

are basic preparedness grants to States, and the failure to fund them would significantly undermine national preparedness efforts.

I am pleased that the budget resolution before us rejects those proposed cuts and funds SHSGP at its current level of \$950 million, which also happens to be the level we authorized in the Implementing the 9/11 Commission Recommendations Act of 2007, which for the first time set forth statutory requirements for the grants' allocation and use.

The budget resolution also rejects proposed cuts to other vital grant programs including grants to firefighters, for emergency management, and for port and transit security. All of these important programs are restored to fiscal year 2008 levels, adjusted for inflation, in the pending budget resolution, and I thank the Budget Committee for that.

On the critical matter of interoperable communications, the Budget Committee has done better still—increasing funding for the interoperable emergency communications grant program, IECGP, from \$50 million this year to \$200 million in fiscal year 2009. State homeland security directors recently identified the development of interoperable communications as their top priority, and it is a complex problem that will be resolved only through strong—Federal leadership, coordination at all levels of government, and a substantial commitment of dedicated funding. This grant program, which was authorized in the recent 9/11 Act, will help achieve this critical goal.

I also want to thank the Budget Committee for providing funds to begin building a new DHS headquarters at the St. Elizabeths West Campus. We cannot expect DHS to succeed at its many challenging missions without the fundamental management tools that are taken for granted by much smaller organizations. Today, DHS is spread throughout 70 buildings across the national capital region making communication, coordination, and cooperation between DHS components a significant challenge. A unified headquarters, which would bring together many of the Department's components into a single facility and allow employees to work more efficiently and interactively. I believe it is a critical cornerstone of the efforts to improve management at the Department of Homeland Security.

I am concerned, however, that the budget resolution does not provide enough to continue reforms underway to strengthen and rebuild FEMA, which is why Senator COLLINS and I are offering this amendment today, to increase FEMA's operations, management and administration account by \$141 million.

Following Hurricane Katrina, the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee conducted an extensive bipartisan investigation into the failed response at all levels of govern-

ment, especially and including FEMA's response. We found that FEMA was woefully unprepared—and in fact had never been prepared—to deal with a catastrophe on the magnitude of Hurricane Katrina, lacking essential capabilities and resources. Our committee subsequently made significant recommendations to strengthen FEMA's capabilities and resources. Congress implemented many of those recommendations in the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act, which was intended to recreate FEMA into a stronger, more robust agency that would, for the first time, be equipped to prepare for and respond to a true catastrophe. The legislation also reunited the agency's preparedness and response functions; strengthened FEMA's regional offices and emergency response teams; and fortified its emergency planning and preparedness responsibilities.

Last year, FEMA received a much needed funding increase, enabling it to take the essential first step in the long process of rebuilding. While the budget resolution would sustain FEMA operations at current levels, it does not include the increases needed for it to continue strengthening its core capabilities. Our amendment proposes an additional \$141 million to fully fund the Administration's requested increase to pay for modernizing the agency's IT systems; strengthening and expanding key teams and other personnel that handle disaster operations, logistics and other vital capabilities; and converting certain temporary disaster support employees to permanent staff, which should help provide a more stable and professional workforce for this program. The cost of the amendment would be offset by reductions in a government-wide, general account.

The President's request does not provide enough to strengthen these core FEMA capabilities, and I would readily support a larger increase. But at a minimum, we should all be able to agree on the administration's proposed figure to correct the significant deficiencies we witnessed during the response to Hurricane Katrina. Therefore, Senator COLLINS and I are offering this amendment to ensure that FEMA continues its transformation into the agency envisioned by the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act, which is an agency prepared to respond to the many potential catastrophes—from natural disasters to manmade terrorists acts—that we face today. Without additional funds, significant deficiencies exposed by Hurricane Katrina will persist and FEMA simply will not be able to protect the American people the way we want it to.

I ask my Senate colleagues to join me in supporting this amendment to improve our homeland security.

MORNING BUSINESS

BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE TO GENE SEGERBLOM

Mr. REID. Mr. President, it is my great pleasure to extend the best wishes of the United States Senate to Genevieve "Gene" Segerblom on the occasion of her 90th birthday.

Born, raised and educated in Nevada, Gene is one of our State's most treasured citizens. She served the public as a nurturing teacher, a Boulder City councilwoman, and a State assemblywoman. Throughout her career, she has been a tireless leader in the fields of historic preservation, sustainable development, cultural affairs, and ethical government practices.

Those familiar only with Gene's family tree might assume that a political career was her destiny. After all, she followed in the footsteps of her mother, Hazel Bell Wines, and her grandfather, William J. Bell, both of whom served in the State legislature. But anyone who knows Gene sees her not as a politician, but as a mother, wife and teacher who took her passion and wisdom into the realm of public service.

A few of the things I treasure are paintings I own, painted by Gene's husband Cliff. He was one of Nevada's all-time great painters. Cliff was also a judge of quality, serving the people of Boulder City and other places where he was called upon to render justice.

Gene's son Tick Segerblom is now serving with distinction as a Nevada State assemblyman.

Gene Segerblom has enriched countless lives, including mine. Landra and I are proud to call her a friend, and I wish her health, happiness, and joy as she celebrates this milestone birthday.

THE MATTHEW SHEPARD ACT

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I wish to speak about the need for hate crimes legislation. Each Congress, Senator KENNEDY and I introduce hate crimes legislation that would strengthen and add new categories to current hate crimes law, sending a signal that violence of any kind is unacceptable in our society. Likewise, each Congress I have come to the floor to highlight a separate hate crime that has occurred in our country.

On the morning of February 23, 2008, Melbourne Brunner and his partner were eating at the Floridian restaurant in Fort Lauderdale, FL, when they were verbally and physically assaulted. According to Brunner, a man at the restaurant began calling the couple antigay slurs, threatening to break their necks and kill them. After a few moments of suffering the man's insults, Brunner and his partner decided to leave. When Brunner attempted to enter his car, the man came from behind him, blocked his path, and struck Brunner in the face, causing him to hit his head on the pavement. The assailant then reportedly walked back to his