HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

SPECIALIST DENNIS G. JENSEN

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute SPC Dennis G. Jensen and his heroic service to our country. A member of the South Dakota National Guard, Spc. Jensen was serving in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. On August 16, 2011, he died of injuries sustained as a result of a bridge construction accident in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

A 2009 graduate of Vermillion High School, SPC Jensen enlisted in the National Guard's 211th Engineer Company in May 2008. In May 2011, SPC Jensen volunteered to deploy to Afghanistan with the National Guard's 200th Engineer Company. It is a special person who is willing to deploy outside of his unit; SPC Jensen's courage and personal sacrifice is commendable. SPC Jensen's service commendations include the National Defense Service Medal, Global ar on Terrorism Service Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, NATO Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal, Overseas Service Ribbon, and the Army Service Ribbon.

SPC Jensen will be remembered for his selfless service to our country and his willingness to put the needs of others before his own. He will be deeply missed by those who survive him: his father Glenn Jensen, mother Christine Bestgen, and sister Melissa Jensen.

SPC Jensen made the ultimate sacrifice for his soldiers and his country. Our Nation owes him a debt of gratitude, and the best way to honor his life is to emulate his commitment to our country. Mr. President, I join with all South Dakotans in expressing my deepest sympathy to the family and friends of SPC Dennis Jensen. He will be missed, but his service to our Nation will never be forgotten.

THIS FOR DIPLOMATS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I would like to congratulate THIS for Diplomats of Washington, DC, on its 50th anniversary. Established in 1961, and formerly known as The Hospitality and Information Service, THIS has welcomed diplomats and their families from around the world to the Nation's Capital. Understanding the power of exchange, THIS continues to provide enriching educational, informational and cultural experiences.

In the past year, THIS' 300 volunteers donated 20,000 hours to provide 65 programs and 208 language and cultural exchanges with 1734 diplomats. Programs included seminars on American government; visits to the Supreme Court, White House, Pentagon, Library of Congress, private art collections, performances at the Kennedy Center, as well as a Sports in America series. Language conversation groups included Arabic, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Spanish, Turkish, and English.

Diplomats and their families from all over the world speak of how important THIS has been to their adjustment to and appreciation of the United States. Congratulations to THIS for Diplomats and its volunteers around the world on 50 years of service in advocating peace, tolerance, and prosperity.

TRIBUTE TO PETER VAN OOT

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, it is a great pleasure to call the Senate's attention to the economic development contributions of Peter Van Oot, a friend and former member of my staff. Pete, a native of Westminster, VT, has long served his community and our State with dedication and enthusiasm. Through his work with the Brattleboro Economic Development Credit Corporation board, and, more recently, the Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation, Pete has worked tirelessly to create jobs and to promote our local economy. Named Volunteer of the Year by the Northeast Economic Development Association, Pete was recently recognized for his hard work, and I take this opportunity to offer him my congratulations. I ask unanimous consent that an August 8 article highlighting his work, in the Brattleboro Reformer, be printed in the RECORD.

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

LOCAL LAWYER RECOGNIZED FOR HIS COMMITMENT TO ECONOMIC GROWTH

[From the Brattleboro Reformer, Aug. 8, 2011]

(By Josh Stilts)

BRATTLEBORO.—Peter D. Van Oot's said his vision of a healthy community starts with a strong local economy. Because of this commitment and his unwavering focus, which he attributes to his father, Van Oot was named Volunteer of the Year by the Northeast Economic Development Association.

Without access to good paying, secure jobs, the education system falters and it can easily lead to social injustice, he said.

''When mom and dad don't have a job anymore, bad things can happen,'' he said.

That's why in his 20s, Van Oot dedicated his spare time to establishing outlets for businesses to grow and to figure out ways to draw large employers to the area.

Van Oot grew up in Westminster and said he can remember when there were plenty of jobs and how much happier the residents seemed. After earning his law degree, he returned to the area and began working at Downs Rachlin Martin PLLC and nearly simultaneously started volunteering on the United Way of Windham County board.

''I realized quickly that if we didn't work to shore up the Windham County economy, all the organizations would be for naught,'' Van Oot said. ''Without good-paying jobs and a solid local economy you lose the base of the community.''

As unemployment rises, the strains on organizations such as the United Way and Youth Services becomes almost too much, he said.

About a decade ago he shifted his focus and began serving on the Brattleboro Economic Development Credit Corporation board.

''My interest really became how do we bring jobs to the area to fulfill the ones that left and bolster the economy,'' Van Oot said. ''It was a fantastic organization to work with. In the past two years we really did some great work. We've had economic development success with Grafton Cheese's retail store and brining in the Common Wealth Yogurt factory.''

Not only do those businesses provide good paying jobs, they're also using Vermont based resources, Van Oot said.

''It really helps to fill the economic gaps,'' he said. ''Like in golf, we need to fill in the divots.''

Van Oot said there's a lot of people who have done and are doing what he does but urged younger people to get involved.

''Brattleboro had always been known as a community that had people who were involved in the economy, in rotary clubs and boards like the United Way,'' he said. ''But now it's much more difficult to get younger business people involved in these types of activities.''

He added that reaching out to young entrepreneurs has already started to bear fruit.

''Look at what they're doing with the BDCC small business competitions,'' Van Oot said. ''What a great way to get people involved.''

Jeff Lewis, executive director of the Brattleboro Economic Development Credit Corporation, said Van Oot was a champion of growing the local economy.

''Pete worked tirelessly to promote economic development in southern Vermont during his many years in Brattleboro,'' Lewis said. ''His focus and leadership helped the organization create dynamic strategy that addressed widespread economic decline in the region.''

Lewis added that Van Oot transformed the board's membership, created a robust public policy, orchestrated annual plan reviews and developed a BDCC CEO council.

''BDCC now annually exceeds its goals for economic development and its own financial stability,'' Lewis said. ''Based on Pete's work with the board, BDCC is now leading a regional strategy project looking to address long-term job and population loss, and the prospective loss of the region's largest employer.''

In the last couple of years Van Oot has transitioned from his Brattleboro office to the firm's Lebanon location, and it was there he got involved with another group, the Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation, which is similarly focused on creating community through jobs.

''Pete has brought that same deep level of commitment to his role on the board at GMEDC (that he had in Brattleboro),'' said Joan Goldstein, the group's executive director. ''Leadership of this type ought to be recognized and I am pleased that NEDA saw it the same way we did.''

Van Oot will be presented his award at the NED's annual meeting on Oct. 24 at the Sheraton Hotel in Burlington.

NATIONAL FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDERS AWARENESS DAY

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Mr. President, today I rise to recognize September 9, 2011, as National Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Awareness Day. Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, FASD, is an umbrella term describing the varied range of alcohol-related birth defects that may result from the use of alcohol during pregnancy. The effects of this disorder may involve mental, behavioral, and/or learning disabilities. FASD is the leading known cause of preventable cognitive impairment in America. It is estimated FASD effects 1 in 100 live births each year.