

their Cold War communist files and make relevant personnel available to us for interview. To me, this apparent inability to follow through on commitments has serious implications which we should be considering in the context of the NATO expansion debate.

Since last summer, there have been follow-up communications by our Commission support staff at the Department of Defense and also by my own office with each of these nations urging them to follow through on their commitments. Most important is the fact that, based on current leads available to us, our Commission believes there is relevant information which likely exists in Eastern Europe, especially in the military, intelligence, security, and communist party archives of these three nations which we are considering bringing into NATO.

We should remember that the Eastern Bloc was an active ally and supporter of the communist North Vietnamese and North Korean regimes during those respective U.S. wars. They had a significant presence in Asia and were probably privy to information about communist policy toward the disposition of American POWs, to include whether any were transferred to the territory of the former Soviet Union as we now suspect.

Mr. President, today I appeal once again to the leaders of the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary to follow through fully with the commitments they have made to help us search for our missing American servicemen from the Cold War. And I urge my colleagues, on behalf of our veterans and POW/MIA family members, to join with me in continuing to push for more progress on this humanitarian issue.

We simply cannot afford to lose sight of this issue of highest national priority in the context of the current NATO expansion debate. It has important ramifications which we should carefully consider. ●

NATIONAL AGRICULTURE DAY

● Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I want to take a few minutes to pay tribute to one of our Nation's most important industries—agriculture. Today, we celebrate National Agriculture Day. It is a time to reflect on the value of production agriculture and to say thank you to all those who are involved, both directly and indirectly, in producing the most abundant and safest food and fiber supply in the world.

Illinois is one of our country's most important agricultural contributors. Illinois farm land, which accounts for about 27 million acres, is considered some of the most productive in the world. More than 76,000 farm families in the State produce corn, soybeans, wheat, beef, pork, dairy products, and specialty crops. Illinois exports more than \$3.4 billion worth of agricultural products. The State's agribusiness activity is vibrant. From the Chicagoland area to Decatur and throughout Illi-

nois, agricultural processing employs thousands of people. And, our researchers continue to help provide answers to some of the most common as well as the most complex agricultural questions we face.

Since last year's National Agriculture Day, we've made some real progress for rural America. The Taxpayer Relief Act raised the inheritance tax exemption for small businesses to \$1.3 million, lowered the capital gains tax rate, and began a gradual increase in the deductibility of health insurance premiums.

This year, we face a number of equally important issues, specifically, reauthorization of agricultural research, expedited health insurance premium deductibility for the self-employed, extension of the ethanol tax incentive, and food safety.

The safety and availability of our Nation's food supply depends directly on agricultural research. This year, Congress must reauthorize the research title of the farm bill. Reauthorization will establish a national policy for important agricultural research into the 21st century. In these times of constrained federal budgets, it is vitally important to maintain an effective system for agricultural research.

Agriculture-related research in this country is currently conducted at over 100 ARS labs, including Peoria, and at over 70 land grant institutions, including the University of Illinois. The University of Illinois is involved in biotechnology, aflatoxin, genome, and food safety research on their campuses. Southern Illinois University is working on groundwater contamination and an important National Corn to Ethanol Research Pilot Plant near its Edwardsville campus. These projects are simply too important to delay. However, the future of agricultural research depends on Congress reauthorizing these vital programs sooner rather than later.

With regard to health care costs, I believe that a 100-percent tax deduction for health insurance premiums is one of the most basic issues of fairness to farm families across this country. Because of the high cost of health insurance, especially insurance purchased in the individual market, lack of affordability is a growing problem to farmers. Health insurance is particularly important to those involved in production agriculture because farming is one of the more dangerous occupations. It is essential that farmers have access to quality health care and affordable health insurance.

In last year's Taxpayer Relief Act, Congress made the commitment to increase deductibility very gradually from 40 percent in 1997 to 100 percent in 2007. Although I believe this legislation was a good first step, we need to provide this relief faster. I have introduced legislation that will expedite the full deductibility of health insurance premiums. I also intend to offer an amendment to increase deductibility

to 60 percent in 1999 and 100 percent thereafter. Relief for farm families in this area is needed now. Farmers should not have to wait until 2007 for equity with their corporate competitors.

Mr. President, finding new and expanded uses for agricultural products is an important endeavor. Soybean growers and the oilseeds industry are proposing a strategy for biodiesel, a diesel fuel derived from soybeans. Including biodiesel in existing and future Department of Energy programs will help the nation reduce dependence on imported oil, while improving the environment, reducing global warming, and creating new domestic agricultural product markets. And, of course, ethanol, a corn-based renewable fuel, is one of the best alternative use opportunities that exists today.

On a day like today, it is important to point out the benefits of ethanol. The industry is responsible for more than 40,000 American jobs. Ethanol contributes more than \$5.6 billion annually to our economy. Five percent of our nation's corn crop goes to ethanol production. Corn growers have seen their incomes increased by more than \$1.2 billion because of ethanol. This year alone, over 1.4 billion gallons of ethanol will be produced. Thanks to the reformulated gasoline program, toxic air pollutants like benzene and carbon monoxide have fallen substantially. And, ethanol contributes over \$2 billion annually to the U.S. trade balance.

Last week, the Senate overwhelmingly defeated a proposal that would have removed the ethanol excise tax exemption from the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). That vote was the strongest in Senate history in support of ethanol. It is my hope that an extension of the ethanol tax incentive will be included in the final conference report on ISTEA. Time is running out. Farmers, the ethanol industry, and rural America deserve to have this important program extended.

An issue that also needs immediate attention is food safety. Make no mistake, our country has been blessed with the safest food supply in the world. However, we can do better. The General Accounting Office estimates that as many as 33 million people will suffer food poisoning this year and more than 9,000 will die. The Department of Health and Human Services predicts that foodborne illnesses and deaths are likely to increase 10 to 15 percent over the next decade.

I have introduced the Safe Food Act, S. 1465, which would empower a single, independent agency to enforce food safety regulations from farm to table. It would provide an easier framework for implementing U.S. standards in an international context. Research could be better coordinated within a single agency rather than among multiple programs. And, new technologies to improve food safety could be approved

more rapidly with one food safety agency.

At a time of government downsizing and reorganization, the U.S. simply can't afford to continue operating multiple systems. In order to achieve a successful, effective food safety and inspection system, a single agency with uniform standards is needed.

Mr. President, National Agriculture Day affords us all the opportunity to say thank you to those who farm, process agricultural products, conduct the research and plan for the future, and keep American agriculture the best in the world.●

MIKE JACOBS AND THE STAFF OF THE GRAND FORKS HERALD

● Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, in the months since the devastating blizzards and floods struck North Dakota last year, I have been pleased to draw the Senate's attention to some truly remarkable people who stepped up when their communities most needed them.

Today, I am pleased to report that one such individual was here in Washington recently to receive an honor he richly deserves. Mike Jacobs, the editor of the Grand Forks Herald, was named "Editor of the Year" by the National Press Foundation for his and the Herald's truly remarkable achievements during last year's flood and fires in Grand Forks. I want to add my voice to the chorus of thanks to Mike and to the entire staff of the Herald for their outstanding work under extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

I saw firsthand how much it meant to the people of Grand Forks that their hometown newspaper never missed a day of printing throughout the city's crisis.

When the Herald arrived at shelters and emergency centers, it flew off the racks. Clusters of people would gather around and jointly read it. They were starved for news of what was happening in their city during their trying time and they devoured the paper.

Yet even more than a conduit of information, the Grand Forks Herald stood as a powerful symbol of people determined to survive and endure, and as a daily reminder that even in the face of this calamity, Grand Forks would continue to remain a community, something the flood waters would never be able to wash away.

That the Herald was there at all was wondrous. Its building was completely flooded and then soon burned to the ground. The homes of nearly every employee of the Herald were inundated by flood waters.

Yet the Herald, led by Editor Mike Jacobs, never faltered, never missed an edition. It found a temporary office in the grade school of a nearby small town. It located alternative presses, and devised creative methods of distributing the paper to its readers. In the most harrowing of times, it flourished. In doing so, it gave hope, inspiration and purpose to its community.

Mike and the Grand Forks Herald staff are part of the story of last year's flood that doesn't get told nearly enough. As this city overcame the worst disaster in North Dakota history, its citizens have marched back with resilience, fortitude and inspirational spirit. Mike Jacobs, the entire Grand Forks Herald staff and the people of Grand Forks have triumphed, and I am proud to salute them.

I can't express my admiration enough.●

RETIREMENT OF JERROLD L. JACOBS

● Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I rise to recognize an old friend and successful businessman on the occasion of his retirement as Chair and CEO of Atlantic Energy, Inc.

Jerry and I both have strong roots in Paterson, New Jersey. We grew up there, and our fathers worked together in the silk mills. Being from Paterson, of course, we were both destined for success!

Jerry began working at Atlantic Electric in 1961, first in various managerial positions and then working his way up to Chairman and CEO. Eventually, Jerry rose to the position of Chairman and CEO at Atlantic Energy, the holding company formed in 1987 which incorporated Atlantic Electric.

Besides Jerry's achievements at work, he has several professional and civic affiliations. He holds everything from memberships to chairmanships in organizations such as the New Jersey Utilities Association, the New Jersey Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, the New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce and the Noyes Museum Board of Directors.

Again, I congratulate Jerry for his devotion to Atlantic Energy for over 35 years, and I extend my warm wishes to his wife Carol and his three children, Michael Jacob, Melissa Kuperminc and Marlene Sandstrom.●

INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND

● Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I want to take a few minutes this afternoon to address the urgent need for IMF funds, to restore confidence to a fragile international financial system and to maintain a leadership role in the world economy.

I am pleased to see that the Appropriations Committee has moved quickly this week to provide funding for continued U.S. participation in the IMF—both for the new arrangements to borrow that represent the emergency reserves of the fund, and for the quota increase to restore the IMF's ability to meet potential new demands on its resources.

The current news from Asia—declining U.S. exports, the threat of increased imports, a more fragile international banking system—has brought home to us the importance of international cooperation to prevent the

outbreak and spread of financial crises. It also reinforces the need to move quickly to restore the IMF's ability to contain the current crisis and to maintain the IMF's ability to respond to future problems.

That is why I am concerned about some of the conditions put on the IMF funds in the Appropriations Committee on Tuesday. Treasury Secretary Rubin, who, along with Federal Reserve Chairman Greenspan has repeatedly reminded Senators of the need for quick action on these funds, has called those conditions—and I quote: "Impractical to the point of being unworkable."

This is no way to treat funds that are needed to restore the equilibrium of the international financial system, and to no way maintain the leadership of the United States in the world economy.

The International Monetary Fund was created by us at the end of World War II to maintain the stability of the international financial system. Today, its task as the lender of last resort in the kinds of meltdowns we have seen in Asia is by no means simple.

With the rise of market economies among the developing nations of the world, and with the expansion of the international financial system—both developments that promote the long-term interests of the United States—the task of the IMF has become increasingly difficult.

I am not here today, Mr. President, to argue that the IMF is a perfect institution; in fact, our own Treasury, under the leadership of Secretary Rubin, has used its substantial influence to push for important reforms, to open the IMF to greater public understanding and trust. Secretary Rubin is also working with his counterparts around the world to reform the workings of the international banking system to reduce the risk of crises such as one we watch today in Asia with great concern.

As the leader in the world's economy—indeed as the model economy which the rest of the world aspires to emulate—we in the United States have a special role to play in helping to sustain the health of the international economy. By maintaining our position in the IMF—by paying our dues and maintaining our dominant position there—we will remove lingering doubts in financial markets that make recovery and reform in Asia harder to achieve.

And, as the most open economy in the world, we have the greatest stake in maintaining the stability of international trade and finance. The longer we leave the issue of our IMF commitment in doubt, the more our own farmers, workers, and manufacturers will lose overseas sales.

I want to remind my colleagues that our contributions to the IMF don't cost American taxpayers a dime. Like deposits in a credit union of our own making, our contributions are matched by interest-bearing assets, and we can