Mr. President, while the

Senate, with the encouragement of a

White House in full campaign mode,

debates a constitutional amendment to

ban gay marriage—a debate which will

consume days of the Senate’s time and

is all about scoring political points in

an election year—the disaster in

Darfur rages on.

It has been nearly 4 weeks since a

peace agreement was signed between

the Sudanese Government and one of

the rebel groups, but violence, hunger

and disease continue to claim innocent

lives.

Jan Egeland, United Nations Under-

Secretary General for Humanitarian

Affairs, recently described the humanitarian

situation in Darfur as being on

the verge of collapse.

In the midst of this calamity, the

Senate is focused on other matters.

Gay marriage. Next it will be flag

burning. And then full repeal of the estate

tax, to benefit the wealthiest of

the wealthy. Solutions in search of a

problem, while whole villages burn,

their inhabitants are slaughtered, and

relief organizations in Darfur struggle

to cope without adequate resources.

Between a quarter of a million and

half a million people have perished in

Darfur—mostly civilians whose villages

have been reduced to ashes.

Many, who escaped being shot or

hacked to death, have died from hunger

and disease.

The Sudanese Government has obstructed

the deployment of a U.N.

peacekeeping force in Darfur. The African

Union has done its best, but with

only 7,000 troops, inadequate resources,

and a weak mandate to patrol a vast

area with few roads, it has been unable

to provide civilians with the protection

they need.

I am so very proud that two high

school students in Vermont are setting

a moral example for all Americans.

Ben Rome and Brian Banks, seniors at

Essex High School, outraged over the

tragedy that is unfolding half a world

away, felt compelled to do something

about it. They have organized a public

rally in Burlington, VT, for this coming

Sunday to bring Vermonters together

to speak out about one of the

worst human disasters in recent memory.

I look forward to joining Ben and

Brian and other concerned Vermonters

this weekend.

The supplemental appropriations bill

for Iraq, Afghanistan, Hurricane

Katrina recovery, and Sudan, which

should be completed this week—and I

hope we can find the time to pass it—

contains additional funds to support

the current level of peacekeepers in

Darfur through the remainder of this

year. This will help, but twice that

amount is needed.

The supplemental also provides additional

funds for food and other humanitarian

aid. It should shame the White

House and the Congress to reflect on

the fact that we know we are not doing

enough.

We also provide funds to support a

Presidential special envoy for Sudan,

to work in pursuit of peace in Darfur

and stability throughout Sudan, northern

Uganda, and Chad. We need someone

of the caliber of Senator Danforth

to be working continuously to help

solve the Darfur crisis.

A tragedy like this is bigger than any

of us as individuals, but it is not too

big if we join together in constructive

action—as individuals, as private relief

organizations, and as nations.

America is a great and good nation

with the power to help stop this. But it

will take sustained attention, and it

will take the efforts of committed citizens

like Brian Banks and Ben Rome

who, one by one, are opening the

world’s eyes to a tragedy that must be

stopped.