jobs than women, making households even more dependent than ever on women's earnings.

The fact is, America's women are working harder than ever, but they are not being fairly compensated for their contributions to our economy. On average, women lose an estimated $700,000 over their lifetimes due to unequal pay practices, and this inequality means real hardships for their families.

And, while many factors influence a worker's earnings—including educational attainment, work experience, and family status—even when controlling for many of these variables, a substantial portion of the wage gap cannot be explained by anything but discrimination.

This issue is highlighted by the experience of Lilly Ledbetter. Over nearly two decades of work, Lilly received performance awards and outstanding reviews. Yet, late in her career, she learned, through an anonymous note, that she had been paid significantly less than men in the company doing the exact same job. When she sued, a jury reviewed the evidence and concluded that she was paid less because of her gender.

Outrageously, the Supreme Court reversed the jury's verdict. They held that, even though Lilly's company, like so many others that discriminate, do so covertly and do not reveal what male workers earn, Lilly somehow should have known that she had been discriminated against within 180 days of when she was hired. Because workers like Lilly do not learn of pay inequities for years, the decision left no recourse for her and for other victims of wage discrimination.

Largely because of Lilly's determination to win justice for women, the first legislation passed by Congress and signed into law by President Obama was the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. Very simply, this law reversed the Court's severely flawed decision.

We celebrate enactment of this important law, but we must recognize that it was only a first step. We need to do much more.

First, there are too many loopholes and too many barriers to effective enforcement of existing laws. That is why I strongly support the Paycheck Fairness Act. This bill—sponsored by Senator DODD, Senator MIKULSKI, and Representative ROSA DELAURO—would strengthen penalties for discrimination and give women the tools they need to identify and confront unfair treatment.

In January, the House of Representatives passed the bill overwhelmingly on a bipartisan basis. And, last month, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, which I chair, held a hearing on this long-overdue bill. I hope that the Senate can pass the bill and send it to the President's desk this year.

In addition, we must recognize that the problem of unequal pay goes beyond insidious discrimination. As a nation, we unjustly devalue jobs traditionally performed by women, even when they require comparable skills to jobs traditionally performed by men. Why is a housekeeper worth less than a janitor? Why is a parking meter reader worth less than an electrical meter reader? To address this more subtle discrimination, last year on Equal Pay Day I introduced the Fair Pay Act to ensure that employers provide equal pay for jobs that are equivalent in skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions.

My bill would also require employers to publicly disclose their job categories and their pay scales, without requiring specific information on individual employees. Giving people better bargaining information in the first place will help alleviate the need for costly litigation by giving employees the leverage they need to have informed pay discussions with their employers. Right now, women who suspect pay discrimination must file a lawsuit and go through a drawn out legal discovery process to find out whether they make less than the man working beside them.

With pay statistics readily available, this expensive process could be avoided. In fact, I asked Lilly Ledbetter: If the Fair Pay Act had been law, would it have prevented her wage discrimination case? She made clear that, if she had been aware of the information about pay scales that the bill provides, she would have known she was a victim of sex discrimination.

The Fair Pay Act removes many of the systematic barriers that lead to unequal pay. We must act this year to pass this important legislation to eliminate the longstanding biases that prevent America's women workers from achieving true equality in the workplace.

On this Equal Pay Day, let us recommit ourselves to eliminating discrimination in the workplace and ensuring that all Americans receive equal pay for equal work. America's working women—and the families that rely on them—deserve fairness on the job. And, let me be clear, as chairman of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, I pledge to fight pay discrimination until we have achieved true equality in the workplace and there is no longer a need to observe Equal Pay Day.

NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS' RIGHTS WEEK

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, this past Sunday marked the start of National Crime Victims' Rights Week. Since 1981, people across the Nation have observed this week with candlelight vigils and public rallies to renew our commitment to crime victims and their families. It is vitally important that we recognize the needs of crime victims and their family members, and work together to promote victims' rights and services.

My involvement with crime victims began more than three decades ago when I served as State's attorney in Chittenden County, VT, and witnessed first-hand how crime can devastate victims' lives. I have worked ever since to ensure that the criminal justice system is one that respects the rights and dignity of victims of crime, rather than one that presents additional ordeals for those already victimized.

I was honored to support the passage of the Victims of Crime Act of 1984, VOCA, which has been the principal means by which the Federal Government has supported essential services for crime victims and their families. This critical piece of legislation provides grants for direct services to victims, such as State crime victim compensation programs, emergency shelters, crisis intervention, counseling, and assistance in participating in the criminal justice system. These services are entirely funded from a reserve fund created from criminal fines and penalties, and are provided without a single dime of funding from Federal taxpayers.

I have worked hard over the years to protect the Crime Victims Fund. State victim compensation and assistance programs serve nearly 4 million crime victims each year, including victims of violent crime, domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, elder abuse, and drunk driving. Several years ago, we made sure the fund had a ''rainy day'' capacity so that in lean years, victims and their advocates would not have to worry that the Crime Victims Fund would run out of money, leaving them stranded. More recently, an annual cap has been set on the level of funding to be spent from the fund in a given year. When this cap was established, and when President Bush then sought to empty the Crime Victims Fund of unexpended funds, I joined with Senator CRAPO and others from both political parties to make sure that the Crime Victims Fund was preserved. These resources are appropriately set aside to assist victims of crime and their families. We have had to work hard to protect the Crime Victims Fund, and I have consistently supported raising the spending cap to allow more money out of the fund and into the field.

As we observe Crime Victims' Rights Week, I would like to highlight a program in Vermont that has developed a unique and innovative approach to supporting victims of crime. In 2006, I was pleased to help the Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services secure funding to design and implement the Burlington Parallel Justice Project. This program addresses the limitations of traditional criminal justice and restorative justice models, and represents a collaborative approach to repair the harm caused by crime. Under this program representatives from different sectors of the community, from government to law enforcement to service providers to local business, come together to address the needs of crime victims in a comprehensive manner.

The concept of parallel justice was developed by Susan Herman, a former executive director of the National Center for Crime Victims, who emphasized the importance of having a victim-driven path through the criminal justice system. With the help of Susan and the National Center for Crime Victims, the Vermont Center for Crime Victims Services, the Burlington Community Justice Center and the Burlington Police Department implemented her vision in their community by forming a Parallel Justice Commission. The commission responds to the needs of victims by working with local service providers and others to address those needs, whether it is emotional support, medical cost assistance, or property repair. By hearing from victims about their experiences with the criminal justice system, they also bring about systemic change where needed. The result is a comprehensive approach to victim assistance that enhances the relationships between different parts of the community and builds safer and stronger neighborhoods.

The Burlington Parallel Justice Project is a national demonstration project for parallel justice and has been able to thrive and expand due to funding from VOCA assistance grants. Last month, Burlington police chief Michael Schirling, a member of the Parallel Justice Commission, testified before the Senate Judiciary committee about innovative crime reduction strategies. He spoke about the success of the parallel justice program as an example of a community policing model and emphasized that developing innovative and effective strategies will be increasingly crucial to effective public safety. I could not agree more. I have often advocated for Federal support of meaningful, community-based solutions to crime and other issues we face in Vermont and across the Nation.

Both Congress and the States have become more sensitive to the rights of crime victims since I was a prosecutor. We have greatly improved our crime victims' assistance programs and made advances in recognizing crime victims' rights. But we still have more to do. As we observe National Crime Victims' Rights week this year, we must renew our national commitment to help crime victims by supporting programs like the Parallel Justice Project, and protecting the Crime Victims Fund.

I want to commend and thank Judy Rex, Karen Tronsgard-Scott, and the many other victims' advocates and service providers in Vermont and across the country who show their dedication every day of the year to crime victims. I am thankful for their advice and insights over the years, and I look forward to continuing our work to address the needs of victims everywhere.

NATURAL RESOURCE CHARTER

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I am pleased to report to you and my colleagues on the excellent work that is being done to help developing countries capitalize on their natural resource wealth. This unique initiative is called the Natural Resource Charter, and it is designed to give countries the tools and knowledge they need to develop their natural resources for the good of their citizens in a transparent and accountable manner. As a collective work coordinated by established academics and development experts, the charter provides a set of policy principles for governments on the successful translation of natural resource wealth into fair and sustainable development.

At the U.S. Helsinki Commission we monitor 56 countries, including the United States, with the mandate to ensure compliance to commitments made under the Helsinki Final Act with focus on three dimensions: security, economics and the environment, and human rights.

The management of extractive industries has broad implications covering all three dimensions of the Helsinki process. We know that oil, gas, and mining are potential sources of conflict and their supply has a direct impact on our national security. The often negative economic consequences for resource rich countries are well documented and we see constant reminders of the environmental impact of extraction both at home and abroad. Finally, the resultant degradation of human rights in countries that are corrupted by resource wealth is a real concern that we must address.

When the charter was launched last year, I was struck by how far we have come in terms of bringing the difficult conversation on extractive industries into the lexicon of world leaders. Only a few short years ago, the word ''transparency'' was not used in the same sentence with oil, gas or mining revenue. After the launch of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative in 2002, we have seen a major shift in attitude. This was followed by G8 and G20 statements in support of greater revenue transparency as a means of achieving greater economic growth in developing countries.

But it is clear that given the challenge ahead, more than statements are needed. The Natural Resource Charter is a concrete and practical next step in the right direction.

Economists have found that many of the resource-rich countries of the world today have fared notably worse than their neighbors economically and politically, despite the positive opportunities granted by resource wealth. The misuse of extractive industry revenues has often mitigated the benefits of such mineral wealth for citizens of developing nations; in many cases the resources acting instead as a source of severe economic and social instability.

In addressing the factors and providing solutions for such difficulties, the Natural Resource Charter aims to be a global public resource for informed, transparent decisionmaking regarding extractive industry management.

The charter's overarching philosophy is that development of natural resources should be designed to secure maximum benefit for the citizens of the host country. To this end, its dialogue includes a special focus on the role of informed public oversight through transparency measures such as EITI in establishing the legitimacy of resource decisions and attracting foreign investment. On fiscal issues, the charter presents guidelines for the systematic reinvestment of resource revenues in national infrastructure and human capital with the goal of diminishing effects of resource price volatility and ensuring long-term economic growth.

This week the commission will hold a public briefing on the Natural Resource Charter and I am pleased to say that there was a candid conversation between the audience and the panel that revealed much about how the charter could be used to promote human rights and good governance. The briefing also addressed ways that U.S. support of democratic and economically sensible extractive industry standards could have a powerful effect in securing the welfare and freedoms of citizens in resource-rich countries. In particular, it was noted that the Energy Security Through Transparency Act, S. 1700, a bipartisan bill I introduced with my colleague Senator LUGAR and 10 other colleagues is consistent with the principles set out in the Natural Resource Charter.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to ensure our continued progress on these issues.

HOLD ON DEFENSE DEPARTMENT NOMINATIONS

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, last year, several of my colleagues and I wrote to Secretary Gates requesting a clear policy through which the Department of Defense would encourage renewable energy development while maintaining necessary protections for military missions. Among other recommendations, to facilitate the development of renewable energy projects consistent with national security needs, we specifically pointed to the Department's need to formally consolidate all decisionmaking into a single office to limit unnecessary conflict between the Department and renewable energy development. At that time, there were a wide array of projects where the Department of Defense had objected very late in the permitting process.

Since that time, conflicts between the siting of renewable energy projects and defense missions have only intensified in scale and now threaten to impede currently planned and permitted renewable energy projects, placing billions of investment dollars and thousands of new U.S. jobs at risk. Recent attempts to work with DOD for various