

BIDEN, SMITH, and MCCAIN. This legislation expresses the Senate's support for the accession of Albania, Croatia, Georgia, and Macedonia to NATO.

I welcome the progress made by these countries in implementing the political, economic, and military reforms needed to qualify for NATO membership. Each of these countries has made substantive contributions to peace and stability in the region and has expressed a desire for closer affiliation with this institution.

Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia have already made tremendous strides in implementing their National Programs under NATO's Membership Action Plan. The MAP remains the key vehicle for NATO to review and assess the readiness of each aspirant for full membership. I am confident that these three countries will continue to progress toward the goals pursued through the MAP, and I look forward to future reports of each country's progress.

Georgia is also coordinating its reform efforts with NATO members to meet the criteria for eventual membership in the Alliance. NATO recently announced the launching of an intensified dialogue with the Georgian Government. The United States stands ready to assist the Georgian people as they continue their reform efforts.

In addition to expressing the Congress's support for their eventual NATO membership, this legislation also designates Albania, Croatia, Georgia, and Macedonia as eligible to receive assistance under the NATO Participation Act of 1994. To underscore this commitment, it authorizes security assistance in the amount of \$3.2 million for Albania, \$3 million for Croatia, \$10 million for Georgia, and \$3.6 million for Macedonia.

Previous rounds of NATO enlargement have shown that the expansion of this great alliance benefits not only the new members but the alliance itself. Albania, Croatia, Georgia, and Macedonia stand to gain as much from NATO membership as the current Allies do from their accession.

The United States cannot build a safer and better world alone. The support of our NATO allies and the strengthening of the alliance are essential in the global war on terrorism. The alliance will be critical in successfully dealing with the mutual challenges we will face in the years ahead.

The United States will continue to work with these countries to institute the reforms necessary for NATO membership. I urge my colleagues to support this bipartisan legislation. And I look forward to the day when Albania, Croatia, Georgia, and Macedonia become America's NATO allies and the most successful alliance in history becomes even stronger.

#### TRIBUTE TO MR. THOMAS KUSTER

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to a dedicated

first responder, Mr. Thomas Kuster. A former Louisville fire chief, Mr. Kuster made Kentucky his home after being stationed with the Army at Fort Knox. He began his service to the Commonwealth of Kentucky by joining the Louisville Fire Department in 1957; he quickly rose through its ranks and was appointed fire chief in 1976.

While serving as Jefferson County judge-executive, I was pleased to name Mr. Kuster to head the county's fire protection in 1980. Years later, he would finish his long career of public service as Louisville's public safety director, supervising the city's fire and police departments, EMS, and health programs.

Earlier this month, Mr. Kuster passed away, and the Commonwealth of Kentucky lost a loyal public servant. The Louisville Courier-Journal published an article highlighting Mr. Kuster's career and dedication to the safety of his fellow man. I ask that the full article be printed in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD and that the entire Senate join me in paying respect to this honored Kentuckian.

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

[From the Louisville Courier-Journal, Sept. 12, 2006]

THOMAS KUSTER, FORMER LOUISVILLE FIRE CHIEF, DIES

(By Paula Burba)

Retired Louisville Fire Chief Thomas Kuster, who also served as Louisville's public safety director and Jefferson County fire protection administrator, died Saturday at Baptist Hospital East: He was 69.

"Tom was a fireman's fireman, a true gentleman who cared about public safety. He dedicated his life to protecting the people of Louisville," Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson said in a statement yesterday.

A native of Newark, Ohio, Kuster was stationed at Fort Knox for three years and decided to stay in Kentucky. He joined the Louisville Fire Department in 1957 shortly after leaving the Army. He was promoted to lieutenant in 1964, captain in 1966, district chief in 1970 and assistant chief five years later.

He was appointed fire chief in 1976 by Mayor Harvey Sloane and served in that position until 1979, years that included the last strike by the city's firefighters.

"He held things together," said Capt. Paul Routon, current president of the firefighters Local 345. "I think he was the right guy at the time for it. When we came back to work, his stance was 'Let's put this behind us and move forward.' I think he did it."

"Philosophically, I'm management," Kuster said in July 1978 when firefighters had finally voted to end the 95-hour strike—during which he had slept about six hours and responded to fire runs with other non-union supervisors and members of the National Guard. At the same time, Kuster said, "I understand, or feel like I understand their [striking firefighters'] position."

City officials praised his leadership, while firefighters on the picket lines shook his hand.

"He didn't demand respect. He knew how to get respect," Assistant Chief Randy Winstead said yesterday.

Winstead described Kuster as "real regimental, real serious" and credited Kuster's acceptance of "social change" as one way "he turned the fire department around."

"You look at (photos of) all the other chiefs," Winstead said, "they all look like your grandfather. Except there's Tom with sideburns and long hair."

He was also the first chief to allow firefighters to wear T-shirts instead of uniform shirts inside the firehouse, Winstead said.

Kuster resigned as fire chief in 1979 after successfully resisting several efforts, according to newspaper stories, by Mayor William Stansbury's administration to demote several assistant chiefs for what he saw as political reasons.

Kuster worked in administration at the Louisville Water Co. until then County Judge Mitch McConnell chose him to head the county's fire protection in 1980.

In 1983, Kuster accepted a job as fire chief in Raleigh, N.C., where he served until 1985.

He returned to Louisville as the first department head named by Mayor-elect Abramson in 1985. He was appointed Louisville's public safety director, overseeing the police and fire departments, EMS and health programs. He held that position until 1993.

"Louisville will always be grateful for Tom's public service," Abramson said.

#### TRIBUTE TO LAJUANA WILCHER

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to honor LaJuana Wilcher, a Kentuckian who nobly served the Bluegrass State as secretary for the State's Environmental and Public Protection Cabinet, EPPC.

Appointed by the Governor in 2003, Ms. Wilcher will step down as Kentucky's top environmental regulator at the end of this month. As secretary for the EPPC, Ms. Wilcher oversaw many of Kentucky's regulatory agencies, including those that regulate the environment, coal mining, horse racing, banking, insurance, occupational safety and health, workers' compensation, housing, alcoholic beverage control, charitable gaming, and professional boxing and wrestling.

Before serving in the Governor's cabinet, Ms. Wilcher had over three decades of experience in environmental and natural-resources issues. She served in President Ronald Reagan's administration as a biologist and environmental lawyer with the U.S. National Park Service. And under President George H.W. Bush, she served as the Environmental Protection Agency's Assistant Administrator of Water.

Known for being a straight shooter who got things done, Ms. Wilcher dealt with the worst mine disaster in Kentucky in the past 16 years and pushed for tougher mine-safety legislation that was passed by the Kentucky General Assembly. She also spearheaded changes to Kentucky's horse racing industry when she instituted drug testing for horses.

Mr. President, I wish Ms. Wilcher well as she returns to her law practice in Bowling Green, KY. I ask my colleagues to join me in thanking her for her dedicated service to the Commonwealth of Kentucky and her Nation. She is a true steward of our environment.