

communication, decision making, community outreach, and public relationships have made this certification possible. They are well deserving of this status, and I am proud to have such a fine department in New Jersey.

I want to thank the department for its tireless efforts to keep their community safe, and it is because of them that the people of Bloomfield can sleep soundly knowing that they are protected in the case of emergency. It is my honor to stand here in this body, in front of my mentor and senior Senator, Mr. BOOKER, to give these organizations and individuals the recognition they deserve for all their efforts to improve the lives of New Jerseyans. I wish to thank them for their tireless service to our communities and wish them much success in the years ahead.

TRIBUTE TO PHIL AND TAMMY MURPHY

Mr. President, on behalf of my senior Senator, I would be remiss if I did not recognize two other individuals in the Gallery whose selfless service has uplifted so many lives across our State: Gov. Phil Murphy and First Lady Tammy Murphy.

Over the past 7 years, I have had the honor of working alongside Governor Murphy and First Lady Tammy Murphy to build a stronger and fairer State for every New Jerseyan. Under their leadership, the Garden State has set the gold standard for progressive and responsible leadership in America, from nearly doubling our State's minimum wage to enacting the most ambitious property tax relief program in modern history.

The Murphy administration has made life more affordable for every New Jersey family. They have taken strides in reviving New Jersey's reputation as a global leader in innovation by seizing upon a number of emerging industries, from clean energy to life science, to generative artificial intelligence. They have upheld our shared responsibility to protect all of our State's children by enacting some of the Nation's most transformative environmental policies and implementing a number of Nation-leading gun safety laws that have brought gun deaths to record lows. And they have also managed to bring the 2026 FIFA World Cup Final to the New Jersey-New York—said in the right order—region, which is sure to provide a massive boost to our local economies.

It is because of this impeccable record that I was so honored the Governor would trust me with the responsibility I hold here. It has been a privilege to work alongside them in this role—both with the Governor and the first lady—on so many issues that matter to New Jersey families, from funding much needed infrastructure improvements to working with the first lady to cosponsor legislation in this Chamber to access maternal healthcare for underserved communities.

Governor and First Lady Murphy, thank you for being here today. Without your support, I would not be standing here today.

Having been born and raised in New Jersey, I hold a deep love for the people in our State. My career in public service has given me the privilege of meeting many of our over 9 million residents who make New Jersey so unique. Serving them in this Chamber has been an incredible honor and a continued part of my public service. I hope the work that my staff and I have accomplished in this short term will leave a lasting impact for years to come.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

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.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. CANTWELL). Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO FRED AUSTIN AND JOHN SHANK

Mr. SULLIVAN. Madam President, it is Thursday afternoon; and, well, I don't know if our new pages know the significance of Thursday afternoon, but it is usually the time I come down and talk about our Alaskan of the Week. Hopefully, everybody can see that. It is kind of a special poster board today because it has the Capitol Christmas tree on it. I want to talk about that Capitol Christmas tree.

The Alaskan of the Week is—for the reporters who are still around here on Thursday afternoon and the American people, they all view this as their favorite speech of the week. I am just saying. Not bragging. It is true, because we talk about someone really special in Alaska. It could be someone national, a great hero; it could be someone who did something great for their local community. Then we talk a little bit about what is going on in Alaska. Most of the country is intrigued by our great State—little snapshot of what is happening.

Let me do that right now.

Winter is not coming; winter is here. In fact, winter came before Halloween. We had a lot of snow in Anchorage before Halloween. Now we are getting a ton of snow. It is cold. There is a lot of snow. The holiday spirit is upon us. We love that. The northern lights are out. It is literally a winter wonderland.

If you want to come up to Alaska—people in the Gallery—come on up. You will have the best visit of your life. Summer, winter, fall—it doesn't matter. By the way, in Utqiagvik, AK—that is our northernmost community referred to previously as Barrow, AK—the sun went down November 19, and it is not coming up until January 23 of 2025. It is kind of dark in Utqiagvik right now. They are not going to have a sunrise until late January. We love them up there. They are tough, great Americans, patriotic Americans.

Everyone in my State is already enjoying winter. So if you can't come up to Alaska to enjoy winter this winter,

we are going to bring a little bit of Alaska here to DC. That is right. The Capitol Christmas tree, which will be lit up in front of the Capitol building for the month of December, is coming all the way from the Tongass National Forest. The Presiding Officer cares a lot about the Tongass, we know that. It is just outside of Wrangell, AK. That is a journey of almost 5,000 miles. And this is no living-room-size Christmas tree, folks. It is an 85-foot Sitka spruce. That is a big tree. You are going to see it out in front of the Capitol here very soon.

I am sure everybody listening—and we know there are millions of people listening to this Alaskan of the Week speech—millions—they have a lot of questions.

Wait. How do you transport a tree that size almost 5,000 miles across America?

There are a lot of moving parts, including seven different vehicles and multiple-force servicemembers on tree-watering duty. You don't want your tree to dry out when you drive it across the country. And, of course, the intrepid truckers—truck drivers—who have taken up this charge to successfully and safely deliver Alaska's Christmas tree to America's Mall, to the Capitol.

These Alaskans, Fred Austin and John Shank—longtime Alaska truck drivers, both Teamsters—are the men responsible for driving for 3 weeks to deliver this tree to Washington, DC. And they, Fred and John, are our Alaskans of the Week.

By the way, I love the Teamsters. I am a big fan of the Teamsters. During the pandemic, I went out in our backyard in Anchorage and gave a speech making all the Teamsters our Alaskans of the Week because they were keeping our economy open when, essentially, the rest of the country, the rest of Alaska, was shut down.

So here is to the Teamsters.

Here is to Fred and John.

Let me give you a little background on this tree that Fred and John shared with me and my team recently. This gigantic tree was cut down outside of Wrangell, AK, as I mentioned, in late October. It was shipped from southeast Alaska—that is where Wrangell is—to Seattle, the Presiding Officer's hometown, on November 3. It was escorted by Forest Service members who are caring for the tree. Like I said, watering it, keeping it fresh the whole trip.

When we checked in on Fred—and they are here now or are going to be here tomorrow morning. We checked in on them. They were just about to stop in Omaha, NE. By the time they conclude their journey, which will be tomorrow, they will have stopped in 12 States, 17 towns across America. And if you were lucky enough to be one of those Americans to live within driving distance of any of their stops, these guys would have been hard to miss.

Thousands of Americans have come out to see this tree going across the

country. The upper half of this tree is already covered in Christmas lights and is visible through Plexiglass in the 85-foot custom-built trailer which serves as a gigantic autograph book that has collected thousands of signatures across the country from Americans and Christmas enthusiasts all across our great Nation.

Let's talk about these two great Alaskans, our Alaskans of the Week.

Fred first. Transporting a tree of this size that many miles requires, like I said, a crack team, which is why Fred and John were chosen. Two Teamsters—get this—with a combined trucking experience of over 130 years. Do the math. These guys know how to drive trucks. Fred has been trucking for 71 years. He is only 89 years old right now, born in 1935. A good year for wine, he says. Fred started trucking at the age of 18. He is literally probably the most experienced truck driver in America driving that tree.

Like so many Alaskans, Fred is a veteran. By the way, Alaska has more veterans per capita than any State in the country. We are very proud of that, our patriotic heritage in Alaska. And I would venture to guess that there are few Navy veterans still around today who were part of the U.S. Navy blockade during the Cuban Missile Crisis, a big point in American history. Guess what? Fred was. He served on the USS *Mullinnix* and was in the Navy 6 years. He was defending democracy then and spreading Christmas cheer now.

Fred literally has done it all. Fred came to Alaska with his family in the mid-sixties and—no kidding—settled in North Pole, AK, a very fitting hometown for what would be his task today, delivering America's Christmas tree.

Some of you "Alaskan of the Week" fans might remember the Alaskan of the Week about a year ago, last December, when I spoke about the North Pole, Alaska's Miller family, and their Santa Claus house.

So, again, Americans, you want to come up and see a part of our great State, come to North Pole, AK, in the interior. The Santa Claus House is still going strong. If you write a letter addressed to Santa in the North Pole, your letter will end up at the Santa Claus House in Fred's hometown. When you get a reply, it is postmarked North Pole, AK—no kidding.

So why did Fred decide to head north to the great State of Alaska? He said:

It's in our blood to go find the frontier. That's been the history of the world. It was time [for me] to go north.

Now he is making this almost 5,000-mile trip to bring the Last Frontier to Washington, DC.

Driving down south is an experience for Fred, much different than driving in the Last Frontier. Fred says that there are "lots of highways and traffic. At home in Alaska, if you want to beat rush hour, you just have one more cup of coffee." There are not a lot of traffic jams in our State. Down here, it is a lot more coffee, pots of coffee.

This is his first year transporting the Christmas tree, and he said that the best part has been watching the reaction of people seeing the tree on the road or at one of the town stops.

Like I said, there have been thousands of people watching this incredible Alaskan tree going across the country.

Fred said:

People come out to watch the truck [and tree] go by. They wave at us to honk our horn.

We are loving it. And the tree, of course, at 85 feet, is hard to miss for "prepping the country for the holiday spirit."

Accompanying Fred is John Shank, also an Alaskan and a Capitol Christmas tree delivery veteran. By the way, he is probably the only veteran. And I am not talking about military veteran; I am talking about, he has delivered the Christmas tree before, driving a truck. This is John's second time delivering Alaska's Christmas tree for the country. So go figure on that one—he is probably the only guy in the history of the country who has done this twice. He did it in 2015, which, by the way, was the only other time an Alaskan Christmas tree has made it for the Capitol Christmas tree since the tree-lighting ceremony officially began in 1964.

But this drive is nothing compared to the 6 million miles John has banked during his nearly 50-year trucking career. Again, these guys, these Teamsters, these great Teamsters are some of the best truck drivers in the country.

I said 6 million miles. For reference, there are only 17,600 miles of public roads in Alaska. During his career, John has effectively driven one of Alaska's public roads more than 340 times. Go figure that one out.

Originally from Michigan but raised by his family in Fairbanks, John's regular route as a trucker for Lynden, which is a great Alaskan transportation company—the route he has usually done is from Fairbanks to the oilfields up in Prudhoe Bay.

By the way, those of you who watched the different Alaska reality shows, those are the ice road truckers—great show. Tough duty, by the way, driving a truck from Fairbanks up to the North Slope, hundreds of miles in the winter, on ice.

John has done this so well that he was nominated for the American Trucking Association Driver of the Year—not Alaskan Driver of the Year, American Driver of the Year—both in 2014 and in 2017.

John came to Alaska in 1975 to transport food for dog mushing veterans but also likes to say that he came up to Alaska "for the adventure. And I've been here ever since." It is such a great State.

He said the highlight of his trip so far across the country was their stop in Indiana, where he reunited with almost 30 members of his extended family in the Hoosier State who had been track-

ing the tree and, of course, their fellow family member John on his trip all the way to Washington, DC.

The tree is a family event all around. During the scheduled stops along the drive, families throughout America—thousands of them—have come to admire the tree and get excited about Christmas. "Seeing family, seeing kids looking at the tree with rosy cheeks," John said, reminds us it is Christmas-time.

So there you have it—two jolly Alaskan men—one literally from North Pole, AK—spreading special Alaskan Christmas cheer with this beautiful tree right here across America as they transport America's Christmas tree, Alaska's Christmas tree, to Washington, DC. All they are missing are some reindeer. See them right here? You know, in Alaska, we get a lot of reindeer. I am sure my State would happily loan a few reindeer down here to DC. You can come see them yourself, by the way, up in our State. One of them, Star, a reindeer, actually lives in downtown Anchorage and is always welcoming to visitors.

But in all seriousness, the tree, as I mentioned, will be arriving here in Washington, DC, tomorrow. Alaskans from across the State have been working for months on the over 5,000 decorations that will go on this tree. It is going to be beautiful. It is going to reach for the heavens, light up the night sky here in DC. An Alaskan tree in our Nation's Capital will truly mark the beginning of a joyful holiday season for all of us.

So thank you, Fred and John, for taking this enormous trek to bring the Capitol Christmas tree and a whole truckload of Christmas spirit across America to DC.

Thanks to all the Alaskans who helped make this happen.

Thanks to the Teamsters who keep our State and country's economy rolling strong.

Fred and John, Merry Christmas and congratulations on one of the highest honors anyone in America can achieve—our Alaskan of the Week. Great job, gentlemen. We will see you tomorrow out there with your Christmas tree.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. HELMY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate consider the following nominations en bloc: Executive Calendar Nos. 821 through 826 and 828, 829, 830, 831, with the exception of Brig. Gen. Walker M. Field and Brig. Gen. Jason G. Woodworth, 832 and 833, and all nominations on the Secretary's desk in the Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Space Force; that the nominations be confirmed en bloc; that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening