

and confrontational at times, but he kept his cool and responded within reasonable parameters. The Judiciary Committee and the full Senate cannot be guarantors that Judge Roberts will fulfill ours or anyone's expectations. The Court's history is full of justices who have surprised or disappointed their appointers or inquisitors.

But the process has been full, fair and dignified. On some questions, Judge Roberts, as the song about the Kansas City burlesque queen in the stage play "Oklahoma" says: "She (he) went about as far as she (he) could go" without committing himself to votes on cases likely to come before the court. When all the facts are considered, my judgment is that Judge Roberts is qualified, has the potential to serve with distinction as Chief Justice and should be confirmed. I will vote "yea."

Mr. SPECTER. I thank the Chair, yield the floor, and, in the absence of any Senator seeking recognition, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DEWINE). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is now closed.

AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2006

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the hour of 3 p.m. having arrived, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 2744, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2744) making appropriations for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies programs for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2006, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Bennett-Kohl amendment No. 1726, to amend the Rural Electrification Act of 1936.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, we are pleased to present to the Senate today the fiscal year 2006 appropriations bill for the Department of Agriculture, rural development, and related agencies. The bill is before the Senate and is open for amendment or discussion and debate. I am pleased to announce to the Senate that this reflects a lot of hard work through hearings, examining the President's budget request for these Departments for this next fiscal year.

The subcommittee was very capably managed by the distinguished Senator from Utah, Mr. BENNETT, who is chairman of this subcommittee. The bill is within the budget authority outlined

by the budget resolution adopted by the Senate. Specifically, section 302(b) of the budget resolution allocates \$17.348 billion to this subcommittee's authority for appropriations. It is within the outlay allocation of \$18.816 billion.

Throughout the past 7 months, the committee has reviewed suggestions by Senators and others who are interested in the provisions of this bill. The bill, as reported by the subcommittee, was approved unanimously and submitted to the full committee. And after review by a bipartisan group of Senators in that subcommittee, all of the Senators in the full committee approved the allocation and the appropriation of funds as reported in this bill.

We hope if any Senators have any suggestions for amendments, they will bring them to the attention of the managers of the bill. We will be happy to discuss those and review them. We hope we can complete action on this bill at an early date. There are other bills that need to be considered by the Senate, so we hope we can take up these suggestions, and if there are amendments, we can vote on them expeditiously.

We appreciate Senator KOHL, who is the ranking minority member of this subcommittee, for his hard work and leadership in the development of this bill. Their staff has worked with the staff on the majority side in a cooperative way. This is a truly bipartisan effort. The Senate appreciates that fact. I congratulate all who have been actively involved in the development of the legislation.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I rise as a member of the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee to discuss the fiscal year 2006 Agriculture appropriations bill. I applaud the chairman, Senator COCHRAN of Mississippi, as well as Chairman BENNETT and Ranking Member KOHL for their diligence on this spending bill and for ensuring that we have arrived at as sound a financial package as was possible, given the pending budget resolution's mandate to cut funds from USDA. At a time of significant budgetary deficits and increasingly tight funding, I worked with my colleagues to maintain a secure package for our producers and rural communities, especially in light of a sorely inadequate proposed USDA budget from the administration.

Producers and ranchers in my State of South Dakota and across the Nation would simply prefer a fair price for what they produce at the day's end. USDA programs and Federal funding are crucial for producers, however, when markets are challenging and prices are depressed. The farm bill that was hammered out in 2002 is a contract with rural America, with South Dakota, to ensure adequate safety nets and increased opportunities for rural communities. Numerous Members of

Congress, as well as agricultural organizations concerned with the President's proposed budget, have pointed out that the farm bill has already come in at \$14 billion under its original projected costs.

At a time when producers need the contract negotiated by Congress and signed into law by this President, the administration proposed limiting the benefits promised to producers. We cannot balance the national deficit on the backs of our Nation's producers. I voted to restore the cuts that were made to the agricultural spending package, and I am concerned for the adjustments that will be made to the agricultural spending bill in light of the budget reconciliation instructions advocated by this administration. I am concerned for the impact these cuts will have on our rural communities and our producers.

There are several initiatives, however, that I am pleased to see in this spending measure. I would like to touch on a few of those priorities. As a member of the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, there are a few South-Dakota-specific items that I am pleased are included in this measure. A few of them include funding for a collaborative four-State effort led by South Dakota State University. These funds will increase opportunities for South Dakota sheep and cattle producers, building a better climate for livestock feeding in our State. There is funding to work at South Dakota State University to integrate pulse crops in crop rotations for South Dakota farmers. By integrating pulse crops into rotations, farmers can increase profits and improve soil quality.

There is some funding for the Seed Technology Center at South Dakota State University. Funds will be used to conduct seed technology and biotechnology research to benefit agricultural producers and consumers, enhancing profitability for producers and resulting in better food production.

Lastly, there is funding for the South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks Department to continue animal damage control work. The funds allow the South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks Department to continue to meet the growing demands of controlling predatory nuisance and diseased animals. SDSU, a land grant university in Brookings, is significantly impacted by Hatch, McIntire-Stennis, and animal health Federal formula funds. SDSU is an institution that makes enormous contributions to our agricultural industry through the research initiatives that it spearheads.

The President's proposed cuts on their research centers would have greatly impacted this land grant institution's ability to function in an effective manner. The President's proposed budget would have cut 45 faculty and staff at South Dakota State University, with a 25- to 50-percent reduction in graduate students. These cuts would have resulted in closure of at least one

SDSU research farm and at least one SDSU public service laboratory. I worked with my colleagues and with the chairman to ensure that formula funds were, in fact, reinstated at sufficient levels in this bill.

I continue to hear from constituents about the viability of the Resource, Conservation, and Development Program, which was funded at only \$25 million in the President's proposed fiscal year 2006 budget. The funding level is a substantial reduction from fiscal year 2005 funding at \$51 million which was reinstated in the fiscal year 2006 spending package. Rural development initiatives are crucial for creating additional opportunities. The Resource, Conservation, and Development Program contributes tremendously to the economic growth in rural communities, and limiting spending for this program limits economic opportunities.

With respect to the animal identification program, \$33 million was devoted to this system last year via the omnibus spending bill, and funds were again requested by the Bush administration. Given the size and scale of this program, the projected costs, it is essential to ensure that the Department of Agriculture includes stakeholders, recognizing the concerns that producers have voiced for the implementation of this system. The USDA needs to ensure adequate communication with Congress in consideration of producers and ranchers. I continue to hear, as well, from producers and ranchers who are increasingly concerned with the Department's initiative to consolidate Farm Service Agency service centers. Our 59 offices in South Dakota are essential for providing face-to-face contact with producers. Not every producer owns a computer. Expecting our farmers and ranchers to drive further distances, especially considering the significant cost of fuel, is not reasonable.

Implementation of our farm bill programs depends on the ability of our FSA offices to communicate with ranchers and farmers. The administration is doing a severe disservice to our agricultural communities with such a drastic course of action.

Lastly, one of the key components I would like to address is the mandatory Country-of-Origin Labeling Program signed into law by President Bush in this most recent farm bill. I was the primary author of the mandatory country-of-origin labeling law that was included in the 2002 farm bill. While I was disappointed to see the House include a 1-year delay for meat and meat products for the Country-of-Origin Labeling Program in the fiscal year 2006 Agriculture appropriations bill, the Senate bill that was reported favorably out of committee contains no such delay. This bill, in fact, contains roughly \$3 million for program implementation, which is a modest amount compared to the necessary funding for other initiatives. Mandatory country-of-origin labeling is a program appreciated by

both consumers and producers. It is not rocket science and, in fact, would be inexpensive to implement. A recent poll by Public Citizen reflects, as well, that 85 percent of consumers want to know where their food comes from. An additional 74 percent of consumers want this labeling program mandated. I continue to hear from producers and ranchers in support of this program, and any type of further delay would be a severe disservice for this right-to-know initiative for our consumers and a marketing tool for producers, as well as a great boost for our export markets.

Again, I thank Chairman BENNETT and Ranking Member KOHL for their leadership on this agricultural spending package.

I thank Chairman COCHRAN, as well, for his leadership during a time of obviously tight budget constraints.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I appreciate very much the kind remarks of the distinguished Senator from South Dakota and for his influence in the process of developing the appropriate levels of funding in this bill. We have tried very hard not only to stay within the budget allocation but to try to identify priorities so that we put money where the problems are and we deal with the realities of living on a farm, trying to make a living, trying to meet the needs of communities around the country for rural development projects. There is a wide range of jurisdiction that comes under the authority of this subcommittee for rural development, such as housing for low-income people who would otherwise not be able to have housing. Also, we have important components in the bill relating to food safety. We are confronted with threats to our country from terrorist groups, so this makes us worry about bioterrorism and being able to develop an infrastructure to protect ourselves against any efforts to contaminate our food supply or to wreak havoc in our communities with other terrorist activities that relate to our food supply and its sources. For that purpose, we have invested in research and other initiatives that will help us more successfully deal with these challenges to help assure the American public that our food supply is safe, wholesome, and nutritious.

In that connection, too, we realize this subcommittee has the responsibility of funding the school feeding programs so that school lunch programs, school breakfast programs, and others maintain healthy diets for children in school throughout our country to bring to them nutritious and safe foods.

We just reauthorized in the legislative Committee on Agriculture last year a new law that authorizes the funding of these programs. We have new initiatives, such as fruit and vegetable programs that help assure that

schools are able to access and provide a wide variety of healthy foods for children in the public school systems of our country.

These are very important steps, building upon a legacy by previous committees that have worked on these challenges and expanding the benefits so that more and more students are reached by these programs.

We try to make sure the costs of these programs are controlled so that people are not priced out of the system. We want to make sure that in our public schools, there are free and reduced-price lunches available in our schools for those who cannot afford the full cost of these meals.

I also want to point out that access to communications systems, to rural water and sewer systems, to modern electricity facilities that are available in rural areas—where providing such services is much more expensive per consumer than it is in urban areas—is made available through Federal programs that help assure access of farm families and others who live in rural areas of our country to these important quality-of-life situations.

We have made a tremendous contribution throughout rural America in promoting economic development using business and industrial loans, trying to attract good-paying jobs to small towns and rural communities. Those programs are funded in this bill, too.

I might say for the purpose of showing the commitment, in many of these areas we have increased the funding over previous year levels of funding.

The Food and Drug Administration is an independent agency that is funded in this bill as well. Such initiatives as medical device review to assure safety for the consumers, drug safety, and the pharmaceutical products that are supplied throughout our country have to meet standards imposed by the Food and Drug Administration.

This year, we are providing an additional \$5 million to the Food and Drug Administration for the purpose of helping ensure drug safety. The medical device review account is increased by \$7.8 million over last year's level. I have mentioned our efforts in counterterrorism and food safety. That is also within the purview of the Food and Drug Administration, and the funding there is \$16.6 million above last year's level. To help meet those challenges, we have had to make adjustments elsewhere in the bill to keep it within the allocation permitted by the Budget Committee.

There is not a specific account in here directed to hurricane victims. The recent hurricane that struck the Gulf Coast States has caused a tremendous amount of damage throughout the Gulf of Mexico States—Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. I think there are more counties in my State of Mississippi affected by that disaster than any other State. The geographical area was so large, it is just horrible to contemplate the total amount of physical

destruction of trees, of growing crops, of poultry facilities. Our agricultural and rural community has been hit hard by the effects of this hurricane. When you get closer to the gulf coast, of course, you see total destruction along the coastal areas.

The other day when the majority leader led a delegation of 14 Senators to Louisiana, New Orleans, across the Mississippi gulf coast and into Alabama, ending our tour in Mobile, it brought home to all of us that the entire gulf coast area has been devastated. Businesses are gone. Houses are gone. Churches are gone. Schools have disappeared. It is breathtaking and horrible to observe.

The point I am making is that while this bill is not a disaster assistance bill per se, there are many provisions in this bill that will help these communities rebuild and recover and will help the people of those areas until they can get their feet back on the ground and back at work and in suitable housing.

I mentioned the farmer's loan programs that exist. There are also funds in this bill for food stamps, for the Women, Infants and Children feeding program. This is for mothers, to help them care for their children, help to get them off to a healthy start in life. Food safety concerns we have mentioned. Conservation recovery, rural housing programs are all very important components to the recovery effort from Hurricane Katrina. The Department of Agriculture has stepped forward and is making good progress in identifying areas that need special help.

Before long, the Senate will take up another supplemental appropriations bill targeted directly to disaster victims. We are in preliminary discussions already with the administration on when that money will be needed, when will it be considered by the Senate, when will the request be submitted. These are issues we are working hard to resolve to be sure that Federal agencies that have the responsibility of responding to this disaster have the funds they need to do it and do it right and to do it quickly.

We have had a number of requests from Senators to consider changes in this bill and for opportunities to speak on the bill. We are here and we will be here the remainder of this day available to discuss issues that may be brought to the attention of the Senate. We appreciate the support of all Senators.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, when I was talking about the strong support

we received in this subcommittee from staff, I wanted to specifically mention those staff members who have been actively involved in the development of this legislation, helping organize the hearings that were held, to review requests, to assess the needs:

John Ziolkowski, who is the clerk of this subcommittee, formerly was staff director of the Senate Agriculture Committee when I was pleased to serve as chairman. He has been very instrumental in managing the work effort of this subcommittee.

Hunter Moorhead, who has had much experience in agricultural issues and is a veteran of this subcommittee staff as well and was very active in his work is deeply appreciated. He, incidentally, is from the State of Mississippi, so we don't have to have a translator or anybody doing simultaneous translation for anyone to understand us.

Fitz Elder, Dianne Preece, as well as Stacy McBride, an FDA fellow who has joined this staff team and has been helpful in developing our section in particular dealing with the Food and Drug Administration, all have been very helpful, and we appreciate their good work.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ALLEN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 1735

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I send an amendment to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Mississippi [Mr. COCHRAN] proposes an amendment numbered 1735.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment is as follows:

At the appropriate place in the bill insert the following:

SEC. . Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Agriculture may consider the Municipality of Carolina, Puerto Rico as meeting the eligibility requirements for loans and grants programs in the Rural Development mission area.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, this is a provision to be added to the bill that deals with eligibility for USDA rural development programs.

This is a provision which enables the municipality of Carolina, Puerto Rico to be eligible for USDA rural development programs. Eligibility for these programs is based on certain statistics such as population and income but on occasion some communities are declared not eligible because they are too

close to an urban area or there is a small pocket of higher income population in the locality.

There is no cost to this amendment. It merely makes the community eligible. They still must apply through USDA and they are subject to the availability of existing funds.

The Agriculture Committee has no objection and it has been cleared on the Democratic side.

Mr. President, the amendment has been cleared on both sides of the aisle and we know of no objection to the amendment from any Senator.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there further debate? If not, the question is on agreeing to the amendment.

The amendment (No. 1735) was agreed to.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, the pending Department of Agriculture and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill for FY 2006, H.R. 2744, as reported by the Senate Committee on Appropriations provides \$86.883 billion in budget authority and \$69.248 billion in outlays in FY 2006. Of these totals, \$69.535 billion in budget authority and \$50.456 billion in outlays are for mandatory programs in FY 2006.

The bill provides total discretionary budget authority in FY 2006 of \$17.348 billion. This amount is \$430 million more than the President's request, equal to the 302(b) allocations adopted by the Senate, \$518 million more than the House-passed bill, and \$905 million less than FY 2005 enacted levels.

I commend the distinguished Chairman of the Appropriations Committee for bringing this legislation before the Senate, and I ask unanimous consent that a table displaying the Budget Committee scoring of the bill be printed in the RECORD.

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

H.R. 2744, 2006 AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS—SPENDING COMPARISONS—SENATE-REPORTED BILL

[Fiscal Year 2006, \$ millions]

	General Purpose	Mandatory	Total
Senate-reported bill:			
Budget authority	17,348	69,535	86,883
Outlays	18,792	50,456	69,248
Senate 302(b) allocation:			
Budget authority	17,348	69,535	86,883
Outlays	18,816	50,456	69,272
2005 Enacted:			
Budget authority	18,253	71,954	90,207
Outlays	18,649	49,563	68,212
President's request:			
Budget authority	16,918	69,535	86,453
Outlays	18,652	50,456	69,108
House-passed bill:			
Budget authority	16,830	69,535	86,365
Outlays	18,519	50,456	68,975
SENATE-REPORTED BILL COMPARED TO:			
Senate 302(b) allocation:			
Budget authority	0	0	0
Outlays	-24	0	-24
2005 Enacted:			
Budget authority	-905	-2,419	-3,324
Outlays	143	893	1,036
President's request:			
Budget authority	430	0	430
Outlays	140	0	140
House-passed bill:			
Budget authority	518	0	518
Outlays	273	0	273

Note: Details may not add to totals due to the rounding. Totals adjusted for consistency with scorekeeping conventions.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there be a period for morning business within which Senators may be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Ohio is recognized.

Mr. DEWINE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 30 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator is recognized.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

ARMY CAPTAIN DENNIS L. PINTOR

Mr. DEWINE. Mr. President, on October 11, 2004, the Lima, OH, newspaper received an e-mail that said the following:

Greetings, My name is Captain Dennis Pintor . . . I was born and raised in Lima and lived there until I enlisted in the Army in 1992. I am currently requesting the help of the citizens of Lima to assist in our efforts here in Baghdad. School here has just begun session and many of the students need supplies . . . I tell you it makes a difference in the kids and my soldiers. I appreciate any assistance . . . the people of Lima can offer. Respectfully—Captain Dennis Pintor.

Tragically, that same newspaper reported the captain's death just a few days later. He was killed when an improvised explosive device detonated near his patrol vehicle in Baghdad.

At the news of his death, family friend Lillian Abelita remembered that Dennis was "one of a kind" and that he touched thousands of lives. She noted that Dennis's "last wish was for the Iraqi children." "It wasn't even for himself," she said. The focus of his life had always been giving all that he had for others.

Dennis Pintor was born and raised in Lima by loving parents, Bert and Ellen Pintor. He was the big brother whom siblings Bob, Sara, and Diana looked up to.

Dennis attended Elida High School, where he belonged to several teams and clubs. He played soccer and tennis, was on the yearbook staff, and started the Red Knees Club for his fellow basketball players who didn't get much playing time. John Hullinger, a teammate, remembered that "Dennis was not one to complain about sitting on the bench. He made the most of it and had fun with it."

Dennis made the most of everything, including his academic studies. Dennis wanted to learn. Alan Chum, a guidance counselor at Elida High School, had Dennis in several math classes. He recalled that Dennis was an "inquisitive" student who would "bring an energy that kept the class going."

Teachers wanted Dennis in their classrooms. Allen emphasized that "[Dennis] had a knack for being able to answer questions and ask good, appropriate questions. He was just a good kid—great to have in class."

Dennis excelled academically and earned an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point where he trained to be an engineer. He graduated in 1998 and then went on to complete Army Ranger School. Dennis quickly became a well-respected superior who was known for putting his men first.

Dennis served as a peacekeeper in Kosovo—an assignment that suited his desire to help those who needed it most. In 2002, Dennis was assigned as Company Commander of Bravo Company, 20th Engineer Battalion, based in Fort Hood, TX.

Dennis was Army through and through. One of Ellen Pintor's favorite memories of her son is when he would visit her classroom at North Middle School on Veterans Day. He would playfully give the kids orders and assign platoon leaders. Dennis would order the kids to stand in line and if they wouldn't do what he said quickly enough, he would command: "Drop and give me five!" Simultaneously, Dennis would drop to the floor and do push-ups with the kids.

While he was in the Army, Dennis was lucky enough to meet the love of his life—Stacy—and married her in 2000. The two were meant for each other. Stacy called her husband, "a glimpse of heaven." She said that "it was love that struck our souls. Individually we were strong, but together we were powerful." They were blessed with a baby girl, whom they named Rhea.

Being together with his wife and daughter was so very important to Dennis. However, he also felt a great sense of duty to his fellow soldiers and to his Nation. His unit was called for deployment to Iraq in March 2004. Although it was difficult to leave his family, Dennis had a job to do. While overseas, Dennis was in charge of rebuilding and securing the safety of several schools in Baghdad. Dennis realized that Iraqi children needed help—and they needed supplies. He enlisted the help of those in his hometown of Lima to give what they could. As he had so many times before, Dennis had the needs of others foremost in his mind.

CPT Jay Wisham, a member of Dennis's unit, noted that he was not surprised Dennis was trying to secure school supplies for the Iraqi children. He said this about Dennis:

He was just a very good guy all the way around. He firmly believed in what we were doing over there. All he wanted to do was make things better for whomever's life he touched.

Indeed, Dennis touched many lives.

After his service, Dennis wanted to return to West Point as a professor. David Garrison said this about his nephew:

[Dennis] refused to take the easy way through life. As an officer, he was determined to receive all the tough training. Unfortunately, America's future cadets will never have the opportunity to learn what this West Point hero might have taught.

Although Dennis will never teach those West Point cadets in the class-

room, he will teach them through his legacy. He will teach them through the love he had for his family and through the lives of those Iraqi children, who now have the opportunity to go to school.

At the memorial service following Dennis's death, his uncle David explained that "was loved so strongly by so many because he loved so selflessly." The Reverend Henry Sattler, who married Dennis and Stacy, noted that Dennis "knew in the career he'd chosen that he may be asked to lay down his life for his friends . . . and he said yes."

CPT Dennis Pintor was a selfless man. Thanks to his efforts, more than 30 boxes of school supplies were sent to Iraq.

Thanks to his efforts, hundreds of Iraqi children have a chance for a better life.

Thanks to his efforts, the Iraqi people have a chance for freedom.

My wife Fran and I keep Dennis's wife and daughter and his parents and siblings in our thoughts and in our prayers.

ARMY SERGEANT BENJAMIN BISKIE

Mr. President, today I remember and pay tribute to a young man from Vermillion, OH, who gave his life for our freedom and for the freedom of the people of Iraq.

Army Sgt Benjamin Biskie gave the ultimate sacrifice—his last true measure of devotion—on Christmas Eve, 2003. His vehicle struck an improvised explosive device near Samarra, Iraq. He was 27 years old.

Ben was born and raised in Arizona with his two sisters, Andrea and Darlene. He attended Tucson Junior Academy until he moved with his mother, Della, to Ohio in 1993. There, he graduated from Vermillion High School one year later. Following graduation, Ben enlisted in the Army, but not before he met his future wife, Marcie, that summer while working at Cedar Point amusement park. The two quickly fell in love and were married.

Although Ben was proud to serve in the U.S. Army, his crowning achievement was the birth of his son Benjamin, Jr. Ben's Army comrades remember how he constantly told stories about his son.

Ben trained at Fort Leonard Wood, MO, where he, Marcie, and Ben, Jr. made their home. Ben, Sr. would eventually serve one year in South Korea before he was sent to the Middle East.

Though Ben did not want to leave his young family, he did not hesitate when he and the rest of the 5th Engineer Battalion, 1st Engineer Brigade were called to serve in Iraq in April 2003. The men of the "Fighting Fifth" were attached to the 4th Infantry Division and were tasked with laying roads and bridges for the Division's advancement. Following the successful completion of that mission, Ben and the rest of the Battalion aided the reconstruction efforts in Iraq.