

nations, and I thank AmCham Russia for your leadership and commitment to that future.

#### EARTH DAY

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, I commemorate April 22—Earth Day 2007, a day set aside to celebrate gains we have made in improving the environment and to renew our commitment to protect our planet.

Earth Day was established by Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin and was first celebrated in 1970. Senator Nelson firmly believed that education was the key to changing people's attitude about the environment. Since then, the Earth Day celebration has spread throughout the nation and to the rest of the world, with more and more people getting involved in efforts to clean and nurture the environment.

Despite Earth Day's popularity and the many programs that were created to improve the health of the planet, our world is still wrought with environmental problems. We still face many pressing issues such as global warming, protecting our coastal waters from over-fishing, and preserving America's most precious resource lands from the Alaskan Tongass Rainforest to the Redrock lands in Utah, to our own Chesapeake Bay.

Today, we face a serious and growing threat from global warming. Recently I told the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee about the immediate threats that global warming poses to Maryland. A significant part of Maryland is in low-lying areas that would be inundated if global temperatures keep rising. The National Flood Insurance Program has designated more than 12 percent of Maryland as a special flood hazard area, and an estimated 68,000 Maryland homes and buildings are located within a flood plain.

We are already seeing the effects. About a third of Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge on the Eastern Shore has been lost to sea level rise in the past 70 years. Smith Island, situated in the Chesapeake Bay, has lost 30 percent of its land to rising sea levels since 1850.

I have long supported a comprehensive, environmentally friendly energy policy that emphasizes increasing the availability and use of renewable energy, as well as promoting greater energy efficiency. Energy efficiency and renewable energy will reduce America's dangerous dependency on foreign oil while also dramatically reducing greenhouse gases.

Closer to home, we must continue to focus our efforts on restoring the Chesapeake Bay. The Bush administration's budget proposes drastic cuts to vital initiatives, including environmental education, funds to upgrade wastewater treatment plants, and several farm bill conservation programs that help farmers reduce nutrient runoff from entering the Bay. The budget

resolution that I helped draft and the Senate passed last month restores many of those dangerous cuts, but we still have much work ahead of us to assure that these critical Federal programs are fully funded.

Earth Day celebrations serve as important reminders that we cannot take our natural resources for granted. I urge all Americans to join together to protect, preserve, and restore the planet's natural treasures.

#### RURAL VETERANS HEALTH CARE IMPROVEMENT ACT

Ms. SNOWE. Madam President, I am a proud cosponsor of the Rural Veterans Health Care Improvement Act. Increasing access to veterans' health care facilities is essential to recognizing the realities that exist on the ground today, not only for veterans living in rural areas of my home State of Maine, but for the millions of veterans living in remote areas across our broad land. I applaud Senator SALAZAR for introducing this legislation at a time when so many of our veterans receive their health care through the VA and nearly half of today's active duty military servicemembers and tomorrow's veteran population list rural communities as their homes of record. Once again, I commend Senator SALAZAR for his continuing resoluteness and advocacy for our veterans.

Our legislation will work to expand upon the Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act of 2006, which passed the Senate with my support at the end of the 109th Congress. Under that legislation, the Veterans Affairs Office of Rural Health was created in order to enhance access to VA medical facilities for veterans living in geographically remote areas.

First off, our newly proposed legislation tasks the Office of Rural Health with developing demonstration projects that would broaden the access to health care in rural areas by way of partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and the Department of Health and Human Services at access hospitals and community health centers. Second, this bill calls on the Office of Rural Health to establish between one and five Centers for Excellence to be based at VA medical centers to research ways to improve health care for rural veterans.

While increased outpatient care services in Maine and other underserved areas is a good step forward, it is only half of the equation. Veterans must also be able to get to the facilities, and while programs such as the Disabled American Veterans Transportation Network are to be commended, they simply cannot take care of all the transportation needs of all the patients who require VA health care.

Therefore, our legislation would task the Director of the Office of Rural Health to create a program that would provide grants of up to \$50,000 to vet-

erans' service organizations and State veterans' service officers to assist veterans with innovative travel options to VA medical centers. Additionally, this legislation directly addresses the inequitable travel reimbursements currently provided to veterans for their travel expenses to VA medical facilities, an issue which I have brought up to the VA Secretary Jim Nicholson in the past. Under current law, veterans with a disability of 30 percent or more are entitled to 11 cents per mile, a rate that has not changed since 1977. In order to put an end to this unjust practice, our legislation would provide critical assistance to veterans traveling long distances to VA health care facilities by reimbursing them at the Federal rate of 48.5 cents per mile.

Establishing new facilities and transportation networks in Maine, as enumerated within the provisions of our legislation, would give rural veterans better access to the veteran health care system and deliver on the promise America has made to our men and women in uniform. But as rural veterans will tell you, there is a long way to go, and we must redouble our efforts to ensure that the VA secures the necessary resources for all rural regions across Maine and throughout the Nation.

Furthermore, I have nothing but the utmost respect for those brave Americans who served in uniform with honor, courage, and distinction. The obligation our Nation holds for its veterans is enormous, and it is an obligation that must be fulfilled every day, by invoking the indelible words of President John F. Kennedy, who stated:

As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.

Undoubtedly, these words still speak truth today, at a time when over 600,000 courageous men and women have returned from combat in both Iraq and Afghanistan. It is now up to Congress to do everything in its power to answer our veterans' call, to ensure that they receive the benefits that they rightly earned and rightly deserve. I strongly urge my colleagues to support this legislation. Our veterans deserve nothing less.

Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

#### ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

##### CONGRATULATING THE SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S BASKETBALL TEAM

• Mr. THUNE. Madam President, today I honor the South Dakota State University women's basketball team. In only their third season as Division I competitors, the Jackrabbits made it to the quarterfinals of the Women's

National Invitational Tournament. This impressive accomplishment capped off an extremely successful season in which the Jacks finished with a record of 25-6.

The SDSU women's basketball team has a long tradition of postseason success. During the 1970s and early 1980s, the Jacks qualified for 10 AIAW regional tournaments. As NCAA Division II competitors, they made nine postseason appearances and won the national title in 2003. Additionally, the Jackrabbits reached the Elite Eight in each of their last three seasons as a Division II team.

In 2004, SDSU transitioned its athletic program to compete in NCAA Division I, becoming the first school in South Dakota to do so. Since this transition, the Jackrabbits women's basketball team has successfully risen to meet the challenge that comes with this new level of competition. By defeating well-known teams with much bigger budgets, this year's team once again proved that SDSU can compete with the top programs in the Nation.

The Jackrabbits were led by Aaron Johnston, who has served as head coach of the SDSU women's basketball team for the past seven seasons. Coach Johnston was responsible for taking the Jacks to the top of NCAA Division II and has shown his strong leadership skills in successfully transitioning the team to Division I. He was the 2006 South Dakota Sportswriters Women's College Basketball Coach of the Year and has been named the Division I Independent Coach of the Year for the past two seasons. Johnston was supported by Assistant Coaches Laurie Melum, Jina Johansen, and Matt Stamerjohn.

Of course, this historic season would be impossible without the players themselves. The athletes of the 2006-2007 South Dakota State University women's basketball team, in alphabetical order, are as follows: Alison Anderson, Maria Boever, Ketty Cornemann, Courtney Grimsrud, Nicole Helsper, Abby Kratovil, Morgan Meier, Ashlea Muckenhirn, Laura Nielsen, Stacie Oistad, Andrea Verdegan, Megan Vogel, and Jennifer Warkenthen.

While all of these women should be commended for their efforts, I would like to especially recognize the team's only senior, Megan Vogel. A 4-year starter, Vogel ended her career as the second leading scorer in SDSU school history with 1,850 career points. During this past season, she led the Jacks in scoring with 17.5 points per game and was chosen as a first-team all-Division I Independent selection for the second time. After participating in the WNBA Pre-Draft Camp, Vogel was chosen as a second round draft pick by the Washington Mystics. Selected as the 19th overall pick, Vogel became the first Jackrabbit and first player from a South Dakota college to be taken in the WNBA draft.

These are just a few of the many firsts that the Jacks accomplished this

season. These student-athletes should be very proud of all of their remarkable achievements. On behalf of the State of South Dakota, I am pleased to say congratulations Jackrabbits on this impressive accomplishment and keep up the great work.●

#### ROBERT WINGET: IN MEMORIAM

● Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring the memory of a respected law enforcement officer, Officer Robert Winget of the Ripon Police Department.

For the past 3 years, Officer Winget worked tirelessly to provide the residents of Ripon with safety and service. On the morning of April 10, 2007, Officer Winget's life was tragically cut short in the line of duty as a result of a vehicle accident while patrolling the heavily wooded banks of the Stanislaus River.

Officer Winget began his law enforcement career at the Los Angeles Police Department in the early 1970s. In a career that would span 37 years, Officer Winget also worked for the Stanislaus County Sheriff's Department before lending his considerable talents to the Ripon Police Department. Throughout his career, Officer Winget demonstrated a passion for law enforcement and commitment to helping others, qualities that enabled him to become a beloved member of the Ripon Police Department. Officer Winget's colleagues and the people whom he protected shall always remember him for his devotion to serving the community.

Officer Winget is survived by his wife and four children. Officer Winget served the people of Ripon with honor and dignity and fulfilled his oath as a peace officer. His contributions to law enforcement and the many lives he touched will serve as a shining example of his legacy.

We shall always be grateful for Officer Wignet's service and the dedication that he displayed while serving the people of Ripon.●

#### MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

At 12:42 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Ms. Niland, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bill, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 1361. An act to improve the disaster relief programs of the Small Business Administration, and for other purposes.

#### ENROLLED BILL SIGNED

At 4:36 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by one of its clerks, announced that the Speaker has signed the following enrolled bill:

H.R. 1132. An act to amend the Public Health Service Act to provide waivers relating to grants for preventive health measures with respect to breast and cervical cancers.

The enrolled bill was subsequently signed by the Acting President pro tempore (Mr. CASEY).

#### EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The following communications were laid before the Senate, together with accompanying papers, reports, and documents, and were referred as indicated:

EC-1571. A communication from the Secretary of Agriculture, transmitting, pursuant to law, an annual report relative to the assessment of the cattle and hog industries; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

EC-1572. A communication from the Principal Deputy, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness), transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of the Department's intent to close the Defense commissary stores at Bad Nauheim, Germany, on or about June 30, 2007, and at Giessen, Germany, on or about September 1, 2007; to the Committee on Armed Services.

EC-1573. A communication from the Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition, Technology and Logistics), transmitting, pursuant to law, the determination that the Joint Cargo Aircraft is subject to realistic survivability testing; to the Committee on Armed Services.

EC-1574. A communication from the Senior Attorney-Advisor, Office of General Counsel, Federal Housing Finance Board, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Federal Home Loan Bank Appointive Directors" (RIN3069-AB33) received on April 17, 2007; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC-1575. A communication from the Counsel for Legislation and Regulations, Office of the Secretary, Department of Housing and Urban Development, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "HOME Investment Partnerships Program; American Dream Downpayment Initiative and Amendments to Homeownership Affordability" ((RIN2501-AC93)(FR-4832-F-02)) received on April 17, 2007; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC-1576. A communication from the Counsel for Legislation and Regulations, Office of Housing, Department of Housing and Urban Development, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Approval of Condominiums in Puerto Rico on Evidence of Presentation of Legal Documents" ((RIN2502-AI36)(FR-5009-F-02)) received on April 17, 2007; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC-1577. A communication from the Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, Department of Commerce, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Cod by Catcher Processor Vessels Using Trawl Gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area" (ID No. 031507D) received on April 17, 2007; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC-1578. A communication from the Acting Director, National Marine Fisheries Service, Department of Commerce, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pollock in Statistical Area 620 of the Gulf of Alaska" (ID No. 032607F) received on April 17, 2007; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC-1579. A communication from the Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, Department of Commerce, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pollock in Statistical Area 610 of the Gulf of Alaska" (ID No. 031507D) received on April 17, 2007; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.