

Although Carmen may no longer be with us, I pray that her friends and family have found some sense of solace knowing that she was not alone at the end of her life's journey but was surrounded by loved ones who sought to comfort her with their presence and their prayers. I would like to share the family's appreciation for the U.S. Navy officials who helped everyone through the difficult issues that arose from Carmen's end-of-life care. She had devoted herself to service and looked forward to a promising career in the Navy, and in her final moments they did everything they could to ensure she was treated with the honor and respect she deserved.

Of particular assistance and comfort to the family were Carmen's commanding officer, LCDR Tim Sullivan, as well as Senior Chief Joseph Adamo, LT Tim Johnson, CAPT Charles King, and ADM Annette Brown. Their compassion and understanding made a tragic situation a little more bearable.

My thoughts and prayers go out to the friends and family of Carmen McCormick, particularly her parents, Michael Flanigan and Leslie Santa Maria. Although her time with us was far too short, her spirit and her love will remain in our hearts forever.●

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE SAN LUIS VALLEY

● Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, I today recognize the extraordinary contributions of the San Luis Valley, in my home State of Colorado, to our national heritage and to the history of the West.

As a native son of the San Luis Valley, I know how hard the peoples of the region have fought to protect their traditions, their language, their art and architecture, and the stories of their ancestors. They have fought to protect treasured ranchlands, sand dunes, waterways, and mountain peaks. And they have fought to protect a rural way of life that cherishes family, faith, and hard work.

To support the stewardship efforts of the valley's peoples, and to ensure that the national treasures of the region are preserved for generations to come, I have introduced legislation to create the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area in the San Luis Valley.

This legislation will direct the National Park Service to assist citizens, organizations, and local governments in Alamosa, Costilla, and Conejos Counties in developing a management plan to guide the continued stewardship of the region's cultural and natural resources. Though this bill provides local communities assistance from the Federal Government, I am proud that the National Heritage Area Program rewards a consensual, locally driven approach to management rather than a top-down, federally dominated approach.

This bill provides economic assistance to a region that has paid an eco-

nomic price for preserving its rural way of life. The towns of San Luis and Antonito, among the oldest settlements in Colorado, have successfully preserved their moradas, placitas, historic churches, religious celebrations, and historic festivals, yet the counties they are in, Conejos and Costilla, are two of the four poorest in America. This bill helps these communities leverage their cultural capital to spur economic development by providing up to \$10 million to rebuild historic structures, develop interpretive exhibits, and attract tourism.

The cultural and historic value of the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area is immeasurable. Since people first settled in the San Luis Valley over 11,000 years ago, the region has been home to Ute, Navajo, Tiwa, Tewa, Kiowa, Hispano, and Anglo peoples, among others. The cultures, lifestyles, and cosmologies of the valley's settlers have converged, conflicted, and coalesced through the centuries, and have left an unmistakable imprint on the peoples who inhabit the Valley today. The region was dubbed "The Land of the Blue Sky People" in honor of the Utes, the oldest continuous residents of what is now Colorado, and is the home of Mount Blanca or Sisnaajini, the sacred mountain that, according to folklore, marks the eastern boundary of the Navajo world. Seventeenth century Spanish, still spoken by about 35 percent of the population of the Sangre de Cristo region, testifies to the strong influence of Hispano settlers, while the narrow gauge rails of the Rio Grande Railroad recall America's era of westward expansion.

In addition to its remarkable historical landmarks and cultural treasures, the San Luis Valley's natural wonders attract visitors from around the world. The valley is home to 3 National Wildlife Refuges, 15 State Wildlife Refuges, a National Forest, 2 National Forest Wilderness Areas, and the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve. These public lands, and thousands of acres of private lands in between, are home to a rich array of plants and animals, from the pika of the alpine tundra to the pronghorn of the prairie and the sandhill cranes among the dunes.

This legislation will help protect these crown jewels of the American landscape by supporting a local, consensus-based approach to land management. Because the best management policies come through cooperation, not coercion, this bill maintains strong protections for private property owners. The Federal funds in this bill cannot be used to purchase private property and the management plan cannot restrict the rights of property owners on their own lands.

For generations the peoples of the San Luis Valley have worked hard to be good stewards of their land and water. They have worked hard to preserve their culture and a rural way of life. And they have worked hard to create this National Heritage Area.

They are looking for our help now to protect a place so central to Colorado peoples, so emblematic of the Western landscape, and so much at the core of the American experience.

Let us honor the contributions of the San Luis Valley to our Nation's heritage by designating the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area.●

U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL SERVING IN IRAQ

● Mr. SANTORUM. Mr. President, today is a historic day for the people of Iraq as they go to the polls to freely elect a permanent 275-member Iraqi National Assembly. It is important to remember that these elections in Iraq would not have been possible without the bravery and sacrifice of the U.S. Armed Forces who have served and are currently serving in Iraq helping to provide the Iraqi people with the freedom and democracy that they deserve.

Our service members who are serving in Iraq are promoting democracy, restoring and repairing public services, working to prevent terror attack, and destroying the insurgency in a country that hasn't known freedom in decades.

As we focus on the meaning of Thursday's election in Iraq, it is important to realize the extraordinary bravery exhibited by our service members.

One unit in particular, the 4th Civil Affairs Group, CAG, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, based in Washington, DC was deployed to Iraq during the January 30, 2005 elections of a temporary Iraqi National Assembly. These marines, many of whom are from my State of Pennsylvania, helped to promote democracy, restore and repair public services to the Iraqi people, and prevent terror attacks by insurgents. This particular unit played an active role in the election day operations in January by setting up polling locations and participating in security patrols to protect voters and voting sites and was an integral part in the United States' battle for Fallujah. Also during its deployment, the 4th CAG worked to install new electricity transformers in the Iraqi city of Ramadi, the capital city of the al Anbar Province, also known as one of the most dangerous cities in Iraq. And I would be remiss if I failed to mention that the deputy commander of this unit of brave marines was William Reynolds, now proudly serving as Senator Specter's chief of staff.

One marine in particular from that unit, CPL William Cahir, has written about his experiences in Iraq. Corporal Cahir, originally from State College PA, was a journalist before September 11, 2001. After seeing the horrific terrorist attacks that occurred in our country on that day, Bill Cahir felt compelled to serve our country and joined the Marine Corps. As part of the 4th CAG of the Marine Corps Reserve, Corporal Cahir was deployed to Iraq.

During his deployment to Iraq, Corporal Cahir, along with other members of the 4th CAG, helped to establish a