we need to feel the commitment to protect it. To be able to be part of a freedom of expression that allows us to tell stories of our choice in the uniqueness of our own voices as citizens and as artists is not to be taken lightly. To be able to freely voice dissent in our hearts or in our art is something to protect at all costs. But then, the glory of art is that it can, not only survive change, it can inspire change.

It is for all these reasons that it behooves government to sustain an environment that enables, supports and nurtures the free and creative expression of its citizenry.

I have great hope for the future of art and thus civil society as I look out over this room, and imagine the collective power, the collective voice that will not cower in the face of budget slashing critics, and will not surrender its advocacy for art and free expression.

My hope comes from not only those gathered here tonight, but from the efforts of grassroots, state and national organizations; young artists I meet at Sundance film labs; inner-city elementary school kids who are learning to play music and write poetry; the literary and theater programs in prisons; and traveling exhibitions to rural communities all across the country.

Thank you to the co-sponsors of this evening. To Americans for the Arts my gratitude for your tireless and effective advocacy on behalf of art and all that comes with that. You truly make a difference and we're all the better for it. And to the Film Foundation a recognition and respect for the important work you do to inspire young artists through education and for protecting and restoring some of the greatest films of all time and thus enabling the diverse perspective of it all to live on.

Lastly, it is an honor to pay tribute to the memory and the contribution of Nancy Hanks whom I knew and remember fondly. Nancy Hanks had a profoundly gifted perspective on cultural policy in the United States, that being access to the arts. Her legacy is the success of many of your programs; the creative mastery of many of the artists here tonight; and the commitment to freedom of expression that we collectively embrace. The life she lived really meant something.

So we go forth here tonight to continue to try to enlighten those who dismiss the arts as unnecessary, irrelevant or dangerous. And we do so not only in the memory of Nancy Hanks, but in the name of the active and deserving imagination of every American child.

REMEMBERING THE HEROES OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Mr. President, I wish to recognize a small group of heroes who are gathering this Saturday at the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery to honor their fallen comrades and to ensure that future generations of Americans remember the tremendous sacrifices of those who served in the Pacific theater during the Second World War.

These former heroes—prisoners of war all—will dedicate a plaque that marks a humble grave within the sea of headstones of those who made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of a grateful nation. The inscription of the plaque reads:

VICTIMS OF THE JAPANESE MASSACRE, PUERTO PRINCESA, PALAWAN, P.I., DECEMBER 14, 1944

These U.S. prisoners of war of the Japanese were on the island of Palawan, P.I., as slave laborers building an airfield for the Japanese military. Believing that an invasion by the U.S. forces was imminent, the prisoners were forced into three tunnel air raid shelters, thus following orders from the Japanese High Command to dispose of prisoners by any means available. Buckets of gasoline were thrown inside the shelters followed by flaming torches. Those not instantly killed by the explosions ran burning from the tunnels and were machine gunned and bayoneted to death.

Only a few survived this horror. Amongst those who did was Mr. Dan Crowley of Simsbury, CT. I thank Mr. Crowley for sharing his experiences with my staff and I, and educating all of us about an important event in U.S. history.

Few words can truly express the horror that those 123 soldiers, sailors, and marines must have suffered as they were cut down in their service to their country. I stand today and offer my respects to the memories of these valiant men and their families. Their story serves to remind all of us of the price of freedom and the sometimes tragic fate of those who have paid its ransom for us all.

DC VOUCHERS

Mr. CORZINE. Mr. President, I would like to take a few moments to discuss my opposition to the voucher provision in the D.C. appropriations bill.

Our government promises every child in the United States a free and appropriate public education. The very idea that Federal funds that should be going to our Nation's public schools to fulfill that promise will instead be siphoned away to private schools is of great concern to me.

As a product of public schools, and the child of a public school teacher, I am a strong supporter of the public school system. I often say that while we cannot be a Nation of equal outcomes, we can and must be a Nation of equal opportunities. Our public schools are the key to equal opportunity for all American children.

Although the voucher program we are discussing today would only impact the District of Columbia, it clearly would have national implications. It is a calculated first step toward broader voucher programs, which would drain resources from our public schools—the very schools that are free and open to all children, and accountable to parents and taxpayers.

Simply put, vouchers are not the answer to our educational ills—they are bad education policy driven by ideological goals.

Wouldn't our energy be better focused on strengthening our public schools, which can and do succeed with adequate resources? To succeed, schools need high-quality teachers, a rigorous curriculum, high expectations, parental involvement, and effective management. All of these require adequate resources.

In 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act, which was intended to reform public education by establishing high standards for every student, providing Federal incentives to boost low-performing schools, and creating accountability.

Unlike vouchers, which even supporters acknowledge would reach only a small fraction of children, No Child Left Behind was intended to implement proven, effective reforms in all schools not just for a few students, but for all students.

But the administration and this Congress are not living up to the promise of No Child Left Behind and are underfunding it by over $8 billion. This leaves millions of children behind and places additional burdens on already burdened State and local education budgets.

And, on top of underfunding No Child Left Behind, we are now considering giving funds to schools that are not even subject to its provisions.

As we know, No Child Left Behind would ensure oversight and accountability, including testing standards and teacher qualification standards. But the voucher program we are considering today does not provide the same system of accountability or oversight of these private schools, nor does it set the same criteria for the very people that will be teaching our children.

In fact, this bill allows any private school to apply to participate in the program, but there is no evaluation process before they are accepted to participate. This leaves D.C. children vulnerable to poor-performing schools.

I ask proponents of the bill: How can we ask our public schools to fulfill the significant mandates of No Child Left Behind, when we are refusing those schools adequate funds and at the same time giving Federal money to schools that are not even required to abide by many of its mandates?

Proponents of the voucher program say that it provides parents with ''choice'' that they do not currently have. This is simply not true. The District of Columbia already offers three alternatives to traditional public schools. First, D.C. has the largest number of public charter schools per capita in the Nation. If we pass this voucher program, these charter schools will remain underfunded. Yet we still want to give private schools money.

Second, D.C. has established 15 public transformation schools that have, for the first time ever, succeeded in raising the scores of low-income children in low-performing schools. Again, however, the very programs in these transformation schools that have succeeded are now seeing cuts in funding. Yet we still want to give private schools money.

Finally, D.C. allows parents who are not content with their neighborhood school to send their child to out-of-boundary schools that are accountable to public education standards. Yet we still want to give private schools money.

If this is not school choice, then what is? Why can't we give these types of