

Constitution, particularly those who serve in Kentucky at Fort Knox, Fort Campbell, the Blue Grass Army Depot, or as Reservists or members of the National Guard. Without their service and sacrifice, we would not enjoy the liberties enshrined in this historical document.

As Abraham Lincoln once said, ours is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. The Constitution begins with the very words, "We the people." It ensures that, in America, power is dependent on the consent of the people. And that principle has helped to build a nation that represents the greatest hope for freedom around the world.

#### TRIBUTE TO MARGARET HOULIHAN SMITH

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today I want to congratulate a former member of my Senate staff, Margaret Houlihan Smith. Margaret served as my Chicago director and previously as a senior member of my 1996 campaign team. Since 2004, Margaret has served as director of corporate and government affairs for United Airlines, responsible for advancing its legislative objectives and protecting its commercial interests in Illinois.

Next week, Margaret is receiving the *Rerum Novarum* Award at St. Joseph College Seminary in Chicago. The *Rerum Novarum* Award, or Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor, is named after an encyclical written by Pope Leo XIII in 1891 that addressed issues facing the working class. Specifically, *Rerum Novarum*'s fundamental principles are respect for the dignity of every person and their labor, the right to organize and belong to a union, and the right to a living wage.

Every year, on behalf of St. Joseph College Seminary, the Seminary Salutes Committee honors men and women who have supported these ideals in the Chicagoland area. Well, I want to tell you that the committee couldn't have made a better choice than Margaret Houlihan Smith.

Margaret learned the importance of these values and public service from her father, Dan Houlihan. Known as Dan-the-man to his constituents—he represented the South Side of Chicago—the Beverly neighborhood—in the Illinois House of Representatives. Public service was in Margaret's blood.

So it is no surprise that, after graduating from St. Mary's College in Winona, MN, Margaret started right at the top in Illinois politics and began working for Michael Madigan, Speaker of the Illinois House of Representatives. In 1995, she helped run my first Senate campaign. And in 1996, Margaret agreed to be the director of my Chicago office. Her boundless energy, quick wit, and great judgment made her an outstanding member of my staff and set a high bar for those that followed.

One day, while working in my Chicago office, Margaret lost her voice.

When she tried to talk, she croaked like a frog. Her doctor urged her to stop talking for about a week. But anyone that knows Margaret knows this would be a challenge. You see, Margaret is the definition of an Irish lass: a wonderful sense of humor and, above all, a great storyteller—so great that she never stops telling stories. And let me assure you, her doctor's urgings didn't stop her. But I couldn't be more proud that Margaret is still out there sharing stories and lending her voice to the issues that matter in her community.

Margaret is driven by a willingness to offer a helping hand and is one of the most generous people I have had the pleasure to know. In her spare time, she serves on the boards of Misericordia Heart of Mercy, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Irish Fellowship of Chicago, the Civic Federation, and the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce PAC Board. If that wasn't enough, Margaret is also a founding member of the Illinois Women's Institute for Leadership.

She is an extraordinarily accomplished professional, but it is her caring heart that makes Margaret such a deserving recipient of this award. For more than a decade, Margaret has served on the Seminary Salutes Committee, tirelessly advocating for the St. Joseph College Seminary. Year after year, she works to raise money and vocation awareness in Chicagoland. And because of her efforts, the Seminary Salutes annual fundraising event, which benefits the scholarship program for low-income students, continues to be a success. I am honored to congratulate her on all the work she has done for St. Joseph College Seminary.

Despite her many achievements, her proudest accomplishment is her family. Never forgetting where she comes from—a trait her father and his beloved wife of 50 years, Mary Alice Houlihan, instilled in her—Margaret lives in the Beverly neighborhood of Chicago with her husband, Jim, and their two children: 8-year-old son Jack and 6-year-old daughter Maeve.

Let me close with this: Margaret's father used to have a favorite saying—"He has a big hat size." It was Dan's way to describe someone who was full of themselves. Well, Margaret has never forgotten those words and always stayed humble. I couldn't be more proud of the work she has done and the person she has become. And although her father is no longer with us, I know he feels the same way.

Congratulations, Margaret, on a well-deserved honor.

#### JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, for 2 years, President Obama's five eminently qualified nominees to the U.S. Court of Federal Claims have been awaiting a vote. This court has been referred to as the "keeper of the na-

tion's conscience" and "the People's Court." It was created by Congress approximately 160 years ago and embodies the constitutional principle that individuals have rights against their government. As President Lincoln said, "It is as much the duty of Government to render prompt justice against itself, in favor of citizens, as it is to administer the same between private individuals." That is what this Court does: it allows citizens to seek prompt justice against our government.

Yet 2 years of obstruction by a single Senator, the junior Senator from Arkansas, has forced the court to operate without one-third of its allotted judges. While these five nominees have been waiting for a vote, another judge retired, leaving the court with only 10 judges for 16 seats, or a vacancy rate of 38 percent. This takes Senate Republican obstruction of judicial nominees to a new level.

The court's jurisdiction is authorized by statute, and it primarily hears monetary claims against the U.S. Government deriving from the Constitution, Federal statutes, executive regulations, and civilian or military contracts. For example, the court has presided over such important cases as the savings and loan crisis of the 1980s and the World War II internment of Japanese-Americans. It also presides over civilian and military pay claims and money claims under the Fifth Amendment's Takings Clause.

I have heard no objections to the qualifications of any of the five nominees to this court. One of these nominees, Armando Bonilla, would be the first Hispanic judge to hold a seat on the Court. He is endorsed by the Hispanic National Bar Association. He has spent his entire career—now spanning over two decades—as an attorney for the Department of Justice. He was hired out of law school in the Department's prestigious honors program and has risen to become the Associate Deputy Attorney General in the Department. Mr. Bonilla should be confirmed without further delay.

Another nominee, Jeri Somers, also has a long record of public service. She served her country in the Air Force, retiring with the rank of lieutenant colonel. She spent over two decades serving first as a judge advocate general and then as a military judge in the U.S. Air Force and the District of Columbia's Air National Guard. In 2007, she became a board judge with the U.S. Civilian Board of Contract Appeals and currently serves as its vice chair.

Armando Bonilla and Jeri Somers are just two of the five nominees that Senate Republicans have been denying a confirmation vote. These are two individuals that have done right every step of the way in their careers and are willing to serve the American people on this important Court. They have dedicated the majority of their careers in service to our Nation. They deserve better than the treatment they are receiving from the Senate.

During the Bush administration, the Senate confirmed nine judges to the Court of Federal Claims, with the support of every Senate Republican. So far, during the Obama administration, only three Court of Federal Claims nominees have received confirmation votes. That is nine CFC judges during the Bush administration to only three so far in the Obama administration.

It appears that the Senate Republicans' obstruction playbook leaves no court behind. It spans from the very top, with their complete refusal to give a hearing and a vote to Chief Judge Merrick Garland, to the article III circuit and district courts, to the article I Court of Federal Claims, where citizens go to sue their government.

This blockade of all five CFC nominees makes no sense, especially because not a single Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee raised a concern about these nominees either during the committee hearings on these nominations 2 years ago or during the Committee debate 2 years ago or last year.

None of President Bush's nominees to the Court of Federal Claims spent longer than 4 months on the Senate floor before receiving a confirmation vote. Two of them waited only a single day. After 2 years, it is well past time for these five nominees to receive a vote so they can get to work on the shorthanded Court of Federal Claims.

#### RECOGNIZING THE VERMONT CENTER FOR EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, Vermonters are proud of the innovation and creativity that generate successful businesses in our small State. And for years, Vermont's tech incubator, the Vermont Center for Emerging Technology, VCET, has been providing space for entrepreneurs to take the next steps in driving their startup businesses. As demonstrated in a recent profile of VCET in the New York Times, any objective observer can see Vermont as more than just an outdoor enthusiasts' playground—but also as an oyster community of emerging technologies and innovative thinking in building smart cities and the infrastructure to go with them.

It is no secret that Vermont is full of entrepreneurs eager to take the next steps in their respective fields. From ice cream to craft beverages, digital forensics to game programming, our State is home to many successful business endeavors. The Vermont Center for Emerging Technologies plays a key role in expanding Vermont's tech network while addressing the skilled labor shortage in the State. At its helm is president and fund manager David Bradbury, whose vision for the city of Burlington as an east coast Silicon Valley has driven the nonprofit's development and success.

Housed in a brick building in downtown Burlington, VCET is powered by a

city-owned green energy grid with an enviable fast internet connection. The small but skilled team not only manages the Vermont Seed Capital Fund to administer initial funding for high-opportunity businesses and teams but also provides mentoring and advice to new startups. In collaboration with other Burlington-based companies and nonprofits, including BTV Ignite and Vermont HITECH, VCET encourages technology pioneers to dream big. With the help of local colleges offering courses in high growth fields, students learn the skills needed to thrive in a fast-changing economy. In turn, Vermont employers benefit from a larger pool of skilled technology workers, while employees gain access to better jobs and benefits.

The success of David's vision to grow Burlington into a technology hub while addressing the lack of skilled workers is rooted in something deeper than the rapidly expanding field of technology. Vermont's community and socially focused values bring neighbors together to benefit from shared experiences while providing local, sustainable, and accessible services. Corporate responsibility and attention to green energy reflect Vermont's commitment to lessening our environmental footprint while promoting energy conservation and efficiency. Whether encouraging Vermonters to pursue their passion for technology or forging new paths in the field, VCET is spurring economic development and technology jobs throughout our Green Mountain State.

I ask unanimous consent that a New York Times article from July 20, "A 'Smart' Green Tech Hub in Vermont Reimagines the Status Quo," be printed in the RECORD.

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

[From The New York Times, July 20, 2016]

A "SMART" GREEN TECH HUB IN VERMONT  
REIMAGINES THE STATUS QUO  
(By Constance Gustke)

Inside a plain brick building in Burlington lies the Vermont Center for Emerging Technologies, a buzzing hipster incubator that looks as if it could be in Silicon Valley. It is powered invisibly by forces that any city would envy: a green grid that is highly energy-efficient and a superfast one-gigabit internet connection.

"People would kill for this internet connection," said Tom Torti, president of the Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce. "For us to grow our tech network, we needed to double down on fiber network." The new Burlington economy is going to be knowledge- and skills-based, he added.

This digital superhighway runs through beautiful Burlington, a small city sandwiched between the distant Green Mountains and the 125-mile-long Lake Champlain. It is an outlier as far as emerging technology hubs and so-called smart cities go. But Burlington, which has a lower unemployment rate than Silicon Valley, is now spawning a wave of technology pioneers.

The technology center, called VCET, provides free advice, mentoring, seed money and gorgeous co-working spaces that are available to entrepreneurs for a low fee. Students can use these spaces free, so Max Robbins

and Peter Silverman, 20-year-old college students, are starting their business, Beacon VT, there. It is similar to the dating site OkCupid, but for employment, matching students with employers.

"We're trying to give people an unfair advantage," said David Bradbury, president and fund manager at VCET. "There's nothing too big that you can't dream here. And the snowball is moving faster."

An ultrahigh-speed internet backbone even helped Burlington form a partnership with US Ignite, which aims to build the next generation of internet apps, to form BTV Ignite. Its goal is to mindfully build on the city's network and further innovation, said Michael Schirling, who heads BTV Ignite.

"Smart cities and new technologies have the potential to change everything," said Mr. Schirling, a former Burlington police chief. "When you put in the right building blocks, you get a collision of ideas, which can become self-generating. It's attitude and infrastructure."

A result is that Burlington, once a timber port, has a stunningly low unemployment rate of 2.3 percent. On the downside, the city is also experiencing a skilled-labor shortage; hundreds of coding jobs alone languish on job boards. Burlington was named a TechHire city by the White House in 2016 to help link local employers with local workers, and to help these workers get the skills they need for a fast-changing economy. The designation does not come with funding, but it does help Burlington get grants for free training.

The TechHire mandate in Burlington is to train 400 technology workers through 2020.

"We want younger people to know that there are career opportunities here," Mr. Torti said. "We're trying to grow our work force rather than importing it."

A nonprofit organization known as Vermont Hitec is a crucial part of that vision.

It works in partnership with local companies to offer boot camps online and in classrooms that teach skills such as medical coding and programming that lead to good-paying jobs with benefits.

Vermont Information Processing, which develops software for the beverage industry, has been working with Vermont Hitec so that it can retrain or recruit employees as its business grows and it becomes less interested in outsourcing.

Colleges like the University of Vermont, which offers a biotechnology program, and Champlain College are also helping solve the employment puzzle Champlain College offers degrees in high-demand careers like digital forensics and game programming, along with a special program for federal employees who can get online degrees in high-growth fields.

"We're responsive, nimble and entrepreneurial," said Don Laackman, president of Champlain College. "There's a connection between employment needs and sources offered."

Burlington got its first push into technology start-ups when IDX Systems, a health care software maker, was founded there in 1969. It was sold to General Electric about 10 years ago.

"IDX created a lot of wealth and talent, and these people could be angel investors," Mr. Bradbury said. "It was a tipping point."

The next wave of innovation has come from internet companies like MyWebGrocer, which offers digital grocery services, and Dealer.com, which offers digital marketing services for the auto industry. Dealer.com became a legend in Burlington after it was sold for \$1 billion a couple of years ago. Mike Lane, one of Dealer.com's founders and its former chief operations officer, who is now on the VCET board, is an angel investor who has funded eight start-ups. One of his investments is Faraday Inc., which uses data analytics to help companies target customers.