

Mainers across our State ushered in this week of solemn events and wreath-laying ceremonies sponsored by Wreaths Across America, the culmination of which will be the delivery of as many as 16,000 wreaths for placement at Arlington National Cemetery on December 12 as well as observances in more than 400 participating locations nationwide, including 24 overseas veterans cemeteries. Indeed, I could not have been more gratified to join Senator COLLINS in introducing legislation, designating December 12, 2009, as "Wreaths Across America Day" which passed the Senate unanimously on the first of this month.

What an inexpressible source of pride it is that tomorrow, on the morning of the 12th, a convoy of Mainers is scheduled to arrive at Arlington National Cemetery to lay Maine-made balsam wreaths at the grave sites of our Nation's fallen heroes. The Patriot Guard Riders will continue their tradition of escorting tractor-trailers filled with wreaths donated by Worcester Wreath Company in Harrington, ME, to Arlington National Cemetery. On a personal note, I well recall the Worcester's initiating the Arlington Wreath Project in December of 1992, when Morrill called my office to ask if he could place his excess wreaths on the graves at Arlington National Cemetery. I never could have imagined that what occurred then would someday evolve into a nationwide expression of unflinching gratitude to our troops.

The enduring legacy of our bravest and finest for whom service above self and country above self-interest is woven into the fabric of our greatness is a powerful reminder that freedom is not free, especially as the indelible memories of those heroes who, in the immortal words of President Lincoln "gave the last full measure of devotion," are etched forever in our minds and upon our hearts. We also owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the men and women extraordinary enough to wear the uniform who are currently serving in harm's way and placing their lives on the line on our behalf, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan. Indeed, what a fitting remembrance this annual gesture of reverence and gratefulness by Wreaths Across America represents, especially during this joyous season of giving, for those who have bequeathed this great land so much, and for whom we are truly grateful.

TRIBUTE TO FIRST SERGEANT BRADLEY G. SIMMONS

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I rise to honor 1stSgt Bradley G. Simmons, U.S. Marine Corps, for his year of service to the U.S. Senate and for his continuing service to our Nation and the Marine Corps.

For the past year, 1stSgt Bradley Simmons has worked in my office and served the people of Ohio as the first enlisted Marine fellow in the U.S. Senate.

Before joining the Senate, 1stSgt Bradley Simmons served in Kuwait with the 3rd Assault Amphibian Battalion. He also participated in the initial attack and continuing operations in Iraq.

His heroic service as an AAV section leader during that time earned him the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal and a combat distinguishing device for valor.

1stSgt Bradley Simmons' strength, dedication, and firsthand experience overseas made him an invaluable resource for my staff and our Nation's service members and veterans.

Understanding of the difficult transition for returning service members and veterans, 1stSgt Bradley Simmons reached out to help them and their families in tangible ways.

From helping Ohio veterans with their VA claims; to assisting a wounded service member during rehabilitation; to meeting and speaking with the families whose loved ones are overseas, 1st Sgt Bradley Simmons demonstrated an unequivocal commitment to his fellow service members.

His tireless work on the Visions Scholars Act of 2009 will help ensure that veterans suffering from eye injuries would not also suffer from the current nationwide shortage of visions specialists at the VA.

The Vision Scholars Act of 2009 passed the Senate last month with great assistance from Sergeant Simmons.

But 1stSgt Bradley Simmons has been more than a trusted adviser.

He's been a teacher and a friend. As First Sergeant Simmons likes to say, he has been running a full-scale Marine Corps familiarization program in my office for the past year.

With a story-telling talent that left you laughing, with a moment of contemplation on the life of a marine, or with a little PT encouragement for the deskbound, First Sergeant Simmons made us appreciate the leadership qualities that are found throughout the ranks of the Marine Corps, but especially in him.

From interns in my office to constituents in the State, to all of my staff in Ohio and Washington, he succeeded in educating us about the honor, tradition, and sacrifices readily made by our Marines and our military forces.

He made us better at our jobs and better citizens in our communities.

He accompanied me to Walter Reed to visit troops recovering from combat injuries and later assisted in helping a few of them transition to life as a civilian, or on active duty in the guard or reserve.

He invited my staff to the Pentagon to a welcome home those recently injured in Iraq and Afghanistan.

During this past year, First Sergeant Simmons taught us about the determination and commitment of the men and women who give honor to the Marine Corps.

A lot has changed in the past year for our office, and for 1stSgt Bradley Simmons as well. First Sergeant Simmons came to my office as a gunnery sergeant.

At his promotion ceremony a few weeks back, his superiors explained that the Marine Corps does not base promotion in rank on previous performance and accomplishment.

Instead, promotion is based on a candidate's innate capability and potential to do the job well and the rank of first sergeant justice.

Like his superiors, I am as confident that he will succeed in anything he attempts and that he demonstrates the courage and commitment that we recognize in him.

His humility belies his dedicated service to our Nation. It provides great comfort knowing that hundreds of marines will have the opportunity to work, live, learn, and serve with First Sergeant Simmons.

He is a testament to the Marines, to our Nation, to his family, and to his home State of Kansas.

And to Karen, his wife, thank you for your support and sacrifice while your husband serves this Nation. I enjoyed meeting you and I know that 1stSgt Bradley Simmons can do what he does because of your love and support.

After having the privilege of working with First Sergeant Simmons over the past year and seeing the lasting mark he has left on my office, I am honored to have someone of his caliber and commitment representing our Nation.

Thank you, 1stSgt Bradley G. Simmons, for your distinguished service to the people of Ohio and for your continued commitment to protecting our Nation and the prosperity of all Americans.

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Mrs. Neiman, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the appropriate committees.

(The nominations received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

At 10:47 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Cole, 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. 4017. An act to designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 43 Maple Avenue in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, as the "Ann Marie Blute Post Office".