

Rules and Administration will meet in SR-301, Russell Senate Office Building, on Wednesday, March 25, 1998 at 9:30 a.m. to receive testimony on the Federal Election Commission's budget authorization request for FY99.

For further information concerning this hearing, please contact Bruce Kasold of the Rules Committee staff at 224-3448.

#### AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

##### COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Armed Services be authorized to meet on Thursday, March 19, 1998, at 10 a.m., in open session, to receive testimony on NATO enlargement.

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

##### COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation be authorized to meet on Thursday, March 19, 1998, at 9:30 a.m. on tobacco legislation (Governors/retailers).

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

##### COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources be granted permission to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 19, for purposes of conducting a full committee hearing on which is scheduled to begin at 9:30 a.m. The purpose of this hearing is to receive testimony on S. 1488 and accompanying Senate amendment No. 1618, legislation to ratify an agreement between the Aleut Corporation and the United States of America to exchange land rights received under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act for certain land interests on Adak Island, and for other purposes; and S. 1670, a bill to amend the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act to provide for selection of lands by certain veterans of the Vietnam era.

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

##### COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Judiciary be authorized to hold an executive business meeting during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 19, 1998, at 5:15 p.m., in the Vice President's office of the United States Capitol Building.

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

##### COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Labor and Human Resources be authorized to meet for a hearing on Health Insurance Portability and Ac-

countability Act of 1996: First Year Implementation Concerns during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 19, 1998, at 10:00 a.m.

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

##### COMMITTEE ON RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Rules and Administration be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 19, 1998 beginning at 8:30 a.m. until business is completed, to conduct an oversight hearing on the FY99 budget and operations of the Smithsonian Institution, the Kennedy Center, and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

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

##### SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Select Committee on Intelligence be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 19, 1998 at 2:30 p.m. to hold a closed hearing on intelligence matters.

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

##### SUBCOMMITTEE ON ANTITRUST, BUSINESS RIGHTS, AND COMPETITION

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on Antitrust, Business Rights, and Competition, of the Senate Judiciary Committee, be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, March 19, 1998 at 2:00 p.m. to hold a hearing in Room 226, Senate Dirksen Building, on: "International Aviation Alliances."

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

##### SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces of the Committee on Armed Services be authorized to meet on Thursday, March 19, 1998, at 2:30 p.m. in open/closed session, to receive testimony on the Department of Energy's Science-Based Stockpile Stewardship and Management Program in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 1999 and the Future Years Defense Program.

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

#### ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

##### POW/MIA COOPERATION FROM FORMER EASTERN BLOC NATIONS

• Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire. Mr. President, as you know, earlier this week the full Senate began to deliberate expanding the NATO treaty to include the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary. While I have already presented some opening remarks on the floor about my concerns with moving forward now on this matter, I want to

update my colleagues on a closely related issue which I personally think has some degree of relevance to what we are considering.

In July, 1997, I was pleased to be a leader of a delegation to Prague and Warsaw whose primary mission was to seek information about missing American servicemen from the Cold War period. I was joined on this trip by my House colleague, Congressman SAM JOHNSON of Texas—himself a former POW from Vietnam—and also by one of our former Ambassadors to the Soviet Union, Malcolm Toon. Together, we are all members of a Joint Commission with Russia on the POW and MIA issue which was established by President Bush and President Yeltsin in 1992. One of our goals last summer was to broaden our search to the former communist Eastern Bloc nations who were allied with North Vietnam, North Korea, and the Soviet Union during the Cold War period.

During our trip, we were received by the President of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel, and the President of the Republic of Poland, Aleksander Kwasniewski. We also met with various ministers in each of these two countries. I want my colleagues to know that we were very impressed with the pledges of cooperation we received at all levels during all of our meetings. It appeared to us at the time that Poland and the Czech Republic clearly understood the importance that Americans attach to resolving lingering questions about the fate of our unaccounted for POWs and MIAs. These nations had suffered their own tragedies under communist domination, and we believed there would be a sincere, thorough effort to assist us with our humanitarian mission.

I might also add that although we did not personally visit Hungary during that trip, we did send staff representatives to Budapest, and we later received similar pledges of cooperation from the Hungarian Embassy in Washington.

Unfortunately, Mr. President, I must report that the follow-up actions that we had hoped would take place have not been satisfactorily fulfilled by these three nations. This is especially disturbing and troublesome to me as the full Senate now considers whether to guarantee putting more American military lives on the line for these republics in the former Eastern Bloc.

It has been said by some NATO expansion advocates that we have an opportunity to ensure the Cold War never resurfaces in this part of the world. Yet, we still cannot seem to get the cooperation we need from this region to address vital questions about our missing and captured Americans from this same Cold War period. We still are not able to resolve this Cold War problem.

If their pledges were indeed genuine, as I believed they were, then I, frankly, question Mr. President why the leaders of these countries cannot convince their respective bureaucracies to open

their Cold War communist files and make relevant personnel available to us for interview. To me, this apparent inability to follow through on commitments has serious implications which we should be considering in the context of the NATO expansion debate.

Since last summer, there have been follow-up communications by our Commission support staff at the Department of Defense and also by my own office with each of these nations urging them to follow through on their commitments. Most important is the fact that, based on current leads available to us, our Commission believes there is relevant information which likely exists in Eastern Europe, especially in the military, intelligence, security, and communist party archives of these three nations which we are considering bringing into NATO.

We should remember that the Eastern Bloc was an active ally and supporter of the communist North Vietnamese and North Korean regimes during those respective U.S. wars. They had a significant presence in Asia and were probably privy to information about communist policy toward the disposition of American POWs, to include whether any were transferred to the territory of the former Soviet Union as we now suspect.

Mr. President, today I appeal once again to the leaders of the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary to follow through fully with the commitments they have made to help us search for our missing American servicemen from the Cold War. And I urge my colleagues, on behalf of our veterans and POW/MIA family members, to join with me in continuing to push for more progress on this humanitarian issue.

We simply cannot afford to lose sight of this issue of highest national priority in the context of the current NATO expansion debate. It has important ramifications which we should carefully consider. ●

#### NATIONAL AGRICULTURE DAY

● Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I want to take a few minutes to pay tribute to one of our Nation's most important industries—agriculture. Today, we celebrate National Agriculture Day. It is a time to reflect on the value of production agriculture and to say thank you to all those who are involved, both directly and indirectly, in producing the most abundant and safest food and fiber supply in the world.

Illinois is one of our country's most important agricultural contributors. Illinois farm land, which accounts for about 27 million acres, is considered some of the most productive in the world. More than 76,000 farm families in the State produce corn, soybeans, wheat, beef, pork, dairy products, and specialty crops. Illinois exports more than \$3.4 billion worth of agricultural products. The State's agribusiness activity is vibrant. From the Chicagoland area to Decatur and throughout Illi-

nois, agricultural processing employs thousands of people. And, our researchers continue to help provide answers to some of the most common as well as the most complex agricultural questions we face.

Since last year's National Agriculture Day, we've made some real progress for rural America. The Taxpayer Relief Act raised the inheritance tax exemption for small businesses to \$1.3 million, lowered the capital gains tax rate, and began a gradual increase in the deductibility of health insurance premiums.

This year, we face a number of equally important issues, specifically, reauthorization of agricultural research, expedited health insurance premium deductibility for the self-employed, extension of the ethanol tax incentive, and food safety.

The safety and availability of our Nation's food supply depends directly on agricultural research. This year, Congress must reauthorize the research title of the farm bill. Reauthorization will establish a national policy for important agricultural research into the 21st century. In these times of constrained federal budgets, it is vitally important to maintain an effective system for agricultural research.

Agriculture-related research in this country is currently conducted at over 100 ARS labs, including Peoria, and at over 70 land grant institutions, including the University of Illinois. The University of Illinois is involved in biotechnology, aflatoxin, genome, and food safety research on their campuses. Southern Illinois University is working on groundwater contamination and an important National Corn to Ethanol Research Pilot Plant near its Edwardsville campus. These projects are simply too important to delay. However, the future of agricultural research depends on Congress reauthorizing these vital programs sooner rather than later.

With regard to health care costs, I believe that a 100-percent tax deduction for health insurance premiums is one of the most basic issues of fairness to farm families across this country. Because of the high cost of health insurance, especially insurance purchased in the individual market, lack of affordability is a growing problem to farmers. Health insurance is particularly important to those involved in production agriculture because farming is one of the more dangerous occupations. It is essential that farmers have access to quality health care and affordable health insurance.

In last year's Taxpayer Relief Act, Congress made the commitment to increase deductibility very gradually from 40 percent in 1997 to 100 percent in 2007. Although I believe this legislation was a good first step, we need to provide this relief faster. I have introduced legislation that will expedite the full deductibility of health insurance premiums. I also intend to offer an amendment to increase deductibility

to 60 percent in 1999 and 100 percent thereafter. Relief for farm families in this area is needed now. Farmers should not have to wait until 2007 for equity with their corporate competitors.

Mr. President, finding new and expanded uses for agricultural products is an important endeavor. Soybean growers and the oilseeds industry are proposing a strategy for biodiesel, a diesel fuel derived from soybeans. Including biodiesel in existing and future Department of Energy programs will help the nation reduce dependence on imported oil, while improving the environment, reducing global warming, and creating new domestic agricultural product markets. And, of course, ethanol, a corn-based renewable fuel, is one of the best alternative use opportunities that exists today.

On a day like today, it is important to point out the benefits of ethanol. The industry is responsible for more than 40,000 American jobs. Ethanol contributes more than \$5.6 billion annually to our economy. Five percent of our nation's corn crop goes to ethanol production. Corn growers have seen their incomes increased by more than \$1.2 billion because of ethanol. This year alone, over 1.4 billion gallons of ethanol will be produced. Thanks to the reformulated gasoline program, toxic air pollutants like benzene and carbon monoxide have fallen substantially. And, ethanol contributes over \$2 billion annually to the U.S. trade balance.

Last week, the Senate overwhelmingly defeated a proposal that would have removed the ethanol excise tax exemption from the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). That vote was the strongest in Senate history in support of ethanol. It is my hope that an extension of the ethanol tax incentive will be included in the final conference report on ISTEA. Time is running out. Farmers, the ethanol industry, and rural America deserve to have this important program extended.

An issue that also needs immediate attention is food safety. Make no mistake, our country has been blessed with the safest food supply in the world. However, we can do better. The General Accounting Office estimates that as many as 33 million people will suffer food poisoning this year and more than 9,000 will die. The Department of Health and Human Services predicts that foodborne illnesses and deaths are likely to increase 10 to 15 percent over the next decade.

I have introduced the Safe Food Act, S. 1465, which would empower a single, independent agency to enforce food safety regulations from farm to table. It would provide an easier framework for implementing U.S. standards in an international context. Research could be better coordinated within a single agency rather than among multiple programs. And, new technologies to improve food safety could be approved