

REPORT ON TRIP TO THE
NETHERLANDS AND FRANCE

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, in the 2 minutes I have left, I would like to comment very briefly on a trip made by the Veterans' Affairs Committee to oversee World War I and World War II cemeteries in the Netherlands and France. The chairman of the committee, the distinguished Senator from Idaho, Mr. CRAIG, organized the trip, with Senator BARR, Senator ISAKSON, and myself.

Let me say to you that it was inspirational to visit the cemeteries—I had never done that before—to see so many marble crosses and marble stars of David. It was especially poignant for me because my father fought in World War I. He left Russia at the age of 18 in 1911 to escape the tyranny. The Czar wanted to send him to Siberia. He wanted to go to Kansas. It was a close call. I say that jokingly. He was proud to serve in the U.S. Army as a Doughboy. It took all of 30 days for him to be inducted, until he was shipped overseas, really, with a big bull's eye on his back as cannon fodder by all means.

When I was growing up, he would regale my brother, my two sisters, and me with World War I songs, such as "It's A Long Way To Tipperary." I recall his singing the song about the bugler in the famous World War I song, "Oh, How I Hate To Get Up In The Morning." It said that if given a chance, he would have shot the bugler. And my father liked to sing that song. He got up early a lot of mornings.

Fighting in the Argonne Forest, he was wounded in action by shrapnel fire. He carried shrapnel in his legs until the day he died. Had the shrapnel hit him a little higher, Harry Specter might have been in one of those cemeteries and he wouldn't have been my father.

It was quite an inspirational trip.

I ask unanimous consent that my written statement be printed in the RECORD.

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

I have sought recognition to comment on a trip by the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee to the Netherlands and France from May 26th through June 1st to conduct congressional oversight on World War I and World War II cemeteries in those countries. The trip was organized by the Committee Chairman, Senator LARRY CRAIG (R-ID) and with Senators RICHARD BARR (R-NC) and JOHNNY ISAKSON (R-GA) and myself in attendance. The itinerary included the following cemeteries: Aines-Marne American Cemetery, France; Ardennes American Cemetery, Belgium; Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery, Belgium; Netherlands American Cemetery, The Netherlands; Normandy American Cemetery, France, and Suresnes American Cemetery, France.

It was a sobering and thought provoking trip to see so many marble Crosses and marble Stars of David in symmetrical rows. We know the history of those two wars with so many casualties but until you actually see the tombstones it is an abstraction.

We found all of the cemeteries to be meticulously maintained. The grass was mani-

cured, the foliage was magnificent and the unique shrines at each cemetery were very impressive. From the point of view of congressional oversight, the Senate delegation was unanimous in concluding that the American Battle Monuments Commission has done a superb job in maintaining the cemeteries.

On May 28th we attended a particularly impressive cemetery at the Netherlands American Cemetery with dozens of wreaths being laid in honor of the fallen veterans. At the Suresnes American Cemetery in Paris, the memorial recounted the statistics of the 126,000 U.S. soldiers who were killed in World War I and the 407,300 U.S. soldiers killed in World War II.

On a personal level, I was especially touched by the graves of World War I veterans because my father, Harry Specter, fought in that War. He came to the United States at the age of 18 in 1911 to escape the Czar's tyranny. The Czar wanted to send him to Siberia. He wanted to go to Kansas. I jokingly say it was a close call.

My father was inducted on May 6, 1918 at Fairbury, Nebraska and shipped out of the United States for France thirty days later. His discharge papers bear the notation: "Character: Excellent".

The reality was that he, like so many others, was sent to France as cannon fodder—with really a big bull's-eye painted on his back. He patriotically brushed off that off and was proud to serve in the Army of his adopted country. He talked jokingly that frequently all they had to eat was "jam sandwiches" which meant two pieces of bread jammed together. He talked about climbing a tree in France to pick fruit for himself and his buddies. That is what his family had done in the village of Batchkurina in the heart of the Ukraine about 160 miles southwest of Kiev. He commented that he was never required to fire his rifle at the German enemy.

When I was growing up, he would regale my brother, two sisters and me with World War I songs such as "It's a Long Way to Tipperary." I recall his singing about the bugler on the famous World War I song "Oh How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning." Fighting in the Argonne Forest, he was wounded in action by shrapnel fire. He carried shrapnel in his legs until the day he died. Had the shrapnel hit him a little higher, Harry Specter might have lain in one of the cemeteries and he wouldn't have been my father.

The U.S. Ambassador to France, Craig R. Stapleton, invited the delegation to dinner on May 31st, attended by French officials and embassy personnel. During the course of the evening, Ambassador Stapleton spoke about a relative, Flem Stapleton, the son of his grandfather's first cousin Benjamin Franklin Stapleton. He recounted finding his relative's name on the roster of World War I veterans killed in action which prompted him to do some research. He found that Flem Stapleton was killed in action in his first battle at the age of twenty. When Ambassador Stapleton recounted the story, tears came to his eyes and he was unable to continue for a few moments.

When I was asked to speak a few moments later, I said Ambassador Stapleton had really captured and articulated the emotion which I felt on seeing the Crosses and Stars of David.

The visits to the cemeteries gave me new meaning for patriotism and the great contributions which our servicemen and women have made to the security of our nation and the freedom we all enjoy.

THE CONTINUING SERVICE OF
SENATOR ROBERT C. BYRD

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, the Senate has just marked another milestone with the extraordinary service of the senior Senator from West Virginia. I consider him a mentor and a friend. I have had the privilege of serving with Senator BYRD on the Judiciary Committee and I currently serve with him on the Appropriations Committee. I know firsthand his work as the Senate majority leader, the Senate Democratic leader, and as our President pro tempore.

He understands the role of the Senate and the need for it to act as a check and a balance on the President. In recent years, he has been discovered by a new generation of Americans as a true Senator.

By his work and his example he teaches each of us every day what the Senate should be and must be if the constitutional design of the Founders is to serve and preserve our rights and liberties.

One of the great privileges of serving in the Senate is to serve with the senior Senator from West Virginia. One of the great pleasures is to hear him speak on this floor. His continuing contributions to the Senate and the Nation are too numerous to recount but I would like to mention one of the many outstanding moments.

Senator BYRD has preserved the Constitution from numerous assaults. He takes seriously the Senate oath to "support and defend" the Constitution. He has protected it from a number of ill-conceived and politically-motivated amendments, including the so-called balanced budget amendment and the line-item veto. The last time the Senate considered amending the Constitution to cut back on our individual liberties and limit the first amendment, that guarantee in the Bill of Rights of our freedom of religion and speech, it was in no small way thanks to Senator BYRD that the Constitution and the rights of Americans were preserved.

On March 29, 2000, he gave an extraordinary speech. I was a manager on the matter and was fortunate to be present. I noted at the time that "periodically, we hear greatness in speeches," and observed that this was a case where the Senate had heard greatness. It is a speech that students of the Constitution and of constitutional history should study.

In the days ahead, we will again be challenged to amend our Bill of Rights for the first time in over 200 years. I can think of no one I would rather stand with and fight for the Constitution than the senior Senator from West Virginia. Every day he walks on the floor of this Senate carrying the Constitution because he knows that the liberties of the American people are not to be sacrificed for passing political favor. He is a fierce advocate for the Nation, the Constitution, the Senate, but first and foremost, for the people of the State of West Virginia whom he represents so ably.

I have said that I sit in the white hair row. It is a row that I picked. Because of my seniority, I can sit just about anywhere I want, but I sit in this row to sit near Senator BYRD.

Senator BYRD is a Senator's Senator, but he is also a Senator who respects and preserves the Constitution. We are supposed to be the conscience of the Nation. There is only 100 of us to represent 219 million Americans. Thank goodness one of those 100 is ROBERT C. BYRD of West Virginia.

COMMONSENSE CONSUMPTION ACT
OF 2005, S. 908

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I would note that regrettably, we have on the Senate's calendar legislation designed to limit the rights of consumers, the so-called Commonsense Consumption Act of 2005, as bad public policy.

It defies common sense to give entire industries blanket immunity from potential harm they impose on Americans. The incentives involved in litigation are one of the few remaining measures leading to real corporate responsibility, not to mention accountability. The handful of lawsuits that would have been barred by this legislation actually resulted in settlements providing for more nutritious food in our schools, more accurate labeling for consumers, and the removal of harmful trans fats from some of the foods we eat. A blanket ban on such measures will lead to more serious problems such as increases in heart disease and diabetes and other chronic conditions that are taxing this Nation's health system.

There are many problems with the sweeping language of this legislation. It would dismiss existing State and Federal cases, as well as preempt future cases. Sponsors of the bill claim that it would not prevent false advertising claims but the language in the bill does not guarantee this result. It prevents suits against manufacturers, marketers, distributors, advertisers or sellers of specific products but the exception for false advertising only applies to manufacturers and sellers. Why should advertisers and sellers be excluded from this exception? They are just as likely to deceive consumers as manufacturers and sellers. Also, the legal standard will be heightened so that consumers would be required to prove intentional violation of Federal or State statutes, rather than simply having to prove violations of government regulations on advertising and food safety. Why would we want to give immunity to companies that violate safety regulations? And why should the injured consumer be required to prove a corporation's intent if it can be proved that the corporation violated the law? We all know how impossible it is to prove "corporate intent" without the extraordinary help of a whistleblower. And we all know that were it not for citizens' lawsuits, we may never have learned of the harm that big tobacco companies knowingly

caused to so many, for so long, while denying so much of what they knew. Time and again, the legal system has been more effective than government watchdog agencies in prying loose consumer information like that, which we otherwise might never see.

This legislation does not create any alternative method for keeping a check on corporate misconduct that has a detrimental effect on the health of all Americans. If this bill passes, American consumers will only be left with the thin hope that suddenly the Bush-Cheney administration will begin true regulation of corporations on behalf of American consumers.

If we are serious about trying to address the national health epidemic that is related to obesity, then we should be considering legislation to clarify food labeling so consumers can make informed choices. How about legislation requiring nutritious food in our schools? How about listening to the scientific and health community about the needless dangers of trans fats in our food? How about ending cuts in education that lead to the cancellation of physical education and health courses?

Consideration of this corporate immunity legislation would be especially ill-timed in light of the numerous pressing issues that face this Nation today. The Senate's time would be better spent debating stem cell research, or the life saving technologies that would make Americans' lives better. We should also be moving forward with comprehensive immigration reform, re-authorizing the Voting Rights Act, and addressing the horrific genocide in Darfur. This bill also yet to be subject to committee consideration. If the Judiciary Committee had considered this legislation, I am confident we would have amended the sweeping language of this blanket immunity bill.

This legislation favors the interests of corporations over the health of our children and the health of their parents. This is not the fix that is needed. Let us direct our energies towards making American health care better by finding cures to diseases, making it easier for consumers to make informed choices, getting more Americans insured and investing in health care prevention.

BIRTHDAY WISHES TO DAW AUNG
SAN SUU KYI

Mr. MCCONNELL. As with all supporters of freedom and democracy in the world, I rise today to extend birthday wishes to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Laureate who remains under house arrest in Burma.

Much like her previous several birthdays, Suu Kyi's birthday today almost certainly will not be a happy one. The "gift" given to Suu Kyi by the ruling State Peace and Development Council, SPDC, a few weeks ago was the news that it was again extending her deten-

Under the autocratic rule of the SPDC, drug trafficking, disease and human rights violations are rampant and pose growing problems to the region as a whole. The SPDC adheres to policies that seek only to consolidate its own power, and the ruined lives of the Burmese people are the result. Indeed, there is little reason for celebration in Burma today.

The plight of Suu Kyi symbolizes the plight of her countrymen. Moreover, her commitment to freedom and justice through peaceful political change has created a legacy that will endure long after the SPDC's reign is no more.

The best gift the free world can give Suu Kyi is to remain steadfast in support of freedom in Burma today. She can count on my support.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that an op-ed in today's Wall Street Journal by Under Secretary of State Paula Dobriansky be printed in the RECORD.

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

[From the Wall Street Journal, June 19, 2006]

"PRESS FOR CHANGE IN BURMA"

(By Paula J. Dobriansky)

Today marks the 61st birthday of Aung San Suu Kyi, the elected leader of Burma's National League for Democracy. It is the third consecutive birthday that she has spent under detention—and a stark reminder that not only she, but 50 million fellow Burmese are living without basic freedoms and human rights. Absent change, Burma is likely to continue a dangerous decline that threatens the welfare of its people and its neighbors alike.

Only by unconditionally releasing Ms. Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners, restoring a democratic form of government, and observing international standards of human rights can Burma's regime bring stability, prosperity and peace to its country—and international respect to its leaders. Toward that end, we are seeking a United Nations Security Council resolution that underscores the aforementioned goals, which were communicated by U.N. Undersecretary General for Political Affairs Ibrahim Gambari to senior Burmese officials during his visit to the country last month. The U.S. is committed to working with the U.N. Security Council, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, regional institutions and governments to press for genuine national reconciliation in Burma.

The threat to the Burmese people from their own leaders is clear: In only the last few months, attacks against ethnic minorities have displaced thousands. Military units abuse their power regularly and commit egregious human rights abuses with impunity, including rape, forced labor, murder and torture. The regime's continued economic mismanagement and corruption have led to a widespread failure of the banking system and rampant inflation, which increases the daily hardships of the Burmese people. Making matters worse, the military's restrictions on U.N. and nongovernmental organizations have hampered the ability of relief organizations to deliver assistance to Burma's most vulnerable populations.

Infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and avian flu are best controlled by responsible governments with transparent public health systems that cooperate closely with international institutions. Yet even as the Burmese regime spends considerable