

cooperate with requests for information from the Government Accountability Office about how they used taxpayer money.

The GAO is supposed to be the “eyes and ears” of Congress. Well it can’t do that job wearing blinders and ear plugs. So I urge my colleagues to support amendment No. 1020, to ensure that GAO has access to TARP recipients’ books and records.

Mr. President, in March the Finance Committee held a hearing on the progress and oversight of the Troubled Assets Relief Program, TARP. At that hearing, we heard testimony from acting Comptroller General, the head of the Government Accountability Office, GAO. He testified that in addition to the problem that S. 340 is intended to fix, there is another major gap in GAO’s access to information about the TARP. It is not just firms that take taxpayer money who can say “no” to GAO’s requests for information. The Federal Reserve can too.

The GAO is prohibited by law from auditing the the Federal Reserve. Perhaps that restriction was defensible back when the Federal Reserve focused on monetary policy. However, today it is routinely exercising extraordinary emergency powers to subsidize financial firms far above the levels Congress is willing to authorize through legislation. The Federal Reserve is taking on more and more risk in complicated and unprecedented ways. That risk is ultimately borne by the American taxpayer, but the elected representatives of the taxpayers have not had a say in the Federal Reserve’s activities or even a reasonable level of transparency to make sure we understand how much risk taxpayers are on the hook for.

The GAO testified at our hearing that the Federal Reserve is heavily involved in two new TARP programs announced since March of this year. It is also responsible for managing huge portfolios of troubled assets it took on in the bailouts of Bear Stearns and AIG. According to GAO testimony, as of March 27, 2009, Treasury has announced initiatives that are projected to use \$590.4 billion of the \$700 billion in TARP funds authorized by Congress. However, the projected assistance in these initiatives by the Federal Reserve could be up to \$2.9 trillion by GAO estimates. In addition, the Federal Reserve has a variety of other facilities it has established to address the financial crisis adding up to another \$1.5 trillion.

Despite these enormous numbers, there is a statutory limitation prohibiting GAO from examining the Federal Reserve. That provision is now in direct conflict with the mission that Congress gave GAO to monitor and report on the TARP.

Amendment No. 1021 would fix this conflict by allowing the GAO to provide Congress a complete and independent view of all the TARP programs, including those with Federal Reserve involvement, such as the Term

Asset Loan Facility, TALF, and the Public Private Investment Partnership, PPIP. It would also allow the GAO to examine other extraordinary Federal Reserve actions, such as its acceptance of risky assets from Bear Stearns and AIG.

I urge my colleagues to support amendment No. 1021. Let’s not give GAO an important mission to do with a blindfold on. Let’s take off the blindfold and let the professionals at GAO take a good hard look on behalf of the American people at what the Federal Reserve is doing.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. SCHUMER. 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.

#### PARTY AFFILIATION CHANGE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I have a letter addressed to the Vice President from Senator SPECTER notifying the Senate of his decision to switch his party affiliation from Republican to Democrat and that he will now caucus with Senate Democrats. While the letter is dated April 29, it was just received today, Thursday, April 30. I ask unanimous consent that the letter be printed in the RECORD.

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

U.S. SENATE,

Washington, DC, April 29, 2009.

The Hon. JOSEPH R. BIDEN, JR.,  
Vice-President and President of the U.S. Senate,  
Washington, DC.

DEAR VICE-PRESIDENT BIDEN: I write to inform you that I will be changing my party affiliation from Republican to Democrat. I will be caucusing with the Democrats, effective immediately.

Sincerely,

ARLEN SPECTER.

#### HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

CORPORAL WILLIAM CRAIG COMSTOCK

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, today, I come to the floor to honor Cpl William Craig Comstock of Van Buren, AR. His life and service to our country embody the full measure of the Marine Corps motto, “Semper Fidelis,” meaning “always faithful.”

We lost Corporal Comstock when he paid the ultimate sacrifice while serving in Iraq’s Anbar Province. Comstock was on his second tour with the 2nd Supply Battalion, Combat Logistics Regiment 25, 2nd Marine Logistics Group, II Marine Expedition Force, Camp Lejeune, NC. Working as an ammunition technician on his first tour in Iraq, he earned a Purple Heart for his bravery after sustaining a gunshot wound in the knee. Ever faithful to his Corps, he volunteered in January to re-

turn to Iraq a second time. He told his family he wanted to make that sacrifice for his fellow marines who he knew were eager to return home to see their own.

Coporal Comstock was loved by many. Those who knew him remember him for his wide smile, independent spirit, and warm heart. He was proud to be a U.S. marine, and the Marines were proud to have him. His awards include the Sea Service Deployment Ribbon, the Iraq Campaign Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and the National Defense Service Medal.

Even before joining the Marines, family, colleagues, and friends say Coporal Comstock lived by the “Semper Fidelis” motto. As an Alma High School football star, he played on despite an injured shoulder, refusing to let his teammates down. One of his football teammates, Nick Harrison, will graduate from Marine Corps basic training next month. Harrison’s mother said it was Coporal Comstock that inspired her son to enlist.

Coporal Comstock was a loyal teammate to his fellow U.S. marines and planned to make a career in military service. Coporal Comstock’s memory will live on through his friend Nick Harrison and others like him who selflessly serve our country in Iraq and Afghanistan. We are grateful for his service and my prayers are with his family during this difficult time.

#### A DECADE OF INACTION

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, last Monday marked the tenth anniversary of the tragic shooting at Columbine High School. The prior Thursday was the second anniversary of the tragic shooting at Virginia Tech. These horrific anniversaries have become far too common. Since the shooting at Columbine, I have spoken regularly on the Senate floor about the pressing need for common sense gun safety legislation. Unfortunately, Congress has failed to act.

Even a decade later, the very mention of Columbine High School strikes a nerve with those who hear it. Many of us can still recall with eerie detail the chaotic scenes of hundreds of terrified children running from their school as SWAT-teams descended on the building, searching for two adolescents who, before taking their own lives, murdered 12 innocent students, a teacher, and wounded two dozen others.

In the years that have followed, those closest to the event have recounted how they are constantly reminded of that day by the fragments of ammunition in their bodies or the physical scars from wounds suffered that day. Many victims have described shuddering at the sight of a trench coat or being instantly transported back to the incident from the sound or smell of fireworks. The physical and emotional pain these victims have endured should be intolerable to us. Yet

Congress has refused to take the necessary steps to prevent it.

Our Nation suffers from a horrific epidemic of gun violence. Over 30,000 Americans die from firearms every year, nearly 12,000 of which are homicides. That is an average of 32 gun murders every day, the same number killed at Virginia Tech. While we all hope and pray that these types of public tragedies do not happen again, the truth is that the threat of gun violence has not diminished.

Gun violence is preventable, however, it requires action. Without action, gun violence will continue to be found in our high schools, universities, religious institutions and our homes. For too long, victims and their families, educators and police officials around this country have cried out for sensible gun legislation that would keep guns out of the wrong hands, close the gun show loophole, reauthorize the assault weapons ban and aid law enforcement agencies in tracking gun traffickers. Passage of such legislation would serve as monumental steps toward ensuring these types of tragedies do not continue. Congress must do everything possible to reduce the level of gun violence in America.

#### ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to the millions of Asian Pacific Islander Americans for their significant contributions and service to strengthen this great Nation, and to join the Nation in celebrating Asian Pacific Islander American Heritage Month.

This month-long tribute would not be complete without recognizing the visionaries who founded Asian Pacific Islander American Heritage Month: U.S. Senator DANIEL INOUE, former U.S. Senator Spark Matsunaga, former Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta, and former U.S. Representative Frank Horton. As a result of their steadfast leadership, a joint resolution established Asian Pacific Islander American Heritage Week in 1978, and the celebration was later expanded to an entire month in 1992.

This celebration takes place in May to mark the first Japanese immigrants' arrival in America in 1842, as well as the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869—which would not have been finished without the hard work and dedication of Chinese laborers.

Today, our Nation faces its trials and tribulations as it sees harsh economic times. People throughout the country are losing their homes and their jobs and we must come together as a community and remain strong and dignified. The Asian Pacific Islander American community constitutes one of the fastest growing minority communities in the United States, with over 13 million Asian Pacific Islander Americans in the country. Despite these economic hardships, members of

the Asian Pacific Islander American community have continued to take positions of leadership and have worked hard to secure a brighter future for all.

Asian Pacific Islander Americans are making great strides both in the private and public sectors. Members of the Asian Pacific Islander American community have been named to key appointments in President Barack Obama's administration and at other levels of government. As Asian Pacific Islander Americans advance to positions of power and leadership, we can ensure that the voice of the community is being heard.

While we celebrate the many accomplishments and the promising future of the Asian Pacific Islander American community, we must not forget the history of Asian Pacific Islander Americans in this country. The Angel Island Immigration Station has a significant place in Asian Pacific Islander American history. Declared a National Historic Landmark in 1997, Angel Island served as the entry point in the West for over 1 million immigrants from 1910-1940. This includes approximately 175,000 Chinese immigrants who were detained at Angel Island before they were granted entry to San Francisco. Along with Representative LYNN WOOLSEY, I sponsored the Angel Island Immigration Station Restoration and Preservation Act, which passed in both the House and the Senate in 2005, authorizing \$15 million of federal funds for the Angel Island Immigration Station Preservation Project. After 3½ years since it was closed for restoration, Angel Island reopened this February and will educate the public about the immigration experience and the significance that it holds for many immigrant families today.

After the recent passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, benefits were finally granted to long-time Filipino veterans of World War II. The act recognizes the service of these veterans and includes a provision which allocates \$198 million to the Filipino veterans for their defense of the Philippines, a commonwealth under the United States during World War II. We must praise and commend these brave soldiers for the sacrifices they made during their service in the Armed Forces.

The idea of family is important to Americans and continues to be at the center of the Asian Pacific Islander American value system. It is imperative that we do what we can to keep families united to ensure that immigrants and children receive the support to sustain a livelihood in the United States.

I have continued to support immigration initiatives, such as comprehensive immigration reform and have supported family reunification. I authored legislation to reform the treatment of unaccompanied immigrant children who are in Federal immigration custody. The bill gives unaccompanied minors access to pro bono legal counsel

and requires family reunification whenever possible.

We must recognize that the Asian Pacific Islander American community is diverse, not only in language, culture and foods, but in education and socio-economic levels as well. That is why it is so important to provide talented students who have clearly embraced the American dream the incentive to take the path toward being a responsible, contributing member in our civic society.

I have cosponsored the DREAM Act of 2009 to give undocumented high school students who wish to attend college or serve in the Armed Forces an opportunity to adjust to a lawful status and pursue these goals. If it becomes law, the DREAM Act would help Asian Pacific Islander Americans and others triumph over adversity.

As future generations of Asian Pacific Islander Americans continue to strive for excellence in our educational system, economy, and communities, I am pleased to honor and distinguish the many triumphs and accomplishments of the Asian Pacific Islander American community and their role in shaping our Nation's identity.

#### MAERSK ALABAMA HEROES

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, this month the Nation was gripped by the pirate attack on Maersk Alabama off the coast of Africa. Today, I rise to cheer Captain Richard Philips, for his bravery and valor, and the Navy SEALs, for securing the Captain's safe return.

We also need to honor the Merchant Marines who did not give up their ship. Though unarmed, using their wits, grit and training, they saved their ship—an American flag-ship—and the much-needed food aid they were carrying to the desperately poor of Africa.

The 20-man crew of the Maersk Alabama belonged to the American Merchant Marines. They were sailing a U.S.-flag vessel carrying 17,000 metric tons of cargo to Mombasa, Kenya.

I am so proud that many of them trained in Maryland at Calhoun MEBA Engineering School in St. Michael's or at the maritime training school in Piney Point. Here, they learned how to navigate at sea, operate and repair ships, and how to handle a pirate or terrorist attack. Here, they received the education to sail the sea with skill that allowed them to save their ship with courage.

Thirteen of the 20 crew members aboard the Maersk Alabama trained in Maryland; 4 at Calhoun MEBA Engineering School and 9 at the Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training and Education.

Richard Matthews of St. Michael's was an engineer aboard Maersk Alabama. He trained at Calhoun MEBA Engineering School, as did three others aboard the ship: Ken Quinn, the ship's second mate who called CNN from the ship; Michael Perry; and John Cronan.