

**-- Senator Jim Jeffords' Dispatch From DC --
- Volume 2, Issue 2 -**

June 2006

Dear Vermonters,

Welcome to another issue of *Dispatch From DC*, my electronic newsletter about my work on Vermont's behalf in the United States Senate.

As we near the end of the 109th Congress—and my career in Washington—I remain deeply concerned about the direction of our country. From the out-of-control federal deficit to the continued instability in Iraq, the United States faces a host of critical challenges.

There were a number of important pieces of legislation before the Congress these last few months. The House and Senate each passed immigration reform bills, but now a compromise must be reached between the two bodies. We tackled a spending bill to cover costs in Iraq and Afghanistan and provide hurricane relief in the Gulf Coast. The Senate has also struggled to deal with the theft of the personal information of millions of American veterans, as well as how to combat high gasoline prices.

I have continued to work with my colleagues to address important issues. In April, Senator Leahy, Representative Sanders and myself introduced the Vermont Wilderness Act of 2006, which, if passed, would increase the amount of wilderness in the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF).

Please be assured that I will continue to fight for Vermonters during my final six months in office. If you have any questions about *Dispatch From DC*, or any other issues, please feel free to e-mail at vermont@jeffords.senate.gov, visit my website at jeffords.senate.gov, or call my office at (800) 835-5500.

Sincerely,



Senator Jim Jeffords

*Please feel free to forward **Dispatch From DC** to any other interested Vermonters.*

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Preserving Vermont's Wilderness

This spring I joined Senator Leahy and Congressman Sanders in introducing the Vermont Wilderness Act of 2006 (S. 2565), which designates certain National Forest System land, in the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF), for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. In addition, the bill designates a National Recreation Area in the Moosalamoo region. Over the course of several years, my colleagues and I spent hundreds of hours working with the Forest Service and local constituents to consider boundaries in the context of the overall forest management plan. Adding new wilderness acres and recreation areas to the GMNF will expand upon the U.S. Forest Service's overall strategy to preserve the recreational, economic, and ecological values of the forest for future generations of Vermonters to enjoy. A set of maps of the proposed wilderness areas may be viewed on my website at www.jeffords.senate.gov/wilderness2006.html. The wilderness bill has been referred to the Senate Agriculture Committee.

Supporting Vermont's Farmers

I have heard from farmers, state government officials, and other friends that Vermont has suffered greatly from our excessively wet spring. I know the first hay and corn crops are lost. I know the prospect of buying feed for animals from other states will be more expensive this year due to the high prices of gasoline and diesel. Unfortunately, dairy farmers will be forced to make up for these losses during a period of low milk prices. I met with Vermont Agriculture Secretary Kerr during his recent visit to Washington to hear details of the state's response plan, and I pledged to him my full support in the matter. I joined Senator Leahy and Representative Sanders in asking President Bush to support disaster funding for Vermont farmers. I also have written in support of Governor Douglas' disaster declaration request. For nearly 32 years in Washington, I have told my colleagues in the House and the Senate that when times get tough for Vermont farmers, the farmers get tougher. I will work closely with state and federal agriculture officials and with my fellow Vermonters in Congress to help do whatever is necessary to help farmers endure this difficult year.

Addressing Climate Change

I am deeply concerned that despite mounting evidence demonstrating the effects of climate change, the Senate has failed to properly address the issue. A year has passed since I joined my colleagues in passing a resolution supporting mandatory restrictions on carbon dioxide, yet no such measure has been adopted. I will introduce legislation this summer that would significantly reduce emissions in the United States over the coming decades. This bill will reduce harmful air pollutants, improve public health, and safeguard our natural resources. I look forward to tackling climate change and air quality issues in the fall, and will continue to push for action in the Senate.

The War in Iraq

The war in Iraq continues to dominate the national agenda, but the Administration still lacks a clear strategy for withdrawal. As of today, more than 2,500 Americans have died in Iraq. Last week, during debate on the Defense Authorization bill, I supported two amendments, one offered by Senator Kerry and one offered by Senator Levin, which called for the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq. Unfortunately, these amendments were defeated.

Though I disagree with the president's strategy in Iraq, I am committed to giving my full support to our soldiers. I supported extensive funding for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan in the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act, which was signed into law on June 16th. This act includes increased funding for armored Humvees and body armor. Further funding is designated for reconstruction and development projects. I hope that with increased focus on development in Iraq, we can bring peace and stability and end the American troop presence there.

Additionally, I recently offered legislation to the Defense Authorization bill that will assist military families struggling with the long-term absence of a family member deployed overseas. Among other things, this legislation would allow some federal employees to access their leave time in a more flexible manner while their family members are deployed. My amendment was included as part of the Defense Authorization bill that passed the Senate, and I hope it will survive the conference committee that will soon meet to iron out the differences between the House and Senate bills.

Welcoming Home Vermont's Service Members

Like all Vermonters, I have been eagerly anticipating the return of Vermont's soldiers from Iraq and Afghanistan. We are now welcoming home members of Task Force Saber. While we are relieved to have them on home soil after a very tumultuous 18 months in Iraq, we also mourn those who lost their lives in the service of their country. In our celebration of returning loved ones, we must also remember the supreme sacrifice of these men and their families. Regardless of their duty station or mission – home or abroad – members of the Vermont Guard have performed their duties valiantly and professionally, and Vermont can be proud of their accomplishments.

The transition from military to civilian life can be challenging for members of the military and their families. I am working with the Veterans Administration and the military to improve employment services and vocational training, financial assistance benefits, and counseling for families and service members. My staff and I are available to assist in any way possible. Please contact Marie Pomainville in my Rutland office at (802) 773-3875, or Diana Harrington in my Montpelier office at (802) 223-5273, or call toll free, 1-800-835-5500.

Ensuring a Clean Water Supply for Vermont

Legislation I introduced, S. 2054, which directs the U.S. Geological Survey to conduct a survey of Vermont's groundwater resources, recently passed the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. This study would be the first comprehensive look at Vermont's groundwater resources, and it will be an important step toward protecting Vermont's water supplies. Two-thirds of all Vermont households depend on groundwater for their drinking water. Groundwater is also critical for manufacturing, agriculture, commercial enterprises and to support aquatic habitat. I believe this legislation is critical to ensuring clean and safe water for future generations, and I will continue to work to see that this bill becomes law.

Bringing Bald Eagles Back to Vermont

The third and final season of the Vermont Bald Eagle Restoration Initiative is underway and we have been very successful. At least 10 birds will be released this year, adding to the 19 released during the past two summers. However, Vermont remains the only state in the contiguous U.S. without nesting bald eagles. A pair did nest this year in Eastern Vermont but the young were lost after a few weeks.

The primary goal of the Initiative has been to establish a self-sustaining breeding population of bald eagles in Vermont, and the ultimate removal of the species from the Vermont list of endangered and threatened species. I secured funding for this collaboration between U.S. Fish & Wildlife Services, the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife, Outreach for Earth Stewardship, the National Wildlife Federation and Central Vermont Public Service. Hundreds of volunteers have also worked to support this project and we could not have done it without them. You can learn more about the eagles at <http://www.cvps.com/eagles>.

Protecting Veterans' Personal Information

I am very troubled by the loss of veterans' personal data, and the subsequent mishandling of this security breach by the Veterans Administration (VA). I have made this very clear to Jim Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. I have also joined many of my colleagues in asking the Government Accountability Office to conduct an inquiry into the incident. It is imperative that the VA take immediate steps to earn back the trust of veterans. The White River Junction VA Regional Office has very knowledgeable and helpful staff on hand to offer assistance and information, and my offices in Vermont and Washington can also provide help.

I am concerned, however, that not enough is being done to protect veterans against the inevitable scam operations that were launched upon notification of the theft. I

have cosponsored legislation introduced by Senator Rockefeller that would provide veterans and their spouses with financial and credit counseling to protect them against the risk of identity theft as a result of the breach. I expect the Secretary to ask for additional funds to deal with the consequences of this theft, and to prevent future problems. I will fight to ensure that the VA receives this critical support, as well as to ensure this type of security breach never happens again.

Examining Telecommunications Reform

Over the past several weeks, scores of Vermonters have written me to express their support for “network neutrality” and their worries about discrimination and the future of the Internet. Network neutrality refers to the proposition that the Internet works best when users control their access to content, as opposed to the owners of the physical infrastructure.

I will remain open-minded during any telecommunications reform debate in the coming months. Any debate in the Congress will mix ideological simplicities with technological complexities. I believe a nondiscriminatory Internet environment, in which users are able to freely use their preferred applications and frequent their preferred Web sites, is beneficial for businesses, schools and colleges, as well as consumers.

Working Toward Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Immigration, both legal and illegal, is clearly an important topic that needs to be addressed by the Congress for both security and economic reasons. Stressing the importance of the issue, many Vermonters contacted me to share their views about immigration reform. I worked with my colleagues in the Senate to ensure that the Senate’s immigration reform bill strengthened border and interior enforcement, established a temporary worker program that satisfies this country’s labor needs, including the needs of Vermont’s dairy farms, and addressed the reality that there are millions of immigrants currently residing in the United States illegally. I supported the Senate’s version of the immigration bill when it passed on May 25th because it satisfies the priorities of our state. The House and Senate must now meet to work through the differences between the bills they passed and produce a compromise.

Investigating Illegal Wiretapping

Warrantless surveillance of phone calls and records, conducted by the National Security Agency (NSA), continues to be in the news. It was recently uncovered that various phone companies have been cooperating with the NSA’s request by providing a broad range of phone records of Americans. The scope of this collaboration remains unclear, but the potential violations of privacy and civil liberties are clear. I support Senator Specter, Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, in his call for phone

companies to disclose more details about the program. I will continue working with my Senate colleagues to uncover and address any potentially illegal practices by the NSA.

Senate Rejects Misguided Attempt to Amend the Constitution

The Senate leadership once again took up the topic of amending the Constitution to define marriage as the union of one man and one woman. This amendment is problematic, as it takes away a state's right to define marriage as it sees appropriate, and it creates a climate of exclusion and intolerance. Therefore, I opposed this constitutional amendment. To read more about my opposition to this Constitutional amendment, please visit my web site at www.jeffords.senate.gov.