

courts: the Ninth and the Fifth. Congress compromised in 1978 by expanding the number of judges in both circuits. However, in 1981 the sheer size forced Congress to split the Fifth Circuit in two, forming the Eleventh Circuit and the Fifth Circuit in its current configuration. Interestingly, a 2003 report shows that the Ninth Circuit is, today, almost the same size as the Fifth and Eleventh if they were recombined.

Legislation was introduced in 1989 to split the Ninth into two circuits, creating a new Twelfth Circuit Court of Appeals. A 1990 report advised against the split without first attempting management changes to ease the caseload burden. Again in 1995, the Senate attempted to split the Ninth, and again in 1997.

In 1997 the Commission on Structural Alternatives for the Federal Courts of Appeals, commonly referred to as the White Commission, was formed to determine, among other things, whether there was a need to split the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. After hearing testimony, taking written statements, and gathering statistical data, the Commission published its final report in December 1998.

The White Commission report based its decision to oppose a split on the fear that population growth would put other circuits in a position similar to the Ninth, and that continuing to split circuits would eventually lead to an unwieldy kaleidoscope of law. The Commission instead proposed a restructuring within the circuit.

Today, we can see the result of the repeated failure to address Federal circuit court growth. In 1997 there were nearly 52,000 appeals filed in Federal circuit courts. In 2003, there were approximately 60,500. Of that 8,500 increase, 4,000 are in the Ninth Circuit but contrary to the White Commission's fear, the remaining 4,500 case increase is spread over the other 10 circuit courts. With this key Commission conclusion challenged, it is neither prudent nor fair to force Idahoans and other citizens of the West to wait an average of 4.5 months longer than citizens of other districts for their cases to be decided.

Although the 4.5 month wait is a critically important number, there are additional numbers that this Senate should take into consideration when evaluating this issue. For example, the Ninth Circuit has 50 authorized judges, while the average for all other circuits is 20. There are more than 57 million people living within the Ninth Circuit, while the other Circuits average a population of just over 21 million. And probably the most telling statistic: the Ninth Circuit has nearly triple the average number of appeals filed by all other circuits. No wonder it takes the Ninth 4.5 months longer to resolve an appeal.

It is worth noting that over the years, the Ninth Circuit has adopted a variety of management reforms aimed

at coping with the circuit's unwieldy size. However, I submit that we have long since reached the point beyond which this crisis can be "managed" away. It is a gross disservice to the talented jurists and staff of the Ninth Circuit, and an injustice to the citizens of the States it represents, for this Congress to stand idly by while caseloads and waiting periods only increase, and increase, and increase.

Two versions of corrective legislation are being introduced by Senators MURKOWSKI and ENSIGN, and it is my intention to cosponsor both of these proposals. I pledge to do everything within my power to help enact a workable plan for splitting the Ninth Circuit, and I urge all of our colleagues in the strongest possible terms to support us in this effort.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

HONORING BURLEY TOBACCO GROWERS COOPERATIVE

• Mr. BUNNING. Mr. President, I proudly rise today to recognize the Burley Tobacco Growers Cooperative for their extremely generous contribution of \$10 million to Phase II payments for Kentucky tobacco farmers. The people of Kentucky are extremely appreciative of this generous gift.

As you may know, Phase II is the second set of payments from the Master Settlement Agreement. This settlement was made between the major tobacco companies and the elected officials of the tobacco growing States. Phase II money requires \$5.15 billion to be contributed by the four companies over a 12 year period. The Phase II money was meant to alleviate some of the financial stress to farmers as quotas were cut.

The Phase II compensations due for 2004, however, were not paid because the tobacco companies requested a refund due to the passage of the tobacco buyout. For Kentucky farmers, this would have been devastating. Fortunately for Kentucky, the Burley Tobacco Growers Cooperative has donated \$10 million to be combined with the \$114 million raised by the Commonwealth to equal \$124 million for payments. This means that 164,000 Kentucky farmers will have Phase II payment checks in their hands by the end of June.

Mr. President, I find the charitable spirit that was so kindly displayed by the Burley Tobacco Growers Cooperative to be exceptional in every way. Kentucky is the only State that has stepped forward to produce Phase II payments, and this is due, in large part, to the generosity of Burley Tobacco Growers Cooperative. I would like to thank President Henry West and all those involved in the cooperative, including the members, for making such a positive impact on Kentucky's tobacco growers. This extraordinary association has helped ensure

that the true spirit of the Phase II agreement is upheld. •

MAJOR GENERAL JANET E.A. HICKS

• Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize and commend an outstanding patriot and American, Major General Janet Hicks, the Commanding General of the United States Army Signal Center at Fort Gordon, GA, the first female Chief of the Signal Corps in the history of the Army and the first female Commanding General of the U.S. Army Signal Center at Fort Gordon, GA. General Hicks will be retiring from the Army on July 15, 2005, after a 30 year distinguished military career.

Originally from Iowa, General Hicks was commissioned into the Army's Signal Corps on March 17, 1975, after receiving her bachelor of arts degree in French language and literature from Simpson College in Central Iowa. Her first assignments took her to Korea, then to Hawaii with the 25th "Tropical Lightning" Infantry Division, where she served as a platoon leader, division radio signal officer and company commander. Following her attendance at the Advanced Signal Officers Course at Fort Gordon, she joined the faculty and staff there where she taught basic and advanced officer courses. General Hicks was then reassigned to Alaska with the Information Systems Command and the 6th Infantry Division in key leadership positions before joining the staff of the U.S. Central Command at McDill Air Force Base in Tampa, FL.

Recognizing her outstanding leadership qualities, General Hicks was designated for Battalion Command and assigned to command the 125th Signal Battalion, 25th Infantry Division at Schofield Barracks, HI, in June 1992. Following her command there, she was selected to attend the Army's War College before being posted as the Chief of the Army's Signal Branch at Personnel Command in Alexandria, VA. In June 1997 she was promoted to Colonel and assumed command of the 516th Signal Brigade in Hawaii, with concurrent duties as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Information Management, US Army Pacific. In June 2000, she was promoted to Brigadier General and became the Director of Command, Control, Communications and Computer Systems, the J-6 for the United States Pacific Command, covering the joint communications for all of the Pacific Theatre. Major General Hicks assumed command of the United States Army Signal Center and School and Fort Gordon on August 7, 2002.

Throughout her career General Hicks has been decorated with many military and civilian awards and citations. But, completing her military career as the Army's Chief of Signal is truly an awesome responsibility and honor. Since assuming command General Hicks has

improved the training of soldiers, campaigned for better equipment and upgraded the facilities and quality of life for soldiers and their families on Fort Gordon. She also claims that besides her demanding military life, she credits her successes to two wonderful people in her life—her husband Ron and her daughter Jennifer.

Throughout her military career General Hicks has always taken the initiative, faced the challenges and resolved problems. Her leadership style has always impressed her superiors. She has always dealt with people—young soldiers, senior military leaders and civilians with equity, candidness and resolve. She is highly respected by the soldiers of her command, people of the Central Savannah Regional Area and the citizens of Georgia.

I feel that it is most appropriate to recognize this outstanding American for her 30 years of dedicated and honorable service to this Nation as a military leader. I ask that all of my colleagues join me in thanking and commending Major General Hicks, her husband Ron and their daughter Jennifer on the completion of a distinguished military career. We also wish her and her family the best in their well deserved retirement and a happy and prosperous future.●

HONORING HAZEL HANON

• Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, it is with great pleasure that I rise today to honor Mrs. Hazel Hanon and the incredible work that she has done over these past 60 years with the Marshall Post No. 3507 Ladies Auxiliary of Britton, SD.

Hazel gained membership to the auxiliary sponsorship of both her husband, Leon, who served in the U.S. Navy during WWII, and her brother, Dempsey, also a WWII veteran and member of the U.S. Air Force. As one of the auxiliary's charter members, save for a short hiatus in her membership, Hazel as been with Marshall Post No. 3507 since its founding in 1945. Despite the auxiliary's declining membership over the past few years, it is clear the organization and Hazel are still wholeheartedly committed to supporting America's brave war heroes.

Over the years the auxiliary has hosted Post Suppers, served banquets, sold poppies, organized bake sales, compiled and sold cookbooks, and even run an annual Turkey Raffle during Thanksgiving, all to raise money for our Nation's veterans. Proceeds from these events are then donated to VA Hospitals or used to buy supplies so the women can bake cookies and cakes and then personally deliver the goodies to veterans in hospitals throughout South Dakota.

Since the post's founding, Hazel has been extremely giving of her time, and her generosity will forever be appreciated. I am pleased that her dedication and patriotism are being publicly recognized, and I am certain that Ha-

zel's achievements and commitment to the auxiliary will serve as inspiration to future generations of passionate and patriotic South Dakotans.

Mr. President, Hazel Hanon is a remarkable person who richly deserves this distinguished recognition. I strongly commend her years of work and dedication, and it is with great honor that I share her impressive accomplishments with my colleagues.●

HONORING GRACE SIERS

• Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, it is with great honor that I rise today to publicly commend Grace Siers, charter member of Marshall Post No. 3507 Ladies Auxiliary in Britton, SD, for her many years of devoted service to our Nation's veterans.

Sixty years ago, in 1945, Grace joined the VFW Ladies Auxiliary, and has been an irreplaceable asset to the organization ever since. Grace is part of a long line of military patriots, as she joined the auxiliary under the sponsorship of her husband, William Siers, who served in WWI, as well as her three brothers, Vance, John, and Clarence Hunscher, all veterans of WWII. Not surprisingly, the tradition of serving our country continues with Grace's five sons, Le Roy, Donald, Virgil, Gary, and Robert, and even her grandson and granddaughter, all of whom served in the military. Regrettably, her son, Robert, died while fighting in Vietnam.

Although decades have passed and auxiliary members are no longer as active as they once were, Grace's hard work and dedication over the years enabled the auxiliary to raise thousands of dollars, bring smiles to the faces of countless injured and recovering veterans, and educate innumerable South Dakotans about the importance of supporting America's brave veterans.

In early years, Grace recalls hosting Post Suppers, serving banquets, selling poppies, organizing bake sales, compiling and selling cookbooks, and even manning the post during the annual Turkey Raffle on Thanksgiving, all to raise money for the auxiliary. In turn, the funds were donated to VA hospitals and used to buy supplies so the women could bake cookies and cakes and then personally deliver the goodies to veterans in hospitals throughout South Dakota.

Grace's tremendous contributions to the Britton community set her apart from other outstanding citizens. Her extraordinary service and commitment to Marshall Post No. 3507 Ladies Auxiliary is to be commended. Through Grace's remarkable community involvement and dedication to America's veterans, the lives of countless South Dakotans have been enormously enhanced. Her wonderful example serves as a model for other hardworking and dedicated individuals throughout South Dakota to emulate.

Grace Siers is an extraordinary woman who richly deserves this distinguished recognition. I strongly com-

mend her years of hard work and dedication, and I am very pleased that her substantial efforts are being publicly honored and celebrated. It is with great pleasure that I share her impressive accomplishments with my colleagues.●

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Mr. Williams, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the PRESIDING OFFICER laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the appropriate committees.

(The nominations received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

LEGISLATION AND SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS TO IMPLEMENT THE UNITED STATES-DOMINICAN REPUBLIC-CENTRAL AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT—PM 14

The PRESIDING OFFICER laid before the Senate the following message from the President of the United States, together with an accompanying report; which was referred to the Committee on Finance:

To the Congress of the United States:

I am pleased to transmit legislation and supporting documents to implement the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement (the "Agreement"). The Agreement represents an historic development in our relations with Central America and the Dominican Republic and reflects the commitment of the United States to supporting democracy, regional integration, and economic growth and opportunity in a region that has transitioned to peaceful, democratic societies.

In negotiating this Agreement, my Administration was guided by the objectives set out in the Trade Act of 2002. Central America and the Dominican Republic constitute our second largest export market in Latin America and our tenth largest export market in the world. The Agreement will create significant new opportunities for American workers, farmers, ranchers, and businesses by opening new markets and eliminating barriers. United States agricultural exports will obtain better access to the millions of consumers in Central America and the Dominican Republic.

Under the Agreement, tariffs on approximately 80 percent of U.S. exports will be eliminated immediately. The Agreement will help to level the playing field because about 80 percent of Central America's imports already enjoy duty-free access to our market. By providing for the effective enforcement of labor and environmental laws,