hand at the wheel. He has shown extraordinarily sound judgment. He’s always been ready to do whatever he was asked, whatever it took. Most of all, Billy knew who we all worked for: 4 million Kentuckians. For 8 years, Billy has been my right-hand man.

Two years ago, Billy was invaluable to me in my reelection campaign. Once again, he proved himself equal to any challenge. He was the one man who knew everything that was going on and what everyone else was doing. He was and is unflappable, steady, and always confident.

He gave it everything he had—and always with a smile on his face. And it wasn’t easy for him, I know. With a young family at home, he sacrificed much. He’s very fortunate that Holly’s an understanding wife.

More than anyone else, Billy is responsible for fostering the feeling of family in my office. It’s one of the things we’ll miss most about him. He always made staff feel like they’re more than just a group of people in an office. He’s grown close to a lot of them over the years, and they all love him and admire him.

But as tough as this change is for me, I know it’s as tough for Billy too. Here’s a guy who went to the same school from kindergarten through the 12th grade, lived in the same house his whole childhood, and has had the same work e-mail address since we started using them here, making this change for the right reason. When he announced his decision, Billy said, “I love this office, I love the Senate, and I love Kentucky . . . but I love my family more.” And no one can begrudge him that.

So while this is a loss for me, my staff, my colleagues in the Senate, and the many people he’s helped in Kentucky over the years, it is a gain for Billy’s wife Holly, and their two little boys, Bill Jr. and Oliver.

Billy, as usual, you are generous with praise for everyone but yourself. But I’ve been struck by the kind of guy Billy is. You’ve inspired me. Thank you for your service and your friendship.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

SENATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, just as the majority leader started to leave the floor, I said to him, what an amazing 2 years. I just left an interview upstairs where a major network asked me: What do you think you have accomplished over the last 2 years?

I said to him: I can’t speak for what happened over the last 2 years in the Senate; I wasn’t around. But I can tell you that in the 28 years I have been in the House and Senate, I have never seen a more amazing, productive session of Congress. In the Senate, you had to put it into perspective. At the same time we were accomplishing these things, we were facing record numbers of filibusters—more obstacles than ever in history. Yet, when you look at the record that was written over the last 2 years in this Chamber and in the House of Representatives, working with the President, it is nothing short of amazing.

Allow me to go through my checklist here. I am sure others will question some things I put on the list and add some of their own particularly the Senator from Iowa, Senator HARKIN, who certainly is an inspiring leader on so many of these important issues.

First, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. That is what the President came to Washington to initiate to stop this recession and slow down the growth in unemployment. None of us is happy with the state of the economy, but it would have been dramatically worse had we not done that.

Two, Wall Street reform. We looked at the root causes of the recession and said we are going to change the law and add oversight and investigators to stop Wall Street from bringing us another recession some day in the future.

Mr. and Mrs. BLANCHE LINCOLN, who is leaving us, for her leadership on this issue. We are providing nutritious meals to hungry children and increasing the Federal reimbursement rate for school meals so local school health care will not have to absorb the increased cost.

No. 13—here is an issue front and center in my career in the House and Senate—tobacco regulation. The bill we passed calls on the Food and Drug Administration to regulate the manufacture, sale, and promotion of tobacco products. The things we did in this bill, I say to Senator HARKIN, would have
been unthinkable 10 years ago. But we did them to try to keep these tobacco products out of the hands of kids.

No. 14 on my list is something that passed a few hours ago, ratifying the New START treaty. This is what the President was saying was what we needed. We only have one President. We want to give him the authority to keep America safe. We want his word to be good. We want him to engage, to face future alliances under the passage of the New START treaty.

No. 15 is one near and dear to my heart. It was originally introduced by Hillary Clinton, and when she left to join the President’s Cabinet, I asked if I could take up the cause of passing the veterans caregiver assistance bill. In a word, it means those disabled veterans who return home, who are fortunate to have a spouse, a parent, or a member of their family who will sacrifice their own lives to make sure they are comfortable in their homes will receive some help from the government. These are people who get to stay home as disabled veterans and, because someone in the family will stay with them where they have lost a limb or, at considerable expense to our government but in the right, positive environment for our disabled veterans. This bill gives those veteran caregivers a little additional assistance, some respite time, and a modest stipend each month so they can continue to do this invaluable work on behalf of the men and women who sacrifice so much for our country.

No. 16 we passed today as well, the 9/11 Health and Compensation Act. We said so much in tribute to first responders—police, firefighters and others—who came to Ground Zero when they were called. Today we said we were going to stand by them with any illness that they suffer as a result of that experience.

No. 17, repeal of don’t ask, don’t tell. I went to that ceremony today, and I have to tell you, I thought it was one of the most profound experiences I had. To see people who served America, who cared so much for this issue, many of whom have seen their lives wrecked because of discrimination based on their sexual orientation. The Pledge of Allegiance was given by retired Air Force Col. Margaret Cammermeyer. I know her story well because I told it so many times. She was an Air Force nurse who risked her life to save the lives of servicemen in Vietnam who rose through the ranks until one day she was asked by someone she cared who was a lesbian. She was discharged, retired from the service. Never in the course of her military career had anything about her sexual preference had any impact on her service to the Nation. She was wronged, discriminated against because of who she was.

She gave the Pledge of Allegiance today with tears in her eyes and joined all of us applauding President Obama as he finally signed this bill repealing don’t ask, don’t tell.

No. 18 is a bill I worked on, and the most unlikely political odd couple on Capitol Hill, Jeff Sessions. It is the Fair Sentencing Act which reduced the unfair disparity in sentencing between crack and powder cocaine. There are literally thousands of men and women serving time in prison because of this disparity in sentencing. Senator Sessions and I reached an accommodation, an agreement, a compromise on sentencing which brings us closer to the reality of the danger of the narcotics involved. I thank him for his bipartisan cooperation.

No. 19 is the first bill signed by President Obama as President of the United States, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, to try to once and for all end discrimination women in the workplace.

No. 20, the hate crimes prevention bill. That is one I think is absolutely essential to renew the promise in America that we will never discriminate against people based on sexual orientation, race, gender, creed, or national origin. This bill is overdue. The Matthew Shepard family, who helped us pass that bill, was instrumental in moving America forward in the field of human rights.

I am sure Senator HARKIN will add three or four on that list.

When I look back and reflect on 2 years of hard work, it is worth the effort. All the long nights, all the time away from family, some of the frustration, all of the anger, all of it was worth it when the work was done and say in our time here, many of us believe we have helped to move America forward with the work we have done in the Congress.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I listened very carefully to my friend from Illinois as he went down his list. I admit it is a pretty thorough list. I may have had a conver—conversing with another Senator briefly. Did I miss the higher education bill? The list covered everything else, I say to my friend. The Higher Education Act, which historically, I say to Senator DURBIN, in 1992, Senator Kennedy, then the chair of the committee which I now chair, had done a study to see whether direct loans would be better than the indirect loans that go through banks for students going to college.

We had this program, this pilot program. In 1993 and 1994, the pilot program ran. By 1994, the data was in. The Direct Loan Program worked well. It saved tons of money, and the schools liked it, students liked it. Our goal was that in 1995, we were going to then expand it nation wide. Of course, we know what happened in 1995. We lost the Congress. It went to the Republican side.

The Republicans did not want to expand the Direct Loan Program. They wanted to keep it going through the banks. Banks loved it. Who does not like free money? From 1995 on, we never had the opportunity to ever expand the Direct Loan Program and save all this money, until finally when Barack Obama became President and Democrats took over the House and the Senate, we were able to pass it and, as the Senator knows, we signed that into law. I think if I am not mistaken, in February of this past year right after we passed the health care bill, and it was part of the health care bill.

In passing that bill, we went from indirect loans to Direct Loan Program and save $80 billion in 10 years. We took that money and put it in better Pell grants for students.

I say to my friend to illustrate, sometimes it takes a long time around here to get things done. If you persevere and the stars align right, you can get it done. It is also a way of saying to my friend from Illinois, thank you for what you did for food safety. I get a lot of accolades. I just happened to be here as chairman of the committee at the right time to get it through. Anyone who knows anything about this issue knows Senator DURBIN was the Senator who got this going. I always wondered how many years ago.

He said 16 years ago.

There is perseverance, stick to it. When you know what is right and good for this country, do not give up and hang in there. Senator DURBIN hung in there for 16 long years. We finally got the bill done and passed. I think the President will be signing it into law some time before January 5.

A lot fewer people will get sick, a lot more families will be healthy, and our food will be safer because of the efforts of Senator DURBIN. I publicly thank him for all of his work on this bill.

TRIBUTE TO RETIRING SENATORS

Evan Bayh

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, time and time I have come to the floor to give a few remarks about Senators who are retiring and leaving the Senate. They all contributed in their unique way one way or the other to the Senate. They all contributed in their unique way one way or the other to the Senate.

I yield the floor.

Mr. BAYH. Mr. President, time and time I have come to the floor to give a few remarks about Senators who are retiring and leaving the Senate. They all contributed in their unique way one way or the other to the Senate.

Mr. President, time and time I have come to the floor to give a few remarks about Senators who are retiring and leaving the Senate. They all contributed in their unique way one way or the other to the Senate.

Looking back on his 12 years in this body, he spoke about times of national crisis, including after the 9/11 attacks and the Iraq war. He talked about the move towards the Affordable Care Act in 2008. He talked of a time when Senators acted not as Democrats and Republicans but as patriots concerned of doing one thing: doing what is right for the American people. He said that these times of bipartisan action were with the Senate at its very best.

For more than two decades, Senator BAYH has embodied everything that is