

majority of fatal motorcoach accidents, when the bus rolled over, the passengers were ejected from their seats and thrown through the bus windows. Seven people were killed and dozens were injured.

John and Joy Betts of Bryan, OH—a couple who have become friends of mine—lost their son David, one of the students who died that day. He was a baseball player and student at Bluffton. I have gotten to know the Betts family since the accident. They have been courageous advocates in raising awareness of motorcoach safety and demanding congressional action. To the family's credit, they used the loss of their son to save the sons and daughters of many others who will not face those tragedies because of the work the Betts family is doing on behalf of this motorcoach safety legislation.

The National Transportation Safety Board's final report from the Bluffton motorcoach accident—released almost 4 years ago—echoed recommendations the NTSB has been urging for years. For nearly 5 years, I have been working with Senator HUTCHISON, whose State has seen its share of tragic motorcoach accidents, to put those recommendations into law. In a bipartisan manner, we are fighting to make motorcoaches safer for the millions of passengers who ride them every day.

Today, because of the Betts family, other courageous families, and activists, we are taking a step in the right direction if we pass the bill.

In the 110th, 111th, and now the 112th Congress, Senator HUTCHISON and I have introduced the bipartisan Motorcoach Enhanced Safety Act, which includes many of the NTSB's "most wanted" safety improvements. Specifically, the bill would address many of the major safety shortfalls from the Bluffton accident, which have plagued tour bus operations for too long. It would mean better protection systems for occupants and stronger passenger safety standards. It would improve safety equipment and devices and the need for onboard recorders with the capability to collect crash data. These safety measures are neither exotic nor complicated; they are commonsense safety features that have been and in many cases are widely used. But since they are not required by law, they have not been installed in most American motorcoaches. Instead of saving lives, the public safety remains at risk.

Some who oppose improved tour bus safety standards will tell you that this isn't a motorcoach problem, that they have a problem with rogue bus companies or bad drivers. Certainly, that is part of the problem, but we cannot simply look the other way and reject the idea that improving the safety of motorcoach manufacturing and motorcoaches is unnecessary or fiscally imprudent.

John Betts said:

It is necessary through our current regulations to get bad operators off the road. How-

ever, it is not sufficient as it does nothing to ensure safety once the crash has occurred.

I couldn't agree more. We can get bad operators off the road, but that is not enough to ensure passenger safety in the tragic event of an accident. If the technology to save lives and reduce injury in motorcoach accidents exists, we must put that technology to use. This bill does that.

Last year in Cleveland I was joined by John's sister and brother-in-law, Pam and Tom Bryan of Vermillion, OH. We met with a Greyhound bus driver who showcased new Greyhound buses equipped with some commonsense safety measures that clearly will save lives and protect both passengers and motorists on the road.

The Betts family and operators like Greyhound understand the urgent need and have too often relived the painful reminders that safety improvements for tour bus operations are long overdue. That is why this Motorcoach Enhanced Safety Act is important, and it is why Greyhound's endorsement of this bill is so critical to turning public sadness and outrage into public action. Bus operators such as Greyhound think we can do this, and manufacturers do too. The technology is there.

The bill is common sense, bipartisan, and it will save lives. How many more motorcoach deaths—in Ohio, Texas, and most recently in New York and New Jersey—do we have to witness before bus companies start doing the right thing? As a father and Senator, it is disturbing to know that students are still traveling in motorcoaches without even the option of buckling up. Our laws should ensure that our vehicles and roads are safer, not less safe, for students, families, and elderly people, who often take motorcoach charters to events and concerts and such.

Tomorrow is the fifth anniversary of the Bluffton University tragic motorcoach accident. Our legislation is in the underlying Transportation bill we are debating on the floor. I urge its passage. I urge continued inclusion of these provisions, as Senator HUTCHISON and I have asked. It is commonsense, middle-of-the-road, bipartisan legislation that will save lives, undoubtedly.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The Senator from Alaska is recognized.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. I thank the Chair. (The remarks of Ms. MURKOWSKI pertaining to the introduction of S. 2151 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BEGICH). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, for everyone's information, it is not as if we have been sitting around doing nothing. We have been trying to work something out on this highway bill. Hopefully, in the next little bit we can do it. We have not been very successful this day. I am glad we had that vote to try to move forward, but there are still some obstacles in the way.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

TRIBUTE TO SHERIFF'S DEPUTY JAMES I. THACKER

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to a man who dedicated many great years of service to the residents of Pike County, KY, Sheriff's Deputy James I. Thacker of Elkhorn City, KY.

Sadly, Deputy Thacker was recently killed in a tragic automobile accident in the line of duty on Monday, January 23, on U.S. Highway 460 near Marrowbone, KY. He was 53 years old. I would like to take a moment to share with my colleagues the legacy that was left behind by this great man and humble public servant.

When asked to comment on the untimely death of Deputy Thacker, Pike County Sheriff Charles "Fuzzy" Keese said, "He was kind and compassionate; he treated everyone else like he wanted to be treated. He was that kind of person, just an excellent officer." Deputy Thacker was genuinely devoted to the people of Pike County, whom he had dedicated his life to serve. James has been described as the type of man you could call on day or night, with anything you may need, no matter how big or how small.

Deputy Thacker held an array of jobs in Pike County throughout his life. He served his country as a Marine early on in his life. Later on he became a Pike County road foreman. Next, he spent 8 years as Pike County's constable before assuming the role of Deputy Sheriff a little over a year ago.

Deputy Thacker most assuredly left an incredible legacy in each of the positions he held in his lifetime. He was cherished and appreciated by the citizens of Pike County, and this was proven when hundreds of friends, colleagues and family members attended his visitation to pay their respects. Among

those assembled, people felt that anyone who knew James was truly blessed, and could find joy in simply being in his company. "He was very likeable and he was the type of person that once you knew him, it seemed like you knew him forever," said Sheriff Keesee.

Mr. President, at this time I would like to ask my U.S. Senate colleagues to join me in commemorating this fallen law-enforcement officer, and recognizing the legacy that he has left behind by making Elkhorn City, Pike County, and the Commonwealth of Kentucky a great place.

A news story on the tragic death of Sheriff's Deputy James I. Thacker recently aired on WYMT TV News of Hazard, Kentucky, and was published on WKYT.com. I ask unanimous consent that said story be printed in the RECORD.

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

[From WKYT.com, January 24, 2012]

SHERIFF REMEMBERS FALLEN DEPUTY

(By Angela Sparkman)

Pike County Sheriff's Deputy James I. Thacker died while on duty after a car crash Monday night near Marrowbone on U.S. 460.

Sheriff Fuzzy Keesee says Thacker was serving papers on his way home to Elkhorn City when the wreck happened.

State police spent most of Tuesday investigating the three-vehicle crash and say an SUV crossed the center line and hit Thacker's cruiser. Another vehicle also hit the cars after the collision.

The sheriff says Thacker will always be remembered for his service to Pike County.

"He was kind and compassionate, he treated everyone else like he wanted to be treated. He was that kind of person, just an excellent officer," Sheriff Keesee said.

Keesee says Thacker joined the department just last year but served as a constable for four years before becoming a sheriff's deputy.

A Pike County Sheriff's cruiser now sits in front of the courthouse, draped in black and a wreath on top in memory of 53-year-old James I. Thacker.

Sheriff Charles "Fuzzy" Keesee says Thacker always answered the call of duty to help people. Monday night, the call for help was for Thacker.

The Sheriff says Thacker was serving papers on his way home to Elkhorn City. He never made it.

The dozens of police who answered the call to help Thacker could not save him. He died at the scene. It was a scene the sheriff will never forget.

"His family was there. I talked to them, had a prayer with them. We were all saddened," said Sheriff Keesee.

State police are still investigating what caused the SUV to allegedly lose control and cause the crash. Troopers are reconstructing the wreck on U.S. 460.

Meanwhile, the Sheriff's department is coming together to remember their friend and fallen officer.

"It's going to be a great loss to the community around us," said Sheriff Keesee.

The visitation for Thacker starts Wednesday night at the Community Funeral Home in Coon Creek. His funeral is Friday at 1 p.m. at East Ridge High School.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

CALIFORNIA CASUALTIES

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I wish today to pay tribute to 15 servicemem-

bers from California or based in California who have died while serving our country in Operation Enduring Freedom since November 15, 2011. This brings to 324 the number of servicemembers either from California or based in California who have been killed while serving our country in Afghanistan. This represents 17 percent of all U.S. deaths in Afghanistan.

SPC Sean M. Walsh, 21, of San Jose, CA, died November 16, in Khowst Province, Afghanistan, of injuries sustained after encountering indirect fire. Specialist Walsh was assigned to the 185th Military Police Battalion, 49th Military Police Brigade, Pittsburg, CA.

LCpl Joshua D. Corral, 19, of Danville, CA, died November 18 while conducting combat operations in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Lance Corporal Corral was assigned to 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Twentynine Palms, CA.

Cpl Zachary C. Reiff, 22, of Preston, IA, died November 21 of wounds suffered November 18 while conducting combat operations in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Corporal Reiff was assigned to 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Twentynine Palms, CA.

SSgt Vincent J. Bell, 28, of Detroit, MI, died November 30 while conducting combat operations in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Staff Sergeant Bell was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Pendleton, CA.

SFC Clark A. Corley Jr., 35, of Oxnard, CA, died December 3, in Wardak Province, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when enemy forces attacked his unit with an improvised explosive device. Sergeant First Class Corley was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Fort Bliss, TX.

SPC Thomas J. Mayberry, 21, of Springville, CA, died December 3, in Wardak Province, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when enemy forces attacked his unit with an improvised explosive device. Specialist Mayberry was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Fort Bliss, TX.

SGT Christopher L. Muniz, 24, of New Cuyama, CA, died December 11, in Kunar Province, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when enemy forces attacked his unit with an improvised explosive device. Sergeant Muniz was assigned to the 3rd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, Schofield Barracks, HI.

SSG Noah M. Korte, 29, of Lake Elsinore, CA, died December 27, in Paktia, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when enemy forces attacked his unit with an improvised explosive device. Staff Sergeant Korte was assigned to the 720th Military Police Battalion, 89th Military Police Brigade, Fort Hood, TX.

PO1 Chad R. Regelin, 24, of Cottonwood, CA, died January 2 while conducting combat operations in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Petty Officer First Class Regelin was assigned as an explosive ordnance disposal technician to Marine Special Operations Company Bravo. Regelin was stationed at Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit 3, San Diego, CA.

Cpl Jon-Luke Bateman, 22, of Tulsa, OK, died January 15 while conducting combat operations in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Corporal Bateman was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Pendleton, CA.

Cpl Christopher G. Singer, 23, of Temecula, CA, died January 21 while conducting combat operations in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Corporal Singer was assigned to 3rd Combat Engineer Battalion, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Twentynine Palms, CA.

Sgt William C. Stacey, 23, of Redding, CA, died January 31 while conducting combat operations in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Sergeant Stacey was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Pendleton, CA.

PFC Cesar Cortez, 24, of Oceanside, CA, died February 11, in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Private First Class Cortez was assigned to 5th Battalion, 52nd Air Defense Artillery Regiment, 11th Air Defense Artillery Brigade, 32nd Army Air and Missile Defense Command, Fort Bliss, TX.

PO3 Kyler L. Estrada, 21, of Maricopa, AZ, died February 14 as a result of a noncombat related training incident in Djibouti. Petty Officer 3rd Class Estrada, a Navy hospital corpsman, was assigned to the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit based at Camp Pendleton, CA.

PO1 Paris S. Pough, 40, of Columbus, GA, died February 17 during a port visit in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Petty Officer First Class Pough, a hull technician, was assigned to the USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70), home-ported in San Diego, CA.

FALLEN MARINES

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, California and the Nation are mourning the loss of seven courageous and dedicated marines who died last week in a midair helicopter collision during a routine training exercise in a remote mountain area in Imperial County, CA.

This is a tragic loss for our military and our Nation. It is also a reminder of the sacrifices that all our servicemembers make each and every day. These brave men and women put themselves in harm's way to keep us safe—whether they are engaged in combat, conducting humanitarian missions, or taking part in training exercises here at home.

I ask my colleagues to join me in paying tribute to these marines: Maj.