

they have done already. They get criticized a lot, but we should highlight some of the good things they have done. The humanitarian assistance provided by the administration, paid for by U.S. taxpayers, is substantial and should be noted. It is now more than \$1.7 billion. No country comes even close when it comes to the support our taxpayers and our government have provided. About half of that \$1.7 billion has been to help within the country. By one USAID estimate, about \$878 million is for help within Syria. The balance of that, something on the order of a little more than \$850 million, of course, is helping refugees in neighboring countries. So substantial help by the American people should be noted. I think we need to figure out ways to do more. There is probably not a lot of room for more dollars and humanitarian aid, but we should consider that if we can. But there are lots of ways we can help here without directly engaging any of our troops or any of our military might on the ground.

There are lots of ways to help and we urge the administration to keep focus on a new and more substantial strategy, which I know they have been working on. They should consult with Congress and work with us as we move forward.

TRIBUTE TO DAVID KESSLER

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, earlier this year, after 39 years of public service, most recently as the National Zoo's keeper for the Small Mammal House, David Kessler turned in his keys and turned toward retirement. He has dedicated two-thirds of his life to caring for the howler monkeys, lemurs, and shrews living at the zoo.

In addition to feeding the animals and cleaning out their enclosures, Kessler spent his days watching, closely observing any changes in appetite or behavior that might suggest something was amiss. He remembers the endless hours he spent with William, a gibbon, after William's traumatizing experience at the hospital that left him afraid of humans and ostracized from his parents. Kessler holds on to a photo of William sleeping on his shoulder.

At the zoo, it wasn't just about Kessler caring for the animals; it was about connecting with them. They kept him as much as he kept them. He admits he wouldn't be the same person if it weren't for the animals. Their connection has kept him in the moment and happy.

I was touched to read a moving profile of David's career and of his last day in the Small Mammal House. His love for the small mammals for which he cared is evident. Health may have rushed his retirement, but by any measure his was a career spent in service to some of the most interesting creatures visited at our Nation's zoo. I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD this touching profile from the Washington Post of a career well worth celebrating.

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

[From the Washington Post, March 6, 2014]
NATIONAL ZOO'S LONGEST-SERVING KEEPER
BIDS FAREWELL

(By Rachel Manteuffel)

On his last night as the longest-serving keeper at the National Zoo, David S. Kessler checks and rechecks the locks on the enclosures in the Small Mammal House. He collects his farewell gifts and mementos and softly narrates to himself what needs to be done. "Okay, lights out here, good. Hi, babies!" he says to Reuben and Jolla, the howler monkey couple. "Aagh, g'night, sweetheart. Did I wake you up? I'm sorry." He checks the seven timers on the lights, saying "timer" aloud at each. He's not thinking, he says, about how this January night is the last time after 39 years, two-thirds of his life, at the zoo. Now Gus the rock hyrax—who looks like a four-pound guinea pig but is more closely related to the elephant—catches his attention in the dark. It's as if the little guy knows something is up.

Considering the personal magnitude of the occasion, everything is going fine as Kessler prepares to walk away from the animals who he says rescued him, who might just have saved his sanity.

"Gus is sticking his head out—" Kessler notes, then stops. He sobs once, his knees buckle, and he drops face-down on the floor of his House.

Earlier in the day, Kessler talked about his career. "I like to work with animals that nobody thinks about," he said. Small mammals, it's true, are not headlines. Hey, kids, let's go see the shrews! In the past few years, Kessler has been lavishing his attention on the naked mole rat, an animal that resembles a flaccid penis with buck teeth. He always has a favorite weirdo. He has been the red panda guy, the house shrew guy, the Prevost's squirrel guy and the moonrat guy. Moonrats have no natural predators, Kessler says with admiration and a little pride, because they smell so bad.

There aren't a lot of jobs like zookeeper. Technically, Kessler's job has been biologist, but the caretaking—the keeping—is what he loves best.

"It's the care of living things. To keep, that's a beautiful thing. The longer you watch an animal or a person just doing their thing, the more you feel connected to them."

A keeper feeds the animals and mucks out their enclosures, but the real work is observation, watching their bodies and behavior closely for subtle changes that mean something is wrong. And figuring out how to fix it.

Take the lemurs, smallish primates with doglike faces, some of the most social creatures in the Small Mammal House. Cortes and Coronado are recent acquisitions—Kessler drove them down from the Bronx Zoo in his Honda Civic—who are being carefully phased in with Molly, who has been the sole lemur at the Small Mammal House since her mate died. The keepers noticed the new lemurs were keeping low to the ground, unlemurlike behavior. Lemurs are at home in treetops, and the damp ground was irritating one of Cortes's paws. Perhaps Molly was being territorial. They would wait and see, maybe give Molly more attention. And keep watching.

Kessler and his colleagues would eventually determine Molly wasn't behaving aggressively toward the other two lemurs. A volunteer noticed it was the rock hyraxes antagonizing Cortes and Coronado. The rock hyraxes were moved to a different exhibit and, voila, the lemurs returned to the trees.

Lemurs are comparatively easy to read. You can spend less than half an hour watching Molly and feel as if you almost understand her thought process. You can become so absorbed you forget who and what you are, and that you are watching. It can become like reading a novel, the closest humans can get to having someone else's consciousness for a change.

It took a year and a half in the reptile house, but eventually Kessler could tell when something was wrong with a snake.

He's about average height, and he has had a beard most of his 59 years, but not now. He wears khakis and polos to work, with big rubber boots, disposable gloves and face masks. Primates can pass each other disease easily, he says. A keeper's herpes cold sore can kill a gorilla.

In conversation, Kessler tosses out bits of philosophy, science, novels, plays—knowledge you should have, if you had time to read, and he acts as if you probably know them, too.

He knows each of the hundred-odd residents of the Small Mammal House by their six-digit reference number. He has also published or co-written about a dozen research papers. Written three unpublished novels. He once went on a radio show to compose sonnets on demand. He mentors high school students and oversees their research projects. Every year Kessler takes off work to see as many shows in the Capital Fringe Festival as possible, since they often run past midnight and his work would start at 6:30 a.m. He spends an hour a day on the treadmill. He lives in Silver Spring and has been married for 30 years—he still writes his wife, Patricia, sonnets. He smiles when he happens upon a picture of her unexpectedly. They have a grown son, Ben, who co-owns an urban farming company in Charlottesville.

When friends asked, he officiated their 2006 wedding, working with them to write a personalized service, complete with sermon. Kessler took lessons from an actor friend on how not to cry. He always cried at weddings but didn't want to distract while performing one. He was asked to officiate another wedding in Rockville, even though he was racing to New Jersey and back to be with his dying father. His father died. Kessler made the arrangements so his mother and sisters wouldn't have to, then drove from New Jersey to the rehearsal dinner that night. When another friend needed him to, he was the one to officially identify her husband's body.

For a while he fronted a calypso-reggae band. He is universally beloved among colleagues and friends—suspiciously so, if you are a person suspicious of that sort of thing.

Kessler's last "Meet a Mammal" demonstration for zoogoers, on his last day at work, was attended by Linda Hopkins, a zoo electrician who'd known him 11 years and brought him a bottle of wine, and Susie Kane, who had never met him, but she had heard he was leaving, and in 2005 he had kindly answered her e-mailed question about building a naked mole rat habitat for her dorm room.

In December, Scientific American declared the naked mole rat Vertebrate of the Year. He is a happy man who's leaving the job he loves.

He's retiring young because of his psoriatic arthritis. It's much better these days—he gets injections of monoclonal antibodies. But it is progressive. "I only have so much health left," he says, and zookeeping is physically taxing. He wants to travel with his wife, and write.

A loved one once told him that he would probably be happier as a hermit. He wasn't insulted.

"I'm more comfortable by myself and with animals than I am with people," he says. "I

don't feel like I fit around people." Around people, he is giving a sort of performance. "But an honest performance." Sometimes he loves it, performing, fronting a band, officiating at weddings. "There's tension, but fun tension, like scary movies. I like the attention and the tension."

So ask to watch him work, ask him to ignore you, and it doesn't work. That's a private part of him, reserved for himself and the animals. He'll start offering you books or telling you stories, and if you patiently sit around, pretending to use a computer in his office until he forgets you're there, he will not forget you're there. He will grow slightly agitated and need some alone time with the lemurs after you're gone.

His last day is a whirl of well-wishers, friends, leftover food from the party the day before, paperwork, gifts, tears and hugs. "I don't like to be touched," he says to one hugger, "but being hugged is fine."

He hadn't been assigned to do the lines that morning—the shift that starts before sunrise, when the animals get their breakfast and their enclosures are cleaned out. He had e-mails to read, but people kept coming by for hugs and predicting he'll be back. He says no, never coming back. He seems to mean it.

Even friends who aren't physically present are distracting him. "Happy birthday to you," he sings into a friend's voice mail, gargling the last line. "Happy Jimmy Page's birthday, happy your birthday, happy your aunt's birthday yesterday." He attends to the needs of the humans for hours, their need to say goodbye, to say they would miss him. He almost always has a specific memory or thought for each, as he thanks them and assures them he won't miss this place and, after some time, they won't miss him.

He's proudest of his work with William the gibbon in 1978. William was a juvenile living with his parents when he got stuck in the enclosure and broke his arm. He was in the hospital so long—so long in the company of humans—that his parents rejected him when he got back. And because his hospital experience was scary and painful, people now made William fearful and angry. He was kept out of the exhibit for a while, off by himself.

Kessler sat in his enclosure each day, doing nothing except being nonthreatening. No mask, no gloves. Back then, this was acceptable zookeeper behavior—interaction not initiated or welcomed by the animal.

William would brachiate around in the farthest corner from Kessler, swinging limb to limb, elaborately ignoring the 130-pound human in the room. Over the course of a week, William came closer and closer, until his feet would brush his keeper's head as he swung by. Eventually he would put his head on Kessler's sweatshirt and go to sleep. There's a picture with William's arms around Kessler's head.

One thing he will miss from the zoo: watching the howler monkeys eat. Jolla likes beets but not the squiggly end of the taproot. She will pick it up, put it down, eat something else, return as if to see if the bit she doesn't like is still there. Maybe it got better! You can learn so much about optimism from her, Kessler says. "People tell me she's just stupid," he says, shaking his head at that human stupidity.

Twelve years ago, Kessler walked with a cane, couldn't turn his head and could sleep only an hour and a half at a time because of his arthritis.

Thirty-six years ago he called his psychiatrist to say he had everything ready to commit a tidy, no-fuss suicide, just a hose and towels in a car exhaust pipe. His doctor had him hospitalized for four days.

Then, at 27, he taught himself to be happy. "You learn from evolution, from animals. If

you have a strategy that doesn't work, change your strategy."

His new strategy was to avoid introspection. Completely. "Working with animals made me start thinking about other things more. And when I was able to start thinking about other animals more, I was able to include humans in that group." Understanding William the gibbon, for example, and building his trust, was a big "breakthrough with myself."

"The real change was Patricia," he says. "But I probably couldn't be with her if I hadn't been working with animals."

According to dominant psychology and philosophy, introspection is the key to living right. But Kessler's unexamined life is the only kind he wants to live.

For obvious reasons, it's difficult for him to explain how he stopped being introspective. Working with animals is one way, but there were others. When he worked alone off-exhibit, he narrated his novels in his head. He noticed that closing certain doors in the building was musical, producing two notes, a seventh interval: the first two notes of a song from "West Side Story": "Somewhere."

Sometimes he needs to go alone to see if Molly wants a belly rub. Lemurs and Reuben the howler are the only ones in the Small Mammal House to much enjoy the touch of a human. But lemurs are not pets. They did not evolve to be companions for humans, to cheer us up or give us something to love. Molly indicates if she wants a belly rub, not unlike a dog, and a keeper may administer it, but the belly rub is entirely for the animal. That's important to Kessler.

It turns out Molly wants a belly rub on Kessler's last day, after he has finally gotten rid of all the people and sneaks off to see her.

Afterward, he keeps putting off leaving, until his shift stretches to 11 hours. And because the rock hyraxes have been moved away from the lemurs they were scaring, here's Gus, too present-focused to understand "goodbye" but seeming to say goodbye, popping his head up, watching the keeper leave for the last time, and the keeper—finished with crying, hugs and goodbyes with people—goes down, face first.

Suzanne Hough, the volunteer coordinator, is leaving with him, and she joins him on the floor. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," he says. "No. No, no, it's okay."

After a moment, Hough speaks. "The floor can be tricky this time of night," she says, generously. She helps him up. He's fine, as far as he lets anyone know.

Moments later he is calm again, and performing. "Well, that was a surprise!" he says breezily. Hough and Kessler walk out into the cold night.

Inside the House, the hundred-odd residents have no sense that their time as keepers of David S. Kessler has come to an end.

TRIBUTE TO KATHERINE PATERSON

MR. LEAHY. Mr. President, I come to the Senate floor today to talk about a treasured Vermont author, Katherine Paterson. Her award-winning prose has won accolades near and far, but her writing has reached more than just those who have read her published words. In 2004, she started a letter exchange with an American soldier based in Afghanistan. Upon his return, she helped him launch his writing career.

Trent Reedy of the Iowa Army National Guard was enthralled with Paterson's master work, "Bridge to Terabithia," while deployed to Farah,

Afghanistan. Reedy's wife Amanda sent him the book, and he loved it so much that he read it in one sitting and sent a thank you note to the author.

Katherine's husband John, whom I knew as a gentle soul, sorted her mail and made sure that his wife saw the letter from Trent. A correspondence began between the two, and Trent finally revealed his intent to become a writer. Upon his return, Trent visited Katherine and John in Vermont and at Katherine's urging, and with her recommendation, studied writing at the Vermont College of Fine Arts and later wrote his first novel, "Words in the Dust."

As someone who considers Katherine and her late husband to be special friends, I was thrilled to read Sally Pollak's article in the Burlington Free Press, "Soldier finds lifeline in letter exchange with Vermont author." In fact I was so pleased, I called Katherine the day the story was published.

In addition to being a Vermont treasure, Katherine is an acclaimed author whose stories will be read for generations. Marcelle and I have enjoyed them, our children have enjoyed them, and now our grandchildren enjoy her stories. Katherine's influence is also felt through the many writers she has mentored, including Trent Reedy.

In honor of Katherine Paterson, I ask that Sally Pollak's story from the February 23, 2014, edition of the Burlington Free Press 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, Feb. 23, 2014]

SOLDIER FINDS LIFELINE IN LETTER EXCHANGE WITH VERMONT AUTHOR (By Sally Pollak)

While serving in Afghanistan Trent Reedy wrote Katherine Paterson to say thank you; the friendship that emerged changed his life.

The truck pulled into the U.S. Army base in Farah, Afghanistan, on another scorching desert day. This July, 2004, delivery promised exciting things: The cook was expecting a load of steak. He had rustled up some potatoes to serve with the meat.

The soldiers in the unit, housed in a stable with a well that often ran dry, were eager for a real meal. They'd been eating field rations called MREs, meals ready to eat. Yet when the cook opened the coveted steak he almost vomited. The meat had gone rancid en route, recalled Trent Reedy, a soldier in the unit. The meal was scrapped.

The truck also carried the mail. In it was a package for Reedy, sent by his wife in Iowa. She had mailed him a book by Katherine Paterson, "Bridge to Terabithia."

Paterson, who lives in Barre, is an acclaimed novelist who writes books for children and teenagers. She is a former National Ambassador for Young People's Literature whose honors include two National Book Awards and two Newbery Medals, the first for "Bridge to Terabithia," published in 1977.

Reedy's wife, Amanda, read "Bridge to Terabithia" in sixth grade. She sent her husband the book after he mentioned to her that the stories he was thinking about concerned young people. Reedy had never read a Paterson book.

The day it arrived at the army base, he read "Bridge to Terabithia" in one sitting. It