

Sanitary Canal. In order to prevent aquatic invasive species, such as the Asian carp, from moving between the Mississippi River watershed and the Great Lakes, this dispersal barrier needs to be completed. Specifically, the Corps will be authorized to convert Barrier I into a permanent facility, to complete construction of Barrier II, and to operate and maintain both dispersal barriers at full Federal cost. The Corps is further authorized to study options for hydrologic separation while maintaining the movement of cargo and recreational vessels so that we can determine what a long-term solution should be.

Second, the bill reauthorizes the Great Lakes Remedial Action Plans and Sediment Remediation program and the Great Lakes Tributary Models Program. The Great Lakes Remedial Action Plans and Sediment Remediation Program has allowed the Corps to provide technical support to States and Remedial Action Plan committees so that the United States can meet international obligations. Michigan has several communities that request this assistance from the Corps every year. Using the Great Lakes Tributary Models Program, the Corps has developed computer models to simulate the erosion, transport and deposition of sediments within a watershed, and can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of soil conservation and other source control measures on the loadings of sediments and sediment contaminants to Great Lakes harbors and navigation channels.

Next, this bill brings equity to both the John Glenn Great Lakes Basin Program and the Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration Program so that in-kind contributions count towards the non-Federal cost-share requirements of those programs. Further, the bill clarifies that any reconnaissance studies under the Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration Program are to be performed at Federal expense. This was the original intent when the program was first authorized in 2000.

Lastly, this bill expands the type of beneficial use of dredge material projects eligible for inclusion under this authority. Dredging improves and maintains navigation channels in the Great Lakes and is used for other purposes such as waterfront construction, utilities placement, and environmental remediation. It only makes sense to use the dredge spoils for beneficial purposes rather than disposing of it in the middle of the lakes.

Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, I would like to applaud the Senator from California, Mrs. BOXER, for her excellent work in swiftly bringing the Water Resources Development Act to final passage in the Senate. When the Senator from California became chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee at the beginning of the 110th Congress, she pledged that this important bill would receive Senate

consideration as quickly as possible. She kept that pledge, and I encourage all supporters of this bill to acknowledge that commitment.

During the 109th Congress, those of us who supported swift enactment of the Water Resources Development Act met considerable obstacles to that goal. I called upon Senate leadership to schedule this bill in the summer of 2005. Later, my colleague, the Senator from Missouri, Mr. BOND, and I worked together on a letter, signed by 40 of our colleagues, calling upon Senate leadership to schedule floor time for this bill. Still later, when we were told that 40 was not enough, that we needed 60 signatures, we came back and got 81. Seven months later, the Senate finally scheduled debate, but the final bill was never finished before the 109th Congress adjourned. It has now been 7 years since the last WRDA bill and it is long overdue.

This bill provides approximately \$2 billion for upgrades to locks and dams along the Mississippi and Illinois rivers. Illinois is the largest shipper of corn and soybeans on these rivers and the 70 year old system of locks and dams needs to be upgraded to ensure swifter access to export markets—something, by the way, that competitors like Brazil are doing right now. A significant part of competitive agriculture is about reducing transportation costs, so if we are to strengthen our agriculture markets, we need to strengthen waterway transportation, and that means upgrading these locks and dams.

Despite my longstanding support for WRDA, I was unable to cast a vote on the bill because I was scheduled to give a speech at the time of the vote. However, had I been able to vote, I would have supported the bill.

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, today I voted in support of the Water Resources Development Act of 2007. While I have concerns about the \$15 billion price tag of the Senate bill and Congress' failure to prioritize these new projects and the nearly \$60 billion of authorized but unconstructed Corps projects, I strongly support the reform provisions in the underlying bill. These reforms are absolutely essential for improving the Nation's water resources planning and should be the baseline of reforms coming out of conference.

These important reform provisions include independent peer review of costly or controversial Corps projects; dramatic improvements to the Corps' mitigation process; modernizing the Corps' woefully out of date planning guidelines; establishing a new national policy that directs the Corps to avoid impacts to floodplains; and requiring an interagency assessment of the nation's vulnerability to flood and related storm damage and recommendations to improve the Nation's various flood prevention programs.

Senator MCCAIN and I have long championed these reforms, and I thank him and his staff for their continued

commitment to this important issue. I also appreciate the support from my colleagues—and the cosponsorship by Senators MCCAIN, COBURN, CARPER, GREGG, SUNUNU, and DEMINT—for the prioritization amendment that I offered. Prioritization is essential to ensure Congress has the information it needs to assess the relative importance of Corps projects. This is not only our fiscal responsibility, but is important to the country's economic development and transportation systems, and our ability to protect citizens and property from natural disasters.

I am very pleased that Senator BOXER, Senator INHOFE, Senator BAUCUS, and Senator ISAKSON reported a WRDA bill that retained the hard-fought reforms from last Congress. Through negotiations and a successful independent review amendment on the floor, we took the first step to ushering in critical reforms to the Corps of Engineers in more than 20 years. As we look ahead to conference, I particularly appreciate Chairman BOXER's commitment to retain these reforms in conference. I thank Chairman BOXER and Majority Leader REID for joining me in a colloquy to this effect.

"Corps reform" has been an ongoing effort over the years. Many of my current and former colleagues, staff, and numerous taxpayer and environmental groups have played a role and I am grateful for all of those efforts. It is my hope that we can honor these efforts and recognize the importance of instituting significant policy changes by enacting a final bill that retains the Senate's strong reforms and keeps the cost to the taxpayer at the current level or less.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington is recognized.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE PASSING OF YOLANDA KING

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, today our nation mourns the loss of Yolanda King, the eldest daughter of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Coretta Scott King, and the "first daughter" of the civil rights movement.

Yolanda King's life moved in the stream of American civil rights history. Born in segregated Montgomery,

AL, in November of 1955, she came into this world only 3 weeks before the Interstate Commerce Commission issued its ban on racial segregation in interstate commerce and 2 weeks before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a bus in Montgomery. Yolanda was 7 years old when her father, in his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, said "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a Nation where they will not be judged by the color of the skin but by the content of their character."

In a 2004 statement entitled, "The Meaning of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday," Coretta Scott King recalled that "Dr. King once said that we all have to decide whether we will walk in the light of creative altruism or the darkness of destructive selfishness. Life's most persistent and nagging question . . . is what are you doing for others?"

Yolanda led a life that made her family and her Nation proud. She was an actress, an author, and a producer. But she also worked in service to others. The world will remember her as an activist for peace, an ardent supporter of nonviolence, and a torchbearer for Dr. King's dream of racial harmony.

Through her actions, the King family legacy lives on. Like her parents, Yolanda inspired a generation of youths to dedicate their lives to service. Her life is a shining example that we all can make a difference, and her deeds will continue to inspire generations to come.

Our thoughts are with the King family today. I salute Yolanda's life, and hope that our Nation will continue its march towards a more inclusive democracy.

PITTSBURGH HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, today I have sought recognition to comment on legislation to increase the authorized spending level for the ongoing consolidation project at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, VA, Pittsburgh Healthcare System.

In May 2004, then-VA Secretary Anthony Principi announced the final results of the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES), plan, a nationwide effort to identify buildings and functions which do not merit continued operation and to create long-term budget efficiencies by getting rid of underutilized facilities while improving access to care. As a result of this process, the Highland Drive VA Medical Center, VAMC, in Pittsburgh was targeted for closure, and the facility's functions are to be consolidated within Pittsburgh's University Drive VAMC and H.J. Heinz VAMC. However, in order for this consolidation to move forward and for the VA to realize the desired savings, significant construction is necessary at the University Drive and Heinz campuses.

Initial estimates placed the total cost for construction at these two facilities at \$189.2 million. I introduced legislation which authorized construction at this level and have helped secure \$102.5 million in appropriations towards this effort—\$20 million in fiscal year 2004 and \$82.5 million in fiscal year 2006. I have pushed for Congress to fully fund this project in order to avoid cost overruns and to help the VA realize long-term savings which can be used to better serve our Nation's veterans.

Despite the Pittsburgh project being ahead of schedule and ready for additional funding, I was disappointed to see that the administration did not seek funding for any component of the Pittsburgh project in its fiscal year 2007 budget request. On February 28, 2006, Senator Rick Santorum and I wrote VA Secretary Jim Nicholson a letter seeking clarification on VA's future plans for funding the project. According to his May 8, 2006, response, "Funding for construction of the mental health and research facilities at the University Drive VAMC and the ambulatory care center at the Heinz VAMC will be incorporated into VA's fiscal year 2008 budget request." The response also stated, ". . . closure of the Highland Drive Division will not be accomplished until all construction is completed." I will ask that this letter be printed in the RECORD.

However, I was disappointed to learn that the VA's fiscal year 2008 Budget request indicates that the estimated total cost to complete these projects has risen dramatically to \$248 million. Further, the VA has only requested \$40 million for these projects in fiscal year 2008, which would leave \$105.5 million remaining to be appropriated to complete construction. I believe Congress should fully fund this project now in order to avoid additional cost increases in the future.

This bill simply raises the authorization to the level indicated by the VA necessary to complete these construction projects. I urge my colleagues to support this technical legislation, which is intended to allow the VA to realize the savings envisioned by the 2004 CARES process on an expedited basis, making more money available for the care of our Nation's veterans.

I ask unanimous consent that the February 28, 2006, letter Senator Santorum and I wrote to Secretary Nicholson and the Secretary's May 8, 2006 response be printed in the RECORD.

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

THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS,
Washington, May 8, 2006.

HON. ARLEN SPECTER,
U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR SPECTER: Thank you for your letter and continued support of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Pittsburgh Healthcare System Major Construction Project. I regret the delay in this reply.

VA planned to fund the consolidation of the Highland Drive psychiatry, mental health, research, and administrative functions within the University Drive and the H. John Heinz VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Pittsburgh over a 3-year period from 2004 through 2007. Planning for this project began in 2003. This preplanning led to \$35 million being made available in fiscal year (FY) 2005, one year ahead of the initial schedule.

This \$35 million plus \$20 million appropriated in FY 2004 supported design and construction of the 1,500 car parking garage for the University Drive VAMC; demolition of vacant structures at the Heinz VAMC; and master design services and multiple renovation projects to immediately enhance care. These projects are being completed on time and within budget. In FY 2006, \$50 million is being used for the construction of the 98-bed residential living center, administration building, and various infrastructure and support facilities at the Heinz VAMC. These projects are also on time and within budget.

Funding for construction of the mental health, and research facilities at the University Drive VAMC and the ambulatory care center at the Heinz VAMC will be incorporated into VA's FY 2008 budget request. The project can still be completed with a marginal delay in schedule. As various buildings are completed, services will be gradually relocated; however, full closure of the Highland Drive Division will not be accomplished until all construction is completed.

Your assistance and support have been instrumental in ensuring this project remains on schedule and fully funded. A similar letter has been sent to Senator Rick Santorum, who co-signed your inquiry.

Sincerely yours,

R. JAMES NICHOLSON.

U.S. SENATE,

Washington, DC, February 28, 2006.

The Hon. R. JAMES NICHOLSON,
Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, DC.

DEAR SECRETARY NICHOLSON: We write today with regard to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 budget, particularly with respect to funding levels to support the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) recommendations.

As you know, the recent VA CARES process closed the Highland Drive VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. As a result, that facility's psychiatry, mental health, research, and administrative functions are to be consolidated within the University Drive VAMC and the H. John Heinz VAMC in Pittsburgh. VA officials promised Congress that there would be no termination of services at the Highland Drive facility until construction of the new facilities is completed and the transfer of patients from the Highland Drive VAMC to the University Drive VAMC and the Heinz VAMC is completed.

Included in the VA Budget Request for FY 2007 is a request for \$457 million for the CARES program, which includes funding for the continuation of specific medical facility projects and the funding of new projects. Notably absent from this request is funding for the continuation of the VA CARES construction project within the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. We are concerned that any delay of funding for this crucial initiative will negatively impact the construction