

brings together people and advocacy groups to raise awareness about the challenges facing girls around the world. Tragically, today's regional crises are having a disproportionately destructive impact on girls. 2015 marks the year with the highest number of displaced persons since World War II. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, women and girls comprise half of any refugee or internally displaced population. Crises such as the ongoing conflict in Syria, over 1.5 million displaced in South Sudan, and the expanding migrant crisis in Europe, among others, risk leaving an entire generation of girls shaped by a lack of opportunity, gender-based violence, forced marriage, and disrupted education.

Access to education is often a top priority for refugee families upon resettling in a foreign country. We know that, if empowered with the appropriate tools, girls can be facilitators of change who can transform their own lives, as well as the lives of their families, communities, and societies and serve as a bulwark against the conditions that contribute to extremism that so many terrorist groups have exploited, often at the expense of women and girls. The lack of access to education for refugee girls stifles empowerment and stands in the way of achieving a durable solution to conflict.

As the United States and the international community work to cope with the current refugee crisis, it is critical that we focus not only on security but on the basic needs of refugees, such as access to education and increasing the role of women and girls in humanitarian response and civil society programs.

#### TRIBUTE TO THOMAS ROCKROADS, JR.

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I wish to honor Thomas Rockroads, Jr., a veteran of the Vietnam war. On behalf of all Montanans and all Americans, I would like to thank Mr. Rockroads for his service to our State and to our Nation. It is my privilege to share Thomas's story for the official Senate Record.

Thomas Rockroads, Jr., was born on December 21, 1948, in Crow Agency, MT. His father worked in sawmills in both Kirby and Lame Deer and was a ranch hand and coal miner in Lame Deer. His mother worked for many years at the Northern Hotel before coming home to the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. He spent his childhood in Busby and attended Busby High School until joining the Army his junior year.

In September of 1968, he volunteered for the Army Airborne Infantry, and by September of 1969, he found himself jumping out of helicopters and into the highlands of Vietnam. Thomas was a member of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, which was stationed in the hot, humid Tiger Mountains of Vietnam's Central

Highlands. Their responsibilities included rescuing and evacuating ground forces, as well as setting up perimeters for operations. They were right in the thick of things, and, as Thomas once put it, "If there was a hot spot where reinforcements were needed . . . we were there." On more than one occasion, this proved to be an important but harrowing position to be in. One night, when the brigade was charged with setting up a perimeter on a hillside, Thomas and his comrades felt particularly concerned. They knew the area was likely heavily booby-trapped, so they proceeded with extra caution. Their mission was to intercept the North Vietnamese forces headed in their direction, and after establishing a perimeter, they were allowed a few hours of rest before being put on high alert. A few hours later, while he was trying to get some sleep, Thomas suddenly heard a blast, and he was thrown nearly a dozen feet from his makeshift tent. Thomas quickly realized that someone had set off a booby trap, but before he could process much else, a medic began calling his name and he rushed over to help. Thomas worked with the medic to care for his fellow soldier, but shortly thereafter the man died in Thomas's arms.

A few days later, Thomas and his brigade found themselves under siege again—this time, without cover, they came face to face with enemy soldiers. The North Vietnamese troops, equipped with an anti-aircraft gun and hiding inside an irrigation trench, began rapid firing on Thomas and his platoon. Knowing they needed air support, Thomas headed right toward the anti-aircraft gun—as long as it was operable, American helicopters couldn't access the area. However, his M16 was jammed, so under heavy fire, he had to dislodge the trapped bullets and replace them with a new magazine. He and a fellow soldier finally located the enemy's weapon at the far end of a hedgerow and headed back into the firestorm with one aim—to disarm it. Before they could reach their target, an enemy soldier intercepted them, lobbing a grenade directly at Thomas and his comrade. They both ran for cover, and thankfully the grenade failed to detonate, but mere seconds after that, another soldier charged them, firing wildly at Thomas and his platoon. The soldier was not more than 10 feet away from Thomas when he finally went down.

Thomas returned to Busby, MT, a full 365 days after his deployment. He remarkably didn't sustain a single scratch. But like many of his fellow veterans, despite his lack of visible wounds, Thomas has struggled with the unseen wounds of war. Thirty-five years after coming back from Vietnam, he was formally diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Despite this often debilitating struggle, Thomas has spent the last 30 years working for Western Energy's Rosebud Mine at Colstrip and raising two

daughters and a son with his wife, Charlotte, of 38 years. He also has grandchildren. He credits his family with helping him heal. "It's all the support of my family that's got me where I'm at today," Thomas said. "My wife is always supporting me. My daughters, my son and my grandchildren—I'm very, very fortunate."

However, Thomas is still haunted by his memories daily, and he doesn't want other soldiers to have to suffer the way he has had to. He believes, like I do, that our commitment to our veterans is a cost of war, and we must make it a priority to help, protect, and serve those who served. Too many of our Vietnam veterans never got the homecoming or the recognition they deserved. So today I am honored to have the opportunity to thank Thomas for his bravery both in battle and beyond. He is a Montanan born and bred, and his life has been a testament to the kind of commitment, courage, and compassion that our State can be proud of.

It was my honor to recognize Thomas Rockroads, Jr. by presenting him with the Bronze Star Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Combat Infantryman Badge 1st Award, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Ribbon with 1960 Device, Sharpshooter Badge with auto rifle bar with rifle bar, Marksman Badge with machine gun bar, and the Parachutist Badge Basic.

Our State and our Nation thank you, Thomas, for your service and for a soldier's sacrifice.

#### RECOGNIZING MENTOR: THE NATIONAL MENTORING PARTNERSHIP

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, today I would like to recognize MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership, the leadership of its founders, Geoffrey T. Boisi and Raymond G. Chambers, and the expansion of the mentoring field in the past quarter century.

This year, MENTOR celebrates its 25th anniversary. Its founders, Geoffrey T. Boisi and Raymond G. Chambers, were leading businessmen and philanthropists who understood the value of mentoring in their own lives. They believed passionately that the intervention of a caring adult is a critical element in the life of a young person, and they believed that every young person needs and deserves a powerful relationship that supports their growth and gives them the opportunity for success.

In 1990, Boisi and Chambers recognized the powerful impact that mentoring could have on our Nation's at-risk youth, and they started a movement to increase opportunity for all young people by establishing MENTOR. The success of Boisi's and Chambers' efforts has been remarkable. That first year, approximately 300,000 youth at risk of falling off track were paired with a caring adult through a structured mentoring program. Today, 4.5 million at-risk young people will find