

trained clinical staff, primarily nurses, from the local delivery systems. Our system continues to suffer and decline as medical professionals move to hospitals in neighboring locales because higher Medicare Wage Indexes allow these regions to pay higher salaries.

Our region has been fortunate, through the leadership of Senator Arlen Specter and others, to have benefited from temporary Section 508 funding adjustments over the past several years. These adjustments have been a temporary yet critical funding source for our area hospitals. The loss of these funds will represent at least a \$35 million financial loss for area facilities, a loss that cannot be absorbed by commercial insurers and their customers.

We are therefore asking for consideration of a more permanent solution to the current calculation of Medicare Wage Index reimbursement for facilities in the northeast and north central regions of Pennsylvania.

DENISE S. CESARE,
President and CEO.

[From the Scranton Times Tribune, Feb. 24, 2007]

RESOLVE FUNDING FOR QUALITY CARE

Hospitals in Northeastern Pennsylvania face the same economic pressures as hospitals everywhere else—and then some. Here, hospitals also face a vicious cycle involving Medicare funding that threatens the financial well-being of regional hospitals and, therefore, access to quality health care for hundreds of thousands of regional residents.

Wage rates at regional hospitals are lower than those for larger metropolitan areas, resulting in lower Medicare reimbursements, resulting in the inability of many hospitals to significantly increase wages, resulting in lower reimbursements . . . and on it goes. The low reimbursement issue is particularly difficult for hospitals in this region because the relatively high average age here means that regional hospitals have a higher percentage of Medicare patients than do hospitals in other parts of the country. Thus, they treat more Medicare patients for less money.

Since 2004, the hospitals have done somewhat better because of a temporary fix authorized by Congress, under which indexes from nearby metropolitan areas have been applied to the regional hospitals. That measure is due to expire in June and, without an extension, 13 regional hospitals will return to the standard reimbursement formula and lose \$35 million a year.

According to several local hospital administrators who met with Sen. Arlen Specter on the issue this week, they have been able to reduce nursing shortages through better pay and otherwise shore up their operations since Congress' action in 2004.

Nationwide, about 80 hospitals are in the same position as those in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Mr. Specter and Sen. Bob Casey, along with Reps. Paul Kanjorski and Chris Carney, should work with their colleagues from the other regions with unrealistic reimbursement rates, in order to permanently set fair rates that ensure access to quality care.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

STAFF SERGEANT DUSTIN GOULD

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, I wish to take a moment of the Senate's time to remember a Coloradan who was lost to us in Iraq last week. Marine Corps SSgt Dustin Michael Gould—7th Engineer Support Battalion, 1st Marine Logistics Group, I Marine Expeditionary

Force—was in his fourth tour in Iraq when he was taken from this life, at the age of 28.

Sergeant Gould was a unique man, with a unique job in Iraq; he was an explosives ordnance demolition technician—a marine who disarmed bombs. In a country whose fabric is strained almost daily with bomb attacks, Sergeant Gould was there to help prevent them, literally working to defuse violence that threatened his fellow marines and Iraqis alike.

Dustin Gould grew up in several towns in Colorado and attended Berthoud High School in Longmont, which he graduated in 1997. He chose to serve his Nation in the Marine Corps because of their elite status.

During his service to this Nation, the Marine Corps estimates that Staff Sergeant Gould neutralized more than a million pounds of explosives, explosives that could have killed untold numbers of marines. Every time Dustin Gould went to work, he saved lives. That, truly, is the definition of heroism.

With all of this talk of military service, we should not lose sight of the man. Dustin Gould loved the outdoors and spent his spare time as a young man there with his father. He was respectful and thoughtful, a natural leader who never hesitated to lend a hand to a friend in need.

GEN Douglas MacArthur once said, "The soldier, above all other people, prays for peace, for he must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war." Dustin's father David said that Dustin did not relish conflict but was serving his Nation because a higher calling, protecting our freedom and way of life, compelled him to act. He did not seek praise or recognition but instead accomplished his job with humility and courage and in doing so helped others do the same.

In the midst of America's Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln wrote to the mother of a Union soldier, "I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours, to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of Freedom." We pray now for Dustin, for his wife Elizabeth, and for his whole family. The wounds they suffer from the loss of Dustin are deep and painful, and we as a Nation honor their and Dustin's humbling sacrifice by never forgetting this fine young man.

SPECIALIST BLAKE HARRIS

Mr. President, I ask the Senate to turn its attention to the loss of a Coloradan in Iraq, Army SPC Blake Harris, of Pueblo, CO. SPC Harris was in the Army's 1st Squadron, 12th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division. He was only 22 years old, and will be laid to rest later this week.

Pueblo, CO, is known as the "Home of Heroes." Pueblo hosts National Medal of Honor Day and has had as many as four living Medal of Honor recipients living in the community. In

1953, President Eisenhower joked to recipient Raymond G. "Jerry" Murphy, "What is it . . . Something in the water out there in Pueblo? All you guys turn out to be heroes."

President Eisenhower was not far off. There is something special in Pueblo—the brave sons and daughters, like Blake Harris, that have answered the call to service for this Nation and those that have given up their lives for the cause of freedom. They are heroes.

Unfortunately, we cannot bring back the heroes like Blake Harris. And, like so many of our Nation's soldiers that have made this ultimate sacrifice, Blake Harris was man of great courage and character who had his entire life ahead of him.

Blake met his wife Joanna at South High School, and while Blake was in Iraq they kept in contact every day. He graduated from South High in 2002 after spending 3 years in ROTC, and he followed in his father's footsteps by enlisting in the Army. He was in his second tour in Iraq and was stationed in Baghdad. Specialist Harris loved his job and was looking to become a career soldier, a man who dedicated his life to the service of his country.

After the assassination of American civil rights pioneer the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Senator Robert Kennedy reflected upon the words of the Greek poet Aeschylus: "Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God."

To his wife Joanna and their son Jonah and Blake's parents John and Deborah, the prayers of our entire Nation are with you, today and always. Each and every American is humbled by the sacrifice made by Blake. He served with honor and distinction, and I hope that the pride in his service and memories you carry with you will help ease the grief you feel at his loss.

S. CON. RES. 20

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I wish to take a moment to explain why I felt it necessary to vote against the Gregg resolution on Iraq, S. Con. Res. 20, when the Senate considered this and other measures related to Iraq on March 15, 2007.

The Bush administration and the Republican leadership in Congress have been making every effort until recently to avoid any real debate on Iraq and have, at each and every step of the way, supported the failed stay-the-course strategy by conflating Iraq with the war on terrorism and by propagating a false choice concerning Iraq: according to their logic, you either support the President or you harm the troops.

I firmly reject this false choice, as I rejected the Gregg resolution which was an attempt to validate that false choice.

There is no doubt that I and every other Member in this body will do all in our power to protect our troops while they are serving so bravely in Iraq or wherever else their political leaders decide to send them. That is why there was overwhelming Senate support for the Murray resolution, S. Res. 107, which we voted on prior to the Gregg resolution.

I would remind our colleagues that I have fought as hard as anyone in the Congress to ensure that our troops have the equipment and resources they need in Iraq—on some occasions over the objections of the administration and their congressional allies, I might add.

In 2003, the Army identified \$322 million in shortfalls in critical health and safety gear—ranging from body armor, camelback hydration systems, and com-

bat helmets to equipment for deactivating high-explosives—all priorities that the Rumsfeld Pentagon and Bush administration failed to provide for in their initial budgets. I offered an amendment to the emergency appropriations bill to resolve these problems. Unfortunately, the Bush administration opposed this legislation, and the amendment was defeated along party lines with the help of the very same Senators who are now claiming to be supporting our troops.

In 2004, we tried a different approach—requiring the Department of Defense to reimburse military personnel who bought equipment with their own funds for military service in Iraq and Afghanistan that the Rumsfeld Pentagon had failed to provide. This time, despite ardent objections of Secretary Rumsfeld's Pentagon, Congress approved the legislation in October 2004. President Bush signed the bill into law. We approved similar legislation in 2005 to further extend this benefit as troops, their families, and their communities continued to dig into their own pockets to buy needed life-saving equipment for use on the battlefield.

Last year, the difficulties associated with equipment shortfalls posed a far more serious problem. I offered an amendment to address a \$17 billion budget shortfall to replace and repair thousands of war-battered tanks, aircraft, and vehicles. Without these additional resources, the Army Chief of Staff claimed that U.S. Army readiness would deteriorate even further.

That said, still more remains to be done if the men and women on active duty, in the Reserves and National Guard are to be fully equipped and ready to defend our country. We need to make certain that our troops have the resources they need to stay ready to fight wherever and whenever duty calls. Regrettably, the war in Iraq is actually draining these resources and making us less safe. That is why I am going to work to continue restocking our troops' equipment inventories to restore their readiness and assure their protection.

Voting for a resolution expressing support for the troops is not the same as making concrete decisions to actually do so. Making sure they are fully equipped and that the mission they have been sent to do is achievable is a fundamental part of meaningfully supporting the troops. For me and many others in this body, our vote in support of the Reid resolution, S.J. Res 9, was a vote to support our troops by mandating a different direction in the current failed policy in Iraq, namely the phased redeployment of our combat troops from Iraq, and a narrowing of the mission for those who remain.

I will continue to stand up for what I believe is a necessary change in course in Iraq and in American strategy. I will continue to fight to reverse the President's failed policy which has made us less safe, which has created a safe haven for extremists and terrorists in Iraq, and which has undermined the moral and political standing of the United States around the world.

Most important, I will continue to stand up for our brave men and women in uniform. I will continue to fight for increased funding for body armor and other critical needs. I will continue to fight for funding for our military personnel to keep them safe and effective and to ensure they are not forgotten if they come home injured and in need of care.

I will continue to call for meaningful actions in this Congress to redirect funding away from major combat operations, while ensuring that we have the means and tools necessary to continue vital training and equipping of Iraqi security forces, counter terrorism operations, and the diplomatic, political, and economic offensive and strategies that are the key elements to finding a solution to the crisis in Iraq and in the wider region.

I refuse to be cowed or bullied by false choices. It is long overdue that we stand up to unreasonable arguments, conflated logic, attacks against dissent and debate, and most important, failed policies which are making our country less safe, each and every day.

HEALTHY FAMILIES ACT

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, on Thursday, March 15, 2007, I proudly joined Senator KENNEDY as a cosponsor of the Healthy Families Act. This legislation will provide full-time employees with up to 7 paid sick days a year so that they can take care of their own medical needs or the medical needs of family members. Part-time employees would receive a pro-rata amount of paid sick leave. All employers—public and private—with at least 15 employees would be covered by the Healthy Families Act.

Today, 57 million workers in the United States do not have paid sick days. Thus, when faced with either a personal or family medical issue, they are forced to choose between caring for themselves or their loved ones and

going to work to keep food on the table and a paycheck in the mail. This is not acceptable. People get sick every day. They should have the right to get medical treatment without jeopardizing their jobs or harming the people around them. The Healthy Families Act would guarantee them that right.

According to Harvard University's Global Working Families Project, 139 nations provide some sort of paid sick days; 177 of those nations guarantee at least a week of annual sick pay. The United States, however, has no such guarantee—the federal Family and Medical Leave Act provides only unpaid sick leave for serious personal or family illnesses. This lack of paid sick leave puts our Nation's workforce, both present and future, at risk.

As ranking member of the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, I am extremely conscious of the regulatory burden that our businesses face—particularly our small businesses. I believe that government should avoid weighing down small businesses with unnecessary regulations. However, the more I have examined this issue, the more obvious it becomes that this legislation benefits both employees and employers.

It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that healthy employees are the key to a productive and vibrant economy. Healthy employees are more productive and often more efficient. But, without paid sick days, many employees will go to work rather than take time off to get regular preventative medical checkups or to recover from an attacking illness or to care for a sick child. Thus, they will get sick more often, and their illnesses will spread. Employees who opt to come to work when sick can make their condition worse or even spread their illness to coworkers. For a business, it is far more costly to cope with a depleted staff or to search for a replacement when an employee is suffering from an extended illness than it is to provide just 7 sick days. Providing employees with a small number of paid sick days is a simple and commonsense fix that will save businesses time and money.

In addition, I have heard that small businesses often complain that they want to offer this benefit but are unable to and need a level playing field. This legislation would offer them just that.

Mr. President, I hope my colleagues will take a look at the Healthy Families Act and will join me in cosponsoring it.

ASSAULT WEAPONS

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, the National Rifle Association leadership has stated repeatedly that a ban on assault weapons is ineffective and unnecessary. They assert that guns labeled as assault weapons are rarely used in violent crimes and that most people use them for hunting. However, despite these repeated assertions, the list of