

service or whose income is higher than the current VA eligibility standards. The current income standard is \$24,000 annually for a single, or \$28,000 for a couple, and applies to 40 percent of the veterans in South Dakota. Assets, such as land, are included in the calculation of income. This is a concern for many farmers and ranchers in my state who may own land worth a considerable amount, but whose actual yearly income is well below the VA threshold. The administration's proposal to impose a \$1,500 co-pay on all Category 7 veterans would be particularly onerous on these veterans.

I would also like to note the concern some veterans have raised about a new VA regulation that increases the price of prescription drugs from \$2 to \$7 a month. Seven dollars a month for a prescription is still relatively inexpensive, and given the lack of prescription benefits under Medicare, many older veterans still benefit greatly from this VA service. However, when you look at longer waits for appointments, cuts in VA services, and the proposed \$1,500 co-pay for Category 7 veterans, this increase in prescription costs is seen as yet another example of the erosion of veterans benefits.

One of the positive steps in VA health care has been the shift away from a health system based on lengthy, in-patient hospital stays, to a system focused on preventative, outpatient care. This shift has vastly improved patient care. It has also proven to be popular with veterans, as demonstrated by the large numbers currently utilizing the Community Based Outpatient Clinics, CBOCs. These community based clinics are particularly important in rural States like South Dakota. By placing clinics in local communities, we increase access to care by cutting down the amount of time a veteran must spend travelling. Greater access to nearby care means veterans are likely to seek medical attention before an illness becomes a major health problem.

This new access to clinics was threatened in South Dakota when budgetary constraints prompted the VA to put a moratorium on enrollment in CBOCs in Aberdeen, Rapid City, and Pierre. This caused concern among veterans in the areas around the clinics who were told their only option for health care was a multiple hour drive away. After working closely with the VA, the enrollment caps appear to have been lifted. I will continue to monitor this situation and will work with Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony Principi to ensure all eligible veterans continue to have access to these clinics.

I believe we in the Senate should commit to making this the year we finally address the issue of concurrent receipt of military retirement benefits. Under current law, military retirees cannot receive both full military retirement pay and full VA disability compensation. Instead, retirement payments are reduced by the amount re-

ceived in disability compensation. Changing the law to allow for concurrent receipt of benefits is an issue of basic fairness because both military retirement pay and VA disability compensation are earned benefits. Retirement pay comes after at least 20 years of dedicated service in the Armed Forces and VA disability is earned as a result of injury during time of service.

I have been working with South Dakota veterans and my colleagues in the Senate for several years to fix this problem. Last year, the Senate adopted an amendment to both the fiscal year 2002 budget resolution and to the fiscal year 2002 Defense authorization bill to include funding to correct this problem. Unfortunately, despite strong support in the Senate, the language to allow concurrent receipt was removed from last year's budget resolution during the conference with the House of Representatives. In the Defense authorization bill, Congress agreed to allow concurrent receipt, but only if the administration included authorizing legislation as a part of the fiscal year 2003 budget request.

I was very disappointed to discover that the President's fiscal year 2003 budget request did not include provisions for concurrent receipt. I recently sent a letter to the President expressing my regret at his decision not to address concurrent receipt and asking him to work with Congress to address this urgent matter. I am very pleased that the Senate version of the fiscal year 2003 budget resolution includes a provision to phase in full concurrent receipt for veterans who are 60-100 percent disabled as a result of their military service. This is only a first step, but a positive step. At a time in which we are asking more and more from the men and women serving in the military, we should be looking for ways to encourage them to make a career in the military by improving benefits and assuring them they will be taken care of in retirement.

Another priority for me is improving educational benefits for veterans. Unfortunately, the current GI bill fails to keep pace with the rising costs of higher education. Less than one-half of the men and women who contribute \$1,200 of their pay to qualify for the GI bill actually use these benefits. Last year, I joined Senator SUSAN COLLINS in introducing legislation to bring the GI bill into 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 4-year university. 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. It is imperative that the Senate passes this legislation this session.

I am also pleased to be a sponsor of two other very important bills that will honor the commitments we have made to our veterans.

S. 1644, The Veterans Memorial Preservation and Recognition Act, will protect all veterans memorials on public property by extending current criminal penalties for destruction of property to any statue, plaque, or monument commemorating veterans. The bill also creates a restoration fund—to which individuals or organization can contribute—to repair and maintain our Nation's veterans memorials. Finally, the bill authorizes States to place supplemental guide signs for veterans cemeteries on Federal-aid highways.

I am also an original cosponsor of S. 2003, the Veterans Benefits and Pensions Protection Act. This bill will help protect veterans from unscrupulous predatory lending. The VA currently prohibits the direct sale of veterans pension or disability benefits. However, certain companies are exploiting a loophole in the law that allows them to enter into contracts with veterans to offer them "instant cash" in exchange for future benefit payments. In essence, a veteran agrees to sign away his or her benefits for a selected amount of time, and in exchange, the company agrees to pay the veteran a lump sum of money. Frequently, this ranges from only 30 to 40 cents on the dollar. The veteran is then required to open a joint bank account with the company in which the benefits are directly deposited and the company makes the withdrawal. Veterans are often also required to take out life insurance, payable to the company, or use their homes as collateral.

S. 2003 will close this loophole and authorize education programs to inform veterans about the danger of this scam. The bill has been endorsed by the Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Vietnam Veterans of America, and AMVETS.

Mr. President, there are few things more important than those who serve our country in the Armed Forces. As a nation, we need to take care of these men and women, not only while they wear the uniform, but also when they become veterans. I look forward to continuing to work on behalf of the veterans of South Dakota and the Nation.

GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the 181st anniversary of Greek Independence that will be celebrated Monday, March 25. Not unlike our founding fathers who sowed the seeds of the American revolution by forming the underground society, the "Sons of Liberty," Greek patriots seeking democracy established the "Friendly Society" in Odessa in 1814. Their ideals spread and the Greek people eventually rose up on March 25, 1821. This day would mark the beginning of an 8 year struggle against the might of the Ottoman Empire which

had ruled Greece for 400 years. In 1829, the Greeks were the first to win their independence from the Ottoman Empire, and were formally recognized in 1832. Their success spurred on other groups.

But this 19th century revolution was not the first time the Greeks had contributed greatly to our world. In ancient times, Greek civilization established traditions of democracy, society and culture that resonate today. These Greek cultural accomplishments deeply influenced thinkers, writers and artists, especially those in ancient Rome, Medieval Arabia, and Renaissance Europe. Modern democratic nations owe their fundamental political principles to ancient Greece. Because of the enduring influence of its ideas, ancient Greece is known as the cradle of Western civilization.

In fact, Greeks invented the idea of the West as a distinct region because they lived west of the powerful civilizations of Egypt, Babylonia, and Phoenicia. Today we continue to marvel at their advances in philosophy, architecture, drama, government, and science, with people worldwide enjoying ancient Greek plays, studying the ideas of ancient Greek philosophers, and incorporating elements of ancient Greek architecture into the designs of new buildings.

So I am proud to recognize the continued contributions of today's Greek-Americans to our country and my home State of Rhode Island. Although the earliest Greeks to come to America were men of the sea, sailing with Christopher Columbus, Ferdinand Magellan and other Spanish expeditions to the New World, today's Greek Americans are involved in all aspects of American business and society, contributing with their hard work and active citizenship.

I would also note that the Greece-US relationship has deepened over the years and there are extraordinary opportunities to strengthen it even more. We share mutual concern for greater security, stability and prosperity in the Mediterranean, Southeastern Europe, and the Caucasus. The Greeks have traditionally been active as well as a force of progress in these regions and their experiences will help the United States as the two countries partner to face the challenges of the new century.

I am proud to join many of my colleagues as a co-sponsor of Senate Resolution 214 which designated March 25, 2002 "Greek Independence Day: A National Day of Celebration of Greek and American Democracy." I give Greek Americans my best wishes as they celebrate Greece's independence.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, over the past few days and weeks the drumbeat for war against Iraq has been rising in both volume and tempo. I rise today to express my concern, and to urge President Bush to proceed with care and prudence.

At a minimum: the United States must first exhaust every diplomatic so-

lution that might avoid war, with war seen as a last resort; the United States must assure sufficient international support, similar to the coalition that made the Gulf War viable; and, the administration must fully consult with Congress, which has a significant constitutional obligation in this matter, and receive proper authorization.

Let me be clear: There is little question that Iraq poses a grave risk to the United States and our friends and allies. How to deal with Iraq remains, as it has for over a decade, one of the top foreign policy priorities for the United States.

At this point we can not and should not lose sight of the fact that we still have considerable work to do in Afghanistan. Rushing precipitously towards another military confrontation, unless the need is imminent, would not be prudent.

We are all aware of the nature of the threat: Iraq under Saddam Hussein seeks to develop WMD, has used these weapons against its own people, has invaded its neighbors and threatened others in the region with its missiles.

And we are all well aware that Iraq, having agreed to United Nations inspectors after its defeat in the Gulf War a decade ago, banned them in 1998. For 4 years the international community has had no access to Iraq and no ability to inspect its weapons facilities.

The administration believes Iraq is continuing to develop chemical and biological weapons, and is seeking nuclear weapons. As a member of the Intelligence Committee I believe that the administration is correct in this assessment.

And the administration has argued that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction must be dismantled before President Saddam Hussein forms an alliance with Al Qaeda or other terrorist groups.

It is critical, therefore, that the United States, through the United Nations, seek additional inspections, under a "go anywhere, anytime" inspection regime, to provide Iraq with the opportunity, one last time, to either work with the international community on this issue or, by its refusal, admit guilt and face the consequences.

I also believe that it is critical that, should an imminent threat require U.S. action, that the Administration come to Congress to seek its judgment and assent.

The resolution authorizing the use of force against the September 11 attackers provides the President authority to take military action only against those groups, individuals, or nations who aided in the September 11 attacks, or harbored those involved.

It states: "The President is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or har-

bored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations, or persons."

On its face, then, this resolution is both narrow and specific, in that it applies only to the September 11 attacks.

In order to take action against Iraq under this resolution, the President must determine both that Iraq has harbored any Al Qaeda members, or anyone else who aided in the September 11 attacks, and that such an attack would "prevent any future acts of international terrorism," as also required by the resolution.

On the other hand, if the President attacks Iraq simply to destroy its weapons of mass destruction, which may be a justified action under certain circumstances, this resolution does not provide the authority for such an attack. Iraq's WMD program, if not directly linked to the September 11 attacks, is a separate issue not covered by the September resolution.

In such a circumstance the President would need to, must, seek an additional authorizing resolution from Congress.

I was pleased to see that Secretary of State Powell has indicated President Bush will fully consult with Congress before any military action is taken against Iraq.

It is imperative that we comply with the provisions of the War Powers Resolution, a joint legislative act that will ensure: "The collective judgment of both Congress and the President will apply to the introduction of United States armed forces into hostilities."

Given the gravity of placing potentially large numbers of America's forces in harm's way, I think anything less than such a "collective judgment" would tarnish the sacred trust our people have in their government.

As our colleague Senator BYRD wrote in *The New York Times* earlier this week: "The Constitution states that the President shall be commander in chief, but it is Congress that has the constitutional authority to provide for the common defense and general welfare, raise armies, and to declare war. In other words, Congress has a constitutional responsibility to weigh in on war-related policy decisions."

The challenges in taking action against Iraq underscore the need for the United States to work with our friends and allies in the region and elsewhere if we are to take effective action against Iraq.

The administration has made great strides in creating as wide an international coalition as possible for action against terror and terrorists, it must do likewise for any action against Iraq.

In contemplating any such action against Iraq, we must consult with allies and build the kind of coalition that supported our efforts in the Gulf War, especially those countries whose peoples and governments are bound to be affected by such an undertaking.

We should not take action against Iraq until both we, the American people and our regional partners, are convinced of the reasons for so doing and that there is a clear mission and goal in mind.

The United States must also consider carefully the consequences of precipitous action.

Can we assure our regional partners that our actions will not involve the de-stabilization of the region?

Might unilateral unsupported action against Iraq result in attacks against close allies such as Israel or protests against regional leaders in Egypt, Saudi Arabia or Jordan?

Following any military action, are we prepared militarily and financially to remain in the region until Saddam is removed, the people of Iraq are free, and a viable democratic government is in place?

These are complex questions to which there may be no easy answers. But they are questions that must be addressed before we take any action if those actions are to be successful and the results, enduring.

If this matter is not handled properly, there is a profound risk that the Middle East will be further destabilized, and place U.S. interests in the region and in the war against terrorism in jeopardy.

None of us has the wisdom or foresight to see where this war will lead us, how long it will last, or when it will end.

But we are all foursquare in our determination that we, and all civilized peoples, succeed.

I offer my thoughts and comments today not as a criticism of the administration, but rather because I feel that we have a deep obligation to make sure that as we proceed with this endeavor we do so with thoughtfulness, not afraid to ask the tough questions that must be asked or address the issues that must be addressed, and with the unity of purpose that will guarantee our success.

GUN-RELATED DEATHS ARE STILL TOO HIGH

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, the Centers for Disease Control most recent National Vital Statistics Report, which measures all causes of death in the United States reports that the death rate from firearm injuries dropped nearly 6 percent from 1998 to 1999. The 1999 gun-death toll was 28,874 persons, the first time the figure has dropped below 30,000 since national statistics on gun deaths were first kept in 1979. Preliminary data indicate that there was likely another significant decline in 2000. These are encouraging statistics, but the number of people killed by guns each year is still far too high.

There are several important pieces of legislation before the Senate that were designed to address gun violence. On April 24, 2001, Senator REED introduced the "Gun Show Background Check

Act." This bill would close a loophole in the law which allows unlicensed private gun sellers to sell guns without conducting a National Instant Criminal Background System check. I co-sponsored that bill because I believe it would be an important tool to prevent guns from getting into the hands of criminals and other people prohibited from owning a firearm.

The "Use the National Instant Criminal Background System in Terrorist Investigations Act" was introduced by Senator KENNEDY and SCHUMER in the wake of September 11. This bill would reinstate the 90-day period for the FBI to retain and review NICS gun purchasing data records for irregularities and criminal activity. The need for this legislation was demonstrated when the Attorney General denied the FBI access to the NICS database to review gun sales to individuals they had detained in response to the terrorist attacks. I am pleased to be a cosponsor of this bill and urge the Senate to act on this legislation.

Another important component of any strategy to reduce gun violence is preventing children from gaining access to firearms. Senator DURBIN's "Children's Access Prevention Act" would hold adults who fail to lock up a loaded firearm or an unloaded firearm with ammunition liable if the weapon is taken by a child and used to kill or injure him or herself or another person. The bill also increases the penalties for selling a gun to a juvenile and creates a gun safety education program that includes parent-teacher organizations, local law enforcement and community organizations. I am also a cosponsor of this important bill that would help to curb the thousands of preventable firearm deaths that occur each year.

The statistics I mentioned support the argument that the Brady Law is working to prevent gun-related deaths. However, the number of gun-related deaths is still disturbingly high and more must be done. The bills I support are common sense approaches to gun-safety that deserve the attention of the Senate.

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, all of us in this Chamber know the dedication of those on our staffs who work tirelessly to keep us informed and keep this process moving forward. And, once in a great while, a staffer comes along who becomes so much a part of the process, so much a presence in this place, that few can't imagine the Senate without them.

Ed Hall, staff director on the Committee on Foreign Relations, is one of those people.

A dedicated public servant for more almost 25 years now, he has been a rock-solid steady hand, an extraordinary professional, and—above all—a gentleman.

Now he is completing his final week with the U.S. Senate. And we wish him well.

But before he goes, I hope Ed won't mind too much, though I know he will,

if I take a few minutes to pay tribute to him. Ed is one of those rare, talented staffers who always seems to know the answer before we ask the question. He always has the facts.

He conscientiously attends to the details of the hearings, the legislation, the briefing books, the negotiations—with a trademark combination of wisdom and graciousness, and without ever expecting a word of thanks, much less an entire speech.

All of us know and appreciate the hard work and dogged efforts of our staffs, but too often it goes unspoken. And rarely is it expressed on the Senate floor. Bud Ed Hall is an exceptional man who deserves exceptional recognition for making what we do here possible.

He is here when most of us arrive. And he is here long after most of us have gone home.

He is one of the most decent, hard-working, fair-minded and open-hearted men I have met, loyal almost to a fault, a professional with no agenda but to promote the work of the committee, and to look after its staff.

Ed is perceptive about human nature and profoundly patient with it. But what has always impressed me is his encyclopedic grasp of the legislative process, along with expert insight into parliamentary procedure.

It takes that kind of experience, wisdom and finesses to get things done around here, and make no mistake, Ed Hall gets things done.

Ed developed these traits, I am sure, at Harvard and Michigan, as an Assistant U.S. Attorney, then in private practice, the Marine Corps Reserve and through a series of positions of distinction on Capitol Hill.

He started in 1975 with Senator Claiborne Pell on the Rules Committee, moving 3 years later to the Commerce Committee as Chief Counsel for Senator Howard Cannon.

Then Ed practiced law for a while in Idaho, but as anyone who knows him could tell you, Ed Hall is no simple country lawyer, to borrow a phrase that was popularized by my Senate colleague Sam Ervin, who was here and Ed and I first arrived, so he came back to the Senate as Chief Counsel on the Foreign Relations Committee, again working with Senator Pell.

A few years later, I had the good sense and the good fortune to retain Ed as Minority Staff Director.

If there is one thing that I think I will always remember when I think of Ed, it is his unique take on the legislative process and the goings-on of the Senate.

He has been known to say that if you know what to listen for, you learn after a while that the Senate produces a kind of music, combining rhythm, pace and melody wholly unique to this place.

Ed Hall has always known what to listen for.

As both minority and majority staff director, Ed's role has been a kind of