40 days of his file being completed, was voted out of Committee only a few weeks after that, and he was confirmed 69 days from the time all his paperwork was complete. Indeed, we proceeded to confirm the first two nominees to the bench of the Eastern District of Kentucky so quickly that they had to delay being sworn in and assuming their judicial duties in order to wind down their legal practices.

This stands in sharp contrast to the length of time it took to get nominees hearings and confirmations in the recent past. During the last six years of the Clinton Administration, it took an average of about 150 days to move a district court nominee to confirmation. I am proud that we have been able to do better since last July.

The hearing on the Bunning nomination included testimony by his home-state Senators as well as testimony by representatives from the American Bar Association's Standing Committee. While a majority of the ABA Committee found the nominee not qualified and a minority found him to be qualified for the federal bench, three United States District Court Judges and a former United States Attorney testified in support of his confirmation. Yesterday, the Senate acted to confirm the President's nomination, as we have with a number of other nominees who received mixed peer review ratings.

For 50 years, beginning with the Eisenhower Administration and including the Clinton Administration, the ABA had provided a valuable public service to Presidents as they determined whom to nominate to the federal bench. In addition, the Senate has had the benefit of the ABA peer reviews. No Senator is bound by the recommendations of the ABA.

As I have said before, it is unfortunate that President Bush decided to shift the ABA's role in the pre-nomination process, but I am grateful that the ABA has agreed to continue to provide their evaluations to the Senate Judiciary Committee. We have always valued their contribution to the process and the willingness of the members of the Standing Committee to volunteer their time, efforts and judgment to this important task.

I congratulate each of the successful nominees and their families on their Senate confirmations.

I intend to notice another confirmation hearing for judicial nominations for February 26. Even though this is a short month with a week's recess, the Committee will hold a second hearing involving judicial nominees in February. This will be the first time in four years that the Committee will have held two February hearings for judicial nominees.

THE SAFE AND FAIR DEPOSIT INSURANCE ACT OF 2002

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise in strong support of the Johnson-Hagel-Reed-Enzi Safe and Fair Deposit Insurance Act of 2002, SFDIA, and I urge my colleagues to support it. I am proud to be one of the authors of this legislation, as I believe it will continue to ensure a strong and safe insurance system for our banks, and most importantly for the consumers that put their trust in that system. The legislation before us also seeks to end the pro-cyclical method now in force, which tends to burden institutions in bad economic times, and not prepare for the future during good economic times. We need to change that, and I think this bill begins to finally address this important issue in a very thoughtful manner.

The bill that my colleagues and I have introduced has five major components. The first element addresses the most non-controversial aspect of this issue, and that is merging of the two insurance funds. This will obviously strengthen the reserve fund for all banks and savings institutions, rather than diffusing that strength between two funds. The second component is that of coverage limits. Although this issue has attracted quite a bit of discussion and controversy over the past few years, this is nonetheless an important issue for many banks and consumers alike. In this section, the legislation authorizes the level of general coverage to rise to $130,000, by indexing for inflation from 1974, when the level of coverage was at $40,000. Going forward, the bill proposes to index coverage for inflation every five years in increments of $10,000. The bill also suggests that coverage for retirement accounts be set at $250,000 now, and that those accounts also be subject to indexing in the future. Lastly, on coverage issues, the legislation would allow for additional coverage for municipal deposits beyond the $130,000 level.

The SFDI Act would also allow for greater flexibility for the FDIC to charge insurance premiums. Since 1996, the FDIC has been prohibited from charging premiums to banks that have the highest rating, as long as the reserve ratio was above the ''hard target'' of 1.25 percent. Our legislation would remove that prohibition, as well as effectively eliminating the hard target, and would instead substitute a range for the fund. Again, these actions will lend the FDIC the necessary flexibility to manage the funds in a much more institution-friendly manner, particularly by relieving pressure on them during the worst business cycles.

In addition, the FDIC will be able to give a one-time assessment credit to institutions, as well as allow for ongoing credits to manage the fund. These credits will in all likelihood give most institutions, if they are well-managed and well-capitalized, the ability to avoid premiums for several years down the road. The FDIC will also be authorized to provide cash rebates to institutions should the fund ever exceed 1.50 percent.

Although I would prefer to address the issue of coverage for municipal deposits in another context, I am confident that during the upcoming legislative process there will be a good debate on the issue, and the Senate will be able to work its will on the issue. I think it is important to note that the introduction of this bill will mark the beginning of a strong, vigorous and positive discussion on the vital issue of deposit insurance. This has become the cornerstone of our banking system's integrity, and it is imperative that the U.S. Congress insure that it remain strong, healthy, and workable for many years to come for both financial institutions and consumers alike.

FEDERAL EMPLOYEES DESERVE PAY PARITY

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, as the government moves to protect its citizens, harden its borders, and defends American interests abroad, I want to make sure that the Nation's Federal employees are given the resources and support needed to carry out these missions.

Numerous studies point to the government's inability to compete with the private sector as one reason why we are unable to attract and retain qualified Federal employees. With a few exceptions, since 1981, military and Federal personnel have received equal pay increases. Yet, the administration's FY03 budget calls for an across-the-board adjustment of only 2.6 percent, while the military would receive a 4.1 percent increase. The proposed 2.6 percent increase is less than the formula used by the Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act and fails to close the pay gap between Federal and private sector workers.

In my capacity as Chairman of both the Senate Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on International Security, Proliferation, and Federal Services and the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support, I am actively involved in issues relating to Federal employees. Our civilian workforce plays a significant role in the support of our service members on active duty, in the reserves, and serving with the National Guard. I support a cohesive and coordinated effort in safeguarding America and believe a strong civilian workforce is crucial to our success in protecting our country.

By 2005, over half the Federal workforce will be eligible to retire, and as long as fewer young people are choosing Federal service to fill these gaps, there should be a commitment from the highest levels of government to ensure that agencies are adequately staffed with the right people and the right skills to run the government in an effective and efficient manner.

The American people know that the war on terrorism will be a long struggle; a different kind of war with fronts both at home and abroad. Our civilian Federal workforce is on the front line of this war and must be prepared to respond to the possibility of attack. We

should not distinguish between our civilian and military workforces, both of whom serve their country with equal dedication.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

NOMINATION OF JAMES GRITZNER

• Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I want to say a few words about James E. Gritzner, who was approved by the Senate last night to serve as United States District Judge for the Southern District of Iowa. I am pleased that the Senate was able to move swiftly on this judicial nomination. Jim Gritzner has extensive trial experience and is fully qualified to serve on the District Court. His reputation for being fair and evenhanded is something we expect of all judges, and he will be a great addition to the Southern District of Iowa.

By way of background for my colleagues, Mr. Gritzner received a Bachelors of Arts degree from Dakota Wesleyan University, a Masters of Arts degree from the University of Northern Iowa, and a law degree from Drake University Law School. His distinguished legal career includes having practiced with several Iowa law firms, most recently with the Des Moines, Iowa firm of Neymaster, Goode, Voights, West, Hansell & O'Brien.

In addition to being in private practice for over 20 years, Mr. Gritzner has had a long record of public service. He served as a member of the Iowa Board of Parole from 1980 to 1982. From 1985 to 1990, Mr. Gritzner was the primary prosecutor for the Committee on Professional Ethics and Conduct of the Iowa State Bar Association and the Client Security and Attorney Disciplinary Commission of the Iowa Supreme Court.

I am sure everyone would agree that these are excellent qualifications. Jim Gritzner will serve the Federal bench very well, and I am proud to have supported his nomination to the Southern District of Iowa.•

CALIFORNIA COASTAL PROTECTION AND LOUISIANA ENERGY ENHANCEMENT ACT

• Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I have joined my colleague, Senator BOXER, in introducing the California Coastal Protection and Louisiana Energy Enhancement Act. This legislation will add to the production of oil and gas off the Louisiana gulf coast while solving a difficult problem associated with production off the coast of California.

The Federal Government, through the Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service, MMS, manages oil and gas exploration in all Federal waters from 3 miles beyond the coastline. For years, leases have been issued to companies, giving them the right to explore and produce on these lands. Companies bid on proffered leases at the MMS, then pay rental payments to the Federal Government to maintain their leases. Once oil or gas is flowing from Federal lands, companies pay a royalty on the production to the Federal treasury.

Between 1968 and 1984, the MMS awarded 40 leases off the coast of California to a number of different companies so that they could explore for oil and gas and bring these energy resources to market. The proven oil reserves under these leases are vast. Over the past 34 years, owners of the leases have been working through the processes of Federal and State government to bring production from these lands online, as was the original purpose of the lease sales. During this time, the owners have been paying annual rental payments to the Federal Government. To date, none of them are producing.

The people of California have become increasingly opposed to new oil and gas production off their coast. This opposition has created a dilemma for the Federal Government and the leaseholders because while the opposition of the people of California has made it more difficult to proceed with oil production, the ability to produce oil from these lands is exactly what the companies have been paying the Federal Government for all these years.

Senator BOXER and I have been working to solve this longstanding problem. The legislation we are introducing today will essentially move the investment these companies have made with the Federal Government from the California waters to the Federal waters in the central and western areas of the Gulf of Mexico. This investment will finally be put to the use for which it was originally intended, to provide a domestic source of energy for the United States. This will mean a more vibrant oil and gas industry in my state and more jobs for Louisianians. It will maintain the integrity of the MMS leasing process and the Federal contracts that have been in place these many years. Finally, it will assist the people of California in reaching their goal of no new oil production off their coastline.

The California Coastal Protection and Louisiana Energy Enhancement Act gives the California leaseholders the option to move their investments to the central and western Gulf of Mexico. If the leaseholders choose, they may receive credits for the money that has been paid to the Federal Government for the California leases, and any other money invested in developing the leases. These credits may be redeemable at the MMS for lease bonus and royalty payments for production in the Gulf of Mexico. participating companies would then surrender the California leases and agree not to bring any future legal actions against the government for their inability to go forward with production over the past 34 years. Finally, our bill takes the lands that were in the leases and creates an ecological preserve to protect traditional fishing areas and provide conservational scientific and recreational benefits.

About 65 percent of our Nation's energy needs are supplied by oil and natural gas. The waters of the Gulf of Mexico have proven to be a significant source of oil and natural gas and are predicted to remain so for the foreseeable future. While states such as Louisiana continue to welcome the development of Federal crude oil and natural gas resources in the Gulf of Mexico, this development is accompanied by adverse impacts on the infrastructure and public service needs of States, counties and local communities that ''host'' the development of these Federal sources. With the rest of the country consistently turning to the waters of the central and western Gulf of Mexico for oil and gas production, it is long past time to share a meaningful portion of the revenues generated annually from Federal offshore crude oil and natural gas resources with the coastal states that serve as the platform for this development: Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi and Alabama.

I believe this bill is a creative solution to a difficult problem that has been left unattended for too many years. I commend my colleague, Senator BOXER, for taking a leading role with me in crafting this legislation. I hope my colleagues will join us in supporting this bill.•

WICHITA HEIGHTS HIGH SCHOOL

• Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, I would like to take this moment to recognize the class from Wichita Heights High School which will be representing the State of Kansas in the 2002 national finals of the We the People . . . The Citizen and the Constitution program.

On May 4–6, 2002, more than 1,200 students from across the United States will visit Washington, DC, to take part in this competition, which is the most extensive educational program in the country developed specifically to educate young people about the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. This 3-day competition, administered by the Center for Civic Education, is modeled after hearings in the U.S. Congress and consists of oral presentations by high school students before a panel of adult judges on constitutional topics. The students' testimony is followed by a period of questioning by the judges who probe their depth of understanding and ability to apply their constitutional knowledge.

I am very pleased to see these young people advocating the fundamental ideals that identify us as a people and bind us together as a Naiton. I am proud that this class from Wichita Heights High School will be representing Kansas on the national level in this worthy endeavor. I wish their entire team the best success at the We the People . . . national finals this May.•