

China's Deputy Chief of Mission in Washington Liu Xiaoming described Taiwan's presidential election as "a local election in an area of China." Yet, even if his description is accepted, it demonstrates how far the rest of China has to go: in China, a germinating democracy has not progressed beyond the stage of local village elections. Municipal or national elections have yet to be held.

As President Clinton so succinctly observed, "the election provides a fresh opportunity for both sides to reach out and resolve their differences through dialogue."

Ironically, it is China, which had urged Taiwan to adopt direct trade, postal, and telecommunications links while Taiwan under President Lee rejected such direct ties, that now rejects President-elect Chen's offers to institute direct contacts.

There apparently is the perception even inside China that their policy needs to be changed. One official was quoted over the weekend as saying, "we are painting ourselves into a corner. We are tough when we should be soft and passive when we should be taking the initiative."

Yet, even as Taiwan has grown apart from China, it has also grown closer. It has invested \$24 billion in China and China now accounts for 23 percent of all Taiwanese exports. Taiwan's and China's economic progress have become mutually self-sustaining.

As a result, we should not be painting China into a corner now. As it attempts to come to terms with the new realities in Taiwan, we should be taking steps to welcome China into a greater, more responsible role in the international system. A critical step in that regard is granting China Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR). This critical vote in the U.S. Congress promises to open up China's markets to greater competition and more goods from the West. PNTR does not mean that China will be a democracy, nor does it mean instant benefits for the American economy, but it is a step towards integrating China into the new world community.

Shortly after China joins the World Trade Organization, Taiwan will join. This is the third new reality with which American policymakers must contend. Taiwan has changed. It is not the single-party dictatorship which it was when the Taiwan Relations Act or the three communiques were promulgated. It is a vibrant democracy with a strong economy. It has long clamored to be allowed to play a more active role in the world community by providing assistance to international aid organizations or in UN Specialized Agencies. Can a new role be found for the Taiwan of today in tomorrow's world? Finding one may well be the key if China and Taiwan are to resolve their differences and achieve conciliation.

VETERANS

Mr. BURNS. Mr. President, I rise today to add my name as a co-sponsor of Senate Bill 1810, "Veterans Claims and Appeals Procedures Clarification and Improvement Act."

Recent court decisions have made it more difficult for veterans to get their rightful assistance from the Veterans Administration, VA, and to develop their claims. This bill will clearly lay out the rules of how the VA will assist veterans with these claims. This bill will remove many of the barriers now standing in the way of veterans gathering information from many different sources to make their claim "well-grounded."

Right now, many veterans who have filed claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs must wait for months and, in some cases, even years for the claims to be decided. This creates a hardship on our veterans who have served our country with pride. In my state of Montana, I have seen veterans wait five to 10 years for their claim and the necessary appeals to make it through this bureaucratic system. Over the past few years, I have seen my veterans' casework increase due to veterans having problems in obtaining information that the VA previously provided.

My President, can you imagine a homeless veteran finding out that they must call this federal agency or write to this private hospital to obtain his or her own information for a claim? Often, many veterans just give up when they face these many bureaucratic obstacles. They fall though the cracks of a system that is fast becoming a legal nightmare and a system that was supposed to be there for them when they came home. Why? It is because the Department of Veterans Affairs has ceased being helpful to the veterans in the development of their claims.

We must honor our commitment to our veterans and ensure the VA is being as helpful as possible to all veterans. This bill will do just that. I urge my colleagues to support this bill and bring an end to the nightmare that America's veterans are having with the present system.

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Thursday, April 6, 2000, the Federal debt stood at \$5,762,301,865,002.06 (Five trillion, seven hundred sixty-two billion, three hundred one million, eight hundred sixty-five thousand, two dollars and six cents).

One year ago, April 6, 1999, the Federal debt stood at \$5,665,194,000,000 (Five trillion, six hundred sixty-five billion, one hundred ninety-four million).

Five years ago, April 6, 1995, the Federal debt stood at \$4,872,968,000,000 (Four trillion, eight hundred seventy-two billion, nine hundred sixty-eight million).

Ten years ago, April 6, 1990, the Federal debt stood at \$3,092,513,000,000 (Three trillion, ninety-two billion, five hundred thirteen million) which reflects a doubling of the debt—an increase of almost \$3 trillion—\$2,669,788,865,002.06 (Two trillion, six hundred sixty-nine billion, seven hundred eighty-eight million, eight hundred sixty-five thousand, two dollars and six cents) during the past 10 years.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO THE HONORABLE VINCENT A. BIFFERATO

• Mr. BIDEN. On March 31st, hundreds of people gathered in a lobby of the courthouse in Wilmington, Delaware. The focal point of the dignified but unassuming room is an information desk, with a big board behind it that's used to post the daily schedule for Delaware's Superior Court. It is, quite literally, where the Court meets the public, and it was the ideal—and perhaps the only—place for this particular occasion, a reception honoring Judge Vincent A. Bifferato as he retired following 32 years on Superior Court, a total of 36 years of public service.

"Biff," as Judge Bifferato is universally known outside of the courtroom, is not the type for a country-club send-off. Part of it is roots. His father, born in Italy and never having had an education himself, always said he knew his son would go to college, and got to see his son sworn in as a member of the Delaware Bar. Biff remembers his father on that day, sitting in the front row, crying; "To him," Biff says, "it was the American dream."

And Biff knew, as his life since he became a lawyer has proved, that there is a second chapter to any true American dream story. It's the chapter written after you get there, the story of what you do with power and status once you've got them. And the truth is, it's the part of the story that matters most.

What Biff has done in his position as a judge is to combine the forceful exercise of authority and the vigorous application of the law with an uncommon sense of compassion for and responsibility to the people he was there to serve. He had never forgotten what drew him to public service in the first place—the opportunity to help people who need government, people who need someone on their side in order to have a chance. And he has never let those of us around him forget it either, always reminding colleagues and students—and anyone else who might need to be reminded—of our particular obligation to the least powerful of our fellow citizens.

Biff's concern for how people treat each other is, in fact, the hallmark of his character. In his courtroom, small-town lawyers from one-person firms knew they stood on equal footing with heavy-hitters from the big city. Litigants and witnesses were treated with