

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