

Third Platoon, nicknamed the “Gladiators,” 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 postcloture 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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.

By the way, it was done without consultation with our military leaders. A Commander in Chief proposing a policy through a tweet without consulting with the experts who have dedicated their lives to the national security of our Nation—that in and of itself is a real betrayal of responsibility.

Attorney General Sessions filed an amicus brief in *Zarda v. Altitude Express*, and this brief says that title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which provides protection against discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, and sex, does not provide protection against discrimination in terms of one's LGBT status. By the way, that is the opposite of what court after court has ruled.

What happened, one might ask, to the President Trump who, as Candidate Trump, said: "Thank you to the LGBT community!" As a candidate, he said: "I will fight for you." What happened to the President who, after the attack on the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, said in a tweet: "Will fight for you." This last week, the President did not fight for you in that community; instead, he attacked that community, and he apparently approved of Attorney General Sessions attacking that community.

This is why we need the Equality Act. The Equality Act would clarify that when we say no discrimination on the basis of sex, that is broadly applying to one's status of who they are or whom they love.

If we go back to President Johnson's presentation of the issue in America, where he said every individual—the matter of freedom is that you have the opportunity to be treated as having the same promise and be treated with the same respect as everyone else, that it is all about being able to thrive in the United States, or to put it quite simply, not having a door slammed in your face when you go to rent an apartment, not having a door slammed in your face when you go to a restaurant or a movie theater, not having a door slammed in your face when you seek to be part of a jury. That is what freedom is in this country. That is the freedom that Attorney General Sessions and President Trump are seeking to rip away from a sizable share of Americans, and that is simply wrong. That is why we need the Equality Act—to make sure that this is remedied. That is why we need the courts to stand up against discrimination on the basis of who you are and whom you love.

It has been a week in which the President attacked and damaged our military and Attorney General Sessions attacked and betrayed and attempted to steal freedom from a vast swath of Americans. That is a very sad week on both counts, and we in this Chamber should stand up and say: That is not OK. We will fight for the security of the United States of America, and we will fight for opportunity for every single American.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). The Senator from Missouri.

RURAL BROADBAND

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, August is Rural Broadband Month at the Federal Communications Commission. The Commerce Committee just today put forward nominees for the Commission, and the Commission does matter. But I want to talk today specifically about highlighting the importance of broadband in rural America and rural Missouri.

In January of this year, I joined a number of my Senate colleagues on a bipartisan letter to President Trump regarding the importance of broadband and expanding its access to all of the country and, particularly, the parts of our country that are not currently served.

As part of any infrastructure legislation that the Congress is talking about, I think we and the administration need to consider policies that advance infrastructure not just solely in terms of roads, bridges, and ports, which are important, particularly where the Presiding Officer and I live, in Arkansas and Missouri. That transportation network means so much to us, but also important is how people are able to communicate and compete. High speed internet access cannot be overlooked as we consider what our infrastructure should look like going forward.

Broadband can be delivered by wireless or wireline technology. It can be brought to customers by traditional communications companies in rural areas. Often, now, rural electric co-ops show great interest and capacity to do this, as do others. Following the significant steps that Congress took to deregulate the market as part of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, the broadband industry has really responded. They invested a lot of money. In fact, they invested \$1.5 trillion of private money to deploy better and faster networks. If you have access to one of those networks, you know what a difference it makes.

In 2015 alone—that is the last number I have access to—the investment by traditional wireline companies, wireless companies, and cable providers was \$76 billion. All of that is really good, except that there is a real divide between the rural areas of my State and the rural areas of the country and the other more populated areas.

Some people say: Oh, that is just a myth; there is no digital divide. I would have them look at any number of articles. One article in the Wall Street Journal in June made the point that 39 percent of the United States' rural population lacks access to broadband. That sounds like a pretty big divide to me—that 39 percent of the entire rural population of the country doesn't have broadband, and 61 percent of rural Missourians lack access to broadband. These numbers are not acceptable.

Most private investment has been directed, as you would assume it would be, toward high populations, highly

populated and easily accessed areas, and future customers. This is like the same problem the country had 100 years ago transitioning to telephones. It was hard to get a telephone to a house that was 5 miles away from the nearest house, as opposed to a house that was in the same apartment building to the nearest apartment. It is a lot harder to do that. The government at that time said that there would be a universal service fee on phone bills, and then use that money to ensure that everybody would have equal access to what was obviously seen as a really important way to communicate. The concept of Universal Service was enshrined in the 1996 act. It said that rural households should have the same access to advanced telecommunications enjoyed by their urban counterparts. It is a good goal for a lot of reasons.

I saw some figures this week. When looking at the overdose deaths and the opioid problems in the country, they are much greater in rural counties than they are in urban centers. In our State, Kansas City, our biggest city by population and any of the five counties that touched it weren't anywhere close to the top list of other areas in our State that had this problem. It matters when you are not connected. It matters when opportunities that you otherwise would have simply aren't there because somehow a service that is essential to our society today isn't available to you in the same way it is available to others. I am not saying it should be free to some and cost other people something, but it should be available to you in the same way that it is available to others in our society, as the 1996 Telecommunications Act stated.

Broadband is necessary to attract and retain business for banks, factories, distribution centers, and small businesses. It is necessary to start and maintain a business, large or small. If business is going to compete outside the local marketplace, there has to be that connectivity. Frankly, in order to compete in the local marketplace and to have the ability to buy at the best price and to get the kind of products needed, the internet really matters.

Broadband is always there. We have to have it if we are going to compete in the world economy. Many people in rural America are able to do that in ways that nobody would have dreamed about 10 years ago, but not everybody has that same access.

Certainly, it is critical for schools and libraries. Just today, a parent was telling me that students can't do their homework anymore unless they can get internet access somewhere close to where they live. Students depend on the internet for education and opportunity where we live today.

A revolution has taken place in agriculture. The great food-producing economy that we have produces more food all the time. It actually produces more food with fewer people. So that creates some displaced people who otherwise would have had those jobs, but