

be saying farewell to one of our most popular Members, Senator BLANCHE LINCOLN of Arkansas.

During her 12 years in this body, at a time when the Senate has become increasingly partisan and ideologically divided, Senator LINCOLN has charted an alternative course. She has cultivated friendships and collaborations on both sides of the aisle, and has been skilled in forging bipartisan agreements on a wide range of issues.

Last year, Senator LINCOLN succeeded me as chair of the Agriculture Committee. I would note that she is the first Arkansan and the first woman to serve in that position.

She has used that position to champion causes that have been her passion for many years, including revitalizing rural communities, supporting family farmers, promoting biofuels and other forms of renewable energy, and advocating for better nutrition for our school-aged children.

Senator LINCOLN is leaving the Senate at the very top of her game. Just this week, President Obama signed into law the Claims Resolution Act of 2010, the culmination of Senator LINCOLN's efforts to provide justice for African-American farmers who suffered decades of discrimination in agricultural programs.

Also this week, President Obama signed into law the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which will become a major part of Senator LINCOLN's legacy as a Senator.

When I handed over the gavel of the Senate Agriculture Committee to Senator LINCOLN last year, much work had been done on the child nutrition bill but much remained to be done. Senator LINCOLN did a fantastic job—a masterful job—of taking over the child nutrition authorization and shepherding it to a unanimous approval by the Senate. Thanks to her leadership, low-income children will have increased access to Federal nutrition programs, the nutritional quality of the programs will improve, and the financial foundation of the National School Lunch Program will be greatly reinforced.

Senator LINCOLN also exhibited extraordinary leadership earlier this year in the Wall Street reform bill. Again, as the chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, she was able to forge bipartisan consensus for strong reform of the derivatives market. Indeed, the provision she championed will help to restore integrity to the derivatives markets, it will allow companies to safely use derivatives to manage their business risk, and it will help to prevent future financial crisis. I was proud to support her in those efforts.

For the last 12 years in this body, Senator LINCOLN has been a tireless advocate for the people of her State of Arkansas, for American agriculture, for rural Americans, and for families with small kids. She has been an outstanding Senator and a wonderful friend. I join with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle in wishing

BLANCHE and Steve and their twin boys Reece and Bennett the very best in the years ahead.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I thank my colleague for his forbearance.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. CARPER. Before Senator HARKIN leaves the floor, let me say I am so pleased that I was literally able to be here on the floor and hear you talk about our colleagues. What a wonderful thing to do, and to single out Democrats and Republicans and to reflect upon their service to their States and to our country. I had to mention that.

You mentioned BLANCHE LINCOLN. A lot of people say I respect my colleague, I think highly of my colleague, but here in the Senate we love BLANCHE. We love BLANCHE and her family. She is such a joy to work with. Always up, even during the course of the tough year she has had. I remember her more than once saying what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. And she has come through this with a smile and such grace, it is just remarkable. I loved working with her on the Finance Committee, especially on the health care bill that is designed to provide better outcomes for less money.

BOB BENNETT

You mentioned BOB BENNETT. He and I served on the Banking Committee for a number of years. In the end, he lost his seat I think because of his willingness to do what we were rewarded for in Delaware, and that is to reach across the aisle and find ways for Republicans and Democrats to do things together. We will certainly miss him.

RUSS FEINGOLD

RUSS FEINGOLD may be best known for his work on campaign finance reform, but I admire his work very much on helping to strengthen the President's rescission powers. I think the seeds he has planted there will bear fruit maybe next year.

So to him and the others who are leaving us, I say what a joy it was to serve with them, and I especially want to commend and thank you for remembering them as you have done today.

Mr. HARKIN. I thank the Senator very much.

DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, in November 1948—that was 1 year after my birth—President Harry Truman issued a highly controversial Executive Order. It called for beginning the process to bring to an end the longstanding policy of racial segregation in the Armed Forces of our Nation.

Just a few years earlier, my father and three of my uncles had served on active duty for much of World War II. One of them—Bob Patton—was killed in a kamikaze attack on his aircraft carrier, the USS Suwannee in 1944. But

all four of them—my dad and three uncles—were born and raised near the coal mining town of Beckley, WV, where my sister and I were born after the war.

Neither my father nor my uncles ever discussed with us the implication of President Truman's Executive Order. Having said that, I later learned that many of the people in my native State opposed it, as did many people in Danville, VA, the last capital of the Confederacy and the place where my sister and I would grow up.

The transition that followed President Truman's actions was not an easy one, but history would later show the steps he ordered 62 years ago this year were the right ones for our military and for our country.

Twenty years after Truman's historic action, I was commissioned an ensign in the Navy and headed for Pensacola, FL, to begin the training that would enable me to become a naval flight officer. I had just graduated from Ohio State University—the Ohio State University, I guess—which I attended on a Navy ROTC scholarship. My sister was not in our ROTC unit at Ohio State. In fact, there were no women in that unit, and to the best of my knowledge there were no women in any of our ROTC units across the country nor in our military service academies in America either.

A lot of people thought that was fine, and while there were women who served then in our Armed Forces, they were denied the opportunities that I and a lot of other men had that enabled us to advance in rank and to assume positions of ever greater responsibility. I went on to serve in Southeast Asia and retire as a Navy captain after 23 years of active and reserve duty. No women served with us in my active-duty squadron, but as the years passed that began to change. Young women gained admission into ROTC programs in colleges and universities across America and into our service academies as well. They became pilots, they flew airplanes, helicopters, served on ships, and someday, before too long, they will serve on some submarines as well.

Today, women are admirals and they are generals. While there is still resistance to the transition that continues to this day—and much of that is understandable—most of us who have lived through it would agree this change has helped to make our military and our Nation stronger.

Today, we face a different kind of transition—a challenging one, too—and that is whether to end the policy of don't ask, don't tell. Confronted with this question and how to answer it, I have sought the counsel of a number of people over the past year whose wisdom I value. Foremost among them has been our Secretary of Defense Bob Gates. He has graciously shared his thoughts on this difficult and contentious issue with me and with many of my colleagues, both in private and in public forums.

Today I stand in agreement with the Secretary and with ADM Mike Mullen, the Chairman of our Joint Chiefs of Staff. The time has come to repeal the law that requires young men and women to lie about who they are in order to serve their country.

Having said that, however, I also agree with them that this transition—like several of the others I have talked about—must be done in a way that eases the military into this change over time so that it does not adversely affect or undermine our military readiness, our ability to recruit, and our morale.

The proposal we approved an hour or so ago seeks to do exactly that. It will empower Secretary Gates and our other military leaders to carefully implement a repeal of don't ask, don't tell in the months ahead. Repeal is not something that is going to happen overnight. The Secretary and the Joint Chiefs are going to do this in a deliberate and responsible way, and it will take some time. Our military leaders have made it clear they want Congress to act now, though, to enable them to begin to implement this repeal of don't ask, don't tell in a thoughtful manner rather than to have the courts force them into it overnight.

I support that approach. I support the approach recommended by our military leaders. I stand behind Secretary Gates and our Nation's other military leaders as they prepare to lead our military and our Nation through this historic transition, rather than to allow the courts to do it for us in ways that we may some day live to regret.

Mr. President, with that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

NET NEUTRALITY AND COMCAST/ NBC MERGER

Mr. FRANKEN. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about the growing threat of corporate control on the flow of information in this country.

Today we have been debating incredibly important issues, and I don't mean to detract from any of them. We need to be doing everything we can to protect our national security and to reduce the threat from nuclear weapons. But while we debate these issues in front of the public, behind the scenes, away from public scrutiny, the Federal Communications Commission is about to decide two distinct but very closely related issues that have the potential to change dramatically the way we get our entertainment, the way we communicate with one another, and, most importantly, the way we use the Internet.

The first matter before the FCC is the proposed merger of Comcast and NBC/Universal. There is no question in my mind that regardless of what you hear from industry, this merger will be bad for consumers on many levels. It will allow Comcast to exploit NBC/Universal's content, charging other

cable networks more for access to NBC shows and movies. Do you know what that will do? It will raise your cable bills. And NBC/Universal—which actually owns 37 broadcast or cable networks—will be favored by Comcast to the exclusion of other independent or competing networks. This means Comcast will pay less to carry channels such as the Discovery Network, the Food Channel, Bloomberg, or the Tennis Channel—threatening their financial viability—or these channels will be relegated to the graveyard around channel 690 or 691 or 692, or customers will have to pay even more each month to buy access to these channels.

This is bad for consumers because it is going to put many of these networks out of business. That means less choice and more Comcast/NBC programming.

But it doesn't end there. Comcast also happens to be the Nation's leading wireline broadband Internet provider, which means this single company will both own the programming and run the pipes that bring us that programming. Here again, Comcast will be able to use its overwhelming market share—and in many markets its near monopoly in the Internet business—to favor its own video services, say, its OnDemand service, over companies such as Netflix, that are cheaper and would otherwise win on a level playing field.

These are all major problems with the deal. But it might be tough to understand in the abstract how this deal will affect you, so let me take a minute or two to make this more concrete.

I ask the people sitting in the gallery, the Senate staff watching this speech, and everyone at home in Minnesota: How many of you like your cable and Internet provider?

When you call Comcast or Verizon or AT&T about a problem, how many of you get good service? How many of you like the prices you pay?

When you decide you want to sign up for broadband, and Comcast tells you that they aren't sure when they can come to install your service, and then finally you get an appointment and you have to take a day off from work to wait between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. for a repairman to come, and then he doesn't come, is that how you feel you deserve to be treated?

Are you getting good service when you call Verizon and spend 10 minutes listening to automated messages and pressing numbers that direct you to more automated messages, and then finally—finally—you get a human being on the line but that person tells you that he or she can't help you and you get put on hold again; is that how you deserve to be treated? Are you getting good service?

When you have had enough with bad service and rapidly rising bills and you decide you want to switch to another company, how many of you have found that you don't have another choice? That there is no other cable provider in your area?

I can tell you that right now, Comcast has about 23 million cable

subscribers and about 16 million Internet subscribers. They are already the largest provider of cable service to Americans by a very large margin, and in some areas, they have a total monopoly.

And this is what cable and Internet customer service is like today. Do you think that merging the single largest cable provider, which is also the largest wireline Internet provider, with one of the biggest TV and movie studios in the country, will make any of this better? Do you think it will lead to lower prices on your cable and Internet bills? Do you think it will mean more choice for what you can watch and download at home? Do you think it will mean better customer service?

I can assure you that the answer to these questions is no, no, no, and no.

We count on competition in this country to keep corporations in check, and we have designed antitrust laws to ensure that companies are not getting too big or too powerful. These laws were designed to protect consumers, because the one thing we know about corporations is that they are created to maximize shareholder profit—not to protect consumers.

There is nothing wrong with that. We want corporations to grow, and create jobs, and provide goods and services. There are some great corporations based in Minnesota, like General Mills and 3M. In addition to providing you Cheerios and Post-it notes, these companies put a lot of Minnesotans to work.

But when you go shopping for cereal, you have a lot of choice. General Mills may produce Cheerios, but they have to compete with companies such as Kellogg's, which makes Corn Flakes, and Post, which makes Fruity Pebbles. And they all have to compete with the store or value brands.

Let's look at another example of the benefits of competition. When you go out for dinner at a restaurant, you usually have a lot of options. I am guessing you don't go back to the restaurant that served you limp lettuce, mediocre meatloaf, and cold, lumpy mashed potatoes. And I am guessing you wouldn't go back if they told you that you would be served sometime between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Unfortunately, you don't always have that kind of choice when it comes to your cable and Internet service. And this is only going to get worse if the FCC allows the merger between Comcast and NBC to sail through. It is competition—and regulation where there isn't competition—that keeps corporations accountable to consumers.

But don't take my word for it. You can already see what Comcast has up its sleeve. If the merger is allowed to go through, as I mentioned before, we can expect Comcast to favor its own content and leave consumers with less choice.

Take the Tennis Channel, which filed a complaint against Comcast earlier