

General Ward and know that he is aware of both the opportunities and risks as AFRICOM stands up. I still believe that a unified regional combatant command can contribute to broader U.S. Government efforts to confront the many security challenges in Africa and can provide additional tools to pursue coherent and strategic objectives across the continent. But to fulfill that potential, AFRICOM must demonstrate in its inaugural months and years that it recognizes the unique political realities throughout Africa, concentrates on its defined mandate, and takes its lead from our diplomats. Simultaneously, we in Congress must act to ensure that our diplomats have the resources they need to take that lead in formulating and implementing comprehensive U.S. strategies in Africa.

NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I rise today in honor of National Adoption Day and National Adoption Month. Senator COLEMAN and I understand that the Senate passed our resolution recognizing National Adoption Day and National Adoption Month. I stand before you today and challenge every Member of Congress to take this opportunity to be the voice for children who do not necessarily have someone to speak for them.

As chair of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption, I strongly believe that "there is no such thing as an unwanted child, just unfound families." The Hague Convention recognizes "that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding." Unfortunately, not all children have a family of their own, but through adoption our children have the opportunity to find their "forever family."

Nearly half of all Americans have been touched by adoption, and last year more than 4,200 children became members of permanent loving families through adoption celebrations that were held in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. I commend every State for its efforts, but we still have miles to go.

Between 2002 and 2007, approximately 4.8 million children were serviced by the U.S. foster care system, and only 310,000 of them were adopted by "forever families." Children in foster care are some of the most vulnerable members of our society, and we must do everything in our power to make sure they have the necessary tools to live a normal healthy life. As Members of Congress we have taken a stance in helping children move from foster care to permanent, adoptive homes by passing the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008. However, National Adoption Day gives us the chance to experience firsthand the joys that adoption brings to the lives of our children and their families.

President Bush has recognized the importance of adoption to children and our Nation. That is why he declares November to be National Adoption Month. This year National Adoption Day occurs on November 15 as a part of National Adoption Month. National Adoption Day is an event to raise awareness of the 129,000 children in foster care who are waiting for permanent families. Since the first National Adoption Day in 2000, nearly 20,000 children have joined "forever families" on this special day. This year we hope to have events in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

I want you to picture what happens on this fall day, children running, laughing, and playing with their new parent. Think about a girl or boy planning their special outfit and joyously awaiting the family celebration. Imagine the excitement welling up inside of a child as she looks into her new parent's eyes and knows she is finally part of a family. She will never dread the sound of a car coming to take her away again or wonder where she will lay her head or which school she will be moved to.

Now picture the other dramatically different reality. There are approximately 513,000 current foster care children in the United States, and 114,000 of them are waiting for adoption. Since 1987, the number of children in foster care has nearly doubled, and the average time a child remains in foster care has lengthened to nearly 3 years. Each year, approximately 24,000 children in foster care will age out of the system without ever being placed with a permanent family.

According to a survey by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, many potential adoptive parents have considered foster care adoption, but "a majority of Americans hold misperceptions about the foster care adoption process and the children who are eligible for adoption." For example, "two-thirds of those considering foster care adoption are unnecessarily concerned that biological parents can return to claim their children and nearly half of all Americans mistakenly believe that foster care adoption is expensive, when in reality adopting from foster care is without substantial cost."

Most foster children entered into State custody because their parents were either unable or unwilling to care for them. Not only are children separated from parents, but in many cases, siblings are separated when they are placed in foster care. Over half the children in foster care are 10 years of age or older and have more difficulty being adopted. These children are just waiting to flourish with the right parent's guidance.

In Louisiana there are 4,541 children in foster care and 1,162 of them are waiting to be adopted. I would like to share with you how foster care and adoption has affected some of our children in Louisiana.

Ian is 15 years old and first entered foster care at the age of 5 due to physical abuse and lack of supervision by his mother. Ian's mother surrendered her parental rights, and he and his three sisters were placed for adoption. Ian's younger sisters were adopted by their foster parents.

In November 2006, Ian was placed in a specialized foster home after completing a facility program. This family has worked very closely with Ian in learning to trust others, making appropriate choices, on becoming part of a family unit, and being able to "attach" to others in preparation of an adoptive family. Ian is working very hard to adjust to a "traditional family lifestyle" and is progressing well in this family setting. Ian states he wants an adoptive family that says, "You are our child and we will not turn you away."

Ian is very personable and is looking for acceptance in life. He is polite, affectionate, and very adventurous. Ian enjoys playing basketball, riding bikes, reading Harry Potter books, and playing video games. Numerous recruitment efforts for an adoptive home have been made since Ian was placed in the specialized foster home, but an adoptive family has not been found to date. One of the greatest barriers to adoption is a lack of resources of prospective adoptive families willing to adopt older children.

While Ian is still desperately searching for someone to love and care for him, Christopher, through all of his struggles, has found that sense of permanency. Christopher is 12 years old and first entered foster care at the age of 2 months. He was subject to abuse by his biological father that resulted in a skull fracture, subdural hematoma, bruises, bites, and burns. Christopher had many developmental delays and problematic behaviors requiring placement in specialized foster homes. Christopher's removal was requested by several foster placements because of behavioral issues. In June 2006, a foster parent who had provided respite for Christopher was asked to consider the fostering of Christopher as the child had formed a very strong bond to this foster parent and her children during his respite visits. Upon placement in this home, drastic improvements were noted in Christopher's behavior, socialization, academic achievements, and physical health. In all appearances, Christopher was now functioning in the normal range for his age and with minimal evidence of neurological impairment. Christopher's neurologist continued to marvel at Christopher's functioning considering the extensive injuries he had suffered as an infant.

One day while the adoption social worker was visiting with Christopher and his foster mother, Christopher said he wanted to change his name to "Kantrell." The social worker responded "Kantrell (and Christopher's last name), that does sound nice." Christopher replied no, "Kantrell" and the last name of his foster mother. The

social worker stated that she immediately noted a glistering in the eye of the foster mother who replied, "Is that really what you want, Christopher?" Christopher responded that was very much his desire. The adoption of Christopher was finalized in January 2008 with Christopher changing his name to "Kantrell." Kantrell has continued to thrive in his adoptive home and is a delight to all who know him.

Each year, 79,000 children and youth who exit foster care leave without a permanent home or belonging to a family. I could stand here every day for the next month and talk about each child who needs to be adopted out of foster care. The bottom line is that each of these children, from 1 day old to 22 years old, needs permanency. They all need a loving, nurturing family that will help them to grow, bring out their unique personalities, and transform them into confident and happy adults.

On National Adoption Day, I have faith that we can be the catalyst to securing a permanent loving family for every child. The miracle of adoption cannot be explained, but the loving parents who are holding their children for the first time today are living examples of how dreams can be realized. As an adoptive mother myself, I find that words cannot adequately explain the miracle of adoption. I can only take a moment to offer my most humble thanks, gratitude, and appreciation to all those across the Nation who have given their Saturday to help find waiting children safe and loving homes.

Let us continue to remember that when National Adoption Month and Day end there are still thousands of children who need that sense of permanency. I challenge Congress to make these children their first priority and not another statistic to be studied. Please join us in supporting National Adoption Day and National Adoption Month by participating in events held across the country celebrating this most joyous, hopeful act.

HIGHER EDUCATION LOANS

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, this past August the President signed into law the Higher Education Opportunity Act which reauthorized programs for postsecondary and higher education. Contained within the reauthorization is the Education Disaster and Emergency Relief Loan Program. The bill established a loan program within the U.S. Department of Education to provide critically needed low-interest guaranteed loans to institutions in the event of catastrophic natural or man-made disasters.

The colleges and universities in Louisiana, particularly those in the New Orleans area, remain in many ways financially crippled by Hurricane Katrina. Three years after Katrina and Rita devastated Louisiana and Mississippi these institutions still have nearly \$700 million in unrecovered losses. The estimates for Gustav and

Ike are still not finalized, but at this stage the damage is purported to be at least \$46 million to State colleges and universities alone.

Before Katrina, the 11 colleges and universities in the New Orleans area educated 70,000 students. Today, that number is only 50,000, but it continues to slowly rebound. This growth comes despite the fact that our institutions of higher education experienced more than \$1 billion in physical damages and operational losses due to the 2005 hurricanes and have recovered less than half of those losses. Higher education institutions are the largest employers in New Orleans both before and after Katrina. The higher education industry in New Orleans continues to attract millions of research dollars and supports industries as diverse as biotechnology, aerospace, and medicine. The work of each institution in the city can be seen in every aspect of the region's recovery, from the redesign of the city's troubled public schools to coastal restoration and hurricane protection to the provision of health care across the region. They engage in this important work even as they continue to struggle with mounting revenue losses, buildings that remain in disrepair due to flooding, and the loss of key faculty and staff.

I call today on the Secretary of Education to make the Education Disaster Loan Program a top regulatory priority. It is my understanding that some Department of Education officials have said that they will not promulgate regulations on any newly created programs in the Higher Education Act until funds are appropriated. This simply is not acceptable. This issue has become a major roadblock in the current disaster funding process, and it is my hope that the Secretary and the Department will move expeditiously to establish regulations so that the program may provide crucial assistance to the colleges and universities impacted by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav, Ike, and the Midwest floods.

PRIVACY PROTECTIONS—S. 2321

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I am pleased to announce that, today, after several discussions, the Bush administration and lead sponsors of the E-Government Reauthorization Act of 2008, S. 2321, have accepted an amendment I have drafted to ensure that Americans' privacy comes first when the Government purchases and uses their most sensitive personal information. My amendment requires that Federal agencies must conduct privacy impact assessments before employing outside contractors that use and market Americans' sensitive personal data.

The addition of privacy protections to the E-Government Reauthorization Act will help to better protect all Americans from the growing threats of data breaches, identity theft, and other cyber crimes. I am particularly pleased about the compromise reached today

because I am a proud supporter of this bill. In 2002, I was an original cosponsor of E-Government Act, and in the intervening years, I have worked to promote and strengthen this law.

The E-Government Reauthorization Act is a good bill that will now be even better because of the privacy protections added by my amendment. Recently, the Government Accountability Office released a report on lessons learned about the Government data breaches at the Veterans' Administration and elsewhere. That report found that Government contractor responsibilities for preventing and responding to data breaches should be clearly defined. My amendment takes a small but important step toward addressing the growing problem of lax data security by Government contractors by making sure that Americans' privacy rights are not compromised when they entrust their sensitive personal information to our Government.

I thank the lead sponsors of this bill for working with me on compromise privacy language for this bill. I also thank the many stakeholders who support this bill and my privacy amendment, including the Center for Democracy and Technology, Symantec, and the Cyber Security Industry Alliance.

I urge all Senators to support and pass this important legislation.

HONORING MARYLAND'S OLYMPIANS

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, today I rise to honor and congratulate Maryland's Olympic athletes for their performance in the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games. These dedicated, disciplined, and accomplished athletes are a source of great pride to Maryland and the country. Therefore, it is with great enthusiasm that I commend:

Freddy Adu of Montgomery County, 2008 men's soccer team; Carmel Anthony of Baltimore, 2008 men's basketball team; David Banks of Potomac, 2008 men's Olympic rowing team; Maurice Edu of College Park, 2008 men's soccer team; Jun Gao of Montgomery County, 2008 women's table-tennis team; Georgia Gould of Baltimore, 2008 women's cycling team; Kathryn Hoff of Towson, 2008 women's Olympic swimming team; Gao Jun of Gaithersburg, 2008 men's Olympic table tennis team; Bobby Lea of Talbot County, 2008 men's Olympic cycling team; Mechelle Lewis of Prince George's County, 2008 women's track & field team; Jessica Long of Baltimore, 2008 Paralympics swimming team; Khan Bob Malaythong of Rockville, 2008 men's Olympic badminton team; Tatyana McFadden of Howard County, 2008 Paralympic wheelchair racing; Scott Parsons of Montgomery County, 2008 men's canoe and kayak team; Michael Phelps II of Baltimore, 2008 men's Olympic swimming team; Lauren Powley of the University of Maryland, 2008 women's field hockey team; Dina Rizzo of the University of Maryland, 2008 women's field