

way America's youth approach problems and give them more control over their futures. The mission of the CEO program is "to prepare youths to be responsible, enterprising individuals who become entrepreneurs and contribute to the economic development and sustainability of their community."

Throughout this program, participants visit 30 to 50 community businesses during the school year. They learn how to start their own businesses from actual CEOs of local, national, and international companies. They also develop important life skills: critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, and communication. Through this program, students gain a new sense of self-confidence to become future business leaders.

The success of the CEO program would not be possible without Craig Lindvahl, the executive director of the Midland Institute for Entrepreneurship in Effingham, IL. Every day he works to empower students through the CEO program. Craig, who is a nationally recognized teacher and filmmaker, has spent the last 5 years teaching the CEO program and bringing together business people, community leaders, and students from high schools across Illinois. The program has also expanded into Minnesota and Indiana.

Under Craig's leadership, the CEO program is helping build a strong foundation for our students, which will have a lasting effect on their futures. Our Nation's economy is evolving at a rapid rate, and in order to meet labor demands and foster innovation, we need mentors like Craig and programs like CEO to help prepare our students with the necessary skills to be competitive and successful. I had a chance to see this for myself when I visited the Williamson and Jackson Counties CEO classes in May and watched students present their final projects.

It is with great pride that today I recognize the Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities program for the transformative education they are providing the next generation of entrepreneurs and community leaders.

TRIBUTE TO DAVID YEPSEN

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I want to take a few moments to acknowledge David Yepsen, director of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University, SIU. Earlier this year, David announced that he would be retiring in late October.

Prior to joining the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at SIU, David was a political writer, editor, and columnist. He spent over three decades at the Des Moines Register. If you have a passion for covering politics, like David Yepsen does, there is no better place to be. Every 4 years, the political class descends on Iowa, and no one takes this more seriously than Iowans. Iowans and politicians fill churches, community centers, schools, libraries, and homes on cold winter nights to talk politics

with friends and neighbors. At the center of this political three-ring circus is the Des Moines Register, and for nine Presidential campaign cycles, that meant David Yepsen.

It should come as no surprise that David has had a lifelong interest in politics. In high school, he was elected student body president, governor of the Iowa American Legion's Boys' State program, and U.S. senator in the group's Boys Nation program.

David Yepsen is "Mr. Iowa." Born in Jefferson, IA, David graduated from the University of Iowa, studied journalism and mass communications at Iowa State University, and earned a masters in public administration from Drake University in Des Moines. In 1977, David became a Statehouse reporter for the Des Moines Register. And in 1983, he got his big break becoming the Des Moines Register's chief political reporter. He was later named political editor and, in 2000, was promoted to full-time political columnist.

In 1997, after retiring from the U.S. Senate, Paul Simon established a public policy institute at Southern Illinois University. When it first opened, the institute was considered a think tank by many, but not by Paul Simon. He called it a "do tank." In 2009, David Yepsen became director of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute, and under his leadership, it was exactly that. Throughout the years, he has organized countless events—including a "pizza and politics" program—encouraging students on campus to get involved in politics and government. David never lost sight of Paul Simon's vision and always searched for ways the institute could educate the public and even influence Washington, DC. He was always looking for opportunities to take the institute to the next level.

Although Senator Paul Simon never saw David Yepsen lead his institute, it was clear what he thought of him and the job he would do. In 1988, when Senator Simon ran for the Democratic nomination to be President of the United States, he praised David's objectivity. He said: "Every four years the chief political reporter for the Des Moines Register becomes the most important reporter in the nation. It is a position that could cause vanity and abuse. To his credit, David Yepsen handled this position with sensitivity and balance. And he worked hard." That is high praise, but well deserved.

Some of the best advice I have received is from Senator Paul Simon. He used to say that "when people disagree with my vote I want them to say that it's because I'm ignorant or stupid, not because I'm greedy or making money." With his credentials and years at the Des Moines Register, David had plenty of opportunities to cash in on his success and make money, but instead, he chose to take a job as director of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at SIU in Carbondale, IL. Paul Simon would have been proud.

I want to congratulate David Yepsen on his distinguished career and thank

him for continuing the outstanding work started by Senator Paul Simon at Southern Illinois University. I especially want to thank David's wife, Dr. Mary Stuart, and daughter Elizabeth for sharing so much of their husband and father with the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at SIU. I wish him and his family all the best.

NOMINATION OF JEFFREY DELAURENTIS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, yesterday President Obama nominated Jeffrey DeLaurentis to be U.S. Ambassador to Cuba. If confirmed, Mr. DeLaurentis would be the first U.S. Ambassador in Havana in more than half a century.

I have known Jeff DeLaurentis since he became the U.S. chief of mission in Havana, and he is the obvious choice to be ambassador. He is a career diplomat who is universally respected by his peers and by Democrats and Republicans in Congress for his intellect, his integrity, and his thoughtfulness.

The decision to resume diplomatic relations with Cuba has been widely supported, and the number of Americans traveling to Cuba is increasing dramatically. We need an ambassador who knows Cuba, who is respected by the Cuban Government, and who will stand up for U.S. interests and values. Jeff DeLaurentis is that person. The Cuban people have their ambassador in Washington. The American people need their ambassador in Havana.

Not surprisingly, one Senator who has opposed the resumption of diplomatic relations with Cuba criticized the nomination of Mr. DeLaurentis. While he did not challenge Mr. DeLaurentis's qualifications for the job, since he is obviously exceptionally well qualified, the Senator instead said "rewarding the Castro government with a U.S. ambassador is another last-ditch legacy project for the president that needs to be stopped." He said the nomination "should go nowhere until the Castro regime makes significant and irreversible progress in the areas of human rights and political freedom for the Cuban people." He was joined in his opposition to Mr. DeLaurentis's nomination by another Senator.

Having been to Cuba many times where I have met with Cuban Government officials, as well as with critics of the government, including some who have been persecuted and imprisoned, no one is a stronger defender of human rights there than I am. Like President Obama, we all want the Cuban people to be able to express themselves freely and to choose their own leaders in a free and fair election.

For 50 years, we have tried the isolationist approach advocated by a dwindling minority of Members of Congress, and it has failed miserably. The Castros are still in power, and Cuba is still a country where political dissent is not tolerated.

No one who knows Cuba expected the resumption of diplomatic relations to

quickly result in an end to repression or free elections. But I am confident that, in a lot less than 50 years, the Cuban people will have a lot more freedom than they have had for the past 50 years.

Consider for a moment what it would mean if we did what these Senators advocate. Not only would we have no ambassador in Cuba, to be consistent, we would have no ambassador in China, Vietnam, Russia, South Sudan, Egypt, Ethiopia, or in any number of other countries where human rights are routinely violated, where political opponents, journalists, and human rights defenders are imprisoned and tortured, where there is no such thing as a fair trial, where civil society organizations are threatened and harassed, and where dissent is severely punished.

Is that what the Senators want, or are they just concerned about human rights in Cuba? Their argument is as illogical as it is inconsistent.

The purpose of an ambassador is to represent the interests of the U.S. Government and the American people. Appointing a U.S. Ambassador is not a reward to a foreign government, any more than their ambassadors are a reward to our government. Do the Senators think that our ambassador in Russia is a reward to President Putin, or that having an ambassador in Moscow somehow conveys that we agree with President Putin's corrupt, repressive policies? Does anyone think that Russia's ambassador is somehow a reward to the Obama administration? Or that our ambassador in Vietnam legitimizes the repressive policies of that government? Does anyone think that the Cuban Government regards its ambassador here as a reward to us?

Let's be sensible. The United States has interests in every country, even if it is just to stand up for the rights of Americans who travel, study, or work overseas. But there are many other reasons like promoting trade and investment, protecting national security and public health, and supporting educational and cultural exchange.

We could do as these Senators urge and downgrade our diplomatic presence and withdraw our ambassadors from every country where there is a repressive government. That, of course, would mean that our lower-ranking diplomats would be relegated to meeting with foreign officials of lesser rank than ambassador.

And, of course, those governments, like Cuba, they would still have their ambassadors in Washington, with access to officials of comparable rank in our government. Would that help us advocate for U.S. interests, for U.S. values, for the American people?

We either believe in diplomacy or we don't. We either empower our diplomats or we don't. The Cubans, after a year of difficult negotiations, agreed to reopen embassies. Now, with their ambassador here conducting business, we are somehow better off without an ambassador there? Of course not.

I understand that this is an emotional issue for some Cuban-American families. But after 55 years, Cuban-Americans overwhelmingly support the new policy of engagement. They want the U.S. to have an ambassador in Havana.

There is a time for family politics, and there is time for what is in the interest of the nation as a whole. Ambassadors serve the national interest, and that is what Jeff DeLaurentis would do, and he would do so as a career diplomat with years of experience.

Finally, I want to quote from Alan Gross, who as we all know, spent 5 long years in a Cuban prison. This is what Mr. Gross said about Mr. DeLaurentis's nomination: "I advocate for the appointment of a U.S. Ambassador to Cuba and I have a very high regard for Ambassador Jeff DeLaurentis. Had there been diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba in December 2008, a U.S. Ambassador could have prevented the loss of five years of my life. Any one in Congress who opposes this nomination goes against the best interests of the United States."

We should listen to Alan Gross. He suffered in Cuba, as do thousands of Americans imprisoned overseas. They depend on our ambassadors to assist and advocate for them, just as we would if it were a member of our families.

I urge these Senators to put what is in the interests of the American people over their personal interests and to not obstruct the confirmation of Jeff DeLaurentis, a superbly qualified nominee, from becoming ambassador to Cuba.

TRIBUTE TO GENERAL GORDON SULLIVAN

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, earlier this summer, GEN Gordon Sullivan, a man who has dedicated his life to caring for and developing world-class leaders, retired from his role as chairman of the Norwich University Board of Trustees, a position he held for 13 years. At the same time, he retired from his role as president of the Association of the United States Army, a post he held for 18 years.

General Sullivan's lifetime of service began in 1959, when he earned his degree in political science from Norwich University and assumed a commission in the Army as a second lieutenant of armor. Like so many from this prestigious Vermont institution, he went on to excel among his peers. He completed two distinguished tours in Vietnam, earning the Purple Heart. General Sullivan could have justifiably concluded his military service then, and his contributions to that point would have been impressive, but he continued to serve, and in clear recognition of his tireless devotion to soldiers, he was eventually appointed as the Army's top officer.

As the 32nd Army Chief of Staff, General Sullivan directed a post-Cold War

downsizing that spanned the administrations of two U.S. Presidents. These transitional years saw unprecedented reorganization within the Department, occurring amid ongoing, complex global peacekeeping operations. By continuing to prioritize the men and women he was tasked with leading, General Sullivan navigated this critical era with a skill and tact that few can match. In 1995, he retired from the Army to begin a new chapter.

In 1998, General Sullivan began his tenure as president of the Association of the United States Army, AUSA, the Nation's largest Army-oriented, non-profit organization. As president of the association, he was known for focusing efforts on improving conditions for soldiers and their families. General Sullivan served as head of AUSA while maintaining close ties to Norwich University, and that connection was further solidified in 2003 when he became chairman of the Norwich University Board of Trustees.

As chairman of the board, he directed and supervised countless improvements to the university, while always adhering to Norwich's core values. During his 13 years leading the board, General Sullivan assisted with the meticulous design of the school's 2019 plan. His influence helped bring about some of the most significant improvements in Norwich's history, including the expansion of student housing, academic resources, and athletic facilities. Perhaps most notably, he played an integral role in building the school's reputation as an internationally known center for education in cyber security. Like Norwich's founder, Captain Alden Partridge, General Sullivan has contributed to Vermont and our Nation's academic prosperity in so many ways.

I would like to recognize GEN Gordon Sullivan for his contributions to Norwich University, the Army, and the Nation as a whole. It gives me great pride to know that General Sullivan benefited so strongly from a Vermont-based education, and I know that our State has benefited from a longtime relationship with him. I am confident that General Sullivan's contributions will continue, and I wish him well as he further expands his already proud and accomplished legacy.

CONTINUING RESOLUTION

Mr. KIRK. Mr. President, today we have made great progress in protecting whistleblowers and veterans at Veterans Affairs hospitals across the country by passing the fiscal year 2017 Military Construction—Veterans Affairs Appropriations Conference Agreement, which includes S. 2291, VA Patient Protection Act. This bill provides protection for the protectors of our veterans, the whistleblowers, who are shedding light on the egregious acts of some employees at VA hospitals across the country. Unfortunately, one of those hospitals is the Edwards Hines Jr. Veterans Affairs Medical Center in my State of Illinois.