

the final silence. And that might be coming quickly, now, without regard for whether I had ever spoken what needed to be said, or had only betrayed myself into small silences, while I planned someday to speak, or waited for someone else's words. And I began to recognize a source of power within myself that comes from the knowledge that while it is most desirable not to be afraid, learning to put fear into perspective gave me great strength.

She writes:

Within those weeks of acute fear came the knowledge—within the war we are all waging with the forces of death, subtle and otherwise, conscious or not—I am not only a casualty, I am also a warrior.

What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? Perhaps for some of you here today, I am the face of one of your fears. Because I am woman, because I am Black, because I am lesbian, because I am myself—a Black woman warrior poet doing work—who has come to ask you, are you doing yours?

Ms. Lorde continues:

And it is never without fear—of visibility, of the harsh light of scrutiny and perhaps judgment, of pain, of death. But we have lived through all of those already, in silence, except death. And I remind myself all the time now that if I were to have been born mute or had maintained an oath of silence my whole life long for safety, I would still have suffered, and I would still die. And where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must, each of us, recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives. That we not hide behind the mockeries of separations that have been imposed upon us and which so often we accept as our own.

We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired. For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us.

The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.

In closing, the writings of Ms. Lorde's in "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" are not only a beautiful articulation in examining the cost of being silent in the face of what could have been for her a terminal illness, she gives us an even better gift: She invites us to acknowledge our commonalities as well as our differences in order to give them voice and to deepen our understanding and expand the power of our words and turn those words into action.

While Ms. Lorde first wrote and delivered this essay in 1977, I think we could all agree that it could easily have been written just yesterday.

Shamefully enough, school administrators in Tennessee took steps to target this book and to issue educational gag orders with a goal to suppress hundreds of other stories from being told.

Now more than ever, we must heed Ms. Lorde's call to speak into the si-

lence, to raise our voices and reject the intimidation of those who would have the history of our Nation, the beauty of our differences, and the complexity of our humanity disappear from generations of learners to come.

I invite all of my colleagues to join me as Freedom Readers, to challenge those who attempt to undermine our history, and uplift the diversity of our stories against the attacks to erase them.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

BICENTENNIAL OF VERMILLION COUNTY, INDIANA

Mr. YOUNG. Mr. President, I rise today to salute Vermillion County, IN, on the occasion of its bicentennial, which occurred earlier this month.

I begin this tribute thousands of miles and an ocean away from West Central Indiana, in Iejima, which is an island off the coast of Okinawa. There in Iejima, in a park by the side of a road, stands a small monument made of white stone. There is a bronze plaque that is placed near its base, and it reads:

At this spot the 77th Infantry Division lost a buddy, Ernie Pyle, 18th April 1945.

They weren't the only ones who lost a friend that day. No other writer so vividly captured the experiences of the American soldier or better chronicled the war that they fought during World War II than Ernie Pyle. The warmth and directness of Ernie Pyle's columns channeled the voice of the GI and communicated it clearly to the countrymen back home.

Pyle was by so many accounts America's greatest war correspondent. He was a shy farm boy from the town of Dana in Vermillion County. In fact, the house he was born in is still there. His writing style reflected his upbringing in the warmth of smalltown America and Hoosier common sense.

That monument that I mentioned near the spot he died is just one of the incredible things that Vermillion County's people have accomplished and how the values instilled there made them possible.

Now, I will allow that not all Americans have heard of this part of Indiana. After all, it is a small spot on the map, bounded to the east by the Wabash River—7 miles wide, 37 miles long—home to less than 16,000 citizens, but as Ernie Pyle's life demonstrates, we are all, each and every one of us, better off because of the Hoosiers who have called Vermillion County home.

They have done great things, and they have done them quietly, in and far away from their own communities. In fact, when our Union was in peril, our freedoms threatened, Vermillion County's residents answered the call again and again and again.

They fought in the siege of Vicksburg, suffered in the misery of Andersonville. Their bodies rest far from Vermillion County's Hoosier soil. They are in American cemeteries abroad. Their names can be found on the tab-

lets of the lost. Their families still hold the Purple Hearts and hang the Gold Star banners.

These Hoosiers have not only defended America, but with their industriousness and creativity, they have contributed to all of our walks of life.

The area's first settlers discovered the richness of Vermillion County soil. Two centuries later, their descendants still work the land. In fact, hundreds of farms—many of them family-owned—help drive the local economy and feed our Nation.

Vermillion County has provided much else, though: leaders—leaders who have risen to Indiana's highest offices; but not just leaders—explorers, actors, athletes, engineers, and, of course, one legendary journalist who was the voice of the American soldier and won the Pulitzer Prize.

The rich history of Vermillion County isn't simply characterized by a list of outbound citizens, though. It is also characterized by hopeful new arrivals.

At the end of the 19th century, the town of Clinton was a destination for Italian immigrants seeking employment in the nearby coal mines. They embraced their new home and their country, and they left a legacy in Vermillion County that is still visible and recalled every September. The Little Italy Festival is a 4-day celebration of Clinton's Italian heritage held almost every Labor Day since 1966. It is one of the most cherished local traditions.

With its small towns, their historic buildings, family businesses, its beautiful landscapes, and beloved covered bridges, Vermillion County is quintessential Indiana and quintessential America. But it is the Hoosiers who live there that we can celebrate on this anniversary.

A story Ernie Pyle recorded from "good old Dana"—as he put it—catches their spirit just as clearly as his reports from the front gave voice to the GIs. You see, when Pyle's mother suffered a stroke, she badly needed a hospital bed. There was only one in the entire county. It was the property of a family living 8 miles away. They were happy to loan it, but the Pyles had no way to transport their bed to their home. When he heard about this dilemma, one Claude Lockeridge, who lived just down the road from the Pyles, fired up his old Model T truck and drove 16 miles in the snow to fetch the bed.

It is a little gesture of kindness, perhaps, but a million of these are what makes America—and I would argue, it is what makes America great.

The occasion of its 200th anniversary is a fitting time not simply to honor Vermillion County but to remember—to remember how much our small towns and our local communities matter and how essential the decency, kindness, and patriotism found in places like Vermillion County is to our Republic.

To the people of Vermillion County, we join you in the celebration of your

bicentennial; we thank you for all you have done for our State and our country; and we look forward to the days ahead.

God bless.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

#### TRIBUTE TO RON WANER

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, today I have the honor of recognizing Mr. Ron Wanek, a great business leader, innovator, and philanthropist from the great State of Wisconsin, as he, his family, and his company celebrate his induction into the Wisconsin Manufacturing Hall of Fame.

Wisconsin has a long history of being the home of many successful manufacturing businesses. With his induction into the Manufacturing Hall of Fame, Mr. Wanek joins the ranks of past inductees, such as Jerome Case, Patrick Cudahy, Sam Johnson, Walter Kohler, Oscar Mayer, Frederick Miller, and Gustave Pabst, just to name a few of the 78 iconic titans of business who helped to make Wisconsin a proud manufacturing State.

For his part in continuing the long legacy of Wisconsin manufacturing, Ron Wanek founded Arcadia Furniture in the small town of Arcadia, WI, back in 1970. Back then, Mr. Wanek employed just a total of 35 people. Through hard work and innovation, in 1982, Arcadia Furniture merged with Ashley Furniture Cooperation and became Ashley Furniture Industries.

During these last 42 years, Ashley Furniture has grown into the world's largest manufacturer of home furnishings, with over 30 million square feet of worldwide manufacturing and distribution capability, with retail locations throughout the United States and in 67 countries worldwide. Ashley proudly employs 16,000 people in the United States, including 3,000 hard-working Wisconsinites.

Throughout his successful professional career, Mr. Wanek has become the personification of the phrase "business is a force for good." With his focus on philanthropy, the Ronald & Joyce Wanek Foundation has contributed tens of millions of dollars in support for important charitable causes in Wisconsin and across the country.

Through his charitable work, Mr. Wanek has become an unmatched supporter of technical and STEM education at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels. Through his various programs, partnerships, and scholarships, the Ronald & Joyce Wanek Foundation aims to encourage students to pursue careers in STEM fields and improve the quality of life in their own communities.

In addition, Mr. Wanek is an ardent supporter of America's veterans. His establishment of the beautiful Soldiers Walk at Memorial Park in Arcadia, WI—a premier war memorial in the United States, with 29 monuments and statues honoring all of those who have served our country—is just one exam-

ple of his dedication to those who have sacrificed and, in some cases, paid the ultimate sacrifice for freedoms Wisconsinites and Americans enjoy every day. Some would say the Arcadia Soldiers Walk rivals the magnificence of the war memorials around our Nation's Capital.

Finally, Mr. Wanek is not only a great personification of the American dream, but he actively and enthusiastically supports a steadfast American free enterprise system—a system which has made this country the economic engine of the world.

I congratulate Ron Wanek on his recent induction into the Wisconsin Manufacturing Hall of Fame. It is well-deserved.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BUTLER). The Senator from Michigan.

#### REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, when my three children were born, it was unlike anything else I have ever, ever experienced before. Those 3 days were the best in my life, and it is hard to put into words how beautiful and how daunting it is to have a child.

Every American who wants to be a parent should have that opportunity, and when they are faced with medical challenges while starting a family, they should have the right to pursue every resource to help them navigate that process. IVF is one of those tools, and it has helped countless Americans. For those who have experienced frequent miscarriages, suffered from genetic disorders, or are otherwise affected by infertility, IVF is an essential procedure. It is safe. It is necessary. And it has given millions of people the chance to have a family.

Last week, a ruling from the Alabama Supreme Court put the future of IVF in jeopardy. So my Democratic colleagues and I went to work. We proposed a bill that would protect the right to seek IVF treatment for all Americans. I am grateful to Senators DUCKWORTH and MURRAY for leading the charge on this legislation, and I was proud to be one of the cosponsors.

But, yesterday, Republicans blocked the Senate from passing it. They decided to put politics before protecting a critical medical procedure. They have put this resource at risk, one that has allowed millions of women and LGBTQ Americans to have children. They think that they know better than doctors. They think they know better than parents. They think they know more than four decades of proven science. The bill they opposed is literally pro-life and pro-family. Yet Republicans refused to put it on the floor.

Let's not forget how this all started. Senate Republicans stood with former President Trump when he stacked the Supreme Court with extreme judges. And when the Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, it ripped the right to make choices about reproductive healthcare away from millions of women.

And now conservatives across the country feel empowered to take it even

further. The ruling in Alabama is just the latest instance in the war against reproductive freedom. It could keep millions of Americans from starting families, and Senate Republicans are just fine with that.

We don't know how far this will go. We don't know what other proven procedures Republicans will try to take away from families in the future. We don't know what effect these rulings will have on new innovations in fertility science. We don't know if they are going to come after birth control next. But one thing is very, very clear: This is just the beginning of their efforts to deny reproductive freedom.

IVF should be available to every American citizen who needs it. And when someone is choosing to have children, politicians should never get in the way.

I call on my Republican colleagues to support the Access to Family Building Act, to stop playing politics and instead stand behind the millions of Americans who simply want—who simply want—the chance to start a family.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

#### TRIBUTE TO MITCH MCCONNELL

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, yesterday, my good friend Leader MCCONNELL shared some big news. At the end of this year, he will step down as the Republican leader of the U.S. Senate after having served the longest tenure of any leader in Senate history. For more than 17 years, he has been the steady hand at the helm, guiding us through some of the most consequential debates in recent history. He steered us through multiple wars, through a pandemic and countless high-stakes political battles under four different Presidents. Under his leadership, Congress rewrote the Federal Tax Code to help families across the country, unleashed American-generated power, and reshaped the Federal judiciary for a generation—and so much more.

It has been an honor to serve alongside Leader MCCONNELL and witness a modern-day "Master of the Senate." I will have more to say about our friend from Kentucky at a later date, but the good news is he is not going anywhere. Senator MCCONNELL will lead our conference through the end of this Congress, but he will remain in the Senate through the rest of his term. During that time, he will do as he has always done: represent the State of Kentucky and put his expert knowledge of this Chamber to use on their behalf.

For now, let me just say thanks to Leader MCCONNELL for everything he has done for this body and our great country.

#### GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Madam President, on another matter, this week, the Senate finds itself in familiar territory. For the fourth time since last September, Congress is rushing to avert a government shutdown. Unless a funding bill is signed