

senior ministry position, he led a major capital campaign that renovated the historic church's building. More importantly, he understood that the church was far more than brick, mortar and stained glass and set about expanding the congregation's role in the community through their Social Impact Center. Under Reverend Hamilton's stewardship, the Center, and particularly its Dream Again Program, provided a variety of hands-on programs to help area residents find jobs, learn new skills, continue their education and even purchase and keep homes.

Also under his leadership, the Roxbury Presbyterian Church began a highly successful "Adopt-A-School" program that has been touted as a model of excellence.

Mr. President, if we are known by the fruits of our labor, then Reverend Hamilton's time with us in Boston was bountiful. He was a champion for summer jobs programs for disadvantaged teens; he also helped secure funding for new textbooks for city schools. Yet nowhere was he more effective than in his efforts to secure access to health insurance for all our citizens. For Reverend Hamilton it was a matter of justice. Thanks in large part to his efforts, 98 percent of Massachusetts residents are now covered by health insurance. The program is not perfect and he understood that, which is why he has helped lead the fight to reduce exploding health care costs in our state.

Shortly after coming to Boston, Reverend Hamilton founded the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization which has been tremendously effective in not just raising awareness of pressing social concerns, but bringing together religious and community organizations to actually improve the lives of our neighbors. Because of the GBIO and Reverend Hamilton's leadership, there are more opportunities for at-risk youth, poor families are better educated and equipped to climb the economic ladder, and the rights of workers in nursing homes are better protected just to name a few of their accomplishments.

Mr. President, Reverend Hamilton leaves a lasting legacy in Massachusetts that expands well beyond his former church's Roxbury neighborhood. His impact can be measured in richer and more fulfilling lives, improved access to health insurance, better job prospects and engaged youth who go on to be productive and effective leaders, parents and workers.

Earlier this year, Reverend Hamilton accepted a new position in his words, God reassigned him to a new ministry in California. I join Reverend Hamilton's former congregation and all the people whose lives he touched in thanking him and wish him and his wife, Dr. Rhonda Hamilton, every blessing with their new opportunities in California.

RECOGNIZING MAJOR GENERALS FRANK VAVALA AND GUS HARGETT

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, in December, with the distinguished leadership of the Senators from Vermont and South Carolina, we passed the National Guard Empowerment Act as an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act with truly bipartisan support, as evidenced by its 71 cosponsors here in the U.S. Senate. At the time, we said that the National Guard has performed extraordinary service in the last 10 years alongside their Reserve and Active Duty counterparts as part of a truly integrated total force, but that the changes included by the National Guard Empowerment Act were most important not because of the great work in the past, but because of the essential need for enhanced cooperation in the future.

The Senate recognized that enhanced capabilities for the National Guard, particularly elevating the Chief of the National Guard Bureau as a statutory member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, this Nation's highest military planning body, were essential to meeting the threats of the future. And today I am happy to join my friend from Delaware to recognize two men who played a key role in advocating that point of view here in the Senate, two men who approached an idea widely regarded as a nice, but unlikely thought and helped transform it into a reality. They are Chairman of the National Guard Association of the United States NGAUS, MG Frank Vavala, and his highly capable "battle buddy," the president of the NGAUS, retired MG Gus Hargett.

People around Tennessee know Gus Hargett as the former Adjutant General of our State's National Guard, but also as the person responsible for supervising the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency and the Tennessee State Guard. They also know Gus as the kind of guy to get things done when they really matter. Throughout his career he had a healthy mixture of active duty service with the U.S. Army and the precise sort of duty with the National Guard at the state level or Active Guard Reserve status that we put GEN Craig McKinley on the Joint Chiefs of Staff to strategize for.

With the support of General Vavala and Adjutant Generals around the country, General Hargett provided key guidance for this legislation, answered countless questions, and provided the needed impetus to take it over the top and onto the President's desk. He recognized that this transcended simply advocating for the National Guard, it was an essential step for preparing our country's homeland defense strategy.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I am pleased to join my friend from Tennessee to show appreciation for the efforts of General Hargett and General Vavala. As he says, it is about much more than recognizing good work done, it is about preparing for the natural

and manmade threats to Americans, and I would like to associate myself with his remarks.

My State is particularly blessed to have General Vavala as our world-class adjutant general, providing invaluable leadership to the Delaware National Guard on behalf of our Governor. I think that people who have had just a few minutes to chat with him come away understanding that he is a dynamic force. They would be able to instantly understand how he and General Hargett helped guide a compelling, grassroots campaign of hundreds of thousands of National Guard men and women and their State leadership to make clear to their representatives that their Guard strategy was a national defense concept to be taken seriously. Defense of our homes begins at home, something the National Guard has specialized in for 375 years. At a time when it seems nothing in Washington works right, General Vavala insisted time and again that the voice of the people matters and worked tirelessly to prove it. Congress recognized the wisdom of investing in the National Guard, and responded appropriately, with the most important piece of legislation since the modern, dual-mission National Guard was established in 1903.

Now, the leadership of the National Guard stands ready to support the President and Secretary of Defense in the new strategic guidance released in January. It is clear that tough decisions have to be made in this budget environment and that we will have a military with a different look and operational approach in the future. However, we are confident that the National Guard will not shrink from its responsibility to defend our Nation and its interests around the world as well as meeting every home State emergency and challenge it faces.

We are grateful to GEN Frank Vavala, GEN Gus Hargett, and the members of NGAUS, for the important roles they played in this momentous legislation.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO RAYMOND J. WIECZOREK

• Ms. AYOTTE. Mr. President, today I wish to honor my dear friend, Raymond J. Wieczorek—a distinguished New Hampshire citizen who has devoted a lifetime of service to his city, State, and Nation. After providing decades of community and civic leadership in and around Manchester, he will retire from public office at the end of this year.

Ray is a father and a grandfather who has also been a loving husband. He has served as a soldier, a volunteer, a small businessman, a mayor, and as a member of New Hampshire's executive

council. But to me, Ray is a model public servant whose commitment to improving the lives of others sets the standard for elected officials.

Not long after graduating from high school, Ray answered the call to serve his country. During the Korean war, he was a soldier with the Army's 40th Infantry Division. An advocate for veterans, he remains a proud member of the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

In 1958, Ray's career brought him to his adopted hometown of Manchester. Six years later, he founded the insurance agency that bears his name—now a second generation family business carried on by his sons.

It didn't take long for Ray to realize that a city is only as strong as its citizenry. He once said that the heart and soul of any community is formed by the people who are willing to give their heart and soul to their community. And that is exactly what Ray has done.

To say that he has given generously of his time and expertise over the past several decades would be an understatement. Ray served as a trustee of the Manchester Boys and Girls Club; director and president of the Manchester Scholarship Foundation; chairman of the Greater Manchester United Way Board of Directors; and as commissioner, and later chairman, of the Manchester Housing and Redevelopment Authority.

In 1989, Ray was elected to his first of five terms as the mayor of Manchester—New Hampshire's largest city. In the midst of an economic downturn, the Queen City faced significant challenges. A once bustling mill town, the city was struggling to reinvent itself. Ray's enormous energy, vision, and optimism made him a perfect fit for the mayor's office—and at just the right time.

While others may have had doubts about the city's future, Ray thought big. To help drive economic activity, he successfully pushed for the approval of a civic center. Today, visitors from across New Hampshire descend on the Verizon Wireless arena—located in the well-named “Raymond J. Wiecezorek Square”—for sporting events and concerts. This facility has literally changed the face of Manchester, enlivening downtown and proving that the Queen City is open for business.

Under Ray's leadership, Manchester made a major comeback. The city's iconic Millyard started to flourish once again. The groundwork was laid for a now-thriving Manchester Airport, which today serves as the gateway to northern New England and Boston's northern suburbs. Fittingly enough, the access road to the airport is named in Ray's honor. Also during his mayoralty, a new city charter was adopted. The FIRST program got underway, and city hall was renovated and restored; it is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Ray once said, “I wasn't born in this city. I'm here [be]cause I want to be

here.” His efforts to improve Manchester were driven by an unwavering devotion to the city he loves. The turnaround Ray led was confirmed in 1998, when Money magazine named Manchester as the Number One Small City in the East.

And after nearly a decade of service as mayor, Ray was honored by the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce as the 1999 Citizen of the Year.

It would have been understandable for Ray to enjoy a quiet retirement. Fortunately for the people of New Hampshire, he instead chose to bring his wisdom to the statehouse in Concord.

Serving with Ray in State government, I had a firsthand opportunity to see his strong commitment to fighting for his constituents. And as New Hampshire has faced challenges during a difficult economic period, there is no question that Ray's experience as a successful mayor and businessman has contributed conspicuously to the work of the executive council. Just as he helped Manchester navigate a challenging chapter in its history, Ray has provided steady and strong leadership at a critical time for our State. Having served on the council for a decade, Ray's voice will be sorely missed after his retirement.

Today, in the Senate, I am honored to recognize Ray Wiecezorek for his tireless work to improve the lives of Manchester residents and citizens from across New Hampshire. I am grateful for his leadership, for his good humor, and most of all for his kind friendship. By raising the bar for excellence in public service, Ray Wiecezorek has earned his rightful place as one of New Hampshire's great statesmen.●

RECOGNIZING THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

● Mr. CARDIN. President Theodore Roosevelt established Pelican Island in Florida as the first national wildlife refuge on March 14, 1903. He was responding not only to an urgent need to conserve our vulnerable natural resources but also to the passionate advocacy of Americans who understood that our Nation's strength lies in the conservation of our wild lands and unique species.

Over the course of his Presidency, Roosevelt established 53 wildlife refuges, from Key West's mangrove islands and sand flats to Flattery Rock along Washington State's coast.

Today, on the refuge system's 109th birthday, the National Wildlife Refuge spans more than 150 million acres, across 556 wildlife refuges and 38 wetland management districts. The National Wildlife Refuge System is the Nation's premier network of public lands dedicated to the conservation of America's land and waters, its fish, wildlife, and plants.

From the Arctic to the Caribbean, the Atlantic to the Pacific, America's wildlife refuges are in every State and

U.S. territory. Wildlife refuges conserve habitat that is essential to more than 700 species of birds, 220 types of mammals, 250 varieties of reptiles and amphibians, more than 1,000 species of fish, and uncounted invertebrates and plants. They sustain nearly 300 of the Nation's more than 1,300 endangered or threatened species.

The National Wildlife Refuge System does not only benefit wildlife. The refuges also play a critical role for our communities. By protecting wetlands, grasslands, forests, wilderness, and other natural habitats, wildlife refuges improve air and water quality, relieve flooding, improve soil quality, and trap greenhouse gases. Wildlife refuges also benefit local economies, drawing visitors to local communities and supporting jobs tied to conservation and outdoor recreation.

I am especially proud of the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge in my home State of Maryland. Blackwater contains roughly one-third of all of the tidal wetlands in the State of Maryland and provides critical storm protection to lower Dorchester County, MD. Home to one of the largest breeding populations of American bald eagles on the east coast, Blackwater Refuge is recognized as a “Wetlands of International Importance” by the Ramsar Convention and has been called one of the “Last Great Places” by the Nature Conservancy. Blackwater also plays a critical economic role in Maryland, attracting approximately 200,000 visitors annually and providing an important economic engine for our Eastern Shore communities.

The Blackwater Refuge is a place of great ecological and economic value, but more than that, it is a place of deep historic value. One of the most important heroes in our Nation's history lived and bravely worked within the boundaries of Blackwater. To commemorate this history, I have introduced legislation to create two national historical parks—one within the Blackwater Refuge and one in New York to honor the legacy of Harriet Ross Tubman for her work on the Underground Railroad. Harriet Tubman was born within the Blackwater boundary and conducted much of her courageous work there leading other slaves northward to freedom. I am deeply committed to ensuring that her legacy is celebrated within the Blackwater Refuge. This is part of the beauty of the National Wildlife Refuge System: by preserving the ecological integrity of our treasured lands, we also preserve an important link to our Nation's past.

In an increasingly urban and high-speed world, our national wildlife refuges— islands of natural beauty—offer Americans priceless places to soothe or stir the soul, educate the mind, and invigorate the body. I am pleased today to recognize the anniversary of this valuable system.●