

extraordinary—milestone in the lives of two very special members of our Senate family.

On May 29, 1937—66 years and one week ago today—ROBERT CARLYLE BYRD and Erma Ora James were married.

The Senate was not in session on their actual anniversary, so I come to the floor today—one week later—to congratulate Senator and Mrs. Byrd on their remarkable achievement.

ROBERT and Erma Byrd both grew up in the hardscrabble coal country of West Virginia. They were high school sweethearts.

Of all of Senator BYRD's tremendous achievements—and there are many—I suspect the two that mean the most to him are convincing Erma James to marry him in the first place—and staying married to her all these years.

I have heard Senator BYRD say often that he could not do this job were it not for his wife's love and support. In his words: "She is not only my wife, but also my best counselor. She has been a strong pillar of support in all my endeavors."

The Byrds' marriage has brought them two wonderful daughters: Mona Byrd Fatemi and Marjorie Byrd Moore.

They have also been blessed with six grandchildren and three great-granddaughters.

After Mrs. Byrd and their family, the Senate and the Constitution, one of the things that Senator BYRD loves best—as we all know—is history—especially ancient history. So I think he may appreciate this thought from Homer:

There is nothing more admirable than two people who see eye-to-eye keeping house as man and wife, confounding their enemies, and delighting their friends.

For 66 years, ROBERT and Erma Byrd have done for more than delight their friends.

Together, they have created a full and rich life. They have raised a family. And they have served the people of West Virginia, and America, well. We wish them many more years of happiness together.

#### LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ACT OF 2003

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the need for hate crimes legislation. On May 1, 2003, Senator KENNEDY and I introduced the Local Law Enforcement Act, a bill that would add new categories to current hate crimes law, sending a signal that violence of any kind is unacceptable in our society.

I would like to describe a terrible crime that occurred on March 21, 2003. In Burbank, IL, an explosion caused by a powerful fireworks-type device damaged the 1989 Ford Econoline van of a Palestinian Muslim family and shook doors and windows of neighboring homes. The blast shattered the vehicle's windows and blew open the vehicle's door. The man who committed the crime is being held on bond and is

being charged with arson, criminal property damage, and committing a hate crime.

I believe that government's first duty is to defend its citizens, to defend them against the harms that come out of hate. The Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act is a symbol that can become substance. I believe that by passing this legislation and changing current law, we can change hearts and minds as well.

#### NATIONAL HUNGER AWARENESS DAY

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, the only problem I have with National Hunger Awareness Day is that it should be every day. Across the Nation, 33 million of our fellow citizens are living in poverty and they deserve our help.

In recent weeks, Congress has been focused on giving hundreds of billions of dollars in new tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans, yet we leave the cupboard bare for millions of parents and low-income families. This week, as we debate the energy bill, we are listening carefully to the concerns of big corporations like Halliburton, Exxon, and Entergy, but not nearly carefully enough to the concerns of all those who need our help the most.

It is a national scandal and disgrace that for so many millions of Americans, hunger is an issue today and every day. Since the year 2000, poverty and unemployment have been on the rise, while wages and income continue to fall. Hardworking parents have been forced to make impossible choices between feeding their children and paying the rent and medical expenses. These are choices no parent should have to make.

No child should go hungry. But every night, 13 million children go to sleep not knowing where or when they will get their next meal. As hunger and malnutrition continue, children are more likely to be absent from school to have behavioral problems, and to have trouble learning to read or do math. They are less likely to be friends with other children or learn from their surroundings, and more likely to miss school because of illness.

Clearly, we have to move to end child hunger. This year, Congress will reauthorize the Child Nutrition Act. The Act includes important initiatives, such as school breakfasts and school lunches, and food programs for summer school, after school, and childcare.

Studies demonstrate that at-risk, school-age children depend on school-based breakfasts and lunches for more than half of their daily meals. In the reauthorization, we must work to see that every child eligible for subsidized programs actually receives these important meals. Schools must be reimbursed for the actual costs of providing nutritionally balanced meals. We also need these programs to provide additional resources, encourage nutrition

education, and to pay school employees a living wage.

We have a choice. Congress can continue to lavish more and more tax breaks on the wealthiest individuals and companies in the Nation, or we can invest in food for hungry children. The answer should be obvious to us all. We can and must ensure that no child is allowed to go hungry.

#### OKLAHOMA LOSS IN OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, over the past few months we've seen the fall of Saddam Hussein's brutal regime coupled with the dawning of a new day for the Iraqi people.

With major military combat operations in Iraq over and the security of our homeland bolstered, America and her allies are turning our efforts toward helping the Iraqi people build a free society.

Like many Americans, I was thrilled and heartened by the dramatic images of U.S. troops helping Iraqi citizens tear down statues and paintings of Saddam Hussein. The Iraqi people needed our help, our tanks, our troops, and our commitment to topple Saddam Hussein.

For the first time in their lives, many Iraqis are tasting freedom, and like people everywhere, they think it's wonderful. I'm proud of our military and America's commitment to make the people of the Middle East more free and secure.

Our military men and women surely face more difficult days in Iraq, and the Iraqi people will be tested by the responsibilities that come with freedom. The thugs who propped up the previous regime and outside forces with goals of their own will seek to cause problems, stir up trouble and initiate violence. Freedom is messy—nowhere more so than in a country that has just shaken off a brutal dictatorship.

But the journey towards a democratic Iraq has now been embarked upon. Like so many nations before it, Iraq now endures the growing pains common to a fledgling democracy. The uncertainty of today's Iraq, I am hopeful, will soon give way to the promise of a better future for the Iraqi people. And as we move closer to this goal, we must remember those who sacrificed for this noble cause.

Today, I rise to honor a man who made the ultimate sacrifice one can make for his country and the cause of freedom.

Specialist Jose A. Perez III was killed last week when his convoy was ambushed near Baghdad. Perez's convoy received fire from a rocket-propelled grenade while on a main supply route.

This San Diego, TX, native was stationed in Fort Sill. He came from a family with a proud military tradition who knows all too well the pain of losing a loved one. His uncle, Baldemar

“Billy” Benavides, Jr. died in the Persian Gulf in 1992.

My heart breaks for this family that has given so much to our great Nation. Of his older brother, 9-year-old Joshua said, “He was a very good hero, and he died for our freedom. I will never forget him.”

A good hero indeed.

As we watch the dawn of a new day in Iraq, let us never forget that the freedom we enjoy every day in America is bought at a price.

Specialist Perez did not die in vain. He died so that many others could live in security and freedom. And for that sacrifice, we are forever indebted. Our thoughts and prayers are with him and his family today and with the troops who are putting their lives on the line in Iraq.

I yield the floor.

#### FBI BACKGROUND CHECK SYSTEM

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, earlier this week, the Federal Bureau of Investigation released a report on the efficiency and effectiveness of the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, also known as NICS. According to the report, the FBI has improved its ability to respond quickly to gun dealer requests for criminal background checks, with only nine percent of the transactions delayed. These improvements have increased the immediate response rate from an average of 71 percent in early 2001 to 91 percent in 2002.

According to the report, in 2001 the NICS system processed 8.9 million background checks, with approximately 125,000 denials of permission to purchase a gun. While, in 2002, the system performed over 8.4 million checks and denied approximately 121,000 of these purchases. I commend the FBI for its hard work and commitment to improving this important law enforcement tool.

Despite the success of the NICS System and the FBI's hard work, many guns are still being purchased without any background checks being performed. Under current Federal law, criminal background checks on gun purchasers are only required for sales by licensed firearm dealers. Consequently, criminals, fugitives, and terrorists are able to purchase firearms without any background check. They do this by purchasing guns at gun shows. I believe we should require a background check on every gun sale and close the loopholes in Federal law that criminals manipulate to buy and sell guns.

During the last Congress, I cosponsored the Gun Show Background Check Act introduced by Senator JACK REED. I believe this legislation would be a vital tool in preventing guns from getting into the hands of criminals and other ineligible buyers. This bill would simply apply existing law governing background checks to individuals buying firearms at gun shows. This bill is

commonsense gun safety legislation that is supported by a number of major law enforcement organizations including the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National Troopers Coalition, the International Brotherhood of Police Officers, the Police Executive Research Forum, the Major Cities Chiefs, the National Association of School Resource Officers, the National Black Police Association, the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, and the Hispanic American Police Command Officers Association.

I believe closing the gun show loophole is an important tool in reducing gun violence and preventing guns from getting into the hands of criminals and foreign terrorists. Since its inception, the National Instant Criminal Background Check System has prevented over 563,000 ineligible buyers from gaining access to guns, but many continue to slip through the gun show loophole. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this important piece of gun safety legislation.

#### FUNDING THE GLOBAL AIR TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I would like to take a moment and recognize the brave men and women who flew and supported the mission of the B-2 bomber. The B-2 is a critical asset of our U.S. military and must be supported in the future. The B-2 can carry up to 40,000 pounds of munitions and can strike up to 16 targets in a single pass. The first night of the bombing in Baghdad, 6 B-2s destroyed 92 targets on the first night. B-2s flew nonstop, 36-hour missions from Whiteman AFB in Missouri to Iraq, unscathed. The B-2s targeted everything from airfields to surface-to-air missiles, sometimes changing targets while airborne enroute to Iraq. No other military has this capability with such accuracy and survivability. It is essential we fund the Global Air Traffic Management, GATM, system, the Secure Nuclear Communications and Broadband Connectivity capability, and the repair of the Aft Deck Durability issue for the B-2. We must ensure the B-2 is maintained and modified to keep its lethal edge.

#### INDICTMENT OF CHARLES TAYLOR

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, yesterday I wanted to give a statement on the indictment of Charles Taylor by the Special Court in Sierra Leone, but due to the rapidly changing events in West Africa and the lack of floor time because of extensive debates on the Defense Authorization and Energy bills, I did not get an opportunity. What follows is the statement that I sent to the State Department, Special Court, and United Nations officials, yesterday, expressing my views on this serious issue.

I rise today to voice my strong support for the decision of the Special Court for Sierra

Leone to indict Charles Taylor for “bearing the greatest responsibility for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and serious violations of international humanitarian law in Sierra Leone.” I commend the Court's prosecutor, David Crane, for taking this decisive action.

Since its inception, the Special Court has moved swiftly to indict key figures allegedly involved in some of the worst atrocities that occurred during the brutal civil war in Sierra Leone during the late 1990s. The Court has also made it a priority to emphasize outreach programs to further the reconciliation process and promote the rule of law throughout the country.

Despite important progress, we all know that the Court's work would be grossly deficient if those most responsible for these crimes were not brought to justice because they were too hard to catch, were high officials of a foreign government, or no longer resided inside of Sierra Leone. It would be like the United States deciding against pursuing the perpetrator of an act of terrorism on American soil, that killed or maimed thousands of individuals, because he left the country or was a high-ranking official in a foreign government. That would be unacceptable.

That is precisely why Congress expressed its clear intent that the Special Court for Sierra Leone should pursue those most responsible, irrespective of where they currently reside.

In the report that accompanied the Senate version of the Fiscal Year 2002 Foreign Operations bill, Report 107-58, Congress stated in unambiguous terms: “To build a lasting peace, the Committee believes that it is imperative for the international community to support a tribunal in order to bring to justice those responsible for war crimes and other atrocities in Sierra Leone, irrespective of where they currently reside.”

This statement was later endorsed by the Conference Report to the Fiscal Year 2002 Foreign Operations bill, Report 107-345, which put the House of Representatives on record on this issue as well.

Even before these reports were issued, Senators FEINGOLD, FRIST, MCCONNELL and I wrote a letter to Secretary Powell, dated June 20, 2001, which stated: “Because some of the individuals most responsible for the atrocities in Sierra Leone are no longer in the country, we believe it is imperative that the tribunal has the authority to prosecute culpable individuals—including senior Liberian officials—regardless of where they reside. This will prevent such persons from escaping justice simply by leaving the country.”

I can safely say that we had one individual especially in mind when we drafted that text: Charles Taylor. I was the principal author of the letter and two Congressional reports referenced above.

The involvement of Charles Taylor in the conflict in Sierra Leone is well documented and I will not go into great detail here. I will simply say that there is no doubt in my mind that he deserves to be brought to justice before the Special Court.

To its credit, the State Department took the advice of Congress. The State Department successfully negotiated an agreement that established the Special Court for Sierra Leone and which did