

about costs, I am committed to finding offsets to cover the expense. After all, fiscal responsibility is not the only kind of responsibility there is. Our country has a deeper responsibility to the men and women who have served in our military, whether they were born in America or the Philippines. We need a solution that is both morally responsible to Filipino veterans and fiscally responsible with taxpayer dollars.

Many of the brothers-in-arms of those who testified at our hearing have since passed away, never having been recognized by the United States for their service. I find that shameful. Following the hearing, I asked myself how we could stray from our moral commitment to these men for over half a century and then argue that it is too expensive to give those who are left the benefits they have earned.

With that in mind, let us look to fulfill both responsibilities, rather than neglecting the Filipino veterans who remain with us today. We have gone down that path for over half a century, denying them care and benefits. Today we find many Filipino veterans living their twilight years in the pain of poverty, without access to the relief available to other veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces. Allowing this to go on without searching vigorously for a realistic solution is not the responsible response. These veterans deserve better.

NATIONAL SMALL BUSINESS WEEK

Ms. SNOWE. Madam President, today I commemorate National Small Business Week, which President Bush designated for April 22–28, 2007. As ranking member of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, I simply cannot understate the vital role of small business in our Nation's economy. Small businesses comprise 99 percent of all businesses in the United States, employ more than half of the total private sector workforce, and are responsible for the creation of more than two-thirds of all new jobs each year. It is essential that we in Congress continue to support small businesses' efforts to grow and do what they do best—create new jobs.

If there is one concern we have all heard time and again, it is the exorbitant cost to small businesses of providing health insurance to their employees. In fact, small business owners in all 50 States have cited rising health insurance costs as their number one concern. Health insurance premiums have increased at double-digit percentage levels in 4 of the past 6 years—far outpacing inflation and wage gains. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, last year the average health policy for an individual was \$4,242; the average family plan cost \$11,480.

As we are all well aware, these sharply rising costs are leading fewer and fewer small businesses to offer health insurance to their employees. Accord-

ing to Kaiser, in 2002, 58 percent of our Nation's smallest businesses, those with less than 10 employees, offered health insurance. In 2004, only 52 percent were able to offer their employees health insurance. Today, just 48 percent of our smallest businesses are now able to offer health insurance as a workplace benefit. As you can see, that is a 10 percentage point reduction over the past 5 years. Clearly, we are heading in the wrong direction.

Further compounding the problem is the fact that small group insurance markets exhibit no real competition. No competition means higher costs. And higher costs mean no health insurance. I recently requested a Government Accountability Office report, which revealed a staggering consolidation in the State small group insurance markets. Today, the five largest carriers now have more than a 75 percent market share in 26 States—and control 98 percent of the small group market in Maine.

This trend is simply unacceptable and represents nothing short of a crisis—and one that can and must be fixed, now. In the Senate, I have been a longstanding champion of small business health plans and I have introduced legislation in the past two Congresses that would allow small businesses to “pool” together, across State lines, and offer uniform health insurance plans to their employees, at significantly lower costs.

I firmly believe that small business health plans are a critical solution to the small business health insurance crisis. It is a matter of simple fairness. Just like larger businesses and unions, I believe small businesses should have the option to purchase health plans across State lines with uniform benefits packages. It would allow them to shop for affordable, quality plans with much lower administrative costs while at the same time drastically shrinking the ranks of the nearly 47 million Americans living without health insurance.

Moving forward this year, we need to leave no stone unturned in our search for solutions to this crisis. For example, we should examine ways to use the Tax Code as a mechanism for increasing access to health care, including through “pooling mechanisms, and injecting competition into the State small group insurance markets. This is why I am currently working with a number of my colleagues in the Senate, on both sides of the political aisle, to forge a bipartisan bill that will pass the Senate and be signed into law. Senate Finance Committee Chairman BAUCUS has announced that we will soon consider health care legislation in the Finance Committee—and I look forward to a robust productive debate there. I also thank Senator ENZI for all of his tremendous efforts in getting legislation passed through the HELP Committee last year, and for having that legislation considered on the Senate floor for the first time ever.

Frankly, now is a time for action, not words. It is incumbent upon this Congress to think “outside of the box” to solve this crisis. We need to consider all options on the table, including a number of recently passed State reforms. We are at a critical juncture on this issue. The United States has the greatest health care system in the world, and yet nearly 47 million Americans are uninsured. Our goal ought to be providing health care access for all, and that means greatly expanding coverage so that we can significantly reduce our Nation's uninsured.

We must figure out how to solve the persistent criticisms that have mired small business health insurance legislation in Congress. We must address how to allow health insurers to provide lower cost products to small businesses across State lines while maintaining the most widely accepted and necessary benefits and services. We must tackle questions of how to “rate,” or price, these products—and also how this can be done in a uniform manner, without jeopardizing consumer protections. And we can and we must do all this without injuring existing health insurance markets in the States. Plain and simple, Congress must bring up small business health insurance legislation this year, in a bipartisan, comprehensive way that can secure significant bipartisan support.

NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS' RIGHTS WEEK

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, last week we joined together in the aftermath of the tragic killings at Virginia Tech to mourn and support the families of the victims and the Virginia Tech community. This week we join together once again to commemorate National Crime Victims' Rights Week.

Yesterday marked the official beginning of National Crime Victims' Rights Week. Since 1981, communities in Vermont and across the Nation have observed this week through candlelight vigils and public rallies to renew our commitment to crime victims and their families. It is important, especially during this time of national sorrow, that we recognize the needs of crime victims and their family members and work together to promote victims' rights and services.

We have been able to make some progress during the past 26 years to provide victims with greater rights and assistance. In particular, I have been honored to support passage of the Victims of Crime Act of 1984, VOCA, Public Law 98-473, which established the Crime Victims Fund, “the Fund.” The fund allows the Federal Government to provide grants to State crime victim compensation programs, direct victim assistance services and services to victims of Federal crimes. Nearly 90 percent of the fund is used to award State crime victim compensation and victim assistance formula grants. These

VOCA-funded victim assistance programs serve nearly 4 million crime victims each year, including victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, elder abuse, and drunk driving, as well as survivors of homicide victims. Our VOCA-funded compensation programs have helped hundreds of thousands of victims of violent crime.

The Crime Victims Fund is the Nation's premier vehicle for supporting victims' services. It bears repeating that the Crime Victims Fund does not receive a dime from tax revenue or appropriated funding. Instead, it is made up of criminal fines, forfeited bail bonds, penalties, and special assessments.

Since fiscal year 2000, Congress has set a cap on annual fund obligations expressly for the purpose of ensuring "that a stable level of funding will remain available for these programs in future years." The "rainy day" fund created by this spending cap has been used to make up the difference between annual deposits and distributions three times during the past 7 years.

The future of the fund is being threatened, however. After 26 years of progress, the Bush administration is proposing to rescind all amounts remaining in the fund at the end of fiscal year 2008. That would leave the fund with a balance of zero going into fiscal year 2009 and create a disastrous situation for providers of victims' services. Over the last few years, the Senate has successfully blocked several past attempts by this administration to rescind the fund's remaining balance and has supported the retention of all amounts deposited into the fund. Over the past 6 years, the Bush administration has squandered record surpluses and racked up \$8.5 trillion in Federal debt. It is wrong to try to pay for its failed fiscal policies by emptying out the Crime Victims Fund. These resources are appropriately set aside to assist victims of crime.

In order to preserve the fund once again, Senator CRAPO and I, joined by more than a dozen other Senators are sending a letter this week to the Senate Appropriations Committee asking that the committee oppose the administration's proposal to empty the Crime Victims Fund and, instead, permit those amounts to remain in the fund, in accordance with law, to be used for the important programs and services needed by crime victims.

Also, last week the Vermont Department of Corrections received a \$400,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice to implement a Statewide Automated Victim Information and Notification, SAVIN, system to provide timely notifications to crime victims who request it. Programs like these give crime victims some peace of mind and facilitate communication among the courts and corrections and other law enforcement officials.

We need to renew our national commitment to crime victims. The Senate can help by recognizing the importance

of the Crime Victims Fund and supporting its essential role in helping crime victims and their families meet critical expenses, recover from the horrific crimes they endured, and move forward with their lives. I urge Senators on both sides of the aisle to honor our longstanding commitment to crime victims by working together to commemorate victims of crime and to preserve the Crime Victims Fund.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

CONGRATULATING DR. HOWARD-YANA SHAPIRO

• Mr. BINGAMAN. Madam President, I wish to congratulate Dr. Howard-Yana Shapiro, who will receive the Organic Leadership Award on May 7, 2007. The award is bestowed annually by the Organic Trade Association on individuals who have demonstrated leadership and vision in furthering the goals of organic agriculture.

Dr. Shapiro has had a very impressive career in organic agriculture, having been involved with sustainable agricultural and agroforestry systems, plant genetics, and food production systems for over 35 years. He is best known as the principal author of "Gardening for the Future of the Earth," which shows how to "create natural bounty in your own backyard and help save the planet one seed at a time."

During his long and diverse career, Dr. Shapiro has been a community gardening activist, a university professor for 15 years, twice a Fulbright Scholar, twice a Ford Foundation Fellow, and winner of the National Endowment for the Humanities Award. He has worked with indigenous communities, non-governmental organizations, governmental agencies, and private institutions throughout the world, including Conservation International, World Wildlife Fund, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Agency for International Development, U.S. Forest Service, ICRAF, The World Agroforestry Centre, Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, and many other national and regional agricultural institutions in Mexico, Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Honduras, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Senegal, South Africa, Vietnam, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and Australia.

Most recently, Dr. Shapiro has held a leadership role in Seeds of Change, the largest certified organic seed company in the country. Located along the Rio Grande in El Guique, NM, Seeds of Change, a division of Mars, Incorporated, is a pioneering cultivator of organically grown seeds for home and market growers, a leader in the organic foods industry, and a valued resource for organic farmers. Dr. Shapiro has been dedicated to Seeds of Change since its inception and was a key figure during the launching of the Seeds of Change 100 percent certified organic food line in the United States, Europe, Australia, and Japan.

I am proud that New Mexico is home to Seeds of Change and that the company, and organic agriculture as an industry, has been so well served by the expertise and vision of Dr. Shapiro throughout its growth. Again, I congratulate Dr. Howard-Yana Shapiro for receiving the Organic Trade Association's highest honor. I thank him for his commitment to furthering organic agriculture around the world, and I wish him continued success in the years ahead.●

MOUNTAIN HOME AIR FORCE BASE

• Mr. CRAIG. Madam President, today with great pride I honor Mountain Home Air Force Base for their recent achievement of winning the Commander in Chief's Annual Award for Installation Excellence for an Air Force base. Over 85 Active-Duty Air Force installations competed this year for the award, and I was extremely pleased to get word that Idaho's own Air Force base came out the winner.

Over the years, I have worked very closely with the different wing commanders at Mountain Home Air Force Base to ensure that their installation will provide our soldiers with the best living conditions and optimal training space to ensure that should they be called to duty, they would be fully prepared. I know firsthand that the work being done both at home and abroad by our airmen and soldiers at Mountain Home Air Force Base is among the best our military can offer.

Over 500 airmen and crew from Mountain Home Air Force Base are currently deployed in Afghanistan in support of our joint mission with NATO to provide freedom and security from terrorist, and they are serving with great courage and determination. I know that their fellow servicemembers, the Idaho delegation, and all of Idaho await their return and they will be greeted with a hero's welcome. Although they are not in Idaho to celebrate this very prestigious honor from the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Air Force, and the Commander in Chief, I know that their contributions greatly aided in Mountain Home Air Force Base receiving this award.

COL Tony Rock, wing commander of the 366 Fighting Wing at Mountain Home Air Force Base, expressed his pride of winning this award but gave the credit to the 4,000-plus men and women who operate the base on a daily basis. Colonel Rock was quoted as saying, "This award validates the hard work, commitment and pride of all our Gunfighters who work together to make Mountain Home the best base in the Air Force. I am simultaneously humbled and awed to be part of this team and lead our Gunfighters as we continue to prove we are the premier combat wing in the entire Air Force."

I couldn't agree more with Colonel Rock's statement.

Again, I would like to extend the appreciation and congratulations of myself and all of Idaho to the soldiers and