

Jefferson's historic call for "decent respect," his assertion that "all men are created equal," form the cornerstones of modern democracies. On this 232d anniversary, we should reflect that these goals are works in progress, and that much more needs to be done here and abroad to attain them.

While the Declaration speaks about all men being created equal, what about women, who didn't get the right to vote until 1919, or slaves who were owned by Washington and Jefferson? What of the phrase separate but equal, from the Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which defined the rights of so many African Americans until 1954?

The United States is challenged today by world opinion that we do not accord "decent respect" to human rights by "enhanced interrogation," denial of due process at Guantanamo, and failure to observe the Geneva Conventions. We make mistakes. We acknowledge them. We correct them.

The work in progress continues. Our judicial system invalidates executive excesses. Our First Amendment rights, due process of law, and separation of powers take time, but they remain the universal gold standard. Our current congressional agenda contains initiatives to expand civil-rights legislation; it is likely to be enacted soon to reverse the Supreme Court decision limiting women's rights to sue for equal employment opportunities.

The work started here in Philadelphia with the Declaration of Independence, leading to our magnificent Constitution.

U.S. SEN. ARLEN SPECTER, (R., Pa.)

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES RULE

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court carefully crafted the *Roe v. Wade* decision to serve as the balanced foundation on which the reproductive rights of women could rest. Now, in 2008, the Bush administration is making a late-stage power grab based on a foundation of flawed ideology.

A flawed ideology that has the potential to harm millions of American women.

Today, I join many of my colleagues in telling this administration that their ideology has no place in the health care system that American women depend upon.

Last week, it came to my attention that the Department of Health and Human Services is circulating a draft regulation that would jeopardize the reproductive health of women and their fundamental freedom of choice.

Studies show that the use of family planning reduces the probability of a woman having an abortion by 85 percent. But this rule could severely limit a woman's access to these family planning resources by adopting an alarmingly broad definition for the term "abortion."

This definition would allow health care professionals to classify contraceptives like birth control pills, intrauterine devices, IUDs, and emergency contraceptives as "abortions." Based on this classification, health care professions could refuse access for women who need these resources.

As such, this proposal would greatly increase the chances of women encoun-

tering hospital and clinic staff who would prevent them from receiving the information they need to make thoughtful, personal decisions about their health, and may even refuse to write prescriptions for basic birth control.

Fundamentally, this Bush administration proposal undermines everything we have worked to achieve in the last 35 years.

It could endanger access to birth control and upend the federal title X family planning program. In 2006 alone, title X provided family planning services to approximately 5 million women and men through a network of more than 4,400 community-based clinics.

It could endanger State laws and regulations like the one in my State that require equitable coverage for contraceptives under insurance plans that cover other prescriptions.

And it could even endanger a sexual assault or rape victim's access to emergency contraception in a hospital emergency room. An unimaginable thought for the millions of American women every year who turn to emergency contraceptives following a traumatic event in their lives.

Seventy-six percent of voters strongly support doing everything we can to reduce the number of unintended pregnancies through commonsense measures.

This is an assault on a common goal of preventing unintended pregnancies and reducing the number of abortions in this country.

And it is unacceptable.

For the millions of women across this Nation, I strongly urge this administration to reconsider their stance and put reproductive health above partisan politics and ideology.

VETERAN VOTING SUPPORT ACT OF 2008

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, yesterday I introduced Senate bill S. 3308, the Veteran Voting Support Act of 2008, with Senator KERRY, and our cosponsors: Senators REID, OBAMA, SCHUMER, LEAHY, CLINTON, MURRAY and WYDEN.

This is a simple, straightforward bill that shows our veterans the respect that they deserve. They have supported our nation, some at great risk and sacrifice. If the government is providing services, veterans should receive every opportunity to voice their vote.

More than a year ago, I learned of a controversy that emerged in California—where the Department of Veterans Affairs had been fighting since 2004 to bar voter registration services at a VA facility. Over the last 16 months, we have tried to encourage the VA to establish a fair, nonpartisan, standard policy that provides the best available support to veterans served by VA facilities.

The answers I received from the VA have been conflicting. First, the VA stated that they considered the possi-

bility of following the National Voter Registration Act—but then determined it would be too costly. Given the only resources needed is a photocopy of a voter registration form, I find that hard to believe.

Then this year, Senator KERRY and I had exchanged multiple letters on this issue with the VA. The response then changed. VA officials asserted that they believed that providing support or allowing groups would violate the Hatch Act.

The Hatch Act is a prohibition of partisan political activities conducted by Federal employees, on official time. It has not been interpreted to include nonpartisan voter registration by the Office of Special Counsel, which interprets the Hatch Act. Furthermore, the veterans served by VA facilities are generally not Federal employees.

The VA then argued that nonpartisan voter registration services would cause "disruptions to facility operations."

That claim is even more dubious. Unless "Rock the Vote" comes to VA facilities, voter registration drives are about as tame an activity as you can get.

The circumstances in this situation raise great concern. Our country faces issues of war and peace, challenges in foreign relations, and serious questions as to the treatment of our veteran population.

The most recent Census data we have—from a 2005 report—indicates that more than 20 percent of our veterans are not registered to vote. That means that almost 5 million veterans do not have an opportunity to cast their ballots.

The VA runs a massive program to assist our veterans to heal, as well as ensure that they thrive on their return from military service.

This is true whether the veteran is recently discharged for tours in Iraq, or served in World War II.

A recent report characterized the VA's services as including "a 'safety net' for the many lower-income veterans who have come to depend on it."

The question has emerged: Will this make the right kind of impact? Will this cause more veterans to be registered? The VA serves large numbers of veterans—in a variety of care facilities.

For example, the Veterans Health Administration operates 155 medical centers, 135 nursing homes, 717 ambulatory care and clinic facilities; 45 residential rehabilitation treatment programs, and 209 vet centers.

In total, there are 1,261 total facilities; where as many as 5 million veterans who are not registered to vote may use each year. That strikes me as a critical need unmet.

And it is a rational step for the government to make.

The National Voter Registration Act requires at least as much—if not more—from the States. Every State social service agency and motor vehicle agency is required to assist persons who use their agencies.