

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

SPECIALIST CHARLES E. ODUMS II

Mr. DEWINE. Madam President, I come to the Senate today to pay tribute to Army SPC Charles Odums, II, who lost his life in the service of our country in Iraq. At times like this, I am reminded of a speech President Ronald Reagan gave on Veterans Day many years ago. He said:

It is, in a way, an odd thing to honor those who died in defense of our country, in defense of us, in wars far away. The imagination plays a trick. We see these soldiers in our mind as old and wise But most of them were boys when they died.

SPC Charles Odums was 22 years old when he died after an improvised explosive device detonated near his patrol in Baghdad, Iraq. Today, I rise to remember this brave young man, who was taken from us much too soon.

Charles, or "Chuck" as he was known by family and friends, was an ambitious kid who always tried to do the right thing. Friends lovingly remembered him as the "sweet and quiet boy who would do anything that was asked of him." He came from a close-knit family and developed an especially strong bond with his younger brother, Robert. The two loved to ride their motorcycles and talk of their big plans for the future. They were going to be millionaires.

Chuck went to Sandusky High School and graduated in 1999. While there, he played football and participated in track. He was the likable guy everyone wanted to be around. Chuck's coach, Brett Fuqua, remembered him as a hardworking young man who would run a marathon if asked. Chuck was always willing to do whatever needed to be done.

After high school, Chuck enrolled at the University of Toledo. While there, he met the love of his life, Melanie, and the two married in December 2001. Chuck remained in college for more than one year, but found that it wasn't for him. After much consideration and much time talking it out with his parents, he decided to enlist in the Army.

Though this would be a difficult decision for anyone to make, Chuck knew it was the right one for him. Brett Fuqua described Chuck's reasons for enlisting this way:

He didn't do it because it was glamorous. He didn't do it because he would be a hero. He did it because he believed it was his duty to defend the freedoms that define America: the freedom to worship, to speak freely, to be safe.

Chuck was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, where he worked as a medic and driver. His comrades called him "Odie" or "Doc," and they knew they could trust him with their lives. In fact, during his time in Iraq, Chuck was credited with saving three lives and helping countless others. His commanding officer recalled that Chuck would steer his Humvee in such a way that suspicious bumps in the road would pass under the driver's side—his

side—putting Chuck in danger rather than his passengers.

While overseas, Chuck made sure to keep in touch with his family by phone or e-mail, and his parents made sure they held on to everything he sent them. In the binder that they now cherish, Annie and Charles Odums have pictures of their son serving in Iraq. In one, Chuck, in full gear, is waiting on a helicopter landing pad for his transport to arrive. In another, he stands guarding an Iraqi man while other soldiers search for a weapons cache. Chuck's e-mail read: "Well, I'm doing good out here."

While Chuck was in Iraq, he was careful of what he told his mother. He knew she would worry. Chuck missed his parents, his brother and sisters, but especially his wife Melanie. Melanie and Chuck were already planning what they would do when Chuck's enlistment ended. They both wanted to start a family. Chuck had dreams of becoming a police officer. No matter what they decided to do, Chuck and Melanie were looking forward to being together.

After Chuck was killed, in his hometown of Sandusky, OH, thousands of people gathered to show their support for the Odums family and to honor Chuck. They lined the street for the funeral procession and placed flags in their yards. One woman held a sign that read: "Thank you, Charles, God bless America." Veterans groups saluted the fallen comrade and many held their hands over their hearts.

One Sandusky native, Debra Churchwell, took her grandchildren, nieces, and nephews to watch the funeral procession. When asked why she brought her family, she replied: "I want them to see a part of history because they'll never see this again. I pray to God they never see this again." No one wants to see this again.

I know Chuck will live on in the hearts of his many friends and his family, especially his wife Melanie, his mother Annie, father Charles, brother Robert, and sisters Janel, Sophia, Candie, and Tashica. Chuck is an American hero who will live on in all our hearts.

Madam President, I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LOTT. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. LOTT. Madam President, I would like to inquire about the time remaining and how it is divided.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is 7 minutes remaining on the Republican side and 30 minutes remaining on the Democratic side.

Mr. LOTT. Madam President, I do not want to use all that time if others

have a need to come and make comments, but I do have a couple issues I would like to speak on briefly this morning.

 TRIBUTE TO SUSAN WOOTEN WELLS

Mr. LOTT. Madam President, I rise to pay tribute this morning to Susan Wooten Wells, a native of Jackson, MS, who today is marking her 30th year on my staff.

Many of you knew Susan when she worked with me in the leader's office. She started off as a scheduler but over the years worked up to be executive assistant and then was administrative assistant in the majority leader's office. Today she serves as the majority staff director of the Senate Rules and Administration Committee, and she has overseen a lot of the moves and renovations and has worked with Senators and their staffs on a number of issues over the past year and a half, and has done a wonderful job.

I first met her in 1974, when she was starting out, teaching eighth grade English in my hometown of Pascagoula, MS.

Despite the fact she is an alumna of the other university in my State, Mississippi State University, and I am a graduate of the University of Mississippi—she is very proud of that institution, and she points out that comedian Jerry Clower and thriller author John Grisham and Washington Redskin Fred Smoot are also graduates of that university, so over the years we have had fun picking at each other about our alma maters—she came to Washington and worked with me for what was supposed to be 1 year, helping me out in a crunch to get my staff filled and to do the scheduling.

Well, here she is 30 years later. She has had a tremendous influence on my office operations, on my life, and I believe on this institution. I am very proud of the fact she went from being an English teacher—and helping me with my English along the way—to being a real leader on my staff for these many years.

In fact, I refer to her as my Mikey, from the old television commercial. I used to call Paul Coverdell, the great Senator from Georgia, Mikey because if we had a task nobody else wanted or would not do, Mikey would do it. Well, that has been Susan on my staff. If there needed to be something done and we wanted it done right, Susan would handle the job.

When I decided years ago to bring 150 Mississippians to annual events here in the city for a day-long seminar, she made it happen. When I decided to bring in entire communities from Hancock County to cook gumbo for the congressional community once a year, she got the assignment, and she made it happen. It turned out to be a tremendous event. A lot of people enjoyed it and everybody benefited from it. In the process, she did go from being one of

the staff members to being a real leader in the majority leader's office.

She helped expedite the construction of the Capitol Visitor Center. I believe history will look back on it, when it is completed, as one of the wisest things we have done in maybe 100 years in terms of this Capitol and the security of our constituents, their convenience and safety and education as they see this building and all it stands for. She oversaw a lot of the Capitol restoration, including changes in this Chamber. She helped me with the Leader's Lecture Series which turned out to be an acclaimed program of oral history lectures by former Senate leaders and Vice Presidents.

Parts of our public and private lives over this time obviously have been intertwined. We have shared three decades of America's triumphs and three decades of accomplishments for our beloved State of Mississippi. Together we have also endured tragedies that have befallen our country and our families. In fact, last month the love of her life, Milton Wells, passed away, and I shared her grief at that moment and continue to work with her as she comes through this difficult period.

Throughout this time she has been loyal, she has been respectful. She has been very helpful to many people. I could not let this day pass without making a public record of my appreciation for Susan Wooten Wells and her service to this institution.

So many times we forget to say thank you to the people who are on our staffs, who work day in and day out for us, the people in this Chamber, the people who make this place function, who serve us and help us in so many ways. We should not forget to say a small word of thanks.

HIGHWAY LEGISLATION

Mr. LOTT. Madam President, I was pleased to see the majority leader say yesterday he was still holding out hope we could get a highway bill completed before we go out for the election. To me this should not be about the election, but it should be a major focus of what we are doing. Another week is about to go by without any real apparent movement on the highway bill. Why? Why isn't the conference getting this job done? It would mean jobs instantly from Alaska to Mississippi and from Maryland to California, because the projects are ready to go, but the money and the new authorizations and new formulas are not in place.

Some suggestion was made yesterday, perhaps we could get together with the House and Senate, the President, and do a 1-year extension. Why? Why would we want to extend the current program? It needs to be bigger and better. It needs to be updated. We haven't done this now in 4 or 5 years. It is time to have a highway bill.

It is not only about highways. It is about highways and bridges and abutments and public transportation and

innovative programs that take advantage of modern technology. We need to upgrade this law.

One other thing. Every day that passes, every week that passes, people are being killed on highways because they are not modern and are not safe. That is what drives me the most. I know too many cases of people who have died on narrow, hilly, inadequate roads in my State and I am sure all over the country.

I am not going to let up on this. As long as we are in session, I am going to keep asking the question: Why aren't we doing a highway bill? There is plenty of blame to go around. But there is no need to get into that. I want to give credit. I want to praise the chairman of the committee and the ranking member, Senate and House, and the leadership for getting the job done. But I don't think that is happening. I don't quite understand why.

Is there some decision that has been made, some silent conspiracy to extend it, do it another day? Maybe we could get more money next year. Maybe we could raise taxes next year and get it even bigger.

Of all of those, if that is the thought, that is wrong. We need to get a bill that is at a level we can defend as being one that is going to be paid for by gasoline taxes, how we use the trust fund, maybe some changes in how that is handled, but we need to find a way to get it done now. We should find a bill the House can pass, the Senate can pass, and the President can sign. Let's do it and let's do it now.

We could complete this bill within a week. Why don't we do it?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time has expired on the majority side.

The Senator from Nevada.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I will take 2 minutes from our side. I have already allocated that.

Let me simply say, I appreciate my friend from Mississippi trying to be a leader of the Senate, being chairman of a committee, doing all those things he is very capable of doing.

The fact is, there is blame to go around on the highway bill. I hope we can pass a bill. I hope we can finish the conference. But let's understand why we are in the predicament we are in today.

The Senate passed a bill of \$318 billion—not a Cadillac version, probably a low level Chevrolet or Ford, barely enough to keep the functions of our transit highway systems together. That bill, passed with four or five dissenting votes, did not increase the deficit 2 cents, not 1 cent. It did not increase the deficit. Suddenly, out of nowhere, the President said he will veto the bill. You figure that one out. No one else can.

As a result, the President has locked in a number. He was at 256. Now they have a number that is 289. They say it is 299, but it probably isn't. It doesn't allow the highway and transit functions to go on.

We are trying. I spent time with Senator INHOFE on Tuesday and Wednesday. Hopefully something can be arrived at. But at that number, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to do.

The Senator from Oklahoma and I have an agreement. That agreement is, if I don't like the bill, he is not going to support it. If he doesn't like the bill, I am not going to support it. That is one of the arrangements we made to go to conference.

I am doing everything within my abilities. I have been chairman of the full committee on two separate occasions. I am speaking for the chairman of the committee, Senator JEFFORDS. I am doing everything within my power to come up with an arrangement so we can have a highway bill. But unless it is good for the country, I am not going to approve it. That is the arrangement Senator INHOFE and I made. If people don't like it, that is part of what goes on around here. We have to work with each other on different issues.

Let me finally say: I have the greatest respect for my friend from Mississippi. But he has not been in on all the arrangements we have made on this bill. It has been very difficult. It was hard to complete the bill at \$318 billion. As we were doing the \$318 billion legislation—this is a 6-year bill—the House was talking about \$375 billion. I was not able to hear all of the comments of the Senator from Mississippi. I was with Senator DOMENICI working on the energy and water bill. But I do not apologize to anyone for what the Senate did on a \$318 billion highway transit bill that was approved by this Senate overwhelmingly because it was a good bill.

I am sorry. For reasons I dare anybody to determine why, a bill that doesn't increase the deficit at all, the President says it is too much money. I will not get into some of the reasons I believe he did this other than to say I am going to continue to work to see if we can come up with a bill. I will do everything I can. But I am laying out as much as I can the position we find ourselves in today.

How much time did I consume?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator consumed 3½ minutes.

Mr. REID. The Senator from New Jersey then would have 18 minutes. The Senator from Arkansas will have 8½ minutes. I think that works out right.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey is recognized.

FLIP-FLOPPING

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Madam President, this morning I rise to talk about something that we heard quite a bit about these days. The subject is flip-flopping.

Flip-flopping is kind of an easy thing to identify. During a recent convention, we heard an irate Senator make an angry speech declaring that it is not what you say but, rather, what you do