

sacrifices in Korea. But there is no time limit on their patriotism or our country's gratitude.

Unfortunately, it has also taken too long for our government to fully honor the commitment made to our veterans for educational benefits and lifetime health care.

I am pleased to report that Congress has finally begun to honor additional commitments made to veterans nationwide. We all know the history: for decades, men and women who joined the military were promised educational benefits and lifetime health care coverage for themselves and their families. Many of the veterans we honor today were told, in effect, "If you disrupt your family, if you work for low pay, if you endanger your life and limb, our nation will in turn guarantee an opportunity for an education and lifetime health benefits."

Those promises have too often not been kept, not only to our veterans but also our military retirees, and that is threatening our national security. Veterans are our nation's most effective recruiters. However, inadequate education benefits and poor health care options make it difficult for these men and women to encourage the younger generation to serve in today's voluntary service. We are blessed to have unprecedented federal budget surpluses, and the only question is whether veterans health care and educational benefits should be a priority instead of an afterthought.

Veterans from around the nation have been calling on Congress to provide the VA with adequate funding to meet the health care needs for all veterans. Without additional funding, VA facilities will be unable to deliver the necessary health care services to our veterans population.

For a number of years, I have worked with veterans to increase flat-line appropriations for veterans' health care. Thanks to the grass roots efforts of veterans, we were successful two years ago in getting a historic \$1.7 billion increase for VA medical care. We fought last year for another \$1.4 billion increase. While these increases will help relieve some of the VA's budgetary constraints, I believe that more needs to be done to make up for those years of budgetary neglect, as well as to keep pace with rising costs of health care.

Another priority for me this year will be to continue to improve educational benefits for veterans. The Montgomery GI Bill has been one of the most effective tools in recruiting and retaining the best and the brightest in the military. It has also been a critical component in the transition of veterans to civilian life. Unfortunately, the current GI Bill fails to keep pace with the rising costs of higher education. On the first day of this legislative year, I joined Senator SUSAN COLLINS in introducing legislation to bring

the GI Bill in the 21st Century by creating a benchmark level of education benefits that automatically covers inflation to meet the increasing costs of higher education. Our concept is a very simple one: at the very least, GI Bill benefits should be equal to the average cost of a commuter student attending a four-year university. Currently, less than one-half of the men and women who contribute \$1200 of their pay to qualify for the GI Bill actually use these benefits.

The Veterans' Higher Education Opportunities Act—S. 131—has broad bipartisan support and the support of an unprecedented partnership of veterans groups and higher education organizations.

My bipartisan "Keep Our Promises to America's Military Retirees Act" called for the government to fulfill its obligation of lifetime health care for military retirees and their dependents. While I am pleased that last year's enactment of the TRICARE-for-Life program begins to address problems with military retiree health care, there is more work that needs to be done.

In fact, a recent federal court of appeals ruling finally supported what we have been saying all along: that the government has not lived up to its contract with millions of military retirees who were told they would receive lifetime health care in return for 20 years of service in the military. That is why I am once again working with Senator OLYMPIA SNOWE and Senator JEFF BINGAMAN to finish the job we started last year and fulfill our country's commitment. Honoring our commitment to active duty personnel, military retirees, and veterans is of special importance to me for a number of reasons. My oldest son, Brooks, currently serves in the Army and tells me firsthand how broken promises impact the morale of active duty personnel and their families.

Finally, an issue that needs to be addressed this year is concurrent receipt. I find it indefensible that our government forces men and women who fought for our country and are disabled as a result of it to choose between retirement pay and disability compensation. This nickel-and-diming of our country's heroes must stop, and I recently joined Senator HARRY REID in introducing the Retired Pay Restoration Act of 2001, S. 170. I am hopeful that we will be able to continue on the progress made last year on Concurrent Receipt and finally make this long-overdue correction for 437,000 disabled veterans nationwide.

Veterans are our country's heroes, and their selfless actions will inspire generations of Americans yet to come. Our country must honor its commitments to veterans, not only because it's the right thing to do, but also because it's the smart thing to do. I consider myself fortunate to live in our de-

mocracy, and I am filled with a sense of patriotism each day as I travel to work and see the United States Capitol come into view. In this city that is filled with monuments to the heroism of our Founding Fathers and the men and women who have served to protect our freedoms, I pledge that I will continue to fight to make veterans issues a priority in Congress.

PRESIDENT BUSH'S NEW JERSEY VISIT

Mr. CORZINE. Mr. President, yesterday, I joined with my distinguished colleague from New Jersey, Senator TORRICELLI, in welcoming the President of the United States to our State of New Jersey.

I was very pleased that the President decided to visit our State, and out of respect for him I decided to go to New Jersey to welcome him personally. In my view, it is critical that members of both parties work together in a positive and constructive way to address our Nation's problems. Although the President and I disagree on a number of issues, I sincerely want to cooperate with him wherever possible to help the people of New Jersey and all Americans, and I appreciated the chance to spend some time with him.

Unfortunately, because I was in New Jersey with the President, I missed a vote on the motion to table the Wyden amendment, No. 78. This amendment would have made nondischargeable certain debts arising from the exchange of electric energy in response to the recent crisis in California. If I had been present, I would have voted "aye" on the motion to table. Like Senator FEINSTEIN, I am concerned that by interjecting ourselves into this issue and giving a priority to certain creditors, we could trigger a rush to bankruptcy court that could force California utilities into bankruptcy.

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVES TAX CREDIT

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, last week I met with South Dakota National Guard Adjutant General Phil Killey and a group of about 30 men and women from the South Dakota Guard and Reserves. Almost every community in our state benefits from the work of these Guardsmen and Reservists. For example, Guard units helped clean up the debris from last August's windstorm that hit Spearfish and Mitchell. Guard units in Aberdeen and Brookings spearheaded city-wide clean up efforts, and soldiers in Brookings even sponsored underprivileged children during the holiday season. The Guard also was instrumental in fighting the Jasper fire in the Black Hills last summer. The list goes on. From Aberdeen to Yankton, the Guard and Reserves are active members of the South Dakota community.