The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The clerk will report the nomination.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Nomination of James Donato, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of California.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. I have a cloture motion which has been filed at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of James Donato, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of California.

Harry Reid, Patrick J. Leahy, Benjamin L. Cardin, Mark L. Pryor, Mark Begich, Robert Menendez, Tom Harkin, Amy Klobuchar, Christopher Murphy, Patty Murray, Jon Tester, Richard J. Durbin, Barbara Boxer, Angus S. King, Jr., Claire McCaskill, Richard Blumenthal, Sheldon Whitehouse, Jack Reed.

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum under rule XXII be waived.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I now move to proceed to executive session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

NOMINATION OF BETH LABSON FREEMAN TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 567.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Nomination of Beth Labson Freeman, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of California.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. I have a cloture motion which has been filed at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Beth Labson Freeman, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of California.

Harry Reid, Patrick J. Leahy, Benjamin L. Cardin, Mark L. Pryor, Mark Begich, Robert Menendez, Tom Harkin, Amy Klobuchar, Christopher Murphy, Patty Murray, Jon Tester, Richard J. Durbin, Barbara Boxer, Angus S. King, Jr., Claire McCaskill, Richard Blumenthal, Sheldon Whitehouse, Jack Reed.

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum under rule XXII be waived.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. REID. I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

COMPREHENSIVE VETERANS HEALTH AND BENEFITS AND MILITARY RETIREMENT PAY RESTORATION ACT OF 2014—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

Mr. REID. Is the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 301, S. 1982, now pending?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion to proceed is pending.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. I have a cloture motion which has been filed at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 301, S. 1982, the Comprehensive Veterans Health Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act.

Harry Reid, Bernard Sanders, Tom Harkin, Brian Schatz, Mary L. Landrieu, Jack Reed, Jeanne Shaheen, Tim Kaine, Christopher A. Coons, Patrick J. Leahy, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Joe Donnelly, Jon Tester, Barbara Boxer, Richard Blumenthal, Sherrod Brown, Barbara A. Mikulski.

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent the mandatory quorum required under rule XXII be waived and that the cloture vote on the motion to proceed occur following the disposition of the Freeman nomination and the resumption of legislative session.

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

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

MORNING BUSINESS

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

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

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN REAUTHORIZATION ACT ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, 1 year ago today, the Senate came together in the best tradition of the Chamber to pass the Leahy-Crapo Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act, including the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, with a strong bipartisan vote. It marked the culmination of years of collaboration with survivors and the victim services professionals who work with them every day. It also marked an historic step to protect all victims, regardless of their immigration status, their sexual orientation or their membership in an Indian tribe. As I have said countless times on the floor of this Chamber, ''a victim is a victim is a victim,'' and the bill the Senate passed 1 year ago today was a reflection of that truth.

In passing this historic VAWA reauthorization, the Senate showed that we still can act in a bipartisan way and put crime victims above politics. Senators CRAPO and MURKOWSKI were steadfast partners in that effort and listened to the call from thousands of survivors of violence and law enforcement by supporting a fully-inclusive, lifesaving bill.

In the year since its passage, the important changes we made to the Violence Against Women Act have made lives better. The new nondiscrimination provisions included in the law are ensuring that all victims, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, have access to lifesaving programs and cannot be turned away. I was discouraged by the opposition of some to these inclusive provisions last year, especially when the research so clearly underscored the need to update the law to protect the most vulnerable populations. I am proud, however, that after all was said and done, we stayed true to our core value of equal protection and these provisions were enacted.

We also made vital improvements to the law to address the epidemic of violence against Native women. Three out of five Native women have been assaulted by their spouses or intimate partners. On some reservations, Native American women are murdered at a rate more than 10 times the national average. Think about those statistics for a minute. They are chilling. Native women are being brutalized and killed at rates that shock the conscience. We simply could not continue to ignore

this ongoing and devastating violence, and I am proud that as a country we said ''enough.''

A key provision in the Leahy-Crapo bill, now law, recognizes tribes' special domestic violence criminal jurisdiction to prosecute non-Indian offenders who commit acts of domestic violence against an Indian on tribal land. This provision also faced strong opposition by some but we held firm in the belief that a tribal government should be able to hold accountable those who commit these heinous crimes against its people on its land. I was so proud when voices from around the country—Indian and non-Indian—joined our message that this was a VAWA to protect all victims and refused to give in. With their unified support, we beat back efforts to strip out this critical provision. That is why I was particularly pleased to see the launch of the new pilot project last week in which three tribes—the Umatilla, the Pascua Yaqui, and the Tulalip—will begin to exercise this authority we fought so hard to protect. I ask unanimous consent that a recent Washington Post article highlighting this project be printed in the RECORD.

Other key provisions of the new law include funding to help law enforcement and victim service providers reduce domestic violence homicides, including in my home State of Vermont. It is leading to more investigation and prosecution of rape and sexual assault crimes and a greater focus on these issues on college campuses. It is also helping eliminate backlogs of untested rape kits to help those victims receive justice and security promptly.

Unfortunately, one provision that was not included in the final VAWA bill was a modest increase in the number of U visas available to immigrant victims of domestic violence and other crimes. These visas are an important law enforcement tool that encourages immigrant victims to report crime, making us all safer. I reluctantly agreed to remove this provision and instead ensured its inclusion in the comprehensive immigration reform bill the Senate passed last year. As the House considers ways to move on that important issue, I urge them to include an increase in U visas so that all victims of domestic violence will be protected.

The Violence Against Women Act is an example of how the Federal Government, in cooperation with State and local communities, can help solve problems. By providing new tools and resources to communities all around the country, we have helped bring the crimes of rape and domestic violence out of the shadows. There is much we can learn from that effort as we consider legislation that should similarly rise above politics.

After the Senate passed the bill last year, I mentioned a tragic incident that had just occurred. A man shot and killed two women waiting to pass through metal detectors at a courthouse, where he was stalking another victim. Two male police officers also were struck by bullets but were saved by their bulletproof vests. At that time, I urged this body to reauthorize the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program so that more of our law enforcement officials can be protected. Sadly, a year later, that effort remains incomplete.

Before I came to the Senate, I spent years in local law enforcement and have great respect for the men and women who protect us every day. When I hear Senators say that we should not provide Federal assistance, we should not help officers get the protection they need with bulletproof vests, or that we should not help the families of fallen public safety officers, I strongly disagree.

In our Federal system, we can help and when we can, we should help. That is what programs like the Violence Against Women Act are all about. Despite our different political perspectives, most of us came to the Senate with the goal of helping people. We must be able to find common ground to do that. I hope that this body can again come together to protect the American people and support law enforcement like we did 1 year ago today when we passed the Leahy-Crapo Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act and the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Washington Post, Feb. 8, 2014]

NEW LAW OFFERS PROTECTION TO ABUSED NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN

(By Sari Horwitz)

WHITE EARTH NATION, MINN.—Linda Davidson. Lisa Brunner remembers the first time she saw her stepfather beat her mother. She was 4 years old, cowering under the table here on the Ojibwe reservation, when her stepfather grabbed his shotgun from the rack. She heard her mother scream, ''No, David! No!''

''He starts beating my mother over the head and I could hear the sickening thud of the butt of the shotgun over her head,'' Brunner said. ''Then he put the gun back on the rack and called her a bitch. He slammed the bedroom door and sat down on the squeaky bed. And then I heard the thud-thud of his cowboy boots as he laid down, squeaking again, and he went to sleep.''

There were many more beatings over the years, Brunner said. Twenty years later, she said, she was brutally assaulted by her own husband on this same Indian reservation, an enormous swath of Minnesota prairie that has seen its share of sorrow for generations.

An estimated one in three Native American women are assaulted or raped in their lifetimes, and three out of five experience domestic violence. But in the cases of Brunner and her mother, the assailants were white, not Native American, and that would turn out to make all the difference.

Lisa Brunner of the Ojibwe tribe in Minnesota speaks on the cycle of sexual violence Native American women, including herself, have faced.

For decades, when a Native American woman has been assaulted or raped by a man who is non-Indian, she has had little or no recourse. Under long-standing law in Indian country, reservations are sovereign nations with their own police departments and courts in charge of prosecuting crimes on tribal land. But Indian police have lacked the legal authority to arrest non-Indian men who commit acts of domestic violence against native women on reservations, and tribal courts have lacked the authority to prosecute the men.

President Obama, joined by Vice President Biden, members of women's organizations, law enforcement officials, tribal leaders, survivors, advocates and members of Congress, signs the Violence Against Women Act in March.

Last year, Congress approved a law—promoted by the Obama administration—that for the first time will allow Indian tribes to prosecute certain crimes of domestic violence committed by non-Indians in Indian country. The Justice Department on Thursday announced it had chosen three tribes for a pilot project to assert the new authority.

While the law has been praised by tribal leaders, native women and the administration as a significant first step, it still falls short of protecting all Indian women from the epidemic of violence they face on tribal lands.

The new authority, which will not go into effect for most of the country's 566 federally recognized Indian tribes until March 2015, covers domestic violence committed by non-Indian husbands and boyfriends, but it does not cover sexual assault or rape committed by non-Indians who are ''strangers'' to their victims. It also does not extend to native women in Alaska.

Proponents of the law acknowledge that it was drawn narrowly to win support in Congress, particularly from Republican lawmakers who argued that non-native suspects would not receive a fair trial in the tribal justice system.

For their part, native women say they have long been ill-served by state and federal law. U.S. attorneys, who already have large caseloads, are often hundreds of miles away from rural reservations. It can take hours or days for them to respond to allegations, if they respond at all, tribal leaders say. Native women also have to navigate a complex maze of legal jurisdictions.

''There are tribal communities where state police have no jurisdiction and federal law enforcement has jurisdiction but is distant and often unable to respond,'' said Thomas J. Perrelli, a former associate attorney general who was one of the administration's chief proponents of the amendment. ''There are tribal communities where the federal government has no jurisdiction but state law enforcement, which has jurisdiction, does not intervene. And there are still other tribal lands where there is a dispute about who, if anyone, has jurisdiction. All of this has led to an inadequate response to the plight of many Native American women.''

More than 75 percent of residents on Indian reservations in the United States are non-Indians. In at least 86 percent of the reported cases of rape or sexual assault of American Indian and Alaska native women, both on and off reservations, the victims say their attackers were non-native men, according to the Justice Department.

'NOT ENROLLED'

The loophole in the American Indian justice system that effectively provides immunity to non-Indians is the story of a patchwork of laws, treaties and Supreme Court decisions over generations.

At the root of the confusion about Indian jurisdiction is the historical tension over Indian land. As American settlers pushed Native Americans off their tribal lands and then renegotiated treaties to guarantee tribes a homeland, large areas of the reservations were opened for white families to homestead.

That migration led to the modern-day reservation, where Indians and non-Indians often live side by side, one farm or ranch home belonging to a white family, the next one belonging to an Indian family. It is a recipe for conflict over who is in charge and who has legal jurisdiction over certain crimes.

''The public safety issues in Indian country are so complicated,'' said Deputy Associate Attorney General Sam Hirsch, one of the Justice Department officials who focus on tribal justice issues. ''No one would have ever designed a system from scratch to look like the system that has come down to us through the generations.''

Over the past 200 years, there have been dramatic swings in Indian-country jurisdiction and the extent of tribal powers.

In 1978, in a case widely known in Indian country as ''Oliphant,'' the Supreme Court held that Indian tribes had no legal jurisdiction to prosecute non-Indians who committed crimes on reservations. Even a violent crime committed by a non-Indian husband against his Indian wife in their home on the reservation—as Brunner said happened to her on the White Earth Nation reservation—could not be prosecuted by the tribe.

The court said it was up to Congress to decide who had that authority.

''We are not unaware of the prevalence of non-Indian crime on today's reservations, which the tribes forcefully argue requires the ability to try non-Indians,'' the court said. ''But these are considerations for Congress to weigh in deciding whether Indian tribes should finally be authorized to try non-Indians.''

Congress took no action for 35 years.

As a result, native women who were assaulted were often told there was nothing tribal police could do for them. If the perpetrator was white and—in the lingo of the tribes—''not enrolled'' in the tribal nation, there would be no recourse.

''Over the years, what happened is that white men, non-native men, would go onto a Native American reservation and go hunting—rape, abuse and even murder a native woman, and there's absolutely nothing anyone could do to them,'' said Kimberly Norris Guerrero, an actress, tribal advocate and native Oklahoman who is Cherokee and Colville Indian. ''They got off scot-free.''

In 2009, shortly after taking office, Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. was briefed by two FBI agents on the issue of violence on Indian reservations.

They told him about the soaring rates of assault and rape and the fact that on some reservations, the murder rate for native women is 10 times the national average.

''The way they phrased it was, if you are a young girl born on an Indian reservation, there's a 1–in–3 chance or higher that you're going to be abused during the course of your life,'' Holder said in an interview. ''I actually did not think the statistics were accurate. I remember asking, 'check on those numbers.' ''

Officials came back to Holder and told him the statistics were right: Native women experience the highest rates of assault of any group in the United States.

''The numbers are just staggering,'' Holder said. ''It's deplorable. And it was at that point I said, this is an issue that we have to deal with. I am simply not going to accept the fact it is acceptable for women to be abused at the rates they are being abused on native lands.''

MEASURING TAPE

Diane Millich, left, joins Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. and Deborah Parker, vice chairwoman of the Tulalip Tribes of Washington state, at the bill-signing ceremony in March.

Diane Millich grew up on the Southern Ute Indian reservation, nestled in the mountain meadows of southwestern Colorado. When she was 26, she fell in love and married a non-Indian man who lived in a town just beyond the reservation.

Not long after they were married, Millich's husband moved in with her and began to push and slap her, she said. The violence escalated, and the abuse, she said, became routine. She called the tribal police and La Plata County authorities many times but was told they had no jurisdiction in the case.

One time after her husband beat her, Millich said, he picked up the phone and called the sheriff to report the incident himself to show that he couldn't be arrested, she said. He knew, she said, there was nothing the sheriff could do.

''After a year of abuse and more than 100 incidents of being slapped, kicked, punched and living in terror, I left for good,'' Millich said.

The brutality, she said, increased after she filed for a divorce.

''Typically, when you look backwards at crimes of domestic violence, if less serious violence is not dealt with by the law enforcement system, it leads to more serious violence, which eventually can lead to homicide,'' said Hirsch, the deputy associate attorney general.

One day when Millich was at work, she saw her ex-husband pull up in a red truck. He was carrying a 9mm gun.

''My ex-husband walked inside our office and told me, 'You promised until death do us part, so death it shall be,' '' Millich recalled. A co-worker saved Millich's life by pushing her out of the way and taking a bullet in his shoulder.

It took hours to decide who had jurisdiction over the shooting.

Investigators at the scene had to use a measuring tape to determine where the gun was fired and where Millich's colleague had been struck, and a map to figure out whether the state, federal government or tribe had jurisdiction.

The case ended up going to the closest district attorney. Because Millich's husband had never been arrested or charged for domestic abuse on tribal land, he was treated as a first-time offender, Millich said, and after trying to flee across state lines was offered a plea of aggravated driving under revocation.

''It was like his attempt to shoot me and the shooting of my co-worker did not happen,'' Millich said. ''The tribe wanted to help me, but couldn't because of the law. In the end, he was right. The law couldn't touch him.''

SECTION 904

Last year, Millich and other American Indian women came to Washington to tell their stories to congressional leaders. They joined tribal leaders in lobbying for the passage of the 288–page reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, which included language proposed by the Justice Department that for the first time would allow tribal courts to prosecute non-Indians who assaulted native women on tribal lands. It would also allow the courts to issue and enforce protective orders, whether the perpetrator is Indian or non-Indian.

Opponents of the provision, known as Section 904, argued that non-native defendants would not be afforded a fair trial by American Indian tribes. In the case of Alaska, the Senate excluded Native Alaskan women because of especially complicated issues involving jurisdiction.

At a town hall meeting, Sen. Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa) said that ''under the laws of our land, you've got to have a jury that is a reflection of society as a whole.''

''On an Indian reservation, it's going to be made up of Indians, right?'' Grassley said. ''So the non-Indian doesn't get a fair trial.''

Sen. John Cornyn (R-Tex.), another opponent, said the Violence Against Women Act was ''being held hostage by a single provision that would take away fundamental constitutional rights for certain American citizens.''

The bill passed the Senate last February but was held up by House Republicans over Section 904. They argued that tribal courts were not equipped to take on the new responsibilities and non-Indian constituents would be deprived of their constitutional rights without being able to appeal to federal courts.

''When we talk about the constitutional rights, don't women on tribal lands deserve their constitutional right of equal protection and not to be raped and battered and beaten and dragged back onto native lands because they know they can be raped with impunity?'' Rep. Gwen Moore (D-Wis.) argued on the floor.

Underlying the opposition, some congressmen said, was a fear of retribution by the tribes for the long history of mistreatment by white Americans.

With the support of Rep. Tom Cole (R-Okla.), a member of the Chickasaw Nation, the House accepted the bill containing Section 904 on a vote of 229 to 196. On March 7, President Obama signed the bill with Millich, Holder and Native American advocates at his side.

The Justice Department has chosen three Indian tribes— the Pascua Yaqui Tribe of Arizona, the Tulalip Tribes of Washington state and the Umatilla tribes of Oregon— to be the first in the nation to exercise their new criminal jurisdiction over certain crimes of domestic and dating violence.

''What we have done, I think, has been game-changing,'' Holder said. ''But there are still attitudes that have to be changed. There are still resources that have to be directed at the problem. There's training that still needs to go on. We're really only at the beginning stages of reversing what is a horrible situation.''

Lisa Brunner and her daughter, Faith Roy, fold clothes at home on the White Earth Indian reservation in Minnesota.

SLIVER OF A FULL MOON

Last summer, several Native American survivors of domestic violence from around the country put on a play, ''Sliver of a Full Moon,'' in Albuquerque. The play documented the story of the abuse and rape of Native American women by non-Indians and the prolonged campaign to bring them justice.

Using the technique of traditional Indian storytelling, Mary Kathryn Nagle, a lawyer and member of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma, wove together their emotional tales of abuse with the story of their fight to get Washington to pay attention.

Millich and Brunner played themselves, and actors played the roles of members of Congress, federal employees and tribal police officers who kept answering desperate phone calls from abused native women by saying over and over again, ''We can't do nothin',?'' ''We don't have jurisdiction,'' and ''He's white and he ain't enrolled.''

Brunner portrayed herself in a play that told the story of the abuse and rape of Native American women by non-Indians and the campaign to bring them justice.

By that time, Brunner's intergenerational story of violence and abuse had taken a painful turn. Her youngest daughter, 17, had been abducted by four white men who drove onto

the reservation one summer night. One of them raped her, Brunner said.

It was the real-life version of author Louise Erdrich's acclaimed fictional account of the rape of an Ojibwe woman by a non-Indian in her 2012 book, ''The Round House.'' In both the real and the unrelated fictional case, the new congressional authority would not give the tribe jurisdiction to arrest and prosecute the suspects, because they were not previously known to the victim.

Last week, inside her home on the frigid White Earth Nation, which was dotted by vast snowy cornfields and hundreds of frozen lakes, Brunner brought out a colorful watercolor she had painted of three native women standing in the woods under a glowing full moon. The painting was the inspiration for the title of Nagle's play, she said, but it's also a metaphor for the new law.

''We have always known that non-Indians can come onto our lands and they can beat, rape and murder us and there is nothing we can do about it,'' Brunner said. ''Now, our tribal officers have jurisdiction for the first time to do something about certain crimes.''

''But,'' she added, ''it is just the first sliver of the full moon that we need to protect us.''

GI EDUCATION BENEFITS FAIRNESS ACT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I introduced a bill this week that would fix a small problem with the Post-9/11 GI bill that is creating big problems for some servicemember and veteran families.

In 2010, SFC Angela Dees sent her son, Christopher Webb, to the University of Illinois at Chicago after receiving approval from DOD that she could transfer her GI benefits to pay for his education.

Dees first enlisted in the Army in 1998. At the time, she was married, and Christopher was her stepson. But after a divorce, she went to court and obtained sole legal custody, raising him from a 2-year-old into a young man. Since she never formally adopted him he was legally considered her ward.

But no matter how you slice it, Angela Dees is Chris's mother, and he is her son.

But halfway through Chris's first year at UIC, he received a letter from the VA telling him that he could no longer use his mother's GI benefits. The letter explained that he needed to repay the first year's benefits, $30,000.

What happened?

It turns out they were caught in a bureaucratic wrinkle with enormous implications for this family. Foster children and legal wards like Chris are considered dependents by the Department of Defense, but not by the VA.

Servicemembers can pass along their GI Bill benefits to their spouses or children if they re-up for 4 more years. So Angela did that. In good faith, she signed an Army contract for 4 more years so that she could give her son a college education.

But the left hand of government did not know what the right hand of government was doing. So when it came time for the VA to pay Chris's tuition bill, VA said no. In their case, neither of them had the money to repay the VA, so Chris had to drop out of school and get a job in order to pay it back.

According to DOD, at least 25 students are in the same boat—approved by DOD, they enrolled in school only to have their benefits revoked by the VA when the bill came due.

It is an expensive bureaucratic nightmare for these families, and it should be fixed.

The Post-9/11 GI bill is the most comprehensive education benefits package for servicemembers since 1944. It was the first time we granted servicemembers the opportunity to transfer some or all of their earned benefits to family members.

But in this small way it is clear that the benefit does not match our intent.

The GI Education Benefits Fairness Act, S. 2014, will fix that.

This bill is very simple: it will align the definition of an ''eligible child'' at the DOD and the VA so that wards and foster children also qualify, and it will offer retroactive payment to those whose benefits were revoked because of the original discrepancy.

The bill has the support of many veteran and military advocacy groups: the Military Officers Association of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, Student Veterans of America, the National Military Family Association, the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, the Association of the United States Navy, and the Foster Parent Association of America.

In the House, Representatives BILL FOSTER and CATHY MCMORRIS RODGERS are leading a companion bill in a bipartisan effort.

These servicemembers have made good on their obligations to our country. And the GI Education Benefits Fairness Act allows us to make good on the promises we have made to them.

I hope my colleagues will join me in support of this important bill.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I wish to discuss the circumstances many unemployed families face.

Millions of Americans have lost their jobs through no fault of their own and now face serious financial consequences.

Many families are having trouble paying the rent or their mortgage, or they are struggling to buy necessities for their children.

On February 6, the Senate voted, again, to try to extend unemployment benefits for the long-term unemployed who are down on their luck.

But we still fell one vote short. We needed one more Republican.

I hope one of my colleagues on the Republican side will join us soon to get that legislation over the top and help folks who have been hurting since the first of the year. Getting this benefit extended is only one of the problems that unemployed families have faced in my State.

Thousands of unemployed Floridians have had their benefits delayed by flaws in the State's new automated unemployment system.

The website is called ''Florida CONNECT.''

But ironically it has left many Floridians disconnected.

We started hearing about some of the problems people were facing soon after the website was launched late last year.

When I started hearing about these reports, I asked U.S. Labor Secretary Thomas Perez to investigate.

And I am pleased to report that the Department of Labor is now working with the State to sort out who should be getting their checks.

I am told most of the people who were stuck in this mess have either started getting the benefits they deserve or have received a letter directing them to a human being they can talk to and resolve possible problems with their applications.

I trust that the State of Florida will hold anyone responsible for that flawed website completely accountable for this mess.

In the meantime I hope that we here in the Congress will do our part to help folks that are down and out and pass the extension of benefits for long-term unemployed.

THE SOCHI OLYMPICS

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, as we speak, the 22nd Winter Olympics are well under way in Sochi, Russia.

Let me first congratulate the organizers on a fantastic opening ceremony. It really was something to see the depth and breadth of Russia's rich history and culture on display for the entire world to admire.

The Olympics put a powerful spotlight on Russia—a spotlight Russia's president has so vigorously sought. But just as this attention is educating the world about Russia's invaluable contributions to music, science, and sport, it is also highlighting the gaps between Russia's previous commitment to fundamental freedoms and the reality on the ground.

There is no question that in recent years we have seen Russia move towards a less open, less pluralistic society. But we cannot lose hope yet. Change is possible and Russia's beleaguered but tenacious civil society offers much hope for the future. We continue to expect Russia's leadership to uphold basic and universal human rights. Now there are other countries where the situation is much worse, but Russia is a powerful global example and should be committed to upholding fundamental freedoms much like Germany or the United Kingdom, its European neighbors. But unlike those governments, Russia's current leadership wantonly violates international commitments and seems bent on trying to redefine a settled consensus on the universality of human rights. We cannot let that go unchallenged.

Much has been said about Russia's 2013 law prohibiting so-called gay propaganda. Some have pointed to the fact