

two of them in Delaware—Rehoboth and Dewey Beach. We have the best Air Force base, we think, in the world. We were first in Ph.Ds per capita. We have, I think, the finest Judiciary—acknowledged year after year after year as the finest judicial system in the States. We have the best financial controls and cash management system. We have had triple A credit rating since—what was that guy's name as Governor, Carper or something? We continue to have that kind of credit rating. So we are proud of being first.

What is our State motto? "It is good to be first." And we attempt to be first in a whole lot of ways. Some things you don't want to be first in, and we want to be last in those. But we are proud of what we are first in—first in civility.

As Senator COONS said, this all goes back to Return Day. When you announce your candidacy for election, whether it is for the U.S. Senate or as sheriff, you know at the end of the campaign—2 days after the campaign—you are going to be in Georgetown, DE, in a horse-drawn carriage or maybe an antique car with the man or woman you were running against, their family, your family, and surrounded by friends and supporters and thousands of other people. And I think it has a very tempering effect on the nature of our campaigns, a wonderful effect.

That is one of much that we are proud of in our State. We are lucky to be Senators from this State, but this is a State that works and focuses on results. This is a State where we govern from the middle, whether the Governor is DuPont or Castle or CARPER or Markell. And whether the Senator is CARPER or COONS or Biden or Kaufman, we govern from the middle. We are a State where Democrats and Republicans actually like each other. We just want to get things done and do what is right for our State.

With that in mind, we hope some of our friends and neighbors can join us later today in the Russell Building up on the third floor. We will make a toast to Delaware and enjoy some sarsaparilla and some other goodies as well.

It is a great joy to serve with my friend.

Mr. COONS. I thank my colleague.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Let me be the first to congratulate my two colleagues from Delaware on Delaware Day. Have a happy Delaware Day.

We have a lot of great things in Colorado, but I am not going to try to outcompete you on beaches this afternoon. We don't have a lot of those. I do think it puts me in mind of something, and that is our constitution. Delaware, as Senator COONS mentioned, was the first State to ratify the Constitution of this great country. My State didn't become a State until nearly a century later. We are the Centennial State as a result of that.

That constitution that enabled generation upon generation of Americans had a preamble which said: to secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity. It is important in these days of these budget discussions to remind ourselves they didn't stop with themselves. The document doesn't stop with ourselves. It is about ourselves and our posterity. That is what we are talking about here when we are involved in this budget discussion. These aren't decisions that are about ourselves, these are decisions that are about the next generation of Americans and the generation after that. And it is time for us to do our job. It is time for us to walk back from this fiscal cliff and come up with a comprehensive plan. We know what the outlines of that are today, and we need to stop playing political games in this holiday season and get this work done, not for ourselves but for our posterity.

TROOPS TO TEACHERS

Mr. BENNET. Madam President, as you know, I have been to the floor many times in the last several years to talk about the dysfunction that reigns in this place too often. But today I am here on a happier occasion because I want to celebrate an accomplishment, a bipartisan accomplishment that I think is very important. We were able to work together earlier this week to improve and expand something called Troops to Teachers. Nothing makes a greater difference to student learning than great teaching. Our teachers are critical to our kids' success and, to a greater extent, our country's competitiveness in the economy.

America's future depends on our ability to recruit and retain great teachers. And by the way, we are falling down on the job. Fifty percent of the people who go into teaching leave the profession in the first 5 years, which means we don't have the benefit of the experience they have gained over that period of time. And I will save for another day what we need to do about this, but for today's purposes let me observe we have done almost nothing—virtually nothing—as a country to change the way we think about recruiting teachers, retaining teachers, inspiring teachers in this country since we had a labor market that discriminated against women and gave them two professional choices, one being a teacher, or a nurse.

Thank goodness, those days are long gone. But we have not modernized our system to make it as attractive to people as it needs to be if we are serious about educating the next generation of Americans. I believe it is our duty in that context to ensure we support new and existing pathways to the teaching profession. We should be making it easier, not harder, for those who want to serve our country in America's classrooms. Troops to Teachers is one of those undertakings. It has been recruiting and placing veterans and serv-

ice men and women in classrooms around the country since 1994. It brings veterans and servicemembers into some of the hardest-to-serve areas in our country.

But in Colorado and across the United States we have school districts near military installations that have not been eligible to participate in Troops to Teachers. These barriers send exactly the wrong message. If veterans want to make a difference in a student's life, they should be able to teach where they are needed most. That is why in 2009 I worked with Senator McCain and his staff to introduce legislation to make it easier for veterans to participate and continue their service in our classrooms.

These changes to the program will increase the number of schools eligible to participate by 49 percent. In Colorado alone, that means it will open over 1,000 of our schools to veterans and servicemembers who want to participate. As someone who has spent a lot of time in the classrooms as a former superintendent of the Denver Public Schools, the benefits of Troops to Teachers for our students are crystal clear to me.

When he talks about this program, Senator McCain often mentions his English teacher—Mr. William B. Ravenel—an Army veteran who served with General Patton in World War II. Because there is no way I could say it better, I wish to quote my friend from Arizona.

Every child should be blessed with a teacher like I had, and to learn at institutions with high academic standards and codes of conduct that reinforce the values their parents try to impart to them. Many students do have that opportunity. But too many do not. And government should be concerned with their fate.

I could not agree more with Senator JOHN McCain. Our military is the strongest in the world not because of our weapons or our tanks but because of the men and women who choose to serve. Troops to Teachers enlists their talents, their drive, their commitment to help make America's system of public education once again the driver of the American dream.

I am glad to have done this bipartisan work with Senator McCain to pass this amendment, and I wish to thank Senator McCain and his staff who worked so hard to get this over the finish line.

Finally, I would like to thank Senator WEBB for his leadership on this initiative, as well as Chairman LEVIN and the staff of the Armed Services Committee.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BLUMENTHAL). The Senator from New Mexico.

CUBA TRADE EMBARGO

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, earlier today, the Senate voted to grant permanent normal trade relations to Russia by a vote of 92 to 4, and I strongly supported that bill.

To extend PNTR to Russia, we had to repeal an out-of-date policy that was adopted during the Cold War; that is, the Jackson-Vanik amendment. I wish to speak briefly on the Senate floor this afternoon about another out-of-date policy of the Cold War that I believe should be ended; that is, the trade embargo on Cuba.

I have spoken about this many times in the past. Along with Senator Pell, Senator Dodd, and many others, I argued against the Helms-Burton Act in 1996.

For the past 50 years, our country's policy toward Cuba has been essentially stagnant. The core element of our foreign policy—which is the embargo—was authorized in a proclamation signed by President Kennedy on February 3, 1962; that is, 51 years ago. At that time, President Kennedy justified the embargo by citing the “. . . subversive offensive of Sino-Soviet Communism with which the Government of Cuba is publicly aligned. . . .”

He also stated his willingness to “. . . take all necessary actions to promote national and hemispheric security by isolating the present Government of Cuba and thereby reducing the threat posed by its alignment with the communist powers.”

It is an understatement to say President Kennedy's rationale is from a different era. The Cold War is over. The “subversive offensive of Sino-Soviet Communism” has been turned back. What remains of the Communist powers he was referring to are now our major trading partners. We have now extended permanent normal trade relations to Russia, which was, of course, the principal Communist power to which President Kennedy was referring, and neither Cuba nor those Communist powers pose a threat to national or hemispheric security today.

The world has changed. It is long past time that we change our policy toward Cuba. The embargo should have been lifted decades ago. It does not serve our national interest. It does not make our country safer. It does no good for the people of Cuba whom we claim to want to help. They would have better jobs and better lives if they could do business with the United States, which is the biggest economy in the world. The embargo does not help their families in the United States. Until recently, their families in the United States were severely restricted in how often they could visit and how much money they could send back to their relatives. It is ironic that for so long our policy for opposing the repression of freedoms in Cuba has included restricting the freedom of Americans to travel to see their families in that country.

As I have said before, I deplore the repression of the Castro brothers' government. The United States should support the efforts of the Cuban people to fight for their basic rights, and they need our help. Earlier this year, Amnesty International issued a damning assessment that said:

The Cuban government wages a permanent campaign of harassment and short-term detentions of political opponents to stop them from demanding respect for civil and political rights. The Cuban government should release all political prisoners.

The Cuban Government should also release Alan Gross, the American who has been jailed for more than 3 years now for distributing telephones in Cuba. As I understand it, he is in poor health and a humanitarian parole is more than justified.

When we hear about the Cuban Government's policies toward people—the repression of their basic freedoms, the persecution of political dissidents—it is understandable to want to punish the government and to weaken it so it collapses. We have to ask ourselves if our goal is to punish the Cuban Government or, instead, to help the Cuban people. Our goal should be to help the Cuban people.

Further, we have to ask ourselves whether continuing the embargo will accomplish that goal. In my view, the answer is clearly no.

It defies belief and 50 years of historical evidence to think that continuing the embargo will result in the toppling of the Castro regime. That regime has survived 50 years of sanctions. Fidel Castro is 84 years old. Raul Castro is 81 years old. It is much more likely that old age and ill health will end their rule rather than the embargo ending their rule; nor will continuing the embargo into a sixth decade—which is what we are now in danger of doing—result in the release of Alan Gross or political prisoners in Cuba or a sudden shift to democracy.

A better approach is to build relationships between the people and businesses in the United States and the people and businesses in Cuba. Interaction is a more powerful driver of change than isolation. We should allow more travel, we should allow more communication, and we should allow more commerce.

I wish to be clear that ending the embargo would not mean we agree with the Cuban Government's policies, nor does it mean we must stop advocating for basic freedoms and democracy in that nation. We need to be clear-eyed about the human rights abuses in Cuba. But the United States, as the only remaining superpower in the world, should be able to balance these goals. It is the approach we have taken with China. It is the approach we are taking with our vote today with Russia.

I wish to point out that as in Cuba, there are significant concerns about human rights and democracy in Russia. In fact, the legislation we voted on to expand our economic ties with Russia includes sanctions targeted at people who commit human rights violations. Those provisions are, of course, called the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law and Accountability Act. They were authored by Senators CARDIN, KYL, MCCAIN, and others. We could take a

similar approach with Cuba, expanding economic ties while continuing to put pressure on those responsible for repressing basic rights and basic freedoms.

Ultimately, because of the web of sanctions legislation that has been enacted over the years, only Congress has the authority to fully lift the embargo. But until Congress is willing to end that embargo, I hope the President will act.

The President has substantial authority to loosen the restrictions on travel and commerce. President Obama has already taken important steps, for example, by removing restrictions on family travel and authorizing licenses for the sale of communications equipment. I urge the President to make maximum use of the authorities he does have to relax sanctions. It should have been done long ago. I hope it can be done soon.

I yield the floor and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTES TO DEPARTING SENATORS

JIM WEBB

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I wish to say a few words about my friend and colleague Senator JIM WEBB. He has made a decision not to run for reelection which, for me, is very sad, but it is truly not a good deal for the State of Virginia or our country. JIM WEBB has served one term in the Senate. He accomplished more in that one term than most do in a lifetime. I repeat, I am very sorry to see him leave.

JIM is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, a highly decorated Marine. He was an infantry officer and served with distinction in Vietnam, and that is an understatement. He did serve with distinction. He earned a Navy Cross, which is the second highest decoration in the Navy and Marine Corps. He got that for heroism in Vietnam. He was awarded a Silver Star, two Bronze Stars, two Purple Hearts.

He, of course, wanted to be in the military all of his life, but when he returned from Vietnam he could not do it anymore. His injuries from the war prevented him from doing that. He attended Georgetown Law School where he graduated with distinction, served 4 years with President Reagan as Assistant Secretary of Defense and Secretary of the Navy. He was the first Naval Academy graduate to serve as the civilian head of the Navy. He is also an author, having written six books, a filmmaker, screen writer. He even won an Emmy.

Long after JIM WEBB left the Marine Corps, and despite his many civilian