

Lordstown—and “abandonment” is the right word. General Motors made the decision to shut down production, losing 4,500 jobs in Lordstown, OH. They moved some of their production to Mexico. They took part of their tax cuts and their profits and used that money to buy stock options for their top executives.

The Vindicator was reporting the story about GM’s abandonment of Lordstown before the national media came to town. When GM laid off one shift of workers back in late 2016, after the Presidential election, then a second shift several months later, the Vindicator was there covering what those job losses meant to this community. We know the end of the Vindicator’s coverage is another huge blow to Mahoning Valley.

Our hearts break for the dedicated journalists and support staff losing their jobs. This was a family-owned paper for 132 years.

This will not just be a loss for those who worked there. When local newspapers close, everyone suffers. Local reporters know their communities better than anyone. David Skolnick, Mark Sweetwood, and the entire Vindicator team have held local officials accountable. They told the stories of how national issues affect real Ohioans, how our trade policy hurts Ohio workers, and how the opioid crisis has devastated the valley. Craig Graziosi and many others have done vital work covering Lordstown. These journalists care about the cities and towns they serve. They hold those in power accountable, whether it is local government or city business leaders.

NPR reported on what happens when local papers shut down. First of all, investigative reporting suffers. Long investigations are expensive. Usually, when there are no local newspapers to do these stories, no one steps in to fill the void. The investigations don’t happen. Corruption increases, the city’s financial health suffers, and citizens get hurt.

Three researchers looked at local newspaper closures over a 19-year period. From 1996 to 2015, 300 papers across the country closed in that time. They found that where papers closed, city borrowing costs went up. Without local journalists, city watchdogs, the city’s finances took a hit. It became more costly for taxpayers to fund local schools and other projects. It is just more evidence that journalists are vital to our communities and are necessary for our democracy.

Too many people in this country already undermine the work that journalists do—or worse. We see reporters restricted, vilified, and even threatened—all for getting up every day and doing their jobs honorably.

On the anniversary of the shooting at the Capital Gazette in Annapolis, MD, where several reporters were murdered in cold blood, the President of the United States joked about getting rid of journalists. That is pretty sick. He

is the same President who says journalists are the enemy of the people.

Meanwhile, Wall Street hedge funds gobble up local papers around the country. Just this spring, the Cincinnati Enquirer and other papers around the country that are owned by Gannett fought off a hostile takeover by a New York hedge fund. These guys—and they are mostly guys in the hedge funds—buy up local newspapers and turn around and dismantle them. They fire reporters, and they sell company assets. That is their business model—to put tens of millions of dollars in their pockets. There is no public benefit to that; there are only benefits to the hedge fund operators. It is the last thing we need as the news business gets tougher and tougher.

We have lost veteran reporters at Cleveland.com and at the Columbus Dispatch. The Dispatch’s parent company, GateHouse Media, laid off more than 100 journalists this spring, including its longtime Washington bureau chief, Jack Torry, and now The Vindicator is closing its doors for good.

It is time for us in the White House and in this Congress to stand up for the free press, to stand up for community newspapers, and to stand up for local journalists, who are vital to the fabric of cities and towns like Youngstown and all across this country.

NOMINATION OF PETER C. WRIGHT

Madam President, Ohioans in the Miami Valley are living with the presence of toxic chemicals known as PFAS that are contaminating their drinking water, and the people have been forced to pay for water treatment costs without their getting the help they need.

PFAS chemicals are contaminating water supplies all over the country. It is why Senators on both sides of the aisle have called on the EPA to officially designate PFAS chemicals as the hazardous substances they are so that communities like Dayton can access the Federal funds they need for cleanup and can hold polluters accountable.

The administration, similar to what the Democratic leader just said, has dragged its feet. Peter Wright has been at the EPA for a year, and under his leadership, the Agency has released a PFAS Action Plan that, frankly, includes very little action. Now the Agency expects the Senate to reward this action by confirming him to oversee the EPA’s Superfund Program.

We know the influence of oil and gas. We know the influence of polluters in this administration. We know they pulled out of the Paris accord, which almost every major country in the world agreed to. We know this administration has tried to compromise on mileage standards. There is an overwhelming agreement in this country that the government should not be on the side of the polluters and oil industries but should be on the side of public health. Someone who has repeatedly failed to hold polluters accountable for the damage they have done to the

drinking water in Dayton and across the country has no business serving in a leadership role within the EPA. I will say it again. Someone who has repeatedly failed to hold polluters accountable for the damage they have done to drinking water in Dayton and across the country has no business serving as a leader within the EPA.

It is not a partisan issue. This year, I joined a bipartisan group of colleagues in introducing legislation to require the Environmental Protection Agency to step up and declare those chemicals as hazardous substances. Last year, I demanded the government release its Federal study of PFAS chemicals and how safe or unsafe they really are. The residents of Dayton and the residents of other communities shouldn’t have to worry about the safety of their water supplies. Ohioans deserve answers from the Environmental Protection Agency. The government is there to protect them.

I thank my colleague Senator CARPER for his leadership on this issue.

I urge my colleagues to oppose Peter Wright’s nomination—another Trump administration official who fronts and shills for the oil industry, for the polluters, and for people who shouldn’t have roles in government. We should demand a nominee who will take this job seriously when it comes to protecting the water supply in Dayton, OH, and across this country.

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

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

REMEMBERING HOWELL HEFLIN AND GILES PERKINS

Mr. JONES. Madam President, I rise to honor two of Alabama’s great citizens. The State misses greatly the late Senator Howell Heflin, who was a Member of this body for 18 years, and my friend and campaign manager, Giles Perkins, who was a lawyer in Birmingham, AL. These two men spent their lives working to improve our great State, and both shaped the future of Alabama in his own way. Following these remarks, we are going to be honoring both of these men in a reception to be held in my office.

I last spoke on the floor of my friend and former campaign manager, Giles Perkins, following his death last December. Giles was an accomplished attorney, community leader, brilliant political adviser, and strategist. Although a native of Texas, he moved to Alabama following his marriage to his true love, Hillary Head, and he quickly came to understand how Alabama’s complicated and sometimes dark history shaped our State. He had the vision of a brighter future if all Alabamians could have just simply worked together to create one Alabama for everyone.

Whether in politics, his legal practice, or with regard to his remarkable community projects—most notably Railroad Park, which helped to transform the city of Birmingham—for anyone who crossed paths with Giles, one saw in him his passion for making Alabama and the entire South better places for us all.

Giles' last political effort was my 2017 Senate campaign. As campaign chair, he was nothing short of extraordinary. He challenged me constantly—so much so that I began calling him Yoda. I still often refer to him as Yoda. His ability to see the bigger picture and his "tough love" approach with me made me a much better candidate, a better person, and certainly a better U.S. Senator. I will always cherish his friendship.

Howell Heflin was, to say the least, a lion of the U.S. Senate and a political mentor of mine. A military hero who hailed from Tuscaloosa, AL, Judge Howell Heflin was sometimes described as the "conscience of the Senate" as he was widely known for his unshakable integrity. Because of that, he was the chair of the Ethics Committee, I think, for 12 years running—something that, in his final remarks, he described as anything but enjoyable, but he was a man of unshakable integrity. He was part of the "greatest generation." He became a marine at the age of 21, and he served the Nation during World War II. He was awarded the Silver Star for valor in combat, and he received two Purple Hearts for his actions.

Even by Members of this body, Howell Heflin was always affectionately referred to as "Judge." If you read back over the day he announced his retirement, which was on March 29, 1995, all of his colleagues referred to him as "Judge" because of his extraordinary career. As a one-term chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, he modernized Alabama's court system and won numerous awards for it as well as for himself personally. He was a known national figure because of his work on the courts. Later, while in this body, he helped to streamline the Federal courts in order to help move the civil courts and the criminal justice system. He always believed that justice delayed was justice denied.

He was elected to the Senate in 1978. I was then in my third year of law school. During the summer of 1978, I opted to work full time on his campaign rather than to clerk for a law firm. This was in part because I believed that his election, following a 20-year or more domination of Alabama politics by George Wallace, would be one of the most significant elections in Alabama's history—a turning point for a State whose reputation had sorely suffered throughout the civil rights movement. It turned out I was absolutely right. Howell Heflin's election ushered in a time in Alabama during which politicians in our State began to look beyond the dog whistle politics of race and to do their best to represent all of the citizens of Alabama.

He was a champion of the rural farmer, NASA, and businesses throughout Alabama. He was also a champion of the small business leader, teachers, members of the union, and African-American citizens in Alabama, who were still feeling the effects of discrimination and restricted voting rights.

By today's standards, Howell Heflin would certainly be considered pretty conservative with his positions that many, including myself, would probably not agree with. Yet, in his heart, Howell Heflin believed in the Constitution of the United States, and he strived to ensure that we lived up to the creed that all people are created equal. During his floor speech in which he announced his retirement, he said, "Not until we become genuinely one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all can this country realize its potential for true greatness."

He worked as a Senator to secure the extension of the Voting Rights Act, which is something we are still arguing about today—23 years after he left the Senate. He appointed the first two African Americans to the Federal bench in Alabama. Sadly, even though the number of Federal judges in Alabama's three Federal districts have grown significantly in number, there are still only two active Federal judges in Alabama who are African American. He supported historically black colleges and universities, and he ensured the passage of the civil rights restoration bill. He helped to pass the fair housing bill and helped to establish a national holiday that honors the late Martin Luther King, Jr.

Howell Heflin's commitment to racial justice and his sensitivity to issues of race led him in 1993 to give a remarkable floor speech that opposed an insignia patent bill that contained an image of a Confederate battle flag. This was over 20 years before the tragedy in Charleston, SC, when battle flags across the country came down. It was 20 years or so before that when he opposed an amendment that would have contained an image of the Confederate battle flag. It was truly a remarkable speech, and I referenced it just recently in a speech I gave here on the Equality Act. It was considered by many—his friends, his family, his staff, and all who knew him, especially those in this body—to be his finest hour. It was his finest hour because it was one of those rare occasions on the floor of the Senate during which an impassioned speech by one Senator swayed a vote.

There was an amendment and a motion to table on that bill—a motion that had not succeeded. Howell Heflin then took to the floor so as to sway Senators to reconsider. Then, overwhelmingly, by a vote of over 75 to 20-something, the motion was tabled, and the bill died, as it should have.

That led Carol Moseley-Braun—the first African-American female Senator in history—to state the following:

His integrity, his intelligence, his commitment and faith in the Constitution of these United States, faith in what the American dream has always stood for and can be in the future, has led Judge Heflin in a direction that I think is without peer and without parallel in this body. He has been a force for good. He has been a force for right.

There are very few people who have known Howell Heflin and there are very few people in Alabama who remember him who would say otherwise.

He was a force for good, and he was a force for right.

I am so proud that my first job after law school was working with him as staff counsel on the Senate Judiciary Committee. It was just an amazing experience for a kid who had never been to Washington, DC, before taking the job.

It is now my privilege to hold the seat that Judge Heflin had for 18 years. It is my honor. The fact that I walked off this floor with him as a staffer in 1980 and walked back on in 2018 in his seat has been one of the greatest honors of my life.

In gratitude for that opportunity the Judge gave me, I have established a fellowship in my office for a recent law school graduate—just like me in 1979—and I look forward to welcoming the first Howell Heflin fellow to my team later this month.

Howell Heflin was sworn into the Senate in 1979, 40 years ago this past January. And it was about 40 years ago this time of year that I joined his staff—fresh out of law school, fresh off of taking the bar exam. He was certainly my mentor and role model in many ways, and each day that I am in the Senate, I strive to continue his legacy—not that I always vote as Howell Heflin would, although, frankly, knowing him as I did, I am absolutely convinced that he would have moderated many of his positions with changing times. He was that kind of leader. But I am certainly guided by the principles of public service to his constituents that he described in his retirement announcement, in which he said:

I have endeavored to represent Alabama in a studied, impartial, and fair-minded manner. My record certainly indicates at least an independent streak. I hope Alabamians know that my decisions were based on what I thought was in the best interest of my State and Nation. While some may argue or disagree with my decisions, I was convinced that I was right. And I believe most Alabamians felt that nothing more could be expected of me.

I agree with him 100 percent.

Ironically, Judge Heflin passed away 10 years to the day from the day he gave that speech on March 29. I miss him. Alabama misses him. And I can assure my colleagues who didn't know him, the U.S. Senate misses him as well.

The threads that tie Judge Heflin and Giles Perkins together in history are their deeply rooted integrity and their dedication to leaving the State of Alabama better than they found it. Their memories inspire me every day.

Today, following these remarks, I am dedicating the conference rooms in my Senate office to these two men who, through leadership and commitment, made a positive difference in the history of the State of Alabama, as well as in my life.

I am so happy that I am going to be joined by Judge Heflin's son Tom and his wife Cornelia, as well as numerous former Heflin staffers, including his longtime chief of staff, Mike House, who is the one who made that fateful call to me that summer as I was studying for the bar exam to offer me the job here on the Hill.

Also with us will be Drew Perkins and his wife Nelly. Drew is the brother of Giles. They will be here with us as we celebrate both Judge Heflin and Giles Perkins.

I would be remiss if I didn't also mention that in the corner of the Giles Perkins Conference Room will be the large Yoda doll that will be kept in his honor.

As for me, I will strive to continue the work that they began, to fulfill their vision, and to honor their memories as long as I have the privilege of serving here in the U.S. Senate.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

VETERAN SUICIDE PREVENTION EFFORTS

Mr. BOOZMAN. Madam President, recently I met with members of the American Legion of Arkansas during their annual convention. This year they celebrated 100 years of helping veterans. I was honored to join them on this occasion and share how proud we are of their efforts to serve their fellow veterans.

Since its founding, Legionnaires have been leading advocates for veterans and their families. They are committed to strengthening the policies, programs, and institutions to support those who have worn our Nation's uniform.

One of the ways they have been instrumental in achieving this is bringing Legionnaires from across the country to Washington to share the Legion's priorities with me and my colleagues. Members from Arkansas expressed that one of the top issues for the Legion this Congress, as has been the case for the past several years, is suicide prevention.

The American Legion and other VSOs like the VFW, AMVETS, IAVA, Wounded Warrior Project—and the list simply goes on and on—are pressing for action to improve access and treatment for veterans who are at risk of suicide. We all know there is room for improvement on this front.

Congress has provided significant funding increases to the Department of Veterans Affairs to decrease veteran suicide rates. In fiscal year 2010, the VA requested \$62 million for suicide prevention outreach. That number nearly quadrupled to \$222 million within 10 years. Despite the sharp increase in resources, sadly, 20 veterans commit

suicide each day. That number has, unfortunately, remained roughly unchanged throughout the years. Tellingly and sadly, only 6 of those 20 veterans are receiving healthcare services at the VA.

Veterans are particularly vulnerable to mental health struggles which, when untreated, can lead to increased risk of suicide. They suffer a disproportionately higher rate of suicide compared to the general population.

In Arkansas, veterans represent about 8 percent of the population, but, sadly, they account for one-fifth of the suicides in my State. So you have 8 percent of the population yet 20 percent of the suicides.

I have heard the anguish of family members and friends who miss the signs of mental health struggles in their loved ones. We have read and heard in the news about veterans who have taken their own lives on VA properties. They were so close to help yet felt that their situations were beyond repair. We need to close the loop to ensure that individuals at risk make contact with professionals trained to respond to address the needs of these vulnerable veterans.

Congress is actively engaged in fighting this public health crisis. In 2015, we passed and the President signed into law the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act. This was an important step to providing the VA with the tools and flexibility to get help for veterans living with mental illness. We knew this was just the start.

My colleagues and I on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee are continuing to build on that foundation. I am hopeful that we can advance the three particular pieces of legislation I am about to highlight so that we can give help to veterans at risk of suicide.

Senator WARNER and I recently introduced the IMPROVE Wellbeing for Veterans Act. This bill will enable the VA to harness the potential of what is already occurring in communities by allowing it to provide grant funding to nonprofits and local organizations for expanded outreach to veterans.

Our bill enhances coordination and planning of veteran mental health and suicide prevention services and will better measure the effectiveness of these programs in order to reduce the alarming number of veteran suicides.

We can work with veteran-serving nonprofits to create and use a standard measurement tool that helps us in this area.

Some nonprofit groups have implemented their own tools to track progress and monitor the results of their programs.

The VA should examine how it can work with partners to develop or adopt a measurement tool that will be used uniformly across all groups. This will allow the VA and its partners to identify which suicide prevention efforts are having the most impact so that resources can be concentrated appropriately.

VA Secretary Robert Wilkie called the IMPROVE Wellbeing for Veterans Act "key" to unlocking the veterans suicide crisis.

I am pleased with the support we have received from the Secretary, members of the committee, and other colleagues, and I encourage other Senators to cosponsor this important legislation that will make a positive impact on our effort to reduce veteran suicides.

It is also important to make it easier for veterans in crisis to get the help they need. That is why I teamed up with Senator MANCHIN to introduce the SPEED Act. This legislation would establish a three-digit number that is easy for veterans to remember in order to reach the Veterans Crisis Line. In a crisis, time is of the essence. Providing a more direct line of communication will save lives.

Created in 2007, the Veterans Crisis Line has answered over 3.5 million calls. This has been an essential tool to prevent veteran suicides. By taking an additional step to simplify the number, we can make further strides and expedite assistance to veterans in crisis.

The VA has indicated that suicide prevention is its highest clinical priority. To help improve its operation, oversight, and evaluations of its suicide prevention media outreach campaigns, we have partnered with Senator RICHARD BLUMENTHAL to introduce the Reach Every Veteran in Crisis Act. This bill supports recommendations by the Government Accountability Office study that found gaps in the VA's suicide prevention media outreach activities.

By delivering an action plan for the VA to follow, we can isolate meaningful suicide prevention programs and ensure resources are focused on efforts that save lives.

An important provision of the legislation requires establishing targets to evaluate the effectiveness of the outreach campaign. It is vital that we have metrics to measure the success of the VA's mental health and suicide prevention programs.

As the chairman of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee, I have been pushing the VA to incorporate measurement tools so that we can better evaluate the effectiveness of VA programs. That is why, in the subcommittee's fiscal year 2019 bill, we incorporated language requiring the VA to report to Congress the metrics it uses to evaluate the efficacy of all of its mental health and suicide prevention programs.

My colleagues and I are committed to upend the trend of veteran suicide. We are blessed to have many organizations devoted to this common goal.

Together, we can make a positive difference in the lives of veterans and their families and give them hope for a brighter tomorrow.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.