

business. As a longtime advocate for women entrepreneurs and SBA's programs, my record in support of the SBA's women's programs and for women business owners speaks for itself. I have continually fought for increased funding of the women's programs at the SBA, for sustaining and expanding the women's business centers, for adequately staffing and improving the National Women's Business Council, and for giving women entrepreneurs their deserved representation within the Federal procurement process, to name a few. With respect to laws assisting women-owned businesses, I have been proud to either introduce the underlying legislation or advocate strongly to ensure their passage and adequate funding.

Today, it is my sincere regret that I cannot sponsor this bill. Senator SNOWE and I both support these programs, agree on many of the changes needed to strengthen these programs, and we have worked together on these issues for many years. However, having only received a copy of the bill this morning, I have not had adequate time to review the proposal and to vet it with the women's business experts that represent the women and the businesses that will be affected by these proposed changes.

One example of a troublesome provision in the proposal is its treatment of existing women's business centers. When our committee was considering my 1999 legislation on this subject, the Women's Business Centers Sustainability Act, I fought to secure a nationwide infrastructure of Women's Business Centers that was in jeopardy because their matching grants from the SBA for the most experienced centers were going to expire. The sustainability legislation allowed 29 Women's Business Centers to continue to operate, serving together with new centers 85,000 women-owned business just in 2002. In this new bill, Senator SNOWE proposes to build on the success of that law by making the existing centers permanent, and I fully support this. If we had written the bill jointly, I would have done exactly the same.

While I praise Senator SNOWE for recognizing the success of centers operating with sustainability grants and the need to make them permanent, I understand her legislation will also establish a process that may create additional and unnecessary administration burdens and costs—thus hindering the centers' ability to deliver critical services to eager entrepreneurs. In some cases, this may cause existing Women's business Centers to close their doors, eliminating access to women business owners in those locales to critical services. This and other key issues need to be carefully addressed, and I look forward to working with Senator SNOWE and other members of our Committee to do so.

I am not alone in my reservations. Just yesterday, both the Association of Women's Business Centers and the Na-

tional Women's Business Council, while still endorsing many of the bill's concepts, expressed concerns about its details and their desire to work together to craft a bill that addresses those concerns and accomplishes our mutual goal for these important women's initiatives.

Once we have had an opportunity to thoroughly examine today's bill, I am confident that all the Democratic members of our Committee stand ready to do just that.

GRANTS TO HIRE FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I rise today to thank my colleagues, especially Chairman WARNER and Senator LEVIN, for their support in approving amendment No. 785 that I offered to help America's firefighters and ensure that our Nation will be prepared to respond to future acts of terrorism, should they occur. The amendment, which was approved by the Senate yesterday as part of the Department of Defense Authorization Act, will authorize the creation of a grant initiative to help local governments hire the firefighters they need to address the threat of terrorism and the dangers posed by more ordinary crises.

This amendment, Senate Amendment No. 785, is nearly identical to the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response, SAFER, Act, which I am pleased to have co-authored with the distinguished Senator and chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee—Mr. WARNER. I am happy to say that this amendment has enjoyed strong support on both sides of the aisle.

The amendment I offered will help ensure that America's local fire agencies have the human resources they need to meet the challenge of an extended war against terrorism. The amendment authorizes the President to provide up to \$3 billion in firefighter staffing grants to State and local governments over the next 3 years. These grants will provide a portion of the salary for new firefighters hired by State and local agencies.

Many of us in Congress have long understood that America's firefighters make extraordinary contributions to their communities every day. But on September 11, 2001, we got a glimpse of the larger role that the men and women of the fire service play. The National role of our firefighters has become apparent and our firefighters have made the Nation proud.

After September 11, we know that America needs its firefighters to be better prepared to respond to deliberate acts of mass destruction. The fire service needs to be better prepared to deal with acts of bioterrorism and it needs to be prepared to help save people who have been attacked with toxic chemical weapons. In short, America's fire departments need to be prepared for what once seemed unthinkable.

Despite the increasingly important role firefighters play as part of our Na-

tional homeland defense system, communities over the years have not been able to maintain the level of staffing necessary to ensure the safety of the public of our firefighters themselves. Since 1970, the number of firefighters as a percentage of the U.S. workforce has steadily declined and the budget crises that our State and local governments are now enduring have only made matters worse. Across the country today, firefighter staffing is being cut and fire stations are even being closed because of State and local budget shortfalls.

That is not to say that we haven't made progress—we have. In recent years, the Federal Government has recognized that it can and should be a better partner with local firefighters. In 2000, my colleagues Senator DEWINE, Senator LEVIN, Senator WARNER, and I worked successfully on this floor to help create the FIRE Act. The FIRE Act was the first Federal grant program explicitly designed to help fire departments throughout America obtain better equipment, improved training, and much needed personnel. Since September 11, 2001, Congress and the administration have provided billions of dollars to help local firefighters purchase equipment and training to respond to acts of terrorism, accidental fires, chemical spills, and natural disasters. Over the last 2 years, the Federal FIRE Act grant initiative has provided nearly \$½ billion in direct assistance to local fire departments across the country and will provide another \$750 million this year. We are beginning to significantly improve the quality of the equipment available to firefighters in every State and in communities large and small.

Today, with passage of the SAFER provision, we have taken a giant step forward toward improving staffing conditions for America's fire service. The need for this legislation is abundantly clear. Currently two-thirds of all fire departments operate with inadequate staffing. Experts believe that previous hiring limitations and the increased demands for first responder services have resulted in a shortage of 85,000 firefighters.

According to a "Needs Assessment Study" recently released by the U.S. Fire Administration, USFA, and the National Fire Protection Association, NFPA, understaffing contributes to enormous problems. For example, USFA and NFPA have found that only 11 percent of our Nation's fire departments have the personnel and equipment they need to respond to a building collapse involving 50 or more occupants. I am delighted that the Senate has taken steps to address these problems and, again, I thank my colleagues for joining me in this important effort.

In closing, let me say that this legislation honors America's firefighters. It acknowledges the men and women who charge up the stairs while everybody else is running down. But it does more

than that. This legislation is an investment in America's security, an investment to ensure the safety of our firefighters, our families, our homes, and our businesses.

Both the International Association of Firefighters and the International Association of Fire Chiefs have expressed their strong support for this legislation.

MCI/WORLDCOM

Mr. BREAUX. Mr. President, I rise today to express my grave concerns about the actions of MCI/Worldcom. MCI committed fraud on a scale that is offensive. It deceived everyone—its employees and retirees, its shareholders and State and Federal officials. The SEC took a step in the right direction by punishing this company with the largest fine in corporate history.

But I fear the rest of the Federal Government may not be following the lead of the SEC. For example, I understand that MCI has been given a contract, valued between \$23 to \$35 million, to build advanced wireless networks in Iraq. The Federal Government should not be rewarding bad actors with precious government contracts.

Other press reports indicate MCI is also using the Tax Code to reap benefits that should not be available to companies that have committed such egregious fraud. I urge the Senate Finance Committee to investigate these allegations as soon as possible.

CONSTITUTION DAY

Mr. DEWINE. Mr. President, each and every Member of the Senate has taken an oath to uphold and protect the sacred document that has guided Our nation well over 200 years: the Constitution. Indeed, we all hold the Constitution near and dear to our hearts here in the Senate, and yet I rise today to let my colleagues know that the students of Lynchburg-Clay High School in Highland County, OH, have done us one better.

You see, I received several letters late last year from students at Lynchburg-Clay High School asking me a simple question: "Why don't we have a holiday to pay tribute to the Constitution?" We have commemorative days to celebrate a great many things in this country, but amazingly enough, we don't have one to honor what is one of our Nation's greatest contributions to democracy. The students at Lynchburg-Clay High School set out to change that, and I was honored to recently introduce a resolution, cosponsored by my friend and colleague from Utah, Senator HATCH, to give life to the idea these student wrote to me about not long ago. I am very pleased that yesterday my Senate colleagues agreed to pass this very important resolution.

Our resolution is simple: It recognizes the special place the Constitution has in our National history, as well as

the extremely vital role it continues to play today. Also, it formally designates September 17, 2003, as "Constitution Day." September 17th, of course, marks the anniversary of the day in 1787 when 39 brave men signed the final draft of the Constitution at the final meeting of the convention.

An appropriate tribute to the Constitution requires more than simply attaching a name to a day on the calendar, however. The students from Lynchburg-Clay High School wrote to me, one of the two Senators representing them in the Senate and one of 20 Ohioans fortunate enough to serve on their behalf in Congress, about their respect for the Constitution. In doing so, the students embraced exactly the kind of democratic values and citizen involvement that the Constitution stands for, and I congratulate them for their effort.

It is my intention that by passing this resolution, many more Americans might come to learn about the Constitution, and that as a result, their love and respect for the Constitution might come to match that held by the fine students and fellow Ohioans at Lynchburg-Clay High School.

SENATOR AND MRS. ROBERT C. BYRD'S SIXTY-SIXTH ANNIVERSARY

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, today I would like to congratulate Senator and Mrs. ROBERT C. BYRD on their 66th anniversary, which they will celebrate on May 29. What a wonderful occasion this is—a truly joyous celebration.

Senator and Mrs. BYRD's devotion to one another is truly powerful. In a world that is far from old-fashioned, they have shown that old-fashioned dedication and commitment can go a long way. The Byrds have risen from humble beginnings, and proven to our State and country that honesty and devotion comes first. Senator BYRD said earlier this year on the Senate floor, "There are only two duties that will exceed my duties in the Senate. One is my duty to God and the second is duty to my family. I think my duty is to my wife." Many of us heard this speech and were struck by that line. We know that with Erma's recent illness, Senator BYRD on occasion had to request an absence from the Senate to be by the side of his lifelong sweetheart. The devotion he has shown to Erma is plain, and these last few weeks have simply been an extension of 60-plus years of love between these two people. This couple is a real gift to the State of West Virginia. We are more than lucky to have them as leaders of our State.

I have had the honor of serving in the Senate with Senator BYRD for the last 18 years, and in that time I have had the pleasure of getting to know Erma as well. Erma is a positively delightful woman. Senator and Mrs. BYRD's dedication to one another is genuine and should be inspiring to us all. They have

been devoted to one another from an early age. In recalling his high school days when he got a candy from a classmate to give to his sweetheart Erma, Senator BYRD said, "I never chewed the gum; I never ate the candy. But when the classes changed, I found Erma in the hall and gave her that candy and chewing gum. I never told her someone had given it to me, but that's the way you court a girl—with another boy's bubble gum." Erma and their family has been the top priority in the Senator's life from the start.

When the valedictorian of Mark Train High School married his sweetheart, Erma Ora James, in May of 1937, no one knew that the coal miner's daughter and adopted young boy would together become one of the most influential couples in the history of West Virginia. Even though Senator BYRD could not afford to go to college, he persisted as a young West Virginian working for his family—pumping gas, working as a produce salesman, and serving his country as a shipbuilder and welder. Mrs. Byrd became the head of the family's finances, and the glue that held their household together as she remains today. Starting as a family of two, the couple worked together to succeed.

While Senator BYRD was spending endless hours at the Capitol building serving his State and country, Mrs. Byrd raised their two lovely daughters, Mona and Marjorie. To this day, Mrs. Byrd continues to remain the stronghold in her family, proudly helping to raise their six grandchildren, and three great-granddaughters. Mrs. Byrd quietly stays out of the spotlight, and instead focuses on her responsibilities as a wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. Senator BYRD once said, "She [Erma] has been my anchor all of these years. I don't know what I would have amounted to if it wasn't for her steadfastness, her integrity, her strength." It is evident that the Senator and Mrs. BYRD have so much respect for one another, and enjoy their lives together every day. Senator and Mrs. BYRD have devoted their lives to better their family and fellow West Virginians. They have proven that working together as a team, husband and wife, can accomplish so much.

It is positively refreshing to see such an amazing couple recognized for their leadership and because of their caring. They truly exemplify a loving and happy marriage. The BYRDS are both leaders, grandparents, and great-grandparents, and compassionate and honorable West Virginians. Senator and Mrs. BYRD have set a great standard. Please join me in congratulating this wonderful couple on their 66th year together.

SALUTE TO LIBERTY: MANY JOURNEYS, ONE DREAM

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the achievements and experiences of Asian Pacific Americans in