

IN HONOR OF OUR FALLEN
HEROES IN THE ARMED FORCES

HON. CHRISTOPHER SHAYS

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 7, 2007

Mr. SHAYS. Madam Speaker, on May 28, 2007, millions of Americans across the country recognized the brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice while fighting to protect the citizens and freedom of our great Nation.

In recognition of Memorial Day, LT. Zach Alessi-Friedlander gave an address at a Memorial Day Ceremony at Hillside Cemetery in Wilton, Connecticut. I submit the text of LT. Alessi-Friedlander's remarks to be entered into the RECORD.

We come together on this solemn occasion to commemorate the sacrifice and celebrate the legacy of those Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, and Airmen who have lost their lives while serving our great Nation.

When the leaders of the Wilton Memorial Day parade committee—especially Mr. Toothaker and Mr. Brautigam as well as Mr. Dartley of the VFW—invited me to speak at this ceremony, I embraced the opportunity because it would give me a forum through which to speak with you all about service—a truly timeless value that is integral to the vibrancy of our society. My purpose here today is to provide a Soldiers'-eye-view on the value of service—drawn not only from my own experiences but from those of the extraordinary Soldiers with whom I have had the great privilege of serving alongside.

Nine years ago, I was 17 years old and a week from my high school graduation. To me, the world seemed pregnant with opportunity and possibility. Over much of these last nine years, my personal journey has been largely defined by abstract intellectual pursuits—college, internships, and even a semester of graduate school. But in early 2004, I felt a growing sense of discomfort. So much was unfolding outside the classrooms and libraries in which I spent so much of my time. I was almost 23 and I felt the need to be a part of something that was larger and more important than me. I then made the decision to pursue a commission in the Army. At the time, in response to the queries of friends and family, I could only describe my motivations in an abstract sense. But over the last two and half years, the reasons for my decision to serve have been made clearer through the crucible of experience.

After attending Basic Training and Officer Candidate School, I was commissioned as a Field Artillery lieutenant. Sixty-five years ago, on the conventional battlefields of World War II, I would have been responsible for planning and coordinating the artillery, mortars, aerial firepower, and naval gunfire needed to support my troop commander's scheme of maneuver. However, the battlefields of Iraq are—at this stage of the war—decidedly different from their World War II counterparts. Conventional schemes of maneuver have been replaced with the unconventional strategies and tactics needed to manage an elusive and adaptive enemy within an asymmetric and three-dimensional battlefield. Coalition Forces are grappling with a multi-faceted insurgency—divided along different ethno-sectarian and ideological lines. The fight for key terrain and the push to force the enemy to formally surrender have been replaced with the fight for the hearts and minds of the Iraqi local nationals—the people upon whom the burden of a free and secure Iraq will ultimately rest.

What I'm talking about is our effort to diversify the scope of the "fight" in order to create a foundation upon which the Iraqi people can rebuild a society less vulnerable to virulent strands of militant Islam and sectarian antipathy. More specifically, we now complement our combat operations with four additional lines of operation: training Iraqi Security Forces; promoting local governance; restoring essential services; and developing the economy. This is a long, tough, unpredictable process that is at times frustrating and at other times exhilarating. Over the last nine months, my troop has been able to develop our sector through a strategy that depends fundamentally upon earning the genuine trust of the local nationals living within our sector. Many of you, I am sure, have heard about many of these new emphases—especially after the recent appointment of General David Petraeus as the new theater commander in Iraq. However, experiencing it on the ground is a truly perspective-altering experience. My unit's progress—especially over the past 5 months—has been startling. In this period, we have poured several million dollars worth of projects into the small villages dotting our sector—providing services like trash collection and replacing dilapidated infrastructure such as a drinking-water tower and power-line transformers. But our most successful-civil military initiatives have been those which have integrated our Soldiers, members of either the Iraqi Army or Iraqi National Police, and the local nationals into combined community projects. Examples of such initiatives include: two medical-assistance visits during which our medics and doctors were able to provide medicine, care, diagnoses, and treatment advice to almost 400 local nationals; as well as something called a "VET CAP" during which an Army veterinarian was able to treat and de-worm 150 sheep and 20 cows.

But, the civil-military initiatives of which I am most proud are the efforts that have enabled us to promote truly indigenous forms of self-government. In December, when we recognized that local nationals residing in our sector were unwilling to participate in the regional branches of the Iraqi government—called Nahia and Qada councils—we decided to host a series of village-level town-hall meetings. At these meetings, we were able to identify community leaders with the initiative, technical expertise, and will to represent the other members of the villages. These town-hall meetings served as jumping-off points for two major developments. A group of local nationals in our largest village now regularly attend the Nahia council meetings, which allows them to interface with the Iraqi government. But, perhaps more impressively, this same group created a Farmers' Cooperative, whose leaders now represent farmers from throughout our entire area of operations.

But, make no mistake, our unit has been forced to combat an adaptive, innovative, patient, and committed insurgent threat intent on disrupting our efforts through a series of persistent attacks against us and—perhaps more ominously—by casting a specter of fear over the local-national population whom we are attempting to secure and whose trust we are working to earn. Our military has been largely built and trained to fight high-intensity conflicts using technological superiority and mobility to combat nation states. My unit is a cavalry troop composed of field artilleryman, cavalry scouts, and infantrymen—all of whom were initially trained to play specific roles in a conventional fight. But, every day, I am amazed at how our Soldiers have been able to adapt to the changing nature of the fight.

My preceding remarks were an effort to provide the context necessary for you all to

appreciate the service of the Soldiers alongside whom I proudly serve. General Robert E. Lee once described duty—the close cousin of service—as the most sublime word in the English language. I would argue that he was trying to explain that duty and service as concepts are impossible to understand in an abstract intellectual sense; rather, in order to wrap our minds around this simple but crucial civic value, we need to discuss specific examples—and that will be the intent of the balance of my remarks.

The key to the success that my unit has experienced has been the influence of our extraordinary non-commissioned officers. For those of you with prior military experience, you know that at troop or company levels, NCOs have dramatically more time in service—and thus experience—than their commissioned-officer counterparts. Therefore, the key to a successful unit is to develop a synergy between the NCO and Officer Corps. Each officer-NCO pair must understand the role that the other plays in training, planning, and operations and must then work to complement their counterpart in every phase of mission preparation and execution. In my troop, the only Soldiers with previous combat experience are the NCOs. Two in particular come to mind: SFC Richardson and SSG Mont-Eton, the platoon sergeant and senior scout for our 2nd platoon—the element whom I would argue has helped to establish the model by which a counter-insurgency must be fought. Perhaps the most illuminating parts of my deployment have come while riding alongside SSG Monty in his truck. Over the course of any given patrol, he spends time instructing his gunner on how to more effectively scan the key pieces of terrain with his optics; teaching his driver on how to scan the road for the command-wire-IED initiators that are carefully concealed alongside the routes in our sector; and positioning his dismount on where he must stand to establish the most effective security when the platoon gets out of the trucks. But SSG Monty's true gift is his uncanny ability to establish rapport with the local nationals upon whose trust the entire troop depends in order to rebuild the communities and counter the insurgent threats. Smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee constantly, SSG Monty can approach any individual in our sector, and, within a matter of minutes, they are exchanging stories about their children or talking about how to improve water flow in a nearby irrigation canal. Never in my life, not at Columbia nor at Harvard, have I ever encountered an individual with more practical intelligence—with the ability to adapt doctrine or theory to a real-world operating environment, which, in our case, carries life and death significance. As for SFC Richardson, he is simply a force of nature. He is the tactical expert upon whom his platoon leader relies to carefully plan any deliberate operation. Riding in the 4-truck, the platoon's trail vehicle, he has managed the evacuation of all Soldiers injured on patrol with a sense of calm and poise that has allowed the platoon to address potentially catastrophic situations with the speed and efficiency needed to ensure the safety of all involved. The Soldiers in his platoon trust him implicitly and would literally follow him wherever he decided to go. He is the most senior Soldier in the entire troop, with even more years in service than our first sergeant; he has used this seniority to be the forceful and articulate voice on all Soldier issues. When his guys are smoked, he goes to my commander and first sergeant, and tells them the platoon needs a day of refit . . . and they listen. SFC Richardson was the one who insisted upon explaining to the local-national children, who gathered to receive their soccer

balls, why Nick's name had been inscribed on each of their gifts. Into his leadership style, SFC Richardson has managed to fold toughness, moral authority, compassion, and intelligence—or, more specifically, the ability to think critically about and to respond swiftly to unpredictable and challenging situations. And then there's the amazing symbiosis that my commander and first sergeant have been able to establish. They are the only command pair in my entire squadron not to have previously deployed to either Afghanistan or Iraq since combat operations began in those places in 2001 and 2003, respectively. However, they have not allowed this relative inexperience to adversely affect our troop's operations. Rather, they have approached our campaign plan with a refreshing open-mindedness, rigorous planning process, and strict attention to detail that have helped to keep our Soldiers safe and our unit mission effective.

I have still only spoken in relatively general terms thus far, but I want to share with you a specific example from our deployment that I believe demonstrates the courage and discipline of our Soldiers and, more generally, illuminates the value of service. In mid-October, after only a month in our sector, our infantry platoon was conducting dismounted night-time reconnaissance of a piece of key terrain. The 8-man dismounted element had just embarked on their patrol when their senior scout, SSG Hurlbutt, stepped on an anti-tank mine. He was blown off the ground and sent hurtling 15 feet through the air into a reed-choked and half-filled irrigation canal. Without hesitating, the dismounted team leader, SGT Love, and one of the other members of the patrol, SPC Conolly, immediately jumped into the canal and extracted—up its steep and slippery banks—their severely injured platoon mate—who, between the weight of his body, protective armor, weapon, and gear weighed more than 300 pounds. While they administered first aid, the platoon leader, 1LT Kimes, who was the trail man in the patrol, positioned the balance of the element in a security perimeter and coordinated for the MEDEVAC. (And, this provides me with an opportunity to praise again the technical skill and courage of Chief Reeves and the other MEDEVAC pilots upon us guys on the ground constantly rely.) Some people may be inclined to attribute the way in which the “rock lizards” were able to handle this situation to their training, but I am more inclined to attribute it to their courage and commitment to one another. As for SSG Hurlbutt, he is an extraordinary Soldier among many extraordinary Soldiers. Just prior to the deployment, he was given the option of deploying late or not deploying at all in order to care for his wife, who had only recently recovered from a very serious illness. Despite his concern for his wife, he declined the offer, understanding that his previous combat experience and deep knowledge were essential to helping his platoon transition to operations in theater. And then, in January, when my commander returned to Fort Drum, where my unit is based, for his mid-tour leave, he visited SSG Hurlbutt, who is still recovering from his injuries. In the months between sustaining the injury and my commander's visit, SSG Hurlbutt had received skin grafts to replace the skin and tissue destroyed by the mine's intense heat and he was undergoing excruciating physical therapy to recover from the chunk of flesh and muscle that he lost from his left thigh. Despite all this and despite the fact that he was barely ambulatory at the time of my commander's visit, he amazingly started campaigning to return to sector before we redeployed.

And then there's SPC Jonathan Cadavero. SPC Cadavero was my good friend and we

were in the same company at Officer Candidate School. Throughout the first half of the course, he began to have reservations about continuing his pursuit of an officer's commission—but never once questioned his desire to serve. After successfully completing the land-navigation course and receiving top marks on his academic testing and leadership evaluations, he recognized that he had met and exceeded the standards required to become an officer. He then felt that he could leave Officer Candidate School without feeling that he was dodging a challenge. He decided that he preferred to fulfill his obligations to the Army as an enlisted medic rather than as an officer, which meant less pay and decision-making authority; but, he did not care about that; he simply wanted to serve his country in Iraq. I remember having long conversations with him about his decision in our barracks at Ft Benning. I told him that he needed to make the decision with which he felt most comfortable; either way, he would have the opportunity to serve—a motivation we both proudly shared and embraced. The next time we met was at Bradley's, the tailor shop just outside of Ft Drum; we were both having nametapes sewn on our boonie caps, assault packs, and ruck sacks in preparation for the deployment of our brigade. We talked informally about our families; about finally being in the regular Army after more than a year in various Army schools; about the long and challenging deployment that hovered on the horizon. Over the next 6 months, we met randomly on Camp Striker—at the gym, at the chow hall, around our living quarters—each time sharing warm conversation, sometimes about the Army, but usually just about baseball. On February 27th, while acting as the platoon medic for a route-clearance element operating in support of my unit's sister troop, he was killed when an IED detonated under the truck in which he was riding. This device was buried deep under the paved surface of the road on which he was traveling, and, when it detonated, it completely destroyed his truck and killed all of the occupants. I remember seeing his name listed among the casualties. At first, everything seemed to collapse with the pain I felt for his loss, for his family, friends, and fellow Soldiers. And then everything seemed to explode in a rush of memories—wandering through the woods of Ft Benning in our desperate attempts to find our points on the land-navigation course or cracking jokes before the dreaded arrival of our supervisors at the ridiculous light-out ritual each night. I remember his distinctive New York accent, his infectious smile, his wit, his intelligence, his unwavering desire to serve his country as a Soldier during wartime. His sacrifice and sense of duty should be an inspiration to his fellow Soldiers and to the country he proudly served, but these are no comfort to his family and friends. The memory of his loss is still too fresh. The loss of each service member sends ripples of pain throughout communities; those closest to him are touched in a way that is impossible for most of us to imagine. Most can sympathize but not really empathize. This is the fundamental challenge of Memorial Day: once a year, we have the opportunity to congregate as a community and as a society to commemorate their sacrifice—but perhaps more importantly—to celebrate their legacy. I would encourage everyone to find the name of an individual Soldier, Marine, Airman, or Sailor, who has lost their life while serving their country; give that name and the magnitude of their sacrifice specific attention. This will help us to humanize the sacrifice that spans generations. This sacrifice and service connect us all in a tragic but crucial narrative. Ours is a country built upon the value of service and

it should be celebrated—even if it must be done with a somber tone and painful heart. I know that on every Memorial Day from this day forward, I'll take the opportunity to reflect on the life and sacrifice of SPC Cadavero.

Rare is this profession of arms for its whole essence is built upon a foundation of specifically conceptualized values that are intended to discipline individual Soldiers into a coherent and selfless team. The only constants that Soldiers will ever have are the support of their fellow Soldiers, the value of their service, and the appreciation of the grateful nation whom they serve. Soldiers have always been asked to sacrifice their comforts and desires for the sake of the team and for the mission. Unlike the civilian world, Soldiers are required to see their commitment through to the end regardless of the extenuating circumstances that may arise after making the oath of enlistment or commission. I am awed by the courage and service of my Soldiers, by their ability to manage their myriad personal and family concerns while negotiating the constant threats to their safety that lurk ominously every time we leave the wire in Iraq. The purpose of Memorial Day is for our nation to recognize and express their appreciation for this service, in general, and the sacrifice of those that have lost their lives while serving, more specifically. I ask only that we, as a community, embrace this opportunity to contemplate seriously what this service and sacrifice have meant in the development of our country and in the expression of our shared values.

HONORING GEOFFREY SEFFENS

HON. TOM DAVIS

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 7, 2007

Mr. TOM DAVIS of Virginia. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Mr. Geoffrey Seffens for 32 years of dedicated service to the Fairfax County Public School system.

After graduating from the Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music in Ohio, Mr. Seffens began his career as an elementary band teacher in Northern Virginia. Not one to shy away from a challenge, Mr. Seffens spent his first 4 years as a teacher engaging students from five different schools. Not only did he rise to this challenge but he pushed himself even further, teaching more than 400 students from nine schools over the course of the next 2 years. Mr. Seffens's hard work was recognized in 1979 when he was selected as the new band director at Lanier Middle School. Ever since joining the faculty at Lanier, Mr. Seffens has continued to guide students towards musical achievement while becoming an indispensable member of the school's community.

As a native of Northern Virginia and a product of the Fairfax County Public School system himself, Mr. Seffens and his successful teaching career stand as a testament to the region's firm commitment to academic excellence. Upon his retirement after years of commendable work, Mr. Seffens will certainly be missed by students and faculty alike.

Madam Speaker, in closing, I would like to take the opportunity to recognize Mr. Seffens's steadfast devotion to raising the standard of musical education and personally thank him for his dedication to the Fairfax County Public