The State Department has urged the Belarusian authorities to mount a vigorous campaign to account for and find the missing former Minister of Internal Affairs Yury Zakharenka, 13th Supreme Soviet Deputy Chairman Viktor Gonchar and his associate Anatoly Krasovsky, as well as Russian Television cameraman Dmitry Zavadsky. They have urged the immediate release of political prisoners and 13th Supreme Soviet members Andrei Klimov and Valery Shchukin. Such an investigation, as well as the release of political prisoners, will be an essential factor in reducing the current climate of fear.

Finally, the Belarusian authorities need to work with the OSCE to facilitate the work of international and domestic observers and to help ensure that free and fair presidential elections are an essential step if Belarus is to move ahead and end its self-imposed isolation. As President Bush has remarked in connection with this week’s observance of Captive Nations Week, America must remain vigilant in our support of those living under authoritarianism. The people of Belarus deserve that support as they seek to overcome the legacy of the past and build an independent nation based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

The Helsinki Commission, which I chair, continues to receive troubling reports concerning developments in Belarus. Indeed, the prospects for free and fair presidential elections this fall remain dim. The unbalanced composition of the regional electoral commissions is particularly disturbing given the apparent rejection by the authorities of all candidates—over 800—proposed by Belarusian democratic parties and non-governmental organizations. The Belarusian authorities need to guarantee the impartiality of the electoral commissions by ensuring that democratic parties and non-governmental organizations, NGOs, are represented meaningfully and to correct other reported violations of the electoral code.

It is imperative that the VA have the ability to recruit and retain nurses. Expert witnesses, like Nurses’ Organization of Veterans’ Affairs, VA, President Sarah Meyers R.N., Ph.D. of Atlanta, GA, testified at the June 14 hearing. These witnesses identified critical issues ranging from those impacting VA nurses’ ability to continue to safely care for veterans to nursing burn-out. Senator Rockefeller and I have developed a comprehensive proposal to address both recruitment and retention of VA nurses.

The Nurse Recruitment and Retention Act of 2001 includes provisions for the nurse scholarship program and education debt reduction. The bill’s other needed measures to enhance retention of nurses are: Saturday premium pay for nurses and other identified health professionals, inclusion of sick leave in retirement computation for nurses enrolled in the Federal Employees Retirement System, FERS, and full-time service credit in annuity computation for part-time service prior to April 7, 1986. Also proposed are reports to Congress on: (1) the use of mandatory overtime with recommendations for alternative staffing strategies and (2) the encouraged use of waivers of pay reduction for reemployed annuitants to fill needed nurse positions to enhance recruitment.

The Nurse Recruitment and Retention Act of 2001 is needed now in order for VA nurses to continue to care for this country’s veterans.

LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ACT OF 2001

Mr. Smith of Oregon. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about hate crimes legislation I introduced with Senator Rockefeller last year, the Local Law Enforcement Act of 2001, which I believe is needed now in order for VA nurses to continue to care for this country’s veterans.

COSPONSORSHIP OF S. 1188

Mr. Rockefeller. Mr. President, because of a clerical mistake, Senator Specter was not listed as an original sponsor of S. 1188.