

cancer, because he felt so blessed, having been allowed to survive what many said at the time was a fatal disease.

So many people came from all over the country to that service, it was really remarkable, including the Republican leader in the Senate, MITCH MCCONNELL, who himself came down and was an honorary pallbearer. He was on a first-name basis with Presidents. Indeed, I am aware that President Bush called him twice in recent months. Foreign leaders, Senators, and Congressmen were on a first-name basis with him. His life is a testament to what can happen when a person focuses his life on making a positive difference in the world and living a good life. He accomplished those things. Probably outside of a public official, he was on a first-name basis with more Senators than maybe any other person in our country. There may be some others, but not many would know as many and be as well respected as he was over the years.

I appreciate the opportunity to make these remarks. Not only did he serve on the board, chairman of the board of the University of South Alabama for 32 years, he gave hours and hours of his time and attention and ideas and ability to making that the great university it is. So he not only gave money, he gave of his time and of himself to make it the great university it is. Gordon Moulton, the president, certainly reflected that in his remarks.

I thank the Chair and Senator SHELBY for his excellent remarks and yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Mr. President, Mayer was a wonderful man who a lot of us got to know because of his leadership role in the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. This was a wonderful gentleman, the exemplification of the American dream. He worked extremely hard, made a great success of himself for his family, for his community, for his country. He loved America. He was devoted to Israel and devoted to the strength of the United States-Israel relationship. He was a great American patriot. I don't want to take the time to describe it now, but I am personally grateful for him for the ways in which he stuck with me at tough times in my own career. He didn't just stick with me, but he sort of worked at it to make sure everything came out all right. He was a good friend, a good man. God bless his soul.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

STAFF SERGEANT ZACHARY TOMCZAK

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I wish to pay tribute to SSG Zachary Tomczak and his heroic service to our country. As a member of the Army's 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division based in North Carolina, Staff Sergeant Tomczak was serving in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. On September

25, 2007, he was killed in action in Baghdad.

A Huron native, Zachary joined the Army in June 2002 and took great pride in serving his country. His graduation from Ranger School at Fort Benning, GA, in May is described by his father as "one of the proudest moments for him and for me." His captain remembers him as "a leader, mentor, warrior, Ranger, hero." Zachary was on his fourth tour of duty in Iraq and had earned the Purple Heart and Bronze Star Medal, among other awards.

A hard worker, Zachary enjoyed hands-on projects and worked for a construction company during high school. He also enjoyed spending time four-wheeling, pheasant hunting, and deer hunting. Friends and family will remember Zachary's love for life and easygoing personality.

Sergeant Tomczak gave his all for his soldiers and his country. Our Nation owes him a debt of gratitude, and the best way to honor his life is to emulate his commitment to our country. Mr. President, I join with all South Dakotans in expressing my deepest sympathy to the family of Staff Sergeant Tomczak. He will be missed, but his service to our Nation will never be forgotten.

PRIVATE FIRST CLASS CHRISTOPHER PFEIFER

Mr. HAGEL. Mr. President, I rise to express my sympathy over the loss of United States Army PFC Christopher Pfeifer of Nebraska. Private First Class Pfeifer died on September 25 from injuries he sustained near Kamu, Afghanistan, when insurgents attacked his unit on August 17. He was 21 years old.

Private First Class Pfeifer grew up in the small town of Spalding, NE, where he played eight-man football at Spalding Academy, as well as the drums in the band. He was assigned to the 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team based in Schweinfurt, Germany. All the flags in Spalding, a town of about 600 people, are at half-mast in honor of Private First Class Pfeifer.

Private First Class Pfeifer is remembered as a devoted husband, son, and brother. Sadly, he was denied the chance to become a proud father; his wife Karen gave birth to a baby girl the day after his death.

All of Nebraska is proud of Private First Class Pfeifer's service to our country, as well as the thousands of other brave Americans serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In addition to his wife and newborn daughter, he is survived by his parents, Mike and Dar, his brother Aaron, and his sister Nicki.

I ask my colleagues to join me and all Americans in honoring PFC Christopher Pfeifer.

HEALTH INSURANCE

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I am here today to talk about health insurance. Congress is well aware of the ever increasing number of the uninsured.

Not to mention the fact that health costs continue to rise at an alarming rate. Make no mistake, the numbers are sobering.

But I am not here to dwell on the past and present. I stand here today to talk about the future. I stand here to discuss ways to expand access to health insurance and to change the inequities in the tax treatment of health insurance.

During the debate on SCHIP, I engaged in a colloquy with Senators BURR, COBURN, MARTINEZ, CORKER, and BENNETT. During that exchange, I explained that, currently, a taxpayer who receives health insurance through his or her employer is not taxed on the cost of the health coverage. I also explained that individuals who do not receive health coverage through their employer generally do not receive a tax benefit. Similarly, a tax benefit is not afforded to people who are not employed and purchase health insurance on the individual market.

I noted that Republicans and Democrats alike agree that Congress should "level the playing field" and expand access to health insurance. The question is how. Senators BURR, COBURN, MARTINEZ, CORKER, and DOLE have introduced a proposal that would eliminate the exclusion for employer-provided health coverage. It would provide a flat tax credit to all Americans who purchase "qualifying health insurance." I commend the Senators for their leadership, and I intend to work with them on ways to expand access to health insurance.

Senators WYDEN and BENNETT have also introduced a proposal that would expand access to health insurance. Senators GREGG, BILL NELSON, and ALEXANDER have cosponsored the proposal. Most recently, Senators STABENOW, LANDRIEU, and COLEMAN cosponsored the legislation. This bipartisan legislation is a "patient-driven" approach to reforming our health care system. I want to stress, a "patient-driven" approach to reforming health care.

A "patient-driven" approach means the patient can shop for their own health care in a competitive marketplace, which will allow them to choose the type of health insurance that meets their needs. Many in the Democratic Party, including several of the Democratic Presidential candidates, want a government-run single-payer health care system that is not "patient-centered." This is a nonstarter and is bad policy. Recent polling shows that the American public thinks so. That is, the majority of Americans do not want a government-run system.

I want to reform the health care system through the Tax Code. I want to cap or eliminate the exclusion for employer-provided health coverage and offer Americans a choice between a tax credit and a deduction for health insurance. I want to condition these tax subsidies on States undertaking certain insurance reforms. I want to give the States the flexibility to decide what

types of reforms are best for their constituencies.

This "patient-driven" approach—with insurance reforms and changes in the tax treatment of health insurance—should make health insurance more affordable. And it should significantly reduce the number of the uninsured.

During my tenure in the Senate, I have sought to build bridges between Republicans and Democrats. I believe that there are times where Republicans and Democrats need to come together to produce results.

An example of my efforts to work in a bipartisan manner is the bipartisan SCHIP legislation that was overwhelmingly passed by this body. In the spirit of bipartisanship, I join Senator WYDEN in cosponsoring the Healthy Americans Act. The Healthy Americans Act is a "patient-driven" approach to reforming our health care system.

While I support this "patient-driven" approach, I have serious concerns about a number of the provisions of the Healthy Americans Act. For example, like many of the Democratic Presidential candidates, the act would require all individuals to buy health insurance. I support accessibility to private insurance and differ with my colleagues on this point. Also, Senator WYDEN's approach is more regulatory than I would prefer.

In addition, I am not endorsing the repeal of the noninterference clause in Medicare Part D. That is not going to be on the table. So my cosponsorship is not an endorsement of these elements. Instead, I am cosponsoring the Healthy Americans Act to add my voice to the call for significant changes in our health care system.

What we have here is Republicans and Democrats coming together to solve a problem. This is what bipartisanship is all about. We are all on the same page when it comes to the big picture; that is, reforming our health care system and expanding access to health insurance.

We have serious problems, and we need serious people to solve them. So let's put politics aside, roll up our sleeves and work in a bipartisan way to reform our health care system.

Make no mistake, my cosponsorship of the Healthy Americans Act is only one step in the process. I intend to work with Senators BURR, COBURN, MARTINEZ, CORKER, and DOLE on their health care reform proposal. I intend to work with Chairman BAUCUS and members of the Senate Finance Committee on small business health reforms, along with more comprehensive health care reform proposals like the Healthy Americans Act. Let's get serious.

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I wish today to pay tribute to the contributions of Hispanic Americans as we commemorate Hispanic Heritage Month. This occasion welcomes the oppor-

tunity to celebrate the achievements made by Hispanic Americans to enrich the culture and day-to-day life of the United States.

Today, there is no denying the strength and impact of Hispanic Americans, who are now more than 40 million strong. In my home State of New Mexico, 44 percent of the total population is made up of people of Hispanic descent, which according to the Census Bureau, is the largest proportion of any State in the Union. What has truly been remarkable to me over the years is the extent to which the Hispanic community has thrived in every facet of civic life.

For instance, I am proud to call attention to the remarkable achievement of PFC José F. Valdez, one of 48 Hispanic American Medal of Honor recipients. Born and raised in Governador, NM, José served during World War II near Rosenkrantz, France. He heroically saved the lives of his fellow comrades by engaging in a firefight which allowed the soldiers to escape after an enemy counterattack. Similar tales of bravery are prevalent in the history of Hispanic Americans, who have served with distinction in every U.S. military campaign including our current engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the areas of science, medicine, sport, art, business, and public service, the various achievements of the Hispanic community are immeasurable. This year, Hispanic Business magazine celebrated its 25th anniversary by profiling 500 of the largest Hispanic-owned companies in the United States, a nearly tenfold increase from the magazine's initial listing in 1982. These companies boast total revenues of \$36.6 billion, which is a sizable contribution to the American economy.

Twenty-five of these top-ranked companies join me in calling New Mexico their home. At the top of this list is Manuel Lujan Agencies from Albuquerque, NM, which has also been awarded "Most Admired Company" by New Mexico's top 100 private companies. Also included in this list is Centinel Bank of Taos in Taos, NM, which is one of the very few minority-owned financial institutions in the United States. I am pleased that Manuel Lujan Agencies and Centinel Bank of Taos are joined by such firms as Roses Southwest Papers, Applied Tech Associates, Network and Sparkle Maintenance Inc. The fact, is Hispanics in New Mexico today lead a growing number of firms that help set the pace for a growing economy in my State, and many of them are firms involving high technology, construction, and service industries.

While there is no doubt that Hispanics have fought to protect our freedoms and made advancements in the corporate world, they are also leaving their imprint on the world of entertainment through sports and the arts. Of the athletes currently playing in the National Football League, 24 players are of Hispanic descent. These players

are represented on 16 teams across the country, and during a recent football matchup, Grammy winners Gloria Estefan and the musical group Ozomatli performed the national anthem at the halftime show in honor of this month's celebration. In my home State, music legends like Al Hurricane and the popular Tobias Rene add to the rich cultural contributions being made to our society.

I encourage Americans to take this moment to remember all of the areas of our society that have been influenced by the Hispanic community. I would also like you to recall the sacrifices Hispanics have made to preserve the liberties and freedom that make America a beacon of hope to millions around the world. These men and women have stood up as proud Americans and volunteered to protect their families and communities during the global war on terror. Our Nation is stronger because of these men and women. They deserve the gratitude of the Nation for their sacrifices.

The tradition of Hispanic Heritage Month dates back almost 40 years. In 1968, Congress started by designating a week to celebrate Hispanic heritage. By the early 1980s, we decided to extend the designation to cover a month starting on September 15. The extra time has been a necessary and appropriate change to allow us to recognize the long record of contributions Hispanic Americans have made to our communities and to our Nation. I call on the American people to join with all children, families, organizations, communities, churches, cities, and States across the Nation to observe the month with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

COMMENDING JIM NICHOLSON

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, it is my distinct pleasure to recognize my friend and fellow Coloradan Jim Nicholson. Although it is with sadness that his resignation takes effect this week, I would like to take this time to commend him for his service as the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Jim is a veteran's veteran. As a West Point graduate, Army Ranger, highly decorated Vietnam war veteran, and 4 years of service as the ambassador to the Holy See, Jim was well prepared and highly qualified for the duties as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Jim was nominated by President Bush to serve as Secretary in December of 2004 and was subsequently confirmed unanimously by the Senate. The confidence bestowed upon Jim Nicholson by the President and all of those who gather here speaks to his unassailable ability to assist our veterans. Sworn into office on February 1, 2004, Jim readily assumed his role as the primary advocate for veterans.

Jim accepted control of the VA at an extremely difficult time and has proven himself to be the right man for the