

they have worked with Congress to make a stronger and more effective department for America's veterans. He has provided continuity in the Department's communication with Congress during the shift of executive administrations.

Most recently, Mr. O'Connor worked with our committee on the VA MIS-SION Act, which is a major reform in veterans' healthcare. He also helped inform Members of Congress about the need to modernize the department's antiquated electronic health records system, and he played a key role as the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act made its way through Congress.

Under his leadership, Mr. O'Connor and his team prepared VA's senior leaders to successfully participate in more than 400 congressional hearings. Their office also coordinated thousands of informational briefings to Members of Congress, committee staff, and personal staff that advanced VA's message and priorities.

Upon his upcoming retirement, Mr. O'Connor leaves the Department with an important legacy. In 2017, Mr. O'Connor spearheaded the Congressional Fellowship Program, which places VA employees in a yearlong fellowship position in the office of a Member of Congress.

Today, I am honored to pay tribute to Mr. O'Connor for his service to our country and his steadfast commitment to advocating on behalf of veterans throughout his career. Congratulations to Mr. O'Connor on his lasting legacy of advocacy for veterans, and I wish him the best in his retirement.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO DAVID BRANSCUM

• Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, today I wish to congratulate David Branscum for being named Arkansas Rural Advocate of the Year by the Arkansas Rural Development Commission.

Raised in Marshall, David is a third-generation cattle rancher, farmer, and small business owner who has dedicated more than four decades of his life to rural Arkansas. After graduating from the University of Arkansas with a degree in agriculture and economics, he returned home to run the family farm and lumber business. For 7 years, David represented House District 83 as a member of the Arkansas House of Representatives where he served on both the agriculture and health committees and chaired the legislative council. In 2017, he resigned from the House after Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue appointed him as Arkansas director for the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Rural Development.

In this role, David has implemented programs across the State intended to improve the quality of life in Arkansas' rural communities. These programs in-

clude rural business development grants, single and multifamily housing loans, community facility grants, and water and waste disposal monies.

One of David's top priorities and one of the largest challenges facing Arkansas and much of rural America is access to reliable and affordable broadband connectivity. With nearly \$1 billion in grant money available nationwide to expand broadband services to rural communities, he has championed this program around our State.

I congratulate David for being named the Arkansas Rural Advocate of the Year. He has spent his career working to advance the economy and improve the standard of living for rural residents throughout Arkansas, and our State is a better place because of him.●

TRIBUTE TO CADET COLONEL SHELBY PETERSON

• Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, today I have the honor of recognizing Civil Air Patrol Cadet Colonel Shelby Petersen of Kalispell. Cadet Colonel Petersen is the first Montanan since 2004 to receive the General Carl A. Spaatz Award, which is the Civil Air Patrol's highest cadet honor.

The Spaatz Award is given to cadets who have demonstrated excellence in leadership, character, fitness, and aerospace education. The selection process is extremely rigorous, and only 5 out of every 1,000 cadets earns the award. Cadet Colonel Petersen joined the Civil Air Patrol at the age of 12, following in the footsteps of her older brother. From day 1, her goal was to become squadron commander and win the Spaatz Award. She has thrived as a member of the Flathead Composite Squadron, receiving 18 promotions and achieving her goal of becoming the squadron commander. I had the pleasure of meeting Cadet Colonel Petersen in March 2018, when she was selected to participate in the prestigious Civil Air Patrol Leadership Academy. There, cadets spend a week in Washington, DC, and gain greater insight into the inner workings of government through meetings with Members of Congress, the State Department, and the intelligence community. She is an outstanding young Montanan who understands what it means to put service before self.

As squadron commander, she has taken a keen interest in mentoring younger cadets and pushes them to set and meet high expectations for themselves. In fact, her final assignment as a Civil Air Patrol cadet is cadet commander for this summer's Civil Air Patrol boot camp.

Cadet Colonel Petersen is currently finishing her senior year at Glacier High School in Kalispell and upon graduation will enlist in the Marine Corps to continue her service to our country. I congratulate Cadet Colonel Petersen on winning the Spaatz Award, and I thank her for her service. I know that she will continue to make her community and Montana proud.●

TRIBUTE TO TOM LEWIS

• Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, today, I am honored to recognize in the RECORD Mr. Tom Lewis of Atlanta, GA, the senior adviser to the president of Georgia State University. Tom has announced he will retire in June after 28 years of service to the school.

Tom Lewis has built a strong legacy in our State and Federal Government, as well as in higher education. Early on, he learned the value of public service from his parents, Eleanor and Carlton Lewis. While he was a student at Georgia Southern University, he spent time here in the Senate as an intern for the venerable Senator Richard B. Russell of Georgia. Upon his graduation from the university, he worked on the campaign of then-Presidential candidate Jimmy Carter of Plains, GA, who was subsequently elected to the office of U.S. President.

Next, Tom set out to make a difference in our State government as executive director of the Georgia Franchise Practices Commission from 1974 to 1978. Later, while he was executive vice president of the Bartow County Chamber of Commerce, Tom met and befriended State legislator Joe Frank Harris of Cartersville, GA, and his wife Elizabeth. That friendship turned into a trusted bond, and when Joe Frank Harris set out to become Governor of Georgia, Tom joined his campaign as an adviser and served in several roles in Harris's administration, including as chief of staff from 1986 to 1991.

I got to know Tom while I was also serving in the Georgia General Assembly, and he was always someone who you could count on and trust. When he went on to Georgia State University, he left his mark there, advancing the school's interests, creating new opportunities, and helping Georgia State University grow in the early years and then absolutely take off. The Washington Post has called Georgia State University a "hotbed of growth and innovation." This and many of its other well-earned accolades are due not only to a serious and active student body, but also thanks to the long-term planning and constant efforts of great leaders like Tom Lewis.

In addition to his accomplishments spanning decades and touching countless lives, Tom and his wife Patty are the parents of three children, Wes, Ellen, and Shannon. His five grandchildren, Wesley Claire, Leighton, Will, Nate, and Jacks will surely benefit from Tom's retirement. I have a strong suspicion that his home community of Cartersville, GA, will benefit from the additional time he is able to spend in town, too.

As Tom and Patty prepare for this new chapter, I wish them and their families all the best. I offer my deepest gratitude for their friendship and work on behalf of our State.●