

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES
PRIVATE FIRST CLASS THEODORE M. "COTY"
WEST

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the legacy left behind by a brave young Kentuckian. In Berea, KY, people remember Theodore M. "Coty" West as a devoted husband, a caring older brother, a loving son, and a steadfast friend.

His fellow soldiers remember him as a sturdy soldier who cared about his buddies. His legacy remains in the form of a charity he founded that sends care packages to soldiers serving in Iraq. This work is now carried on by his family, in his memory.

PFC Theodore M. West—"Coty" was his nickname—enlisted in the U.S. Army in August 2005, and was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, at Fort Hood, TX.

He was deployed in Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in November 2006. Just a few weeks later, on November 29, 2006, an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle during combat operations in Baghdad, tragically ending Coty's life. He was 23 years old.

For his valorous service, Private First Class West received the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart, along with numerous other medals and awards.

Private First Class West understood the values that set America apart have been paid for by freedom's defenders, and he wanted to join their ranks. In a letter to his church that arrived on the day he died, Coty urged his friends at home to "sleep well tonight . . . because tonight we stand guard on the wall, and no one will get through to hurt you."

That kind of courage to stand up to any enemy, that strength of spirit, made Coty West one of America's finest sons.

Coty grew up amidst the rolling hills of Berea, KY, surrounded by a loving family, a circle of friends, and a devoted young wife. All of these members of Coty's community hold special memories of him, from when he was a little boy to the day he left for Fort Hood.

It was in Berea, when Coty was only 4 years old, that he told his parents he and his brother Ben would go out and dig for treasure. His parents told their young treasure hunters to be safe and stay within sight. Imagine their surprise when Coty and Ben returned home with a collection of 14 antique silver dollars and some antique jewelry they had dug up in the yard.

Coty's family was important to him. They remember him gallantly saddling up and taking out his horse at the age of 8, in a saddle as big as he was, desperately trying to be brave, when he must have been scared to death.

And the time he and his younger sister Sheri enrolled in a hunting safety course so they could get their hunting licenses. The younger Sheri bested Coty by 10 points on the test, a fact he was never allowed to live down.

Coty and his family especially enjoyed taking road trips. They would travel to NASCAR races, State parks, and Civil War battlefields. It was something the family cherished, especially as the kids grew up. It gave them a way of all getting back together again.

On July 5, 2006, Coty married Jennifer Gregory in a military ceremony near her home in Greenville, KY. His father later wrote that "the ceremony really fit Coty, as it was beautiful, it was country, and it was military." Jennifer remembers her husband as "an angel . . . and perfect." I am certain Coty felt the same about her.

After graduating from Estill County High School, Coty worked in his family's energy and construction business as an operator and foreman. He was certain, though, that his career lay in the military. His father describes Coty as neither a hawk nor a dove, but a soldier. He viewed his job as protecting those he loved and waging war on those who would harm them.

Early on in his military career, Coty became aware of the financial burden combat could have on his fellow soldiers. He also felt for those with little or no family, who lacked the messages from home that so often sustain a young soldier.

So Coty began a charity to help his fellow soldiers going to Iraq. His efforts evolved into "Coty and Friends," a circle of military families and supporters who would send soldiers needed supplies before their deployment.

But Coty never lived to see his plans come to fruition. He was killed before the first box of Coty and Friends supplies arrived in Iraq. The group's efforts still continue, in his memory.

The night Coty was deployed to Iraq, the last thing he told his family was: "I love you all, I know you love me, I am good at my job, and I will see you soon."

Coty leaves behind a beloved family. He is missed and cherished by his wife, Jennifer Gregory West, his mother, Rene Brandenburg, his father, Bill West, his stepmother, Mary Ann West, his sister, Sheri Miller, his brothers Dee, Matt, and Ben West, his grandparents Rufus West and Jessie Mae Brandenburg, and many others.

Coty West understood the price of freedom. He wanted his family to be safe here at home, and he saw that they would be, as he and his fellow soldiers stood guard on the wall. He gave of himself so others could enjoy what he fought to protect.

The Coty and Friends charity still brings his family together, and it still sustains our brave sons and daughters in Iraq who stand guard on the wall, so that others may live in peace and security.

This country will never forget PFC Theodore West's sacrifice. Neither will the soldier in Iraq who opens a Coty and Friends care package tonight. I ask the Senate to send their thoughts and prayers to the West family, who continue to give to their country, even after they have already given so much.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The senior Senator from Massachusetts is recognized.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, we are all thankful for those comments given by our Members about the extraordinary bravery and heroism of our men and women who serve in the Armed Forces of our country. All of us, day after day, salute their courage and their dedication to the country, and it reminds us of our responsibility of making sure we are going to get the policy right in Iraq. More about that at another time.

THE ECONOMY AND WORKING
FAMILIES

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, we find ourselves now in the middle of June, and it is important, as we move through the legislative agenda—and more on that next week—that we pause for a few moments and take stock about where our country is in terms of the economy of this Nation and take stock about where our country is with regard to working families in this Nation.

We often get tied up on particular pieces of legislation, but I think all of us are very mindful it is the working families of this Nation who have made America great. If America is great—and it is great—it is because of working families in all parts of our Nation.

We are mindful of our recent history: of those extraordinary men and women who lifted our Nation out of the Great Depression of the 1920s and the 1930s; the extraordinary exploitation of workers that took place, even prior to that time and during that period of time; and the struggle workers had in order to have a voice in the decisionmaking part of this Nation, in the workplace as well as in governmental policies, that influenced the conditions by which they worked. It was a long, continuing struggle. It was a long, continuing struggle, with a loss of life and blood that was shed and with battles that were fought—physically fought.

Out of the end of it came the trade union movement, which has made such a difference in terms of the life of this country, the fairness of the country, the economic fairness and economic justice of the Nation.

It has always impressed me—as one who has been a sponsor of the increase in the minimum wage, with a number of our colleagues—that even though many of these union members are making a good deal more than the minimum wage, that any time issues about the working conditions of fellow Americans who are at the short end of the economic ladder arise, they are always out there. They are always there. They are always not only speaking for but in support of their fellow workers in this country.

That was seen in this last year in the six different States that had initiatives about the increase in the minimum