

who have given their lives to defend this Nation.

The people of Mississippi are proud and supportive of those in military service. On Memorial Day, citizens all across our State will join other Americans to remember, honor, and say a prayer of thanksgiving for those who gave their lives in service to their country. We will also remember and comfort their families, who mourn the loss of loved ones. We will enjoy the fellowship of our friends and neighbors with whom we enjoy the liberty that has been so preciously guarded by the fallen.

The national day of commemoration that we observe today evolved from a practice first started in the aftermath of the Civil War. In April 1866, citizens of Columbus, MS, started what became Decoration Day, time set aside to decorate the graves of Confederate and Union soldiers alike. That tradition of honoring all those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice continues to this day. It is the right thing to do.

While we naturally look back to battles now consigned to history, we will also honor those brave men and women who, in more recent times, have died for their country. This Memorial Day 2014, my State will remember Army SPC Terry K.D. Gordon of Shubuta, MS, who lost his life in a helicopter accident in Now Bahar, Afghanistan, on December 18, 2013. We will mourn his loss and honor him for his courage, dedication and sacrifice.

This Memorial Day should also prompt us to recommit ourselves to meeting our obligations to the men and women who take up arms to protect this great Nation. The serious problems that surround the delivery of benefits and services we owe to our veterans are unacceptable. The Department of Veterans Affairs has an important and sacred mission to uphold the full faith and trust of our government's commitment to our veterans.

As I observe Memorial Day and honor those who have given their lives to their country, I will also be mindful of our commitment to protect and support veterans and their families.

SKI AREA RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITY ENHANCEMENT ACT

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Madam President, I wish to highlight an important milestone in our work in Congress. I speak of my legislation to create year-round, sustainable jobs in mountain communities around the country while expanding opportunities for Americans to enjoy the great outdoors through the expansion of summer recreational opportunities at ski areas. On April 17, 2014, the U.S. Forest Service issued its final directives for implementing my Ski Area Recreational Opportunity Act, a law that allows and encourages ski areas on national forests to offer new activities for all seasons, such as expanded hiking and mountain biking, Frisbee golf, climb-

ing walls, mountain coasters, zip lines, ropes courses, special events, and other popular activities.

I am proud to have led this bipartisan effort, from my time in the House, where I first introduced the Ski Area Recreational Opportunity Enhancement Act, to here in the Senate, where we saw the president sign it into law in 2011. After its passage, I worked with stakeholders and the U.S. Forest Service to make sure that the law's implementation empowers site-specific decisions that are appropriate for ski areas and local communities. This allows for the greatest opportunity for success in achieving the bill's main goals: boosting rural economies and promoting outdoor recreation. I would like to thank my colleagues Senators FEINSTEIN, HELLER, and BARRASSO for working with me to ensure this would happen.

Ski areas across the country and especially in my home State of Colorado have embraced the new flexibility provided by the Ski Area Recreational Opportunity Enhancement Act. Since its passage, they have been proposing projects to create activities for all seasons. I encourage the U.S. Forest Service to quickly review these proposals and to reach the best decision for each local project and community. That includes allowing for public input as prescribed by the National Environmental Policy Act. The local U.S. Forest Service land managers have a strong record of successfully working with ski areas to manage these long-running partnerships and that record is one of the reasons I advocated for a flexible directive empowering local decisionmaking.

I want to thank the U.S. Forest Service for finalizing a directive that provides that flexibility.

The U.S. Forest Service estimates that expanded recreational opportunities at ski areas will increase summer visits to national forests by 600,000 people each year, create 600 full or part-time jobs and inject nearly \$40 million into mountain communities. I think we all can agree these are substantial gains for rural economies and a testament to the importance of these ski areas to the recreation community and the American public at large.

I also would like to recognize the important support of our other cosponsors: Senators MURRAY, BENNET, RISCH, SHAHEEN, ENZI, CANTWELL, AYOTTE, SANDERS, REID, LEAHY, and STABENOW. It was a strong bipartisan effort and I know we are all eager to see projects get underway to benefit rural economies and the recreating public.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

COOKS FROM THE VALLEY

• Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, I want to commend the extraordinary work of Cooks from the Valley, a volunteer organization dedicated to supporting our Nation's servicemembers, veterans and their families.

Cooks from the Valley was established in Bakersfield, CA, by local resident Tom Anton, to bring the taste of home cooking to military members stationed all over the world.

What first began with one person in Bakersfield has grown to a diverse group of service-minded volunteers from coast to coast bound by one common goal: to say thank you to the men and women who serve in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Our military members and their families have made tremendous sacrifices and they deserve nothing less than the full and enduring support of a grateful nation. As co-chair of the Senate Military Family Caucus, I want to express my deepest gratitude to everyone at Cooks from the Valley—Mr. Anton, the volunteers, and many community supporters for their steadfast support of our servicemembers, veterans, and their families.

These dedicated Americans generously volunteer their time and resources to travel to all corners of the globe, providing our servicemembers with a taste of home that has boosted the spirits and filled the stomachs of those who put their lives on the line each and every day in service to our Nation. Cooks from the Valley's unique way of giving back to our military men and women should be an inspiration to us all.

As Americans, we have an obligation to give back to those who give so much for us. For many years, Cooks from the Valley has worked to fulfill this responsibility and I know they will continue to make a difference in the lives of our military families for many years to come.●

MILITARY APPRECIATION MONTH

• Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, I wish to recognize our military servicemembers, their families, and all veterans who have sacrificed in the service of this great country. After a long winter, Americans are finally enjoying the outdoors and spending precious time with their loved ones this month. But we should always remember that we enjoy these freedoms because the Guard, Reserve, and Active members of the U.S. military remain diligent, ready and willing to serve and sacrifice.

We celebrate our 15th annual National Military Appreciation Month this year, thanks to the leadership of my colleague Senator MCCAIN, who sponsored legislation in 1999 that set aside an entire month to honor, remember, and appreciate the patriotism and dedication of the military and their families. Military Appreciation Month includes specific recognition of Loyalty Day on May 1, Victory in Europe Day on May 8, Military Spouse Appreciation Day on May 9, Armed Forces Day on May 17, and, most importantly, Memorial Day on May 26.

From the American Revolution to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, military men and women have always made

enormous sacrifices in order to defend our Nation. I am inspired by their patriotism, their courage, and their dedication to freedom. Military Appreciation Month also recognizes the more than 90 million Americans who have family members serving in the military. Military families are also making tremendous sacrifices on behalf of the American people, and they are equally deserving of recognition during National Military Appreciation Month.

Recent events have provided another reminder of the constant guard our brave servicemembers provide. Earlier this year, 24-year-old PO2 Mark Mayo of Hagerstown, MD, gave his life, without hesitation, to protect his fellow shipmate. As a civilian assaulted a fellow sailor and grabbed her gun, Petty Officer Mayo stepped into harm's way, shielded his shipmate, and died so that she could live. Petty Officer Mayo was laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery on April 25, 2014, and posthumously awarded The Navy and Marine Corps Medal, the highest noncombat decoration for heroism awarded by the U.S. Department of the Navy.

Petty Officer Mayo is just one example of the heroism of our servicemembers; heroism that has been displayed countless times, both at home and abroad, throughout our Nation's history.

Young military men and women represent the best of our country. They choose to serve our communities, fight for their fellow Americans and defend our liberties with the fullest measure of devotion. Similar to generations before them, they have committed themselves to the defense of our Constitution against all enemies. Their devotion to their fellow Americans makes our Nation exceptional.

Not all those who support our national defense have worn a uniform or have been called away to distant battlefields. World War II's "Rosie the Riveter" saying "We can do it" sounds an awful lot like today's young people saying "Yes, we can." I urge my colleagues to keep this spirit of our "Rosies" in mind today as we commit ourselves to answering the challenges that face our Nation.

We are fortunate to have so many women still living in Maryland who evoke the spirit of Rosie the Riveter. Crena Anderson riveted airplanes in Hagerstown, MD, during World War II. Ruth Staples of Brunswick, MD, worked on the railroad in support of allied efforts during the war. Even today, Crena and Ruth are both actively helping their local communities create replicable projects that teach and preserve World War II-era history and advance positive roles that women can play in our changing world.

This Memorial Day should be a time when all Americans can reconnect with our history and core values by honoring those who gave their lives for the ideals we cherish. In addition to remembering the servicemembers who fought and died in our Nation's wars, I

believe that we must also take care of the servicemembers and veterans who are still with us, especially when they return home. There are serious issues that need to be addressed in the military and veteran communities. Active-Duty military and veteran suicide rates are at record high, Veterans' Administration disability claims continue to face unacceptable delays, and many programs that help discharged servicemembers make the transition to civilian life are inadequate. It is unacceptable that many of our servicemembers, veterans, and their caregivers lack the health care they need after a decade of war. Too many of these men and women are suffering from not only visible injuries but invisible ones too. We must do better. In these challenging times, let us pledge to redouble our efforts to provide for our veterans, not just on this Memorial Day but every day.

Military Appreciation Month is a time we should hold close to our hearts. In our hectic daily lives, let us not forget why our country endures. Throughout this month we will see many American flags and flowers adorning the graves of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our Nation. We honor them and remember their families, who wear the Gold Star Pin, because they bear the greatest burden of sacrifice. I remember in particular the 114 Marylanders who have been killed in our most recent conflicts and am reminded that our freedom isn't free. The best way to honor their sacrifice is to ensure that we are unwavering in our support for those who return to us wounded, ill, and injured. Let us affirm our commitment to them today and every day. ●

JASPER COUNTY, IOWA

● Mr. HARKIN. Madam President, the strength of my State of Iowa lies in its vibrant local communities, where citizens come together to foster economic development, make smart investments to expand opportunity, and take the initiative to improve the health and well-being of residents. Over the decades, I have witnessed the growth and revitalization of so many communities across my State. And it has been deeply gratifying to see how my work in Congress has supported these local efforts.

I have always believed in accountability for public officials, and this, my final year in the Senate, is an appropriate time to give an accounting of my work across four decades representing Iowa in Congress. I take pride in accomplishments that have been national in scope—for instance, passing the Americans with Disabilities Act and spearheading successful farm bills. But I take a very special pride in projects that have made a big difference in local communities across my State.

Today, I would like to give an accounting of my work with leaders and

residents of Jasper County to build a legacy of a stronger local economy, better schools and educational opportunities, and a healthier, safer community.

Between 2001 and 2013, the creative leadership in your community has worked with me to secure funding in Jasper County worth over \$3.2 million and successfully acquired financial assistance from programs I have fought hard to support, which have provided more than \$22 million to the local economy.

Of course my favorite memory of working together has to be working to fund the Neal Smith Wildlife National Wildlife Refuge. Congressman SMITH's dedication to protecting Iowa's local wildlife, fragile ecosystems, and beautiful natural scenery was a legacy that was truly a privilege to carry on. This refuge is not just a state natural resource, but a national treasure. It is home to grazing buffalo herds, white-tailed deer, badgers and pheasants, and more than 200 types of native prairie flowers and grasses. The hundreds of thousands of Iowans who visit the refuge every year experience the beauty and fragility of our natural environment. I hope that as I worked to carry on Congressman SMITH's legacy in providing over \$1.3 million since 2000 to the refuge, Iowans will help take up the mantle to continue to support this tremendous local resource.

Among the highlights: Main Street Iowa: One of the greatest challenges we face—in Iowa and all across America—is preserving the character and vitality of our small towns and rural communities. This isn't just about economics. It is also about maintaining our identity as Iowans. Main Street Iowa helps preserve Iowa's heart and soul by providing funds to revitalize downtown business districts. This program has allowed towns like Colfax to use that money to leverage other investments to jumpstart change and renewal. I am so pleased that Jasper County has earned \$43,000 through this program. These grants build much more than buildings. They build up the spirit and morale of people in our small towns and local communities.

School grants: Every child in Iowa deserves to be educated in a classroom that is safe, accessible, and modern. That is why, for the past decade and a half, I have secured funding for the innovative Iowa Demonstration Construction Grant Program—better known among educators in Iowa as Harkin grants for public schools construction and renovation. Across 15 years, Harkin grants worth more than \$132 million have helped school districts to fund a range of renovation and repair efforts—everything from updating fire safety systems to building new schools. In many cases, these Federal dollars have served as the needed incentive to leverage local public and private dollars, so it often has a tremendous multiplier effect within a school district. Over the years, Jasper