

recently visited Belfast to begin conversations about this with community leaders, politicians, former paramilitaries, and the police. While some expressed scepticism, a much larger number were eager to begin the conversation. Some were conjecturing, hoping that their interface community might be confident by April. After all, many unexpected and welcome things have happened this year in Northern Ireland. It would be naive to underestimate concerns about the dismantling of that which has provided physical and psychological protection for many years. And walls coming down won't alone solve Northern Ireland's many problems—disaffected youth, a growing suicide rate, a parochial outlook, high levels of economic inactivity, and an economy overly reliant on the state.

It is also disheartening to see new walls going up in some neighbourhoods at the very time the virtual walls between Ireland and Northern Ireland are coming down. Progress at the political level is slowed by a lack of confidence on the street. The loyalist community, in particular, is still reeling from political developments it didn't see coming. What is now most necessary for Northern Ireland is economic development. Foreign investment and increasing tourism can play a part in that. While the political developments that have occurred this year are truly incredible, they only briefly and barely registered on the world's consciousness.

It is likely that there is only a small window of opportunity with the business community in the U.S. Disproportionate attention has been paid to Northern Ireland for more than a decade and there is a sense that it's sorted. Attention will wane.

In 1998, when I was Senator Ted Kennedy's foreign policy adviser, I contacted a Massachusetts company with a call centre in Northern Ireland, thinking the company might like a photo opportunity with Senator Kennedy when he visited Northern Ireland.

That was the last thing they wanted. Many of their clients didn't know where the call centre was located.

They feared they would associate Northern Ireland with disruption and that wouldn't be good for business. Northern Ireland must dispel any remaining doubts that it is bad for business. Nothing will say that like walls coming down.

It is no coincidence that the walls are in the most economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods of Belfast and it is these neighbourhoods that have so much to gain by their removal.

It is worth considering how much the walls prevent problems and how much they are an invitation to confrontation.

A fundamental shift in thinking about neighbours previously not known, feared and hated is required. It won't happen overnight. But there are some hopeful signs. There are excellent cross-community projects at several interfaces.

The parades season went off peacefully. And those inciting violence at interfaces are no longer paramilitaries but alcohol-fuelled teenagers.

While such anti-social behaviour by teenagers can be found in most American cities, the danger in Belfast is the potential those otherwise minor incidents have to turn into riots.

Many in interface neighbourhoods feel powerless, left behind, and they know that the walls are holding them back, economically as well as psychologically. But the removal of walls is something they do have control over.

This will be for people there to decide. We are simply providing a date on the horizon with the hope that it might spur conversation and consideration. In order to most ac-

curately assess what the people at interfaces think, we will soon commission a survey of people living at interfaces.

When will peace truly come to Northern Ireland? When walls fall. There is nothing more evocative of Northern Ireland's divided past, and nothing more indicative of a shared future than their removal.

Trina Vargo is the president of the U.S.-Ireland Alliance.

#### CELEBRATING THE 108TH BIRTHDAY OF THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. SUNUNU. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize an extraordinary organization with a membership consisting of the best and the bravest America has to offer. On Saturday, September 29, 2007, we honor the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, more commonly known as the VFW, by celebrating the organization's 108th birthday.

The VFW is defined by a record of service and commitment to our country and our veterans. From initially fighting to protect our freedom overseas, to later ensuring that veterans have the compensation and care they deserve back home, the 2.3 million members in approximately 8,400 Posts worldwide deserve our thanks and recognition.

Since 1899, when a group of 13 Spanish-American War veterans convened to advocate for the benefits then denied to their comrades in arms, the VFW has worked tirelessly to protect the rights of fellow veterans while continuously honoring the service of those who made the ultimate sacrifice to protect our way of life.

One of the many privileges I have in serving New Hampshire is working with representatives of the Granite State's VFW Auxiliary Posts. Never losing sight of the organization's mission or obligations, the straightforward approach of members serves as a breath of fresh air. They ask direct questions and expect direct answers. New Hampshire's VFW members should be proud of their representation.

Nationally, the VFW is committed to its mission to "honor the dead by helping the living" through veterans' service, community service, and steadfast advocacy of a strong national defense. This dedication can be witnessed through the organization's work to create the Veterans Administration, its efforts to establish numerous memorials in memory of those who have served, and its devotion to improving the educational, health, and other benefits owed to returning veterans. Moreover, the VFW's efforts in the community, annually providing more than 13 million hours of volunteerism and donating \$2.5 million in college scholarships, further endears the organization and its members to all Americans.

At a time of ongoing conflict abroad, the VFW welcomes our returning servicemembers with support, guidance, and camaraderie as they readjust

to life on the home front. Additionally, as they continue to serve the communities around them, VFW members act as role models whose experiences and commitment to service provide a beacon of light in today's society. For their longstanding and continued contributions, the VFW and its members deserve our immense respect and sincere gratitude.

#### 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF LITTLE ROCK CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL DESEGREGATION

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, this week marks the 50th anniversary of the desegregation of Little Rock Central High School, a victory for equality in education that was only secured with the help of Federal troops. The images that came out of Little Rock in September 1953 remain indelible; the National Guard literally standing in the way of equal education; a citizens' blockade threatening to break into mob violence at the mere thought of sharing their school with Black students; and the quiet dignity and courage of the Little Rock Nine. Their determination to claim their rights is still a source of inspiration, but the rest of the Little Rock crisis is a source of shame.

So we do two things on this 50th anniversary. First and foremost, we honor the nine young students who integrated Little Rock and who gave eloquent testimony that equality begins with education. We thank them today: Ernest Green, Elizabeth Eckford, Jefferson Thomas, Terrence Roberts, Carlotta Walls LaNier, Minnijean Brown, Gloria Ray Karlmark, Thelma Mothershed, and Melba Pattillo Beals.

But second, we need to forthrightly face the truth this week: 50 years later and 53 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, the work they helped begin is still incomplete. Segregation in law is over, but who can doubt that it persists in fact? National Guard troops may no longer be blocking children from the door to an equal education, but the forces that have taken their place, if less visible, are no less potent.

Whether an American child has good teachers, whether that child has up-to-date textbooks, whether that child goes to school in a safe, modern building—all of these educational essentials depend far too much on where that child happens to live. In fact, America—the country that struck down segregation more than a half-century ago—ranks at the bottom of developed countries in the disparity of schooling it offers to the rich and the poor. Why doesn't that gap shame us just as much as anything that happened in Little Rock?

Mr. President, a textbook published in this millennium should not be a luxury. Modern school buildings and computers and libraries should not be luxuries. Qualified teachers, competent guidance counselors, rigorous curricula, small classes—they should not