

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

TRIBUTE TO TODD WEBSTER

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I rise today to express my thanks to my chief of staff of the last 5 years, Todd Webster. It is a bittersweet day for me because my office says farewell to someone who has been a trusted, loyal, reliable, energetic, patient, faithful leader of the Coons team for my first 5 years here in Washington. He is someone who has been warm and humorous, caring, and always ready with a funny story to tell. He is down to earth, someone who takes interest in whomever he is speaking to; who seems to know everyone here, and who is well liked and well respected. He is a true family man who helped plan a surprise birthday party for his father Peter who recently turned 75; whose delightful and beautiful wife Lisa last fall was named president and CEO of Physicians for Peace and who joins him in their commitment to public service; and whose wonderful children, his daughter Sydney, son Peter, and daughter Catherine have sustained and supported him in his service—his 5 years with me in the Senate and his years before that with other Senators. Even their dog Kili, an Irish doodle, has been a part of the extended Webster family that has helped engage and entertain and support my office these last 5 years.

When I first came to Washington, under the most unlikely circumstances in 2010, I was looking for someone who could help me navigate the culture and folkways of this building, and there was no one better suited for that than Todd Webster. He worked on the campaigns of Senators Harkin and Byrd, as the deputy communications director for the Gore-Lieberman campaign, and as the communications director for Senator PATTY MURRAY. After that he was the communications director for Senator Tom Daschle.

After those years of service in the Senate, he had gone off on his own to form the WebStrong Group, and he was the owner of Webster Strategies and a regular commentator on MSNBC.

So when I had the chance to first meet him in 2010, I was encouraged that he was willing to offer his significant skills and talent to the challenge of helping me shape my team and decide on my trajectory here in the Senate. So this 9-year Senate veteran, this graduate of Bowdoin College and possessor of a master's degree from the GW Graduate School of Political Management set off with me on a fascinating and at times challenging trip.

Todd is a great athlete. He is someone who is a dedicated golfer, "an honorable player," as was commented by JJ Singh, one of our great team mem-

bers in the office. You can tell a lot about a person by how they behave on the golf course, and Todd is a gentleman. He plays fast so as not to hold up others, but will go out of his way to look for your lost ball in the woods.

If Todd left the office a few minutes early on Fridays, he would announce that he was "going to investigate some greenspace." Although rare, his outings on golf courses, I know, were a source of encouragement and relief.

On the softball field he was also a great contributor. A member of my team commented that "he was a valuable member" of our team, known as the Small Wonders, after Delaware's nickname, "and was known for his ability to turn triples into doubles and sacrificing his body at first base to get much-needed outs."

"He was also instrumental," JJ wrote, "to the team's magical 2014 turnaround season and Cinderella run to the playoffs."

On the management side, Todd would constantly walk around the office unannounced, just to check in and see how folks were doing. Rather than making staff find him, he would proactively seek out staff. His door was always open, whether to chat about something work-related or to vent or to listen about something personal. He always had a funny story to tell and was willing to listen and offer meaningful advice.

When Tom sensed that the afternoon was dragging on and our subterranean executive suite was in need of a pick-me-up, he would go on what we call in Delaware a "WaWa run," picking up snacks and caffeinated beverages to keep everybody focused until the end of what are sometimes very long days.

I got one interesting comment from a constituent staffer who has worked for me and for several other Senators in her many long years at the Senate. She commented that on one visit to DC, Todd cared enough to make sure our whole constituent relations team had lunch in the Senate dining room. She was astonished that he took time out of his busy day to have lunch and get to know them and get to know what they do on behalf of the people of Delaware every day.

Todd also understood and connected with my commitment to my home State and enthusiastically made an annual trek to the Delaware State Fair and devoted himself to learning more about Delaware's all-important poultry business. I will say that in equal part I did my best to learn more about sports, going to Caps events, Wizards events, and on golf outings with Todd. He joined me in going to memorable visits of processing plants where thousands of chickens made the eye-opening transition from being broilers to being dinner. In addition, I want to thank him for his strong constitution and his dedication for advancing the agricultural interests of my home State, which even included trying scrapple on one occasion.

At a time when congressional budgets have constantly been under pressure and many in America believe our political system is dysfunctional, Capitol Hill depends on dedicated, loyal, optimistic, and positive public servants like Todd—not only for the kind of policy and political accomplishments that ultimately show up on a resume or a job description but even more for the qualities and characteristics that make this place function—an unquestioningly positive attitude, a management style that makes everyone from interns to seasoned professionals feel welcome and valued, a willingness to speak candidly about himself and the office, about our challenges and prospects, a keen perspective on the absurdity of the many aspects of the modern political process, and the relentless idealism that inspires those around him to keep believing and working hard. These are the hallmarks of Todd's time over the past 5 years.

In the 5 years I have had the joy of working with him. He has always been at my side, helping my office get up and running and teaching me the ways of this town and this institution. Walking around Capitol Hill with him was often like walking beside the "mayor of the Senate." Every few steps, every few minutes, someone would stop to say hello, to catch up, to reconnect or talk about what is next. Far too often, people leave the Hill, having forgotten long ago why they ever got into public service in the first place. Todd never has. Throughout his 9 years serving three different Senators, he has remained cheerful, optimistic, tireless, and committed.

His car is often the very first one in the Russell garage in the morning, and he often has been the last staffer to leave and go home at the end of a long workday. Whether it is his willingness to call a staff member after the passing of a family member or bounding into the office every morning with a smile, saying, "top of the morning to you, hello friends, hello Meg, hello T, hello Chels," my office will simply not be the same without him—without his cheer, without his loyalty, without his hard work, without his energy, and without his optimism about what we can still do together here in this greatest institution in the American constitutional order.

So with that, I would like to offer my thanks and best wishes to my departing chief of Staff, Todd Webster.

Thank you.

REMEMBERING U.S. CAPITOL POLICE OFFICER VERNON ALSTON, JR.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I rise today to honor a fellow Delawarean, U.S. Capitol Police Officer Vernon Alston, who passed away unexpectedly last month at the much too young age of 44.

Officer Alston was a fixture in the House of Representatives, spending

nearly 20 years on the Hill with the Capitol Police. As one of his colleagues, Officer Scott McBane, noted, Vernon was a “gentle giant.” His wife Nicole describes him as “a very genuine man” who had a deep and genuine love for people.

While I didn’t have the privilege of knowing Officer Alston personally, we shared at least two commitments: to be in Washington each morning to go to work and to be back home in Delaware to see our kids each night.

For years, Vernon’s shift started at 5 a.m., meaning he would be beginning his 90-minute commute from Magnolia, DE, at a time when few, if any, of the people he would soon be protecting would even be awake. For those who knew him, Vernon’s willingness to drive 3 hours a day just to be home with his family every night wasn’t the only reflection of his commitment to service and his family.

In fact, Vernon’s entire career is a testament to his passion for helping others. While still a student at Howard University, he joined the U.S. Army Reserve and served as an Army reservist until 1994. After graduating from college in 1995, Vernon joined the DC Army National Guard and served as a member of the Guard for another decade.

In 1996, Vernon joined the U.S. Capitol Police and spent the next two decades dedicated not just to keeping lawmakers and their families and our offices’ visitors safe but doing so with humility, a smile, and with a relentlessly positive attitude.

It is not just the job Vernon chose to dedicate his life to that says so much about his character but how he did it. Those who served with him will tell you how he always wore a smile on his face and never had a harsh word to say.

Two weeks ago Vernon died as he lived both his professional and personal life—helping people around him. In this case, he was shoveling snow for his next door neighbor in the aftermath of one of the biggest storms to hit our beloved home State of Delaware in years.

From the employees of the House and Senate who work around-the-clock to keep the lights on to the Members of Congress ourselves, everyone plays their part in keeping this institution working and in making our country’s legislative process functional and accessible. That accessibility, that openness, is a guiding light to which nations around the world aspire, and that is in many ways a direct reflection of the efforts of Officer Alston and fellow Capitol Police officers who serve with bravery and tirelessness, day in and day out.

When we talk about public service on this floor, we are often referring to our country or our constituents, but just as important is service to our colleagues, family, and friends.

Vernon first met his wife Nicole when they were both students at Howard in 1992, but they didn’t truly connect until running into each other near

this Capitol 15 years ago. It was just 6 months after that, Nicole remembers, that she married the man of her dreams.

Let me leave with you a passage from the Scriptures, Galatians 6:9–10, which teaches us:

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people.

Whether in the Army Reserve, at his post outside the Cannon House Office Building or at his home in Delaware, Vernon sought the opportunity to do good to all people, and in doing so he made a real difference in the lives of those he knew and those he served.

While the words and tributes to Officer Alston that have poured forth from his colleagues and his friends may provide little comfort today to his friends and family, it is my hope and prayer that Nicole, Brittany, Yasmeen, Brandon, Israel, and Breyden can take solace in knowing in the years to come that the man they so loved was beloved by so many people.

Thank you.

With that, I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, the Senator, my colleague from Delaware, and I are close friends and we ride the same train together a lot of days, coming and going to Delaware. I would like to think that we think alike and share a lot of the same values. It was interesting to listen to his remarks about Vernon Alston, which actually reflect and track very closely with what I am prepared to say. But there are some differences. I am happy to be here with him, and I think it is great that we are here. I think we are also speaking for JOHN CARNEY, who is our Congressman, and who would, if he could speak on this floor, join us today as well.

Mr. President, I also want to join Senator COONS and the Presiding Officer, who presides in the chair almost every time I speak on this floor. I don’t know how this works out, but it is good to see the Presiding Officer and this new group of pages who have joined us this week to tell you about a man you never had a chance to meet who was a Capitol policeman for almost 20 years.

Senator COONS talked about him. I am going to say a few words about him, and then we will probably head for the train and head home.

Let me just say a few things about Vernon J. Alston, Jr. His Dad is also Vernon J. Alston. As Senator COONS said, he passed away at the age of 44. We did have a big snowstorm. We had a lot of snow. We had a couple of feet here and almost that much in parts of Delaware.

When Vernon died, he had actually just finished helping a neighbor shovel out after the snowstorm, and that sort of epitomized his life. He was always helping other people, not asking for anything much in return but setting a good example to every one of us. But in

life and death, Vernon epitomized the best of our country—people who put their lives on the line to protect and serve in this Capitol Complex and those of us who live and work in this part of the Nation.

The U.S. Capitol Police are some of the finest men and women in uniform. I say this as a former naval flight officer and a retired Navy captain. We have wonderful men and women who serve us and all the folks who come from all over the world to visit this place throughout the year. But each day these officers perform perhaps the most important jobs here on the Hill—protecting those of us who are privileged to work here either as Members of the Senate and the House or staff and also the millions of visitors and folks who travel here from not just the 50 States but from a lot of places around the globe.

Whether these officers are patrolling the ground to prevent or detect mischief, investigating suspicious activity or responding to emergencies, their mission is the same. Their mission is to protect one of our country’s principal symbols of democracy—the United States Capitol. Their mission is not one that comes without sacrifice. Just 17 years ago, I remember this to the day, in 1998, two of our Capitol Police officers, not far from the sound of my voice, were gunned down in the line of duty when a gunman opened fire, trying to force his way into the Capitol.

Vernon, in his service with the U.S. Army Reserve, with the National Guard, and with the Capitol Police force, consistently exhibited unwavering courage, devotion to duty, and, above all, honor. In the way he lived his life and how we remember him, Vernon reminds each of us just how good we can be and ought to be.

Vernon Alston was born in 1971 to his mom Barbara Alston and Vernon Alston, Sr.—and not in this country. He was born in Vincenza, which is a town in Italy where his dad Vernon, Sr., was stationed in the U.S. Air Force. Vernon spent the first 10 years of his life in Italy before his father was transferred to Dover Air Force Base in Dover, DE. There Vernon attended grade school on the Air Force base and later graduated from Dover High School, a school that I have been privileged to visit many times. He went on to attend Howard University in Washington, DC, and graduated from there about 20 years ago in 1995.

Vernon was still a student at Howard University when he answered the call of duty, following the footsteps of his dad Vernon, Sr., and his grandfather David Alston, who was a U.S. Army World War II veteran. In 1991, Vernon—this is the son—joined the U.S. Army Reserve, and he served in the Army Reserve until 1994. After graduating from college in 1995, Vernon joined the District of Columbia Army National Guard and served as a member of the Army National Guard for another 10 years.

I am sure our Presiding Officer spends time with his Guard troops in his home State. We do, too. We have an Army Guard and an Air Guard in Delaware. We are very proud of the literally thousands of men and women who serve our country. I think 300 are in Afghanistan. We will welcome some folks home this weekend. We are welcoming some folks home this weekend.

But this is what Winston Churchill used to say about people who serve in the Guard or Reserve and have their own day jobs. Winston Churchill said they are twice the citizen. Think about that—twice the citizen.

I know a lot of people who are in the Army Guard who used to be in the Army, and a lot of folks in the Air Guard in Delaware who used to be in the Air Force. They have their day jobs, and they serve our State and our Nation through the Guard. They are two-times the citizen. So was Vernon.

He began his service with the Capitol Police Force 20 years ago, and for those 20 years he protected and served the Capitol Complex and its community, including folks such as us here: Senators, staff, our pages sitting here at the dais today, members of our families, staffs, members of their families, and millions of folks who visit our Capitol throughout each year. Vernon's positive energy, which Senator COONS has alluded to, and his attitude made a lasting impression with his Capitol Police colleagues.

In the latter part of his career, most recently Vernon was stationed at the Capitol powerplant, which provides steam and water that is used to heat and cool buildings across the Capitol Complex. At that plant, it was his responsibility to check visitors and staff at the door and work to keep that facility safe and secure every day, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, throughout the year.

According to his colleagues, he always found time to ask others: Well, how are you doing? And he possessed the all-too-rare quality of being a patient listener. My dad used to say to my sister and me that God gave us two ears, one mouth, and we should use them in that proportion—listen a lot more than we talk. I always admire good listeners, and Vernon was one of those.

One of his fellow officers described Vernon as a “beacon.” A beacon of what? Well, a “beacon of positivity,” a positive force. No matter the mission—an early morning for a Presidential inauguration or a late night for the State of the Union Address at the other end of the Capitol—Vernon always wore a smile on his face.

In 2008, while Vernon was on the job and patrolling the Capitol grounds, he ran into a woman whom he had actually run into before named Nicole Davis. Despite attending Howard University at the same time, Vernon and Nicole never really knew each other. But earlier this week, I talked to Nicole, who for years also made the com-

mute from Magnolia, DE—just south of Dover—to serve not in the Capitol Police but to serve our country in another capacity here in our Nation's Capital. She told me their love story or an abbreviated version of it. When they were at Howard University at roughly the same point in time, Vernon would see her from afar and would admire her. He never really summoned the courage—if you will, the temerity—to go up to her and say: Here is who I am; who are you? But he sort of admired her from afar and wished he could get to know her.

Many years later, while he was on patrol, I think at the corner of First and Independence, guess who comes walking along—that same woman whom he had admired from afar all those years ago. They struck up a conversation, hit it off, and went out on a date together. The rest is history. Six months later they were married. I know some people who married that quickly, and I am one of them. Vernon and Nicole knew what they were looking for. They were looking for each other, and they found each other. They have a wonderful family they have raised.

Later when they were onboard the *Spirit of Washington*, they became husband and wife. After they married, they moved, in this case to Delaware. As I said, people in Magnolia—their claim to fame is that Magnolia, DE, is a little town that is the center of the universe. There are probably other places where people think they are the center of the universe, but the Alston family lived in Magnolia, the center of the universe, for a number of years.

Nicole, as Senator COONS said—not only did Vernon get up and drive to work every day, so did Nicole. And they didn't carpool many days; they each drove separately. They both loved Delaware, but they wanted to work here and to serve our Nation in different roles. Nicole served and worked for a number of years at the Smithsonian's National Zoo, while Vernon was keeping things safe here in our Capitol. Together they have five children: Brittany, a sophomore at Delaware State University, the home of the Hornets in Dover; Yasmeen, a senior at Polytech High School in Delaware, the home of the Panthers, just south of Dover; Brandon, a sophomore at Paul Public Charter School in DC; and Israel and Breyden, who are both in preschool.

I am close to closing, but I want to share a story that we heard from Vernon's mom the other day. It deals with the time when he was in the fourth grade. Vernon's principal told Vernon's parents that he was a great example to his peers, to other students. The principal said he knew he would come to learn about Vernon's accomplishments and achievements in the newspapers years down the road.

Think of that. I don't know what my principals were thinking about me when I was in the fourth or fifth or sixth grade, but I don't think any of

them thought that I would end up in the Senate or that they would be reading about me in the newspaper or watching me on television. But when Vernon was not even 10 years old, his principal knew he was a guy who was on his way to being somebody his parents could be enormously proud of.

I think it is clear through the outpouring of love and accounts of so many others after Vernon's untimely passing that Vernon's principal was right. If he is out there listening somewhere and if his teachers are out there listening somewhere, I thank them for helping—along with Vernon's parents—raise a remarkable young man.

Today I rise to commemorate Vernon, to celebrate his life with Senator COONS by my side, and on behalf of Congressman JOHN CARNEY, our at-large Congressman from Delaware. We want to offer to Vernon's family—particularly to Nicole, their children, their friends, and family—our support and our deepest sympathy on their tragic loss and really the loss to all of us here. We consider Vernon and those with whom he served as part of our family.

I asked my staff to see if they could find a couple of people who serve in the Capitol Police who might have something to say about Vernon, and I want to quote them and maybe close my remarks with their words.

These are the words Officer Scott McBane said about Vernon Alston:

Vern Alston was an outstanding human being. To know Vern was to love him. I was privileged to work with Vern for three years at the Traffic One checkpoint of the House Division [on the House side]. He treated everyone he met with patience, good humor, and remarkable kindness. A great talker who told very funny stories, he also had that rare quality of being a sympathetic and a patient listener.

We heard that before, didn't we?

Continuing:

Smart, positive, and always supportive, people would stop by all day to see Vern and share their stories with him. A warm and sympathetic friend to so many, Vern will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Thank you, Scott McBane, an officer with the Capitol Police, for sharing those memories of Vern Alston.

I have one more from another Capitol Police officer who knew and worked with Vernon. This officer's name is Michael Woodward. Michael said these words about Vernon Alston:

Of all the people I have had the honor to work with Vernon Alston was by far the most positive, warm, friendly and outgoing person I have ever met.

Let me just stop there. How many people in the world do you suppose there are who would say those words about us? Whether we happen to be Senators, our staff, our families, those are wonderful words for someone to say about us, that we were the most “positive, warm,” or “friendly and outgoing person” that someone ever met. What a compliment.

He continues:

He was always one to greet you with a smile, and ask how you and your family were

doing. It doesn't matter what was going on—if we were coming in early for the Inauguration or staying late for the State of the Union—he always had a smile. I never heard him speak a negative word or raise his voice. He treated everyone as a close friend and was a beacon of positivity. His passing leaves a hole that cannot be filled.

Senator COONS closed with a little Scripture from the New Testament. I think it was Galatians, if I am not mistaken. I will try to paraphrase a little something maybe from Luke and from the Book of James: People may not believe what we say; they will believe what we do. We lead by our example. And in our lives, it cannot be do as I say, but really do as I do.

Throughout his life, Vernon was a great example, not just for the people with whom he worked on the police force here, not just for all of us who came into contact with him throughout the day or week, but for some of those millions of people whose only lasting impression of our country that they took home with them wherever they came from around the world was this wonderful Capitol Police officer who took the time to talk with them, to listen to them, to be patient, to be helpful, and to be friendly.

There is a great lesson for all of us in that—a great lesson for all of us. For that, Vernon, we thank you. God bless you.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

AGRICULTURAL EXPORT EXPANSION ACT

Ms. HEITKAMP. Mr. President, I rise to talk about a bill which I introduced that I would love to have the Presiding Officer's sponsorship, given how important the Port of Louisiana is to American agriculture and certainly commodities that we ship across the world. It is called the Agricultural Export Expansion Act that I introduced with Senator BOOZMAN as my cosponsor. We have a great bipartisan lineup of people who are interested in this.

So what does this bill do? I will say, very rarely does a day go by—whether I am in North Dakota or whether I am here in Washington, DC—that I don't speak with or hear from North Dakota farmers and ranchers. The agriculture economy is absolutely critical to North Dakota. Almost one-quarter of North Dakota workers are farmers and ranchers or they are employed in farm-related jobs. During every meeting, farmers and ranchers express the urgent need—the urgent need—to open trade with Cuba and to stop tying the hands of our producers.

Just on Tuesday our barley growers were in my office telling me about how

important the market in Cuba could be. Last week it was the Dry Bean Council telling me what I already know from my visit with Cuba: The products we grow in the United States—like North Dakota pinto beans or Arkansas rice—are compatible with the Cuban diet, and there is high demand for our high-quality products.

These aren't just crops that North Dakota grows. These are crops that North Dakota knows exceptionally well and that we excel in. My State is the No. 1 producer of barley, multiple varieties of beans, lentils, and certain types of wheat. Enabling agriculture exports to Cuba would be a huge boon for North Dakota farmers and ranchers, as well as those from many other States.

Unfortunately, because of trade barriers the United States puts on itself, the Cuban people aren't eating North Dakota beans, Kansas wheat or Arkansas rice. Instead, they are importing those products from countries much further away—like Brazil, Canada, Europe, and even Vietnam. I would say not only in terms of proximity of our product to the Cuban market—which is a huge freight advantage—we also have the highest quality of products. So we are forfeiting what in fact would be a natural market for us. Think about that. In this day, where trade is so important—where improving our balance of trade is so important—we will not be able to access the Cuban market.

Congress has eased some restrictions on exports to Cuba for agricultural products. They did that back in 2000 with the passage of the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act. That was a great first step. We did make some progress in increased sales to Cuba. Unfortunately, now that same law is holding us back.

The administration made important changes to U.S. policy and opened some travel and some trade to Cuba starting with their January 2015 changes. Most recently, including last month, the administration made more changes, including allowing for financing of authorized exports to Cuba. Unfortunately, those exports are other than agricultural exports. Because of our once forward-looking bill, agricultural exporters are prohibited now from offering financing that all other exporters can provide to Cuba. That needs changing.

In 2014 I visited Cuba. I met with Cuban agricultural trade officials to discuss bilateral economic benefits of expanding agricultural exports from North Dakota and the United States to Cuba. These are conversations we need to continue to have.

Last April I and Senator BOOZMAN introduced our bipartisan bill to level the playing field for our farmers and ranchers and make sure we can compete with the rest of the world in Cuba. What does that bill do and how does it improve our trade relationship with Cuba? One of the greatest barriers we have in getting our products to Cuba is

we can't finance it. Some might say: Well, we don't want to put government taxpayer dollars at risk. This bill does not put one taxpayer dollar at risk. We are talking about opening the market so we can access private financing for agricultural exports to Cuba. Let me repeat that. No taxpayer dollars are at risk. It is based entirely on individual risk assessment and decisions. Our bill is supported by the U.S. Agricultural Coalition for Cuba, a wide-ranging coalition including every grower group and industry association.

This week, the Cuban Government announced that El Nino is going to create an even greater loss of agricultural products in Cuba. This is going to create an even greater opportunity for our agricultural exports—a greater opportunity. Why—why—why would we let other countries keep eating our lunch and dominating this important market, especially given our proximity? It is time for Congress to get out of American agriculture's way and let private businesses make exporting and financing decisions.

I urge all of my colleagues to cosponsor and help pass our bill, S. 1049, the Agricultural Export Expansion Act.

Finally, I want to talk about the challenges that American agriculture has. Higher-dollar value has put tremendous stress on our products. We have seen corn prices drop, we have seen soybean prices drop, we have seen American agriculture challenged in ways we haven't seen for the last decade. How do we fix that problem? With another government program? Maybe we will have to help or expand the farm bill to deal with our food security issues created by low commodity prices. I will not take that off the table, but I will say the surest way that we can get out from underneath these challenges is export, is to provide for trade. It is one of the reasons I supported TPA. I believe it is great for American commodities to access additional markets and take down trade barriers to provide us with market, but why are we artificially standing in the way of private investment and private financing of American agricultural products? It is time that we do the right thing by American agriculture and open this market. We can take this incremental step without having this body agree to lifting any kind of embargo. We can take this incremental step without changing the prohibition we have on Federal-sponsored marketing programs. We can begin to access the Cuban market and introduce our high-quality beans, edible peas, and lentils. We can do that.

I will close with a story about my great friend MARIA CANTWELL from the State of Washington. Washington also grows what we call a lot of cross crops—although, I would argue that ours are probably even lot better than what is grown in the State of Washington.

MARIA CANTWELL went on a trade mission to try to sell Washington State