

of over 750,000 veterans conducted by Dr. Jonathan Perlin, the Under Secretary for Health at the VA, consistently found that veterans living in rural areas are in poorer health than their urban counterparts. Still, despite the fact that 23 percent of the Nation's veterans live in rural areas, the VA does not have a high-level office responsible for coordinating care to this vital constituency.

This is simply unacceptable. We need policies that address the plight of our rural veterans, and we need them now.

With that objective in mind, Senator THUNE and I recently introduced legislation that would significantly enhance our approach to rural veterans' health care. Thanks to the support of the 12 cosponsors of this legislation and to the bipartisan efforts of my colleagues on the Veterans' Affairs Committee who worked to ensure its fair, insightful, and constructive review, we were able to include many of this legislation's provisions as part of S. 2694, a broader legislative package that passed out of committee last week.

In keeping with the objectives of our original Rural Veterans Care Act, this legislation would create an Office of Rural Health within the Veterans Health Administration. The new office would be responsible for taking a number of steps aimed at improving the way we provide care to rural veterans. Specifically, the Office of Rural Health would be charged with conducting, promoting, and disseminating research into issues affecting rural veterans, and developing and refining policies and programs to improve care and services for rural veterans. Because nearly one in every four veterans is from a rural area, the creation of this Office of Rural Health is crucial if we are to live up to our promise to provide all of our Nation's veterans with high-quality services.

Through specifically designated officials in each of the country's 23 Veterans Integrated Service Networks, this office will have a real and effective presence in rural veterans communities. These individuals will serve as regional officers responsible for consulting on and coordinating research and policies in their respective service networks. Their insight into how to provide rural veterans in their areas with the best health care possible will be incredibly useful and will help expand the reach of the new office outside the beltway, and to all corners of the country.

The Office of Rural Health will also be required to conduct a study on the feasibility of expanding the use of fee-basis care, whereby the VA contracts its services out on a limited basis to third party providers. I continue to believe we should carefully explore every available option when it comes to improving access to care for veterans living in rural areas, and I am happy that this legislation will provide a way to do just that.

With almost one-quarter of our Nation's veterans living in rural commu-

nities, and with the obstacles they face with respect to accessing high-quality care so pronounced, it is obvious we need to do better. I am pleased that the Veterans' Affairs Committee has taken an important first step toward that goal, and I am committed to working with my colleagues in the Senate, with the VA, and with veterans across the country to build on this momentum. This legislation may not be the whole answer, but it is a start, and the dialogue we have helped to start on this critical issue is long overdue.

I want to thank Senators THUNE, AKAKA, BURR, MURRAY, BAUCUS, BURNS, CONRAD, DORGAN, PRYOR, LINCOLN, MURKOWSKI, THOMAS, and ENZI for cosponsoring the Rural Veterans' Care Act. I also want to thank Chairman CRAIG and his staff for working with me and the rest of the bill's sponsors to include a provision creating a new Office of Rural Health as part of S. 2694.

I know that each and every one of my colleagues deals with veterans issues and feels a deep sense of gratitude toward the brave men and women who have fought for our freedom. I hope we can join together in support of our rural veterans. We owe it to them to make sure our actions match our rhetoric when it comes to expressing our gratitude and fulfilling the promises we have made. Toward that end, I look forward to seeing this legislation passed by Congress and sent to the President for his signature.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

125TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING OF WENTWORTH, SOUTH DAKOTA

• Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, today I wish to pay tribute to the 125th anniversary of the founding of the city of Wentworth, SD.

The first settlers came to Wentworth by horse or oxen-drawn wagons, and were mainly from Milwaukee, eastern Atlantic States, Minnesota, and Iowa. The land had few trees, and most of the settlers built and lived in sod houses. On December 15, 1880, the land was surveyed and platted for owner Rinaldo Wentworth and the town was later named for his father, George Wentworth.

In 1880 the first business—a grocery store—opened its door in Wentworth. In 1881, the first train came into Wentworth, in 1904 the first telephone line was installed, and in 1917 electric street lights were turned on. There were several hotels that operated in early Wentworth as well, including the Commercial Hotel, which is now on display at nearby Prairie Village.

Wentworth will be commemorating its anniversary with a celebration from June 30 through July 4. The town plans to hold golf tournaments, parades, softball tournaments, car shows, and fireworks. The 5-day event promises to be a great opportunity to celebrate such a historic milestone.

Even 125 years after its founding, Wentworth continues to be a vibrant and progressive community. I am proud to honor the accomplishments of the people of Wentworth, and congratulate them on this impressive achievement.●

TRIBUTE TO WILLIAM CHRISTOPHER VILLAR

• Mr. MARTINEZ. Mr. President, today I wish to share with you the story of a remarkable young man from Milton, FL. William Christopher Villar, by all surface accounts, was your typical 22-year-old. He was attending community college with the hopes of one day obtaining a degree in business. He was working at a job that he loved, and he had recently gotten engaged to his long time sweetheart, Heather Dieterich. His life was unfolding the way we hope that all of our children's lives will eventually unfold.

Certainly, it was not these things or even the fact that, as a young man, he was actively involved with his church that made him atypical. And it was not the fact that he was a star on the basketball court—making the All-Conference and All-State teams his senior year at Central High School in Santa Rosa County—a high school he entered after being home schooled for a number of years. Quite simply, it was his selflessness and his unyielding love for his family that set him apart.

Chris was the oldest of three boys. As such, he was fiercely protective of his younger brothers. There is a story the family tells about an accident that happened 12 years ago that illustrates this best: Chris and Jacob, his youngest brother, were riding in the back seat of their father's car when the driver of a large recreational vehicle, coming over the peak of the I-10 bridge between Santa Rosa and Escambia counties, failed to slow down for a disabled vehicle. The significantly larger vehicle collided with Villar's car with devastating force. Chris, in an instinctive moment and without thinking of his own safety, grabbed his 2-year-old brother Jacob—perched high in his car seat—and threw his own 10-year-old body over him to save him. That should tell you volumes about the kind of person Chris Villar was.

By and large, the people who knew Chris all said the same things about him: He was a "good boy" and he had been "raised right." That is a compliment we hear far too infrequently these days, but it is a testament to his parents. It should make them proud.

I wish I could tell you that the story ends there that this exceptional boy will one day become an exceptional man, an exceptional husband, and an exceptional dad. Unfortunately, on the evening of Thursday, June 15, Christopher Villar's life came to a tragic end when a car driven by a drunk driver crashed through the roof of his family's home. This was an avoidable tragedy. This is a grave reminder of the dangers of driving while under the influence.

Just moments before this tragedy began to unfold, Chris, like so many of us, had been enjoying the NBA playoffs with his family. He was a New York Knicks fan but pulled for the Miami Heat in this series as a way to tease his younger brother, Matt. They were kidding about it, as brothers do, when a loud noise was heard in the front yard. Whether it was the sheer instinct of a protective older brother, the hand of God, or both, Chris pushed Matt away from himself and toward the middle of his room just as the car crashed through the ceiling. In that instant, it was over. If any good can be found in this tragedy, it is that one life was lost instead of two. Once again, Chris hadn't thought of himself.

Mr. President, these words do nothing to ease the pain the friends and family of William Christopher Villar are feeling today. Their void is a void that no words can fill. I share them with you because this remarkable young man deserves to be remembered, not for the tragic accident that took his life but for the positive impact he had on the lives of others.●

125TH ANNIVERSARY OF ASHTON, SOUTH DAKOTA

● Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize the community of Ashton, SD, on reaching the 125th anniversary of its founding. Ashton is a rural community located in Spink County.

The city of Ashton was founded in the summer of 1881. There are competing stories of how the town was named: one that it was named for the railroad official R.H. Ashton; one that a group of settlers from Boston named it for a town in England; and one that it was named for the groves of Ash trees in the James Valley. The first store was operated out of a tent by Mr. McPherson. The town grew quickly, with two real estate offices, a blacksmith, and two lumberyards soon constructed. The train arrived in Ashton in September of 1881, shortly followed by the telegraph. The post office was established on December 8, 1881. Other early buildings on in Ashton were the Bowman House, CC Morris General Store, Basset and Kelly's Hardware, Anderson's Bakery, and Reed, and Kelsey's Drug Store.

Ashton was named county seat of Spink County by the Territorial Legislature in 1885, though the seat moved to Redfield about 2 years later. The people of Ashton endured a series of disasters in the ensuing years. There were large fires in 1887, 1890, 1908, and 1910. Also, a tornado damaged much of the town in 1897.

Today, Ashton is still a thriving community. There are many active businesses operating in Ashton, such as a seed and spraying store; plumbing, heating and sheet metal services; a post office; and neighborhood bar.

The people of Ashton celebrated this momentous occasion on the weekend of

June 16–18. 125 years after its founding, Ashton remains a vital community and a great asset to the wonderful State of South Dakota. I am proud to honor Ashton on this historic milestone.●

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

At 12:22 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Ms. Niland, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bill, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 4416. An act to reauthorize permanently the use of penalty and franked mail in efforts relating to the location and recovery of missing children.

The message also announced that the House has agreed to the following concurrent resolution, without amendment:

S. Con. Res. 103. Concurrent resolution to correct the enrollment of the bill H.R. 889.

At 2:23 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Hanrahan, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House agrees to the report of the committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 889) to authorize appropriations for the Coast Guard for fiscal year 2006, to make technical corrections to various laws administered by the Coast Guard, and for other purposes.

MEASURES REFERRED

The following bill was read the first and the second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

H.R. 4416. An act to reauthorize permanently the use of penalty and franked mail in efforts relating to the location and recovery of missing children; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The following communications were laid before the Senate, together with accompanying papers, reports, and documents, and were referred as indicated:

EC-7328. A communication from the Associate General Counsel for Legislation and Regulations, Office of Community Planning and Development, Department of Housing and Urban Development, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Prohibition on Use of Community Development Block Grant Assistance for Job-Pirating Activities" ((RIN2506-AC04)(FR-4556-F-03)) received on June 15, 2006; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC-7329. A communication from the Associate General Counsel for Legislation and Regulations, Office of Community Planning and Development, Department of Housing and Urban Development, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Community Development Block Grant Programs; Revision of CDBG Eligibility and National Objective Regulations" ((RIN2506-AC12)(FR-4699-F-02)) received on June 15,

2006; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC-7330. A communication from the Chairman, Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, transmitting, pursuant to law, the annual report on the profitability of the credit card operations of depository institutions; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC-7331. A communication from the Secretary of the Treasury, transmitting, pursuant to law, two semiannual reports which were prepared separately by both the Treasury Department's Office of Inspector General and Inspector General for Tax Administration for the period ended March 31, 2006; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

EC-7332. A communication from the Fiscal Assistant Secretary, Department of the Treasury, transmitting, pursuant to law, the annual reports that appear on pages 119–143 of the March 2006 "Treasury Bulletin"; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC-7333. A communication from the Chairman and President (Acting) of the Export-Import Bank of the United States, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to a transaction involving U.S. exports to the Turkey; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC-7334. A communication from the Chairman and President (Acting) of the Export-Import Bank of the United States, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to transactions involving U.S. exports to the Chile; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC-7335. A communication from the Acting Chair, Federal Subsistence Board, Fish and Wildlife Service, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Subsistence Management Regulations for Public Lands in Alaska, Subparts C and D—2006–2007 Subsistence Taking of Fish and Wildlife Regulations" (RIN1018-AT98) received on June 15, 2006; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC-7336. A communication from the Principal Deputy Associate Administrator, Office of Policy, Economics, and Innovation, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Approval and Promulgation of Air Quality Implementation Plans; Lakeview PM10 Maintenance Plan and Redesignation Request" (FRL No. 8179-5) received on June 15, 2006; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC-7337. A communication from the Principal Deputy Associate Administrator, Office of Policy, Economics, and Innovation, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Approval and Promulgation of Air Quality Implementation Plans; La Grande PM10 Maintenance Plan and Redesignation Request" (FRL No. 8179-4) received on June 15, 2006; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC-7338. A communication from the Principal Deputy Associate Administrator, Office of Policy, Economics, and Innovation, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Approval and Promulgation of Air Quality Implementation Plans; Medford-Ashland PM10 Attainment Plan, Maintenance Plan and Redesignation Request" (FRL No. 8175-7) received on June 15, 2006; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC-7339. A communication from the Principal Deputy Associate Administrator, Office of Policy, Economics, and Innovation, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Outer Continental Shelf Air Regulations