

have each expressed concern and disapproval with Iran's mistreatment of Baha'is. They are joined by a long list of human rights groups, such as the International Federation for Human Rights, Human Rights Watch and the Iranian League for the Defense of Human Rights. I want to add my voice in condemning Iran's persecution of its Baha'i religious minority.

Our Nation stands for fundamental rights and freedoms. We are not perfect, and I have not hesitated to speak out when I felt short of our own values and principles. But I also believe we have an obligation to speak out when the fundamental rights of citizens of other nations are being denied. The Baha'is of Iran deserve our admiration and support.

ASSISTANCE FOR AFGHANISTAN

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, at a time when many Americans are increasingly concerned with the situation in Afghanistan, I was interested in an investigative report on U.S. aid for Afghanistan in the August 2, 2010, issue of the *Christian Science Monitor* weekly magazine. The report describes several aspects of the U.S. Agency for International Development's approach to development in that country, and I want to take a minute to clarify what may be a misconception about the Congress's expectations.

The article describes USAID's focus on the "burn rate"—that is, how quickly aid funds are spent. With this as USAID's focus, the more money the President asks for, the more money Congress appropriates, the more money USAID has available to spend, and the faster USAID says it needs to spend it in order to satisfy Congress.

The article gives examples of the mistakes and problems that have resulted from trying to spend too much, too fast, in an environment where security threats severely limit the ability of USAID to monitor the funds, where a large percentage of the population lives as though it were the 12th century, where corruption is pervasive, and where the Karzai Government is widely perceived as ineffective or worse. The article describes big-dollar contracts with foreign companies that are not familiar with Afghanistan, for projects that are hastily designed from the top down, are overly ambitious, and too often do not produce good results.

This is one Senator who is not impressed by burn rates. I don't think they are a good measure of anything, except possibly waste. When I hear that the administration expects to increase the burn rate for USAID programs and activities in Afghanistan from \$250 million per month to \$300 million per month, it rings alarm bells. I am interested in projects that are worth the investment and that provide lasting improvements in the lives of the Afghan people. More often, that means spending less, and spending it more slowly and more carefully.

What we are seeing in Afghanistan is reminiscent of Iraq, although in Iraq the waste and shoddy results were on a far larger scale. The Pentagon was asked to be a relief and reconstruction agency that it was never meant to be. The empty buildings, electricity blackouts and unfinished projects are part of the costly legacy of that debacle.

But the increasing tendency in Afghanistan to measure progress by the rate at which money is spent is unwise. We have urged USAID to go slower, to focus on smaller, manageable, sustainable projects that are chosen with input from local communities. Local people, and local governments or national government ministries with a record of transparency, accountability and good performance, should be involved at all stages, from design to implementation to oversight. It may take longer, the projects may not be as grandiose, but the long term results are likely to be better.

In response, we are told USAID needs more money to support the civilian surge and implement bigger projects quickly as part of the "clear, hold, build" strategy. I understand the pressure USAID is under, from the Pentagon, the White House, and the State Department, to spend more money faster. I suspect if it were up to USAID alone it would spend less and get better results. And I am concerned that at the same time USAID is being told to spend more, it is treated as a second-class agency that sometimes has to fight just to be included in the discussions about the very strategy it is told to implement.

But I have seen, as the *Christian Science Monitor* describes, the disappointing results of the big-spending, rushed approach. Costly new roads that are already deteriorating, poorly built irrigation canals that have collapsed from landslides, hydro-electric projects that don't produce electricity. United States officials in Kabul who have been in the country only a few months and will be gone after a year, trying to direct what happens on the ground hundreds of miles away. Perhaps the worst of it is that many Afghans have become angry and distrustful of the United States because they know these projects were expensive and mismanaged, and promises were not kept. Just as bad is when USAID contractors issue self-serving reports—describing projects which cost too much and produced too little—as success stories.

Of course, spending billions of dollars does produce successes. Hundreds of thousands of Afghan girls are in school thanks to the United States. That alone is a major achievement. Agricultural productivity is increasing, thanks to USAID programs, although opium poppy cultivation is also flourishing. Another success is the money we provide to the National Solidarity Program, which works from the bottom up, with better oversight and less waste than the big contracts. It is supporting economic development

projects, often costing only a few tens of thousands of dollars, in thousands of Afghan towns and villages.

But these successes should not obscure the fact that planning, implementation, and oversight of programs need to be better, both for American taxpayers and for the Afghan people.

At a time when we face large budget deficits and money is scarce, I doubt the wisdom of spending billions of dollars this way. That is one reason the Department of State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee has recommended \$1.3 billion less than the President requested for aid for Afghanistan for fiscal year 2011. Some argue that we should have cut even more.

We want to help the people of Afghanistan. They have suffered, and continue to suffer, every imaginable hardship. Combating poverty, empowering women whose political participation is essential to the future of that country, building more effective public institutions, and strengthening the rule of law in Afghanistan are in the long term interests of the United States. We know that in a country torn by conflict and where corruption is rampant, some projects will fail no matter how well designed they are. We understand that there is an unavoidable element of risk. But spending money fast is not the same as taking risks to help people.

I urge the administration to review its current assumptions, look critically at the results so far, take the time to understand the lessons learned, and re-evaluate the amount of aid that Afghanistan can effectively absorb so progress is measured not by the rate at which money is spent, but by tangible improvements in the lives of the Afghan people.

10TH ANNIVERSARY OF BONE BUILDERS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, next month, RSVP programs in Vermont's Rutland and Addison Counties will be celebrating the 10th anniversary of Bone Builders, a free exercise program that helps Vermonters combat and prevent osteoporosis. I congratulate all the participants and volunteers who have contributed to the success of Bone Builders and for reaching this milestone.

As we mark the 6-month milestone of the Affordable Health Care Act and the implementation of more and more of its benefits for Americans and their families, we all are increasingly attuned to the advantages of ending the corrosive health cost spiral, and the roles to be played by individual and organized preventive efforts like Bone Builders.

Bone Builders uses RSVP volunteers to lead weight training and balance exercise classes aimed at preventing fractures caused by osteoporosis. Classes help participants increase their muscular strength, balance, and overall bone density. Countless studies have

shown that women who participate in exercise programs like Bone Builders can gain bone density while nonparticipants will continue to lose bone density.

One particular story shared with me captures how important this program is to help keep Vermonters healthy. A few years ago during a particularly rough winter, a Bone Builders participant was walking to her bird feeder and fell, injuring herself. Yards away from her house and her phone, she found the strength to drag herself back to her house. Later she told an RSVP volunteer that she would not have been able to get inside to call for help if she had not participated in Bone Builders.

Medical experts estimate that there are 1.5 million fractures per year in the United States due to osteoporosis, costing nearly \$20 million in health care services and treatments. Doctors in Vermont, understanding how important strength training programs are for seniors in order to prevent osteoporosis, have started to refer patients to local classes and hand out Bone Builders brochures. Since the program has been so successful and popular in Vermont, there are now more than 100 classes offered across our State.

The program has helped countless Vermonters not only improve their health but make connections in their communities. Some participants have recently lost spouses or have had health difficulties that may isolate them within their neighborhood and communities. The camaraderie and friendship that participants in Bone Builders find through classes often leads them to socialize outside of the program. In fact, the program has been so successful in Vermont that the Bone Builders model has been replicated in several other States, including California, Maine, Florida and Minnesota.

I am proud of the Vermonters who have taken the initiative and challenged themselves in these classes, and for the work of the volunteers who spend their time inspiring others to improve their health. I look forward to celebrating the work of RSVP Bone Builders and many other such anniversaries in the years ahead.

COMMENDING SENATOR ROLAND BURRIS

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, Senator Roland Burris of Illinois was sworn into office less than 2 years ago. In that short time, he has debated and voted on some of the most important legislation the Senate has considered in 40 years. During his tenure, Senator BURRIS has helped pass major reforms to end abuses by the credit card industry, to put a cop back on the beat on Wall Street, and to expand health care coverage to 32 million Americans while reducing the Federal deficit by \$143 billion. Senator BURRIS also voted to confirm the nomination of two U.S. Supreme Court Justices: Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan.

Senator BURRIS serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee, which I chair. During his service on the committee, Senator BURRIS helped provide oversight of the military as we draw down U.S. forces in Iraq and standup Afghan forces in Afghanistan. He has helped pass weapons acquisition reform legislation and two National Defense Authorization Acts out of committee. He has helped confirm the nominations of Nation's top civilian and military leaders.

Before coming to the Senate, Roland Burris had a distinguished career in Illinois politics, as Illinois comptroller and then as the Illinois attorney general.

As Senator BURRIS ends his time here in the Senate, I thank him for his service to our Nation and wish him and his family the very best.

COMMENDING SENATOR CARTE GOODWIN

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, today I rise to congratulate Senator CARTE P. GOODWIN of West Virginia for his service. When he was sworn into office in July, Senator GOODWIN assumed the seat previously held by the Chamber's longest serving and one of the most distinguished Senators in our history—Senator Robert C. Byrd, who passed away on June 28.

Before arriving in the Senate, Senator GOODWIN already had an impressive political career. As chief counsel to West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin, CARTE GOODWIN led the effort to reform mine safety rules in the wake of the Sago and Aracoma coal mine disasters that killed 14 coal miners. He also served as the chairman of the West Virginia School Building Authority.

Senator GOODWIN serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee, which I chair. As a committee member, Senator GOODWIN has helped pass the National Defense Authorization Act out of committee. He has also contributed to hearings overseeing the status of conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As Senator GOODWIN's time in the Senate draws to a close, I thank him for his service to our country, and I wish him and his family the very best.

WORLD STEM CELL SUMMIT

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, next week, scientists, researchers, industry leaders and advocates from around the world will gather in Detroit, MI, for the sixth annual World Stem Cell Summit. By bringing together experts in medicine, genetics, business, and economic development, the summit will give a boost to global efforts aimed at finding cures for debilitating and deadly diseases, as well as bringing the important economic benefits of bioscience. By choosing Detroit as the site of this year's summit, the organizers have made a powerful statement about Michigan's commitment to this vital area of scientific exploration.

In 2008, Michigan voters approved a referendum protecting the ability of Michigan researchers to engage in research involving stem cells. This wise decision has already paid significant dividends. Researchers at the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Wayne State University, and other Michigan institutions have made significant progress even in that short time. UM has established a consortium to aid the search for treatments and cures, and a UM researcher, Dr. Eva Feldman, last year obtained FDA approval for the first ever clinical trials on a stem cell therapy for ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease. Researchers at MSU are advancing work on stem cell treatments for Parkinson's disease. At Wayne State, scientists are examining how stem cells can be made more useful for a wide variety of medical purposes. These and other institutions across the State are working hard to save and improve lives, and I congratulate them for their efforts.

Michigan researchers will join others from across the country and around the world at next week's summit. They will examine not only the latest scientific advances but important subjects such as how stem cell research can contribute to economic development efforts, another area in which Michigan has quickly become a leader.

I would like to welcome those who will travel to Detroit next week and thank them for the opportunity to show what Michigan has accomplished in the stem cell field. I wish them every success as they seek to protect the health and save the lives of the millions of people coping with diseases that stem cell research might one day cure.

COMBATTING TERRORISTS' ACCESS TO FIREARMS

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, in May 2010, the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee held a hearing on how known or suspected terrorists are taking advantage of lax Federal laws to purchase firearms. The committee discussed two legislative proposals, both of which I have cosponsored, to address this weakness in current law: the Denying Firearms and Explosives to Dangerous Terrorists Act, S. 1317, and the PROTECT Act, S. 2820. S. 1317 would close the loophole in current law—known as the terror gap—that prevents the Federal Government from stopping the sale of firearms or explosives to a known or suspected terrorist—unless that individual falls under another disqualifying category. S.2820 would lengthen the time—from the current duration of 90 days to 10-years the FBI is required to keep gun transfer records that involve a purchaser on the terrorist watch list. Unfortunately, despite broad support from the law enforcement community, Congress has failed to pass these commonsense pieces of legislation.