Mr. President, I am

pleased that the Senate is considering

H.R. 5834, a bill to reauthorize the

North Korea Human Rights Act. The

act underscores U.S. concern about the

poor human rights conditions inside

North Korea and the difficulties faced

by thousands of North Koreans who

have fled the country and become refugees.

I support this bill because I believe

our Government’s approach to

North Korean human rights and refugee

issues must be seamlessly integrated

into a coherent strategy that

promotes regional peace and stability,

advances core U.S. national security

interests by verifiably eliminating

North Korea’s pursuit of nuclear weapons,

and step by step encourages North

Korea to adhere to international norms

in the areas of human rights, security,

and trade.

It is essential that the United States

reach out and begin a dialogue with

North Korea on issues related to basic

human rights. Four years ago, I was

proud to work with my colleague, Senator

BROWNBACK of Kansas, on an

amendment to the North Korean

Human Rights Act that created within

the Department of State a Special

Envoy for Human Rights in North

Korea. In reauthorizing the act, the

Congress expresses its intent that the

envoy should be a full-time employee,

and Congress elevates the post to the

rank of ambassador, subject to the advice

and consent of the Senate. The incumbent

special envoy has pursued his

duties part-time while residing outside

of Washington, making coordination

with the Department more difficult

and limiting the overall effectiveness

of his diplomatic efforts. By expressing

the sense of the Congress that the new

ambassador should be a full-time position,

the Congress does not preclude

the possibility that the President may

find it desirable to nominate as ambassador

an individual who already has

other duties closely related to those to

be pursued by the Ambassador for

North Korean Human Rights Issues. Indeed,

such dual assignments are not

uncommon within the State Department.

The bill acknowledges that the new

Ambassador for North Korean Human

Rights Issues should be able to participate

in policy planning and implementation

with respect to refugee issues,

particularly given the fact that returning

refugees are among those most

likely to be persecuted by North Korean

authorities. But it is my expectation

that the State Department’s Bureau

of Population, Refugees, and Migration

(PRM) will continue to play

the leading role on North Korean refugee

issues, engaging with China and

other nations to ensure humane treatment

in accordance with international

norms. PRM has the staffing, expertise,

congressional authorization, and experience

needed to spearhead U.S. efforts

in this area, and they should continue

to do so.

The new Ambassador for North Korean

Human Rights Issues will have to

approach the job with quiet determination

and considerable patience. Discussing

human rights issues with North

Korean authorities will not be easy,

and the new ambassador will need to

have both excellent diplomatic skills

and a deep understanding of East Asia

and the particular circumstances on

the Korean Peninsula. Change will not

come easily, and is more likely to flow

from dialogue and engagement than

from bombast and condemnation.

There are many issues on the table,

ranging from family reunification visits

for the thousands of Korean-Americans

with relatives in the north, to

ending the persecution of people of

faith inside North Korea. Other humanitarian

issues may also enter the mix,

including food security and public

health. It is my hope that the new ambassador

will work with our treaty

ally, South Korea, and with other

countries neighboring North Korea to

craft an approach to human rights

issues that can, step by step, see an improvement

in the lives of average

North Koreans and compassionate care

for those who have fled the country. In

this effort, the ambassador may find it

useful to draw appropriate lessons from

the Helsinki process in Europe, but ultimately

the approach will have to be

one that is specifically tailored to the

North Korean situation.

As Congress passes this legislation,

we must not lose sight of the fact that

members of the Bush administration

are toiling to convince North Korea to

resume the disablement of its nuclear

facilities and to agree to a verification

mechanism for its nuclear declaration.

These efforts are of vital importance.

It is regrettable that progress has been

derailed over a dispute about sanctions

relief and the verification protocol.

North Korea should understand that if

Pyongyang honors its commitments,

we stand ready to honor ours. On the

basis of action-for-action, I hope the

United States and North Korea, along

with other members of the Six Party

Talks, will work to accomplish the

denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula

and the full integration of North

Korea into the community of nations.

In exchange for the complete and

verifiable elimination of its nuclear

weapons programs, North Korea stands

to receive energy assistance, sanctions

relief, and security assurances from the

United States and other members of

the Six Party Talks. I look forward to

the day when North Korea is truly at

peace with its neighbors and enjoys

normal relations with the United

States. It is a future that is within

North Korea’s grasp if it abandons its

pursuit of nuclear weapons.