

Created by Congress in 1999, the Vets Corp had a slow start. While I believe that the new Vets Corp leadership is turning things around, there are some lingering concerns about the Vets Corp's funding and mission. I am hopeful that this legislation we are introducing today will help remedy these concerns. Under the terms of the legislation, the Vets Corp would be provided matching funds instead of a straight allocation. In addition, this bill would clarify the purpose of the organization as well as improve the structure of their advisory board.

Mr. President, I am proud to be a cosponsor of this bill. I applaud the hard work of Senators KERRY, SNOWE, TALENT, and their staffs in crafting this bipartisan bill. I hope my colleagues will support this bill and I urge its speedy passage.

#### VIOLENCE IN DARFUR

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I am deeply troubled that violence in Darfur continues. It is disheartening to learn that the Government of Sudan continues to serve as an obstacle to the deployment of U.N. peacekeeping forces that could bolster the African Union Mission in Sudan, AMIS. While AMIS has conducted its mission to the best of its ability, it is clear that it has neither the resources nor the mandate to stop the violence that is affecting the lives of millions of innocent people. It remains critical that an international peacekeeping force be allowed to deploy to Darfur to augment the African Union Mission in Sudan and to establish a lasting and sustainable peace.

Peace in Darfur has been elusive, but it is not unattainable. The Government of Sudan must be a willing partner for peace; it must work with the international community to find an acceptable and expedient plan to introduce peacekeeping forces to that region. Until a more robust peacekeeping force can deploy to Darfur, it is important that the international community support continuing AMIS efforts there. Finally, parties to the conflict in Darfur must also abide by the recently agreed upon Darfur Peace Agreement, DPA, although it is apparent that this peace agreement is showing signs of strain.

Peace in Darfur is critical for establishing a lasting and comprehensive peace throughout Sudan and the region. That said, we must not ignore the continuing need to press for progress on the North-South Comprehensive Peace Agreement, CPA. The U.S. Government, with the international community and the United Nations, must continue to press for progress in implementing the CPA between the north and the south of Sudan. Unfortunately, well over a year from the signing of the CPA, it has become painfully clear that various important elements of the agreement have yet to be implemented, let alone completed. Key issues concerning land tenure rights, critical border agreements, oil revenue sharing,

and armed militias in southern Sudan have yet to be settled or addressed fully.

While much of the lack of progress relating to the CPA relates to the complexity of the peace agreement, much of it relates to the limited capacity of the Government of Southern Sudan, GOSS, to provide effective governance, services, and protection of its citizens. There remain serious obstacles to the establishment of a viable and strong GOSS, including a continuing lack of sufficient infrastructure throughout the south and sporadic violence that disrupts various parts of the region. The international community must continue its support of Sudan's CPA, which means addressing the capacity that parties to the agreement have to implement the agreement.

The U.S. Government and the international community need to be sustained, coordinated, and comprehensive. We cannot dismiss the significance of the linkages and impact that each of these agreements have on one another, nor their significance for developing a solid foundation for addressing conflict throughout the region. Successful implementation of both the CPA and DPA will provide significant benefits to all communities in Sudan and will set the stage for a new era of peace for the entire country and region.

#### NATIONAL VETERANS BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Ms. SNOWE. The Veterans Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Act of 1999 created the National Veterans Business Development Corporation—The Veterans Corporation—to address gaps in providing small business and entrepreneurship assistance to veterans and service-disabled veterans. These services are to be delivered through newly created, community-based veterans business resource centers, VBRCs. The legislation authorized Federal funding through fiscal year 2004, with the requirement that the Corporation “institute and implement a plan to raise private funds and become a self-sustaining corporation.”

While the Veterans Corporation's purpose and mission are well-intentioned, in practice, the Corporation has been unable to become self-sustaining and continues to rely on congressional appropriations. Furthermore, the Corporation's funding concerns have diminished its ability to create a vibrant national network of VBRCs. The Corporation's struggles have led it astray from the original intent of the law and hurt its delivery of services to our Nation's veterans. As such, my colleagues and I are introducing legislation to reauthorize the Veterans Corporation and to improve the direction of the Corporation as it works to serve veteran and service-disabled veteran entrepreneurs.

Although the Veterans Corporation has fallen on hard times, its vision of

assisting veterans with their business needs is still admirable. In fact, according to the Small Business Administration, about 22 percent of veterans were either purchasing or starting a new business or considering doing so in 2004. Moreover, almost 72 percent of these new veteran entrepreneurs planned to employ at least one person at the outset of their new venture. Supporting veterans' small business needs has become increasingly important as soldiers begin to return from continuing U.S. military operations worldwide.

I have worked hard to put the Veterans Corporation on the track to success and to support the veteran entrepreneurs and veteran-owned small businesses that it serves. I have led efforts to ensure proper oversight of the Corporation, as well as assisted the Corporation through appropriate legislative action.

As Chair of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, I requested a Government Accountability Office, GAO, study, released in August 2004, to ensure that the Veterans Corporation was meeting its responsibilities and the needs of our Nation's veterans. The GAO report concluded that the Veterans Corporation faced a number of challenges in achieving self-sufficiency, noting that dramatically lower-than-expected revenues delayed the estimated date for achieving self-sustaining operations from fiscal year 2004 to fiscal year 2009. The GAO was also concerned with the Corporation's distinction as a government corporation, as determined by the Office of Management and Budget and the Department of Justice. This determination subjected the Corporation to numerous agency requirements and drained significant resources away from serving veterans. Again, this designation inhibited the Corporation's ability to become self-sustaining.

In the fall of 2004, I introduced emergency legislation that was passed into law to clarify the Corporation's status as a “quasi-private entity,” not a “government corporation.” At the time, this legislation relieved the 12-employee Corporation from burdensome Federal agency reporting requirements.

Following the enactment of this legislation, many of my colleagues and I encouraged the Corporation to work hard to get its fiscal house in order and to focus on reaching out to veterans in local communities, particularly through VBRCs. Unfortunately, the Corporation's most recent efforts to become self-sustaining have yielded insufficient results. Furthermore, since its inception, the Corporation has only succeeded in establishing four VBRCs. Therefore, it is appropriate to restructure the corporation to meet the original intent of the law and to better serve our veteran entrepreneurs.