

MORNING BUSINESS

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

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

 NATIONAL PEACE OFFICERS
MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, today marks the 26th year that peace officers from around the country have gathered in the Nation's Capital to participate in the National Peace Officers Memorial Day Service. Every year, Peace Officers Memorial Day offers the people of the United States, in their communities, in their State capitals, and in the Nation's Capital, the opportunity to honor and reflect on the extraordinary service and sacrifice given year after year by our police forces. I welcome the visiting peace officers and their family members who are gathered in Washington today as we honor their services and those lost this past year.

Earlier this month, the Senate passed a resolution marking today National Peace Officers Memorial Day. This is now the 11th year running that I have sponsored this resolution to honor the sacrifice and commitment of those law enforcement officers who give their lives serving their communities. Senator SPECTER, himself a former prosecutor, former chairman of the Judiciary Committee, and now our ranking member, was the lead Republican sponsor of this bipartisan measure this year. I thank the majority leader, himself a former police officer, and all Senators for their support in recognizing the sacrifices that law enforcement officers make each day for the American people.

Currently, more than 900,000 men and women who guard our communities do so at great risk. After the hijacked planes hit the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001, 72 peace officers died while trying to ensure that their fellow citizens in those buildings got to safety. That act of terrorism resulted in the highest number of peace officers ever killed in a single incident in the history of our country and is a tragic reminder of how important it is for the Congress to provide all of the resources necessary to protect officers in the line of duty.

Since the first recorded police death in 1792, there have been more than 17,900 law enforcement officers who have made the ultimate sacrifice. We are fortunate in Vermont that we rank as the State with the fewest officer deaths. With 19 deaths, however, that is, of course, 19 deaths too many.

In 2006, 145 law enforcement officers died while serving in the line of duty, below the decade-long average of 165 deaths annually and a drop from 2005 when 156 officers were killed. That is still 145 officers too many. We need to

continue our support for better equipment and the increased use of bullet-resistant vests, improved training, and advanced emergency medical care. I hope as the 110th Congress moves forward that all Senators can work together to ensure that all of our law enforcement officers and their families have the full support and the resources they need from the Federal Government.

I have been working to help make it safer on the beat for our officers. Back in 1998, Senator Campbell and I authored the Bulletproof Vest Grant Partnership Act, in part a response to the tragic Carl Drega shootout on the Vermont-New Hampshire border in which two State troopers who lacked bulletproof vests were killed. Since then, we have successfully reauthorized this program three times: In the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act of 2000, in the State Justice Institute Reauthorization Act of 2004, and most recently as part of the Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005. It is now authorized at \$50 million per year through fiscal year 2009 to help State, tribal, and local jurisdictions purchase armor vests for use by law enforcement officers. Senator SPECTER and I joined together to send a letter to other Senators last week to make sure that the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program is fully funded this year. Bulletproof vests have saved the lives of thousands of officers and are a fundamental line of defense that no officer should be without. It is crucial that Congress provide the full funding authorized to the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Program. Hundreds of thousands of police officers and local jurisdictions are counting on us.

I am disappointed that not all of Congress's actions to protect and help our law enforcement officers are implemented by this administration. President Bush has repeatedly proposed drastic cuts to the bulletproof vest initiative and other grant programs that directly assist State and local law enforcement. The Bush administration has spent more than \$400 billion on a failed policy in Iraq, and yet the President continues to propose cuts in funding for programs here in the United States for first responders who protect our Nation's communities.

I will mention one other important example of a law I sponsored and helped pass in 2003, the Hometown Heroes Survivors Benefit Act. This important, bipartisan legislation reflects the belief of Congress that the families of firefighters, law enforcement officers, and other first responders should be cared for when a public safety officer dies of a heart attack or stroke in the line of duty. To date, the Department of Justice has made only two positive determinations from the more than 230 applications it has received. It is inexcusable that the Department of Justice appears to be interpreting this law as narrowly as possible and is denying and

delaying so many of these claims. Congress and the American people want to see fair and equitable treatment for the families of the brave individuals who lose their lives in the line of duty, not foot-dragging and excuses from the Justice Department.

We can all agree that the men and women in law enforcement who have sacrificed for our safety deserve our deep gratitude and respect. National Peace Officers Memorial Day recognizes real-life heroes. Our Nation's law enforcement officers deserve our commitment to provide for those who help keep us all safe. I support and respect our State and local police officers and all of our first responders and am proud to recognize their role in upholding the rule of law and keeping our Nation safe and secure.

 FEDERAL CRACK COCAINE
SENTENCING POLICY

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, today, the U.S. Sentencing Commission took another important step in addressing the wide disparity in our Federal cocaine sentencing laws.

The Commission released its fourth report to Congress in 12 years that, once again, provides a comprehensive review of our cocaine policies, and recommendations about how those policies can be improved. Almost 3 weeks ago, the Commission recommended to Congress a change in the Sentencing Guidelines that would lower the offense level for crack offenders across the board. Both of these actions are positive steps, but real progress in this area requires congressional action.

Under current law, an offender apprehended with 5 grams of crack cocaine faces the same 5 year mandatory minimum sentence as an offender with 500 grams of powder cocaine—that is the same sentence for 100 times more powder cocaine. In 2000, the average sentence for a crack cocaine defendant was nearly 4 years longer than the average sentence for a powder cocaine defendant.

Last week, the Commission announced it will issue a guideline change that lowers the offense level for crack offenders by 2 points across the board. As a result, 75 percent of Federal crack offenders will have their sentences reduced by approximately 16 months. This change represents a step in the right direction.

For far too long, the Federal crack-powder sentencing laws have created an injustice in our Nation. Over 20 years now, Congress has silently stood by as this policy swelled our prisons, disproportionately impacted African Americans, and misdirected precious Federal resources on low-level street dealers rather than on the worst offenders—drug kingpins who bring crack into our neighborhoods. Twenty years of irresponsible policy is enough.

I hope the Commission's report and recommendations will serve as a roadmap for the 110th Congress. Americans