

School's auditorium. There were only 28 students. When the Nevada Board of Regents founded the Southern Nevada Division of the University of Nevada, students led the charge to become their own independent institution. They adopted the Rebel as their mascot to signify their desire to break free of the Reno campus. With pressure from students and the Las Vegas community, an 80-acre parcel along a two-lane dirt road was selected as the location for the campus. On September 10, 1957, the first classes were held on the new campus. And in 1968, UNLV began its journey as an independent institution.

Over the past 50 years, Las Vegas has grown and become the entertainment capital of the world, and just like the city that it calls home, UNLV, too, has had its fair share of celebrity. In 1964 Elvis Presley and Ann-Margret danced in the gym in the famous scene from the film "Viva Las Vegas". Frank Sinatra and Wayne Newton served on the UNLV Foundation's board in the 1980s and Anthony Zuiker, the creator and producer of the hit show "CSI", is an alumni.

Today, UNLV is a thriving urban research institution with more than 28,000 students and more than 220 undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degree programs. The campus—now 350 acres—boasts over 100 buildings with state-of-the-art technology and research facilities. Two of the most recent additions have been a new student union and a student recreation and wellness facility all paid for by the students. In 1998, UNLV opened the Boyd School of Law, which quickly gained accreditation from the American Bar Association and is now nationally ranked for its quality legal education. This year, UNLV also welcomed its eighth president, David Ashley.

Many outside of Nevada know of UNLV for its athletic teams. The Rebels participate in 17 intercollegiate sports. In 1990, the Runnin' Rebels won the NCAA Men's Division I tournament, beating Duke 103 to 73, the largest margin of victory ever in the championship game. While the Runnin' Rebels have continued to be a perennial player in the NCAA tournament, in recent years, UNLV athletics have also achieved success in golf, swimming and diving, boxing, track and field, and soccer.

In its first 50 years, UNLV has grown from a satellite outpost of higher learning to a major player in the fields of gaming and hotel management, environmental and experimental science, engineering, English, and law. UNLV has blossomed with the city around it, and as UNLV enters its next 50 years, I am confident that it will continue to prosper and strengthen the city it calls home.

TRIBUTE TO EDWARD M. SMITH

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise today to honor my good friend Edward M. Smith, a man for whom I have great respect and admiration.

Ed has been involved in the labor movement in Illinois for more than 40 years. He is deeply committed to the working families of America.

As a leader in the Laborers' International Union, Ed has worked to ensure workers earn a living wage, good benefits and the opportunity to advance and better their lives.

He is stepping down as Midwest Regional Manager of the Laborers' International Union of North America, Vice President of Laborers' International and Assistant to the General President, to become President of the Union Labor Life Insurance Company, labor's own insurance and financial services company.

For those who may not be familiar with the Laborers, they are the men and women who do the hard, dangerous work of building our country.

Ed literally grew up in the labor movement. He was only 13 when he joined Laborers' Local 773 in Cairo, IL. He worked his way through school as a construction craft laborer.

He was elected business manager of his local union in 1976 at the young age of 21. A decade later, he was elected president of the Southern Illinois Laborers' District Council.

In 1994, Ed was elected Midwest Regional Manager of the Laborers' International, leading more than 50,000 union members. Two years later, he was elected Vice President of the Laborers' International Union and became Assistant to the General President of the Union.

Laborers' International Union is one of the fastest-growing unions of construction workers and Ed oversaw over 30 successful organizing campaigns, mainly in the public sector.

Ed was the first member of the Laborers' International Union to graduate from the National Labor College with a bachelors degree. Ed also graduated from the Harvard University Trade program and from Shawnee College. In 1992, he received Shawnee College's first outstanding alumni award.

As Ed fought for Illinois' working families, he raised his own family with his wife Betty. He has two children, daughter Jordan and son Matt.

Ed also devotes a great deal of his life to charitable organizations. He has been a major benefactor to the Therapy Center in Carterville, IL, an organization that assists physically disabled children. He also serves as a board member of the I Can Read Program, for children with reading and learning disabilities.

In addition to his many union roles, Ed is well respected for his leadership with the Illinois State Board of Investment, the Illinois Department of Labor Advisory Board, and the National Alliance for Fair Contracting.

Ed Smith is a big man with a big heart. It says something about him that he has risen to such prominence in the American labor movement without ever leaving his hometown of Cairo, IL and without ever losing touch with his

Midwestern roots and values. While he has remained in southern Illinois, the effects of his work can be seen and felt throughout our Nation.

As my friend Ed Smith begins the next chapter in his life, I want to congratulate him on his retirement from Laborers' International Union and thank him for over 40 years of dedication to working men and women. I wish him the best in his new role as president of Union Labor Life Insurance Company as he continues to protect the working families of America.

REMARKS OF RUPERT MURDOCK

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, last Monday evening I had the honor of attending a dinner of the Atlantic Council. At that dinner several distinguished individuals were honored: former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, News Corporation chairman and CEO Rupert Murdoch, and Admiral Michael Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for Distinguished International, Business and Military Leadership respectively.

During the evening, there was much discussion about the health of the transatlantic relationship. I was impressed with Rupert Murdoch's comments as to how the alliance must change to meet future threats. He went on to say "We must face up to a painful truth: Europe no longer has either the political will or social culture to support military engagements in defense of itself and its allies. However strong NATO may be on paper, this fact makes NATO weak in practice. And it means that reform will not come from within.

Those who want a reformed NATO must look to the outside. In other words, we need to transform this Alliance from a community formed around a map to a community based on common values and a willingness to take joint action in defense of these values.

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I ask unanimous consent to have Mr. Murdoch's entire remarks printed in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

MR. RUPERT MURDOCH'S PREPARED REMARKS FOR THE ATLANTIC COUNCIL'S 2008 ANNUAL AWARDS DINNER

Good evening. Thank you, Henry, for that kind introduction. Your words remind me of the definition of a diplomat: A man who always remembers his wife's birthday—but never remembers her age.

I also want to thank the Atlantic Council for this fine award. By honoring me, you honor the work that News Corporation's 61,000 employees are doing to connect people across oceans, borders, and cultures. And you underscore the importance of a strong private sector for a free society.

Few organizations have done more for the preservation of our freedom than this Council. Tonight I want to commend Fred Kempe

... General Jim Jones . . . the Council Board . . . and all the Council members for the important work you are doing. This Council was founded in the years following World War II. Statesmen on both sides of the Atlantic recognized that the defense of freedom would require the active engagement of a new generation of leaders. By working to keep that Alliance strong, you have helped the West prevail against Soviet communism—and ensure the advance of democracy from the Atlantic to the Urals.

Today we can be tempted to bask in our achievements—and wax nostalgic about all we have been through.

But this is no time for nostalgia. At this moment in our history, the Alliance that has been built up over decades now finds itself threatened on several fronts:

First, by the growing appeal of protectionism on both sides of the Atlantic . . .

Second, by the terrorists who target civilians in all our countries . . . and finally, by the crisis of confidence in a Europe that is losing its faith in the values and institutions that have kept us free.

We see this crisis of confidence in many areas. Yet nowhere is it more apparent than in the failure of nerve we are seeing in Afghanistan. After the attacks of September the 11th, 2001, it was clear that America and its allies needed to deprive al Qaeda of its safe haven. It was clear that we needed to help the Afghan people replace the Taliban with a free government that would build a more hopeful future for its citizens.

Unfortunately, far from reflecting our unity, NATO's entry into Afghanistan has exposed its divisions. Instead of standing together as full and equal partners, a handful of Alliance members are bearing the brunt of the fighting. Defense Secretary Robert Gates has said that the lack of equal burden sharing threatens the future of the Alliance. And he is right.

We must face up to a painful truth: Europe no longer has either the political will or social culture to support military engagements in defense of itself and its allies. However strong NATO may be on paper, this fact makes NATO weak in practice. And it means that reform will not come from within.

Those who want a reformed NATO must look to the outside. In other words, we need to transform this Alliance from a community formed around a map to a community based on common values and a willingness to take joint action in defense of these values.

In short, a strong and successful Atlantic Alliance will have to ground itself more on shared principles rather than accident of geography. And we need to show we are serious about defending those principles by standing with those who are standing up for them.

NATO's agreement to invite Albania and Croatia to become members is a welcome start. So is the somewhat weaker commitment that Ukraine and Georgia will become members of NATO at some point in the future.

But we need to go much further. As a rule, when an organization expands, the expansion dilutes its principles. For today's NATO, it is just the opposite. Expansion is the only hope of invigorating an Alliance weighed down by those who are no longer willing to commit themselves to defend its founding principles.

Around the world, there is no shortage of nations who share our values, and are willing to defend them. I am thinking of countries like Australia, which sent troops to Iraq . . . Israel, which has been fighting Islamic terrorism almost since its founding . . . and Japan, which generally follows a more "Western" policy than most of Western Europe.

Other countries have not reached the level of development these countries enjoy. But

some are working hard to get there, and would be strong partners down the road. At the very least, the United States needs to support them as they struggle against the dark forces trying to pull them down.

Right now the United States has a test in our own backyard. Colombia is a nation that is fighting poverty, battling the drug lords, and taking on terrorists backed by foreign governments. Its citizens have suffered tremendously from violence, and who want peace and opportunity. And it is being led by a brave and innovative President, who is bringing the rule of law to people who have not known it.

What does this brave President ask of us? He asks that we ratify the trade agreement we have negotiated with his nation.

By ratifying this agreement, we would open an important market for American goods. We would demonstrate to millions in our hemisphere that the path to prosperity lies in freedom and democracy. And we would give strong moral support to a leader struggling to bring hope and opportunity to his people in an important part of the world.

Everyone knows this. Even the New York Times says the Democratic Congress should ratify this trade deal. Instead, Speaker Pelosi has effectively put off the bill by not scheduling a vote. We need to make clear to the leadership in Congress needs to know what killing this trade deal would mean.

Throughout Colombia, a defeat for the trade deal would be confirmation that the United States is not an ally you could count on.

Throughout Latin America, a defeat for the trade deal would be exploited by thugs like Hugo Chavez, who would tell the people, "See, the Americans will never accept you as equals and partners."

And throughout the world, a defeat for the trade deal would be taken as another sign that the U.S. will not stand by its friends when the going gets tough.

The Mexican ambassador to the United States puts it this way: "The most important geopolitical mistake the United States could do today . . . is not ratifying that treaty."

The world is watching. The same values that we are trying to uphold in the Atlantic Alliance are at stake now in Colombia. And if we fail to support them in Colombia, it will be harder to revive them in the Alliance.

Let me conclude with a little story. I was born in Australia . . . I received my university education in Britain . . . and I have made my home in America. Over a long and I hope productive life, I have learned that shared values are more important than shared borders.

If we continue to define "the West" or "the Alliance" as a strictly geographical concept, the Alliance will continue to erode. But if we define the West as a community of values, institutions, and a willingness to act jointly, we will revive an important bastion of freedom—and make it as pivotal in our own century as it was in the last.

Thank you for having me. And thank you again for this fine award.

VETERANS BENEFITS ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2007

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I am pleased that S. 1315, as reported by the Veterans' Affairs Committee, the proposed Veterans Benefits Enhancement Act of 2007, finally passed in the Senate. This comprehensive legislation would improve benefits and services for veterans both young and old.

The Veterans' Affairs Committee reported S. 1315 to the full Senate in Au-

gust of last year. At that time, my belief was that debate and consideration of this legislation by the full Senate, would take place during September. That did not happen. As I described in detail yesterday, further action on the bill has been blocked because of opposition from the other side of the aisle to certain benefits for Filipinos who fought under U.S. command during World War II.

I will first describe some of the provisions in the bill and then will discuss in more detail my views on the provisions relating to Filipino veterans.

This legislation, as reported by the committee, would make several important improvements in insurance programs for disabled veterans. It would establish a new program of insurance for service-connected disabled veterans that would provide up to a maximum of \$50,000 in level premium term life insurance coverage.

This legislation would also expand eligibility for retroactive benefits from traumatic injury protection coverage under the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance program. This insurance program went into effect on December 1, 2005. All insured servicemembers under SGLI from that point forward are covered by traumatic injury protection regardless of where their injuries occur. However, individuals sustaining traumatic injuries between October 7, 2001 and November 30, 2005, that were not incurred as a direct result of Operations Enduring or Iraqi Freedom, are not eligible for a retroactive payment under the traumatic injury protection program. This legislation would expand eligibility to these individuals.

This legislation would also increase the maximum amount of Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance so that a service-connected disabled veteran may purchase from the current maximum of \$90,000 to \$200,000. In the event of the veteran's death, the veteran's family is protected because VA will pay the balance of the mortgage owed up to the maximum amount of insurance purchased. The need for this increase is obvious in today's housing market.

In addition, S. 1315, as reported, would also increase the amount of supplemental life insurance available to totally disabled veterans from \$20,000 to \$30,000. Many totally disabled veterans find it difficult to obtain commercial life insurance. These are the veterans we are trying to help with this legislation by providing them with a reasonable amount of life insurance coverage.

S. 1315, as reported, would also make small but necessary changes in existing laws relating to education and employment. First, it would restore the funding cap on the amount of support available to State Approving Agencies to the fiscal year 2007 level of \$19 million. Without this restoration, these entities that assist VA in approving programs of education would be facing a reduction of more than 30 percent beginning in this fiscal year. It is particularly