

its klutzy way, it has become one of the slender pillars that make America the most open of modern societies.”

In recent years records released under FOIA have revealed the government's radiation experiments on human guinea pigs during the Cold War, the evidence that the Food and Drug Administration had about heart-valve disease at the time it approved the Fen-Phen diet drug, the Federal Aviation Administration's concerns about ValuJet before the 1996 crash in the Everglades, radiation contamination by a government-run uranium processing plant on nearby recreation and wildlife areas in Kentucky, the government's maltreatment of South Vietnamese commandos who fought in a CIA-sponsored army in the early 1960's, the high salaries paid to independent counsels, and the unsafe lead content of tap water in the nation's capital.

Five years ago we updated FOIA's charter with the Electronic Freedom of Information Act that I proposed as a way to bring the law into the information age, recognizing that technology is dramatically changing the way government handles and stores information. The “E-FOIA” law directs federal agencies to make the information in their computer files available to citizens on the same basis as that in conventional paper files. We also took this as an opportunity to encourage agencies to use technology and the Internet to make government more accessible and accountable to its customers, the citizens. For instance, we now have the technology to translate government records into Braille or large print or synthetic speech for people with sight or hearing impairments, and the new law promotes that. Electronic records also make it possible to offer dial-up access to citizens over the Internet so they can have instant direct access to unclassified information stored in government computer banks. This is far easier for Vermonters than having to travel to Washington to visit an agency's public reading room. Information is a valuable commodity, and the federal government is the largest single producer and repository of data on topics ranging from agriculture to geography to labor statistics and the weather. Better and timelier access to this information helps lubricate our economy.

FOIA today is healthy, but only constant vigilance will keep Congress from needlessly whittling away its promise to the American people. We fought back one such effort last year, and new carve-out proposals are already in the air.

FOIA gives each American the power to ask—and the government the obligation to answer—questions about official actions or inaction. We can count on a government agency to tell us when it does something right, but we need FOIA to help tell us when it does something wrong. Of all the laws that fill our law libraries, none better than

FOIA breathes life into the first words in our Constitution, “We the people of the United States” and into our First Amendment rights to petition our government. This is a law to celebrate, to use, and to defend.

VETERANS EDUCATION AND HEALTH CARE PRIORITIES

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, as I travel my state of South Dakota and meet with veterans, I am reminded of the very core of what the Founding Fathers meant when they talked about America's citizen soldiers who serve as the bulwark of defending our democracy and freedom. The sacrifices of the men and women who served this nation in time of war are a dramatic story that we need to tell to future generations.

We need to remind younger generations of the sacrifice of the quiet heroes who have served our nation in the military service. We need to remind them that freedom isn't really free. Throughout our nation's proud history, people have made profound sacrifices to preserve liberty and democracy.

I have had the privilege this past year of honoring the South Dakotans who so bravely defended the seeds of democracy in the foreign soil of Korea and remember those who fought and died for democracy. In ceremonies across my state, I have had the honor of presenting the Korean War Service Medals as a long-overdue expression of gratitude from the American public and the South Korean government. It may have taken 50 years for us to properly recognize these veterans for their sacrifices in Korea. But there is no time limit on their patriotism or our country's gratitude.

Unfortunately, it has also taken too long for our government to fully honor the commitment made to our veterans for educational benefits and lifetime health care.

I am pleased to report that Congress has finally begun to honor additional commitments made to veterans nationwide. We all know the history: for decades, men and women who joined the military were promised educational benefits and lifetime health care coverage for themselves and their families. Many of the veterans we honor today were told, in effect, “If you disrupt your family, if you work for low pay, if you endanger your life and limb, our nation will in turn guarantee an opportunity for an education and lifetime health benefits.”

Those promises have too often not been kept, not only to our veterans but also our military retirees, and that is threatening our national security. Veterans are our nation's most effective recruiters. However, inadequate education benefits and poor health care options make it difficult for these men and women to encourage the younger generation to serve in today's voluntary service. We are blessed to have unprecedented federal budget sur-

pluses, and the only question is whether veterans health care and educational benefits should be a priority instead of an afterthought.

Veterans from around the nation have been calling on Congress to provide the VA with adequate funding to meet the health care needs for all veterans. Without additional funding, VA facilities will be unable to deliver the necessary health care services to our veterans population.

For a number of years, I have worked with veterans to increase flat-line appropriations for veterans' health care. Thanks to the grass roots efforts of veterans, we were successful two years ago in getting a historic \$1.7 billion increase for VA medical care. We fought last year for another \$1.4 billion increase. While these increases will help relieve some of the VA's budgetary constraints, I believe that more needs to be done to make up for those years of budgetary neglect, as well as to keep pace with rising costs of health care.

Another priority for me this year will be to continue to improve educational benefits for veterans. The Montgomery GI Bill has been one of the most effective tools in recruiting and retaining the best and the brightest in the military. It has also been a critical component in the transition of veterans to civilian life. Unfortunately, the current GI Bill fails to keep pace with the rising costs of higher education. On the first day of this legislative year, I joined Senator SUSAN COLLINS in introducing legislation to bring the GI Bill in the 21st Century by creating a benchmark level of education benefits that automatically covers inflation to meet the increasing costs of higher education. Our concept is a very simple one: at the very least, GI Bill benefits should be equal to the average cost of a commuter student attending a four-year university. Currently, less than one-half of the men and women who contribute \$1200 of their pay to qualify for the GI Bill actually use these benefits.

The Veterans' Higher Education Opportunities Act—S. 131—has broad bipartisan support and the support of an unprecedented partnership of veterans groups and higher education organizations.

My bipartisan “Keep Our Promises to America's Military Retirees Act” called for the government to fulfill its obligation of lifetime health care for military retirees and their dependents. While I am pleased that last year's enactment of the TRICARE-for-Life program begins to address problems with military retiree health care, there is more work that needs to be done.

In fact, a recent federal court of appeals ruling finally supported what we have been saying all along: that the government has not lived up to its contract with millions of military retirees who were told they would receive lifetime health care in return for 20 years of service in the military. That is why I am once again working with Senator

OLYMPIA SNOWE and Senator JEFF BINGAMAN to finish the job we started last year and fulfill our country's commitment. Honoring our commitment to active duty personnel, military retirees, and veterans is of special importance to me for a number of reasons. My oldest son, Brooks, currently serves in the Army and tells me firsthand how broken promises impact the morale of active duty personnel and their families.

Finally, an issue that needs to be addressed this year is concurrent receipt. I find it indefensible that our government forces men and women who fought for our country and are disabled as a result of it to choose between retirement pay and disability compensation. This nickel-and-diming of our country's heroes must stop, and I recently joined Senator HARRY REID in introducing the Retired Pay Restoration Act of 2001, S. 170. I am hopeful that we will be able to continue on the progress made last year on Concurrent Receipt and finally make this long-overdue correction for 437,000 disabled veterans nationwide.

Veterans are our country's heroes, and their selfless actions will inspire generations of Americans yet to come. Our country must honor its commitments to veterans, not only because it's the right thing to do, but also because it's the smart thing to do. I consider myself fortunate to live in our democracy, and I am filled with a sense of patriotism each day as I travel to work and see the United States Capitol come into view. In this city that is filled with monuments to the heroism of our Founding Fathers and the men and women who have served to protect our freedoms, I pledge that I will continue to fight to make veterans issues a priority in Congress.

PRESIDENT BUSH'S NEW JERSEY VISIT

Mr. CORZINE. Mr. President, yesterday, I joined with my distinguished colleague from New Jersey, Senator TORICELLI, in welcoming the President of the United States to our State of New Jersey.

I was very pleased that the President decided to visit our State, and out of respect for him I decided to go to New Jersey to welcome him personally. In my view, it is critical that members of both parties work together in a positive and constructive way to address our Nation's problems. Although the President and I disagree on a number of issues, I sincerely want to cooperate with him wherever possible to help the people of New Jersey and all Americans, and I appreciated the chance to spend some time with him.

Unfortunately, because I was in New Jersey with the President, I missed a vote on the motion to table the Wyden amendment, No. 78. This amendment would have made nondischargeable certain debts arising from the exchange of electric energy in response to the re-

cent crisis in California. If I had been present, I would have voted "aye" on the motion to table. Like Senator FEINSTEIN, I am concerned that by interjecting ourselves into this issue and giving a priority to certain creditors, we could trigger a rush to bankruptcy court that could force California utilities into bankruptcy.

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVES TAX CREDIT

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, last week I met with South Dakota National Guard Adjutant General Phil Killey and a group of about 30 men and women from the South Dakota Guard and Reserves. Almost every community in our state benefits from the work of these Guardsmen and Reservists. For example, Guard units helped clean up the debris from last August's windstorm that hit Spearfish and Mitchell. Guard units in Aberdeen and Brookings spearheaded city-wide clean up efforts, and soldiers in Brookings even sponsored underprivileged children during the holiday season. The Guard also was instrumental in fighting the Jasper fire in the Black Hills last summer. The list goes on. From Aberdeen to Yankton, the Guard and Reserves are active members of the South Dakota community.

In addition to the support the Guard and Reserves give to South Dakota, they have also supported overseas operations including those in Central America, the Middle East, Europe, and Asia. The South Dakota Air Guard is currently preparing for its mission later this year, where it will patrol the "No-Fly Zone" in Iraq.

Most South Dakotans know at least one of the 4,500 current members of the South Dakota Guard and Reserves or the thousands of former Guardsmen and Reservists. Sometimes, the connection is even more direct. Before joining the Army, my oldest son was a member of the South Dakota Army Guard in Yankton.

General Killey reported that South Dakota ranks third in the nation in the readiness of its Guard and Reserve units. South Dakota's units are also tops in the nation in the quality of its new recruits. I commend the South Dakota Guard and Reserves for their continued excellence. National rankings only confirm the quality that has come to be expected of the Guard and Reserve of a great state.

However, recruiting and keeping the best of the best in the South Dakota National Guard and Reserves is becoming more of a challenge as our military's operations tempo has remained high while the number of active duty military forces has decreased. This tempo places significant pressure on members of the reserve component and those who employ them as they experience greater training and participation demands. That is why I am joining Senator MIKE DEWINE in introducing targeted tax relief for Guardsmen, Reservists, and those who employ them.

The legislation, called the Reserve Component Tax Assistance Act, will allow Guardsmen and Reservists to claim deductions for travel, meals, and lodging when they travel away from home and remain overnight to attend National Guard and Reserve meetings. A significant portion of the Guard and Reserve in South Dakota must travel at least 40 miles for training and meetings.

The second part of this legislation gives their employers a tax credit when the Reservists and Guardsmen are called up for a contingency operation. Often, these men and women will be gone months in support of overseas military efforts, leaving employers in a difficult position. This year the Air Guard will be deployed to Iraq, and members of the Army National Guard will be deployed to Bosnia next year. Our bipartisan legislation helps to minimize the economic impact by giving a maximum tax credit per employee of \$2000. Each employer would be eligible for a maximum credit of \$7500. This credit will help an estimated 1,100 to 1,300 businesses in our state who employ Guardsmen and Reservists.

Our legislation provides much needed tax relief to Guardsmen and Reservists, and the employers who support them, and I will continue to do all I can to support our National Guard and Reserves.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

NATIONAL GIRL SCOUT WEEK

• Mrs. CARNAHAN. Mr. President, this week marks the 89th anniversary of the founding of the Girl Scouts of America. What began with a single troop of 12 girls in 1912 has grown into a 3.6 million member organization. Missouri alone has nearly 100,000 members. Over the last 89 years Girl Scouts of America has helped to instill in countless girls strong values, a social conscience, and the conviction of their own potential and self-worth.

Earlier this week, I cosponsored a resolution to designate this week as National Girl Scout Week. I thank my colleagues for unanimously passing that resolution. The Girl Scouts of America has become a national institution. The organization has held a Congressional charter for more than 50 years, and spread to nearly every city in the nation. Girl Scouts learn to be, as the Girl Scout Law says, "considerate, caring, courageous and strong." They develop a strong sense of community responsibility along with a sense of self-worth. These girls serve as role models in their communities and become tomorrow's leaders.

Community service is a bedrock principal of the Girl Scouts. Every year, each troop conducts a service project to assist their community. The Girl Scout Council of Greater St. Louis is about to start their annual April Showers project. Every year they collect and