

The promise of our Nation lies in its promise to every one of its citizens that they will be judged by the quality of their work, the depth of their potential and the strength of their intellect and character. Anything less undermines the very principles of fairness we uphold and it diminishes not just those who are discriminated against, but the professional communities in which they live and work the Senate included.

Recently, several Senate employees announced that they have formed an informal, non-partisan group called Gays, Lesbians and Allies Senate Staff, GLASS, Caucus. The caucus is open to all Senate staff and is the first ever for gay and lesbian Senate staff and their allies. It is designed to raise awareness of issues affecting the gay and lesbian community and increase visibility; and promote the welfare and dignity of gay and lesbian Senate employees by providing a safe environment for social interaction and professional development.

The GLASS caucus held its inaugural reception last night. I was honored to attend and congratulate the members on their organization's formation. This was an historic moment for the Senate and special recognition must be given to four of the founding members of the caucus for a job well done: Mat Young, Lynden Armstrong, John Fossum and Jeffrey Levensaler.

Gay and lesbian Americans want the same civil rights that are extended to other Americans—nothing more, nothing less. We must build a community here in the Senate and across the Nation of mutual respect, tolerance, and freedom. This new staff caucus will make many valuable contributions in that regard.

I wish this group well and hope that it will prove to be a valuable addition to the Senate community.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

SMALL BUSINESS PERSONS OF THE YEAR 2004

• Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I rise today to commemorate the importance of small business as the foundation of the U.S. economy and to congratulate Michael and Michele Robuck, co-owners of the Alaska Mint based in Anchorage, AK, who today have been named the Small Business Persons of the Year for 2004 by the U.S. Small Business Administration, SBA.

According to the Small Business Development Center of Alaska, 97 percent of all businesses in Alaska are defined as small businesses. Eighty-five percent of all new jobs in Alaska are created by businesses with fewer than 20 employees. Small businesses have created the majority of the new jobs created in the last few years on a nationwide basis. So the importance of small businesses to the Nation's and to the Alaskan economies is obvious.

The President's small business agenda recognizes that the role of government is not to create wealth but to create an environment where entrepreneurial endeavors can flourish and people can directly benefit from their efforts. It is well accepted that small businesses and young business are the driving force in job creation and prosperity.

Since 1963, the President has designated a week as the National Small Business Week in recognition of the small business's contributions to the country. Next month, the White House and the Small Business Administration will join in celebrating the small business people and businesses of the year.

Today, Mike and Michelle Robuck, as co-owners of the Alaska Mint, will be named as the Alaska District Small Business of the Year 2004. They were nominated by their banker, First National Bank Alaska for this award. Congratulations to Mike and Michele Robuck.

Small business winners are evaluated in Alaska by a panel of judges convened by the Alaska District Office on a variety of criteria including: staying power, growth in employees, increase in market or sales volume, response to adversity, contributions to the community, and innovation of the products they offer.

Now let me tell you about Mike and Michele Robuck, the Alaska Mint and why they deserved to be small business persons of the year for Alaska. Alaska Mint is a second generation Alaskan business that trades in many things but most important in the commodities that made Alaska—gold, silver, and platinum. Alaska Mint designs and produces medallions, coins and jewelry. The Alaska Mint is designated as the official mint of the State of Alaska, the Alaska Railroad, the White Pass and Yukon Route, the Iditarod Trail Committee, the Yukon Quest, and the Anchorage Fur Rendezvous.

Part of the wonderful story of the Alaska Mint is its very beginning. Mike Robuck started the business as a sidewalk vending cart in downtown Anchorage in 1989. He was following in his father's foot steps that had started a small family-owned jewelry store in Anchorage in 1967. Mike learned the importance of dealing with the public and the value of tourism to Alaska. It was not long after that Mike opened a store and assemble the equipment to manufacture his coins, jewelry, and collectibles. I wish I could share with each member of the Senate an example of his creativity and artistry.

With the help of the Small Business Administration and the First National Bank Alaska, Mike and Michele Robuck expanded the business and began doing business nationwide with the help of QVC network and the internet. Last year Alaska Mint released a coin to commemorate the tragic events of September 11, 2001, that within a 24-hour period sold and raised over \$50,000 for the Red Cross.

Their success is more than just the bottom line. The Robucks often assist a variety of charities and local schools. Mike and Michele help with counseling and provide jobs for two rehabilitation programs helping people to regain their place in the community.

It took 5 years since the Robucks formally formed the Alaska Mint for the business to become truly established and successful. From a one-person operation in the mid 1980s, the business now employs 10 people full time and increases to 20 during the summer tourist season. They are now a tourist destination and a place of education about the art of their work.

When the criteria for the award of the Small Business Persons of the Year are applied to the Robucks, they meet all of the standards. They shine like the coins they make. They have shown their staying power, increased the number of employees, increased their markets and sales volume, responded to challenges, shown innovation of the products they offer, and continue to contribute to the community. Mike and Michele Robuck, as a team, exemplify the qualities, the business skills, personal character, and the spirit of Alaska that warrant their being awarded the Small Business Persons of the Year Award for 2004.●

IN RECOGNITION OF SMOKEY BEAR'S 60TH BIRTHDAY

• Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I rise today to celebrate a birthday and to pay tribute to a hero and icon from my home State a New Mexican who became the renowned symbol for the Cooperative Forest Fire Prevention program. His name is Smokey Bear.

Sixty years ago this year, Smokey Bear became the voice for the Forest Service public education campaign to save American forests. Since his creation in 1944, most Americans now quickly associate the name Smokey Bear with his mantra: "Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires."

Not many know the remarkable story of Smokey Bear or that the fire prevention program is the longest running public service advertising campaign in the history of the Ad Council. In 1950, Smokey Bear became real, sadly through an unfortunate forest fire. That spring, in Lincoln County, a little black bear cub was found clinging to the side of a charred pine tree after a forest fire swept through the mountains. After being discovered, he was briefly called "Hot Foot Teddy," but was later named Smokey Bear after the Ad Council's poster bear.

Since that late spring day, that cub became the living symbol of Smokey Bear and worked to remind Americans of the importance of outdoor fire safety. It is a message whose importance has not faded since the bear was discovered on a charred New Mexico mountain.

New Mexico, along with other Western States, has experienced devastating

fires in recent years, which is why the fire prevention message is so important. Forest fires burn millions of acres, destroy homes and businesses, and, worse yet, take the lives of wildland firefighters. As we remember all too well, 2000 was the worst fire year on record since 1957, and subsequent years have not been much better.

Last year's devastating fires prompted us to finally agree to the passage of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. I have a feeling Smokey Bear would be proud of that accomplishment, and know that his wildfire program had never been more important. While we now work to improve our forests with this new law, Smokey's message must still resound. This message of forest fire prevention has undoubtedly helped to reduce the number of forest acres lost annually to wildfire. By what measure, I can never know. However, to suggest that he has not made a significant difference would be amiss.

The injured cub discovered in 1950, our Smokey Bear, eventually arrived at the National Zoo in Washington, DC, where he would become the living symbol for fire prevention. He resided in the National Zoo for 26 years until he passed on November 9, 1976. Most appropriately he was returned to his old roaming grounds and to his home town to be laid to rest.

Capitan is a small town in Lincoln County, nestled between those Capitan and Sacramento Mountains of central New Mexico. This beautiful place is full of wonderful people who love the land and refer to Smokey Bear as "Capitan's favorite son." Each year Capitan residents celebrate his memory with the Fourth of July Smokey Bear Stampede, but this year is a special tribute. The village is hosting a special 60th birthday celebration May 7-9. Much of the 3-day festivity will take place at the historical park named in Smokey Bear's honor and along what is now aptly named Smokey Bear Boulevard.

I pay tribute to the people of Capitan in this RECORD—they have gone to great lengths to preserve the story and meaning of Smokey Bear. I also salute the USDA, the Forest Service, the National Association of State Foresters, and the Ad Council for supporting this program all these years. May the initiative's success only be a prelude to future forest preservation and wildfire prevention, and may Smokey Bear and all he represents forever remain.●

AMADOR VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL'S INVOLVEMENT IN WE THE PEOPLE

● Ms. BOXER. Mr. President, I would like to recognize a remarkable group of young people who will be traveling to Washington, DC next week, May 1-3, to participate in the national finals of "We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution." This program consists of competitions in which students field questions that test their knowledge of the U.S. Constitution.

I am pleased to announce that students from Amador Valley High School in Pleasanton, CA will be representing the State of California in this competition. With the help of their civics teacher, Matthew Campbell, these students have studied for months to prepare for their role as experts testifying on constitutional issues in a simulated congressional hearing.

These students have all worked very hard through first the congressional, then state, and now national competitions. The members of this year's civics team are Nichole Barlow, Anna Currin, Tony D'Albora, Logan Daniels, Shelley DeFord, Michael Gondkoff, Gabe Ivey, Nate Koppikar, Kristin MacDonnell, Sonia Markovic, Jennifer Martin, Lacie McFarland, Shawna McGrath, Nicole Melton, Barry Ripley, Elisabeth Schulze, Sunaina Selam, Kent Stander, and Jae Yoo. I congratulate each of them for coming this far and send them my best wishes for next week's competition.

It is very encouraging to see young people take such a profound interest in studying those ideas and principles which are at the heart of our democracy and of our country. I am certain that this type of involvement will only lead to a deeper interest and that it will build strong citizens and strong leaders for our country's future.●

HONORING AN ARMY LEGEND

● Mr. MILLER. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the Commanding General, United States Army Forces Command, General Larry R. Ellis. General Ellis has served as the Commanding General of U.S. Army Forces Command from November 19, 2001, to May 7, 2004.

General Ellis, an outstanding American Soldier from the great State of Maryland, will soon complete over 35 years of selfless service to this great Nation in the United States Army. General Ellis' dedication to our Soldiers, commitment to excellence, and performance of duty has been extraordinary throughout his career, a lifetime of service culminating in an assignment as the Commanding General of the largest major command in the United States Army. He will retire on July 1, 2004.

During more than 35 years in uniform, General Ellis served in a succession of command and staff positions worldwide. As a junior officer, he served in combat in the Republic of Vietnam, and subsequently with troop units in positions of increasing responsibility throughout the continental United States, Europe, and the Republic of Korea.

While the Deputy Director for Strategic Planning and Policy at U.S. Pacific Command, and as the Assistant Chief of Staff, J3, for United States Forces Korea, General Ellis supervised the training and performance of American military forces throughout the Far East.

He commanded units at every echelon of the Army, including the First

Armored Division in Germany and when deployed as the Multinational Division (North), in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a combined task force that included units from 13 nations. In this capacity General Ellis coordinated European military and civil efforts to implement an extensive array of operations and programs to provide stability and restore favorable economic and political conditions in that war-torn region.

As the Army's Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, General Ellis oversaw multi-year, multi-billion dollar programs supporting United States Army budget strategic objectives, and executed annual operating budgets of more than \$15 billion across 16 major subordinate organizations. He directed the development of comprehensive strategic plans supporting the Army's continued success across the next three decades by resourcing plans through decisive application of deliberate management systems, strategic planning processes, environmental assessments, and periodic situational appraisals to ensure full integration and compliance with strictly defined performance objectives. He spearheaded the Army's effort to translate the senior leadership's Strategic Vision into an executable Transformation Campaign Plan.

Soon after the United States went to war in 2001, General Ellis assumed command of U.S. Army Forces Command, the Army's largest major command. He aggressively orchestrated the training, mobilization, and deployment of more than 500,000 Soldiers and more than a million tons of equipment to locations worldwide which represents the largest mobilization since the Korean War. In addition to providing resources and directing long-range planning to move Army forces, he maintained close operational control of ongoing events to ensure his subordinate units could respond to emerging trends and circumstances. The strategic communications plan he instigated to engage disparate and complex audiences to include academia, Congress, local public officials, industry, and members of the Department of Defense, ensured that his commands' operations were understood and supported.

General Ellis holds degrees from Morgan State University, B.S., 1969, and Indiana University, M.S., 1975. His honors include the NAACP National Service Award, 1999; Honorary Doctor of Law, Morgan State University, 2000; Honorary Master of Strategic Studies, U.S. Army War College, 2001; Distinguished Alumni Service Award, Indiana University, 2003. His military awards include the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, the Army Distinguished Service Medal, and the Combat Infantryman Badge.

His three and a half decades of service earned for General Ellis a reputation as one of the Department of Defense's most forward thinking and insightful leaders. General Ellis represents the epitome of what Army leaders, Soldiers, and the country expect