

I commend MG Bernard S. Champoux, commanding general, and CSM Ray Devens, division command sergeant major, for their exceptional service and strong leadership of the 25th Infantry Division.

With this weekend's homecoming, the 25th Infantry Division represents the last U.S. military division to leave Iraq as part of the complete withdrawal of American combat forces following the successful Iraqi campaign.

I am pleased that the war in Iraq has finally come to an end, and I urge my colleagues to remember that the full cost of war includes the extended care of the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines who serve so bravely. These men and women have risked their lives to protect this country in its time of need, and we must honor our Nation's commitment to them afterwards. I would like to again thank these soldiers for their service, and may God bless them and their families in Honolulu.

#### OFFSETTING DISASTER FUNDING

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, Vermont and other the other States still reeling in the aftermath of Hurricane Irene have a huge stake in the misguided offset resolution sent to us by the House of Representatives. In fact, all Americans have a stake in this.

On the heels of unprecedented flooding this spring, the State of Vermont bore the full brunt of Irene in August. Our small State is stretched to the limit right now. Our people need the helping hand of Federal disaster recovery programs just as Vermonters, decade after decade, have always supported this safety net when other States have needed it.

These programs were already running on fumes before Irene and now the need is even greater in this tough year in which 48 States have had Federal disasters declared within their borders.

The Senate promptly started the effort to replenish the depleted disaster funds with a strong and responsible stand-alone bill in September. Our legislation is within the bounds of the budget agreement reached this summer, and after overcoming a partisan filibuster, we got that bill through the Senate in a bipartisan vote.

Now all these months later the House of Representatives sends us a smaller disaster aid bill along with a resolution that calls for the new disaster spending to be offset. In other words, undo the bipartisan budget agreement that we all agreed to back in August; change the long practice of Americans promptly helping fellow Americans in a disaster's aftermath; and pit disaster victims against those trying to get a loan to start their small business, those needing student loans, those needing nutrition and housing assistance, those developing alternative energy sources, or those performing cutting-edge research against disease.

The House resolution calling for disaster funding to be offset with across-

the-board cuts is a weak and cynical response, and it should be rejected.

It is disappointing and incomprehensible that some in Congress continue to insist that assistance can only come at the cost of other programs relied upon by the American people. Some of these same voices had no problem with spending hundreds of billions of borrowed dollars on wars waged overseas, on rebuilding communities in Iraq and Afghanistan, and on giving tax breaks to the wealthiest among us. But now they insist on a different standard, different rules, for emergency recovery efforts desperately needed by Americans here at home. That is just wrong.

We need to come together as a country, as we always have in the past, to pass an emergency disaster bill that is adequate to the devastation faced by Vermonters and millions of other Americans. We are bound together as one nation, the United States. Americans help each other in time of need.

I know there are bipartisan majorities for passing a straightforward disaster relief package as we have for every other disaster in the past, but political point-scoring and my-way-or-no-way factionalism stand in the way. That is unconscionable.

Vermonters and countless others who are trying to get back on their feet after Irene and other calamities across our Nation do not have the luxury of time to waste on the temper tantrums of ideological factions in Congress. It is winter now; a harsh season in our part of the country. Some parts of Vermont already have seen over a foot of snow and more is on the way.

Statesmanship should never be out of season least of all, when our fellow Americans' livelihoods are at stake.

In the spirit of the holiday season, I continue to hope that reason and goodwill will prevail in the Senate on this ridiculous call to offset disaster relief, and on so many other issues before us that are critical to the American people.

#### 375TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATIONAL GUARD

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Today I rise to commemorate the 375th anniversary of the National Guard. As ceremonies are held across the country to celebrate this historic milestone, I wanted to pay tribute to our National Guard for the enormous contributions it has made to our country throughout the course of its proud history. The origin of the National Guard traces its roots back to the militias of the 13 original English colonies. The oldest units were organized on December 13, 1636, in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

As the motto of the National Guard so aptly puts it, the force is "Always Ready, Always There." Our Constitution bestows on the National Guard dual State and Federal missions. Whether aiding State law enforcement, responding to a national emergency or catastrophic natural disaster, or serv-

ing alongside our Active-Duty Forces overseas, the National Guard has always been and continues to be a force on which we can depend, in wartime and in peacetime.

Rhode Island has a distinguished record of National Guard service, which began in 1638 when the first colonial defensive force was established in Portsmouth, RI. The militia, which was known as the Traine Band, was formed to provide protection and security for the people. The group eventually evolved into the Rhode Island National Guard.

It was the Rhode Island militia that first engaged in offensive action against England during the lead up to the Revolutionary War. On July 19, 1769, members of the Rhode Island militia sunk the British schooner HMS Liberty in Newport. A few years later, on the night of June 10, 1772, Rhode Island volunteers organized under Captain Abraham Whipple, seized and burned the HMS Gaspee in Narragansett Bay. Then, on April 22, 1775, in response to shots fired at Lexington, MA, the Rhode Island General Assembly mobilized a 1,500-man "Army of Observation" to serve under the command of BG Nathaniel Greene. This force was sent to Boston to support the Continental Army in its fight for American independence. By the end of the Revolutionary War, more than 22 Rhode Island militia units had contributed to our country's glorious cause.

During the Civil War, more than 23,000 Rhode Island militiamen deployed in support of Union forces, and 16 soldiers received Medals of Honor. During the First World War, more than 3,800 members of the Rhode Island National Guard served in combat as part of the 26th "Yankee" Division. Furthermore, over 3,000 Rhode Island National Guard members were deployed to both the European and Pacific theaters to support operations in the Second World War. Rhode Island National Guard units also supported operations during the Korean and Vietnam wars, as well as Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm.

The Rhode Island National Guard has been particularly active meeting the operational demands of the post-9/11 era. Rhode Island has the second highest per capita National Guard deployment rate of all the States. It has fulfilled over 5,600 deployment requests, and many of its 3,200 members have deployed multiple times. In addition, the Rhode Island National Guard remains an indispensable asset in protecting the lives and property of Rhode Island citizens. The Guard played an instrumental role in 2010 responding to the historic floods in our State, from which we are still recovering. Today, the diverse mission of the Rhode Island National Guard is directed by MG Kevin R. McBride, adjutant general of the State of Rhode Island.

Since September 11, the National Guard has been deployed at unprecedented levels, with over 650,000 soldiers

and airmen mobilized in support of American operations overseas. In addition, thousands of National Guard members have responded to the litany of major disasters that devastated several areas of the country in the recent years. I applaud the National Guard for its vital work in protecting our country at home and abroad and commend its 375 years of dedicated service.

#### TRIBUTE TO GUION S. BLUFORD, JR.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, it is with great pleasure that I rise today to recognize Guion S. Bluford, Jr. for being the 2011 recipient of the Pennsylvania Society Gold Medal for Distinguished Achievement.

Mr. Bluford was born on November 22, 1942, to Guion Senior and Lolita Bluford in Philadelphia, PA. Mr. Bluford grew up in inner-city Philadelphia during a time of great prejudice and social change. As a youth he spent his free time reading about aviation technology, building model aircrafts, and dreaming of flying aircrafts.

Mr. Bluford attended Pennsylvania State University and joined the Air Force ROTC Program, receiving his FAA pilot license while still a senior in college. After graduating college in 1964 Mr. Bluford was assigned to the 556th Tactical Fighter Squadron in Vietnam and flew over 140 combat missions in Southeast Asia.

In 1978, Mr. Bluford was selected as one of NASA's class of 35 astronauts. On August 30, 1980, Mr. Bluford became America's first African American in space when he flew to orbit aboard the shuttle *Challenger*. During his career at NASA he flew on several other space missions, and when he retired in July 1993, he had logged more than 688 hours in space.

Mr. President, I ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing Mr. Guion S. Bluford, Jr., for his years of service to our country. I invite my colleagues to join me in recognizing Mr. Bluford for his recent award and wish him well in the future.

#### TRIBUTE TO MARTY PETERSON

Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, today I join with Idaho's senior Senator MIKE CRAPO to recognize and pay tribute to the exceptional dedication of Marty Peterson, who is retiring after 51 years of public service in our great State.

For nearly 20 years, Marty has served as the special assistant to the president of the University of Idaho. He has served seven U of I presidents during that time, giving them valuable insight into the politics of the State as he oversaw the government affairs work of the university.

Marty has an in-depth understanding of Idaho's government, having served as the budget director under Governors John Evans and Cecil Andrus. He also served on the staff of U.S. Senator Frank Church and was executive direc-

tor of the Association of Idaho Cities. His counsel was always valuable and insightful.

It is no wonder, when Idaho was going to celebrate its 100th birthday in 1990, he was asked to oversee the planning and implementation of the State's centennial celebration. Twenty years later, he was the cochair of the committee that planned the rededication of Idaho's newly restored capitol building. Marty could always be counted on to deliver quality results.

His education and military service may have had something to do with his success. At the age of 17, as a junior in high school, he joined the Army National Guard. Marty served 8 years and was a staff sergeant when he was discharged.

Marty is a graduate of Columbia Basin College, the University of Idaho, and Harvard University's Senior Managers in Government Program. But through the years, Marty never stopped learning. He adapted, he studied and continued to provide good counsel to those who sought out his advice.

He consistently shares his time and expertise with community groups. Currently, he serves on the board of directors of the Foundation for Idaho History, North Idaho Chamber of Commerce, Idaho Humanities Council, and the James A. and Louise McClure Center for Public Policy, as well as on the advisory board for the School of Journalism and Mass Media at the University of Idaho.

In addition, he is the current president of the Historic Silver City Foundation and a past president of the City Club of Boise and the Idaho Hemingway House Foundation.

As a well-known Hemingway scholar, Marty has lectured on Hemingway throughout the United States, Spain, and Cuba. He has also been very involved in the preservation of Ernest Hemingway's home in Ketchum, ID and in Cuba.

Although Marty will be retiring from the working world at the end of 2011, we know he will continue serving these and other groups throughout the State. His retirement will give him more time to spend with his wife Barb and their family and especially the grandchildren.

When people ask us what makes Idaho such a great place, we could talk about the beautiful mountains, skiing, whitewater rafting, hunting and fishing, or a myriad of other things. But in reality, it is people such as Marty Peterson who work to make Idaho even better—that is why Idaho is so great.

It is with our sincere thanks and well wishes that Senator CRAPO and I recognize Marty Peterson for his many contributions to the State of Idaho and its people. We wish him a happy and productive retirement.

#### ANNIVERSARY OF BELARUS ELECTION

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to the coura-

geous men and women who are struggling for freedom in Belarus.

Almost 1 year ago, on December 19, 2010, elections took place in Belarus. At that time, some in the United States and Europe hoped that this vote would be a turning point for Belarus and that its authoritarian ruler, Aleksandr Lukashenko, would finally begin to pursue the political and economic reforms demanded by his people.

In fact, the December 19 election was a turning point for Belarus—but not in the way that some had hoped. It soon became obvious that the election had been egregiously rigged by the regime. In response, thousands of Belarusians from every background peacefully took to the streets in protest. It was the most significant public demonstration the country had seen in over a half decade, and the Lukashenko regime responded with violence.

On that day, Belarusian security forces detained or arrested over 600 peaceful protestors. Hundreds more were surrounded by armored tanks and beaten by thugs dispatched by the regime. The Lukashenko regime arrested seven opposition candidates who participated in the vote, severely beating one candidate. In the year that has followed the election, hundreds of people—including several Presidential candidates—have been sentenced to lengthy prison terms in sham trials that have again revealed Belarus' judicial system to be nothing more than a political tool abused by the regime. It is a system that has institutionalized torture and denies its prisoners access to family, lawyers, medical treatment, and open legal proceedings.

I should note that the peaceful protests that erupted in Belarus 1 year ago took place just 2 days after a 26-year-old man in the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid set himself on fire, which in turn sparked a series of peaceful protests that overthrew the long-ruling dictator in that country—starting the Arab Spring. But as the winds of change sweep across north Africa and the Middle East, ousting some of the world's most entrenched regimes, it is important for us to remember that there remains one last dictatorship in Europe; that is, the Lukashenko regime in Belarus.

Despite the extraordinary changes taking place around the world, the Lukashenko regime has sustained, and even intensified, its crackdown against its own people. This is a regime that recently outlawed nearly all forms of public speech and peaceful assembly, including silent protest. It is a regime that, instead of responding to the legitimate demands of its people, has sought to cultivate close ties with other dictatorships, like the regime in Tehran. It is a regime that, according to reports, delivered military equipment to the Qadhafi regime in Libya in February 2011 just as it prepared to slaughter its own people.