

all, which was introduced recently by the Senator from Illinois, Mr. DURBIN.

The School of the Americas (SOA) was created in 1946 to train Latin American military officers in combat and counterinsurgency skills with the goal of professionalizing Latin American armies and strengthening democracies. Originally located in Panama, SOA moved to Fort Benning in 1984. There has been a great deal of controversy surrounding some of SOA's alumni, leading it to be called "the School for Dictators." Some of SOA's notorious graduates include Manuel Noriega, Argentinian dictator Leopoldo Galtieri, at least 19 Salvadorean officers implicated by El Salvador's Truth Commission in the murder of six Jesuit priests, and two of the three officers prosecuted in Guatemala for their roles in the murder of anthropologist Myrna Mack.

In 1991, following an internal investigation, the Pentagon removed certain SOA training manuals from circulation. On September 22, 1996, the Pentagon released the full text of those training manuals and acknowledged that some of those manuals provided instruction in techniques that, in the Pentagon's words, were "clearly objectionable and possibly illegal." The "techniques" in question included such awful activities as torture, extortion, false arrest, and execution.

Not only are the human costs of this training program unjustifiable, but so are its financial costs. When I first ran for this body in 1992, I included the School of the Americas as an item on my 82+ point plan for deficit reduction. With a national debt in excess of \$5 trillion, we must carefully scrutinize every program to ensure that federal tax dollars are wisely spent. We certainly do not need to spend taxpayer dollars on this kind of activity.

Since coming to the Senate in 1993, I have been contacted by hundreds of Wisconsinites who support closing the School of the Americas. Just this week, a number of Wisconsin residents joined scores of individuals from around the country at a protest here in Washington, D.C., against the continued operation of the school. The group from my home state included students, human rights activists, and members of several religious communities. I am pleased that so many Wisconsin residents are committed to working toward the closing of this school.

Numerous organizations, including Public Citizen, the Washington Office on Latin America and Human Rights Watch also support the elimination of SOA.

As a member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, I am committed to promoting human rights throughout the world. In my view, our government cannot continue to support the existence of a school that counts so many murderers among its alumni. While it may be appropriate for the United States military to train its colleagues from other nations, it is

inexcusable that this training should take place at an institution with a reputation as far beyond salvage as that of the School of the Americas. This legislation gives members of this body the opportunity to separate the legitimate training exercises conducted by the United States military from the sordid acts of many individuals who have been trained at SOA. We must lift the cloud of suspicion that has fallen on these programs by closing SOA.

I am pleased that S. 873 includes language expressing the sense of the Congress that all foreign military training conducted by the United States should stress respect for human rights, the proper role of the military in a democratic society, and accountability and transparency in defense and security policy. This is an excellent opportunity for the Congress, which has oversight responsibilities for military training programs, to reiterate the importance of these basic principles to the Administration, the American people, and perspective candidates for military training from other countries.

The bill also calls on the Department of Defense to vigorously screen all candidates for military training programs to ensure that they have not been implicated in human rights abuses, corruption, or drug trafficking.

I urge my colleagues to support S. 873 and close the "School for Dictators" once and for all.

#### SBP BENEFIT IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1999

Mr. BURNS. Mr. President, I am pleased to rise to join my Senate colleagues in supporting the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) Benefit Improvement Act of 1999. This bill corrects a discrepancy between what Congress intended at the creation of this Act in 1972, and how it eventually got implemented.

I have always believed that the people most affected by military service are not the service members, it is the family. The spouses that raise kids on their own during a deployment. The sons and daughters that change schools in the middle of a school year because a parent got assigned to a new base. It's hard to make up for missed soccer games and scout meetings. The Senate has already passed legislation to try to improve some of these areas of quality of life, but S.4 was passed absent one item that I feel is very important, especially to our elderly military retirees living in Montana.

The uniformed services spousal benefit annuity provides 55 percent of retirement pay for a surviving military spouse, as long as the spouse is under age 62. Once the survivor reaches age 62, the benefit drops as low as 35 percent of retired pay. Let me put it on a more familiar level. If a Korean War-era Marine had signed up for this plan after his 20 years of military service, when he passed on, his wife would only get 35 percent of his eligible retirement

pay, instead of the 55 percent she would have received if she was under age 62. No other federal retirement plan has this age-oriented cut. It was also intended for Congress to pay 40 percent of the benefit, and premiums for the plan were set up with that target in mind. Unfortunately, the actuaries were too pessimistic, and as a result, premiums now pay for 73 percent of the cost, with congress paying for 27 percent. This is a far cry from the 40 percent we originally intended. Other federal civilian survivor benefit plans pay up to a 50 percent subsidy with no reduction after age 62.

This bill corrects the problem by stepping up the federal share of military retirement to 45 percent by FY 2005. Given the sacrifices by our service men and women and their families, it's time we provided fair survivors benefits and fulfill our original Congressional intent.

I'm grateful to Senator THURMOND for introducing this legislation to correct this discrepancy and for letting me vocalize my support for this bill by including me as a co-sponsor. I'm confident that the Armed Services Subcommittee will give this a favorable review, and I look forward to supporting it when it comes to the floor. I encourage my colleagues to lend their support to this important provision as well.

#### FUNDING OF ACADEMIC HEALTH CENTERS

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, the combination of Medicare payment cuts and the growth of managed care has become a devastating one-two punch against many of the nation's most respected academic health centers. A front-page article in today's New York Times documents what is happening. Teaching hospitals across the country are losing money and facing the prospect of cutting back the research, the teaching and training, and the advanced medical care that have made American medicine the envy of the world. These centers are also major safety-net institutions that provide extensive care for the uninsured.

Every American depends for quality health care on doctors trained in the nation's teaching hospitals. Research conducted at these hospitals is the basis for much of the astounding progress that we are making in medical science, and these institutions are indispensable in bringing advances in the laboratory to the bedside of the patient. For the most serious and intractable illnesses, teaching hospitals are the caregivers of last resort. They have the newest and most sophisticated equipment. The physicians who practice there are on the cutting edge of new treatments, and they see the largest number of such cases.

It would be an American tragedy if, as a result of short-sighted Medicare payment policies and equally short-sighted pressures for HMO profits, academic health centers are forced to