

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

(The remarks of Mr. GRAMS pertaining to the introduction of S. 487, S. 488, S. 489, and S. 490 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, Dr. Carter G. Woodson was the son of former slaves. He believed passionately that the solution to injustice was education. If Americans from different backgrounds could learn to see our similarities and appreciate our differences, he believed, we could end the fear that is at the heart of racial discrimination.

So, in February 1926, Dr. Woodson proposed the first Negro History Week as a way to preserve African American history and promote greater understanding among all Americans. Over the years, as the civil rights movement progressed, Negro History Week evolved into what we now know as Black History Month.

This month, as our nation once again pauses to reflect on the achievements and experiences of African Americans, we celebrate the birthdays of several renowned leaders, including Frederick Douglass, Rosa Parks, and Barbara Jordan. We also celebrate the founding 90 years ago of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, one of this century's most powerful engines for social and economic justice.

It is right and fitting that we acknowledge such famous people and important milestones. But it is also important to recall the contributions of other African Americans who were less well known, but who contributed much to their communities. Today I want to pay tribute to two such men from my home state of South Dakota: Oscar Micheaux and Ross Owens.

Oscar Micheaux was a gifted, early filmmaker who settled in Gregory, South Dakota, in the early 1900s. His company, the Micheaux Film Corporation, was responsible for producing films that ran counter to Hollywood's negative portrayal of African Americans at that time.

Ross Owens was a 1925 graduate of my alma mater, South Dakota State University. Not only was he inducted into SDSU's Athletic Hall of Fame, but his masters thesis, "Leisure Time Activities of the American Negro Prior to the Civil War", became a classic in African American history and physical education.

One can only wonder what else Mr. Micheaux and Mr. Owens might have achieved had they been born later, after the civil rights movement toppled many of the barriers to equality that existed during their lifetimes.

Today, thanks to the vision of leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Thurgood Marshall and John Lewis, as well as countless other Americans

whose names are less well known but whose courage was no less real, many of those barriers are gone. Our nation no longer tolerates legal discrimination. We no longer permit injustices like poll taxes, "separate but equal" schools, and segregated public facilities. We have moved closer to that ideal on which our nation was founded: that all men—and women—are created equal. And we are all better for it.

Today, as our country thrives, millions of African Americans are sharing the benefits of the best economy in decades. But not all African Americans have been given the opportunity to share in America's economic progress. Not all of the barriers have been torn down. There is still work to be done. As we prepare to enter the new century, we must remain committed to equal educational opportunity, and economic and social justice—for all Americans.

This month, as we celebrate Black History Month, let us recall the words of the poet Langston Hughes, who wrote of a land "where opportunity is real, life is free, and equality is in the air we breathe." And let us rededicate ourselves to finishing the task of establishing that land here, in the United States.

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Wednesday, February 24, 1999, the federal debt stood at \$5,620,229,439,635.41 (Five trillion, six hundred twenty billion, two hundred twenty-nine million, four hundred thirty-nine thousand, six hundred thirty-five dollars and forty-one cents).

One year ago, February 24, 1998, the federal debt stood at \$5,522,503,000,000 (Five trillion, five hundred twenty-two billion, five hundred three million).

Five years ago, February 24, 1994, the federal debt stood at \$4,541,555,000,000 (Four trillion, five hundred forty-one billion, five hundred fifty-five million).

Ten years ago, February 24, 1989, the federal debt stood at \$2,722,784,000,000 (Two trillion, seven hundred twenty-two billion, seven hundred eighty-four million).

Fifteen years ago, February 24, 1984, the federal debt stood at \$1,454,599,000,000 (One trillion, four hundred fifty-four billion, five hundred ninety-nine million) which reflects a debt increase of more than \$4 trillion—\$4,165,630,439,635.41 (Four trillion, one hundred sixty-five billion, six hundred thirty million, four hundred thirty-nine thousand, six hundred thirty-five dollars and forty-one cents) during the past 15 years.

SOLDIERS', SAILORS', AIRMEN'S, AND MARINES' BILL OF RIGHTS ACT OF 1999

Mr. ASHCROFT. Mr. President, I rise today in strong support of S. 4, The Soldiers', Sailors', Airmen's, and Marines' (SSAM) Bill of Rights Act of 1999. This bill addresses critical person-

nel and retention issues in our nation's armed forces and hopefully will arrest the accelerating decline in military readiness. I commend the distinguished chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator WARNER, and the Committee as a whole for reporting this legislation.

I have been concerned for quite some time with declining defense budgets and increased deployments overseas. Those who defend the United States often are the first casualties of budget cuts here at home, even as they have been deployed overseas more frequently than ever before. Declining morale in our armed forces and diminished military readiness are national security legacies this Administration is leaving, legacies I hope the Senate will begin reversing with the passage of S. 4.

Our military is hemorrhaging due to poor morale, plentiful private sector opportunities in a robust economy, and burdensome deployment schedules. The pay and benefit provisions in S. 4 will be critical to arrest declining morale and diminished readiness. As General Hugh Shelton, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, stated before the Senate Armed Services Committee last September, "... we must act soon to send a clear signal to the backbone of our military, our mid-grade commissioned and non-commissioned officers, that their leadership and this Congress recognize the value of their service and their sacrifices and that we have not lost sight of our commitment to the success of the all-volunteer force."

Mr. President, the Administration has taken too long to address the morale and retention problems undermining the readiness of our armed forces. Senior Pentagon officials downplayed evidence of growing personnel and readiness problems for months, but finally began addressing these issues squarely before the Senate Armed Services Committee last September. General Shelton stated that "... our forces are showing increasing signs of serious wear. Anecdotal initially, and now measurable, evidence indicates that our readiness is fraying and that the long-term health of the total force is in jeopardy."

A cursory survey of declining defense budgets and increased operations around the world certainly provides the factual background to support General Shelton's statement. For many leaving the forces today, military compensation and benefits simply do not justify extended deployments away from home.

Our military is doing more with less. Defense spending has declined in real terms by 27 percent since 1990. Military procurement spending has declined by a staggering 54 percent during that same time period. In the midst of this dramatic downsizing, the pace of operations abroad has risen dramatically. In the 1990s, operational missions increased 300 percent while the force structure for the Army and Air Force

was reduced by 45 percent each, the Navy by approximately 40 percent, and the Marines by over 10 percent. President Reagan deployed U.S. forces 17 times during his eight year term. During his four-year term, President Bush deployed U.S. forces 14 times. During the six year tenure of President Clinton, however, the U.S. armed forces have been deployed over 46 times. Contingency operations during this Administration have exacted a heavy cost (in real terms): \$8.1 billion in Bosnia; \$1.1 billion in Haiti; \$6.1 billion in Iraq.

Diminished resources, inadequate benefits, and increased deployments are taking a serious toll on the health of our armed forces. Our Air Force pilots defeat Iraq's forces soundly on the battlefield, but Saddam is winning a war of attrition when it comes to pilot retention. The Air Force has experienced a 14 percent decline in readiness since 1996 and ended 1998 with a 700 pilot shortfall that could grow to 2,000 pilots by 2002. Air Force second-term reenlistment rates have dropped 13% in the last 5 years.

The Navy was 7,000 recruits short in 1998 and reports diminished deployed readiness due to personnel shortages, such as a 9% shortfall in junior Surface Warfare Officers. The non-deployed readiness of carrier air wings is at its lowest level in a decade.

Retention rates for critical personnel in all services is suffering. Declines in retention of critical personnel since 1995 are very troubling: Air Force enlisted aircrew with 7 years service declined from 83 to 55 percent; Air Force AWAC personnel with 5-8 years service declined from 56 to 35 percent; Army aircraft armament personnel with 8 years service declined from 72 to 47 percent; Army chemical operations specialists with 5-8 years service declined from 69 to 51 percent; Marine aircraft avionics technicians with 9-12 years service declined from 76 to 63 percent; and Navy electronic technicians with 9-12 years service declined from 77 to 63 percent.

The Soldiers', Sailors', Airmen's, and Marines' (SSAM) Bill of Rights Act of 1999 addresses these problems on several fronts. The legislation contains important provisions to address immediate needs and establishes longer-term mechanisms to improve retention of military personnel. The bill provides for an across the board pay increase of 4.8 percent. The pay table is reformed to benefit critical mid-career personnel the most. Retirement system reform gives military personnel with 15 years of service the option of remaining in the Redux retirement plan and taking a \$30,000 cash bonus or returning to a pre-Redux system with retirement at 50 percent of base pay and no COLA caps.

Retirement opportunities also are enhanced by allowing military personnel to contribute 5 percent of their base pay tax-free to a Thrift Savings Plan (TSP). A special retention initiative is also provided where the Secretary of

Defense can choose to offer 5 percent matching TSP contributions to critical personnel for six years in return for a six year commitment. Finally, there is a special subsistence allowance to address the intolerable condition of 12,000 military personnel on food stamps. In the U.S. military, the finest fighting force in the world, there should never be families who are so poorly provided for as to need food stamps. The monthly subsistence allowance in this legislation, in addition to other pay reforms, will help end this disgraceful treatment of thousands of military personnel.

The need for this legislation cannot be more obvious. Our troops maintain a constant presence in the Persian Gulf, East Asia, and Europe. Now in Bosnia two years past the original deadline, American soldiers could face yet another prolonged nation-building exercise in Kosovo if this Administration has its way. These troops have been asked to achieve more missions with fewer resources and less manpower, and the signs of fraying readiness and declining morale are mounting.

In addressing current readiness and funding problems, Administration officials repeatedly have said personnel issues were their first priority. General Shelton testified last September: "... if I had to choose the area of greatest concern to me, I would say that we need to put additional dollars into taking care of our most important resource, the uniformed members of the armed forces."

General Shelton is right to place the highest priority on our military personnel. The defense of this country, in the final analysis, is essentially a personnel issue. Admiral Chester Nimitz stated in 1950: "Our armaments must be adequate to the needs, but our faith is not primarily in these machines of defense but in ourselves." General Shelton seems to concur with that statement when he says: "The best tanks, the best planes, the best ships in the world are not what makes our military the superb force that it is today . . . Advanced technology and modern weapons are important . . . But even the finest high-tech equipment will never be the determining factor on the battlefield. The most critical factor for both current and future readiness are our men and women . . . in uniform today."

Our military personnel are our greatest resource, and our failure to take care of them our greatest oversight. No soldier should have to worry about feeding his family as he defends his country. No military family should be repeatedly divided by constant deployments.

We entrust our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines with the responsibility given to our nation as a whole: the defense of liberty. How we provide for those men and women in uniform reflects on how seriously we take that mission, on how seriously we safeguard the blessings of liberty. I urge passage

of this legislation to improve much-needed benefits for those who defend the United States and the cause of freedom abroad.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. SARBANES. Mr. President, every February, since Dr. Carter G. Woodson first initiated the idea in 1926, Americans have celebrated the contributions of African-Americans to our history, literature, arts, sciences, politics and every other facet of American life. What was in the beginning only a week-long event, has blossomed into a month-long celebration.

This year's theme, as selected by the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History (ASALH), is "The Legacy of African-American Leadership for the Present and the Future." This theme captures one of the primary objectives of Dr. Woodson in creating this annual celebration. Dr. Woodson believed that you must look back in order to look forward. He dedicated his entire life to the research and documentation of African-American history, and his efforts were intended to educate and inspire contemporaneous and future generations of Americans.

In keeping with this theme and Dr. Woodson's vision, I rise today to share with my colleagues of the Senate and the American people a few of the legacies of outstanding African-Americans from Maryland. While this is not an exhaustive listing, it exemplifies the legacy of African-Americans in the areas of science, engineering, abolitionism, literature, religion, theater, education, civil rights, law, business, athletics, diplomacy and politics. I believe you will find—as I have found—their stories and accomplishments inspiring, and it is my fervent hope that today's African-American youth will find in these men and women role models to inspire their own efforts as we move into the 21st Century.

Benjamin Banneker (1731-1806) of Ellicott's Mill, Maryland is credited with building the first clock in America in 1753. He was an inventor, scientist and surveyor who played an important role in the layout and design of our nation's capital city.

Harriet Tubman (1820-1913) of Dorchester County, Maryland escaped from slavery and was responsible for assisting more than 300 slaves reach freedom in the north through the underground railway.

Francis E.W. Harper (1825-1911) of Baltimore, Maryland was the first African-American writer to have a published short story. She also had her poetry and other verse published, including a novel in 1892.

Billie Holiday (1915-1959) of Baltimore, Maryland is to this day regarded as one the greatest jazz vocalists in history, and as one of America's premier artists of the 20th Century.

Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960) of Baltimore, Maryland was a distinguished author, folklorist and anthropologist.