known as the Pieta. It is a monument to those who gave their lives during this recent struggle for independence in Lithuania. I was struck by the fact, as I walked along the gravestones of those martyrs to freedom in Lithuania, how many of them were teenagers, or in their early 20's, who lost their lives in the hope that Lithuania would be free. Many of them in their lifetimes had never known anything but Soviet domination, Communist domination, a domination where the Soviets tried to Russify the Lithuanian language, take away Lithuanian culture and traditions, close down Catholic churches and literally close down the press. They saw that.

I saw as well, when I visited, in Kaunas, the archbishop, His Excellency Sigitas Tamkevicius, who is considered a saint, having spent many years in a Soviet prison for the audacity of publishing an underground journal, how much this country has been through, how much it has suffered. It is not unreasonable for us as leaders of democracy and freedom in the world to understand why Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia want to be part of our peace-loving and democratic alliance.

I sincerely hope that the United States, starting first with the meeting between the President and President Yeltsin in Helsinki this coming week, and then again in Madrid this coming summer, will really try to show the initiative, to broach this discussion about Lithuania and the Baltic countries becoming part of the NATO alliance. I think it is important for us to say unequivocally that this will happen and we are committed to it, and to say as well, now let us discuss with these countries and with Russia when this will occur and how this will occur.

It should be a transparent process. By that I mean we should say to the Russians this is clearly defensive in nature. These tiny countries are only looking for the assurance that they will have freedom and great opportunity in the future.

I will close, Madam President, by saying that one of the more memorable moments in my trip to Lithuania was on Independence Day, on February 16, when on Sunday I stood in the square in front of the parliament in Vilnius and saw the people gathered singing the Lithuanian national anthem and then went to the cathedral for a Mass celebrated by the Cardinal of Lithuania. At the end of this Mass they once again sang the Lithuanian national anthem, and then closed with a Catholic hymn entitled ''Maria, Maria.'' My brother and I were standing there and looked around and saw men and women with tears rolling down their cheeks. This was the hymn that the Lithuanians turned to in their churches many times in clandestine masses to give them hope that they could survive the occupation by the Russians, the occupation by the Nazis, the occupation by the Soviets. These men and women have suffered so much in the name of freedom and independence, and now they are asking us today as leaders in the free world to invite them into this family of freedom-loving and peace-loving nations.

I hope I can prevail on my colleagues in the Senate to join with me in encouraging the United States to include the Baltic countries, as well as Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and all the other countries that are genuinely interested in becoming peace-loving partners in NATO. I think that will continue the great legacy that really defines America.

We are not out to conquer territory. We have defied history by being the conquerors in World War II and literally working as hard as we could to rebuild the vanquished, and now we have again the chance to say as we embark on this 21st century that this NATO alliance will guarantee that a new Europe, East and West together, will be a peaceful Europe for decades to come.

I thank the Chair.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ENZI). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MIXED SIGNALS ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I was disappointed to note that the United States, alone among its allies on the United Nations Security Council, vetoed a proposed resolution urging Israel to abandon its plans to build housing for Israeli settlers in East Jerusalem. This housing initiative, which was reported last week to have been pushed by the right wing of Prime Minister Netanyahu's party, threw a cold towel on the peace process that had been so painfully promoted through U.S. intermediation.

Indeed, the President and the Secretary of State, Ms. Albright, both correctly criticized Israel's position on this issue. It is unfortunate that the President felt compelled to mix that clear signal of American displeasure with an American veto of essentially the same policy position, expressed in a United Nations Security Council resolution. American policy on this very important matter needs more consistency if the United States intends to maximize its influence and leadership on the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. It is unfortunate that the message of displeasure has been diluted, because that softening risks emboldening the hard-liners in Israel who act as if they do not want that process to succeed.

I believe that the policy of the administration rightly remains opposed to the recently announced settlement initiative by the Israeli government, and I spoke out on the floor a few days ago in support of that position. It does not seem logically consistent that a Security Council resolution essentially expressing the same disapproval could in any way itself ''jeopardize efforts to keep the peace process moving'', as was reported by the Washington Post on March 8, 1997. Strong leadership on this matter requires sustained consistency in all foras, both national and international regarding American policy, and I hope that there will be further opportunities to make our very correct position in opposition to this new housing initiative abundantly clear.

The Israeli leader stands at a pivotal point in the Middle East. The peace process is clearly very fragile, and great efforts are needed on a sustained basis by all the parties, not some of the parties, for it to succeed. The alarming exchange of letters between King Hussein and Prime Minister Netanyahu, released publicly yesterday reveals the damage that the Israeli housing initiative is causing. Neither the U.S., not the Palestenians, nor the Israeli people should passively allow the Israeli right wing to sabotage this process anytime it decides it has gone far enough for their taste. I congratulate the President for sending an American envoy to meet in Gaza with Mr. Arafat on the overall situation.

I make an urgent plea to Prime Minister Netanyahu to look history in the face and to take a bold step and reverse his decision on the housing matter, regardless of the merits of the initiative in his mind from a narrow geographical perspective. This decision has become the central indicator of his government's commitment to peace in the Middle East. It is clear that, regardless of any merits which may attach to the housing decision, it is causing grave damage to the peace process which our governments have worked so painfully to engender. Therefore, I urge the Israeli Prime Minister to reverse that decision. This would certainly require considerable personal courage and political difficulty on his part, but it would mark him as a true leader at a time when such leadership is desperately needed. He alone is in the position to make a crucial change in the present explosive atmosphere. The process of peace in the Middle East has reached a vital juncture, and its future is highly dependent on the action he takes now.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair recognizes the Senator from New Jersey.

THE DECISION TO CERTIFY MEXICO

Mr. TORRICELLI. Mr. President, the decision by the administration to certify Mexico as an ally in the fight against narcotics raises a broader issue. In my judgment, it is time to

reach several difficult but obvious conclusions about United States policy toward Mexico and our bilateral relations. Indeed, perhaps, if there was a contribution offered by the unfortunate decision to certify Mexico in the war against narcotraffickers, it is the growing sense in the United States of the need for a moment of honest reflection about Mexican-American relations. In short, it is time to simply tell the truth about Mexico.

Mexican-American policy in these years has been based, in my judgment, on three broad deceptions, deceptions not only of ourselves but, perhaps more importantly, of the Mexican people themselves. Deceptions which I recognize have been made, sometimes, with the best of intentions. The United States has understood that some historic injustices create particular sensitivities in Mexico. There is always the need to account for nationalist pride and the obvious concern of internal interference. But not telling the truth to our own people, or to the people of Mexico, allows the Mexican people to avoid dealing with the realities of their own country. This conspiracy of silence about the realities in Mexico prevents the United States from constructing real policies to defend our own interests, and hampers our ability to work with Mexico in protecting its own interests.

These three deceptions are, in my judgment, convincing the American people that Mexico is, in fact, making the transition to a vibrant democracy; that Mexico has a genuinely free economy; and, finally, that Mexico is, indeed, participating in waging a war on narcotics. I believe that an analysis of these assumptions will establish that none of them are true.

First is the question of the Mexican economy. In 1993, in an effort to support the North American Free-Trade Agreement, the American people were told that if only Mexico had access to the American market, then Mexico would complete its historic transition to a free and open economy. I understood the reasons to support NAFTA. A free-trade agreement for North America makes sense. But a condition precedent of a North American Free-Trade Agreement is that each of the participants genuinely has a free and an open economy. Therefore, this Congress could not have affirmatively accepted the treaty without being convinced that Mexico, like Canada and the United States, would accept the rules of a market economy.

The simple reality is that in 1997, despite assurances to the contrary, Mexico retains strong elements of a centrally directed economy, officially controlled and unofficially corrupt. The most important elements of the Mexican economy are either under state sponsorship or government control, including banking, finance, and petroleum. The result has been, predictably, anemic growth which stimulates increased migration and denys the Mexican people real economic opportunity.

Last year, 1.2 million young Mexicans attempted to join the national work force, only to find employment available for a fraction of those seeking work. Since the 1980's, irregular or low levels of growth in the economy have been the exception in the region. Throughout that decade, annual growth in Mexico, the GNP, averaged 1 percent. In some years in the 1990's it grew, but the results were uneven for the people themselves.

The reasons are clear. It is not enough for the national leadership to declare Mexico a free economy. Making pledges to the United States in order to get access to NAFTA accomplishes nothing if the fundamentals of a free economy are not established. Most obvious is the need to allow the development of a free trade union movement. But, indeed, Mexico will conclude the 20th century as one of the last nations in our hemisphere to still not permit the development of independent trade unions.

The results are declining real wages of a magnitude of 70 percent in the last 20 years, a minimum wage which decreased by 13 percent in 1995 and fell by an additional 11 percent in 1996.

A free economy means a free market for labor. Real competition requires that people can engage in collective bargaining. Similarly frustrating to the development of a free economy in Mexico has been the failure to privatize important sectors of the economy. In September of 1995, the Mexican Government announced the sale of 61 petrochemical plants that would be open to the free economy and to foreign investment. It was an attractive response to the promise of NAFTA. On October 13, 1996, the Mexican Government reversed its policy and has maintained Government control over this vital center of the Mexican economy.

As a result of this failure to permit the free exchange of labor, foreign investment, and privatization, Mexico is one of the few countries in the world where, because of declining wages, life expectancy has leveled off and may actually be declining.

The Mexican peso, because of a failure to adequately control both debts and the currency, literally collapsed in 1994, requiring $40 billion of external financing from the United States and other international institutions. And in 1997, the international community faces the same prospect, because the peso is, again, overvalued and, again, facing downward pressure.

The first simple truth, therefore, is we need to be honest with ourselves, investors, and the Mexican people. The promise of establishing a free market in Mexico, the ending of state-sponsored industries, has not been kept. Words do not suffice. The promises mean nothing. Mexico remains a state-controlled and directed economy where market forces are not allowed to operate. And for whatever price that may hold for American investors, or Mexico's new trade partners in NAFTA, the price is principally borne by the Mexican people themselves, who, despite their labors and their sacrifices and their desire to free their economy, are on a downward spiral of opportunity and living standards.

The second truth concerns the promise of democracy in Mexico. For 7 decades, the Mexican people have been victimized by a one-party authoritarian state. It is self-perpetuating and it is not a democracy under any contemporary definition. Successive Mexican administrations choose the next government. Power has been maintained through corruption and outright electoral theft. As recently as 1988, Mexico's ruling PRI party had to resort to outright fraud to guarantee the election of President Carlos Salinas. In 1994, the leading presidential candidate was assassinated, with credible allegations that elements of his own party conspired in the assassination because of his opposition to electoral reforms that might have fulfilled elements of the promise of democracy.

The level of corruption and denial of democratic freedoms has not involved simply the presidency, but almost every level of government. This includes disputed state elections throughout the 1980's and during this decade. In at least four recent gubernatorial elections the opposition PAN party ultimately took control or demonstrated a strong presence because of court challenges and public opposition.

In 1996, despite promises of electoral reform, the PRI majority in the Mexican Congress placed restrictions on electoral procedures and public financing that greatly restricted the ability of opposition parties to participate in, and have a chance of succeeding in, Mexican elections.

Promises of electoral reform in Mexico have simply not been realized. Access to the media, public finance, and control of government institutions to the advantage of the ruling party have all gone without change. Despite public protests and international challenges which have resulted in some successes in state gubernatorial elections, the simple truth is the 20th century will end without Mexico having experienced the peaceful transfer of power from the ruling party to the opposition. That, Mr. President, is a contradiction of any claim that Mexico is operating under contemporary standards of democratic elections.

Mexico has not been alone in having difficulty making the transition from one-party government to a competitive pluralist system. What makes Mexico different is that, unlike in Japan or Italy which had similar monopolies on power in the postwar period, but whose governments bore American encouragement and sometimes criticism, there has been a conspiracy of silence about the realities of Mexican politics and its economy.

Those who remain silent or fail to inform our people or the Mexican people of the truth of their national experience bear responsibility.

There are, indeed, many victims of the realities of Mexican politics. The failure to democratize has caused just as much suffering as the loss of economic opportunity. Suffering which forces thousands of Mexicans to migrate or live with the downward spiral of the Mexican economy.

In 1996, Amnesty International's annual report accused Mexican security forces of outright human rights abuses including the murder and torture of leftist rebels. They also uncovered the use of torture, and the many disappearances which have occurred throughout the areas of conflict. The Mexican media are no less a target. Journalists have been intimidated, abducted, and even killed, with cases as late as 1995 still unresolved.

Public financing of the media, the corruption of journalists, and the monopoly of government power still distorts the view of the Mexican people about their own country and its problems, with predictable results. The Mexican people are unable to express themselves equally through the media, and are unable to gain control of their own lives through the electoral system. They face a declining standard of living because of the monopoly of government power in the economy, and are tragically, but predictably, now involved in guerrilla operations in fully eight of Mexico's states.

Third and finally, Mr. President, is the truth about narcotrafficking in Mexico. Not only is it true that the Mexican people are paying an extraordinary price for the failure to develop a genuine market economy, and democratic institutions, but they, together with the American people, are paying an enormous price for the failure to control or even cooperate in controlling illegal drugs.

The administration has been asked a simple question: Is, or is not Mexico an ally in the fight against narcotrafficking? The administration has answered by explaining that we have to consider the past difficulties in Mexican-American history. They have responded that Mexico is an increasing source of American investment. Those, Mr. President, were not the questions.

The question is this: Is, or is not Mexico cooperating? The simple truth is that the highest levels of the Mexican Government have been corrupted and are, at a minimum, working at cross-purposes with the U.S. Government in controlling the flow of narcotics.

Indeed, the administration's own reports conclude that fully two-thirds of all of the cocaine entering the United States is being transshipped through Mexico. The State Department has concluded that Mexico is now the most important location in the Western Hemisphere for the laundering of narcotics funds.

On March 1, we learned that General Gutierrez, the drug czar of Mexico, was himself arrested for complicity and conspiracy with drug traffickers.

Mr. President, the decision to certify Mexico as an ally in the war against narcotics was a decision to protect the Mexican Government from criticism. It was the wrong decision. The simple truth is that every day, in every way, Mexican officials are permitting the transshipment of narcotics to our country. New laws to stop the laundering of funds in Mexican banks have not been enforced. Not a single Mexican bank has had to alter its operations to comply with new legislation.

Of the 1,250 police officers dismissed for corruption because of narcotics in Mexico, not a single officer has been prosecuted.

Despite 52 outstanding extradition requests to send corrupt officials to the United States, not one has been complied with. Indeed, not a single Mexican national has been extradited to the United States because of drug-related charges.

Most discouraging of all, the head of the DEA, Thomas Constantine, concluded before this Congress:

> There is not one single law enforcement institution in Mexico with whom the DEA has an entirely trusting relationship.

Mr. President, there were times during the cold war, indeed times during moments of national peril when the United States needed to compromise an honest look at the world because of issues of national security. The end of the cold war has ended that time.

We need to honestly assess our relationship with Mexico. We need to tell the American people the truth about the state of Mexican democracy, its economy, and its fight against narcotrafficking. Change will never come without the truth. Ending the certification process will begin that national debate in this Chamber.

I urge the Senate to reject the administration's conclusion, which cannot be borne out by the facts. Let us tell the truth about Mexico.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

ELDERLY IMMIGRANTS AT RISK OF LOSING SSI

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, we have received early reports from the Social Security Administration large numbers of of elderly legal immigrants who will lose their SSI benefits under the new welfare law unless Congress acts to help them.

In Social Security field offices across the country, the same reports are being heard. Elderly immigrants come into the field offices after receiving a notice that their SSI benefits will be terminated unless the immigrants can prove U.S. citizenship. Many of these immigrants are citizens, but they cannot remember where they stored their naturalization certificate. Most are very old and often infirm. Sometimes they are too infirm to remember whether they were naturalized or not.

For example, two elderly women, both over 90 years old, were senile, and confined to a convalescent home. They sought help from SSA after receiving the notice that their SSI payments would be terminated. Both women say they were born in the United States, but they cannot prove their citizenship.

Another woman, born in Ireland over 80 years ago, came to the US when she was 2. Her parents were naturalized, but she has no proof that she was. She has never left the United States, and believes she is a citizen, but she has no way to prove it.

The Social Security office in New York City reports that a woman's 85-year-old daughter came to inquire about her 105-year-old mother's termination notice. She stated that her mother was born in New York City, but has no birth certificate. Her mother has been receiving SSI benefits since 1976. The only way to find a record of her birth is to search the New York City birth records from 105 years ago. No one knows if the birth was even recorded.

These are just a few stories of the hundreds coming into Social Security offices since the termination notices were mailed a few weeks ago. Several recent news articles have reported stories of legal immigrants about to lose their benefits. I ask unanimous consent that these stories may be placed in the RECORD following my statement. Unless Congress intervenes, the consequences of the welfare bill will be too harsh.

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

[From the Des Moines Register, Mar. 3, 1997]

OVERWHELMED BY OVERHAUL

(By Shirley Salemy)

Israel and Faina Staroselsky are snared in the intricacies of the new welfare overhaul law.

The couple, both 68, fled anti-Semitism in Ukraine five years ago. They applied to become naturalized U.S. citizens seven months ago. They're still waiting, they say.

And if they don't get citizenship soon, they'll lose their Supplementary Security Income.

''We got this letter,'' said Israel Staroselsky, pointing to a memo from the Social Security Administration. ''If we are not able to prove our American citizenship by May, we will lose all sources of life.''

If the federal welfare overhaul is a gigantic jigsaw puzzle, the pieces that shape assistance to poor, elderly and disabled legal immigrants may be the most intricate—the ones that remain on the card table the longest.

The rules are complicated, and people like the Staroselskys aren't the only ones confused. Lawmakers are, too.

A DRAMATIC CHANGE

''Generally, I think the Legislature is real confused'' about the ins and outs of the law, said Sen. Maggie Tinsman, R-Bettendorf and co-chairwoman of the joint human services appropriations subcommittee.

''It's always confusing when the law changes,'' Tinsman said. ''This is a dramatic change. And people always think the worst.''

Generally, the new law prohibits non-citizens who are not new refugees, U.S. military veterans or have not worked and paid taxes