

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

SPECIALIST DENNIS G. JENSEN

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute SPC Dennis G. Jensen and his heroic service to our country. A member of the South Dakota National Guard, Spc. Jensen was serving in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. On August 16, 2011, he died of injuries sustained as a result of a bridge construction accident in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

A 2009 graduate of Vermillion High School, SPC Jensen enlisted in the National Guard's 211th Engineer Company in May 2008. In May 2011, SPC Jensen volunteered to deploy to Afghanistan with the National Guard's 200th Engineer Company. It is a special person who is willing to deploy outside of his unit; SPC Jensen's courage and personal sacrifice is commendable. SPC Jensen's service commendations include the National Defense Service Medal, Global ar on Terrorism Service Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, NATO Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal, Overseas Service Ribbon, and the Army Service Ribbon.

SPC Jensen will be remembered for his selfless service to our country and his willingness to put the needs of others before his own. He will be deeply missed by those who survive him: his father Glenn Jensen, mother Christine Bestgen, and sister Melissa Jensen.

SPC Jensen made the ultimate sacrifice 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 and friends of SPC Dennis Jensen. He will be missed, but his service to our Nation will never be forgotten.

THIS FOR DIPLOMATS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I would like to congratulate THIS for Diplomats of Washington, DC, on its 50th anniversary. Established in 1961, and formerly known as The Hospitality and Information Service, THIS has welcomed diplomats and their families from around the world to the Nation's Capital. Understanding the power of exchange, THIS continues to provide enriching educational, informational and cultural experiences.

In the past year, THIS' 300 volunteers donated 20,000 hours to provide 65 programs and 208 language and cultural exchanges with 1734 diplomats. Programs included seminars on American government; visits to the Supreme Court, White House, Pentagon, Library of Congress, private art collections, performances at the Kennedy Center, as well as a Sports in America series. Language conversation groups included Arabic, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Spanish, Turkish, and English.

Diplomats and their families from all over the world speak of how important

THIS has been to their adjustment to and appreciation of the United States. Congratulations to THIS for Diplomats and its volunteers around the world on 50 years of service in advocating peace, tolerance, and prosperity.

TRIBUTE TO PETER VAN OOT

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, it is a great pleasure to call the Senate's attention to the economic development contributions of Peter Van Oot, a friend and former member of my staff. Pete, a native of Westminster, VT, has long served his community and our State with dedication and enthusiasm. Through his work with the Brattleboro Economic Development Credit Corporation board, and, more recently, the Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation, Pete has worked tirelessly to create jobs and to promote our local economy. Named Volunteer of the Year by the Northeast Economic Development Association, Pete was recently recognized for his hard work, and I take this opportunity to offer him my congratulations. I ask unanimous consent that an August 8 article highlighting his work, in the Brattleboro Reformer, be printed in the RECORD.

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

LOCAL LAWYER RECOGNIZED FOR HIS COMMITMENT TO ECONOMIC GROWTH

[From the Brattleboro Reformer, Aug. 8, 2011]

(By Josh Stilts)

BRATTLEBORO.—Peter D. Van Oot's said his vision of a healthy community starts with a strong local economy. Because of this commitment and his unwavering focus, which he attributes to his father, Van Oot was named Volunteer of the Year by the Northeast Economic Development Association.

Without access to good paying, secure jobs, the education system falters and it can easily lead to social injustice, he said.

"When mom and dad don't have a job anymore, bad things can happen," he said.

That's why in his 20s, Van Oot dedicated his spare time to establishing outlets for businesses to grow and to figure out ways to draw large employers to the area.

Van Oot grew up in Westminster and said he can remember when there were plenty of jobs and how much happier the residents seemed. After earning his law degree, he returned to the area and began working at Downs Rachlin Martin PLLC and nearly simultaneously started volunteering on the United Way of Windham County board.

"I realized quickly that if we didn't work to shore up the Windham County economy, all the organizations would be for naught," Van Oot said. "Without good-paying jobs and a solid local economy you lose the base of the community."

As unemployment rises, the strains on organizations such as the United Way and Youth Services becomes almost too much, he said.

About a decade ago he shifted his focus and began serving on the Brattleboro Economic Development Credit Corporation board.

"My interest really became how do we bring jobs to the area to fulfill the ones that left and bolster the economy," Van Oot said. "It was a fantastic organization to work

with. In the past two years we really did some great work. We've had economic development success with Grafton Cheese's retail store and brining in the Common Wealth Yogurt factory."

Not only do those businesses provide good paying jobs, they're also using Vermont based resources, Van Oot said.

"It really helps to fill the economic gaps," he said. "Like in golf, we need to fill in the divots."

Van Oot said there's a lot of people who have done and are doing what he does but urged younger people to get involved.

"Brattleboro had always been known as a community that had people who were involved in the economy, in rotary clubs and boards like the United Way," he said. "But now it's much more difficult to get younger business people involved in these types of activities."

He added that reaching out to young entrepreneurs has already started to bear fruit.

"Look at what they're doing with the BDCC small business competitions," Van Oot said. "What a great way to get people involved."

Jeff Lewis, executive director of the Brattleboro Economic Development Credit Corporation, said Van Oot was a champion of growing the local economy.

"Pete worked tirelessly to promote economic development in southern Vermont during his many years in Brattleboro," Lewis said. "His focus and leadership helped the organization create dynamic strategy that addressed widespread economic decline in the region."

Lewis added that Van Oot transformed the board's membership, created a robust public policy, orchestrated annual plan reviews and developed a BDCC CEO council.

"BDCC now annually exceeds its goals for economic development and its own financial stability," Lewis said. "Based on Pete's work with the board, BDCC is now leading a regional strategy project looking to address long-term job and population loss, and the prospective loss of the region's largest employer."

In the last couple of years Van Oot has transitioned from his Brattleboro office to the firm's Lebanon location, and it was there he got involved with another group, the Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation, which is similarly focused on creating community through jobs.

"Pete has brought that same deep level of commitment to his role on the board at GMEDC (that he had in Brattleboro)," said Joan Goldstein, the group's executive director. "Leadership of this type ought to be recognized and I am pleased that NEDA saw it the same way we did."

Van Oot will be presented his award at the NED's annual meeting on Oct. 24 at the Sheraton Hotel in Burlington.

NATIONAL FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDERS AWARENESS DAY

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Mr. President, today I rise to recognize September 9, 2011, as National Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Awareness Day. Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, FASD, is an umbrella term describing the varied range of alcohol-related birth defects that may result from the use of alcohol during pregnancy. The effects of this disorder may involve mental, behavioral, and/or learning disabilities. FASD is the leading known cause of preventable cognitive impairment in America. It is estimated FASD effects 1 in 100 live births each year.

Unfortunately, my State of South Dakota suffers from one of the highest incidences of FASDs in the Nation. While I applaud the ongoing efforts of local organizations, State governments and federal agencies to address the public health threat of FASD, I continue to have great concern about this disorder's impact in South Dakota and across the country.

We must move past the stigma of this devastating disease to truly help those and their families who are affected by FASD get the health, education, counseling and support services they need and deserve. We must also address the tragedy of FASD at the source, by increasing awareness that any amount of alcohol during pregnancy can have heartbreaking, lifelong effects. Education and outreach efforts must continue their focus of ensuring this message is understood by all women of child-bearing age and ensuring access to treatment and counseling services for those at risk of substance abuse.

One of the most distressing facts regarding FASD is that it is entirely preventable. I have joined my colleagues in the Senate to introduce and pass a resolution designating September 9, 2011 as National FASD Awareness Day. It is my hope these efforts progress towards global awareness of FASD and an end to this destructive disease.

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION WEEK AND WORLD SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the 37th annual National Suicide Prevention Week, which began on September 4 and culminated with World Suicide Prevention Day on September 10. I take this opportunity to reflect on the destructive effects of suicide on families and communities and to raise awareness about the need for an effective national suicide prevention strategy to help communities address this serious public mental health threat. Suicide is a major cause of premature death, and we must do more to prevent it.

The statistics about suicide are deeply concerning. In our Nation, suicide is the 11th leading cause of death for all ages. Among young adults ages 15 through 24, there are approximately 100 to 200 attempts for every completed suicide. Suicide takes the lives of approximately 30,000 Americans each year, and a person dies by suicide almost every 15 minutes. Our Nation's veterans account for 20 percent of suicides and the Army recently suffered a record number of suicides this past July.

In my State of South Dakota, suicide is the fourth-leading cause of death among all South Dakotans and the second-leading cause of death for adolescents and young adults between the ages of 10 and 24. The rate of youth suicide in my State is over three times

the national average. These statistics place South Dakota among a group of Western States that consistently has a higher rate of suicide than the rest of the country.

Youth suicide among American Indians in South Dakota is of particular concern. The suicide rate for American Indians ages 15 to 34 is more than two times higher than the national average and is the second leading cause of death for this age group. The suicide rate for the Rosebud Sioux Tribe is among the highest in the world. The loss of young people to suicide is a real crisis. On American Indian reservations in South Dakota, I have seen the catastrophic ripple effect that one suicide can have. Given the alarming occurrence of "suicide clusters" and imitative deaths that have occurred in Indian country in the past, it is imperative to provide support for those at risk.

Substance abuse and violence, two accepted risk factors for suicide, are common on the reservation, and tribe members also face extreme poverty and geographic isolation. During the past few years, I have been encouraged by the increased recognition of the need for suicide prevention programs in tribal areas. Tribes now have more access to funds that will aid in the building of suicide prevention programs. However, we must continue to provide tribes with the resources they need to implement culturally sensitive suicide prevention programs. It is critical to strengthen the social fabric to help improve mental health. Youth suicide prevention programs have helped bridge this service gap, but further investments are necessary to sustain and expand these efforts. Decreasing the number of suicides in Indian country will require increased community awareness, developing effective prevention and intervention methods, and enhancing access to mental health service providers.

Studies indicate the best way to prevent suicide is through early recognition and treatment of depression and other psychiatric illnesses. Depression goes unrecognized in half of the general population and in 80 percent of seniors. Over 90 percent of suicide victims have a significant psychiatric illness at the time of their death. These are often undiagnosed, untreated, or both.

Furthermore, it is necessary to acknowledge the obstacles that individuals at risk of suicide face in accessing treatment. Lack of insurance coverage, limited access to affordable mental health care, as well as cultural stigmas and myths about suicide pose significant barriers to treatment. A serious effort to prevent suicide must break down those barriers and expand access to mental health services nationwide, with a special focus on increased mental health awareness and improving prevention and early intervention methods. In addition, investments in tools to evaluate intervention and prevention methods and training pro-

grams for health care professionals are needed to foster the development and implementation of evidence-based and emerging best practices in the prevention of suicide.

National Suicide Prevention Week and World Suicide Prevention Day are reminders that suicide is a preventable cause of premature death that tears families and communities apart, and more can be done to prevent these tragedies. Each day, families and communities across the Nation suffer devastating losses as a result of suicide. It is estimated that for each suicide, seven other lives are altered forever. Every year, approximately 200,000 people become survivors due to this tragic loss of life. Many suicide survivors are left devastated, confused and weakened by their loss. Friends and family often experience depression, guilt, shock and anger. Unfortunately, there remains a stigma surrounding suicide and mental illness, and victims often shoulder some of the blame.

I appreciate this opportunity to increase awareness about the destructive impact of suicide on America's families and communities and to raise awareness about the urgent need for an effective national suicide prevention strategy to help communities prevent future losses of life.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO GARY SONSTENG

• Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, today I honor Gary Sonsteng and his service to the United States of America during the Vietnam war.

Gary enlisted in the U.S. Navy at the age of 17.

As a boatswain mate second class, Gary was assigned to the U.S.S. Talladega for several years. After a stint in Japan, Gary served on patrol boats in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam for a little over a year.

In 1971, after 6 years of wartime service, Gary quietly returned to his home in Butte, MT, where he worked as a miner and a truck driver for more than 30 years.

Gary is a modest man. He never asked for recognition for his service in Vietnam. And through all these years, that recognition of his valor and service slipped through the cracks.

In working with my office, we discovered that Gary never received the medals he earned decades ago. Gary insists his service was, quote, "nothing extraordinary." I, along with millions of Americans and the U.S. military, see it differently.

Last month, I had the honor of presenting Gary Sonsteng with a Combat Action Ribbon, and a Navy Commendation Medal with a Combat Valor Device. This Navy Commendation Medal is reserved for "sustained acts of heroism or meritorious service."

It was also my honor to present Gary a Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon, an