

many of us today in a totally different way, with a multitude of options we never had. If, in fact, we don't begin to change this, the system will reflect one choice, one doctor, one hospital, one delivery port.

I challenge my colleagues today that is universal control, control where one entity—the Federal Government—dictates where we go, who we see, what they are reimbursed for delivering the service, and the outcome will be the lack of innovation, the lack of breakthroughs, and no reason for the American people to make healthy choices and to engage in prevention and wellness.

That is where we are. I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will engage and encourage our leadership to have a healthy debate on health care. I haven't locked in to any prescribed legislation tonight. It is the principles of the Republican Conference that I am here to present and will continue to come back to the Senate floor to present. I encourage my colleagues on both sides of the aisle: let's come to the floor. Bring your legislation. Let's examine it, let's debate it, let's let America see it. Let them be the judge. At the end of the day, it is the American people who will influence where this debate goes, and that is exactly who should influence it. They are the patients of the future health care system.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado is recognized.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period for the transaction of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

5TH ANNIVERSARY OF NEVADA STATE COLLEGE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I rise today to commemorate the 5th anniversary of Nevada State College, the newest institution in the Nevada System of Higher Education.

Nevada State College was born out of a dire need. In recent years, southern Nevada has been growing at a break-neck pace. In 1990, Clark County's population was just over 740,000 people; today, it is over 2 million. With such tremendous growth came considerable growing pains. Enrollment in Nevada's two universities and four community colleges swelled 16 percent from 1994 to 2000. Clark County was facing both teacher and nursing shortages. Nevada needed another place to train the next generation of nurses, teachers, and business professionals. That place is Nevada State College.

In many ways, Nevada State College is representative of our State. In 2002,

Nevada State opened its doors with 177 students; 5 years later, NSC's enrollment has swelled to over 1,900. In true pioneer fashion, Nevada State's students tend to focus on professions that are needed most in the community. NSC's two largest majors, nursing and teaching, are two areas of critical need in Nevada. But Nevada State is more than simply a nursing and teaching college.

Nevada State students also practice civic responsibility. Before they graduate, NSC students are required to take a course called Community Based Learning, CBL, 400. In this course, students work with different organizations to improve their community. For example, Nevada State graduates have worked at their local libraries, volunteered at nonprofits, and tutored public school students in the areas of math, science, and engineering. This service-oriented program has been such a success, it was named to the Presidential Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll for 2007.

Nevada State College has experienced rapid growth in its first 5 years, and I am sure it will continue to grow in both students and stature. Soon, NSC will begin expanding into its 500-acre parcel situated in the beautiful foothills of Henderson. I look forward to the completion of the new campus. Nevada State College is only 5 years old, but it has already made its mark as one of Nevada's shining academic gems.

IN HONOR OF JOHNNIE ALBERTSON

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the life and accomplishments of Ms. Johnnie Albertson. Johnnie, a valued employee of the Small Business Administration for 32 years, succumbed to illnesses resulting from pneumonia. A native North Carolinian, Ms. Albertson was able, through her own perseverance, to overcome poverty and the loss of her parents to establish herself as a champion of equal rights.

Ms. Albertson will be remembered for her dedication to her work with the Small Business Administration. Johnnie was a modern pioneer who overcame gender and class restrictions and went on to hold numerous senior positions at the SBA. She served as the first Associate Administrator for the Small Business Development Center Program and was the first woman to achieve the rank of senior executive within the SBA—the highest rank possible without a congressional appointment.

Through the many programs she initiated at the SBA, Johnnie was instrumental in guaranteeing the rights of minority and female small business owners across the country. Thousands of business owners owe their success, in part, to Ms. Albertson's resolve to ensure equal opportunities for all entrepreneurial Americans.

For her achievements, Ms. Albertson was awarded the SBA's Silver Medal for Meritorious Service and the inaugural SBA Lifetime Achievement Award. She was also the first female to sell advertising space for the Washington Post, New York Times, and the New York Tribune. These awards, coupled with her work in the private sector, forged a path for others to follow.

Johnnie Albertson will be remembered by those closest to her for her enthusiasm for reading, her wonderful sense of humor, and her love of jazz music. Those who benefited personally by knowing Ms. Albertson, along with those who profited by her good works, will forever be indebted to her generosity, devotion, and diligence in promoting equal opportunities for all. Mr. President, I extend my deepest sympathies to the friends and family of Ms. Albertson and express my gratitude for the passion with which she served our country.

INDIAN HEALTH CARE IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I welcome the Senate passage of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act. The bill is a long overdue response to a health crisis for our country's American Indians and would at last strengthen and expand health services to those who need it most and those to whom promises were made but far too few promises have been kept. The last comprehensive reauthorization of IHCIA took place in 1992—and since then, progress has been ground to a halt in the Senate while health disparities for American Indians have dramatically widened.

The situation is dire. Today, American Indians suffer from disproportionately higher rates of diabetes, heart disease, suicide, and several types of cancer than all other groups in the United States: 2.6 times more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes; 630 percent more likely to die from alcoholism; and a life expectancy nearly 6 years shorter than the rest of the U.S. population. The gap between the needs of this community and the resources dedicated to addressing them is stark: fewer mental health professionals available to treat Indians than the rest of the U.S. population; health care expenditures for Indians less than half of what America spends for Federal prisoners.

It goes without saying that we should invest the necessary funds in improving health coverage and care for American Indians, which is why it is so important that the Indian Health Care Improvement Act modernizes Indian health care services and helps ensure at least that money is no longer the biggest impediment to quality health care in Indian Country.

In my home State, the status of Indian health care is particularly daunting: inadequate health facilities, mental health services and assisted living care for the elderly; the percentage

of American Indians with poor emotional health is on average 2.1 times higher than the adult Massachusetts population; an obesity rate twice as high as the rate for Massachusetts adults in general. Moreover, the percentage of Mashpee Wampanoag adults with diabetes is nearly two times higher than the rest of the adult population in our State. During the 5 years between 1999 and 2004, American Indian mothers were over three times more likely to smoke during pregnancy than all mothers giving birth in Massachusetts. American Indian students have much higher percentages of smoking, drinking alcohol before age 13, and lifetime cocaine use than all other students in Massachusetts. Also, 1 in 4 American Indian high school students have reported attempting suicide compared to 1 out of 10 for all other students. The Indian health bill is an important step we must take to begin reversing these troubling statistics in Massachusetts and across the Nation.

This bill can mark a new day of at last addressing the health care needs of Indian Country programs to increase the outreach and enrollment of Indians in Medicaid and CHIP and improve the ability for tribes to participate in managed care health plans. The Indian Health Care Improvement Act brings greater access to health care services, improved medical insurance coverage, and education of disease prevention and healthy lifestyles.

The Senate came together across partisan lines to take a step forward with Indian Country, and I look forward to the quick passage of the bill and ultimately to seeing it signed into law by President Bush. This must be the beginning, not the end, of a new compact with Indian Country—and a renewed commitment to making sure that no American's health suffers because they are born on a farm, in a city, or on a reservation.

RED CROSS MONTH

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I rise to speak on the Red Cross and its campaign to encourage citizen preparedness for disasters.

For 65 years, since the first proclamation by Franklin D. Roosevelt, Presidents of the United States have designated March as Red Cross Month.

I am proud to support this year's proclamation in recognizing this great organization, whose activities include lifesaving courses, blood drives, sheltering families displaced by fire or flood, and responding to major disasters. This January, for example, Red Cross work in my home State of Maine included an urgent blood drive amid ice and snow that had reduced some hospitals' blood supply to a single day. Other Maine Red Cross workers were taking care of a seven-member family in the town of Skowhegan who had lost their home and possessions in a fire.

I know the good works of the Red Cross both as a Maine resident and as a

Senator. As ranking member of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security, I have worked closely with emergency management agencies and non-profit organizations for years. I know the Red Cross has not only saved many lives and comforted millions but has taken steps to improve its structure and capabilities for disaster response.

The record of recent years for terrorism, fires, earthquakes, floods, and other disasters underscores the need for preparedness not only at all levels of government but among individual citizens and families.

I therefore commend the Red Cross for focusing their public-communication efforts this year on the theme of "Be Red Cross Ready." It is a well-chosen theme: Red Cross survey work finds that up to 60 percent of Americans are entirely unprepared for disaster. They have no emergency supplies, no firstaid or CPR training, no rendezvous or communication plans or other precautions.

The catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina reminded us that government and other first responders, no matter how efficient and heroic, cannot appear instantly at every point affected by a disaster. Every citizen should be prepared to serve as a first responder for family and neighbors if official or volunteer responders cannot offer immediate assistance.

Encouraging individual responsibility and preparedness to augment government and private organization efforts can reinforce our national response framework to provide truly comprehensive and all-hazards protection.

For promoting readiness, and for all its good works, the American Red Cross deserves the thanks of all Americans and the recognition of Red Cross Month.

NATIONAL PEACE CORPS WEEK

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, as a part of National Peace Corps Week, I wish to join many of my colleagues in celebrating the 47th anniversary of the Peace Corps and honoring the important work of Peace Corps volunteers.

During this week, Peace Corps volunteers from around the world who have served over the years will share their overseas experiences with schools and community groups around the United States.

By giving presentations during Peace Corps Week, former Peace Corps volunteers will help Americans better understand the people and cultures they have experienced, and the many benefits of Peace Corps service.

By making presentations in classrooms, former volunteers will help create greater global awareness among students.

The Peace Corps is one of our most effective and successful foreign aid programs.

Since the establishment of the Peace Corps by President John F. Kennedy in 1961, more than 190,000 U.S. citizens, in-

cluding 25,000 from my home State of California, have served their country in the cause of peace by living and working in 139 developing countries.

The world has changed since 1961—and the Peace Corps has succeeded in keeping up with these changes.

While education and agriculture are still an important part of what a Peace Corp volunteer does, today's volunteers also work on HIV/AIDS awareness, information technology, and business development.

Many volunteers work in orphanages with HIV-positive children, implement programs for at-risk youth, and create support groups for HIV-positive people.

Business volunteers conduct seminars on subjects like marketing, strategic planning, and tourism development. They work with women and minority groups to strengthen their participation in the economic system.

Agriculture volunteers may find themselves working with farmers to implement techniques to improve soil quality and conserve water—or on the business end conducting production cost-and-price analyses.

The Peace Corps also assists countries in need by supplying Crisis Corps volunteers—former volunteers who return to the field on a short-term basis. In 2005, for the first time in its history, Peace Corps deployed 272 Crisis Corps volunteers domestically to assist in Hurricane Katrina relief efforts along the gulf coast.

Also in 2005, Crisis Corps volunteers were deployed to Sri Lanka and Thailand to assist with rebuilding tsunami devastated areas, and to Guatemala following Hurricane Stan. As part of PEPFAR, Crisis Corps has deployed volunteers to Uganda, Kenya, Namibia and Zambia. Finally, Crisis Corps is working with Peace Corps posts in Central America and the Caribbean to address disaster preparedness in the region.

Today's Peace Corps is more vital than ever, working in emerging and essential areas such as information technology and business development. They have made significant and lasting contributions around the world in agriculture, education, health, HIV/AIDS, and the environment.

Peace Corps volunteers continue to help countless individuals who want to build a better life for themselves, their children, and their communities.

At a time when the United States is seeking to reclaim the respect and admiration of the world and once again be seen as a champion and a leader of democracy, justice, and human rights, Peace Corps volunteers revitalize faith in this country.

They are leaders and diplomats, and they serve as an inspiration not only to their fellow American citizens but to citizens all across the world.

I urge all my colleagues to support the Peace Corps and celebrate National Peace Corps Week.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to commemorate National Peace