problems of gun violence in their own communities. Unfortunately, legislation introduced earlier this year would undermine both of these objectives.

Among other things, the misnamed District of Columbia Personal Protection Act would repeal local laws in Washington, DC that ban the sale and possession of unregistered firearms, require firearm registration, impose common sense safe storage requirements, and ban semiautomatic weapons.

Elected officials and community leaders throughout Washington, DC, have made clear their opposition to this bill and any other attempt to roll back Washington's local gun safety laws. In recent months, many groups around the country working to end gun violence have also expressed strong opposition to the proposed repeal of local gun safety laws in Washington, DC. In July, 44 national, state, and local organizations issued an open letter to Congress opposing the so called District of Columbia Personal Protection Act. Among the groups who signed the letter were the United States Conference of Mayors, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Black Police Association, Physicians for Social Responsibility, the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, and the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence. Their letter said:

> The citizens of the District of Columbia should have the power to decide by democratic means whether and how firearms are regulated in the city where they live. DC's current gun laws were passed almost 30 years ago by an elected city council, and these laws continue to enjoy broad support among business executives, law enforcement officials, health care professionals, civic organizations, and ordinary citizens. When legislation to repeal DC's gun laws was introduced last year, it generated widespread opposition—and attracted virtually no support—among DC residents.

While this bill has not yet been considered in the Senate, the citizens of Washington, DC, continue to face attempts to roll back their local gun safety laws. During consideration of the fiscal year 2006 District of Columbia appropriations bill, the House of Representatives adopted an amendment strongly supported by the National Rifle Association which would prohibit funds in the bill from being used to enforce a local requirement that District residents keep their firearms unloaded and disassembled or bound by a trigger lock in their homes. Fortunately, the current Senate version of the bill does not include a similar provision and I am hopeful the House-passed language will not become law.

The Senate should respect the will of the people of Washington, DC, with regard to local gun safety laws. I hope the Senate will focus its efforts on legislation that will help make communities across our Nation safer, not on steps which would make our Nation's Capital less safe.

I ask unanimous consent that the above-mentioned letter be printed in the RECORD.

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

JULY 15, 2005.

U.S. SENATE,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR: We are writing to express our strong opposition to S. 1082, a bill that would strip the District of Columbia's voters and elected officials of the power to pass gun laws.

The citizens of the District of Columbia should have the power to decide by democratic means whether and how firearms are regulated in the city where they live. DC's current gun laws were passed almost 30 years ago by an elected city council, and these laws continue to enjoy broad support among business executives, law enforcement officials, health care professionals, civic organizations, and ordinary citizens. When legislation to repeal DC's gun laws was introduced last year, it generated widespread opposition—and attracted virtually no support—among DC residents.

DC has made great strides in recent years, both in reducing violent crime and in encouraging people to establish businesses, buy homes, and build their lives in the city. The city's finances are in order (it has an ''A'' rating from bond analysts), the homicide rate is down (by 55 percent over the past ten years), and commercial as well as residential real estate markets are booming.

The city has many challenges ahead, but its citizens and political leaders are working to build consensus and solve problems like any other municipality in the country through vigorous debate, hard work, and participation in democratic political institutions. While some members of Congress might have different ideas about what's good for the city, we believe the choices made by DC citizens and their elected representatives in local government should be entitled to respect.

The debate over S. 1082 is about democracy, not the Second Amendment. By denying the citizens of DC—who have no representation in Congress—the right to decide how best to protect public safety and reduce violent crime, this bill would violate basic American values, and we urge you to reject it.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Justice, Americans for Democratic Action, American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, Break the Cycle Washington, DC, CeaseFire Maryland, Ceasefire NJ, Ceasefire PA, and Children's Defense Fund;

Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, Common Cause, Consumer Federation of America, DC Action for Children, DC Democracy Fund, DC Vote, The Episcopal Church, USA, Episcopal Diocese of Washington, Florida Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, and Florida Consumer Action Network;

Hoosiers Concerned About Gun Violence, Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence, Iowans for the Prevention of Gun Violence, Jewish Women International, The League of Women Voters of the United States, Legal Community Against Violence, and Maine Citizens Against Handgun Violence;

Michigan Partnership to Prevent Gun Violence, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), National Black Police Association, National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), New Yorkers Against Gun Violence, and North Carolinians Against Gun Violence Education Fund;

Ohio Coalition Against Gun Violence, Oregon Consumer League, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Saferworld, States United to Prevent Gun Violence, and United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries;

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, United States Conference of Mayors, Virginians Against Handgun Violence, Wisconsin Anti-Violence Effort, and Women Against Gun Violence (California).

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I rise today to inform my colleagues as to why I missed voting on the motion to table Senator COBURN's amendment No. 2005 to the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2006. At the time the vote occurred, I was attending the funeral of a longtime employee and friend, Shawn Bentley.

Should I have been present, I would have voted in favor of tabling the amendment, which would not have changed the outcome of the vote.

GI EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, the original G.I. bill in 1944 made a sacred bargain: honor our troops for their sacrifice, and keep faith with our veterans by helping them readjust to civilian life. Historically, G.I. bill educational benefits have risen and fallen—at times covering over 100 percent of the cost of tuition, books, supplies and other educational costs. And we know how valuable its benefits have become in recruiting the world's finest military.

But each year, the G.I. bill covers a little bit less of the cost of education in this country. It's a cruel mathematical calculation—the cost of a university education is growing faster than the benefits provided by the G.I. bill. Our troops in Iraq, Afghanistan and around the world fight just as hard and sacrifice just as much as any in American history. Yet the G.I. bill—this great act of gratitude that transformed America 60 years ago—has not kept pace. Today, our troops return home to a G.I. bill that covers only 63 percent of the average price of a 4-year public secondary education. The result is veterans struggling to afford the education they were promised and have earned.

The U.S. Congress should never break promises to our veterans—like 28-year-old Jeff Memmer. As a member of the U.S. Navy, Jeff served two deployments in the Persian Gulf between 1996 and 2002. When he came home, he had to take out tens of thousands of dollars in emergency loans and work part time as a bartender to get through school because costs kept outpacing benefits. He said, ''When I started putting a plan together in 1999, the benefit would have covered two-thirds of my tuition and costs. By the time I got to college, the tuition had increased so much it only covered half, and by the time I graduated it was only covering a third of my expenses.'' We are not proposing that veterans live in luxury while they earn their degrees. But clearly, it shouldn't be this hard.

Take the case of Eric VonEuw, a veteran of 4 years with the airborne infantry. Even with G.I. bill benefits, he is working part time to make ends meet and cover the cost of his community college. If he is able to finish at UC Davis, his benefits won't cover half his bills.

Today's military looks a lot different from the military I served in during the Vietnam war. Today, almost 60 percent of enlisted men and women are married. These veterans are faced with a choice: to borrow for their education or to take care of their families now.

The amendment I offered on the Defense appropriations bill, cosponsored by Senator ENSIGN, would have required a report on G.I. bill educational benefits—who uses them, how they are used, and how they can be improved. The report would have included cost estimates to help us assess various options for increasing the value of the education benefits so they cover more, if not all, of the costs of a 4-year public education.

In the course of preparing this amendment, Senator ENSIGN and I were invited to work with the Veterans' Affairs Committee to accomplish the same thing. We hope this approach will be successful and will therefore not bring our amendment to a vote.

This is the start of an effort to improve G.I. bill educational benefits. It is not just the right thing to do; it is critical to our national security. We all know that this is the most challenging recruiting environment in the history of the All-Volunteer military. In a 2004 survey, servicemembers reported that the G.I. bill is the number one reason they choose to enlist in the military. We must make sure that we understand how those benefits are being used and what the alternatives are to improve them.

I ask unanimous consent that the text of the letter I sent with Senator ENSIGN to the Veterans' Affairs Committee, which was mentioned above, be printed in the RECORD.

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

U.S. SENATE,
Washington, DC, October 5, 2005.

Senator LARRY CRAIG,
Chairman,
Senator DANIEL AKAKA,
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, DC.
Representative STEVEN BUYER,
Chairman,
Representative LANE EVANS,
Ranking Member, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Cannon House Office Building, Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR CRAIG, SENATOR AKAKA, CONGRESSMAN BUYER, AND CONGRESSMAN EVANS: As you continue negotiations on The Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2005, S1235, and its companion bills in the House, we write to draw your attention to 38 USC, Section 3036, which required a biannual report from the Secretary of Defense on the use and adequacy of readjustment and educational benefits for veterans. As of January 2005, no additional reports are required by this section.

We believe receiving this report remains vital today. This country is at war. American forces are serving heroically around the world, in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. The men and women of our armed forces serve for many reasons. Undoubtedly, all serve with a sense of patriotism and duty to country. But there are other important reasons a young American chooses the military, and as recently as 2004 a survey indicated that educational benefits are the primary reason soldiers cite for their decision to enlist.

It is no secret that we are today in the midst of the most challenging recruiting environment our all-volunteer military has ever faced. The Army officially fell short of its FY2005 recruiting goals, delaying the expansion of the active-duty Army. It is essential that we continue to receive periodic updates from the Secretary of Defense on the value of education benefits to new recruits, how these benefits are used by veterans, and recommendations about how the benefits can be improved.

Accordingly, we ask you to reauthorize 38 USC Section 3036, with the minor modification of the first issuance of the report being required within six months of enactment of this bill. We also ask that you consider an additional modification to require that the first report include the attached provisions from an amendment we offered on the Defense Authorization bill to provide a more accurate estimate of the costs of various proposals to increase GI Bill benefits.

We appreciate your continued leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

JOHN KERRY.
JOHN ENSIGN.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT

Mrs. CLINTON. Mr. President, I rise today to applaud my Senate colleagues for unanimously passing legislation to protect American women from domestic violence.

The Violence Against Women Act expired this past Saturday, October 1. I cosponsored the renewal of this vital legislation because it strengthens Federal and State efforts to prevent domestic violence and assist victims of domestic violence. It focuses resources and attention on some of the most vulnerable women in our society—women who too often suffer in silence.

I am so pleased that by passing this bill the Senate has reaffirmed its commitment to helping women, men, and children prevent and cope with domestic abuse.

The Violence Against Women Act responds to an ongoing crisis within many American families. Too many of our grandmothers, mothers, and daughters, and too many of our grandfathers, fathers, and sons are abused at home by a partner or family member. Every day in America some women and men, some elderly, are beaten, have objects thrown at them, suffer emotional and verbal abuse. Teenagers suffer abusive dating relationships. Many victims of domestic violence feel trapped and need support and assistance to leave their abusers and start violence-free lives.

The image of a severely battered woman spurs many of us to stop domestic violence, but what is also disturbing is the prevalence of domestic violence. Domestic abuse is the common cold of violence. According to the Journal of the American Medical Women's Association, nearly one in every three women will experience a physical assault by a romantic partner. And of this group, one in three will experience a severe physical assault. Every day more than three women in this country are murdered by their husbands and boyfriends. Children also suffer. Half of women who report rape are under the age of 18. Shockingly, 22 percent are under the age of 12. And I know that violence against the elderly is a serious and growing problem.

For the past decade, the Violence Against Women Act has provided crucial aid to women, men, and children experiencing violence. Between 1994 and 2000, Congress distributed over $3.8 billion to States and local communities to train and support police, lawyers, judges, nurses, shelter directors and advocates to end domestic violence and sexual assault. Our efforts contributed to almost a 50 percent drop in domestic violence.

The Violence Against Women Act of 2005 renews several successful programs and provides funding for training, education and outreach to protect women. It encourages collaboration among law enforcement, the courts, and public and private services providers to victims of domestic and sexual violence. It stiffens criminal penalties for repeat Federal domestic violence offenders, and updates the criminal law on stalking to incorporate new surveillance technology like global positioning systems. It incorporates prevention strategies targeted at men and boys. And it strengthens rape crisis centers and the health care system's response to family violence.

The bill also addresses the special needs of victims who are elderly, disabled, children, immigrants, residents of rural communities, and members of ethnic and racial communities. It provides emergency leave and long-term transitional housing for victims.

The Violence Against Women Act of 2005 will save lives. It also will save money. A 2002 university study found that money spent to reduce domestic violence saved nearly ten times the potential costs incurred between 1995 and 2000 for medical, legal, and other victimization costs. On an individual level, the bill costs roughly $15.50 per woman in the United States and saves an estimated $159 per woman.

Despite the funding provided by the Violence Against Women Act, I believe that reducing the scale and alleviating the human toll of domestic violence requires stronger Federal support. In my own State of New York, in Albany, an award-winning organization dedicated to providing legal assistance to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault faces the possibility of shutting down. Just this past September, the Department of Justice informed the group,