trip, especially given high gas prices and the lengthy distances some veterans must travel.

The State of South Dakota is home to almost 77,000 veterans—approximately 10 percent of the State’s population. Today gasoline averages $2.97 per gallon. In rural States such as South Dakota, many veterans must travel more than 120 miles each way in order to reach a veterans hospital. South Dakotans living in Selby and Gettysburg must travel as much as 170 miles. With the price of gas rising, the fixed mileage reimbursement leaves these veterans behind.

Oil companies are reaping substantial profits without reinvesting these profits in the infrastructure that helps keep gasoline markets operating smoothly. I am deeply concerned that these funds are not reaching those who need them. We must force programs that are equally meritorious and necessary but forced to compete for the same pot of money to reimburse veterans for travel and treatment. The men and women who defended our Nation should not have to choose between buying groceries and visiting a doctor at the VA.

For over 30 years, mileage reimbursement rates for veterans have remained stagnant, whereas Federal employees received an 8-cent increase for a similar travel program in September 2005. Currently, Federal employees are reimbursed 44.5 cents per mile when using a private vehicle for official Government business. We owe our nation’s veterans the same benefit.

President Bush has consistently supported VA budgets that short change veterans health care by billions of dollars. Unfortunately, under current law, money to reimburse veterans for travel is allocated from the same account used to provide medical care. This bill changes the funding formula and would mandate a separate allowance to reimburse travel costs. This will reduce the competition between programs that are equally meritorious and necessary but are forced to compete for the same pot of funds.

Mr. President, I encourage my colleagues to support the Emergency Energy Assistance for Disabled Veterans Act. It is time we’re being paid for all the gains we’ve made in profits while at the same time receiving tax cuts and incentives. On the opposite end of the spectrum, veterans are forced to make tough choices in order to afford driving to the VA for treatment. The members of the U.S. military who served in combat and those who served in the Vietnam War have already paid a high price and should not have to choose between buying groceries and visiting a doctor at the VA.

Most troubling is the fact that the rate of new HIV infections dramatically outpaces current efforts to reach those who are most vulnerable to this disease. We must bring increased focus to prevention efforts and do a better job of reaching out to those who are most vulnerable to this disease.

It is also becoming increasingly clear that we cannot address HIV/AIDS in isolation and that we need to deepen coordination between HIV/AIDS initiatives and other development goals. HIV/AIDS does not just affect isolated individuals but families, communities, and entire economies. One problem that has led to international concern is that international AIDS programs are siphoning off advanced medical care workers from national health care systems. The World Health Organization has reported that the total number of health care workers per 1,000 people in Africa is 2.3—less than one-tenth the density in the Americas. This “brain drain” issue must be addressed. We need to strengthen national health and social systems by integrating HIV/AIDS intervention into programs for primary health care, mother and child health, sexual and reproductive health, tuberculosis, nutrition, and education. Not only will it be more cost-efficient to work with existing systems, but it will also increase access for people who otherwise might not seek out counseling, testing, or treatment. As we look ahead to the next 5, 10 years and beyond, strong national health systems will be crucial.

The 25-year anniversary of this terrible disease is an opportunity to take stock of where we have been and to renew our commitment to overcoming the challenges that lie ahead in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST DOCUMENTED AIDS CASE

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, it was 25 years ago this week that a little-noticed report from the Centers for Disease Control documented a peculiar cluster of deadly pneumonia cases in Los Angeles. That report was the first official mention of AIDS, although the disease had no name at the time. Since 1981, AIDS has become an international human catastrophe, killing more than 25 million people, orphaning more than 15 million children, and infecting more than 65 million people. Today, there are 40 million people living with HIV.

This issue affects us on both a global and a domestic scale. There are over 1.2 million people in the United States living with HIV/AIDS, and there are over 40,000 new infections each year. While the United States made great strides to contain the disease and reduce the number of deaths throughout the 1990s, it now appears that this trend is reversing. The death rate is beginning to destabilize, and the infection rate is growing at a staggering rate among certain populations, particularly people of color. African Americans have the highest AIDS case rates of any racial or ethnic group—more than nine times the rate for Whites.

The U.N. report, while the spread of HIV/AIDS has increased, indicated that the United States made great strides to contain the disease and reduce the number of deaths throughout the 1990s, it now appears that this trend is reversing. The death rate is beginning to destabilize, and the infection rate is growing at a staggering rate among certain populations, particularly people of color. African Americans have the highest AIDS case rates of any racial or ethnic group—more than nine times the rate for Whites.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now estimate that there are 40,000 deaths each year in the United States from HIV/AIDS, bringing the total number of deaths in the United States to over 1 million. Nearly 60 percent of all people living with HIV in Africa are children. In sub-Saharan Africa, 20-25 million people are infected with HIV. In Africa, the disease has caused the average life expectancy to drop below 40. HIV/AIDS has ravaged countries, economies, and families.

The most vulnerable in our global societies are in many cases those who are most at risk from HIV/AIDS. Women and girls, who in Africa are often left physically, economically, and politically vulnerable, are more disproportionately affected from HIV/AIDS. Nearly 60 percent of all people living with HIV in Africa are women; girls in sub-Saharan Africa aged 15 to 19 are infected with HIV at rates as much as five to seven times higher than boys their age. Gender inequalities, cultural norms, transactional sex, and all forms of violence against women and girls increase their susceptibility to HIV/AIDS. Women and girls desperately need legal protection and economic empowerment so that they can make safe health choices. These are fundamentally connected issues.

There is some cause for hope in our battle against this terrible disease: the United States has committed an unprecedented amount of money to the fight, and we are beginning to see some results. This is no cause for complacency, however. According to a recent U.N. report, while the spread of HIV/AIDS appears to be slowing down in some countries, there are regions that are reporting progress in bringing the pandemic under control, others are falling to reach key targets for prevention and treatment.

Mr. SARBANES. Mr. President, I rise today to become the first and only Senator to order the 75th Anniversary of the National Housing Conference, NHC, an organization of over 900 members dedicated to forwarding the cause of affordable housing and community development. For the past 75 years, the National Housing Conference has been an important contributor to the national debate on housing policy. Over the years, NHC has worked to achieve the goal set forth in the landmark Housing Act of 1949: “a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family.”

Organized in New York City in 1931 by the efforts of reformer and social worker Mary Simkhovitch, NHC has
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the distinction of being the first non-partisan, independent coalition of national housing leaders from both public and private sectors. This pioneering advocacy group included bankers, builders, civic leaders, realtors, organized labor, architects, and residents. Early on, NHC was instrumental in the efforts to raise public awareness in New York City about the plight of hundreds of thousands of its people and the consequences of housing slums had on the general welfare.

In 1945, NHC moved its headquarters to Washington, DC, and took on a tremendous challenge: get rid of the slums, and eliminate substandard housing. Through the 1940s NHC forged partnerships and mobilized grassroots forces around the country in an effort to pass Federal legislation to meet this challenge. And again, NHC officials were rewarded with the passage of the landmark Housing Act of 1949, the most sweeping, ambitious housing legislation the Nation had ever had. The act called for “a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family.”

In the 1960s, NHC was again instrumental in the passage of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965, which resulted in the creation of a Cabinet-level department devoted to housing.

Throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s NHC was a constant presence in the national debate on housing policy, and continued to advocate on behalf of better housing opportunities for all Americans.

NHC continues to be a force in shaping this Nation’s housing policy. Today, as NHC celebrates this milestone, it has redefined itself to a central mission: fulfilling the dream of the 1940s Housing Act—a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family.” I commend the National Housing Conference for its past efforts and honor the organization on this very special anniversary.

COAST GUARD CUTTER “ACACIA”

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, today at a 10 a.m. a U.S. Coast Guard will decommission the Cutter Acacia in a ceremony in Charlevoix, MI. The Acacia’s keel was laid in 1942 in Duluth MN, and was commissioned on September 1, 1944. The cutter is named Duluth MN, and was commissioned on this very special anniversary.

The cutter’s primary mission is maintaining aids to navigation but has also performed search and rescue missions, as well as providing ice breaking assistance during the winter. The Acacia, also known as “The Big A” or “Ace of the Great Lakes” has performed an unparalleled but vital mission in the Great Lakes for more than six decades.

I commend the Acacia crew both past and present for their tireless service to maintain the Great Lakes navigational aids. Each fall the Acacia and its crew begin a race against the Lakes brutal winter weather when they set out to remove buoys in Lake Michigan and Lake Huron. These buoys can weigh over 18 tons and are covered in ice. Pulling buoys out of the frigid and unpredictable Great Lakes in October, November and December is back breaking work in rough seas and sub zero weather. Hoisting to keep these waterways open for commercial shipping as long as possible before the ice closes the shipping lanes and grinds any buoys left behind into scrap metal.

Mr. President, the Acacia and her crew have freed the Great Lakes faithfully since the 1940s and we will miss her fondly.

PROCLAMATION

Mr. DEWINE. Mr. President, I request unanimous consent to transmit this proclamation honoring the bicentennial of the Steubenville Herald-Star newspaper be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

A PROCLAMATION HONORING THE BICENTENNIAL OF THE STEUBENBURG HERALD-STAR NEWSPAPER

WHEREAS; The Herald-Star Newspaper was founded on June 7, 1806 in Steubenville by William Lowry and John Miller, who named it the Western Herald, and

WHEREAS; It is the oldest newspaper in Jefferson County and is also one of the oldest daily circulated newspapers in Ohio, and

WHEREAS; John Miller left the paper to his cousin, William Lowry, who continued the newspaper between Steubenville and Pittsburgh, earning the rank of Colonel—eventually becoming the territorial governor, and

WHEREAS; President Woodrow Wilson’s grandfather, James Wilson bought the Western Herald in 1863. The newspaper played an important role in the Wilson family for nearly three decades, and

WHEREAS; With the establishment of a telegraph between Steubenville and Pittsburgh, the Western Herald became one of the most widely read and influential papers in the area, and

WHEREAS; The Western Herald once employed journalists who went on to become powerful players in the newspaper industry, like R.B. Allison, who left Steubenville to become a powerful player in the newspaper industry, like R.B. Allison, who left Steubenville to become immense in the publishing industry, and

WHEREAS; The Western Herald and the Steubenville Star merged in 1897 to become the Herald-Star, and

WHEREAS; The Herald-Star is now operated by Ogden Newspapers Inc. and now resides at 401 Herald Square in downtown Steubenville.

Now, therefore, I, Mike DeWine, United States Senator from the Great State of Ohio, would like to commend The Herald-Star for two centuries of commitment to one of this country’s founding ideals—the freedom of the press—and congratulate past, present and future employees for their success.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

COLLBRAN JOB CORPS

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, today I recognize and commend the fantastic achievements of the student and staff at the Collbran Job Corps located in Collbran, CO.

Last year, the Collbran Job Corps was awarded the outstanding Organization of the Year award by the Colorado Special Olympics Hall of Fame for their outstanding service and dedication to the Special Olympics in Colorado. This recognition was well deserved as Collbran Job Corps has actively participated and supported the Colorado Special Olympics for almost 20 years.

Recently, the students and staff at the Collbran Job Corps Center collaborated to form a robotics team that competed in national competitions against other robotics teams from universities, colleges, and the private sector. In May, Collbran team was awarded 1st place honors in a regional robotics competition in Denver and won an opportunity to compete in the International Robotics Competition in Atlanta against robotics teams from around the globe. The judges at the international competition in Atlanta awarded Collbran the Engineering Inspiration Award for their ability to inspire other competitors.

The students and staff at the Collbran Job Corps certainly live up to their mission statement: “Believe, Achieve, and Succeed.” Their first place victory at the Denver regional competition and excellent showing at the International Robotics Competition demonstrates that Collbran is meeting and exceeding above and beyond this mission statement.

Collbran Job Corps students are well known throughout western Colorado for their achievements and commitment to the betterment of their community. They have actively been involved in community projects that utilized the skills of students in the construction trades, including the Cisco Networking Program, business technology occupations, as well as those in culinary arts training. The long-standing sense of commitment to enhancing community spirit and outreach serves as a benchmark to other Job Corps sites throughout the country.

Recently, the Department of Labor national Office of Job Corps selected Collbran Job Corps as a Career Success