

The first has to do with the Iraq war. When President Bush set us on this course, few had the courage and strength to question, let alone oppose, this rush to war, but BOB BYRD stood strong against it. Facing enormous pressure, he led the opposition. He was in the minority—a lonely minority—but he was unbowed. He was right, and I am sure that history will judge his courageous leadership well.

The second memory is of a campaign trip I took to West Virginia in the fall of 2004 to support our candidate JOHN KERRY. We crisscrossed the State from Charleston to Mingo County, and what I saw everywhere was the extraordinary love and affection the people of West Virginia have for BOB and that he has for them. It was an amazing and touching thing to sense the deep bond between this great man and the people he has so ably represented in Washington for so long. It is an experience I will never forget.

Now, as we reflect on his unparalleled career in the Senate on this special 50th anniversary, I congratulate our friend. I thank him for all he has done so well for so many for so long. On this golden anniversary of his arrival in the Senate, I think of the famous lines of A. E. Housman about the “golden friends” the poet had. BOB BYRD is our golden friend, and we are all deeply honored to have the privilege of serving with him.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I would like to add my congratulations to Senator ROBERT C. BYRD for his historic achievement today. Senator BYRD arrived in the Senate 50 years ago. For decades, he has defended the Constitution and the principles upon which it stands. Senator BYRD is truly a statesman, a patriot, a proud son of West Virginia, and an important voice in the history of this country.

The people of West Virginia definitely know that they have a champion who will stand up for them. Senator BYRD has never forgotten the hard life that he had as a boy growing up in poverty in the southern West Virginia coalfields. He has always remained true to his faith and his family and has worked to build a better future for West Virginia and the Nation.

In the history of our great Nation, Senator BYRD has served longer than all but one Member of Congress and has been a committed public servant. Senator BYRD first came to Washington in 1953 as a Congressman and served three terms in the House before being elected to the Senate. Senator BYRD quickly learned the rules and procedures that make the Senate run. He used these to his advantage while serving as the Senate majority leader and in other key leadership positions. On June 11, 2006, Senator BYRD became the longest serving U.S. Senator in history, and in November 2006, he was elected to an unprecedented ninth full term.

During his tenure, his colleagues have elected him to more leadership positions than any other Senator in

history. This includes Senate majority whip, chairman of the Democratic Conference, Senate minority leader, and Senate majority leader. Currently, BYRD is the President pro tempore. Throughout his career, Senator BYRD has cast more than 18,100 roll call votes in five decades of service in the Senate.

Senator BYRD is also the longest serving member of the esteemed Appropriations Committee. He has served as its chairman or ranking member since 1989. After many distinguished years of service, he has stepped down from his leadership position but will remain an important voice on this committee. I have enjoyed serving with him on the Appropriations Committee and have learned a tremendous amount under his leadership.

There are other sides to Senator BYRD that have contributed to his life's accomplishments, his achievements as a musician and author. Senator BYRD learned to play the fiddle at a young age and carried it with him everywhere he went. His skill with the instrument led to performances at the Kennedy Center and on a national television appearance on “Hee Haw.” He even recorded his own album, “Mountain Fiddler.” He is also the author of a magisterial four volume set about this body entitled “The Senate, 1789–1989” and other works.

No tribute to Senator BYRD would be complete without mentioning his life's love, Erma Ora James. For nearly 69 years, the Byrds were inseparable, traveling throughout their native West Virginia and crossing the globe together. Sadly, Mrs. Byrd passed away on March 25, 2006, but Senator BYRD speaks lovingly of her and their life together each day.

The times have changed considerably since Senator BYRD was first elected to the West Virginia House of Delegates and eventually the U.S. Senate. We have seen a man walk on the Moon. We have mapped the human genome, and we have seen unbelievable technological advances that have changed the way we live, work and communicate. But through it all, the one constant is Senator BYRD's steadfast championing of our Constitution and the people of West Virginia. I join my colleagues in offering my hardy congratulations to him on this important day.

Mr. INOUE. Mr. President, today marks the 50th anniversary of Senator ROBERT BYRD's service to this most American of institutions: the United States Senate.

“Service to the Senate”—I have chosen these words intentionally, and with care. To serve in this hallowed chamber is to meld service to home and community with service to the Nation as a whole. It is a distinction that we are all privileged to share.

But through his five decades in this Chamber, ROBERT BYRD's service has transcended the ordinary to rise to the absolute allegiance our country has only rarely received over her long history.

Senator BYRD was born and raised in humble circumstances. The loss of his mother at the age of 1 left him a virtual orphan, and he grew up in West Virginia's coal country. The Great Depression postponed the young ROBERT BYRD's education, but it did nothing to hold back his lively and agile mind or his passion to seize on America's promise of equal opportunity. In 1946, he entered West Virginia's House of Delegates, and sought progressively higher offices. Finally, in 1958, he arrived in the Senate and found his “home.”

It is said that education opens doors, but in Senator BYRD's case, we learn that the doors it opens may not be the ones that we expect. For him, he was already a Member of the House of Representatives when he began work to earn his J.D. Ten years of night school finally earned him the degree as a sitting Senator.

So what doors did his studies open? After all, he was already one of the Nation's highest officials.

Education, a love of history, the discipline of rigorous study, the independence of thought. If you think about it, these are the very qualities that our American democracy most depends on. And by cultivating them, Senator BYRD grew in his capacity to serve his home, serve his Nation, and to serve the Senate.

Mr. BYRD served as the Senate majority leader from 1977 to 1981, and many believe it is in recognition of that time that I continue to call him “Mr. Leader.” But I would like to take this opportunity to set the record straight.

Mr. Leader. My dear friend. Protocol dictates that anyone who served as majority leader should retain the title for life. Even in the absence of protocol, however, my heart would demand that I rise and salute you as leader of this institution. Congratulations on this milestone, Mr. Leader. We have worked together for many years, and it will be a distinct honor to continue working with you on the Appropriations Committee and in the Senate.

WORKING FAMILY CHILD ASSISTANCE ACT

Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, yesterday, I joined Senator LINCOLN to introduce legislation to make permanent the tremendous change Congress enacted last October to enhance the refundable child tax credit. To assist working families, Congress reduced the amount of earnings a family must have to qualify for the refundable child tax credit to \$8,500 for 2008 from the \$12,050 that prevailed prior to passage of the Act. Unfortunately, because Congress did not make the incentive permanent, families will have to earn at least \$12,550—\$4,050 more—this year to take advantage of the incentive.

At a time in which the economy is in recession and many have to work two or even three jobs to put food on the table, it would be unconscionable to

make families toil even harder to provide their children with life's necessities. That is why I am so proud to introduce the Working Family Child Assistance Act to permanently set the amount of earnings necessary to qualify for the refundable child tax credit at \$8,500.

Last October's change to boost the refundable child tax credit took a significant time to materialize, and although the road was long, it was a worthwhile journey. Indeed, our work began in 2001 when I pushed to make the child tax credit refundable for workers making around the minimum wage. As enacted in 2001, a portion of a taxpayer's child tax credit would be refundable—up to 10 percent of earnings above \$10,000.

Not resting on our victory in 2001, in 2004, Congress passed the Working Families Tax Relief Act of 2004, which increased from 10 percent to 15 percent the portion of the child tax credit that is refundable. Although the legislation increased the amount of the refundable child credit, it failed to increase the number of families eligible for the benefit. The reason was that it did not reduce the amount of earnings a family must have to qualify for the incentive. Worse still, the earnings threshold rose each year because it was adjusted for inflation. The consequences were serious for low-income Americans living paycheck-to-paycheck because it meant that tens of thousands of low-income families were left completely ineligible for a credit they should receive.

To ensure that low-income families could get the benefits that they so rightly deserve, I worked with my colleagues to introduce legislation in both 2005 and 2007 to reduce the earnings threshold for the refundable child tax credit to \$10,000 and to de-index that amount for inflation. As I mentioned, we were more successful than that last year when Congress lowered the earnings threshold for 2008 to \$8,500.

Unfortunately, we cannot rest on our laurels and must get right back to work. This year, because the incentive we passed last October was effective for just 2008, only taxpayers earning over \$12,550 are eligible to receive the refundable portion of the child tax credit. Low-income families earning less than that amount are shut out of the child tax credit completely.

As an example of how crucial it is to enact our legislation to permanently set the threshold for the refundable credit at \$8,500, let's look at the following example. A single mother who earns the current minimum wage of \$6.55 per hour and works a 40 hour week for all 52 weeks of the year would earn \$13,264. Accordingly, under the law effective for 2009, her refundable child tax credit would be \$161. In contrast, if the earnings threshold were set at \$8,500, her refundable child tax credit would jump to \$715. Thus, if Congress does not change the law, that mother will have 554 fewer dollars in her pocket

this year than she did last year. Put another way, she won't have the money that is so necessary for her to clothe her child and put gas in the car. What is even more regrettable is that the \$554 amount will only grow next year because the \$12,550 she needed to earn this year is adjusted for inflation and will increase.

Let's do the right thing and make permanent the sensible change Congress made last year to set the earnings threshold for the refundable child tax credit at \$8,500. Our families and our country are better off when Government lets people keep more of what they earn, particularly the most vulnerable among us. Parents deserve their per-child tax credit, and this bill rewards families for work.

In conclusion, I would note that President-elect Obama was a stalwart supporter of our efforts as a Member of the Senate, and I hope that he will work with Congress so we can help an additional 1 million children, whose parents and guardians struggle every day to take care of them.

IDAHOANS SPEAK OUT ON HIGH ENERGY PRICES

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, in mid-June, I asked Idahoans to share with me how high energy prices are affecting their lives, and they responded by the hundreds. The stories, numbering well over 1,200, are heartbreaking and touching. While energy prices have dropped in recent weeks, the concerns expressed remain very relevant. To respect the efforts of those who took the opportunity to share their thoughts, I am submitting every e-mail sent to me through an address set up specifically for this purpose to the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD. This is not an issue that will be easily resolved, but it is one that deserves immediate and serious attention, and Idahoans deserve to be heard. Their stories not only detail their struggles to meet everyday expenses, but also have suggestions and recommendations as to what Congress can do now to tackle this problem and find solutions that last beyond today. I ask unanimous consent to have today's letters printed in the RECORD:

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

Thank you for asking about our story and giving us an opportunity to help. Me and my wife are students at BYU-Idaho and have one child on the way. The situation that we are in requires us to drive to school and work. We use about 2 tanks of gas a month and that is just business travel and does not include any enjoyment travel such as going to see family which has been very limited lately. My job consists of working at a Thai restaurant as a waiter for only 10 hours a week because with my heavy school load; that is all I can do. My wife does not work and is 37 weeks pregnant and attending school. Luckily we have received government financial aid for school, which consists of Pell grants. This money helps but we find that instead of using that money the government gave us for education, we are using it to pay for gas.

We are grateful for the aid the government is giving us but sorry that it is not used for what they meant it for but instead find ourselves using it to pay the oil companies. To try to limit the use of such fund we tend to stay home more and visit family less but even with that sacrifice we still see the money slowly seeping out due to gas prices.

Thank you for your efforts,

BLAKE.

Our government's inaction in this energy crisis is in my view the greatest act of treason by a group of Americans in recent memory. Inaction and pointing fingers at each other is unacceptable behavior by a government who is "supposed" to be looking after the best interests of the American people. We have every ability to provide for our energy needs with our own resources while we work to conserve and provide the energy responsibly in our environment. The fact that our government is allowing the American people to be held hostage by the world on this issue is tragic and has enhanced my view that the corruption is not with our industries but with those that we are electing.

JAY.

Trucks move the nation and the price of diesel is hurting everyone.

MARGE.

I see my married children struggle to buy gas for their cars—money that should go to food, medical, and housing costs.

Two years ago, in my construction business, it would not have mattered whether a job was 3 miles away or 30 miles away, but now I cannot bid a job without adding extra for fuel for added distance. All of our construction materials are going up also. How long will the economy stand this?

It is frustrating to see the congress do nothing to help relieve the pressure of this on the nation. Raising taxes will not help. Just doing something about the environmentalists will help. Stop the government controls and get drilling for oil and build some refineries.

Thank you for what you do, Senator Crapo. I know that you are for drilling because I watch your voting record. I also listen to you on "Probing America". The United States needs more people like you.

ALLAN, *Shelley*.

Living in Southeast Idaho with its wide open spaces can be both a blessing and a curse. As an educator and a proud parent, I am deeply concerned about the rising energy costs. I work fifteen miles from where I live. That translates to thirty miles round-trip. I choose to work in a rural school district and am proud to do so as I believe every district deserves quality teachers. As you are well aware, educators are already some of the poorest paid in this great state. I fear that I may not be able to afford to keep my job, but I can also not afford to lose it. One thing I am sure of and that is that Washington does not know about the special needs of our state as far as transportation is concerned. I am glad that you can present our situation to them.

STEPHANIE.

Our business is ATV Alternatives, LLC in Caldwell. Our product is a fantastic utility vehicle imported to the USA from abroad that gets nearly 40 MPG and is increasingly popular to businesses (especially dairies, farms, ranches, recreational users) who see value in using a smaller vehicle that can carry a variety of things along with a second passenger in an enclosed cab. It gets 2-4 times better mileage than other products