worked around the clock responding to calls from panicked residents. They dealt with hazardous materials and even helped to pump out flooded basements.

They are committed to keeping our communities safe, even when that means putting their own lives at risk for the sake of protecting ours.

In the abstract, this can be hard to keep in perspective.

But unfortunately, the community of Bridgeport, CT, was recently reminded just what this commitment means.

A week ago, two firefighters, Lieutenant Steven Velasquez and Michel 'Mitch' Baik, were killed while fighting a fire in a home in that community. Three of their colleagues were also injured.

All of these individuals were incredibly brave—they entered a burning building to search for survivors and try to prevent the emergency from spreading.

This tragedy highlights just how selfless and courageous these people are each and every day.

And it should remind us all that, just as they have made a solemn commitment to us, so too must we affirm our commitment to them.

Part of our commitment is to ensure that they never, ever, put their lives at risk on our behalf without the proper equipment and training.

I have worked tirelessly over the years to ensure that this commitment is kept.

That is why I authored the Firefighter Investment and Response Enhancement—FIRE—Act back in 2000. This legislation created the first competitive grant program to assist local fire departments in addressing a wide range of equipment, training, and other fire prevention needs. Senator John Warner, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, was my partner in that effort, making it possible for it to become law.

To date this program has provided more than $5.2 billion directly to fire departments.

And these grants have not just gone to the largest metropolitan areas. Fire departments in small and medium-sized communities across the country have received funds through the program—including departments in 150 of the 169 towns in my home State of Connecticut.

In 2003, we built on the success of the FIRE program by passing the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters—SAFER—bill, which I also authored.

This program provides funds to ensure that fire departments are adequately staffed. Too many of these rigs go out with only two or three people on them when a minimum of four is required to make sure that they are safe doing their jobs. Since the program began, more than $1.1 billion has helped to put over 75,000 additional firefighters in our Nation's firehouses.

I am extremely proud to have been able to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to get these important programs enacted.

But our commitment to our public safety community is still not complete.

As the Presiding Officer knows, the bipartisan Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act is a critical next step towards fulfilling our commitment to the men and women who keep us safe.

As we know, firefighters, police, and emergency medical personnel have a special place in the workforce and in society. They are respected for what they do. But they are also respected for doing it no matter what they face.

Once they get the call, they don't get to decide whether to take it or not—they just go.

We depend on them every day, and they respond with unquestioned dedication.

They are looking out for our well-being. Do we not owe it to them to look out for theirs?

In many States these brave men and women are deprived one of the most basic rights that workers in America have—to bargain collectively with their employers.

The right to collectively bargain has been proven over time to improve cooperation between employers and employees.

This cooperation leads to better, fairer compensation and benefits. It contributes to improved work conditions and safety. And it makes the quality of services better and more efficient for everyone.

Quality and efficiency is vitally important in the field of public safety. It can be the difference between an emergency and a tragedy.

I know that improving public safety is a goal that I share with every single Member of this body.

The Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act is a carefully crafted bill that grants these rights to all first responders, without disrupting their vital role in emergency response.

While it requires that all States provide public safety workers with the most basic of collective bargaining rights, it also gives States the flexibility to implement plans that work best for them.

These include the right to form and join unions, and to collectively bargain over wages, hours and working conditions—rights that many States, including my State of Connecticut, already provide to these workers.

The bill also allows States with right-to-work laws—which prohibit contracts requiring union membership for employment—to continue to enforce those laws.

Importantly, the bill explicitly provides for safeguards against the disruption of emergency services. It does this with strong language explicitly prohibiting any strikes, lockouts, or other work stoppages.

Of course this legislation is about more than negotiating wages, hours, and benefits. For our Nation's first responders, this cooperation means so much more.

It means that the men and women who risk their lives every day keeping us safe can sit down and relate their real life experiences to their employers.

It also means that their on-the-ground expertise will be used to help public safety agencies improve services in the community.

When tragedies have struck us, from the September 11 attacks to Hurricane Katrina, to the house fire in Bridgeport, CT, just last week, these workers were the first on the scene and the last to leave.

We owe them everything, and all they ask in return is the dignity and respect in the workplace that all workers deserve.

The legislation before us is important to them; therefore, it should be important to us, regardless of panty and ideology.

As I say, this legislation already has strong bipartisan support in this Chamber. All we are looking for is the opportunity to bring it up and vote yes or no. After almost 20 years, with a well-crafted bill that protects against work stoppages and strikes and respects so-called right-to-work States—can we not guarantee this basic right of collective bargaining?

I hope before we adjourn that, after 20 years and at a unique opportunity, after all the speeches that have been given in praise and gratitude for the service of these men and women, we can give something back to them. This is the one thing that our first responders—our police, our emergency medical personnel and our firefighters—have asked of us. They appreciate all the wonderful speeches, all the great remarks, all the accolades, all the commendations. But what they would like to have, more than anything else, is for us to recognize their right to collectively bargain. That is something we ought to be able to give these fine men and women who serve our country every single day.

I urge my colleagues to give us one chance to vote on this legislation and decide whether we want to say to them how much we appreciate what they do. That is what we are asking for before we adjourn in this Congress.

I yield the floor.

REMEMBERING SENATOR ROBERT C. BYRD

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I join my colleagues in appreciation and admiration of Senator Robert Byrd.

By the time I took my seat in this Chamber, Senator Byrd had already held his for more than four decades. He had already held numerous leadership positions, including Senate majority leader and President pro tempore. He had already become a master of parliamentary procedure. He had already championed many Federal projects that still bear his name in his home State of West Virginia.

Senator Byrd won the admiration of all his colleagues for his study of the history of this body. He delivered hundreds of addresses on Senate history and procedure, as well as the debt we owe to the original Senate that governed Ancient Rome for centuries. For such work, Senator Byrd has earned the gratitude of all future generations of Americans.

Texans especially appreciate Senator Byrd's attention to the contributions of our Senators to the history of this body. Senator Sam Houston, the original occupant of the seat I hold, was described by Senator Byrd in this way:

The flamboyant Sam Houston of Texas used to stride into the old Senate chamber wearing such eye-catching accessories as a leopard-skin waist-coat, a bright red vest, or a Mexican sombrero. . . . He would while away the time in the old chamber by whittling, creating a pile of shavings beneath his desk, and pages would bring him his pine blocks and then clean up the shavings.

Senator Byrd also devoted several speeches of his history to the tenure of Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, which were all collected into a single chapter upon publication. In personal interviews with then-current and former Senators, Senator Byrd documents a remarkably personal account of Senator Johnson's leadership style and his influence over landmark legislation, including the Civil Rights Act of 1957.

During his discussion of Senator Johnson's use of the quorum call, Senator Byrd was asked to yield by his friend, Senator Russell Long of Louisiana, who wished to clarify his own recollection of the matter. Senator Long then continued with a fitting tribute to the Senator from West Virginia:

I have no doubt that in years to come, his will be the most authoritative text anyone will be able to find to say what did happen and what did not happen in the Senate, both while the Senator from West Virginia was a member and in the years prior thereto.

I can offer no better epitaph to Senator Byrd than that offered by his former colleague more than two decades ago. He and his beloved Erma have now been reunited, and we offer our condolences to their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and all who miss him most.

SAVING WEAK BANKS

Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the article titled, SPIN METER: Program risks $30B to save weak banks,'' published on August 1 by the Associated Press, be printed in the RECORD.

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

[From the Associated Press, Aug. 1, 2010]

SPIN METER: PROGRAM RISKS $30B TO SAVE WEAK BANKS

(By Daniel Wagner)

WASHINGTON.—People are fed up with bank bailouts that risk taxpayer billions. The government's apparent solution: call them something else.

Congress is at work on a new program that would send $30 billion to struggling community banks, in a process similar to the huge federal bailouts of big banks during the financial crisis. This time, money is more likely to disappear as a result of bank failures or fraud.

Two weeks ago, President Barack Obama declared an end to taxpayer bailouts when he signed a sweeping overhaul of financial rules. In his weekly radio and Internet address on Saturday, he described the new bailout program as ''a common-sense'' plan that would give badly needed lending help to small-business owners to expand and hire.

At its core, the program is another bank rescue. Some lenders need the bailouts to survive. Others could take the bailouts and crumble anyway. That's what happens when banks run out of capital—the money they must keep in case of unexpected losses. Banks with too little capital can be shuttered to protect the taxpayer-insured deposits they hold.

Or, under this proposal, many could get bailouts. The new money would be available to banks that are short on cash. It's supposedly reserved for banks deemed ''viable.'' But regulators won't consider whether banks are viable now. They'll envision how strong a bank would be after receiving a fresh infusion cash from taxpayers and private investors. If the bank would become viable because of the bailout, the government can make it happen.

''This is a below-the-radar bailout for community banks,'' said Mark Williams, formerly a bank examiner with the Federal Reserve. ''What we lack here is oversight and true accountability.'' He said the potential costs are far greater than the program's impact on small businesses. The change for them would barely be noticed, he said.

Small banks are struggling partly because the economy is so weak. For banks in the hardest-hit areas, it can be nearly impossible to recover once too many loans sour.

Yet the bill would require that banks be protected against ''discrimination based on geography.'' It says the money must be available to lenders in areas with high unemployment.

Such banks are ''only as strong as the loans they make in their communities,'' said Williams, now a finance professor at Boston University.

Also, the government knows far less about these lenders than about Wall Street megabanks. Many community banks are overseen by state regulators struggling under budget cuts and limited expertise. Many are ill-equipped to monitor banks during a crisis, Williams said.

The administration says the bill is not a bailout, but a way to spur lending to small businesses and bolster the shaky economic recovery. The idea is that businesses want bank loans, but banks don't have enough money to lend. And they say the program has to include riskier banks in order to work.

''When banking groups have advocated for measures that were about saving or bailing out struggling banks and not spurring small business lending, we have strongly opposed those proposals,'' said Gene Sperling, a senior counselor to Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner who has met with community bank lobbyists on the issue.

Sperling said Treasury rejected proposals to further lower the bar for which banks are considered ''viable'' or to let banks delay accounting for commercial real estate losses.

Some banks will have an easier time granting loans after receiving bailouts. But Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke and others have questioned whether the problem is lack of capital, or if there simply aren't enough creditworthy borrowers.

The administration's haziness about whom the program benefits has fueled comparisons to the $700 billion bailout known as the Troubled Asset Relief Program, or TARP. A few important differences make this bailout riskier.

The bailouts that started in 2008 were subject to oversight by a special watchdog. Neil Barofsky, who heads that inspector general's office, recently saved taxpayers $553 million by stopping the Treasury from mailing a check to a failing bank accused of fraud.

Under the new law, it's not clear the money would have been saved. The new bailouts have the same investment structure, size limits and approval process as the old ones. Yet they aren't subject to Barofsky's oversight. His office has staff and procedures in place to monitor banks for bailout fraud—resources that cost taxpayers millions.

The new law creates an office that duplicates those efforts, and Barofsky's supporters say that's an effort to silence one of Treasury's loudest critics.

There's another reason banks want to join the new program: It will save them money.

Assuming they increase lending modestly, the banks will pay lower quarterly fees to Treasury. If lending falls, their fees will rise. But the banks still will pay less than they would to private investors, experts said.

Banks that were short on cash weren't even eligible for money from the $700 billion financial bailout passed in 2008. Yet limiting it to healthy banks was no guarantee the money would be safe.

A few bailed-out banks have failed. One-sixth of them were behind on their quarterly payments to Treasury at the end of May, according to an analysis by University of Louisiana finance professor Linus Wilson.

''The problem is, they're not really picking healthy banks,'' Wilson said.

Legislation to put the new program in place ran into a roadblock in the Senate last week. Further action isn't expected until September, after lawmakers' summer break.

The measure has been the subject of a months long lobbying push by small bankers. Disclosures show that community bank bailouts have been the most common topic of Treasury's bailout meetings with lobbyists over the past 10 months.

The trade groups insist that smaller banks are not necessarily riskier because they weren't behind the speculation that nearly toppled Wall Street.

History suggests that's not true. Most of the 268 banks that have failed since 2008 were community banks.

The proposal has drawn little notice from a public weary of bailouts for Wall Street, auto makers, insurers and homebuyers.

Wilson said that shows how well it's been sold.

''If you put small business in the name, people will like it, and if you put banks in the name no one will like it—but the money is going to banks, not small businesses,'' he said.

UGANDA

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I want to discuss the important relationship that our country has with the East African nation of Uganda. Last month, Uganda was targeted by horrific bombings that killed 76 people and wounded scores more. We all continue to mourn for the victims of this cowardly attack and sympathize with the people and government of Uganda. The