

helping students who are at risk to not graduate from high school as early as prekindergarten and through elementary and middle school.

Some may ask, Why are you concentrating on toddlers and elementary school children when you are trying to solve the high school dropout crisis facing our Nation? Why not focus attention and our Nation's scarce resources on high school students, or even middle school students?

The reason is simple. Early on is when children's troubles in school begin, and an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. High school and middle school students do not just wake up one day and say, I think I will drop out of school today. Twenty-five years of research tells us that dropping out is a long process of frustration, alienation, and even boredom—it is not a sudden decision. We know that students with disabilities, minority and poor children, and students whose home lives are, in all sorts of ways, difficult have lower graduation rates than their peers. The challenges children face today are all too prevalent, and we know the factors that make it harder for them to succeed in school. We know this.

It only makes sense, then, that we rework the program intended to help schools increase their graduation rates so that it actually helps schools help children when we can make the most difference. We need to act before these children have fought for years just to stay afloat, and before they are too tired, frustrated, alienated, and angry to fight anymore.

But I have also heard from some who asked that my legislation include a stronger focus on secondary schools, knowing that today we have middle and high schools that are struggling to keep their students in school and on a path to success. So I have done that.

I have also heard from my State. They shared concerns with me that the cost to create a database combining data from multiple State agencies that have information that will inform schools as to students' risk factors for dropping out—participation in public assistance programs, being homeless or a foster child, having an incarcerated parent, etc.—would be too high. So, knowing that it still makes sense to help our educators better identify students who are at risk, I have amended my bill to just ask the State to help schools access this information while following FERPA and HIPAA rules for privacy of that data.

We all want our schools to be successful. We all want our children to be successful. I am hopeful my colleagues will take a good look at both of these bills, and that they will help to move the conversation forward about how we can help reach our goals.

TRIBUTE TO BRIGADIER GENERAL STEVEN R. RUDDER

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, today I rise to honor a true patriot and

native son of Canton, CT. After more than 3 years of service as the legislative assistant to the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Brig. Gen. Steven R. Rudder is deservedly moving up to assume the responsibilities of commanding general, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. On this occasion, I wish to recognize General Rudder's noble service and dedication to fostering the warm relationship between the U.S. Marine Corps and the U.S. Senate.

Commissioned in June of 1984, General Rudder is well-known and respected as a true leader and warrior. In addition to serving as a weapons and tactics instructor, he has distinguished himself in combat and effectively commanded HML/A-167 and Marine Air Group 26.

Over the last 3 years, General Rudder has been instrumental in facilitating the oversight responsibilities of the Senate. Known for his comprehensive knowledge of legislative issues and the operational requirements of the Marine Corps, he ensured that the Senate Armed Services Committee was armed with timely information on Operation Enduring Freedom and other forward-deployed Marine forces, as well as numerous Marine Corps programs to include the Joint Strike Fighter, the Amphibious Combat Vehicle, and the MV-22 *Osprey*. Moreover, General Rudder worked to recognize the contributions of the Montford Point Marines—the first African Americans who entered into service with the Marine Corps during World War II—with a Congressional Gold Medal.

In 2011 I had the unique privilege of being the guest of honor at the U.S. Marine Corps Sunset Parade, hosted by General Rudder. It was a glorious display of military precision and a truly enjoyable and moving event. I join many past and present members of Congress in my gratitude and appreciation for General Rudder's outstanding leadership. I invite my Senate colleagues to wish him well, along with his wife Holly, as he transfers to Okinawa, Japan.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

ALASKA AIR NATIONAL GUARD

• Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I have the honor today to recognize five great Americans who valiantly risked their lives multiple times in the service of their country. CPT Christopher Keen, MSgt. Sergeant Chad Moore, TSgt. Christopher Harding, SSgt. William Cenna, and SSgt. Sergeant Nickolas Watson are members of the Air National Guard from the State of Alaska who serve with the 212th Rescue Squadron from Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska. I'd like to tell you about some of the heroic actions taken by these men in the summer of 2012, when they were deployed to Afghanistan.

Captain Keen, Master Sergeant Moore, Tech Sergeant Harding, Staff

Sergeant Cenna, and Staff Sergeant Watson are assigned to an Air National Guard unit that specializes in dangerous medical evacuation missions. Pararescue Jumpers, or PJs, train to be inserted into the most hazardous and precarious situations to save lives. They learn to operate in the extreme cold and harsh terrain. As a matter of fact, Staff Sergeant Cenna was part of a five-member team to summit Denali about a month ago on May 9, 2013. PJs train on some of the most cutting edge equipment and master complicated medical procedures. If that is not enough, they prepare to do this job in the face of an enemy that, when they are plunged into the heart of a battle, can appear from any direction.

In order to fully understand the valorous actions of these five men in 2012, I must begin the story in April 2011. Staff Sergeant Cenna, who you will hear about again, was part of a rescue team tasked to recover two U.S. Army pilots downed in the Tagab Valley, Afghanistan. After dropping Sergeant Cenna and his teammate at the crash site, members of the aircrew were injured by enemy fire and forced to leave the team without overhead coverage. On the ground, insurgents began voicing their intent to take individuals hostage and Sergeant Cenna began taking enemy fire. A six-hour firefight ensued, and Sergeant Cenna maintained complete situational awareness while relaying critical information to attack helicopters above. Risking his life repeatedly, Sergeant Cenna's actions directly contributed to eliminating the threat and most importantly, enabled the recovery of the downed American pilot, a killed in action infantryman, and another critically wounded soldier from enemy territory. For his gallantry and devotion to duty on April 23, 2011, Staff Sergeant Cenna was awarded the Silver Star.

Just over a year later, on July 29, 2012, Staff Sergeant Cenna was again deployed to Afghanistan. He, along with Tech Sergeant Harding and Staff Sergeant Watson, were conducting a mission to evacuate two Danish soldiers near Gereshk, Afghanistan. The Danes had been critically wounded and were pinned down in an active firefight. The three-man pararescue team infiltrated at an unplanned insertion point approximately 100 meters from the soldiers. Without hesitation, the PJs maneuvered through a field with possible improvised explosive devices and enemy machine gun fire. The team then forded a flowing canal and climbed a 12-foot embankment to reach the wounded Danish soldiers. After applying lifesaving medical interventions and evacuating them to the transport vehicle, the team was notified of two more critically wounded soldiers at the incident site. Exposing themselves to extreme danger again, the team extracted those wounded troopers as well. In all that day, Tech Sergeant Harding, Staff Sergeant Cenna, and Staff Sergeant Watson saved four lives. Just a