Mr. President, colleagues, we must seize every opportunity, including the upcoming G–7 summit, to continue to relay our serious concerns with the intransigence of the Russian Federation to acknowledge the concerns of the international community. The G–7 summit, which becomes the G–8 with the inclusion of the Russian Federation, is an association of democratic societies with advanced economies. Although Russia is not yet a liberal democracy or an advanced economy, it was important for the United States to participate in this summit in encouraging its democratic evolution. Today as I watch Russia continue to deny international human rights monitors access to Chechnya in defiance of the international community, I must question that evolution.

In February this body passed Resolution 262 which called on President Putin to allow international monitors immediate, full, and unimpeded access into and around Chechnya to report on the situation there and to investigate alleged atrocities and war crimes. In March, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly suspended the voting rights of Russia due to the large number of reports of human rights violations. And most recently, Mr. President, at the 56th Session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights last April, the Commission harshly criticized the Russian military’s behavior in Chechnya. The Commission approved a Resolution calling on the Russian government to establish a commission of inquiry into human rights abuses in Chechnya and mandating visits to Chechnya by U.N. special envoys on torture, political killings, and violence against women. Yet, despite all this concern, Russia continues to ignore our requests.

The war in Chechnya from 1994–1996 left over 80,000 civilians dead. The number of deaths of innocent civilians rises daily as the current war continues. This is due not only to fighting, but to the inability of international organizations to easily distribute much needed humanitarian aid. A recent report from the U.N. High Commission on Refugees noted that elderly and sick people in the vast areas of Chechnya have difficulty reaching soup kitchens which are scattered throughout the city due to continued fighting. Russia has closed investigations into alleged human rights abuses by Russian soldiers citing a lack of evidence, and none of the U.N. mandated special envoys to Chechnya have been given access to the area. Just three weeks ago customs officials in Moscow confiscated an Amnesty International report on human rights violations in Chechnya.

Mr. President, this body and the international community has consistently spoken out demanding the Russian government allow into Chechnya international human rights monitors. It is important that we not turn silent now. In her address to the U.N. Human Rights Commission in March, Secretary Albright said that no nation should feel threatened by the Commission’s work since its task is to support the right of people everywhere to criticize their government, and that the Commission asks only that its members play by global rules. Mr. President, colleagues, the United States must seize the opportunity of next month’s G–7 summit in Japan to once again call on Russia to abide by these rules. Our leadership within the G–7 and in the international community deserves no less. The people of Chechnya deserve no less.

Mr. President, I had a chance to meet with the Foreign Minister from Chechnya last week. I promised him that, as a Senator, I would speak out on the floor about what is happening in Chechnya. Just to summarize, the Foreign Minister came here with a proposal. It is a proposal that really calls for a cease-fire, calls for a political settlement, calls for international observers to be there.

What I want to say on the floor of the Senate is that this is a brutal war. If we are going to have this referendum, and Mr. President, I believe there have been many more than 400,000 Chechens killed. Certainly, some of the Chechens are responsible for the murder of Russians; but, overall, what we have seen is a tremendous loss of life, the decimation of a country. I have sent letters to Putin. I have spoken out about this. I think it is a human rights question. I call upon our Government, in particular, to be much more actively involved in trying to bring about some resolution to this conflict.

There are entirely too many innocent people paying the price. Entirely too many innocent people are losing their lives. I think it is a role for our Government to push for some kind of a peaceful settlement. I know we need to negotiate with Putin and be in contact with the Russian Government and work with them. I am all for that. I am not at all interested in rekindling a cold war. My father is a Jewish immigrant. My country has been a partner in peace. Violence is met with violence. Violence begets violence. Violence is met with violence.

I think our Government can play a more positive role than we have played. For the Senate today, I call on the Secretary of State and President Clinton to be much more actively involved in trying to bring about a resolution to this conflict.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, last Friday I was necessarily absent from the Senate to survey recent flood damage in North Dakota. For a period of three days, rain, hail and tornadoes inundated northeast North Dakota and, sadly, four people lost their lives. My duty was to my constituents who were in the middle of another devastating natural disaster. As a result, I missed one vote.

For the record, had I been present, I would have voted yes on adoption of the conference report to S. 761, the Electronic Signatures Act. The legislation will have an important impact on the electronic marketplace and how business is conducted via the Internet. My vote would not have changed the outcome of this vote.

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Tuesday, June 20, 2000, the Federal debt stood at $5,653,599,850,881.99 (Five trillion, six hundred fifty-three billion, five hundred ninety-nine million, eight hundred fifty-nine million, eight hundred eighty-one dollars and ninety-nine cents).

Five years ago, June 20, 1995, the Federal debt stood at $4,895,341,000,000 (Four trillion, eight hundred ninety-five billion, three hundred forty-one million).

Ten years ago, June 20, 1990, the Federal debt stood at $3,121,083,000,000 (Three trillion, one hundred twenty-one billion, eighty-three million).

Fifteen years ago, June 20, 1975, the Federal debt stood at $1,761,499,000,000 (One trillion, seven hundred sixty-one billion, four hundred ninety-nine million).

Twenty-five years ago, June 20, 1950, the Federal debt stood at $525,258,000,000 (Five hundred twenty-five billion, two hundred fifty-eight million) which reflects a debt increase of more than $5 trillion—$5,128,301,850,881.99 (Five trillion, one hundred eighty-two billion, three hundred one million, eight hundred fifty-nine billion, eight hundred eighty-one dollars and ninety-nine cents) during the past 25 years.