

Republican Party in the State, and his vision continues to be realized as the party continues its growth in the State.

“John Paul” is a name that is just as familiar in Arkansas as it is to my colleagues in the Senate who served with him before serving in this Chamber as well as the many Members in the House who worked alongside him during his years of elected service and through decades more of providing assistance to his beloved Arkansas.

You would have been hard-pressed to find a kinder, gentler man than John Paul Hammerschmidt. As a mentor and friend, John Paul’s wisdom and counsel have shaped my Washington experience more than anyone else. When I ran for Congress in 2001, I sought John Paul out for advice. I quickly learned, as a newly elected Member of Congress for the Third District of Arkansas, how fond his former colleagues were of him. Senior Members of the House of Representatives had so much respect for him that they welcomed me into their inner circle because he had given his approval.

It was John Paul who taught me that after the election is over, there are no more Republicans, no more Democrats, there are only the people of Arkansas. His dedication to his constituents during his career of public service was unmatched and is a marker we should all strive to meet. During his time in Congress, he served in the minority, but he would disagree without being disagreeable.

I always valued John Paul’s friendship and his continued advice.

John Paul set the standard for helping Arkansans. That bar is something members of the Arkansas congressional delegation continue to strive toward today.

His vision to improve life for Arkansans led him to serve on the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee as well as the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. By the time he retired, he served as the latter’s ranking member.

Using his position on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, he helped secure funds for roads and infrastructure projects, including Interstate 540, which now bears his name, the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport, as well as protecting the Buffalo River and getting a designation as the first national river.

John Paul left big shoes to fill. He believed he could make a difference in the lives of Arkansans because he believed in loving his fellow man. We are capitalizing on the benefits he helped provide—a testament to his time in Washington.

From all Arkansans, I thank John Paul for his devotion to public service, his leadership, and his dedication to Arkansas. His example is something we should continue to strive for in Washington.

REMEMBERING SERGEANT EDWARD GOBEL

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the life of SGT Edward Gobel, a long-time resident of Las Vegas, NV, who passed away on April 1, 2015. Ed Gobel was a man whose strong sense of duty to his Nation drove him to continuously seek new ways to help others and improve his community, and I am grateful for his years of service. He will truly be missed.

Sergeant Gobel proudly served in the 101st Airborne Division during the Vietnam war. After his military service left him confined to a wheelchair, he drew from his personal experiences to help enact positive change in Las Vegas. He became a leading advocate for military veterans and the disabled in Nevada. Recognizing the importance of being involved in his community, Sergeant Gobel took on numerous roles, from director of the Council of Nevada Veterans Organizations to State commander of the Veterans of the Vietnam War. His tireless efforts to push key bills through the Nevada Legislature, such as a bill to create Nevada’s first veterans home, earned him the Jefferson Award for Public Service in 2003. And in 2014, he was honored with the Chapel of Four Chaplains Legion of Honor Gold Medallion for his giving nature and commitment to service. I am impressed by Sergeant Gobel’s investment in the people and issues that mattered most to him and by his continuous belief that change was possible.

Sergeant Gobel is survived by his wife of nearly 40 years, Caryl Gobel, along with his sister, children, and grandchildren. My thoughts are with his family as they celebrate him and a life well lived.

MARRIAGE EQUALITY CASES BEFORE THE SUPREME COURT

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, this morning, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments on the marriage equality cases. The legal principle at stake is whether the 14th Amendment to the Constitution protects marriages between individuals of the same sex. But at the heart, these cases represent something more fundamental. They are about the right of every American to marry the person they love and to have their relationships treated with the respect and dignity to which every American is entitled.

I am proud that my home State of Vermont has embraced love, equality, and freedom in its active and leading role on marriage equality. In 2000, Vermont was the first in the Nation to provide for civil unions. As the years went by, Vermont came to see that civil unions were insufficient to provide the protections all American couples are entitled to, and in 2009, the Vermont Legislature on a bipartisan vote was the first State legislature to enact marriage equality into law.

Vermont, which has led by example, is now one of 37 States and the District of Columbia that recognizes marriage equality.

While the arguments in the cases today analyzed legal principles and precedent, we should remember that they are ultimately about love and recognizing the extraordinary commitment between two people. Jim Obergefell had been with his partner, John Arthur, for over 20 years. They wanted to marry, but the marriage laws in their home State of Ohio would not allow it. Bedridden and incapacitated with ALS, John could neither drive nor fly commercially to get married in another State. It took the generosity of friends and family, along with the kindness of coworkers and others, to cover the cost of a \$12,700 chartered, medically equipped private plane.

After more than 20 years together, Jim and John finally married during a seven and one-half minute ceremony in an airplane at a Baltimore airport. Upon their return to Ohio, the State refused to recognize their marriage. And John passed away just a few months later. Jim, now a widower, should not have to live in a State like Vermont to be able to have his 20-year relationship validated and recognized by the State. He should not have had to fly to another State to say his vows and pledge his commitment to his partner. Jim’s current fight—and our current fight—is to show that relationships like his should be treated with the same respect and dignity that has been accorded to all other Americans. It is to persuade the Supreme Court to live up to the motto engraved in Vermont marble above its own building, which declares “Equal Justice Under Law.”

Nearly five decades ago when the Supreme Court decided *Loving v. Virginia*, the Court recognized that:

Marriage is one of the ‘basic civil rights of man,’ fundamental to our very existence and survival. To deny this fundamental freedom on so unsupportable a basis as [] racial classifications . . . is surely to deprive all the State’s citizens of liberty without due process of law. The Fourteenth Amendment requires that the freedom of choice to marry not be restricted by invidious racial discriminations. Under our Constitution, the freedom to marry, or not marry, a person of another race resides with the individual, and cannot be infringed by the State.

In the marriage equality cases heard today, the Court has a simple job to do. It need only apply these same constitutional principles to hold that the same principle applies equally regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

When the Supreme Court issues its decision this summer, I am hopeful that it will be another landmark moment demonstrating that ours is a more perfect union when it is a more inclusive union. And that the name Obergefell will come to signify love, equality, and freedom the same way it does when *Loving* and *Windsor* are invoked.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR OBJECTION

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I am objecting to consideration of the nomination of Brodi Fontenot to be Chief Financial Officer of the Treasury Department.

In May 2014, I found out about questionable hiring practices at the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, known as FinCEN. The problem occurred after the agency posted job requirements for openings in the enforcement division. Eligible candidates were disqualified for a criterion that was never in the original job posting: a law degree. This is illegal under Federal hiring guidelines.

In the process, FinCEN rejected qualified veterans who applied for the positions. Instead, FinCEN hired three former Federal prosecutors for the positions. Veterans preference doesn't guarantee veterans a job, but it does give them extra consideration for jobs for which they are qualified. The unemployment rate for post-9/11 veterans is significantly higher than the rate for the general population. These men and women are extremely capable. They have an array of job skills to offer in the workplace. It is inexcusable for FinCEN or any other Federal agency to reject qualified veterans who faithfully served our country. Our veterans deserve better from the Obama administration.

As part of my investigation, I requested all emails sent between the Treasury Department and FinCEN pertaining to this issue. To date, I have received a total of four emails. The Treasury Department has tried to convince me that no other relevant emails exist, but I am still not convinced. Their search was limited to only the 8 months when the vacancy announcements were open. This excluded any email communications that took place in preparation for posting the announcements or during 2014 when problems with the announcements were found.

As a result, I placed a hold on the former Assistant Secretary for Management at the Treasury Department who was nominated to be Deputy Secretary at HUD. Instead of simply providing the requested documents so that I could release the hold, former Majority Leader REID ignored what was done to veterans and pushed through the nomination over my objections.

In January 2015, I requested any emails sent between FinCEN and main Treasury using alternate email and handheld devices, as well as any email messages that were printed and saved by FinCEN but no longer retained in the electronic email system. The response from the Treasury Department outlined the Federal Government's records retention regulations but did not include any of the requested documents.

This is unacceptable. Therefore, I am objecting to consideration of Mr. Fontenot's nomination.

VOTE EXPLANATION

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I was unable to cast a vote on the nomination of Dr. Dava Newman to be the Deputy Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. I missed the vote yesterday because I was meeting with turkey growers in Minnesota who are struggling with the avian influenza outbreak, and I attended the funeral services for my long-time friend, colleague and mentor, John Mooty. My vote would not have changed the outcome and had I been present I would have voted in support of Dr. Newman's nomination.

The work being done at NASA pushes the boundaries of innovation, science, and exploration, and it is critical we have strong leaders like Dr. Newman in place to lead those initiatives. Dr. Newman is well known for her cutting-edge work in developing the next generation of space suits. As a professor of aeronautics and astronautics and engineering systems at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dr. Newman will bring a strong academic, research, and technical background to this position. As a member of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, I supported Dr. Newman's nomination when it was considered by the committee earlier this year. I am pleased that Dr. Newman was confirmed by the Senate to be the Deputy Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

STEVE GLEASON ACT

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I support the Steve Gleason Act, which passed the Senate last week. I would especially like to thank Senator VITTER for championing this important legislation that will ensure patients on Medicare have access to critical speech-generating devices.

I am so glad that we were able to come together to pass this bipartisan bill and take an important step toward giving patients their voices back.

For Americans affected by debilitating diseases, speech-generating devices aren't a luxury—they are a lifeline. Without these devices, many people who are suffering from diseases like ALS and Parkinson's can't communicate with their family members, caregivers and friends. Many patients use their devices in conjunction with eye gaze technology because they no longer have use of their hands, arms, and other parts of their body. And these new technologies allow patients to use the Internet and email—technologies most of us take for granted but are crucial to help keep patients connected with their communities.

Unfortunately, recent policy changes have threatened patients' access to these important devices and associated technologies.

Under the new policy, Medicare will stop paying for speech-generating devices if a patient is admitted to a hos-

pital, nursing facility, or hospice. It is at this time that patients are most vulnerable and most in need of being able to communicate with their doctors, caregivers, and loved ones.

I have heard heartbreaking stories of patients who have lost their ability to communicate when they enter a care facility. One person told of having to put her mother in hospice care. When her mother entered hospice, Medicare would no longer cover her mother's device. The daughter was devastated that she could no longer understand what her mother was saying. She could tell how frustrated her mother was by this new isolation, but she was helpless to do anything about it.

I have also heard from people who have decided to forego treatment in hospice or a nursing home because they would rather suffer at home than lose their voice. This is simply unacceptable.

That is why I have worked with Senator VITTER to restore full access to speech-generating devices for those who need them.

The Steve Gleason Act will ensure that patients have continuous access to their speech-generating devices, no matter where they are receiving treatment. And the bill will allow patients to use eye-tracking technology with their devices—technology that is vital for patients who can no longer use their arms or hands.

Ultimately, these changes will ensure that Americans who have been robbed of their ability to speak by diseases like ALS aren't also robbed of relationships with their caregivers and loved ones.

Again, I thank my colleagues in the Senate for passing this important bill and I urge the House to pass this legislation and give patients their voices back.

REMEMBERING SHAWN PHILLIP SOMITS

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, today I honor the life and service of Shawn Phillip Somits of Muncy, PA, a Federal corrections officer at USP Allenwood and a U.S. Army veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, whose life tragically ended on April 2, 2015.

Shawn Somits was born on July 1, 1975, in Williamsport, PA, the son of John and Charlotte Somits, of Muncy. Shawn was a 1994 graduate of Muncy High School and attended both Penn College and Bucknell University. In 2003, Shawn married his wife, Daisy, and welcomed the birth of his first child, Faith. At this time, Shawn was dutifully serving his country in OIF/OEF in the U.S. Army, where he was deployed to both Iraq and Kuwait from February 2003 until April of 2004. Upon his return from deployment in 2004, Shawn entered into Federal service with the U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Prisons as a corrections officer at USP Allenwood,