

huge tax cuts for the rich under the Wall Street Journal theory that it would trickle down and everybody would be better. There was literally no net private sector job increase during the Bush years. There were 22 million private sector jobs in the Clinton years and zero net growth in the Bush years. That is because, during the Bush years, they believed the economy was built from the top down. It is not large businesses that drive the economy—it is the workers. That is how you grow the economy—from the middle class out. If work is not valued, Americans cannot earn their way to better lives for their families no matter how hard they work.

That is what I think of when I hear Pope Francis talk about the social nature of our economy. Work has to support families and communities. Today businesses seem to be more focused on cutting costs than on investing in their workforces. Workers are often nothing more than a line item in a budget, a cost to be minimized. More businesses use temp workers, more businesses use contractors—look at the airlines—and more businesses use subcontractors. They pay a lower wage. They provide less job security. They roll back their retirement benefits. They undercut their health benefits, and they take away legal protections. We have to change this.

This spring, I laid out a plan to make work pay off by raising wages and benefits, including retirement, giving workers more say and more power in the workplace, encouraging companies to invest in their greatest asset—the American worker. My plan to restore the value of work has to include the labor movement. Modernizing labor law means recognizing the right of all workers, even those in alternative work arrangements, to collectively bargain for higher pay and better wages.

Pope Francis concluded:

There is no good society without a good union, and there is no good union that is not reborn every day in the peripheries that does not transform the discarded stones of the economy into its cornerstones.

We are a country of discarded stones—of people who rose from humble beginnings and joined together to build institutions that were greater than any one of us. We need laws that reflect that—that reflect the dignity of work and that reflect, as in the Pope's words, the dignity of every discarded stone, of each and every American who works too many hours for too little pay.

The last thing we need for the National Labor Relations Board is another nominee who does not value work, who demeans work, and who demeans the workers and the unions who do it. Everyone in this town ought to listen a little more to Pope Francis and a little less to corporate lobbyists, a little less to big banks, and a little less to Wall Street. Maybe, then, we will start to make hard work pay off again

for American workers. We can start today by rejecting this anti-worker nominee.

I yield the floor.

(Disturbance in the Visitors' Galleries.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Expression of approval or disapproval is not permitted in the Gallery.

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, 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.

Mrs. FISCHER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

HONORING NEBRASKA'S SOLDIERS WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN COMBAT

Mrs. FISCHER. Madam President, I rise to continue my tribute to Nebraska's heroes and the current generation of men and women who lost their lives defending our freedom in Iraq and Afghanistan. Each of these Nebraskans has a special story to tell.

CORPORAL MATTHEW ALEXANDER

Madam President, today, I recall the life and the service of Army CPL Matthew Alexander, a native of Gretna, NE.

Matthew was drawn to the military at a young age. His parents Mel and Monica and brother Marshall described him as always eager to be part of a team. He practiced martial arts, played the piano, and participated in band as a kid. As a member of the Gretna High School band, Matthew helped to organize the uniforms and shoes before concerts to ensure that all of the band members were ready to perform. He helped his band mates play at their best, and his caring and compassionate nature stood out among his classmates.

Matthew and his wife Kara had been friends since childhood. Kara described the teenage Matthew as somebody who could not sit still and who loved to learn. He took a keen interest in history and English classes in high school. He was also comfortable in talking with anyone and often referred to the mothers of his friends as "Mom." Kara recalled how Matthew always had a grin or a smile on his face. Matthew also loved his church youth group, and he embraced his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Matthew always wanted to be a soldier, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks further solidified his desire to defend his country. He enlisted in the Army shortly before graduating from Gretna High School in May of 2004, and he shipped off to basic training that summer.

After he finished training, Matthew attended the Advanced Individual Training to become an infantry soldier. This was the first step toward his dream of joining the Army Special Forces. He was assigned to the 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Division, 2nd Infantry Division,

and like both of his grandfathers, Corporal Alexander was stationed at Fort Lewis in Washington State.

When he first arrived, his unit had just returned to Fort Lewis from a deployment. Matthew had to wait until the next deployment cycle to go overseas. He did not like that delay. As a brave soldier, eager to defend his country, Matthew wanted to be in the fight. Several months later, Matthew's unit deployed to Mosul, Iraq. They assisted with the training of the Iraqi militia.

From the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Mosul has been the center of battle. The fighting escalated in 2006 during the Sunni awakening. During the training of Iraqi forces and while conducting combat patrols, troops in Mosul encountered enemy attacks on a daily basis.

Matthew returned home on leave in February of 2007, and he proposed to Kara. They were married 2 weeks later, on February 14, Valentine's Day. Regarding their very short engagement, Kara simply explained that Matthew felt strongly about being married before he returned to combat.

When Matthew returned to Iraq, he learned that his unit had moved to Baqubah. The Battle of Baqubah began in March. The enemy used hit-and-run tactics to harass Allied forces that were trying to control the city. During April and May, the fighting intensified, and casualties were high. Some likened the fierce fight to the close quarters of the combat of Vietnam.

It was in this heat of battle that CPL Alexander showed heroism and leadership when an IED hit a Bradley Fighting Vehicle on one of his missions. As Matthew's section rushed to the burning Bradley, the other vehicle commander told him to block off the southern approach and prevent the enemy from attacking up the road. While the Bradley continued to burn and take machine gun fire, Matthew acted without further instructions, and he saved lives. He set up his vehicle to prevent the attacking enemy forces from shooting accurate fire into those helping with that rescue operation. For his valor, Matthew received the Army Commendation Medal.

One of the members of Matthew's platoon, SSG Mark Grover, remembered Matthew feeling surprised to have been recommended for the honor. He said that he was just doing the right thing to protect his fellow soldiers.

Days before a mission on Sunday, May 6, Matthew called home to talk to his mother Monica and to Kara. Tragically, this was the last time he spoke to loved ones. While on the mission, an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle, killing him instantly.

Corporal Alexander was laid to rest on May 18, 2007, in a rural cemetery between Gretna and Elkhorn, NE. Hundreds of Patriot Guard riders led the funeral procession and over 1,500 people filled Gretna High School to say their final goodbyes. Staff Sergeant Grover traveled to Gretna to represent the

Third Platoon, nicknamed the “Glad-iators,” at the service. Grover was riding in the armored vehicle just in front of the one carrying Matthew at the time of the explosion. He said that the entire company loved Matthew and that he was one of the best soldiers in the platoon.

To honor Matthew’s life, his family established Matt’s Music Memorial. The charity helps children interested in music but who can’t afford an instrument, and they receive one from the local community. As Matthew’s father Mel put it, Matthew had two passions: music and the military. However, you didn’t need money to join the military.

CPL Matthew Alexander is truly a hero. He served with great compassion and respect.

I join Nebraskans and Americans across our country in saluting his willingness and his family’s sacrifice to keep us free, and I am honored to tell his story.

Thank you, Madam President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that all postclosure time on the Kaplan nomination expire at 5 p.m. today; that if the nomination is confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate’s action, and the Senate then resume legislative session and be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MCCONNELL. 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.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TILLIS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO FALLEN SOLDIERS’ MOTORCYCLE BRIGADE

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, a few moments ago, I had the opportunity to meet with a group called the Tribute to Fallen Soldiers. They have an annual cross-country motorcycle ride in honor of soldiers who died during combat. The motorcycle brigade escorts the Fallen Soldiers Memorial Flame from Eugene, OR, all the way to Arlington National Cemetery. Along the way, they visit Gold Star families—families who have a loved one who died on the battlefield in service to the United States of America.

One couple who came today was Terry Burgess and Elizabeth Burgess, whose son Bryan lost his life fighting

in Afghanistan, and they shared with me, in the military tradition, a medal.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to use a visual aid.

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

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, this medal has a picture of their son. It says: “In memory of SSG Bryan A. Burgess, who lived from April 23, 1981, through March 29, 2011.” On the back of it, it has a picture of a memorial that shows a pair of boots and a rifle and a hat and “never forget.”

The Tribute to Fallen Soldiers is about never forgetting our fallen soldiers. We put them into situations of enormous stress and challenge and danger, and they are there for all of us. In those particular situations, time and again, one of our soldiers loses their life. So may we never forget our soldiers who have died, our soldiers who have been wounded, and may we continue to reach out to Gold Star families to provide a community of support to them.

I completely respect and appreciate the Tribute to Fallen Soldiers’ motorcycle brigade that rides across the country visiting with Gold Star families, making sure they have that community of support and making sure they know that the sacrifices of their son or daughter are not forgotten.

TRANSGENDER MILITARY BAN

Mr. President, while focusing on the military, I want to shift to another aspect of military service, and I am going to start by thinking about the foundation of our country, our “we the people” Nation. “We the People” are the first three words of our Constitution, the mission statement of our Nation. We are not a nation that is founded of, by, and for the powerful, not a nation founded to govern of, by, and for the privileged, but for the people. It was a very deliberate strategy of our Founders not to repeat the type of structure in America that they saw in Europe, where government became beholden and in servitude to simply the powerful class.

Throughout our history, we have strived to live up to this vision of a nation where every individual has the opportunity to thrive. Time after time, we have broken down barriers, we have overcome discrimination, and we have thrown open the doors of opportunity for one group after another—for women, for Africa Americans, for indigenous peoples, for immigrants, for the disabled.

Freedom, said President Lyndon Baines Johnson, “is the right to be treated, in every part of our national life, as a person equal in dignity and promise to all others.” So we strive to reach that perspective, that point where our vision of the pursuit of happiness embraces freedom as Lyndon Baines Johnson described it—“the right to be treated, in every part of our national life, as a person equal in dignity and promise to all others.” It has not been easy.

It was Martin Luther King who saw how challenging it was to progress toward that vision, and he noted that “human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. . . . Every step towards the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.” And it is with that tireless exertion, that passionate concern, that dedication, that we have made progress time and time again.

But last week, we did not make progress. Last week, we fell back from this vision of opportunity, the freedom to engage in our national life with the respect and promise accorded to all others. This step back came in the form of an attack by President Trump and Attorney General Sessions on our LGBTQ Americans. President Trump announced a ban on transgender Americans serving in the military, and Attorney General Sessions filed an amicus brief in *Zarda v. Altitude Express* arguing that discrimination is completely legal under the law, including the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Well, let’s talk for a moment about our members of the military who have joined a Volunteer military, who have gone through significant training—and I am not just referring to boot camp but the ongoing training in specialty after specialty—so they can operate that radar effectively that provides warning to an entire ship, or that communication device to make sure that patrol is where it is supposed to be and able to follow instructions in the field, or any of the hundreds of specialties within the military that these individuals step forward and gain training on. Each one of them is significant to the overall success of the entire unit. Well, that is something President Trump didn’t understand last week when he attacked and said that he is going to throw our transgender individuals out of the military.

What is important isn’t whether you are gay or lesbian or transgender, it is whether you serve with your heart and soul and sinew the purpose of the security of the United States, and those individuals who do are respected within their units. They contribute to those units. The lives of each member depend on the success of the other team members. They are a team. And to reach in, in a cavalier fashion, as the President did, and say “I am going to rip thousands of these team members out of their units” is wrong in so many ways. It is disrespectful, of course, of those individuals and their dedicated service to our Nation. It is disrespectful and damaging to the units in which they serve and provide those various skills which they have worked so hard to acquire and which we have worked so hard to make sure they have the chance to acquire. And it certainly damages the security of the United States of America to eject individuals with those talents and that training from our military. Therefore, that should be reversed.