

Mike's flag on the wall of our cell and together recite the Pledge of Allegiance. No other event of the day had as much meaning to us.

The guards discovered Mike's flag one afternoon during a routine inspection and confiscated it. They returned that evening and took Mike outside. For our benefit as much as Mike's, they beat him severely, just outside our cell, puncturing his eardrum and breaking several of his ribs. When they finished, they dragged him bleeding and nearly senseless back into our cell, and we helped him crawl to his place on the sleeping platform. After things quieted down, we all lay down to go to sleep. Before drifting off, I happened to look toward a corner of the room, where one of the four naked light bulbs that were always illuminated in our cell cast a dim light on Mike Christian. He had crawled there when he thought the rest of us were sleeping. With his eyes nearly swollen shut from the beating, he had quietly picked up his needle and thread and begun sewing a new flag.

I witnessed many acts of heroism in prison, but none braver than that. As I watched him, I felt a surge of pride at serving with him, and an equal measure of humility for lacking that extra ration of courage that distinguished Mike Christian from other men.

I mentioned this yesterday because I had it in my mind when we saluted the flag. I said yesterday—and I will repeat and paraphrase today—when we salute the flag, we should remember the Mike Christians of the world who sacrificed so much so that we can salute the flag.

A FAIR SHOT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I love baseball season. I have never had the good fortune of having a team I grew up with, as has my colleague, the senior Senator from Illinois—Cubs fan, where he lives, White Sox fan—but I have loved baseball since I was a little boy. I love baseball season. I go to games. I think I can go to one this Saturday, unless something comes up. But I do go home at night—and I have spoken with the Republican leader about the pleasure we get from watching a little bit of the baseball games every evening. I do enjoy that.

I have watched over the years these managers. I spent so much time in southern Nevada, in Las Vegas. The baseball team most everyone in Las Vegas watched and listened to was the Los Angeles Dodgers, and the manager for much of that time, after I came back here, was Tommy Lasorda, and he was like so many managers, he was a character. He was a showman. I assume he picked some of the times to pick a fight with the umpire because he was upset with a call, but I think part of it was his idea that the team needed something a little extra. Tommy Lasorda would go out there, and he was famous for kicking the dirt and yelling loudly at the umpire and making sure he used a lot of swear words. That was the manager. He wasn't the only one. Tommy Lasorda comes to my mind. And, on occasion, he would get thrown out of the game.

Why did he do this? Was he upset at the call? At times it got real ugly, with

chest thumping and, as I indicated, kicking dirt. Lou Pinella was famous for that. He would kick dirt sometimes on an umpire and it usually got him kicked out of the game. As I indicated, they tried to keep it clean, but those baseball managers and players sometimes have a vocabulary that is for locker rooms and they would say mean-spirited things to the umpire, and certainly what they said wasn't suitable for children.

A lot of times they exited the game after being told they were ejected to divert attention from what was going on with their team. It was a gimmick many times, a distraction meant to sidetrack one side and rally the other.

In the House of Representatives, the Republican leadership is trying a similar tactic by threatening to bring a lawsuit against the President of the United States. They are searching desperately for something—anything—to keep the radicals within their own pockets over there happy. That is hard to do, as we have seen. They want to do this to divert the American people's attention from their very own inaction.

The Presiding Officer doesn't have to take my word for it—no one has to—because conservative pundits are falling over themselves to criticize this ploy. Even last night, Sarah Palin—what did Sarah Palin say? She said, "You don't bring a lawsuit to a gun fight, and there's no room for lawyers on our front lines." That is Sarah Palin. That is what she thinks of the action by the Republican leadership in the House. She wants to go even further, whatever that is.

One Republican pundit said it was political theater. Another called the lawsuit feckless.

However they choose to label it, there is one thing that conservatives, liberals, and moderates agree on: This lawsuit is nothing more than a political stunt. It is nothing more than kicking dirt at the umpire. This feeble attempt to pick a fight with President Obama is intended to draw attention away from the House's inertia on issues important to the American people, such as immigration. More than a year ago we passed immigration and the other House has refused to do anything about it, creating lots of problems, and causing this great country of ours to go further in debt. One trillion dollars would result in reducing our debt if we could pass that legislation. We did it; the House should do it.

All we are asking is that the middle class get a fair shot, whether it is raising the minimum wage, whether it is student debt, which is stunningly high—the highest debt we have in America today is student debt, \$1.3 trillion. We need to do something about fair pay for women, that they get the same money men get for doing the very same work. A fair shot—that is what the American middle class deserves, and the House Republicans are refusing to give them any shot at fairness.

Instead of considering all of these important legislative initiatives—I mentioned only a few—the tea party House is content to put on a show, to kick a little dirt—a big, expensive show, in many instances. Who pays for the charade they are talking about over there? The American taxpayers.

Let me give one example. Benghazi. Benghazi was a tragedy, but there is no political conspiracy. Here is what they have done, mostly in the House: 13 public hearings, 15 Member and staff briefings, over 25,000 pages of documents from the White House. Now they are using taxpayer money on a large-scale stunt that isn't new for them. They have other stunts such as the supposed lawsuit. But they have now set up a 12-member Benghazi panel they are creating. They intend to spend \$3.3 million this year—this year, which has just a few months left in it—\$3.3 million, as they try once again to turn a real tragedy into some kind of a conspiracy.

To put that number in perspective, think about this: The Benghazi panel will outspend the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs has 25 Members of Congress and it has about 30 staff members. The Benghazi little program they are putting on over there will spend more money than the entire Veterans Affairs' Committee in the House.

We are still waiting for the House to come together with us to do something about the veterans emergency we have. They have forgotten about what is going on around the country. We need thousands of new personnel in the Veterans Affairs Department, and the House refuses to complete the conference with Chairman SANDERS.

Much like the other sideshows put on by the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, this so-called lawsuit is baseless. When Sarah Palin thinks you are going too far, you better take a look at it by the tea party-driven House over there. And the House direction of the lawsuit—people keep asking the House leadership: On what are you going to sue him? They do not know. They are working on it. But they are going to have a lawsuit. They are going to kick around a little dirt. I am in no position to offer legal guidance, but I have been in court a few times. You know your case is in big trouble when you cannot specify the reason you are filing the lawsuit.

So the leadership in the House of Representatives should put aside this ill-fated venture and leave the chest-bumping and dirt-kicking charade to baseball managers.

President Obama is doing something to solve problems, and Republicans are suing him because they want to do nothing, and that is sad. Republicans in the House would be better served spending their efforts and resources passing legislation, giving the middle class a fair shot.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

ENERGY REGULATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, earlier this week I hosted a tele-townhall with people from across western Kentucky, from places such as Lyon County and Webster County. These constituents shared their thoughts on a range of issues, from ObamaCare to taxes, but one issue kept coming up over and over again. The Kentuckians I spoke with were truly worried about the Obama administration's war on coal jobs. They have seen the devastation in eastern Kentucky, and they know what the President's newest regulations will likely mean for middle-class families such as theirs: skyrocketing utility bills, higher prices, fewer jobs. They know the administration's war is an elitist crusade that threatens to shift good, well-paying jobs overseas, splinter our manufacturing base, and throw yet another load onto the backs of middle-class Kentuckians who have already struggled so much.

The hard-working people I represent are worried enough just about making their mortgage payments and paying for car repairs and coping with energy bills and summer vacations. These are the people whom President Obama and his Washington Democratic allies should be listening to—not to liberal elites who have been begging the President to go after the coal industry and the people whose livelihoods depend on it. But President Obama does not seem terribly interested in those folks or their problems. Once again he will be off campaigning this week. He will huddle with more leftwing ideologues—the folks who love to make a buck off of coal and then attack coal families with ego-driven political crusades, such as the ideology the President rolled out the red carpet for just a few weeks ago down at the White House.

Meanwhile, here in the Senate the Democratic majority will continue to block and tackle for the President and his anticoal offensive. Senate Democrats block basically every attempt—every attempt, however small—to inject congressional oversight into the administration's energy regulations. They shut down votes. They obstruct the committee process that should be at the heart of our work. They even gag their own Members.

They blocked commonsense legislation such as the Coal Country Protection Act. What that bill—my bill—would do is require the administration to certify that jobs will not be lost and utility rates will not go up as a result of the President's energy regulations. That is not too much to ask. But Washington Democrats are blocking my bill because they know the President's reg-

ulations will cost jobs and will raise utility rates, and they are more interested in protecting the President's ideological agenda than jobs.

In other words, Senate Democrats block and tackle and obstruct—all to defend the President's war on coal jobs. It is a clear case of extreme devotion, and it makes sense because the Democratic majority really only has one mission these days: Protect the President and the left at all costs. That is why the average Democratic Senator has almost no power anymore. Our friends on the other side of the aisle do not ever get to do anything. They are just another backbencher fortifying President Obama's Senate moat—the place where good ideas go to die. It is a shame.

The Senate used to be a place where big ideas were debated and serious solutions were explored. Committees operated and amendments were offered. I remember a time not too long ago when there was even such a thing as an independent-minded Senate Democrat. But today's Democratic leadership has put an end to all of that.

It is about time our Washington Democratic friends open their eyes to the true cost of the President's policies, both in my State and in theirs.

It is time for these Washington Democrats to stop pretending they are not complicit in the administration's war on coal jobs or in the harm it is causing to our constituents because there is real pain out there. Beyond the Democratic echo chamber, there is real pain out there, out in the real world, in places such as Pike County.

Washington Democrats need to understand that Kentuckians are more than just some statistic on the bureaucratic balance sheet. These are real Americans who are hurting, and they deserve to have their voices heard. One way to do that, as I have suggested, is for the administration to hold some listening sessions on its new energy regulations in the areas that stand to suffer the most from them, in places such as eastern and western Kentucky. I have already issued multiple invitations for the President's people to visit places in my home State. I am issuing one again today.

The sad truth is that officials in Washington do not want to come anywhere near coal country. They just want to impose their regulations, hear some "feedback" from the echo chamber in order to check a box, and then move right along to the next front in their war on coal. They do not even want to talk to the very people they intend to put out of work. Well, several tele-townhall participants want to know why the President will not come down to see the mines and the coal families themselves. I am wondering too.

Mr. President, the campaign trips can wait. You recently expressed an interest in hanging around middle-class Americans for a change. What I am saying is, here is a perfect chance.

Come on down to Kentucky and talk to some coal miners.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

SPECIALIST KEVIN J. GRAHAM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, today I wish to honor the life of one soldier from Kentucky who gave his life in service to our country. SPC Kevin J. Graham of Benton, KY, was killed in Kandahar, Afghanistan, on September 26, 2009, when the enemy attacked his vehicle with an IED. He was 27 years old.

For his service in uniform, Specialist Graham received many medals, awards, and decorations, including the Bronze Star Medal, the Purple Heart, the Army Good Conduct Medal, the Combat Infantryman Badge, the National Defense Service Medal, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal with Bronze Service Star, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, the Army Service Ribbon, the Overseas Service Ribbon, the NATO Medal, the Expert Marksmanship Badge, the National Defense Service Medal, and the Army Service Ribbon.

Soldiering was not simply a vocation to Specialist Graham; it was a way of life and it was a calling. From a young age, friends and family recall his strong desire to become a soldier.

"Before he went into the Army, he would see guys in uniform and say he needed to be doing something like that," says the Reverend Jonathan Goodman, Kevin's pastor from Benton's Calvary Baptist Church. "He felt like it was his life's work, and he was honored to serve his country."

Kevin was born in 1982 in Illinois and raised in Wisconsin. He moved with his parents to Marshall County, KY, about 5 years before his death. As a child Kevin received his education through Christian Liberty Academy as a homeschooler. He was a member of Paddock Lake Baptist Church in Wisconsin, where he was involved with the youth group and assisted the youth pastor.

As a young boy Kevin and his best friend used to dress up in Army fatigues and patrol the neighborhood. Neighbors would say they felt safe because they knew someone was watching out for them. Kevin's interest in the military also included a love of military history. He would read endlessly about the Civil War and World War II and talk often with his father, grandfather, and others who had served about their experiences. Kevin collected memorabilia from different conflicts, including some given to him by veterans. His interest in military aviation led him to spend his summers at an airfield in Kenosha, WI, to see hundreds of World War II planes gather in formation.

Kevin also learned to shoot at an early age. By the time he was 16, he had earned a job overseeing the skeet range at the local shooting facility. He