

to consolidate its young democracy and to set an example for other developing countries in the region and around the world. Last November, the Senate unanimously passed a resolution I introduced that called upon the Government of Nigeria and the Independent National Electoral Commission to demonstrate a commitment to successful democratic elections and promised continued U.S. and international support for this effort. With the first set of votes just days away, I am disheartened by the poor performance of these individuals and institutions in the leadup to these historic polls.

Since GEN Olusegun Obasanjo took the helm of Nigeria's first civilian government in 15 years in 1999, the United States and the wider international community have made significant investments in assisting Nigeria's democratic transition in recognition of the country's strategic and symbolic importance. If this month's polls do not produce a legitimate, fairly elected government, however, the United States and our allies will need to reconsider our political and material support to Nigeria.

Following a violently contested election in 2003, President Obasanjo declared that his "initial assignment as President is trying to heal the wounds from the elections." Instead, in the runup to this month's polls, he has sparked fresh outrage by using the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, to limit competition, not promote it; by repressing dissent rather than encouraging free speech; by harassing domestic observers and obstructing the free and fair participation of opposition candidates. These abuses reveal the need for substantial electoral reform if Nigeria is to continue becoming a role model of democracy in Africa and around the world.

By almost all accounts, Nigeria is simply not ready to conduct this election, and the President and the Chairman of INEC should be held accountable for that failure. There is still time, however, to demonstrate a commitment to the democratic process by accrediting and facilitating the work of domestic and foreign election observers, approving and publicizing election procedures and polling places, and posting voter lists at each polling location. Transparent conduct of the polls to be held on April 14 and 21, including unrestricted access to polling places for election monitors, will bolster the credibility of President Obasanjo's government and INEC, which have been damaged by slow and incomplete preparations in past months.

Disrespect for the principles and processes of democracy threaten the gains that President Obasanjo's government has overseen in the past 8 years. Nigeria's recent economic growth, domestic security, and international reputation are all at stake because development, stability, and credibility cannot be sustained in a

dysfunctional political system. Regardless of the outcome of this month's elections, I urge all political leaders and their supporters to respect the rule of law, preserve the democratic process, and renounce violence.

This is a critical moment for Nigeria and for Africa. If problems related to this month's elections lead to unrest and instability in Nigeria, the impact could unsettle the region, indirectly by example and directly by weakening one of the most important forces for peace and progress on the continent. Under President Obasanjo's leadership, Nigeria has defended democracy throughout Africa by working with allies to reverse coups and efforts to undermine constitutional processes. Now the President has put his own democracy at risk, and the world is watching. Corruption, violence, repression, and obstruction of transparent, legitimate elections will not be tolerated by the international community, and Nigeria and its leaders will be judged accordingly.

RETIREMENT OF ROBERT D. EVANS

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I welcome this opportunity to pay tribute to Robert D. Evans, who retired on February 28, after 35 years of distinguished service with the American Bar Association, including services as director of the ABA's Governmental Affairs Office.

Born in Vermont, Bob received his B.A. from Yale University in 1966 and his law degree from the University of Michigan in 1969. He began his legal career at the Chicago firm known today as Sachnoff & Weaver, practicing corporate and commercial law. When an opportunity to work on public policy issues arose, he joined the ABA Chicago staff in 1972, and soon found himself working in the ABA's Washington, DC, office. Since 1982, Bob has served as director of the Governmental Affairs Office, providing strong leadership on many issues, including judicial independence, tax reform, the PATRIOT Act, and numerous anticrime and anti-terrorism bills. Perhaps what people will remember most is Bob's career-long effort to guarantee access to justice for all through the development and preservation of the Legal Services Corporation, which funds local legal aid programs to help low-income individuals and families deal with basic legal problems that affect day-to-day living.

Bob is listed in "Who's Who in America" and "Who's Who in American Law." He has received numerous awards and commendations for his dedicated and tireless work in seeking equal justice for America's poor, including recognition from the National Legal Aid and Defender Association and the National Clients Council.

Bob has also made outstanding contributions to Washington-area communities. He has served Washington

Grove, MD, as mayor and town council member, and currently sits on the Washington Grove Planning Commission. Bob has also chaired the Associations Division of the National Capital Area United Way Campaign, and has helped to raise millions of dollars for DC area charities to support those in need. He also was president of Project Northstar, a homeless children's tutoring program for homeless children in the District of Columbia.

With his dedication to the rule of law, his professionalism, his expertise and his unflinching good humor, Bob has fulfilled the highest ideals and goals of the legal profession. He has improved the administration of justice, and brought greater access to legal representation and American justice for all persons, regardless of their economic or social condition. Bob will be greatly missed. I join his many colleagues and friends in wishing Bob, his wife Kathie, and their daughter Sarah much happiness in the years to come.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

PRIVATE FIRST CLASS STEPHEN K. RICHARDSON

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I rise today to humbly honor a Bridgeport, CT, soldier who lost his life in the service of our country: Private First Class Stephen K. Richardson.

On Tuesday, March 20, the 22-year-old Private First Class Richardson and another soldier were killed when a roadside bomb exploded near their vehicle in Baghdad. Now Stephen is being remembered for his spirit of service, for his devotion to his country, and for his love of his family.

Stephen served with the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry, 4th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, which has been charged with securing Baghdad. Private First Class Richardson took on that mission willingly: "He wanted to be part of America's protection," said his grandmother, Ina Jackson. "He wanted to help resolve the problems in Iraq." Like nearly every other soldier who has enlisted since the start of the Iraq war, Private First Class Richardson knew exactly where he was going and exactly what risks he'd be facing which makes his sacrifice all the more admirable.

Those who were close to Stephen know just what a fine young life has been cut off. Edward Geist, a professor at the University of Bridgeport, remembers teaching him. "He was older than my other students he took the work more seriously," said Professor Geist. He still remembers an essay Private First Class Richardson wrote about his future plans returning to his family's home in Jamaica and starting a business to help improve living conditions. "It was much more reflective and serious than what we normally get," Stephen's professor said. I think that seriousness of purpose was exactly what drove Private First Class Richardson to serve his country and a glimpse of the bright future he might have had in store.

Instead, his death leaves a father and mother to bury their son; a fatherless daughter, Iyanna; and a widowed and pregnant wife, Katana. Their memories of Stephen are bright and indelible: Stephen planting tomatoes, spinach, and string beans in the backyard garden with his grandmother; Stephen giving a pony ride to his 7-year-old cousin; Stephen watching "Bugs Bunny" with infant Iyanna. Today, I imagine that each of those memories comes back with a stab of grief to those who loved Stephen; but I pray that time will turn them into a wellspring of comfort.

This war leaves behind more anguish than we can easily bear. At 4 a.m. on Tuesday morning, Stephen's mother, Jacqueline Hamilton-Carby, started out of bed in Jamaica and sat down to write him a letter: "It has been 43 days, that is 1,032 hours or 61,920 minutes, better yet 3,715,200 seconds, since I heard your voice. That is a long, 1-on-n-g time but whereas I was worried before, I have placed you in the hand of God." On the same day, her son was killed.

But she has no doubt that he is in that hand still. "I'm not angry with anyone," said Ms. Hamilton-Carby. "I just view it as the work of God."

May she find comfort, and all who loved Stephen, and all who are bereaved. I add my voice to their prayers, and I pledge my highest respect to an American soldier who died in our service, Private First Class Stephen K. Richardson.

STRATEGIC REFINERY RESERVE ACT

Mr. KOHL. Mr. President, I rise today to speak on a bill I introduced, the Strategic Refinery Reserve Act of 2007. This bill would authorize the Department of Energy to build enough refining capacity to meet the energy needs of the Federal Government—primarily the Department of Defense—and to supply the private market in times of shortages and price spikes.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which severely damaged oil refineries in the Gulf Coast, illustrated the Nation's vulnerability to a disruption in supply of refined petroleum and exposed shortcomings in our current Strategic Petroleum Reserve system. The Strategic Refinery Reserve Act would address these issues by having a refining capacity of 5 percent of total U.S. consumption of gasoline, diesel, and jet fuel. Three percent of capacity would be held in reserve, ready to increase supply in the private market in times of energy emergencies. The remaining 2 percent of that would go to the Federal Government to support the day-to-day needs of the military, saving taxpayers from paying the oil industry's inflated prices.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration reported Monday that drivers paid an average of \$2.80 a gallon for regular gasoline last week, up from \$2.70 the week prior. According to the

report, prices are now 11.7 cents per gallon higher than April of 2006. The price per barrel of oil, set by the Middle East cartel Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, OPEC, is only one factor that pushes up the price of gas and oil in our country. Refining capacity, the infrastructure that takes crude oil and turns it into gas, is down dramatically, which pushes the price of gas up for everyone.

U.S. refineries today are running at full, or near full, capacity. In 1981, there were 324 refineries in the United States; today there are 149. Big Oil has made it clear that they are unwilling to reinvest their record profits in new refineries because the less they sell, the more they make per gallon. That may be good for oil company shareholders, but it is bad for consumers. The Strategic Refinery Reserve Act will ensure the availability of emergency refinery capacity and protect consumers from sharp increases in the price of petroleum products. Our economy, our military, our communities and our families are struggling under the burden of high energy prices. They expect us to work to bring energy prices down. This bill would do that.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

IN HONOR OF JOSEPH W. COTCHETT

• Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, today I recognize Joseph W. Cotchett of Burlingame, CA, on the occasion of his being honored by Santa Clara University School of Law as their 2007 Distinguished Advocate. Joe is a partner in the law firm of Cotchett, Pitre & McCarthy and is widely considered to be one of the leading trial lawyers in the United States by plaintiffs and defense attorneys.

The renowned Santa Clara University, SCU, School of Law is honoring Joe for his exceptional lifetime of advocacy. For more than 15 years, SCU has carefully selected Distinguished Advocates and brought them to campus to expose students to outstanding trial lawyers. This month, Joe Cotchett joins an impressive list of Santa Clara University's Distinguished Advocates.

For the past 10 years, the National Law Journal has named Joe Cotchett one of the 100 Most Influential Lawyers in America. In 2003, the San Francisco Chronicle named him one of the Top Ten Lawyers in the San Francisco Bay Area, saying:

The Burlingame attorney has had a star career that's not only talked about in legal circles but has made headlines around the country. Known mostly as a plaintiff lawyer, many of his cases are filed on behalf of fraud victims, and have a widows-and-orphan flavor to them.

The San Francisco/Los Angeles Daily Journal has said that Joe is "considered one of the best trial strategists in the state" who built a career out of representing the underdog against powerful interests.

One of the Nation's best trial lawyers, Joe fights for what he believes is right. Joe has won settlements for investors in white-collar fraud cases and represented numerous California public agencies, including the California State Teachers' Retirement System. He took on corrupt energy giant Enron during California's energy crisis.

Joe was the lead trial lawyer for 23,000 elderly customers in the Lincoln Savings & Loan Association debacle. After a 4-month trial, he won one of the largest jury verdicts then recorded. For his work in defense of the watchdog group Consumers Union, Trial Lawyers for Public Justice honored Joe for his "outstanding contribution to the public interest" as "Trial of the Year Finalist" in 2000.

In the 1970s, Joe was involved in early environment lawsuits to save the California coast and numerous consumer actions which laid the groundwork for many of our present consumer laws in California. In recent years, Joe has focused on financial fraud on behalf of shareholders and public pension funds.

Joe is also my appointment to the Federal Judicial Advisory Committee, which President George W. Bush, Senator DIANNE FEINSTEIN, and I authorized.

It is clear that Joe is one of the top trial lawyers in the country. What is equally impressive is that while some people would have stopped there, satisfied with this outstanding accomplishment, Joe continues to give of his time and resources. And not just with worthy pro bono work.

Throughout his lifetime, Joe has been committed to fighting the good fight. From his days as a college student in the South, challenging segregation by drinking from segregated water fountains, to his work as one of nine members and chair of the California State Parks Commission; from his involvement with the Boys and Girls Club to his work with Disability Rights Advocates, which honored him in 2003 for his nearly 40 years of civil rights work, Joe's dedication to others has had an enormous reach.

Joe is deeply committed to giving back to his local community. He preserved the DeBenedetti building, a Mission Revival Style building which is very special to residents of Half Moon Bay in California. He wrote "The Lost Coast," the historical guide to the California coast between Santa Cruz and San Francisco. Joe is involved in numerous bay area charitable organizations involving animals, children, women, and minorities. He established the Cotchett Family Foundation to aid those in need.

Born in Brooklyn, Joe received his B.S. in engineering from California Polytechnic College in San Luis Obispo in 1960. He earned his J.D. from Hastings College of Law at the University of California in 1964. Joe served in the U.S. Army Intelligence Corps and was a Special Forces paratrooper and