

Jane Hammer and the State coordinator Joani Byer also contributed a significant amount of time and effort to help the team to the national finals.

The We the People—The Citizen and the Constitution Program is the most extensive educational program in the country developed specifically to educate young people about the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The 3-day national competition simulates a congressional hearing in which students' oral presentations are judged on the basis of their knowledge of constitutional principles and their ability to apply them to historical and contemporary issues. Administered by the Center for Civic Education, the We the People—Program, now in its ninth academic year, has reached more than 70,400 teachers and 22,600,000 students nationwide at the upper elementary, middle, and high school levels. Members of Congress and their staff enhance the program by discussing current constitutional issues with students and teachers.

The We the People—Program provides an excellent opportunity for students to gain an informed perspective on the significance of the U.S. Constitution and its place in our history and our lives. I wish these students the best of luck in the national finals and look forward to their continued success in the years ahead.●

WATER RESOURCE RESEARCH ACT

● Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I am pleased that today the Senate will pass H.R. 1743, a bill to reauthorize the Water Resource Research Act, as amended by the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. This is a small, but vitally important piece of legislation that gained unanimous support in the House of Representatives, as well as the Environment and Public Works Committee here in the Senate. I want to thank Senator KEMPTHORNE and Senator REID, along with Chairman CHAFEE and Senator BAUCUS for working with me to ensure the swift passage of this legislation. Their hard work, and that of their staffs, is greatly appreciated.

H.R. 1743 extends the authorization for the water resources research institutes program through the year 2000. The water resources research institutes program is a vital Federal/State water research, education and information transfer partnership. This program supports a network of institutes at the land grant colleges in each of the 50 States, 3 trust territories and the District of Columbia. These institutes are the primary link between the academic community, the water-related personnel of the Federal and State government, and the private sector. The institutes provide a mechanism to promote State, regional and national coordination of water resources research and training, as well as information transfer. This is a very productive program. In fiscal year 1995, the Federal appropriation for the water institutes—under \$5 million—leveraged approxi-

mately \$65 million from State, private and other sources to support the institutes research and training activities.

Federal regulations and programs designed to solve water problems have their primary impact at the State and local level. State and local governments are in a far better position to tailor solutions to local water problems than the Federal Government. Programs such as the water resources research institutes are an efficient and effective way for the Federal Government to assist States to conduct research and solve problems in the water resources field. In administering the State water resources research institute program, the Interior Department and the Geological Survey distribute funds equally among all the institutes. The State institutes then award research funds through a competitive, peer review process. Institutes have advisory panels comprised of local, State, and Federal water officials, representatives from water user groups and other interested parties, which develop yearly research priorities for their States and review the allocation of funds among various competing projects. This is the true strength of this program. Individual State institutes are able to focus grants on research that addresses the most pressing water problems in that State. There have been efforts made to strengthen the competition for funding between the individual water institutes. I have serious concerns about that. We must fund this program at a level that allows us to maintain the network of institutes in every State. In addition, we must preserve the role of the advisory panels in each State, continuing to allow each State to determine the research agenda for themselves. I would hope the Department of Interior would not impose new restrictions on State water resources research programs in the future.

In addition to the core program, I am pleased the bill before us contains an authorization for a second program focused on regional issues. I amended the House bill to include this important program, which will allow the institutes to conduct research of regional, interstate issues. Increasingly the water issues we're asking States to deal with are of a regional, interjurisdictional nature. The bill as amended in committee reauthorizes the section 104(g) program to support this needed interdisciplinary research and analysis necessary for assessing regional and interstate water resource problems.

Finally, Mr. President, this bill takes a realistic look at future funding. This bill funds the institute programs at a level more in line with historical appropriations, reducing the current authorization by more than 40 percent below the current authorized level.

This is a good bill, a good program, and I'm pleased the Senate is moving ahead with passage today. I'm hopeful the House will agree to our changes quickly and we can get this bill signed into law without delay. Thanks again to the leadership of the Environment

and Public Works Committee for working with me on this legislation.

COMMEMORATING THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CHERNOBYL TRAGEDY

● Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I rise today to solemnly commemorate the tenth anniversary of the worst nuclear accident since the dawn of the nuclear age.

On April 26, 1986, a flawed structural design and operator error caused a sudden power surge within reactor number four at the V.I. Lenin atomic power plant in Chernobyl, Ukraine.

The resulting chemical explosion vaporized nuclear fuel, melted the reactor's substandard shell and released into the atmosphere a gigantic, 180-ton cloud of deadly radioactive iodine, cesium and other lethal isotopes—containing 200 times the amount of radioactive material emitted during the atomic blasts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Within a 4-month period, 31 power plant employees and cleanup workers died of acute radiation poisoning. Tens of thousands of other Ukrainian and Belarusian men, women and children suffered radiation sickness. Invisible fallout—detected as far away as California—contaminated forever more than 10 million acres of nearby forests and farmland, permanently poisoning the local food chain.

When the magnitude and the severity of the catastrophe became clear, close to 200,000 people were hastily and permanently evacuated from the rich, fertile land which was their home for generations. The Chernobyl area—once lush with old-growth forests rich in mushrooms, berries and other medicinal herbs—is now a 30 kilometer dead zone.

Human habitation is strictly forbidden.

A decaying, 24-story concrete tomb known as the sarcophagus now encases the destroyed reactor, serving as a grim reminder of this dark page in human history.

A decade later, those affected continue to struggle with the lingering health effects. The incidence of adolescent thyroid cancer throughout northern Ukraine and nearby Belarus is an astounding 200 percent higher than average, due in part to the consumption of poisoned milk.

Already 800 children have contracted the disease, and experts say that as many as 5,000 will develop it.

The incidence of radiation-related birth defects in the region has doubled. A team of British and Russian scientists recently concluded that genetic DNA mutations caused by radiation poisoning are being passed along to a generation of children who did not even exist at the time of the accident.

Whether these malformations will affect the future health of these children is a mystery.

Many surviving Chernobyl victims also suffer from a myriad of psychological disorders, more difficult to identify and treat but every bit as harmful as the physiological effects of radiation.

Sadly, a recent study comparing mortality rates before and after the disaster places the total number of fatalities at roughly 32,000.

Despite these disturbing findings, we really know very little.

Information on radiation exposure is incomplete and unreliable, and many of those affected have moved or relocated hampering study efforts. Others may suffer from yet-to-be diagnosed diseases caused by prolonged exposure to unsafe levels of background radiation.

It is unlikely that we will ever know the true scope of this tragedy.

Though two of Chernobyl's four nuclear units remain operational, I am pleased that President Clinton and Ukrainian President Lenoid Kuchma agreed to an accord earlier this year to close the facility completely by the year 2000.

I am also pleased that the United States is committed to improving international nuclear reactor safety.

I am hopeful that more can be done for the afflicted region, and was heartened by the serious dialog at last week's G-7 nuclear safety summit in Moscow.

These are all important steps toward putting this devastating tragedy behind the Ukrainian people.

I also want to pay tribute to the compassion of the Ukrainian-Americans who have remained steadfast in their support for Chernobyl's victims.

Mr. President, the legacy of the Chernobyl disaster extends beyond nationalistic and ethnic boundaries and reaches all humanity.

Indeed, fallout from the accident affected 5 million people and set off monitors throughout the Northern Hemisphere.

Radiation knows no borders.

Here in the United States, I am comforted by the knowledge that because of our superior design and safety standards a Chernobyl-type event is, for all practicable purposes, an impossibility.

The Chernobyl facility never would have been permitted to open under our regulations.

Nonetheless, we can never be too vigilant in our efforts to ensure that nuclear power plants are operated in the safest possible manner.

As my colleagues in this body know, I have long believed that there exists an inherent conflict of interest in our nuclear regulatory system that requires the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to sit in judgment of itself.

NRC's two functions—providing day-to-day oversight and investigating serious events—are incompatible in my view.

For this reason, I have asked the General Accounting Office to look into

the extent to which this conflict is responsible for events and accidents at nuclear plants.

I also propose that we remove the investigatory functions from the NRC, and give these functions to an impartial, truly independent nuclear safety board.

This watchdog would have broad authority to look into all circumstances surrounding any accident and to lay blame where it rightfully belongs—whether it is the utility, the reactor manufacturer, or the NRC.

By removing the structural conflict which currently exists within the NRC, it is my hope that we can regain the public's confidence and provide the utmost degree of safety to all Americans.

I look forward to working with my colleagues as we strive to restore needed objectivity to the oversight process.

Mr. President, the 10th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster is more than just a reminder of the potential cost of nuclear energy.

It is a call to us, our Nation's elective representatives, to work together to ensure the safe operation of nuclear power, both domestically and internationally, for our children and our grandchildren.

Let us not watch this day pass without thoroughly and carefully examining our current nuclear regulatory system. All of humanity is depending on us. ●

AUTHORIZATION FOR THE USE OF THE CAPITOL GROUNDS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H. Con. Res. 166, which has just been received from the House of Representatives.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 166) authorizing the use of the Capitol Grounds for the Washington for Jesus 1996 prayer rally.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the concurrent resolution be considered and agreed to and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

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

The concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 166) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I thank the distinguished ranking member of the Rules Committee, Mr. FORD. I raise this matter in my capacity as chairman of the Rules Committee. We did not have time, given the nature of the schedule, to take it up in the Rules Committee but both sides have cleared this.

I also thank the distinguished majority leader and the Senator from Missouri, [Mr. ASHCROFT], for their cooperation and support.

COMMEMORATING THE 1996 NATIONAL PEACE OFFICERS MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. KEMPTHORNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Senate Resolution 251 submitted earlier today by myself.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 251) to commemorate and acknowledge the dedication and sacrifice made by the men and women who have lost their lives while serving as law enforcement officers.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the immediate consideration of the resolution?

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. KEMPTHORNE. I ask unanimous consent the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and that any statements relating to the resolution appear at the appropriate place in the RECORD.

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

So the resolution (S. Res. 251) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

The resolution with its preamble is as follows:

S. RES. 251

Whereas, the well-being of all citizens of this country is preserved and enhanced as a direct result of the vigilance and dedication of law enforcement personnel;

Whereas, more than 500,000 men and women, at great risk to their personal safety, presently serve their fellow citizens in their capacity as guardians of the peace;

Whereas, peace officers are the front line in preserving our children's right to receive an education in a crime-free environment that is all too often threatened by the insidious fear caused by violence in schools;

Whereas, 162 peace officers lost their lives in the performance of their duty in 1995, and a total of 13,575 men and women have now made that supreme sacrifice;

Whereas, every year 1 in 9 officers is assaulted, 1 in 25 is injured, and 1 in 4,000 is killed in the line of duty;

Whereas, on May 15, 1996, more than 15,000 peace officers are expected to gather in our nation's Capital to join with the families of their recently fallen comrades to honor them and all others before them: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That May 15, 1996, is hereby designated as "National Peace Officers Memorial Day" for the purpose of recognizing all peace officers slain in the line of duty. The President is authorized and requested to issue a proclamation calling upon the people of the United States to observe this day with the appropriate ceremonies and respect.