

Without reform, this process will drag on, triggering the bankruptcy of yet more firms, many of which have only tenuous asbestos connections, because the main firms responsible have already gone under. Meanwhile, many who are ill from asbestos-related diseases won't be able to get timely compensation or, in some cases, any compensation. Unless the bill passes, Navy veterans, for example, will go uncompensated for diseases caused by asbestos on ships. Veterans are not allowed to sue the government, and many of the shipbuilders are long since bankrupt.

The bill will be debated and amended, and it may face a second attempted filibuster before it gets a vote. Some amendment may be reasonable at the margins, but the bill's central idea—to replace litigation with a \$140 billion compensation fund to be financed by defendant companies and their insurers—must be preserved. Democrats complain that the fund won't have enough money to compensate asbestos victims; Republicans complain that the fund will have too much money, the raising of which will constitute a burden on small and medium-size firms. The fact that the bill is being attacked from both directions suggests that its authors, Sens. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) and Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vt), have balanced competing interests in a reasonable manner.

Unfortunately, the bill's critics are not always so reasonable. Sen. Harry M. Reid of Nevada, the Democratic minority leader, has complained, "One would have to search long and hard to find a bill in my opinion as bad as this." He has even described the legislation as the work of lobbyists hired by corporations to limit asbestos exposure. But the truth is that the bill's main opponents are trial lawyers, who profit mightily from asbestos lawsuits and who constitute a powerful lobby in their own right. Mr. Specter and Mr. Leahy are in fact model resisters of special interests who have spent more than two years crafting legislation that serves the public interest. For Mr. Reid to demean this effort in order to fire off campaign sound bites is reprehensible.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SUNUNU). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be dispensed with.

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there be a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak up to 10 minutes each.

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

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, it was 80 years ago when we first recognized February as Black History Month. Today, I am pleased to rise to add my voice to those honoring African Americans.

African Americans have both a tragic and vibrant history in the United States. This month is an opportunity to reflect upon their struggles, perse-

verance, and triumphs. African Americans have contributed to every segment of our community, ranging from politics and sports to medicine and business—and have greatly impacted the music industry. Our society continues to benefit from their service as national leaders, role models, athletes, scholars, and much more.

As you know, we cannot reflect on the achievements of our friends without remembering the civil rights movement. I vividly remember the movement's powerful call for nonviolent change. In 1963, my brother, Rev. Abraham Akaka, joined Dr. King for the famous March on Washington to help show Hawaii's support for the movement. Since 1926, Americans have dedicated the month to honoring the African American legacy. As a staunch supporter of civil rights, I am proud of the many ways that our country has evolved into a more fair and just nation since the movement.

Earlier this week, we bid a fond farewell to Coretta Scott King, who, along with her husband Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., carried the torch against discrimination and bigotry everywhere. As a nation, we are indebted to the Kings and their life's work, and the work of countless other civil rights leaders. However, it is an unfortunate reality that, despite all of this progress, inequities remain. To properly pay tribute to their legacy, I believe that it is important that we use this month not just as a time for reflection, but also as a springboard for action.

In looking back at the progress of African Americans throughout the years and how it has changed the face of our Nation, it is clear that Black history is American history. As a nation, we must work together to close the gap on these important issues. Where possible, we must work in our communities on a local level, to ensure that all members of our society have equal opportunities to thrive and succeed.

This is also a national problem that requires a refocusing of national legislative priorities. Earlier this week, President Bush released his budget for fiscal year 2007, and I was disappointed that he did not devote the proper resources to these fundamental issues. President Bush's budget once again underfunds important health care and education priorities. It saddens me that so many people will be negatively affected by the President's proposals. Unfortunately, the administration has again demonstrated a disregard for domestic programs to improve the lives of working people at the expense of tax cuts for the wealthiest.

The administration needs to refocus its priorities. There are a variety of legislative initiatives that have been introduced this Congress which will address the shortcomings in education and health care for minorities, including African Americans. Earlier this year, I introduced S. 1580—the Healthcare Equality and Account-

ability Act—which establishes programs designed to improve the quality of and access to health care for minorities, while also improving health workforce accountability. My bill also includes a comprehensive diabetes education program. Diabetes is a disease that disproportionately impacts African Americans and other minorities such as native Hawaiians.

As a former teacher, I have seen the ways that education can open doors for people from all walks of life. For that reason, I also introduced S. 1521, the Teacher Acculturation Act of 2005. This bill recognizes that cultural incongruence along racial, socioeconomic, and ethnic vectors impedes learning in our classrooms. Too often, this makes it difficult for knowledge that needs to be transmitted between students aiming to learn and teachers seeking to teach. My bill helps teachers implement strategies to create a healthy learning environment for all students.

I am hopeful that my colleagues will join me in support of my bills, which address significant gaps in services for minorities and African Americans. I am proud to stand with my Democratic colleagues in working to support and empower African Americans in addressing important issues like education, health care, and the economy. As we move through the month of February, I am hopeful that we can work together to make America a better place for all Americans.

MAKE GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION A PRIORITY

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, last month was declared "Guns Aside Month" by the DC City Council in honor of the grassroots campaign known by the same name. The Guns Aside campaign is run by a DC community organization named Reaching Out to Others Together, or ROOT.

Washington, DC, resident Kenneth Barnes established ROOT after his son was shot to death in 2001. According to its Web site, ROOT is "committed to advocacy, education, and intervention on behalf of individuals and families who have been victimized by homicides. Its mission is to bring visibility and focus community and organizational resources on these homicides on behalf of families, while addressing the root causes of the systemic apathy that fosters a culture of violence in our communities today."

Among other things, Kenneth Barnes and other ROOT members work with the DC police and local and national organizations to help address the needs of families who have been affected by gun violence and homicide. ROOT also works with community organizations to develop violence prevention strategies and better coordinate their efforts.

ROOT's Guns Aside campaign began in September 2004 as a multimedia outreach program targeted at young people. As part of the campaign, ROOT members have visited schools and held