

Crapo Violence Against Women Act reauthorization. Today, as we mark Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention month, I hope Senate Republicans will join Senate Democrats to stand with them again by passing the Leahy-Cornyn Justice For All Act.

TRIBUTE TO SERGEANT JESSE T. WETHINGTON

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, this past Saturday, April 5, I was extremely pleased and honored to be a part of the awarding of the Purple Heart Medal to a brave soldier Kentucky is proud to call one of its own. SGT Jesse T. Wethington of Liberty, KY, received his Purple Heart for wounds suffered while serving our country in Iraq. I want to share the honor and majesty of this event with my colleagues and so therefore ask unanimous consent that the full text of my remarks at the ceremony to award SGT Jesse T. Wethington his Purple Heart, as well as the text of the proclamation for the Purple Heart be printed in the RECORD following my remarks.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

SENATOR McCONNELL'S REMARKS AT AWARDING OF PURPLE HEART TO SERGEANT JESSE T. WETHINGTON, APRIL 5, 2014

Thank you for that kind introduction. Thank you, General Dolan, for the invocation. It is my great honor to be here for the presentation of the Purple Heart Medal to Sergeant Jesse T. Wethington of Liberty, Kentucky, for wounds received in action while in service to our country in Iraq. It is an honor that is long overdue.

Because we are here to recognize the service of a brave soldier, it is fitting to be at VFW Post 1170. I want to thank our hosts, led by VFW Post Commander Dwight Riggle. I also want to thank VFW State Commander Joe Schnitterbaum and VFW leaders Brian Duffy and Carl Kaelin for all they have done in support of America's veterans.

It's a pleasure to have Chris Smrt and the Kentucky chapter of the Military Order of the Purple Heart here today to welcome Sergeant Wethington into their ranks. Chris and the Military Order of the Purple Heart, like the VFW, are strong advocates for our veterans.

And on this day when we're honoring a Kentucky Guardsman, it's wonderful to see so many Kentucky Guard soldiers and airmen here today, including our outstanding Adjutant General, Ed Tonini.

Finally, I'd like to welcome the folks who came here from Jesse's hometown of Liberty, including Jesse's wife, Ashley; his daughter, Hannah; his mother, Gayle; Jesse's brother, Chris, and Chris's wife, Dorothy; Jesse's mother-in-law, Mrs. Hope Metz; and Liberty VFW Post Commander and former State VFW Commander Claude Wyatt. Welcome to VFW Post 1170.

The original Purple Heart, also known as the Badge of Military Merit, was established by George Washington himself, and as such, the Purple Heart is the oldest existing military award that is still given to servicemembers.

I think the commander of the Continental Army and our first president can speak better than I to the courage and bravery which this award represents. In July of 1776, at the outbreak of the War for Independence, Gen-

eral Washington wrote in his own hand the weight of the task that had befallen him and his army. He said:

"The fate of unborn millions will now depend, under God, on the courage and conduct of this Army . . . we have therefore to resolve to conquer or die. . . . Let us therefore rely upon the goodness of the cause, and the aid of the Supreme Being, in whose hands victory is, to animate and encourage us to great and noble actions. The eyes of all our countrymen are now upon us."

That same patriotism—that same Spirit of '76—which was embodied by the leader of the Revolutionary Army lives on today in those in uniform such as Jesse. Perhaps that is inevitable in Jesse's case, given that he hails from a place called Liberty, a town founded by Revolutionary War veterans in 1806.

Although warfare has changed dramatically since the Revolutionary Era, the valor of our warfighters, such as Jesse, remains the same. That valor would have been instantly recognizable to George Washington.

It is the same valor that propelled Americans to victory against the mighty British Empire. The same valor that propelled Americans to die for other men's freedoms in the Civil War. The same valor we remember in the Greatest Generation, men and women who sacrificed halfway around the globe to save democracy. The same valor displayed in Cold War conflicts in Korea and Vietnam.

Sergeant Wethington's service is simply the latest chapter in a long and unbroken line of heroism and sacrifice, a line that is as old as our country.

The story of Jesse Wethington, the soldier from Liberty, is like that of those who served in the Revolutionary War—it is the story of a volunteer. Jesse could have chosen any number of paths, paths that would not have involved protecting "the fate of unborn millions," paths that would not have placed him in imminent danger.

Instead, Jesse volunteered to serve in the Kentucky Army National Guard. He volunteered to go on the road in a Humvee that would be targeted by the enemy in Iraq. He volunteered to sit in the gunner's turret. And even after his injury in combat, Jesse volunteered again to sit right back in that gunner's turret through the end of his tour of duty.

Jesse was mobilized with Battery B, First Battalion, 623rd Field Artillery of the Kentucky Army National Guard in late 2004, and he deployed to Iraq in January 2005. He served as a communications specialist and worked in the tactical operations center at the forward operating base.

In his communications role, Jesse had a view of his entire unit's activities. He saw the gun trucks and Humvees that deployed every day, and how often they were targeted by the enemy's IEDs. He saw good men, friends of his, injured. He saw the deaths of three soldiers in his unit, Kentuckians all.

Knowing these things, knowing all the risks involved, Jesse still volunteered. And when a spot opened up in a gun truck, Jesse stepped forward and said, "Send me." Jesse volunteered yet again to serve as a gunner. He encountered several IEDs on the road, but always came away uninjured. Until the fateful day of September 30, 2005.

On that day, Jesse's Humvee was moving slowly through congested traffic as part of a convoy. It stopped, and Jesse stood up in the gunner's hatch to direct traffic. Suddenly, an IED struck the right side of the truck with devastating force. The impact from the blast was so great it sent shrapnel hurdling through the back window, just missing Jesse's right leg and embedding itself into a storage bin within the Humvee.

Jesse suffered injury to his throat and the back of his head. After the explosion, he

could not hear, and his vision and thoughts were blurred. Yet, amazingly, he continued his mission. Upon returning to the base, Jesse received medical care, and after a few days of light duty returned to the gunner's turret. He finished out his tour of duty through the end of the year and returned from Iraq in January 2006.

Unfortunately, Jesse's departure from the battlefield didn't end his struggles. He suffered traumatic brain injury, hearing loss, and post-traumatic stress disorder, and he is continually confronted by the effects of his injuries.

Through all these difficulties, I know Jesse's greatest source of strength and support is his family, especially, Ashley and Hannah.

Coincidentally, the very same day Jesse found out he would be receiving this Purple Heart, he and Ashley also discovered they would be having a baby boy. It is entirely fitting that news of both events arrived on the same day, given Jesse's valor in defending the "fate of unborn millions."

Before the presentation of the Purple Heart Medal, I want to note that there is another hero in this story. It's Jesse's friend and fellow soldier, retired Staff Sergeant Glen Phillips, who we heard from earlier this morning.

It was Staff Sergeant Phillips who gathered the facts in order for Jesse to receive his Purple Heart today. Glen, who is also from Liberty, has helped look out for Jesse and many other veterans over the years.

When Jesse told Glen he didn't think anyone would care that he had yet to receive his Purple Heart, this is what Glen had to say: "Jesse, I care, the VA cares, the U.S. Army cares, and people you don't even know care across this great land."

I couldn't agree more. I think the witnesses here today for this solemn occasion are proof positive that Kentucky does indeed care and cares deeply about you, Jesse, and your bravery in uniform. And we are grateful for all you have done and continue to do to make us proud.

And I believe that many people who are not present today—including, one day, your son—will see how you served in Iraq with dignity and honor, will see that you continue to carry yourself with dignity and honor here at home, and will see the Purple Heart proclamation of your heroism. And they too will be moved by your service and your sacrifice.

The presentation of this Purple Heart Medal is just a small recognition of the wealth of respect you deserve for your service to our country. Your service in protecting all of us. And your service to the values that make America the greatest nation on earth—values expressed by General Washington and the men who founded a place called Liberty more than two centuries ago.

Now, the solemn moment we're gathered here today for has arrived. Sergeant Jesse T. Wethington, Ashley, and Hannah—please join me for the reading of the proclamation and the presentation of the Purple Heart Medal.

TEXT OF PURPLE HEART MEDAL PROCLAMATION

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
To All Who Shall See These Presents, Greeting:

This is to Certify That the President of the United States of America Has Awarded the PURPLE HEART

Established by General George Washington At Newburgh, New York, August 7, 1782 to: Specialist Jesse T. Wethington United States Army For Wounds Received in Action On 30 September 2005 in Iraq Given Under my Hand in the City of Washington

This 5th Day of March 2014

David K. MacEwen

THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

Permanent Order 064-08, 5 March 2014

United States Army Human Resources Command

Fort Knox, Kentucky 40122-5408

John M. McHugh

SECRETARY OF THE ARMY

SCHOOL FOOD MODERNIZATION ACT

Ms. HEITKAMP. Mr. President, our kids spend at least 7 hours a day at school working, learning, growing, and trying to build themselves into the people they want to grow up to become. It is our job to help them. That means giving them the education they deserve. It means giving them the support they need to keep working hard. And it means making sure they get healthy meals to keep them strong and to give them the fuel they need to focus in class.

That is why Senator SUSAN COLLINS from Maine and I introduced the School Food Modernization Act, which would help schools provide healthier meals to students in North Dakota and throughout the country. This bill would continue ongoing efforts to provide healthy meals for our children during the school day and make sure schools have the resources they need to get the most nutritious food to students.

Providing healthy meals is particularly important as childhood obesity rates in the U.S. have tripled over the last three decades. More than 23 million adolescents and children in our country—nearly 1 in 3 young people nationwide—are obese or overweight. According to the American Heart Association, it is the No. 1 healthy concern among parents—more than drug abuse and smoking. Even in my State of North Dakota, which is consistently ranked as one of the healthiest States in the country, more than 1 in 8 adolescents are overweight or obese.

Improving the nutritional quality of school meals can help fight the obesity epidemic, putting children on strong footing to prevent long-term health concerns related to obesity, such as diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. In 2010, Congress passed the Healthy and Hunger Free Kids Act to improve the school nutrition standards. It made important improvements to nutrition standards in school meals, but was not perfect. Most importantly, it mandated school lunch requirements without offering real support to reach those standards.

Senator COLLINS and I are working to improve these standards in order to provide greater flexibility to school meal planners to make sure they can provide students with the nutrition they need in workable fashion. We are also offering grant assistance to help schools get resources to comply with standards.

Another way we can help provide more nutritious meals to students is by providing our schools with the necessary tools to prepare meals and store

fresh produce. While nutritional standards for meals served in our schools have increased considerably, support for schools to implement these important changes has lagged behind.

Many school kitchens were built decades ago and designed with little capacity beyond reheating and holding food for dining service. In fact, according to the Pew Charitable Trusts, 74 percent of school districts in North Dakota need at least one piece of kitchen equipment to better serve healthy meals. We can do better than that.

The legislation we introduced would give schools greater access to the equipment they need to prepare healthy meals, reduce waste, and make resources stretch further.

Specifically, our legislation would provide targeted grant assistance to school administrators and food service directors to upgrade kitchen infrastructure or purchase high-quality, durable kitchen equipment such as commercial ovens, steamers, and stoves. Additionally, our legislation would establish a loan assistance program within USDA to help schools acquire new equipment to prepare and serve healthier, more nutritious meals to students. School administrators and other eligible borrowers would be able to obtain Federal guarantees for 90 percent of the loan value needed to construct, remodel, or expand their kitchens, dining, or food storage infrastructure. Finally, our legislation would strengthen training and provide technical assistance to aid school food service personnel in meeting the updated nutrition guidelines. Not every school food service employee is equipped with the expertise to comply with healthier meal and food preparation standards. Our bill authorizes USDA to provide support on a competitive basis to highly qualified third-party trainers to develop and administer training and technical assistance.

USDA has a long history of providing support for schools to upgrade meal preparation equipment; however, this support has been sporadic and unreliable for long-term planning. And in recent years, the demand for support has been great with requests for assistance far outpacing availability.

As the Senate agriculture committee begins to consider reauthorization of the school nutrition program, I look forward to working with my colleagues on improving school meal offerings and providing schools with the tools needed to give our children the nutritional fuel necessary to learn and grow.

As the daughter of a school cook, I understand the work that goes into preparing many healthy meals each day for kids, and this bill would help make limited resources stretch as far as possible to provide support to communities that need it in North Dakota and throughout the U.S. That just makes sense for our students, parents, teachers, and school cooks.

THE MINIMUM WAGE

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, growing up, my mother was a single parent. She

raised three children by herself. I know what it is like to run out of money at the end of the month, what it is like when every dime matters.

The minimum wage is a poverty wage. Today, the minimum wage hasn't kept up with inflation. If the minimum wage had kept up with inflation in 1968, the minimum wage today would be \$10.68. If you do the math, minimum wage workers today earn less than \$15,000 per year. If you are supporting a child or an elderly parent, that is a family income below the Federal poverty line. Raising the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10.10 would help lift nearly a million workers and their families out of poverty. In Hawaii, nearly 100,000 women would get a raise.

This is especially important for women. More and more women serve as heads of households. And nearly two-thirds of minimum wage workers are women. Nearly two-thirds of workers in tipped occupations are women.

The situation is even more dire in Hawaii, where the cost of living is higher. In Hawaii, one out of five Hawaii women workers would get a raise if we raised the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10.10. A person working full time making \$7.25 per hour makes \$14,500 per year. The average rent in Hawaii for a one-bedroom is \$1,278. That is more than \$15,000 per year. That is why many in Hawaii have to work more than one job.

And there are stories all across the country of women struggling. Hawaii Catholic Charities recently shared their story with me of a woman in Hawaii working for minimum wage who was unable to afford basic living expenses for herself and her son. She had to move back in with her parents. Over the course of a few years she was able to change jobs to a department store, where she eventually earned \$10 per hour. At that wage she was able to contribute to her family's household expenses and start a savings account for her son. We all hear stories like this often. It's why we must raise the minimum wage—so that hard working families have a chance at building a better life for themselves and their children.

Some critics claim the minimum wage will cost jobs. The CBO report looked at old studies and not the latest research. Just last week, a Goldman Sachs report said the CBO estimate of 0.3 percent job loss is too high because raising the minimum wage would actually increase demand. Minimum-wage workers spend that money right away, at local businesses in their communities. A survey of small business owners found that three out of five supported raising the minimum wage. They said a higher minimum wage would increase consumer spending on their goods and services. The Goldman Sachs report said that States which raised their minimum wage in 2014 actually created more jobs than other states.