

to First Lady Laura Bush in a special ceremony at the White House on November 26, 2007.

This year's Official White House Christmas Tree is a fine example of the exceptional quality of Christmas trees that we have in North Carolina. According to the North Carolina Department of Agriculture, in 2006 North Carolina led the nation in Christmas tree production, providing roughly one out of every four Christmas trees in the United States, and contributing over \$134 million to North Carolina's economy. But this success did not come easily; it takes several years of meticulous care and attention to raise a Christmas tree. An average 7 foot tree is about 10 years old, and throughout that time the grower diligently shapes, grooms, and fertilizes the tree several times per year. Not many people realize the years of hard work and sacrifice that go into raising a Christmas tree, and our growers are to be commended for their continuous success.

North Carolina celebrates a rich history of Christmas Trees, and year after year, many American families enjoy the warmth and beauty of these North Carolina trees that are a symbol of the holiday season. I am proud of the hard work exhibited by our Christmas tree growers in North Carolina, and I am proud that there will be another North Carolina Christmas tree in the White House this year.●

TRIBUTE TO MAJOR GENERAL DANIEL J. DARNELL

● Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, today I pay tribute to a great leader and an exceptional officer of the U.S. Air Force, MG Daniel J. Darnell, now serving as the Director of Legislative Liaison for Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, as he prepares to leave this position for one of even greater importance.

A command pilot with more than 4,500 flying hours, primarily in the F-15A/B/C/D and F-16C/D, Major General Darnell has commanded at the squadron, group, wing, and warfare center levels and has flown combat missions in Iraq, enforcing no-fly zones during operations Northern and Southern Watch. Major General Darnell continues to provide outstanding leadership, advice, and sound professional judgment on numerous critical issues of enduring importance to the Air Force, Congress, and this Nation.

Major General Darnell was born at March Air Force Base in California, where his father flew with Curtis LeMay as a B-29 radio operator, later retired as a B-52 tail gunner. He graduated as valedictorian from the Virginia Military Institute in 1975 and, immediately following graduation, he entered the Air Force and was recognized as a distinguished graduate from the Air Force ROTC Program. Major General Darnell was selected to attend pilot training at Reese Air Force Base

in Texas and was again at the top of his class, graduating pilot training as a Distinguished Graduate. Upon completion of pilot training, Major General Darnell was selected to fly the F-15, the Air Force's premier air-to-air fighter. He was initially assigned to the 7th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Holloman Air Force Base but then moved overseas to Kadena Air Base in Japan. At Kadena, Major General Darnell again excelled in the air and on the ground leading to his selection as instructor pilot, flight examiner, and the sole F-15 aerial demonstration pilot in the Pacific.

In 1982, Major General Darnell was selected to attend the F-15 Fighter Weapons Instructor Course at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada, an honor only bestowed on the top fighter pilots in the U.S. Air Force. After graduating, he returned to Kadena as the squadron weapons officer and then was assigned to McChord Air Force Base in Washington, first as the Chief of Standardization and Evaluation, and then as Chief of Weapons and Tactics. His weapons expertise, coupled with his superior leadership, led him back to Nellis Air Force Base and the U.S. Air Force Fighter Weapons School in 1986 where he was a Fighter Weapons Instructor Course instructor, flight commander and operations officer, providing the most advanced air-to-air training in weapons and tactics employment in the world.

Following a staff assignment to Headquarters Tactical Air Command at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, as the Chief of Weapons and Tactics, Major General Darnell was selected as the 20th commander and leader of the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds, "America's Ambassadors in Blue." Major General Darnell flew the F-16 as Thunderbird lead for 2 years, performing hundreds of aerial demonstrations for millions of people all over the globe. In 1994, he was hand-picked to attend National War College in Washington, DC, where he received a master's degree in national security policy.

In 1997, Major General Darnell became the commander of the 12th Operations Group at Randolph Air Force Base where he was responsible for conducting joint and allied pilot instructor training as well as Air Force and Navy undergraduate combat systems officer training. He returned to the F-16 in 1998 and commanded the 20th Fighter Wing at Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina and then 31st Wing at Aviano Air Base in Italy.

Major General Darnell returned to Nellis Air Force Base in 2001 as commander, 57th Wing, the largest composite wing in the Air Force. During that time, he deployed to Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia where he was the Senior Director of the Combined Air Operations Center during the opening weeks and months of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In 2003, Major General Darnell was assigned to Schriever Air Force Base in Colorado

as the commander of the Space Warfare Center where he was responsible for advancing America's space capabilities and employment concepts.

For the past 2 years, Major General Darnell has been the Director of Legislative Liaison. During that time, he laid the legislative groundwork for procurement of four new major weapon systems, including Joint Strike Fighter, Joint Cargo Aircraft, Next Generation Combat Search and Rescue platform, and the \$20 billion KC-X, the Air Force's No. 1 acquisition priority. His leadership, vision, and political acumen allowed the Air Force to break through years of congressional restrictions on aircraft retirements, resulting in the landmark \$4 billion 2007 National Defense Authorization Act language, a milestone year for Air Force recapitalization and fleet management. He flawlessly orchestrated the movement of more than 1,500 congressional delegation trips for Members and staff throughout the world.

Major General Darnell's mastery of complex issues and decisive leadership guided Air Force relations with Congress through a myriad of difficult issues to include Base Realignment and Closure, Total Force Integration, and a 40,000 personnel drawdown. Additionally, he was responsible for effectively communicating a consistent Air Force message that was the driving force behind approval of an unprecedented multiyear funding authorization for the F-22A Raptor, garnering approximately \$411 million in Air Force savings.

On behalf of Congress and the United States of America, I thank Major General Darnell, his wife Vickie, and their entire family for their continued commitment, sacrifice, and contribution to this great Nation. I congratulate Major General Darnell on his selection to the rank of lieutenant general and wish him success as he transitions into his new job as Deputy Chief of Staff for Air, Space and Information Operations, Plans and Requirements.●

TRIBUTE TO DR. ANDREW MAYS

● Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, today I want to commend a distinguished resident of the State of Alabama, Dr. Andrew Mays. Dr. Mays lives in Birmingham, AL. He is a well-respected member of the medical community in our State, serving as a faculty member in the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine's Department of Ophthalmology, as well as operating a private clinical practice. He serves our State public education and health systems at the Callahan Eye Foundation Hospital, where he concentrates his research and practice in combating the devastating effects of the eye disease glaucoma. Dr. Mays also sits on the Board of Directors for the Alabama Academy of Ophthalmology.

However, I speak to you today not to praise Dr. Mays for his accomplishments in medicine, but to congratulate

him on being awarded the first prize in the 2007 Van Cliburn International Competition for Outstanding Amateurs. Dr. Mays beat 74 other contestants on June 3, 2007, to earn this mark of distinction. This competition lasts a week, and allows competitors over the age of 35 who do not earn their livelihood through playing or providing instruction on the piano to vie for a chance to win this distinguished title.

Michael Huebner of the Birmingham News once stated that Dr. Mays possessed "a heart and mind of extraordinary capacity." Drew Mays possesses wonderful talent. He polished and sharpened this talent at the School of Music at the University of Alabama, earning both a Bachelor of Music in 1982, *summa cum laude* honors included, and a Master of Music degree in 1987 from this fine institution. In addition, he earned the opportunities to study at the Conservatory of Music in Hanover, Germany, and the Manhattan School of Music in New York City, where he began his Master studies.

Not only has Dr. Mays made a name for himself through medicine and music, he is a man dedicated to family values. He and his wife, Dr. Therese Mays, have four young children. Dr. Mays had his family by his side as he won the Van Cliburn competition this year. I had the pleasure of meeting him and his wife when they came to visit my office during a trip to play at George Washington University through a Smithsonian Associates program. During the recital he gave at the Jack Morton Auditorium on the GWU campus, you could see the bond these two shared as musicians and partners, as his wife nodded along to the twists, turns, and rhythms of his performance.

I commend Dr. Andrew Mays for all of his accomplishments and successes, and I am proud to be able to represent such a wonderful man. I share with this body today my pleasure in congratulating Dr. Mays for winning this prestigious competition, as he is certainly a worthy recipient.●

CAPTAIN SETH CHAPPELL

● Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that this letter from CAPT Seth Chappell be read into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD. Captain Chappell wrote this address for East Anchorage High School's Veterans Day Remembrance Ceremony. He is a 2000 East High graduate and a 2004 Graduate of the U.S. Military Academy. Captain Chappell served with the 37th Engineer Battalion, Combat, Airborne, in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom VII as a route clearance platoon leader a light equipment platoon leader.

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

EAST HIGH THUNDERBIRDS

When Mrs. Strickland approached me and asked for my thoughts on Veterans Day, I had to take pause for a minute. For me, Vet-

erans Day 2007 will be my first as a veteran back from war, free to enjoy my long four-day weekend, sales, barbecues, and all the other trappings of Veterans Day here in the States. Last year at this time I was in Ghazni, Afghanistan, eight months into my tour as a Route Clearance platoon leader, hunting the roads of Afghanistan for bombs and mines. Since returning in March, I have had time to reflect on what my deployment experience and coming home has meant to me, and how it shapes who I am, what I do, and what I value.

For many Americans Afghanistan is a dimly understood backwater that occupies a place in world affairs somewhere between interest rates and celebrity sightings. For those of us who have served Afghanistan is much more. Afghanistan is days of boredom and seconds of terror. Afghanistan is 120 degrees in the shade and you have to keep your helmet and body armor on. Afghanistan is 10 degrees at night and the heater in your vehicle is broken. Afghanistan is eating combat rations for the 35th day in a row and showering out of a water bottle for a month. Afghanistan is waking up before daylight to roll out and hoping you find the roadside bombs and they don't find you. Afghanistan is the car coming up fast behind your convoy that you hope isn't a suicide bomber. Afghanistan is going to bed at night and hoping that a mortar round doesn't find you, and being so tired that you don't think twice about it. Afghanistan isn't all hardship and torment though. Afghanistan is the sun coming up on the mountains while I drink my coffee. Afghanistan is sitting with the locals and sharing tea. Most of all for me, Afghanistan is the combat engineers of 2nd Platoon, Alpha Company, 37th Engineer Battalion. Having the opportunity to serve with such great Soldiers made all the hardship and trial worth it, and looking back on the experience now, I wouldn't trade a minute of it.

The service members serving overseas today aren't much different than you, and aren't much older, and are doing amazing things. My twenty year old medic almost cut his life short when he ran 200 meters under fire to work on a Soldier with a sucking chest wound who he didn't even know. These are men and women who face extraordinary circumstances and hardship every day, and to see what they endure and achieve is humbling. The job is hard, the risks are high, the pay is low, the clock never stops, and deployments are over when they are over (sometimes in excess of 15 months) and come again all too soon. So why serve again and again and again? Some of our Soldiers and Marines are now on their fourth tour of duty in the Middle East, and still they keep coming back. This morning in the Middle East, Soldiers are strapping on body armor, checking weapons, and readying vehicles to go outside the wire in places like Baghdad, Kandahar, and Mosul. Everyday they give 100% to accomplish their mission with honor and keep each other alive. As an officer, I have to work hard every day to deserve the privilege to lead men and women of this caliber.

We are a nation at war, and a thin red line, less than one half of one percent of Americans, are directly engaged in this conflict. The great majority of Americans can go about their day and think about Iraq or Afghanistan if they choose to, or blow it off completely and watch Laguna Beach on MTV. Whatever your political leanings may be, understand that the men and women of the volunteer military serve on your behalf, and stand on that wall so you don't have to. The profession to which they devote themselves is defined by sacrifice and service to something greater than themselves. You are high school students, with a whole life before you, and how you live it will either honor

that service and sacrifice, or deny it. Graduate, work hard, and do something to help others, something that you can be proud of. Earn the sacrifice that generations of Americans have made to give you this birthright of opportunity.

Lastly, I would ask you to think about how you spend Veterans Day. Tomorrow I will board a plane to West Point, and visit my alma mater for the first time since I graduated in 2004. I'm going back to do some upkeep on the pedestrian bridge that my best friend David Fraser and I built as seniors for a civil engineering project. Dave won't be able to join me however. His name will be read today. Captain David M. Fraser was killed last year in Baghdad on November 26th when a roadside bomb destroyed the vehicle he was riding in. Dave's commander and driver were killed in the attack also. He was supposed to return to the States the next week. Take the time this weekend to thank a veteran. More than 3,000 paratroopers are returning to Anchorage after a hard tour in Iraq. You will see them out and about in town, and when you do, tell them thank you. It means more than you can ever know.

Regards,

SETH L. CHAPPELL,
Captain, U.S. Army Engineers.●

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message from the President of the United States was communicated to the Senate by Mrs. Neiman, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGE REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate a message from the President of the United States submitting a nomination which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations. (The nomination received today is printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR

The following bill was read the second time, and placed on the calendar:

S. 2363. A bill making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2008, and for other purposes.

MEASURES READ THE FIRST TIME

The following bills were read the first time:

H.R. 3703. An act to amend section 5112(p)(1)(A) of title 31, United States Code, to allow an exception from the \$1 coin dispensing capability requirement for certain vending machines.

H.R. 3997. An act to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide earnings assistance and tax relief to members of the uniformed services, volunteer firefighters, and Peace Corps volunteers, and for other purposes.

EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The following communications were laid before the Senate, together with