

Pola has two simple wishes.

"I want to hear that my family is living in peace, not in war, worried all the time, and to have the hope of seeing them."

Hedo and Pola have also received support from their friends, Noah and Natalie Baker Merrill.

"It's very important in these times for Americans to get to know Iraqis and see them as their neighbors," said Noah Baker Merrill, a founder of Direct Aid International, which helps Iraqi refugees in Syria and Jordan.

Baker Merrill and his wife met Hedo and Pola through SIT, where Natalie is a student advocate.

The United States has done a disgraceful job in helping the refugees, said Baker Merrill, accepting only 1,800 of the 2 to 2.5 million who have fled Iraq.

Nearly 100,000 Iraqis have been allowed to settle in Sweden, but the majority live in refugee camps in Jordan and Syria. Resettlement in a different country is not the answer, said Baker Merrill. Making Iraq a safe country that Iraqis can return to is the answer.

"The overwhelming majority just desperately want to be able to go home."

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I rise today to add my voice of support for the first-ever World Autism Awareness Day, a day that is sorely needed. In 2006 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, estimated that 1 in 166 children were diagnosed with autism. Today the CDC estimates that number to be 1 in 150. In fact, 67 children are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder per day; a new case is diagnosed almost every 20 minutes.

Like many of my colleagues, I have had the opportunity to spend time with children with autism and their families, from Connecticut and around the Nation. Autism is a complex neurological disorder, which manifests itself differently in each individual but occurs in all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups. It is a lifelong condition that affects not only the individual with the disability, but impacts the entire family, often requiring intensive levels of support and intervention.

There are so many unanswered questions about autism. The first step in answering them is for us to come together as a society and recognize the many challenges autism presents in the U.S. and throughout the world. It is my hope that today everyone will take a moment to consider autism and the millions of individuals and families struggling with this developmental disability.

We should also make note of the great work and sacrifice of families affected by autism and the tireless advocates for autism research and treatment who have worked to make this day a reality. Among them I want to particularly note my friends Bob and Suzanne Wright who have worked with me for years to address the needs of those dealing with autism. But there is still more to be done.

At a time when the number of children and families living with autism has grown exponentially, it is important that we recognize the need to ex-

pand our federal commitment to combating this disease. Autism is the fastest growing developmental disability in the United States, yet we are not committing enough of our federal resources to developing the type of scientific breakthroughs in autism that are needed. It is time to redouble our efforts and help the thousands of families who are raising children with autism.

Among the first major steps in the Federal response to autism was in 2006 when Congress unanimously passed the Combating Autism Act, which my former colleague from Pennsylvania, Senator Rick Santorum and I authored along with the strong support of many of our colleagues including Senators KENNEDY and ENZI. This initiative represents the largest federal expansion of funding and programs for children and families with autism spectrum disorder.

We took another major step recently on the Senate floor with the unanimous passage of an amendment Senator SUSAN COLLINS and I offered to the fiscal year 2009 budget resolution that would double funding for programs dealing with autism at the CDC, the National Institutes of Health, and other health agencies. It is my hope that my colleagues will keep this momentum going by making sure this funding finds its way into the final budget resolution conference report and then through the appropriations process. The research these funds would support will help us understand more about the causes of and appropriate treatments and services for autism.

We should close no doors on promising avenues of research into the causes of autism. The Combating Autism Act and my recent amendment to the budget resolution allow all biomedical research opportunities on autism to be pursued. In fact, just today a new study of toddlers finds that there may be a link between babies born very prematurely and autism. As the author of the PREEMIE Act, along with my colleague Senator LAMAR ALEXANDER, I find this news particularly interesting. I look forward to the upcoming Surgeon General's Conference in June which was called for under the PREEMIE Act as an opportunity to further pursue this possible link between extreme prematurity and autism.

As we look to the future, we also need to find new and innovative ways to help parents and loved ones care for family members suffering from autism. That is why I have introduced S. 2741, The Disability Savings Act of 2008. This bill will encourage individuals with disabilities and their families to save money for their unique needs in tax-advantaged disability savings accounts. This money could then be drawn out as needed, to pay for services and care that are needed.

Today, on World Autism Awareness Day, I hope we in the Senate can make finding a cure for autism a top priority of the Congress and the Nation. To-

gether, we can make life a little better for those with autism and their loved ones.

IN HONOR OF BOB VALEU

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, on May 1, 2008, Bob Valeu ends his service to the U.S. Senate.

For 16 years, Bob Valeu has done an outstanding job as the director of my North Dakota Senate offices. His passion for public policy, his dedication to our State and country, and his commitment to excellence have been a hallmark of his service these past years.

Those of us who serve as Senators get attention for the work we do. But we understand that very often that attention and our accomplishments are a result of some very talented and dedicated staff who work with us to advance the interests of our State and our country. That is certainly the case with Bob Valeu's service to me and to the Senate.

Whenever an event ended, the lights were turned down, the microphone was turned off, and I had moved on to another event, Bob Valeu was usually still there solving problems and working with people to address their needs. He was that kind of State director—the type every Senator aspires to have.

Bob and I have traveled tens of thousands of miles together to every nook and cranny of our State. We have been to every kind of event imaginable: high school convocations, Main Street tours, ribbon cuttings, university commencements, lutefisk dinners, State fairs, karaoke competitions, and chili cookoffs. But beyond all of that—and even more importantly—Bob Valeu had provided wise counsel and advice over the years. And I know that even as he leaves my official staff, he will continue to be a valuable advisor and a good friend.

So I want to use this opportunity to publicly thank my friend and a very dedicated American with whom I have been privileged to serve these past 16 years.

To Bob and his wife Marge and their entire family, on behalf of the Senate, I tell you that our country is a better place because of your service. And this Senator is deeply appreciative of the many years of excellence you dedicated to the best interests of our great Nation.

COMMEMORATING THE LIFE OF DITH PRAN

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I rise today to commemorate the extraordinary life of Dith Pran, who risked his life to expose the terrors of the Khmer Rouge regime in his native Cambodia, and who later became the subject of the Oscar award-winning film, "The Killing Fields." Mr. Dith died March 30, 2008, in New Jersey, surrounded by relatives and friends. He