

search program for POW/MIA's. There are few people who have as deep of an understanding of the uniqueness of America's relationship with Vietnam, so I fully support the President's choice.

This does not mean that there do not remain myriad outstanding questions and issues in our bilateral relations with Vietnam. One issue that is of particular concern to me is the human rights record of the Vietnamese Government which remains poor. According to the most recent State Department Report on Human Rights Practices, the Government of Vietnam continues to restrict basic freedoms; of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of privacy, and of religion. Citizens can be arbitrarily arrested or detained for trying to express political or religious objections to government policies. And although the Vietnamese Constitution provides for the right to privacy, according to the State Department, the Vietnamese Government continues to operate a "nationwide system of surveillance and control through * * * block wardens who use informants to keep track of individuals' activities." The Vietnamese Government also has in place a policy of forced family planning.

Mr. President, this is not a country that shares with the United States the principle that government should exist to promote the general welfare of its people. Nor is it one that has respect for the rule of law.

But, as I said in 1995 when the President first announced his decision to restore diplomatic relations with Vietnam, I believe that diplomatic relations actually enhance our ability to advocate for issues such as human rights and political freedoms. Through a permanent, high-level presence in the country, I believe the United States can intensify the dialog on human rights, work more closely with Vietnamese reformers, and more effectively monitor developments in the human rights situation.

Now I have listened carefully to the veterans in Wisconsin and to the national veterans' organizations. I recognize that the veterans themselves have differing opinions on the issue of diplomatic relations, in general, and of Senate confirmation of this nomination, in particular. The concerns are two-fold: Does having an ambassador on the ground in Vietnam actually help advance the accounting of POW and MIA cases? Or does the dispatching of a President's representative with ambassadorial rank imply that the United States no longer thinks we have reason to withhold a special privilege for Vietnam?

Mr. President, it is my view that having an ambassador resident in Hanoi can serve to better advance U.S. interests, in human rights, as I said earlier, and on issues related to the continued accounting of our POW's and MIA's. I salute the efforts of all those who have tirelessly sought details

about missing U.S. service men and women, and, from most of their testimony, I am inclined to believe that we will enhance our ability to collect more information about the remaining POW and MIA cases through fulfilling the President's commitment to full diplomatic relations.

On the other hand, I think it is equally important to acknowledge that sending a Presidential representative of ambassadorial rank does indicate a symbolic change in our relationship with Vietnam that I know some observers still are hesitant to send. It is my view, however, that the United States can serve two purposes by that change: Better advance our interests as described above, and better indicate our concerns about Vietnam or its government through other actions. For example, that is why I voted against lifting the trade embargo against Vietnam and why I have supported congressional efforts to limit United States assistance to Vietnam.

However, I believe that in an era of global engagement and integration, it usually makes little sense to refuse diplomatic relations with a country in the international community. Vietnam is a large presence in a fast-growing region where the United States has ever-increasing interests. We can no longer hope to isolate it, nor will isolation serve to advance any of our goals.

To reiterate, Mr. President, I support the President's choice of Pete Peterson to be Ambassador to Vietnam because I believe that the United States best serves its citizens by having a Presidential representative of the highest order resident in the country. Nevertheless, I remain concerned about other aspects of our bilateral relations in that country and I will continue to scrutinize carefully the President's policies in that regard.●

COMMENDATION OF LT. COL.
STEPHEN G. GRESS, JR.

● Mr. SANTORUM. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to Lt. Col. Stephen G. Gress, Jr., who recently retired from the U.S. Air Force. A native of Pittsburgh, PA, Lieutenant Colonel Gress has served his country with valor and distinction for more than 22 years as an instructor pilot, a combat pilot, and as a member of the Air Force legislative liaison.

One needs only to look at Steve's academic credentials to see that he is a man of exceptional achievement. In addition to graduating from the Air Force Academy, Lieutenant Colonel Gress earned a masters degree in operation research from the Air Force Institute of Technology at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. Likewise, Steve became a distinguished graduate of the Air Command and Staff College at Maxwell Air Force Base in 1987.

Mr. President, Lieutenant Colonel Gress was one of the military's premier pilots. He served as an instructor pilot for the T-38 at Webb Air Force Base,

and later, for the T-41 at his alma mater, the U.S. Air Force Academy. In 1979, the Air Force chose Steve from a very select few to become an F-15 fighter pilot. Steve also distinguished himself in the Air Force Special Programs Office, where he managed the development of future fighter weapons systems. During his tenure at Bitburgh Air Force Base, Steve's extensive knowledge of fighter combat operations led to an appointment as the chief of wing inspections, a position that is critical to the combat effectiveness of all Air Force organizations.

I would also note that Lieutenant Colonel Gress is a war hero. As an F-15 flight leader, he flew 19 combat missions in Operation Desert Storm.

Later in 1991, Steve returned to the Pentagon. Once again, the Air Force came to rely upon his keen understanding of fighter combat. As the branch chief for both air to air weapons and fighter development, he worked to ensure that the next generation of fighter systems would secure American air dominance.

Steve moved to the Office of the Air Force Legislative Liaison in 1993. He worked his way up from the branch chief for fighter and fighter weapons to the division chief of the weapons systems division. As always, Steve took tremendous pride in his work. He strove to ensure that critical military issues were presented to Congress in a clear and nonparochial manner. Over the years, many congressional staff members have come to know Steve both as a serious professional and as a man of integrity.

As Lt. Col. Stephen G. Gress, Jr. retires to private life, I ask my colleagues will join me in commending the outstanding service he has given this country. On behalf of the Senate, I would like to wish Lieutenant Colonel Gress and his family the very best.

FENTON A.J. PHILLIPS LIBRARY

● Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the Fenton A.J. Phillips Library as it celebrates the 10th anniversary of operations in its current building. The history of the library dates back to 1906, when local industrialist A.J. Phillips bequeathed his old office building to the community for use as a library. Since then, the library has experienced many changes, but it has never stopped serving the residents of Fenton. In order to properly celebrate this achievement, the city of Fenton and the Fenton Library Board is holding a gala event which will include some of Neil Simon's hilarious sketches. These will be presented by the actors of the Readers Theatre at the library. Mayor Patricia Lockwood has proclaimed April 17, "Pride in the Fenton A.J. Phillips Library Day."

The Fenton Library is one of 18 libraries in the Genesee County Library System. It serves over 10,000 residents of Fenton, Fenton Township, and Tyrone Township. It contains over 55,000