State meeting with members to address their concerns and listen to their suggestions. In addition, he has a keen sense of the legislative process and has been able to use this knowledge to accomplish great things for the association.

Throughout his career, Dr. Bowen has garnered deep respect among his colleagues. He has an ability to listen to others, determine a course of action, and implement his ideas in an effective way.

Dr. Bowen is a practicing dentist and has had an established practice in the Salt Lake Valley for the past 22 years. He graduated with honors from the University of the Pacific, UOP, Dental School in San Francisco, CA. While at UOP, Ron served as student body and junior class presidents—demonstrating strong leadership skills at a young age.

During his longtime service to the dental community, Dr. Bowen has served on the UDA board of directors, where he has chaired the Government and Political Action Committees. Dr. Bowen has also served as the president of the Salt Lake District Dental Society and the Great Basin Academy. He was inducted into the International College of Dentists in 2003 and is a member of the Pierre Fuchard Society.

In addition, he is married to Melanie Hamilton Bowen and is the caring father of two daughters, Elysa and Lindsey.

Mr. President, the UDA has been greatly served this past year with Dr. Ron Bowen at the helm. His enthusiasm for the practice of dentistry and good dental health has been felt by many, and his colleagues have appreciated his efforts. I wish him many more happy, successful years of dentistry in Utah and join with many satisfied patients in thanking him for his tremendous service.

TRIBUTE TO JO ANNE BARNHART

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I want to commend someone who represents the very best of citizens in public service. I am speaking of Jo Anne Barnhart, the Commissioner of Social Security. Unfortunately, her term ended last Friday. I say ''unfortunately'' because she has done a superb job.

Jo Anne Barnhart did not need to take this job. She was doing very well running her own consulting firm. But she took the job for one reason: She wanted to improve the way that the Social Security Administration performs its duties. And SSA is a significantly better agency when Jo Anne left than when she first came on board.

That is not all. Many long-term career employees at SSA have said that she is the best Social Security Commissioner for whom they have worked. And a number of veteran Social Security observers and advocates have said the same thing. She has made a remarkable contribution to that agency.

What has Jo Anne accomplished? Everyone knows that the Social Security Program provides benefits to workers who have retired. And the Social Security Program also provides benefits to the families of workers who have died. What is less well known is that Social Security provides benefits to workers who become disabled and to the families of those workers. This is one of Social Security's major functions.

Determining the benefits that retirees and survivors get is a relatively straightforward process, even where the eligibility rules are very detailed. But the same is not true for benefits for disabled workers.

There, SSA has to determine whether the applicant is permanently and totally disabled. This determination requires a lot of difficult work. For many applicants, the answer is not readily apparent. And the applicant can use several layers of appeals, if denied benefits. These additional layers add to the time that an applicant may have to wait before receiving benefits.

When Jo Anne took over the agency, it could take as much as 4 years for an applicant to be approved for benefits, if the applicant succeeded at the last layer of appeal. A disabled worker waiting for a decision is not earning any money. This can put enormous pressures on the worker and the worker's family.

My case workers in Montana have heard from some of the applicants who have been waiting incredibly long times for a decision. And their stories are harrowing. And the same was true for one Montana applicant who had to wait 4 years to get his disability benefits and who was kind enough to testify before the Finance Committee last year.

Jo Anne was fully aware of this problem when she took over the agency. And she was determined to do something about it.

The first step was to determine why it took so long for applicants to be approved. At her confirmation hearing, Jo Anne indicated that she would study this issue immediately. And she and I agreed that she would report back to me in 6 months.

Jo Anne completed that study and briefed me 6 months later, just as she had promised. Amazingly, this was the first comprehensive study SSA had ever done to determine why it took so long for disability applicants to be approved for benefits.

Jo Anne and her staff put every step involved in the disability application process on one chart. When she completed it, that chart was 25 feet long. Jo Anne deserves great credit for initiating and executing this pioneering study.

The study found that there were two causes of the long waiting times for approval of disability benefits, and Jo Anne set out to tackle each of them. About half of the delays occurred because of huge backlogs of cases. The principal cause of these backlogs is inadequate staffing, and the principal cause of inadequate staffing is lack of budgetary resources. The other half of the waiting times was due to huge inefficiencies in the processing of disability claims.

Jo Anne responded to these challenges. First, she set out to reduce as much of the inefficiency in the disability adjudication process as possible.

She initiated the conversion of the application process from a paper-driven process to a completely electronic process. And she aggressively accelerated this conversion, completing the transformation in record time.

As a result, SSA now has the largest repository of medical evidence in the world. And the new system works. Previously, all evidence and records used during the adjudication process had to be mailed from one SSA office to another and from doctors' offices to SSA offices. This was inefficient, time-consuming, and expensive. Now all of this is accomplished electronically. Jo Anne deserves great credit for these changes.

And Jo Anne initiated a Disability Service initiative. This was a major overhaul of the multiple steps in the disability adjudication process. This initiative brought many improvements.

First, quick decisions are made in cases where the disability is obvious. Second, redundant appeal processes were eliminated. Third, huge amounts of time were saved for some appeals that would normally go to a hearing before an administrative law judge. That is a process that can take well over a year to occur. A new type of legal official was created in the system. This lawyer is given authority to award benefits before the case ever proceeds to a hearing. This dramatically reduces the time for the applicant to get benefits. Many other changes were made as well.

All of these changes are being piloted. It is hoped that these new processes will greatly increase the efficiency by which disability claims are adjudicated. If they do, Jo Anne will have accomplished something truly great.

Jo Anne also initiated action to deal with scarce budgetary resources, the second cause of long delays. She provided detailed and cogent briefings to the Directors of the Office of Management and Budget.

As a result, the President's budgets have requested a significant increase for SSA's administrative costs each year. This occurred at a time when the President's budgets contained little or no increases or even decreases in funding for most appropriated programs.

Unfortunately, through no lack of effort on Jo Anne's part, the amount of money ultimately appropriated for SSA's administrative costs has been substantially below the amount requested by the President each year. This is a problem that needs to be rectified in the future.

One of Jo Anne's finest moments came after the terrible hurricanes,

Katrina, Rita, and Wilma, decimated whole areas of the gulf coast and Florida. GAO reported: ''The Social Security Administration had enhanced planning and pre-established procedures in place to provide immediate emergency payments to the significant number of beneficiaries who evacuated and did not receive their monthly checks. With these procedures in place, the Social Security Administration had the capability to deploy staff and equipment from its 1,300 offices across the Nation to address the increased workload.''

Under Jo Anne's guidance, SSA also successfully implemented some brand new permanent responsibilities without a hitch. For example, SSA was asked to take applications for the low-income subsidy portion of the Medicare prescription drug program. This subsidy allows low-income Medicare beneficiaries to participate in the prescription drug program at no or reduced cost. SSA was also asked to do massive amounts of outreach to find the people who qualified for the subsidies, and it did so.

Jo Anne also guided the implementation of some brand new systems projects. For example, she oversaw the digital recording of hearings. SSA used to record all hearings before its administrative law judges with regular cassette tapes. These tapes were difficult to ship and were often lost during transit. Jo Anne and her team spearheaded the effort to have hearings recorded digitally.

It is clear that Commissioner Barnhart accomplished an extraordinary number of achievements for SSA. She has reason to be proud, and the country owes her a huge debt of gratitude.

I wish her the very best in whatever endeavors she takes on after she leaves SSA. But we will sorely miss her.

CRACKING DOWN ON SWEATSHOP ABUSES

• Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, this week I am introducing a bipartisan piece of legislation that every Member of the Senate should support. The legislation aims to crack down on sweatshop abuses taking place in overseas factories that produce merchandise for sale in the American marketplace.

The United States currently prohibits the importation of products made with prison labor but does not similarly prohibit the importation of products made in sweatshops under slave-like conditions. What is more, if a U.S. retailer finds that one of its competitors is importing products made in a foreign sweatshop, it has no recourse in U.S. courts and is placed at a competitive disadvantage.

I am certain that if Members of the Senate were asked to raise their hand if they support abusive sweatshop conditions at foreign factories producing for the United States, not one hand would go up. Yet, as the media and watchdog groups have documented all too well, these conditions are prevalent in a number of our major trading partners.

We have to put a stop to this. Sweatshop factories undermine the foreign workers who work in them, and they undermine U.S. workers who are asked to compete with them.

The bill I am introducing is called the Decent Working Conditions and Fair Competition Act, and it is really very simple.

First, the bill says that it is illegal to bring the product of sweatshop factories to this country. In this bill, a ''sweatshop factory'' is one where workers are abused in violation of that country's labor laws.

Second, the bill allows U.S. retailers the right to sue their competitors for damages in U.S. court if their competitors are sourcing their merchandise from sweatshop factories.

Let me give you an example of why such legislation is essential, involving the country of Jordan.

Our trade negotiators signed the Jordan Free Trade Agreement in October of 2000. The agreement was negotiated under the Clinton administration, and it was supposed to be a model trade agreement. I give the Clinton administration credit for at least giving some thought to putting labor provisions in the trade deal with Jordan.

But those labor provisions were not enforced, and the result has been the proliferation of sweatshops in Jordan. In May of last year, the New York Times described this trend.

It turned out that when the agreement was signed in 1999, Jordan began to fly in so-called guest workers from countries like Bangladesh and China to make products in Jordan for sale at stores like Wal-Mart and Target. The conditions for these so-called guest workers in Jordan were slave-like.

This is how the New York Times described it: ''Propelled by a free trade agreement with the United States, apparel manufacturing is booming in Jordan, its exports to America soaring twenty fold in the last five years. But some foreign workers in Jordanian factories that produce garments for Target, Wal-Mart and other retailers are complaining of dismal conditions—of 20-hour days, of not being paid for months and of being hit by supervisors and jailed when they complain.''

These were some of the other conditions documented at these factories. Workers were promised $120 a month but in some cases were hardly paid at all. One worker was paid only $50 for 5 months of work. And 40-hour shifts were common. Incredibly, the 40-hour shift apparently had replaced the 40-hour workweek.

To its credit, Wal-Mart admitted to the New York Times that it had found ''serious problems with the conditions at several major Jordanian factories.'' But it should not have taken a New York Times investigation to uncover these abuses.

Here is another instance of sweatshop conditions. In November 2006, BusinessWeek had a cover story on sweatshop abuses entitled ''Secrets, Lies, and Sweatshops.'' The article begins with the description of a Chinese company called the Ningbo Beifa Group. This company has made a lot of money as a top supplier of pens, mechanical pencils, and highlighters to Wal-Mart Stores and other major retailers.

In 2005, Wal-Mart inspected this company's factories. It found that the company was paying its 3,000 workers less than China's minimum wage and violating overtime rules. So Wal-Mart asked the company to fix these serious problems.

The Chinese company failed to do so. Wal-Mart then returned to the company, found the same problems, and told the company to shape up. Again, the Chinese company failed to do so and happily continued making pens and highlighters for Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart returned a third time and gave the Chinese company its third warning. Once again, the Chinese company failed to treat its workers according to Chinese law.

So finally, even Wal-Mart had had enough, and they issued a fourth warning—comply with the law or we will stop doing business with you. What did the Chinese company do? It turned to another Chinese company called the Shanghai Corporate Responsibility Management & Consulting Co. For a $5,000 fee, the company promised to send a consultant to take care of the Wal-Mart problem.

The consultant provided advice on how to create fake but authentic-looking payroll records. The consultant also told the company that, on the day of the fourth Wal-Mart audit, they should give the day off to any workers with grievances, so that they would not tell any inconvenient stories. After following the consultant's advice, the Chinese factory passed the Wal-Mart audit—even though the Chinese company later admitted that it didn't change any of its practices.

Now, I am not suggesting that Wal-Mart deliberately turned a blind eye in this case. And there are certainly documented cases of other companies selling sweatshop products in the United States.

But I do think that companies that decide to import products for sale in this country should not be allowed to gain an unfair competitive advantage by deliberately sourcing from sweatshop factories. And the bill that I am introducing would address such abuses by banning the importation or sale of products made in factories under sweatshop conditions.

For purposes of the bill, ''sweatshop conditions'' are gross violations of the labor, health, and safety laws of the country where the labor is performed. Enforcement would be divided between the Customs Service and the Federal Trade Commission. If the Federal