

multiple fronts, from flying combat missions and conducting manned and unmanned surveillance to logistical ground support. Thirty-five thousand Air Force personnel are currently deployed to 120 duty stations worldwide, keeping freedom alive and the forces of tyranny at bay. Whether it is monitoring satellites in orbit or the space shuttle, delivering precision-guided munitions to air and ground targets or patrolling the far reaches of cyberspace, the USAF maintains strategic and operational dominance in theater and around the globe. Fighters, bombers, missiles, and unmanned aircraft are the unparalleled tools of today's airmen, tools they use with unmatched skill and lethal precision in defense of our freedom and liberties.

On a daily basis for over 4 years now, dozens of close air support missions—troop support, infrastructure protection, reconstruction activities and operations to deter and disrupt terrorist activities—are conducted by coalition forces in Iraq. The U.S. Air Force is responsible for the majority of these.

Sixty years of Air Force excellence and superiority has been possible only because of those who have voluntarily dedicated their lives to the success of U.S. air power. With the esteemed heritage of "Hap" Arnold and other distinguished and outstanding leaders in their hearts, the men and women of the USAF and their families serve our Nation with distinction, integrity, and patriotism. They approach their mission in the same spirit with which they swore their oath of allegiance: with a grave sense of duty, honor and bravery.

Idaho has been home to Mountain Home Air Force Base for over 60 years now. Over the past half century, Mountain Home AFB has hosted many diverse missions of the Air Force including special and covert operations, combat and reconnaissance operations, ballistic missile defense, electronic combat, and fighter operations. It is one of the largest employers in the State of Idaho.

The Gunfighters, as Mountain Home AFB personnel are known, deploy to fight terror in an integrated fashion, from the maintenance and piloting of F-15 Eagles, F-15E Strike Eagles, and F-16 Fighting Falcons to complementary support missions such as intelligence and communications. In the air campaign against the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Gunfighters flew almost 1,000 individual sorties.

In addition to executing its military mission, the Air Force recognizes its environmental responsibility to the communities in which it operates and has worked diligently over the years to be a good steward of Federal land in southern Idaho. I have worked with leadership at the base on many land management issues during my service in Congress. Further, the Air Force continues to respect Native-American cultural sensitivities and practices and works hard to do its part in maintaining a respectful relationship for the

betterment of Shoshone-Paiute tribal interests as well as maintaining state of the art training for our airmen.

As a Nation, we are blessed to have such an outstanding, committed, and respectable military. The Air Force works intricately and effectively with the other military branches to skillfully execute the war on terror, specifically, but not limited to, military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Always innovative, the Air Force continues to look ahead, establishing itself as the dominant space defense force empowered and capable of facing new strategic global realities in an ever-changing global threat environment, ensuring its ability to respond to threats immediately and wherever they arise. Americans can be incredibly proud of and thankful for the sacrifice of their Air Force women and men worldwide. In the words of another famous former Chief of the Air Force, GEN Curtis LeMay, "If we maintain our faith in God, love of freedom, and superior global air power, the future looks good."

NEPAL'S FUTURE

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, there are times in virtually every country's history when years of underdevelopment and conflict give rise to opportunities to change course. Such times are rare, and such opportunities are too often missed.

I think of our Civil War, which caused so much loss of life and devastation. It preserved the Union, and it led to the emancipation of some 3 million African slaves. Nothing can diminish those achievements or the sacrifice of those who gave their lives. But instead of providing the former slaves with the equal rights to which they were entitled, until passage of the Civil Rights Act a century later African Americans suffered from racially discriminatory laws that kept them in an inferior status. The country remained bitterly divided because of it.

Nepal today faces its own historic choice.

For more than a decade, Nepal has been plagued by an internal armed conflict in which savage brutality was inflicted on impoverished civilians by Maoist insurgents and the Royal Nepal Army. Over 13,000 people died, mostly noncombatants, and virtually no one has been held accountable for those crimes.

For more than two centuries, Nepal has been a monarchy whose Kings, with rare exception, denied the rights and ignored the needs of their people who remain among the world's poorest. In February 2005, King Gyanendra, a narcissistic, arrogant autocrat, seized absolute power, jailed his opponents, and muzzled the press, only to relent in April 2006 in the face of mounting international pressure and the protests of thousands of courageous Nepali citizens.

Nepal's previous experiment with multiparty democracy during the 1990s

had been disappointing. The leaders of the country's political parties distinguished themselves by amassing personal fortunes and doing little for the people.

But since the restoration of civilian government in April last year there has been impressive progress. A Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed, Maoist combatants have gone into cantonments, the army has been confined to barracks, and the Maoists, until today, were part of the interim Government. The King has been stripped of all political power, although the ultimate fate of the monarchy has yet to be decided. The word "royal" has been eliminated from Government institutions, including the army. Elections for a Constituent Assembly to be held in June were postponed, but they have been rescheduled for November 22. The assembly is to draft a new constitution.

Also during this period, Nepal's ethnic minorities, women, and other groups who have long been persecuted and denied a voice have demanded equal rights and representation. This poses both challenges and opportunities for the Government.

The international community, including the United States, has supported the peace process directly and through our financial contributions to the United Nations which has performed key monitoring functions. Recently, the United States provided \$3 million to purchase the ballots for the elections.

Much has transpired since April 2006, when I last spoke in this Chamber about political developments in Nepal. Today, just 65 days before Nepal's elections, I would like to address my brief remarks to the people of Nepal and to Nepal's political parties, including the Maoists.

On November 22, the people of Nepal will be presented with one of two options: They will either have a historic opportunity to create a legitimate, representative government which can only be achieved through a popular vote or they will be denied that opportunity. If the elections are held, Nepal will continue on a path that can bring its governmental institutions and its society into the modern age and begin to finally address the poverty and injustices that gave rise to the conflict. If they are denied, the Nepali people will likely see their country become more fragmented and ungovernable and more vulnerable to external influences over which they have little control.

Recent developments have been both encouraging and troubling. Perhaps that is to be expected in a country of multiple ethnic groups speaking some 93 languages that is struggling to transform itself.

The bombings in Kathmandu 3 weeks ago, other violent acts perpetrated by newly formed armed groups in the Terai and members of the Maoist young wing, the Young Communist League, and the Maoists decision to

withdraw from the Government illustrate the fragility of the process.

Moreover, the leaders of the Congress parties and the Maoists have done little to prepare for the elections. At times, party members have seemed more interested in furthering their own personal ambitions and in derailing the electoral process altogether. The leading party of the left, the UML, has done more to prepare. But all parties will need to promptly step up their election activities if voters are to have the informed choice they deserve.

On the positive side, the Election Commission deserves credit for a voter registration process that has reached Nepal's remotest villages. There is no doubt that the people are eager to go to the polls, just as they were determined to put an end to the King's abuse of power.

Over the past 3 years, I have observed the fortitude of the Nepali people's desire for peace, for justice, and for a meaningful voice in government. Their desire is shared and admired by the American people.

To the Maoists, I would say that it was you who called for a Constituent Assembly. Saying you are committed to the democratic process at the same time that you withdraw from the Government, make new demands that contradict previous commitments, support disruptive economic strikes, and threaten to return to confrontation is not the way to earn the people's trust and support that are necessary to become an effective force for change. Nor is it the way to earn the trust of the United States.

I have campaigned for elective office five times over more than 30 years, and I know something about earning the people's trust and support. It does not come from dogmatic speeches or lofty party platforms or manifestos. It does not come from saying one thing and then doing the opposite. It certainly does not come through the use of violence, threats, and extortion. It comes by showing that you deserve the people's trust and support. There is no better way to begin that process than to seize this opportunity and show the people that you can make the government work for them.

History is replete with examples of armed groups that achieved popular legitimacy through the democratic process. If the Maoists win seats through free and fair elections, uphold the commitments they have made in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and other agreements, and devote themselves to working for change peacefully, I am confident the United States will treat them as rightful members of the elected Constituent Assembly or of the Government. We may disagree with their positions on some issues but not about their right to serve in Government and to advocate for those positions.

I know the Maoists are looking to the United States to lift our restrictions on their party and its leaders and to remove them from our list of ter-

rorist organizations. In order for that to happen, the Maoists need to take unequivocal, positive steps. The cases of the murdered Nepali security guards need to be satisfactorily resolved. The party's resumption of land seizures and the reopening of so-called people's courts are steps in the wrong direction.

To the other political parties in Government, I would say that it is time to make good on your commitments. Not only the Maoists but traditionally marginalized groups as well are increasingly skeptical that the Government is serious about delivering on its key commitments to the peace process, whether downsizing and reforming the army, supporting land reform, or creating jobs and opportunities for minority groups that have long been disadvantaged and ignored. While those groups should pursue their grievances through a vigorous election campaign, not through obstruction of the democratic process, the failure of the parties to govern and match rhetoric with action threatens the elections, as does the Maoists' saber rattling.

The leaders of Nepal's political parties know that the power of holding office comes with responsibilities, and the spotlight is on them. Lasting legitimacy comes not only through the ballot box but in the day-to-day ability to honor commitments and improve the lives of all citizens. This is their chance to put the Nepali people and their country first, by showing that they believe in effective, accountable government. If they do not, the United States, and I suspect many other countries, will no longer afford them the legitimacy they will need for our continued support.

Mr. President, Nepal's path to the future may be decided in the waning months of this year. Although a small country wedged between two emerging giants, Nepal is unique in more ways, more beautiful ways, than most other countries its size. Today, the United States—Congress and the Executive—are united in our desire to help Nepal become a democracy whose Government is representative of Nepal's remarkably diverse population and where the fundamental rights of all people are respected.

REPRESENTATIVE PIGNATELLI TAKES ON KATRINA

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I welcome this opportunity to commend my friend and colleague in Massachusetts, State representative William Pignatelli, who represents the fourth Berkshire district. In addition to his tireless dedication to the people of western Massachusetts, Smitty, as we all call him, has also shown his extraordinary commitment to public service by going far above and beyond the call of duty to help people in New Orleans devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

During a trip to New Orleans last December, Smitty met Stanley Stewart

and his family of 12, who had just moved into a FEMA trailer after 16 horrific months of suffering. The family had been rescued from the second-floor balcony of their home in the city after spending 2 days without food, water, and plumbing.

Distressed by the plight of Stanley and his family, Smitty decided to help them rebuild their home and has already made a number of trips to New Orleans to do what he can. Now he has decided to spend his fall vacation in New Orleans to finish the job. On September 30, he will be taking a group of volunteer builders from the Berkshires to New Orleans to do so. With these generous acts of kindness, Smitty has shown us extraordinary dedication to those less fortunate.

As my brother Robert F. Kennedy said, "Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest of oppression and resistance."

I commend Smitty for the remarkable ripple of hope he is sending forth. A recent article in the Berkshire Eagle describes this amazing chapter in Smitty's life. I believe the article will be of interest to all my colleagues in the Senate, and I ask unanimous consent to have the article printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Berkshire Eagle, Sept. 3, 2007]
PIGNATELLI WILL TAKE ON KATRINA AGAIN
(By Derek Gentile)

LENOX.—State Rep. William "Smitty" Pignatelli admitted yesterday that he understands that he cannot repair all the problems that beset many of the folks in New Orleans affected by Hurricane Katrina.

But he and a group of contractor friends and constituents are going to try to fix a very small corner of that world.

Pignatelli and a small army of local builders will be heading down to New Orleans on Sept. 30 to repair and rebuild the home of New Orleans native Stanley Stewart, whose house was one of the tens of thousands of homes devastated by the 2005 hurricane.

"This is going to be the Berkshire County version of (the television show) 'Extreme Home Makeover,'" Pignatelli said.

This will be Pignatelli's fourth trip to New Orleans. He said he has been appalled by the damage he has seen.

"When you go down there, and see the damage that is still in evidence, you feel ashamed of the government responsible for this," he said.

But he is also heartened constantly by the way people from other parts of the country have come to try to help the survivors.

Pignatelli met Stewart, who lives in the lower ninth ward of New Orleans, last December, while on one of his first trips to the beleaguered city. Eventually, he learned that Stewart and his family lost their home in the hurricane and were living in a FEMA trailer "maybe a little bit bigger than my SUV," Pignatelli said.

Resolving to help the family, he has made several trips to New Orleans since with other