

their kids and take care of their obligations. That is the foundation that built America. It is the foundation of the development of something that was called the "greatest generation."

That was the generation in the last century who served in World War II. All of us had an opportunity to get a college education when we otherwise would not have been near a college.

That built our country. That strengthened our foundation. Now we see people, Republicans, who want to make it tougher for people to make a living, tougher for people to get an education, tougher to provide heat for people who desperately need it in the wintertime, tougher to think ahead and say: You know what. I know my children will do better than I have done in my life.

That used to be a truism in our view of life in this country. We don't hear that much anymore because people are unsure, and it does not help to have the Republicans sticking up for the wealthiest among us and turning their backs on working-class families in this country, the middle-class families. It is not right.

I hope the people across this country will say: No. We are going to say no to these Republican policies. I hope our Republican colleagues will disband their millionaires' protection game, stop standing in the way, and start standing up for everyday Americans who need our help.

Help us continue the payroll tax cut for working families. Help us protect the programs that benefit the people who need them most. Help us, friends on the Republican side, to make America even stronger than it is today. We can do that.

Countries are failing all over the globe. America need not to do that. We just have to make sure that while we take care of our expenses, we also make sure we have the revenues to do the job.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FRANKEN). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. SHAHEEN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF NORMAN L. EISEN TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC

NOMINATION OF MARI CARMEN APONTE TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF EL SALVADOR

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that we now proceed to executive session to consider Calendar Nos. 360 and 501, and I send two cloture motions to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will report the nominations.

The assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Norman L. Eisen, of the District of Columbia, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Czech Republic.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Norman L. Eisen, of the District of Columbia, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Czech Republic:

Harry Reid, Barbara Boxer, Patrick J. Leahy, Patty Murray, Richard J. Durbin, Kent Conrad, John D. Rockefeller IV, Jeff Bingaman, Tim Johnson, Daniel K. Inouye, Debbie Stabenow, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Max Baucus, Charles E. Schumer, John F. Kerry, Mark Udall, Michael F. Bennet.

The assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Mari Carmen Aponte, of the District of Columbia, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of El Salvador.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Mari Carmen Aponte, of the District of Columbia, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of El Salvador:

Harry Reid, John F. Kerry, Barbara Boxer, Patrick J. Leahy, Patty Murray, Richard J. Durbin, Kent Conrad, John D. Rockefeller IV, Jeff Bingaman, Tim Johnson, Robert Menendez, Daniel K. Inouye, Max Baucus, Charles E. Schumer, Mark Udall, Michael F. Bennet, Al Franken.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the mandatory quorum under rule XXII be waived in each instance; that on Monday, December 12, at 4:30 p.m., the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations concurrently: Calendar No. 360 and Calendar No. 501; that there be 1 hour of debate, equally divided, in the usual form; that upon the use or yielding back of that time, the Senate proceed without interviewing action or debate to vote on Calendar No. 360; and that if cloture is invoked, the Senate immediately vote on confirmation of the nomination, and following disposition of Calendar No. 360, the Senate proceed to vote on cloture on Calendar No. 501; further, that if cloture is not invoked on Calendar No. 360, the Senate proceed to vote on cloture on Calendar No. 501; that any statements be printed in the RECORD, and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action and the Senate then resume legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will resume legislative session.

TRIBUTE TO JACOB'S TREE

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I rise today to extend my personal blessing this holiday season to the family of Jacob Akin of Somerset, Kentucky. This year, the town of Somerset has graciously chosen to honor the Akin family by accepting their donation of a 20-foot cherry spruce tree to be displayed in the town's Fountain Square as the county Christmas tree. More important, however, is the solemn but heart-warming story of the tree's origin, and the inspiration it brings to the people of the community.

The tree, known as "Jacob's Tree," was planted in remembrance of Jacob Akin, who was tragically killed in a terrible accident on December 6, 1994. Five-year-old Jacob was playing with his older brother, Abraham, in a house when a chimney unexpectedly collapsed on top of him. Thus, the holiday season each year is especially burdensome for his family, as it serves as a constant reminder of the horrific accident that took place 17 years ago.

A year after his death, his family decided to plant a tree to honor young Jacob. Over the years, the tree has helped bring comfort and peace to the family. "We decided to put up the tree in memory of my son," Jacob's mother, Rebecca Buis, says. "I felt like as the tree grew, I could keep up with the

years and somehow see how my son might have grown. It's kind of a reminder, and it helps with the grieving process to plant something in memory of someone you love."

Almost two decades later, Jacob's spirit remains ever-present in the magnificent 20-foot cherry spruce tree that Rebecca hopes will bring a joyful light to the community on Fountain Square. "Over the years, it just grew and grew," she says. "It's a beautiful, well-rounded tree and would make a wonderful Christmas tree."

On December 3, Jacob's Tree was scheduled to be lit for the first time in Fountain Square in a special tree-lighting ceremony during this year's annual Christmas parade. In the spirit of the season, Jacob's family hopes that the community will come together around the tree and share in its joy. "Christmas is a time of giving," Rebecca said.

The story of Jacob's Tree and the selflessness of the Akin family is truly inspirational. I would like to extend my personal blessing to Jacob's mother, Rebecca Buis, his father, David Akin, and his brother, Abraham Akin, this holiday season. And I ask my Senate colleagues to join me in wishing the family a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. It is my hope that the tree brings them comfort, and that it shine especially bright in honor of young Jacob.

The Commonwealth Journal, a Somerset-area publication, recently published an article telling the story of Jacob's Tree. I ask unanimous consent that the full article be printed in the RECORD.

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

[From the Commonwealth Journal, Nov. 25, 2011]

'JACOB'S TREE' WILL WARM THE SPIRIT THIS SEASON

(By Chris Harris)

The Christmas season is seen as a time of miracles, a time of redemption for mankind.

This year, one of Somerset's proudest symbols of the Christmas tradition will be its own miracle of sorts—a chance to redeem joy and light out of the clouds of tragedy.

The Christmas tree in the town's Fountain Square is scheduled to be lit in a special ceremony on Saturday, December 3, as is the annual custom.

This year's tree comes from the yard of Rebecca Buis, known to local bank customers as a branch manager and loan officer at First & Farmers National Bank in Somerset.

Anyone who has driven down Denham Street lately has probably noticed the towering cherry spruce standing out with its bold green hue, even as the trees around it have shed their leaves and stand bare and bland.

The tree was planted around the holiday season of 1995—one year after a horrific accident that changed Buis's life forever.

On December 6, 1994, Jacob Akin, Buis's 5-year-old son, was killed in what his mother can only call a "freak accident."

Jacob and his brother Abraham, who was 10 at the time, were playing in a house on Newton Street in Ferguson that their father was in the process of razing.

"(The father, David Akin) did construction work," said Buis. "This wasn't anything that was new to (the children). They were used to playing around that kind of stuff."

This time, however, was different.

After Abraham exited the structure to ask his father a question, a chimney crumbled and collapsed on top of young Jacob.

A parent's worst nightmare had come to pass—and during the holiday season meant to be a happy time for families.

The memories remain painful to this day.

"They couldn't find my son underneath the bricks," recalled Buis, who still finds herself overcome with emotion when talking about the incident. "They had to pull them off brick by brick until they found him."

According to then-county coroner Alan Stringer, Jacob died of multiple skull fractures as a result of the toppled bricks. Buis noted that Jacob's neck was broken immediately, which meant that death came quickly. This and the fact that Abraham survived provided the only sources of solace in that terrible time.

"My worry was that he suffered, and they told me he had not," said Buis. "I'm lucky in the sense that I felt like God could have taken both my boys that day, playing in the house together. I could have lost them both."

Still, the holiday season was unalterably affected for Buis and her family.

"I wasn't able to focus on Christmas at all," said Buis. "We didn't put up a tree that year."

For one thing, Buis felt like she had to stay strong for her other son's sake. The necessity of putting on a brave face took its own toll on the devastated mother.

"You have to carry on because you have two children," she said. "Kids grieve differently. It's not an easy thing to deal with; kids don't usually tell you, but they feel responsible. I tried hard not to show grief because I didn't want (Abraham) to feel responsible. Nobody could have done anything. It was a freak accident."

Buis recalls Jacob, in kindergarten at Hopkins Elementary at the time, as "a funny little young man," as well as one who was both handsome and intelligent.

"He was a very smart young man," she said. "He understood lots of things, I think."

The calendar pages turned, and soon enough, it was the Christmas season again. Buis decided it would be appropriate to pay some kind of tribute to Jacob, and decided to plant the household Christmas tree, only about five feet tall at the time, in the ground outside their home.

"We decided to put up the tree in memory of my son," she said. "I felt like as the tree grew, I could keep up with the years and somehow see how my son might have grown. Every time I would pull in the driveway, I would see the tree."

"It's kind of a reminder," she added. "It helps with the grieving process to plant something in memory of someone you love."

Today, the majestic tree stands about 20 feet tall. It's "reached its potential," as Buis put it, and has "overgrown the place."

As such, Buis decided it might be the perfect time to inquire about donating "Jacob's Tree," as it's called, to use on the Fountain Square as the county's official Christmas tree. County officials happily obliged.

"Over the years, it just grew and grew," said Buis. "I'd been thinking for some time about (donating it), and just decided, 'You know, it's time to cut the tree down.'"

Buis said she also took Abraham's feelings into consideration. Now 27, still in Pulaski County working in construction, Abraham "thinks it's a good idea," according to Buis, but she wanted to make sure he was okay with the choice to donate the tree given the effect Jacob's death had on him as well.

Much as the tree reached its adult size, Jacob would have been 22 years old this year. However, his legacy has managed to live on in other ways as well.

After Jacob's death, Buis decided to donate his corneas and heart valves to help save the lives of other individuals. "(Christmas) is a time of giving," she said, noting that Jacob's untimely passing was able to give hope to others.

"I received letters telling me that one of Jacob's corneas went to a child who was born with a birth defect, and another went to an older man in his 60s with an eye injury from a work accident," said Buis. "His heart valves also went to adults. I didn't realize how important heart valves were to people who need them (until then)."

"It's a hard decision to make because you have to make it quickly," she added, referring to the decision to donate Jacob's organs. "You can't think about it for days. You have to know at the time of death, and it's a very hard time."

Just as Jacob's body was donated to bring a new light of hope to those in need, his spirit remains in the tree that has now been donated to bring a similarly joyful light to the community.

"It's a beautiful tree," said Buis. "It's well-rounded and would make a wonderful Christmas tree."

Citizens can see "Jacob's Tree" lit for the first time on December 3. The annual Christmas parade, sponsored and organized by the Chamber of Commerce, begins at 5 p.m. with the tree lighting activities set for 7 p.m.

As a Chamber Ambassador, Buis is looking forward to the yearly festivities that are so beloved by locals—but especially since she will get to see that special memorial to her son shining in all its glory.

"I just hope that (those who see it) will enjoy the tree and that it will be beautifully decorated," said Buis. "I hope that people will get a warm feeling from the tree, and know that it's given in a good spirit."

COMPUTER SCIENCE EDUCATION WEEK

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about Computer Science Education Week, which began on December 4, 2011, and continues until December 10, 2011. This celebration includes events in my home State of Pennsylvania that advance the teaching and learning of computer science. These activities help to engage students and build their interest in a field that promises good jobs in a rapidly expanding sector. The week also draws attention to the critical need for strong computer science education in our schools.

E-mails, text messages, financial transactions, cell phone calls and doctor's visits are just a few of the activities that rely on computer science. In the last 20 years, we have undergone a technological revolution that has transformed industry, created entirely new segments of the economy, and transformed our daily lives. Pennsylvania's high-tech industry has played a crucial role in this growth, and we must prepare the next generation to continue innovating. The events of Computer Science Education Week help to build momentum for students to learn computer science.

In Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon University, which boasts one of the best