

majority of fatal motorcoach accidents, when the bus rolled over, the passengers were ejected from their seats and thrown through the bus windows. Seven people were killed and dozens were injured.

John and Joy Betts of Bryan, OH—a couple who have become friends of mine—lost their son David, one of the students who died that day. He was a baseball player and student at Bluffton. I have gotten to know the Betts family since the accident. They have been courageous advocates in raising awareness of motorcoach safety and demanding congressional action. To the family's credit, they used the loss of their son to save the sons and daughters of many others who will not face those tragedies because of the work the Betts family is doing on behalf of this motorcoach safety legislation.

The National Transportation Safety Board's final report from the Bluffton motorcoach accident—released almost 4 years ago—echoed recommendations the NTSB has been urging for years. For nearly 5 years, I have been working with Senator HUTCHISON, whose State has seen its share of tragic motorcoach accidents, to put those recommendations into law. In a bipartisan manner, we are fighting to make motorcoaches safer for the millions of passengers who ride them every day.

Today, because of the Betts family, other courageous families, and activists, we are taking a step in the right direction if we pass the bill.

In the 110th, 111th, and now the 112th Congress, Senator HUTCHISON and I have introduced the bipartisan Motorcoach Enhanced Safety Act, which includes many of the NTSB's "most wanted" safety improvements. Specifically, the bill would address many of the major safety shortfalls from the Bluffton accident, which have plagued tour bus operations for too long. It would mean better protection systems for occupants and stronger passenger safety standards. It would improve safety equipment and devices and the need for onboard recorders with the capability to collect crash data. These safety measures are neither exotic nor complicated; they are commonsense safety features that have been and in many cases are widely used. But since they are not required by law, they have not been installed in most American motorcoaches. Instead of saving lives, the public safety remains at risk.

Some who oppose improved tour bus safety standards will tell you that this isn't a motorcoach problem, that they have a problem with rogue bus companies or bad drivers. Certainly, that is part of the problem, but we cannot simply look the other way and reject the idea that improving the safety of motorcoach manufacturing and motorcoaches is unnecessary or fiscally imprudent.

John Betts said:

It is necessary through our current regulations to get bad operators off the road. How-

ever, it is not sufficient as it does nothing to ensure safety once the crash has occurred.

I couldn't agree more. We can get bad operators off the road, but that is not enough to ensure passenger safety in the tragic event of an accident. If the technology to save lives and reduce injury in motorcoach accidents exists, we must put that technology to use. This bill does that.

Last year in Cleveland I was joined by John's sister and brother-in-law, Pam and Tom Bryan of Vermillion, OH. We met with a Greyhound bus driver who showcased new Greyhound buses equipped with some commonsense safety measures that clearly will save lives and protect both passengers and motorists on the road.

The Betts family and operators like Greyhound understand the urgent need and have too often relived the painful reminders that safety improvements for tour bus operations are long overdue. That is why this Motorcoach Enhanced Safety Act is important, and it is why Greyhound's endorsement of this bill is so critical to turning public sadness and outrage into public action. Bus operators such as Greyhound think we can do this, and manufacturers do too. The technology is there.

The bill is common sense, bipartisan, and it will save lives. How many more motorcoach deaths—in Ohio, Texas, and most recently in New York and New Jersey—do we have to witness before bus companies start doing the right thing? As a father and Senator, it is disturbing to know that students are still traveling in motorcoaches without even the option of buckling up. Our laws should ensure that our vehicles and roads are safer, not less safe, for students, families, and elderly people, who often take motorcoach charters to events and concerts and such.

Tomorrow is the fifth anniversary of the Bluffton University tragic motorcoach accident. Our legislation is in the underlying Transportation bill we are debating on the floor. I urge its passage. I urge continued inclusion of these provisions, as Senator HUTCHISON and I have asked. It is commonsense, middle-of-the-road, bipartisan legislation that will save lives, undoubtedly.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The Senator from Alaska is recognized.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. I thank the Chair. (The remarks of Ms. MURKOWSKI pertaining to the introduction of S. 2151 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BEGICH). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, for everyone's information, it is not as if we have been sitting around doing nothing. We have been trying to work something out on this highway bill. Hopefully, in the next little bit we can do it. We have not been very successful this day. I am glad we had that vote to try to move forward, but there are still some obstacles in the way.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

#### TRIBUTE TO SHERIFF'S DEPUTY JAMES I. THACKER

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to a man who dedicated many great years of service to the residents of Pike County, KY, Sheriff's Deputy James I. Thacker of Elkhorn City, KY.

Sadly, Deputy Thacker was recently killed in a tragic automobile accident in the line of duty on Monday, January 23, on U.S. Highway 460 near Marrowbone, KY. He was 53 years old. I would like to take a moment to share with my colleagues the legacy that was left behind by this great man and humble public servant.

When asked to comment on the untimely death of Deputy Thacker, Pike County Sheriff Charles "Fuzzy" Keese said, "He was kind and compassionate; he treated everyone else like he wanted to be treated. He was that kind of person, just an excellent officer." Deputy Thacker was genuinely devoted to the people of Pike County, whom he had dedicated his life to serve. James has been described as the type of man you could call on day or night, with anything you may need, no matter how big or how small.

Deputy Thacker held an array of jobs in Pike County throughout his life. He served his country as a Marine early on in his life. Later on he became a Pike County road foreman. Next, he spent 8 years as Pike County's constable before assuming the role of Deputy Sheriff a little over a year ago.

Deputy Thacker most assuredly left an incredible legacy in each of the positions he held in his lifetime. He was cherished and appreciated by the citizens of Pike County, and this was proven when hundreds of friends, colleagues and family members attended his visitation to pay their respects. Among