

Senate Republican conference, an important leadership position in which he influenced his fellow Members to accomplish conservative achievements by working in unison.

Currently, LAMAR is the chairman of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, HELP, Committee—a “Class A” committee in the Senate. In 2016, he was instrumental in passing the overwhelmingly bipartisan 21st Century Cures Act—landmark legislation that has brought new innovations and advances to patients who need them faster and more efficiently.

I have been blessed to serve with LAMAR on the Senate Rules Committee and the Senate Appropriations Committee, where he is the current chairman of the Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development.

In this role on Appropriations, he has supported and advanced a host of important national priorities, such as nuclear security, critical infrastructure projects across the country, and the science and research taking place at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory. I, along with my colleagues on the committee, am grateful for his hard work to craft many years of significant and influential funding measures.

LAMAR came to the Senate as a staffer and is leaving as chairman of one of the largest and most significant committees in the Senate. His impact and leadership during his time here has been both substantial and constructive.

LAMAR and I have travelled the world together. Annette and I have enjoyed the many hours spent with Honey and him. He will be missed in the Senate. I thank Senator ALEXANDER for his dedication to the betterment of our country and wish him all the best in his next chapter of life.

HONORING AMERICA'S FALLEN SERVICEMEMBERS

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, as we approach the end of another year, I rise to remember all those American men and women who have given what President Lincoln called “the last full measure of devotion” in service to this great Nation.

I often reflect on the Gettysburg Address when thinking about our servicemembers and veterans. We all know this short, somber speech has reverberated throughout our history with an influence that vastly exceeds the few minutes for which Lincoln actually spoke. In November 1863, President Lincoln stood on the battlefield in Gettysburg to bless those brave soldiers who had fallen in what was the bloodiest battle in U.S. history up to that point. The “last full measure of devotion” remark has always resonated with me, as it does with so many Americans, but Lincoln had another message in his address. He said, “It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.”

Even in moments of mourning, Lincoln charged those still standing to rededicate themselves to the hard work of preserving our Nation’s integrity, protecting our fundamental freedoms, and building our families’ security and prosperity. In a time of great division, this was no small task, and it today remains one of our urgent and most solemn tasks.

The year after the Gettysburg Address, the women of Boalsburg, PA, began a tradition that would carry on for generations. They gathered together to decorate the gravestones of their loved ones who had gone to God. They wanted to reach beyond the pain to show their fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons that their memories endure in the hearts and minds of the living. Honoring the spirit and sacrifice of our military and veterans isn’t just about isolated days of commemoration on Veterans Day and Memorial Day each year, it is about the work we do every day to be worthy of their valor, as my father used to say.

As we discuss a potential U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, combat the resurgence of ISIS in the Middle East, exercise oversight over other U.S. military engagements overseas, and look to resolve increasingly complicated global crises, we must not forget those who have given the ultimate sacrifice in service to our country, particularly in the most recent wars. The numbers are important: 7034 Americans have lost their lives in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, with an additional 7 killed in African Command operations since 2001. This includes 300 servicemembers from Pennsylvania—the fifth highest toll of any State. Over 53,000 have been wounded, including more than 2,000 from Pennsylvania. Although this administration refuses to be transparent in its deployment tracking, press reports indicate that approximately 7,500 Americans are currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, with an additional 65,000 serving in the Persian Gulf and Saudi Arabia.

This year, for the first time in nearly two decades, Pennsylvania did not lose any servicemembers abroad. While I am grateful Pennsylvania did not suffer losses this year, this milestone only serves as a reminder of the grim toll that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have taken on the Commonwealth and the Nation. As families of fallen servicemembers continue to mourn, we must reconsider the nature of our military commitments overseas and recommit to ensuring those who serve are taken care of.

These fighting men and women were born into families, not into divisions and brigades. They are sons and daughters, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers. Their love for their families is matched only by their devotion to our country.

But many more bear the scars of war. Some families have a loved one who served in Iraq or Afghanistan and returned home but was one of the 53,250

wounded. And we must not overlook the unusually high percentage of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who have died since returning home, whether from drug overdose or suicide. Thousands of American families continue to pay a terrible price for the courage and dedication of their family members who gave life and limb for this country.

As we look to a new year and a new Congress, I am reminded of the moments when policymakers reached across the aisle, putting partisan differences aside to implement ideas that best served the American people. We can think about the establishment of the first system of State veterans homes after the Civil War, enactment of the GI bill after World War II, creation of the modern, Cabinet-level Department of Veterans Affairs under President Reagan, all required foresight and courage to see come to fruition. The year ahead provides an opportunity for further bipartisan cooperation in service of our veterans and our men and women in uniform.

Each of us, those who have served and those who haven’t, must be a part of the effort toward healing. We can meet today’s challenges with the spirit of the women in Boalsburg so many years ago, to remember our past and keep working towards our future. We can continue our work here in Washington, in Pennsylvania, and across the Nation, to ensure we are worthy of the valor of the men and women we commemorate today. I call on my colleagues in the Senate to reflect every day on the sacrifice of those who came before us.

As another year comes to a close, we remember and honor those who have laid down their lives for this great Nation. God bless them.

TRIBUTE TO SENATOR DOUG JONES' STAFF

Mr. JONES. Mr. President, as I mentioned in my farewell speech last week, I also wanted to spend a few final moments here on the Senate floor honoring my incredible staff. As the first Democrat elected to the Senate from Alabama in two decades, I had no idea how many brilliant young folks would want to come work in my offices, but we were absolutely overwhelmed with the talent my election attracted—and not just from Alabama—we had applicants from all over the country. We of course tried to give priority to folks from Alabama, but we did have a few from other States who brought special expertise and who, after just a short time with us, became honorary Alabamians.

Some of my staff came from other Senate or House offices where they had been biding their time, hoping 1 day to work for an Alabama Democratic Senator. Their experience was critical. Some staff members brought no legislative experience at all, but they were quick and eager learners and got up to speed unbelievably fast. What they all