

serve with you, and we look forward to working with you in the days and weeks and months ahead to serve the very people you talked about in your remarks.

NATIONAL MILITARY APPRECIATION MONTH

Mr. President, May is National Military Appreciation Month, a chance for us to honor the service of those who have kept our Nation free for 243 years.

For me, when I reflect on our military men and women, there are always two things in the forefront of my mind: my dad, Harold Thune, and the men and women of Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota and the South Dakota National Guard.

My father was a fighter pilot who flew Hellcats off the USS *Intrepid* in the Pacific theater during World War II. I came to know the “greatest generation” through my dad—their humility, their quiet service, their patriotism, and their deep dedication to the cause of freedom.

I have come to know the men and women of today’s military through Ellsworth and through South Dakota’s National Guard and the great work, the extraordinary work they do day in and day out, the professionalism, the skill, the talent, and the dedication they bring to the work of defending America and America’s freedoms.

Ellsworth has been on my mind in particular this week because right now the Air Force is conducting a large force exercise involving B-1 bombers, B-2s, B-52s, F-16s, C-17s, KC-135s, JSTARS and AWACS, and, for the first time, F-35s.

My acquaintance with Ellsworth began during my time as a Member of the House of Representatives, but I really got to know the base and what it meant to the Rapid City area shortly after I became a Senator.

Just a few months into my first term in the Senate, Ellsworth found itself targeted for closure by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission. That summer of 2005 was a long one as we mobilized to protect the base. I don’t think I missed a BRAC hearing in DC that summer. It didn’t matter whether Ellsworth was on the agenda; I wanted to be there in case the chance to advocate for Ellsworth arose.

Thanks to the efforts of a lot of dedicated people, we were victorious. We demonstrated to the Commission that Ellsworth was a vital national security asset and that moving the B-1 fleet from Ellsworth would actually cost money. We also made the case that the United States shouldn’t put all of its eggs in one basket, that it shouldn’t consolidate all of its assets in one location.

By August, we had succeeded in having Ellsworth removed from the closure list. Since then, the congressional delegation, Ellsworth, and community leaders have worked hard to build up the base so that we never again find ourselves in that same position. In 2007, we saw the Air Force Financial Services Center open at Ellsworth. In

2011, we saw the arrival of the 89th Attack Squadron and its command and control stations for MQ-9 Reapers. In 2015, a decade-long mission paid off with the expansion of the training airspace for the base. The Powder River Training Complex is now the largest training airspace in the continental United States. It is undoubtedly partly thanks to this airspace that Ellsworth was just chosen not only as the home for the B-21 training mission, the first bombers to the fleet, but operational squadrons as well.

Once on the chopping block, Ellsworth is going from strength to strength, and South Dakota is deeply proud to host this crucial base.

Ellsworth’s airmen have played an essential role in the armed conflicts of recent years. Ellsworth’s pilots have engaged targets in the Middle East using Predator and Reaper remotely piloted aircraft for vital reconnaissance, search and rescue, and strike missions.

The Thunderbirds of the 34th Bomb Squadron and the Tigers of the 37th Bomb Squadron have flown countless missions, conducting strikes, providing deterrence, and delivering critical close air support.

During Operation Odyssey Dawn, B-1s from Ellsworth launched from South Dakota, flew halfway around the world to Libya, dropped their bombs, and returned home—all in a single mission. This marked the first time in history that B-1s launched combat missions from the United States to strike targets overseas.

During my time advocating for Ellsworth, I have had the chance to learn a lot about aircraft and the incredible capabilities of the U.S. military, especially the capabilities of the U.S. Air Force. But the greatest part of representing Ellsworth has been the chance to meet with and get to know its airmen, from the wing commanders and other base leaders to the airmen who care for the planes.

Ultimately, no matter what technology we have, the strength of our fighting force comes down to our military men and women. It is because of the men and women we have that the United States has the strongest fighting force in the world.

Members of the military are a special breed. At an age when many are focused on graduation ceremonies or summer vacations, they take a different path—a path that challenges them mentally and physically, that pushes them to their limits and then asks them to go further, that asks them to forget their own needs and to focus only on what they can do for others, and that asks them to forgo comfort for sacrifice, up to and including the sacrifice of their lives. At 18, at 21, these warriors pledge to lay down their lives for the rest of us, and they make that pledge again every day of their service, every morning when they wake up and head to work, whether that is the repair base at Ellsworth or a battlefield half a world away.

I am profoundly grateful for the honor of representing some of the men and women of the U.S. military here in the Senate. We owe our soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and Coast Guard a debt we can never repay.

As Military Appreciation Month continues and Armed Forces Day approaches, we can take the time to remember—to remember that we go about our lives in peace and freedom every day because of members of the U.S. military who are standing watch for us. May God bless the members of the U.S. military, and may God continue to bless the United States of America.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

ABORTION

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I want to start today by saying I am really appalled by the extreme, cruel, shameful abortion ban that was passed yesterday in Alabama. That legislation is nothing short of an attack on women, and it is part of a larger effort we are seeing today around the country to take away the constitutional right of women to safe, legal abortion and allowing politicians to make decisions for women about their bodies, their health, and their lives instead of trusting doctors and women.

I want every woman reading the news this morning and wondering what this means for you, your family, and for your granddaughters to know I am with you, and I am going to keep fighting for you every step of the way.

NOMINATION OF WENDY VITTER

Mr. President, I want to turn to speak about my opposition to Wendy Vitter’s nomination, which is yet another step extreme politicians are taking to undermine women’s rights and access to healthcare.

I oppose Wendy Vitter’s nomination to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana.

President Trump and Vice President PENCE have made it clear that they want to pack the Judiciary with far-right judges who will turn back the clock on reproductive rights, and this nominee is no exception.

Time and again, Mrs. Vitter has advocated against women’s reproductive rights using inflammatory language and falsehoods. She has demonstrated a keen sense of partisanship and a poor sense of judgment, starting with her initial response to the Senate Judiciary Committee’s questionnaire.

Mrs. Vitter left out information about her past statements in her response to the committee—the kinds of serious submissions Republicans have objected to with other nominees. I am

not talking about a small memory lapse. I am talking about nearly 200 additional pages that had to be added to her response once they were brought to light. I am not talking about insignificant statements, things that are hard to find or easy to forget. I am talking about campaign ads, panel discussions, political rallies. I am not talking about innocent uncontroversial comments. I am talking about the fearmongering of an activist who is entirely unfit for the Federal bench.

Mrs. Vitter initially failed to disclose her remarks at a political rally opposing the construction of a Planned Parenthood clinic, remarks where she claimed Planned Parenthood—which, by the way, provides low-cost healthcare like cancer screenings and STI screenings and contraceptive care to millions of people. She claimed Planned Parenthood is responsible for killing 150,000 women a year. That is careless, it is reckless, and it is wrong. It is incredibly poor judgment for somebody who is being considered for a lifetime judicial appointment.

She also failed to disclose the time she moderated a deeply dishonest panel called “Abortion Hurts Women’s Health.” Mrs. Vitter prompted panelists to peddle misinformation about women’s health, encouraging a discussion that falsely suggested abortion is linked to cancer and infertility. One panel spoke at length about a deeply inaccurate brochure she had authored called “How the Pill Kills.” As you can tell from that title, the brochure was loaded with glaring falsehoods, like the false claim that birth control causes breast cancer or that women on birth control are more likely to die a violent death. In response to that speaker’s long string of very dangerous lies about women’s healthcare, Mrs. Vitter encouraged the attendees to download the brochure, bring it to their doctors, and ask them to put it in their waiting rooms.

It is incredibly alarming that a nominee for the Federal bench would be so willing to voice her support for such dangerous propaganda, especially when that same nominee is unwilling to voice her support for one of the landmark civil rights cases in our country’s history, *Brown v. Board of Education*.

During her confirmation hearing, Mrs. Vitter was asked whether *Brown v. Board* was decided correctly. It wasn’t a trick question. Many past judicial nominees, including Chief Justice Roberts, have been able to answer it. Mrs. Vitter refused.

This week, we are going to celebrate the 65th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board* decision. Do Republicans really want to mark this occasion by confirming a judge who has voiced more support for outright lies about women’s health than for the historic decision that struck down State-sponsored segregation? This should be simple. Someone whose statements and record fail to support the *Brown v. Board* decision cannot be trusted with the respon-

sibility of deciding the historic cases of tomorrow. Someone who has worked to spread misinformation about contraceptives and undermine the constitutional right to safe, legal abortion that is enshrined in *Roe v. Wade* cannot be trusted to fight for the truth or uphold women’s reproductive rights. In other words, someone like Wendy Vitter cannot be trusted with a lifetime seat on a Federal bench.

I urge my colleagues to join me in rejecting this nomination. While President Trump and Vice President PENCE may keep sending us these far-right nominees and Senate Republicans may keep jamming them through under the radar, Democrats are not going to stand by or stand down. They may try to push our courts to the right. We are going to keep pushing back. We are going to keep holding a spotlight on these nominees and making clear just how extreme they are, and we are going to keep fighting for women and men and families in this country.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MENTAL HEALTH

Ms. SMITH. Mr. President, when I first came to the Senate, I knew I wanted to make mental health one of my top priorities. As a Minnesotan, I am proud of the way our Senators have led the way on this important issue, from Paul Wellstone to Al Franken, to AMY KLOBUCHAR. I am honored to have the chance to further our proud legacy when it comes to improving our mental health system, but that is not the only reason I have chosen to make mental health a focus.

I am glad it has become a more prominent issue here in Washington, but I have noticed it usually comes to the forefront in the context of some unthinkable tragedy. When a high-profile celebrity takes his or her own life, we immediately want to reach out to other people who are suffering in silence. Of course, we do. That is not a bad thing.

We can’t repeat the number often enough. If you are having thoughts of suicide, please, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. Even if you aren’t suffering from acute mental illness, put that number in your cell phone so you can, someday, help someone who is.

On the other hand, when a profoundly disturbed person commits a horrible act of violence, we immediately want to intervene before the next time it happens. Of course, we do.

When we bring up the need to improve our mental health system as the answer to the epidemic of mass shoot-

ings in America, though, we are making two huge mistakes. First, we are ignoring our responsibility to address a much more direct cause of these tragedies—guns. Second, we are unfairly and falsely stigmatizing mental illness.

Here is another thing we can’t say often enough: It is exceedingly rare that one’s mental illness leads one to commit acts of violence. In fact, one is much more likely to be a victim of violence than to be a perpetrator, and we must not make it harder for people to seek help by falsely tagging them, as we do, as being potentially dangerous.

Yes, these tragedies are reminders that we need to spend more time talking about mental health, but let’s have the right conversation. For most people who struggle with mental illness in America, the struggle is not about life or death; it is about the quality of the lives we lead. Mental health is a continuum, and many of our fellow citizens fall somewhere along this continuum. These millions of Americans deserve our attention, and these millions of Americans deserve our help.

The other reason I want to focus on mental health care while I am here in the Senate is that I am one of them. When it started for me, I thought I was just having a bad day or, really, a series of bad days. While growing up, I had always been a pretty cheerful kid, but at some point during my second year of college, I had started to find it harder and harder to cope with the daily challenges of life. Actually, it had been my roommate who had noticed that I had not been myself and hadn’t been myself for a long time. She had suggested that I talk to someone over at the Student Health Services. It had been a completely foreign idea to me, and I had responded in the way a lot of people would have—“I have this.” Eventually, I had realized that maybe I had been wrong about that.

It was really hard to make that phone call, walk over to the counselor’s office, and sit in the waiting room. I didn’t know what to expect, and to be honest, I was embarrassed. The counselor’s name was Charlotte. She was nice, had common sense, and wasn’t patronizing or judgmental. She just asked me some simple questions about how I was feeling, and I remember what a relief it was just to talk about it. Over the course of a few months, Charlotte gave me some ideas about how to cope a little bit better with the challenges I was facing, and I would always walk out of her office feeling a little bit more courageous and a little bit more hopeful.

Did I live happily ever after? Well, not quite. That is not how mental illness works. There isn’t a box for when you are healthy and a box for when you are not. Like I said, it is a continuum, and you try to get a little closer to the healthy end every day.

At one point in my thirties, though, I found myself sliding back in the wrong direction. There was nothing unusually traumatic going on in my life.