

To give you a sense of what that means for State and local governments, consider that in 2005 the community development block grant, CDBG, program alone was funded at \$4.15 billion, \$450 million more than the \$3.7 billion requested for the total 18 programs being consolidated under the new strengthening America's communities grant program in 2006.

That is not a consolidation of programs. It is a direct attempt to dismantle those programs. That is why the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the National Association of Counties, and the National League of Cities all oppose this.

As those groups have pointed out, the Commerce Department lacks the capacity to administer the newly proposed program. HUD has 1,100 urban, suburban, and rural CDBG grantees, constituting a strong infrastructure for program administration. And, HUD's \$4.7 billion CDBG program dwarfs the Commerce Department's \$257 million economic development program. HUD has skills and experience Commerce lacks.

On March 4, 2005, I wrote a letter to Chairman GREGG and Ranking Member CONRAD supporting full funding for the CDBG and objecting to its transfer to the Department of Commerce from HUD.

Those who are closest to the needs of low-income communities our Nation's Governors, community based organizations in Illinois, and local government officials from Illinois have all come out in support of the Sarbanes amendment. They know the CDBG program works and have shared success stories of communities strengthened with CDBG funds. They respect the public servants that administer the program, and they have developed a working partnership with them.

In Illinois, communities large and small are making the most of this assistance.

The city of Chicago, for example, which has already seen its formula share of CDBG funds reduced by \$14 million over the last 3 years, has focused its CDBG priorities on five specific program areas: affordable housing, youth programming, health clinics, job training, and support services to groups with specific needs, such as domestic violence, emergency food aid, and meals on wheels.

Let me give you a specific example of CDBG funds in action. Mujeres Latinas en Acci3n is an organization in Chicago's Pilsen community that serves Latinas and their families. The total they receive in CDBG funds both through the city of Chicago and the city of Cicero is close to \$170,000.

Mujeres Latinas en Acci3n depends on CDBG funds to support services such as rental assistance for program participants to prevent homelessness. They also provide comprehensive services for victims of domestic violence including crisis intervention, court advocacy, individual counseling, group

counseling, 24-hour crisis hotline, and referrals to shelters. And, the group also uses CDBG funds to provide services to young people promoting the development of peaceful relationships, open communication with peers and family, and school success. The goal of the program is to provide youth a variety of age appropriate structured activities during nonschool hours to help prevent teen involvement in gangs, alcohol and drug use, sexual activity, pregnancy, and other problems facing adolescents in low-income communities.

In Champaign, IL, CDBG funds have been used to help low-income families become homeowners, make homes accessible for the disabled, provide credit counseling, construct emergency and transitional shelters for the homeless, and provide a broad range of services to people in need. A number of towns in St. Clair County, IL, are using CDBG funds for housing rehabilitation grants and loans for their low to moderate income residents.

As you can see, these proposed cuts in the CDBG program affect big cities and smaller towns. Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley wrote me that, "significant reductions in CDBG funds . . . would have a serious effect on the network of community-based organizations throughout the city which rely on CDBG for their existence. A number of them would likely close their doors." And, in the words of Eric Kellogg, the mayor of Harvey, IL, population 30,000, "Many have characterized CDBG as the best federal domestic program ever enacted because of its flexibility and adaptability in meeting the needs of a diverse America."

The CDBG program works. Let's not destroy it.

I urge my colleagues to support the Sarbanes amendment.

MORNING BUSINESS

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA GRIZZLIES IN THE NCAA

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I rise today to congratulate the University of Montana, which for the first time since 1997 will watch both its men's and its women's basketball teams advance to the NCAA tournament, and we do so with Big Sky tournament championships fresh in hand.

The University of Montana men's basketball team will head to the tournament for the sixth time in school history. The Grizzlies now face a daunting task, facing the No. 1 seed University of Washington, and we are going to beat them.

Under Coach Larry Krystkowiak, we have a coach and a team that is going to win. Larry was a legendary basketball player for the Grizzlies in the 1980s, rising all the way up to the NBA, and now in his first year as head coach of the Grizzlies, he is a champion.

We won the tournament. We are going to beat those characters over in

the State of Washington. We are going to win the next round.

The Lady Griz basketball team is leading to the tournament for the 16th time in school history. They will face Vanderbilt, and I am quite confident head coach Robin Selvig—just a terrific coach—will have his team ready to play.

Both teams represent that which is great about college athletics: fellowship, sportsmanship, and fair play. They are great kids. The student athletes conduct themselves with dignity and class, and I am very proud how well they have represented my home State, and we are very proud to see them compete on a national stage for the national championship.

All I have to say is, watch out, Vanderbilt; watch out, University of Washington. Montana is coming.

LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2005

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the need for hate crimes legislation. Each Congress, Senator KENNEDY and I introduce hate crimes legislation that would add new categories to current hate crimes law, sending a signal that violence of any kind is unacceptable in our society. Likewise, each Congress I have come to the floor to highlight a separate hate crime that has occurred in our country.

Last September, a gay tourist was attacked outside a popular gay club in Hawaii. The woman was walking to the club with two of her friends when she was approached by two men. One of the men asked if the women were gay. When the men found out that the women were lesbians, they began to shout antigay epithets at them, and the tourist was struck in the face. She received several fractures below her eye, a broken jaw, and a concussion from the attack.

I believe that the Government's first duty is to defend its citizens, to defend them against the harms that come out of hate. The Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act is a symbol that can become substance. I believe that by passing this legislation and changing current law, we can change hearts and minds as well.

RUSSIAN SUPPORT FOR THE SYRIAN REGIME

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, the Helsinki Commission, which I chair, held a hearing last week that examined the close relationship between Russian Federation and Syria. The Commission heard testimony detailing their intricate financial and military dealings that began in the earliest days of the Cold War and continue to this day. This relationship allows Syria to continue to support numerous terrorist groups, groups that have terrorized Lebanon for the past three decades and fuel the insurgency in Iraq. In addition,

we heard details about Syria's support of terrorist organizations who operate around the world. Finally, we heard from both Lebanese and Syrians committed to freedom and democracy who have become victims of the Assad regime and are now languishing in the prison cells of Damascus.

The Commission's concern regarding Russia's involvement with Syria—a country that has been listed as a state sponsor of terrorism since 1979 by the State Department—rises from the Helsinki commitments that Russia has freely accepted as a participating State of the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe OSCE. The OSCE Charter on Preventing and Combating Terrorism was agreed to at the Porto Ministerial in 2002. Russia then committed to refrain from instigating or providing active or passive support or assistance to, or otherwise sponsoring terrorist acts in another state. Russia also committed to reducing the risk of terrorists gaining access to weapons and materials of mass destruction and their means of delivery.

Russia's support for the terrorist regime in Damascus flies in the face of these commitments. Russia is an active enabler of the Assad regime, whose Ba'ath Party was described by one of our witnesses as the richest terrorist organization in the region. The Syrian regime has received untold amounts of military hardware, much of which are currently being used by terrorists in Iraq against our American troops and our allies. Additionally, Syrian intelligence supports terrorist units in Iraq, composed not only of Syrians, but including Egyptians, Sudanese, Moroccans, and other Islamic mujaheddin.

Even more alarming is Russia's plan to sell an unknown number of Iglu SA-18 shoulder-held missiles to Syria. Such a sale to this terrorist state is more than criminal. This sale will put in the hands of terrorists some of the most sophisticated shoulder-held missiles in the Russian inventory, and increases the likelihood that they will get into the arsenals of other terrorist organizations around the world. Despite Russia's denials, indicators are that this sale will go forward soon, putting at risk every airline flight, every military flight, with the potential for massive loss of life and the shutting down of modern transportation around the world.

We must focus on the fact that, while there is no apparent direct Russian involvement in Iraq, this direct support of Syrian military and intelligence operations, coupled with Syria's support for Hezbollah in Lebanon and the long list of evil deeds coming out of Damascus, cast Russia as a suspicious party to these terrorist activities. We should not sit idly by and allow this to transpire without comment. We must call upon President Bush and Secretary Rice to reiterate U.S. demands that Russia disengage from its support of Syria, a state sponsor of terrorism. It is not enough to stop the sale of the

missiles. Complete cessation of financial and military support to this rogue regime is necessary.

On the eve of the Helsinki Commission hearing, a courageous group of human rights activists and pro democracy reformists held a demonstration in Damascus, a daring display of dissent quickly broken up by the security forces. One of the protesters held up at banner that read: "Freedom for Prisoners of Opinion and Conscience." According to the Syrian Human Rights Committee, the Assad regime in Damascus has executed nearly 17,000 Syrian and Lebanese prisoners. Additionally, there are over 600 prisoners of conscience in Syrian jails, champions of human rights, accountability and transparency who are still languishing under horrible conditions.

I would like to highlight a few of these prisoners of conscience whose names were submitted to us by one of the witnesses and call for their immediate release: Riad Seif, member of parliament; Aref Dalilah, economist; Maamun al-Homsi, member of parliament; Abdul Aziz al-Khayer, physician; Habib Issa, lawyer; Walid al-Bounni, physician; Mohammad Bashir al-Arab, student leader and doctor; Muhanad al-Debs, student leader; Mahmoud Ammo, activist; Mahmoud Abou Sader, activist; Mazid Ali Al-Terkawi, businessman; and Fawaz Tello, engineer.

I was pleased to hear of Syria's promise to a U.N. envoy to withdraw its troops and intelligence agents from Lebanon, but as the counter-demonstrations yesterday against Syria demanded, Damascus must follow through with actions as soon as possible. I am hoping that details of the withdrawal plan from U.N. envoy Terje Roed-Larsen after his talks with Syrian President Bashar Assad and Lebanese President Emile Lahoud will allow the people of Lebanon to hold their parliamentary elections in May without any interference from the Syrians and to do so in a manner that is free, timely, and transparent.

What would be unacceptable is the kind of warning issued by Prime Minister-designate Omar Karami that polls may have to be postponed if the country's political opposition fails to enter a dialogue with the government. Such an effort will surely ignite the kind of violence that the Lebanese people have been yearning for so many years to avoid.

It is time for the international community to lend support for the slogan that defines the people's revolution in Lebanon and in the region: "Kifaya," which means "enough." Let's listen to what the people in Lebanon are saying for what they are saying is now being heard not only in Beirut but in Damascus, in Cairo, and in Riyadh: enough of autocrats, enough of the corruption, and enough of the repression.

WINDS OF CHANGE IN ROMANIA?

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, I rise to congratulate the people of Romania and newly elected President Traian Basescu on the success of their recent national elections, and to encourage them in their efforts to consolidate democracy in Romania. In the 15 years since the overthrow of the brutal Communist dictatorship which ruled that country for decades, Romania has undertaken four successful national elections and peaceful transfers of power, and has made important strides in building democratic institutions and the rule of law.

I was recently appointed chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe—the Helsinki Commission—and have followed events in Romania for many years. In that capacity, I look forward to working with the government and the people of Romania on the challenges confronting both of our countries.

Romania is a good friend of the United States and a strong partner in the war on global terrorism. I thank the Government of Romania for its steadfast support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, where a battalion serves on the ground, and for its support of the U.S.-led military action in Iraq. More than 700 Romanian soldiers contributed to the efforts that supported the people of Iraq in their historic ballot. Romania is our NATO ally and anticipates accession to the European Union in 2007.

President Basescu has recognized that endemic corruption and the poverty it breeds are a threat to Romania's national security, and his government is already taking steps to combat this scourge and to institute effective government reform. We commend the President's efforts and stand ready to assist him as he shines the light of transparency across Romania.

President Basescu's focus and determination give me hope that progress can also be made on a number of matters that have been of concern.

In 2001, Romania imposed a moratorium on all international adoptions under pressure from the European Union, and amid allegations of "baby selling." This moratorium was extended several times pending development of comprehensive child protection legislation to include new rules on adoption. The new legislation came into effect in January of this year and limits international adoption to the grandparents of the Romanian child—effectively ending international adoption. More than 200 U.S. families were in the process of adopting Romanian children when the moratorium was established, and the Government of Romania indicated that it would proceed with those adoption requests that were "already in the pipeline." However, to date, these cases remain unresolved. This total ban on international adoptions is regrettable and means that many children in Romania will now grow up without permanent families. I