

Vermont Guard's helicopters were in Iraq, General Dubie coordinated with other State Guards to get the help Vermont needed.

The Guard's intensive rescue and aid mission eventually evolved into a longer-term recovery and rebuilding mission. Skillfully and tirelessly, Vermont citizen-soldiers set to work removing debris and rebuilding roads and infrastructure.

General Dubie commanded some 500 activated Guard members in the wake of Irene. But that does not account for other ongoing missions in 2011, or the substantial contribution the Vermont Guard has made to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq—including a major activation to Afghanistan in 2010. In honoring General Dubie as Vermonter of the Year, we pay tribute to the tremendous sacrifice made both in State and overseas by Vermont National Guard members and their families.

True to form, General Dubie, despite his extensive experience with dangerous overseas missions, has called the Irene deployment the proudest mission of his career because he was able to directly help so many of his fellow Vermonters.

MG Michael Dubie is a proven leader and he embodies the best of Vermont. I am proud to recognize his hard work and I wish him continued success in his career.

I ask unanimous consent that the Burlington Free Press article entitled “Maj. Gen. Dubie is Vermonter of the Year” be printed in the RECORD.

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

[From the Burlington Free Press, Jan. 1, 2012]

MAJ. GEN. DUBIE IS VERMONTER OF THE YEAR

As the Vermonter of the Year, we select Maj. Gen. Michael Dubie, adjutant general of the Vermont National Guard, as the representative of the team of men and women of the Guard and the many civilians who worked together to help Vermont recover from Tropical Storm Irene.

In our lifetime, Tropical Storm Irene is arguably the biggest and most dominant local news story. Three people lost their lives during the storm. Vermont National Guard 1st Sgt. Shawn Stocker lost his life working to respond. Thousands lost their homes, their businesses and many of their possessions. Thousands more suffered property damage. Irene washed away some roads, damaged many others and rendered useless the state office complex in Waterbury.

Who would have thought that our state could recover so well in less than 90 days!

Vermonters owe this recovery to so many. State and local government leaders have done their jobs well. In every community impacted by the storm, there were at least a few civilians who devoted most of their time and energy for many weeks helping their community respond and recover. Hundreds of volunteers from all over our state and beyond stepped up to do extraordinary things. They collectively demonstrated both the indomitable spirit of Vermonters and our love for community.

Approximately 500 Vermont National Guard members were activated as well. We are especially mindful that this activation is in addition to Air Guard deployments to

Norway and Korea, ongoing Vermont National Guard missions in Djibouti, Kosovo, Macedonia and Senegal, helicopter rescues in Iraq—all in 2011—and following the major activation to Afghanistan in 2010. Let us also remember, as the Iraq War officially comes to its end, the tremendous sacrifice made by Vermont National Guard members and their families while serving our country during these past nine years.

As Dubie said in nominating the men and women of the Vermont National Guard, “As you know, we are a team. It is what makes us so strong.” In responding to Tropical Storm Irene, the Vermont “team” also included many civilians. Together, the Vermont National Guard and the community members searched and rescued and then delivered supplies to people in otherwise unreachable locations. Then they began reconstruction. In addition to the National Guard, all of these volunteers should be commended and thanked for their efforts.

We can choose only one person, however, as Vermonter of the Year. Because so many people did so much, the selection committee found it hard to identify a single individual to recognize. So we choose Maj. Gen. Michael Dubie to honor them all.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

RECOGNIZING THE “MAJOR CHARLES ROBERT SOLTES JR., O.D. BLIND REHABILITATION CENTER”

• Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, today I wish to commemorate the dedication of the “Major Charles Robert Soltes Jr., O.D. Department of Veterans Affairs Blind Rehabilitation Center.”

As a member of the U.S. House of Representatives during the 111th Congress, I strongly supported the bill that ultimately became P.L. 111-164. That law designated the Department of Veterans Affairs Blind Rehabilitation Center in Long Beach, CA, as the “Major Charles Robert Soltes, Jr., O.D. Department of Veterans Affairs Blind Rehabilitation Center.”

Naming this facility after MAJ Charles Robert Soltes, Jr. is an appropriate expression of our support for our blinded veterans. In 2004, while deployed in Iraq, MAJ Soltes was serving in the 426th Civil Affairs Battalion in the U.S. Army when the vehicle he was traveling in was struck by an improvised explosive device, costing him his life.

MAJ Soltes was the first Army optometrist to be killed in action while on active duty. He left behind a long-lasting legacy in the veteran community. His sacrifices remain an inspiration, particularly amongst the approximately 157,000 veterans in the United States who are legally blind and the more than one million veterans suffering from debilitating low vision.

Mr. President, I was the son of a World War II veteran and before entering public service, I practiced optometry in Rogers, AR. With that background, I hold an immense respect for, and a particularly strong interest in, the care that VA blind rehabilitation centers provide our wounded warriors.

Approximately 60 percent of veterans with known combat-related Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and 30 percent with noncombat-related TBI report vision symptoms. As eye injuries continue to plague our servicemembers overseas, our VA eye care providers play a vital role in the medical service our veterans receive.

This week, the VA health care system adds one more location where those who have given so much for our freedoms can seek help with their vision problems. The dedication of this facility as the “Major Charles Robert Soltes Jr., O.D. Department of Veterans Affairs Blind Rehabilitation Center” is a fitting tribute to a fallen hero who committed his life to our country and the health and wellbeing of his fellow Americans. The service and sacrifice of MAJ Soltes will not be forgotten and his dedication to country and mankind will live on through the increased care for our Nation’s blind veterans. •

REMEMBERING ETTA JAMES

• Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, today I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring the life and artistry of Etta James, the legendary singer and entertainer who moved and delighted music lovers for more than half a century. She died in her hometown of Riverside, CA last week at the age of 73 after a long and valiant battle with leukemia.

Born Jamesetta Hawkins in Los Angeles in 1938, she began singing in the St. Paul Baptist Church choir at age 5 and recorded her first hit record, “The Wallflower (Roll With Me Henry),” when she was just 15. Etta James was equally at home singing rhythm & blues classics like “Something’s Got a Hold on Me,” soulful ballads such as “All I Could Do Was Cry,” and passionate love songs including the incomparable “At Last.”

I was fortunate enough to grow up with her music, dancing to “The Wallflower” in high school, “At Last” as a newlywed, and “Tell Mama” as a young mother. As she continued to tour and record, later generations marveled at her talents, reveled in her exuberant performances, and admired her indomitable spirit.

Through her music, Etta James brought the joys and sorrows of life home to millions of fans all over the world. She will be deeply missed, but her music will live on in our hearts and souls.

On behalf of the people of California, I send my deepest condolences to her husband, Artis Mills; her two sons, Donto and Sametto James; and her four grandchildren. •

TRIBUTE TO MASTER SERGEANT TRAVIS RIDICK

• Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I rise to pay tribute to a fallen son of Iowa,

MSgt. Travis Riddick. Master Sergeant Riddick joined the Marine Corps after graduating from high school in Centerville, IA. In doing so, he was following in a laudable family tradition of patriotic service. His father and grandfather were marines, as well as his uncle and cousins. His twin brother recently retired after 21 years in the Navy. Travis Riddick certainly did his family, his State, and his country proud. He was awarded six Air Medals, the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, four Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals, seven Marine Corps Good Conduct Medals, two National Defense Service Medals, the Southwest Asia Service Medal, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, the Iraq Campaign Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, the Armed Forces Service Medal, the Humanitarian Service Medal, the NATO Medal, the NATO ISAF Medal, and the Kuwait Liberation Medal.

My prayers are with his mother, Barbara, his father, John, and his wife, Jennifer, as well as his children and all his family and friends. His father reports that Travis loved his job and his mother said that he was the best marine ever. Our Nation is tremendously fortunate to have individuals like Travis Riddick who have the drive to step forward and serve their country with enthusiasm and honor. To selfless heroes like Travis Riddick, we owe nothing short of our liberty. Unlike at the birth of our country, when every person who aligned with the cause of freedom was putting themselves at great risk, those who enjoy our way of life today rely on a select group of patriotic Americans to preserve everything we hold so dear. We can never repay the debt we owe, but we are obliged to honor and remember them for their sacrifice in the name of liberty.●

RECOGNIZING THE NATIONAL HANDICAPPING CHAMPIONSHIP

• Mr. HELLER. Mr. President, today I wish to bring awareness to an event being hosted in my State this weekend. The National Handicapping Championship, NHC, will take place on January 27 and 28 at Treasure Island Las Vegas. Tourism and gaming are the backbone of Nevada's economy. It's a legacy that we must continue to nurture and I welcome events like the NHC to my state.

Las Vegas is a world-class destination unmatched by any other, and I have and will continue working to support policies that will keep Nevada's gaming industry growing and prosperous. Travel and tourism are a major part of my State's economy, attracting millions of visitors every year because of the variety of attractions and entertainment options available.

Considered the most anticipated tournament in the world for horseplayers, the NHC marks the con-

clusion of a year-long series of tournaments endorsed by the Daily Racing Form and the National Thoroughbred Racing Association, NTRA, where Thoroughbred racing handicappers wager more than \$12 billion each year. In turn, these dollars are put back into the horse industry contributing significantly to this agribusiness' future growth.

I commend the Daily Racing Form and the NTRA for choosing Las Vegas, NV to host this prestigious tournament and wish them a successful event this weekend. I look forward to building upon this success and encourage more events to visit my State. As a United States Senator from Nevada, I will continue to do all that I can to make sure that organizations such as these have the opportunity to enjoy all that my great State has to offer.●

ST. CROIX RIVER BRIDGE PROJECT

• Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the remarkable commitment of a key group of Senate staffers, who worked tirelessly over the last several months to ensure the passage of a critical bill for advancing the bipartisan St. Croix River Bridge Project. By replacing the outdated, 80-year-old Stillwater Lift Bridge with a bridge that adequately meets the needs of local businesses and families, this bill will promote public safety and economic development in communities throughout the St. Croix River Valley.

Passing the bill was truly a team effort, requiring all hands on deck from lawmakers at the State, local and Federal level. We could not have done it without the leadership of my co-sponsors in the Senate—AL FRANKEN, RON JOHNSON and HERB KOHL—or our colleagues in the House from both Minnesota and Wisconsin. But most importantly, we could not have reached this important milestone without the talent and tenacity of the hard working people “behind the scenes.”

This includes the staff of the Environment and Public Works and Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committees as well as the U.S. Departments of Transportation and Interior, who worked closely with my office. And it includes all of the hard-working members of my staff who logged countless long hours to ensure we had a bill that was strong, effective and bipartisan. Their hard work made all the difference.

I am especially grateful to my Deputy-Legislative Director Travis Talvitie, who played an indispensable role every step of the way. Travis came into this process with a deep understanding of infrastructure policy, which he immediately put to work on this bill. When he wasn't meeting with community leaders from Stillwater and the St. Croix River Valley, he was coordinating with Federal agencies, and has become an expert on the important Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Thanks to the efforts of all involved, I am hopeful that Minnesota and Wisconsin will soon have a bridge that not only improves public safety and promotes economic growth, but preserves the incredible beauty of the St. Croix River.●

VERMONT STUDENTS' ESSAYS

• Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask to have printed in the RECORD these essays written by Vermont High School students as part of the second annual “What is the State of the Union?” essay contest conducted by my office. The following essays were selected as “Runners Up.”

The Statements follow.

MONICA ALLARD, MILTON HIGH SCHOOL
(RUNNER UP)

[January 23, 2012]

The American Dream is adaptable. The ideals that we have long valued are admirable, but often contradicting or impossible to achieve with a large population. In today's economy, that translates to the right to a free market economy, conflicting with the practical need for government interference; the right to succeed for oneself, battling with the need to work together for today's and future generations. As long as our country is able to prosper without certain regulations, I encourage it to run free, but when the winter comes and there is no more grazing, the horse must accept the fence that accompanies the grain. It is imperative that Americans collectively work to solve problems with social security, our economy, and our political system in these troubled times.

“Maybe if we ignore it, it will go away” has been the standard approach to growing concerns about social security in the last few years. Because of increasing life expectancy, more people are retiring than the system can support. When the newest generation retires, there won't be enough funds for everyone, unless something changes soon. A fixed rate retirement check is the logical solution, if we deduct money from the fixed rate check based on income. Working citizens would pay fewer taxes because only the people who need social security will be receiving it, and everyone else would have more money to put aside for their own retirement plans.

The predominant issue of the 21st century has been the international recession. Unemployment rates are high, but what many young Americans don't realize is the shortage in technical workers. There is a national trend towards traditional four-year universities, but technical careers are the road to take if you are searching for job stability, demand, potential for advancement, and self-employment or a local employer in today's economy. Through ad campaigns and offering incentives to students enrolling in technical universities. This is a simple way to lower the unemployment rate, while promoting local businesses.

Another important step in rejuvenating our economy is passing legislation that gives the national government more control over the stock market. Occupy movements have swept the country and it is time for Congress to respond, instead of hiring and appointing the same executives who were largely responsible for our economy's collapse.

In order to move forward, we need to present a united front. Republicans and Democrats are rending our country in two because of partisan pressure. We need radical change in the political system: remove all party authority. Primaries and power distribution in Congress put too much emphasis