

supervised election if at least 30 percent of employees want it. This bill also allows employees to form unions using another method as well.

The Employee Free Choice Act would also establish penalties for companies that coerce or intimidate employees and would provide for mediation and binding arbitration when the employer and workers cannot agree on a first contract. In short, it makes needed updates to our labor laws to better protect workers.

By allowing employees to form unions through a majority sign-up, we are supporting a worker's freedom to form a union and to bargain for better pay and better benefits. Experience has shown that this will be a good deal for the worker and a boost for America.

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, since joining this body in 1993, I have supported a number of initiatives to help the hard working men and women of this country, including increasing the minimum wage, supporting equal pay for America's workers, and promoting better trade policies. One piece of legislation that would help American workers is the Employee Free Choice Act, EFCA, and I am proud to be an original cosponsor of EFCA again this Congress. I commend my colleague, the senior Senator from Massachusetts, Senator KENNEDY, for his hard work on this legislation, as well as his longstanding dedication to improving the quality of life for America's working people.

One of the best things we can do for American workers is to remove obstacles that make it harder for them to form and join unions. As many of my colleagues will likely point out in the course of this debate, more than 60 million U.S. workers say they would join a union today if they could. Further, workers who belong to unions earn 30 percent more than nonunion workers, are 62 percent more likely to have employer-provided health care, and are four times more likely to have a pension. Better wages and better benefits help lift Americans out of poverty and into the middle class. Far too many Americans are working for wages that keep them at or below the Federal poverty line with little, if any, opportunity to bargain for better wages and benefits or advance to a better-paying position.

The Employee Free Choice Act would address some of the inequities in the current system of collective bargaining in the U.S. Many critics of this legislation focus on the card check provision, but there is much more to this legislation than just the method of voting. This bill provides for first-contract mediation and arbitration. Importantly, if an agreement has not been reached after 90 days of negotiations, either the employer or the employees can refer the dispute to the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service for mediation. Clearly, under the ideal negotiation this would not be necessary, but it is an important option for employees to have in the collective bargaining proc-

ess. The bill also provides for stronger penalties for employer violations while employees are attempting to form a union. Employers who intimidate workers attempting to unionize should face appropriate consequences.

While I understand that the vote on cloture on the motion to proceed to the Employee Free Choice Act may not be successful this week, this fight is far from over. Over the last 2 years, I have received over 1,500 letters, calls, and e-mails in support of this legislation from my constituents, and their voices mean a great deal. I support passage of this legislation for the hard-working Wisconsinites who deserve better from us. I am disappointed that more of my colleagues have not joined in supporting this bill, and I hope that they will rethink their opposition to this bill. I will continue working to pass this important legislation.

30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE TRANS-ALASKA PIPELINE

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, on June 20, 1977—30 years ago to this day—oil began flowing through the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System. This event represents an important milestone in Alaska's history and a watershed moment in our struggle to secure America's energy independence.

My distinguished colleague from Alaska, Senator LISA MURKOWSKI, spoke at length about the history of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline before we adjourned last night. As she so vividly illustrated, its creation was a monumental undertaking which required the hard work of countless individuals.

During the long political fight to allow this important project to proceed, members of the environmental lobby claimed the pipeline would devastate Alaska. History has proven these critics wrong—responsible development and attentive stewardship have ensured the continued protection of our State's wildlife and lands.

Even after the Arab oil embargo in 1973, the Senate remained closely divided on this matter. In fact, a tie vote on the authorizing legislation was not broken until Vice President Spiro Agnew cast the decisive vote in its favor. My own vote on that bill still ranks as one of the most memorable I have ever cast.

When construction began in 1974, this project was the largest ever financed by private capital. Engineers faced staggering challenges as they plotted a route across 800 miles of rugged terrain and three major mountain ranges. Various geographic hurdles also necessitated the construction of seven airfields, dozens of bridges, and a 360-mile-long road to connect Prudhoe Bay to Fairbanks.

Just more than 3 years after construction started, however, the Trans-Alaska Pipeline was ready to operate. Since then, more than 15.5 billion barrels of crude oil have been sent from Alaska's North Slope, through the

pipeline to Valdez, and on to refineries throughout the country.

The revenues generated by this production have had a tremendous impact in Alaska and throughout the United States. Over the past 30 years, North Slope oil production has added more than \$300 billion to the U.S. economy and reduced domestic oil imports by more than \$200 billion. Energy will always cost money, but instead of sending our dollars overseas, North Slope oil production—made possible by the Trans-Alaska Pipeline—has greatly contributed to economic growth here at home.

In Alaska, the economic effects of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline are even more apparent. Last year, revenues from oil production and transportation accounted for nearly 90 percent of the State government's total income—funds which were then used to help pay for our schools, our roads, and other important projects. North Slope oil revenue also provides the foundation for the permanent fund dividend, which will help assure the well-being of future generations of Alaskans.

When oil began to flow through the Trans-Alaska Pipeline in 1977, gasoline cost a mere 38 cents per gallon. Today, the nationwide average has soared to \$3.00 per gallon, and many experts predict this price will reach \$4.00 by the end of summer.

As those of us in the Senate continue to debate a comprehensive energy policy for our Nation, we must take note of the consequences of 30 years of oil production in Alaska. Instead of the ecological disaster many predicted, the Trans-Alaska Pipeline has been an economic lifeline for our Nation. It continues to prove we can balance environmental concerns with the production of our natural resources. I urge my colleagues to heed this lesson.

TRAVEL PROMOTION ACT

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I am pleased to speak in support of the Travel Promotion Act of 2007, which I introduced late yesterday with Senator INOUE and Senator DORGAN.

Our legislation has a simple purpose: To increase the number of foreign tourists who visit the United States.

To accomplish this goal, two complementary strategies must be undertaken: existing travel problems must be resolved, and fundamental improvements must be made to the manner in which we market our country to prospective tourists.

First, the efficiency of our border entry and screening processes must be improved. The Commerce Committee recently held two hearings on this issue, and industry leaders testified about the adverse effect September 11, 2001, has had on travel to the United States.

Heightened security measures implemented after 9/11, while necessary, continue to inconvenience many travelers. We heard witnesses describe the aforementioned difficulties international

visitors face with regard to our Nation's entry and screening processes, including the issuance of visas.

To address these problems, the Senate has already passed legislation that establishes a "Model Ports" program at the 20 busiest international airports in the United States. This program should reduce bottlenecks to safely and efficiently move travelers through the screening process.

The legislation we introduced yesterday, the Travel Promotion Act, would establish a nonprofit corporation to promote travel to the United States. This entity would not use one cent of taxpayer funds.

Instead, this corporation will be funded by fees paid by travelers who enter our country and matching contributions from members of the travel and tourism industry.

The corporation would be led by experts in the travel and tourism industry, appointed by the Secretary of Commerce, and held accountable by Congress. This essential step will let foreign visitors know that our country is open to tourists.

The travel and tourism industry plays an important role in every State. Those of us in Congress should take steps to resolve these pressing issues and encourage tourists to visit America.

In my home State of Alaska, the travel and tourism industry is the second largest private sector employer. More than 24,000 Alaskans hold tourism-related jobs, and the industry contributes more than \$2 billion to our State's economy each year.

I look forward to working with my colleagues on this legislation.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

TECHNICAL SERGEANT RYAN A. BALMER

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I rise today to pay humble tribute to TSgt Ryan A. Balmer, who died of injuries sustained after the detonation of an improvised explosive device in Kirkuk, Iraq. A native of Mishawaka, IN, Sergeant Balmer was a member of the Air Force Office of Special Investigations and assigned to Hill Air Force Base, UT.

Sergeant Balmer was truly a special man. He was an individual deeply loved by all who knew him for his kindness, his positive outlook on life, and his infectious smile. Friends close to Special Agent Balmer say he was someone you always wanted to be around. They remembered a man who possessed the unique gift of being able to bring out the best in everyone and at 6 feet 2 inches tall he commanded respect wherever he went.

I understand that Sergeant Balmer was scheduled to come home only days after his passing. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my most heartfelt condolences to his wife Danielle and to his three children. I want to reiterate what they already know, that he saved lives and by his

sacrifice that we, as a Nation, enjoy the great blessings of freedom so often take for granted. TSgt Ryan A. Balmer is an American hero in every sense of the word.

The sergeant and his family will be in my prayers forever.

SERGEANT JESSE A. BLAMIRES

Mr. President, today I rise to pay tribute to one Nation's fallen sons, SGT Jesse A. Blamires. Sergeant Blamires was a native of Sandy, UT, and a member of the 82nd Airborne Division. He was killed in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan.

Sergeant Blamires had a lifelong connection to our Nation's military. His father Craig Blamires, with whom the sergeant enjoyed camping, also served his country in the Army. Eager to pursue his dreams of service, Sergeant Blamires followed his father's footsteps and joined the U.S. Army.

The sergeant was known as a man dedicated to reaching his goals. This was reflected by his recent promotion to crew chief. One day he hoped to become a helicopter pilot, a goal I am certain he would have accomplished.

His service in Afghanistan was not the first time Sergeant Blamires had been in harm's way. In 2005, he served a tour in Iraq. Well-respected by his commanders and fellow soldiers, Sergeant Blamires was known for his ability to make others laugh and his willingness to help others in need.

However, undoubtedly, his most important life's work was as a family man. In addition to two caring parents and five supportive brothers and sisters, Sergeant Blamires is survived by his wife, Kim and their two young daughters.

Sergeant Blamires was a man who truly lived an abundant life. Although his calls to service often required him to be away from the family he loved, there was nothing Sergeant Blamires desired more than to be with his family. Fellow serviceman, SSG Ronald Walton recalls that Sergeant Blamires, "dreamt of being a better husband and father to his two girls and he talked of it often."

What a fine man.

What an extraordinary life.

We will always remember his dedicated service to our Nation, and it is my fervent hope that he and his family remain in our prayers.

STAFF SERGEANT VIRGIL C. MARTINEZ

Mr. President, I stand here today to pay tribute to a hero, SSG Virgil C. "Chance" Martinez. Sergeant Martinez was a member of the 1st Infantry Division's 1st Battalion, 7th Field Artillery Regiment and recently gave his life while serving his country in Iraq.

From the time Sergeant Martinez was a 5-year-old boy, he felt a duty-bound responsibility to follow in the footsteps of his stepfather and answer his country's call to service. His sister Kim Austin-Oliver said of her brother "We knew at a very young age that he was going to be a soldier. It is who he has always been."

As a teenager, Sergeant Martinez enjoyed playing on his high school ski and football teams. Shortly after graduating from high school in 1992, he would achieve his life long ambition and join the U.S. Army.

I understand that Sergeant Martinez was a man deeply devoted not only to his country but also to his family. When speaking of his lost stepson, Daniel Oliver noted, "Chance would do anything and everything for his children and for his mother . . . he was like the Disneyland father—wanted to show his children everything." Sergeant Martinez was the husband to wife Mandy and father of five beautiful children.

I would like to close my remarks by highlighting an observation made by Sergeant Martinez's sister. Kim Austin-Oliver commented that Sergeant Martinez died doing what he had always wanted to do, and that is, serve his country.

I can think of no truer definition of a hero. Sergeant Martinez and the family he has left behind will forever remain in my memory and in my prayers for his selfless service to our Nation.

CORPORAL MICHAEL A. PURSEL

Mr. President, I rise to pay tribute to one of Utah's fallen sons, CPL Michael A. Pursel. Corporal Pursel, a member of the 2nd Infantry Division, recently lost his life in Baqubah, Iraq. He was 19 years old.

Corporal Pursel is actually a two-time volunteer. His service began when he joined the Army and he then volunteered to replace other soldiers from the 2nd Infantry Division. In fact, Corporal Pursel not only answered that call, but was one of the first to offer his service.

I have been informed that Corporal Pursel belonged to a family of great patriots, many of whom have served in the military themselves. This includes both of Corporal Pursel's parents. His mother Terry Dutcher, who is a Captain in the Air Force Reserve, said of her son, "Michael was doing what he always wanted to do . . . he died living his dream."

In memory of the life of this great soldier would submit to you that the dream of serving one's country—the dream that CPL Michael A. Pursel achieved—is a dream that more Americans must embrace. Although young in years, Corporal Pursel understood the premise that to serve one's country extends far beyond the notion of being active in one's military duty. To serve one's country enables the rest of us to enjoy our Nation's greatest gift: freedom. This was at the very core of his service and how Corporal Pursel lived his life, the life of a hero, the life of one who will forever be remembered in my prayers.

This country owes CPL Michael A. Pursel a great debt of gratitude. He shall forever be remembered and honored for his service to our Nation.