

as he was known to his friends and loved ones, grew up on his family's farm near Verdon, NE, a town with fewer than 200 people. While attending Dawson-Verdon High School, Jake thrived and stood out as a model student. He was an all-around athlete and played the baritone in the honor band. He was also passionate about helping others in need and regularly devoted his time to organizations that combat substance abuse in Verdon and around the State.

Jake's former principal, John Eickhoff, described him as "a great kid, student and athlete." Principal Eickhoff recalls, "If I had a school full of Jacob Fritzes, I wouldn't have had anything to do."

When Jake entered his senior year in high school, his focus remained on his commitment to helping others, and he began pursuing a career in the U.S. military. His mother Noala recalls Jake's dream of serving his country, which was inspired by his grandfather, a retired Air Force officer. Karen Mezger, a family friend, recalls that Jake wanted to have a career in the Army and more than anything come back to Verdon and live the life of a gentleman farmer.

With the support of his family and the nomination from then-Senator Chuck Hagel, Jake left Nebraska in June of 2000 to begin his first year at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. As soon as he arrived, Jake earned the reputation among his fellow cadets as a warm and supportive person. His friend, 1LT Travis Reinhold, recalls Jake's midwestern values. "I called him 'Jolly Jake,'" Lieutenant Reinhold remembers, "because no matter who you were, he always gave you a warm country smile." Lieutenant Reinhold also noted Jake's superb voice as a member of the West Point Glee Club. His voice was always filled with conviction and beauty, particularly when singing the hymn "Mansions of the Lord."

After 4 years, Jake graduated from West Point with a bachelor's degree in systems engineering. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army on May 28, 2005. Following speciality training, Jake was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 377th Parachute Field Artillery Regiment, at Fort Richardson, AK.

Not long after Jake's arrival at Fort Richardson, the 2nd Battalion was deployed to Iraq. It was 2006, and the war was escalating. The insurgency was in full force and threatening to erase the progress made by American troops. By the end of that year, President Bush announced a counterassault known as the "surge" and deployed an additional 30,000 troops to the region. Lieutenant Fritz joined this effort and routinely volunteered at Forward Operating Base Karbala to assist Iraqi soldiers. Jake had a natural instinct to step up and take charge. He felt an obligation and a commitment to the mission, which often required volunteering for these types of assignments.

But shortly after Jake arrived at Karbala, all hell broke loose. On January 20, 2007, enemy militants disguised as friendly soldiers entered the base and attacked. In a matter of minutes, Lieutenant Fritz and three other American soldiers were captured. The militants rushed Jake and the other hostages east towards Mahawil. American troops quickly located their trail and they followed in hot pursuit. Shortly after crossing the Euphrates River and with American forces gaining, the militants attempted to hasten their escape by executing the four captives. The American soldiers were stripped of their identification and shot as the militants fled the scene, and Jake was mortally wounded. As his heartless murderers fled into the abyss, Jake realized his body might not be identified, and so in a final act of bravery, he managed to scrawl a few letters in the dust of an abandoned vehicle. So when the American troops arrived at the scene, they saw his body and the word "Fritz."

Back in Verdon, NE, it was a snowy day in late January of 2007. Jake's mother Noala arrived home to find two strange cars in the driveway. Men dressed in uniform approached her as she walked to the back door. She instinctively knew why they were there, and she refused to listen to the words no mother should ever hear. It was clear that her son would not be coming home.

First Lieutenant Jacob Fritz was laid to rest on January 31, 2007. He received full military honors, and he was buried in a church ceremony just 4 miles from his home. Family and friends paid their final respects in a moving service that honored the courage, commitment, and sacrifice of this local hero. Jake was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Prisoner of War Medal, and the Combat Action Badge.

His two younger brothers later followed in his footsteps, and they earned commissions in the Army. They serve to this day with the same distinction and the honor they learned from their big brother.

Jake's mother retired from teaching and spends much of her time helping Gold Star families throughout Nebraska.

Meanwhile, Jake's memory lives on in the hearts and minds of the State he served. Nebraskans are forever indebted to his sacrifice.

First Lieutenant Jacob Fritz is a hero, and I am honored to tell his story.

Thank you, Madam President.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASIDY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATIONS OF BETH COBERT AND MICHAEL MISSAL

Mr. CARPER. Thank you, Mr. President. It is good to see the Presiding Officer on this St. Patrick's Day, and I am pleased to have a chance to rise and to urge my colleagues to confirm two very important nominees. Some of my colleagues have scattered across the country to go home for a 2-week recess, but the Presiding Officer is here. Hopefully, the words that I am saying here today will find their way to our colleagues wherever they are or wherever they are headed.

One of the nominees is a woman named Beth Cobert, who has been nominated to be the Director of the Office of Personnel Management, and the other is Michael Missal, who has been nominated to be the inspector general of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Like many of my colleagues, I have grown frustrated over the years as, too often, senior positions in the Federal Government have been left vacant or filled by someone serving in an acting capacity for far too long. A lack of critical leadership at agencies can—and oftentimes does—undermine the effectiveness of Federal programs. I know all of us want Federal agencies to work more efficiently to provide the most value to American taxpayers, and having strong leadership in place is key to that effort. I hope we can move to quickly confirm both of these nominees when the Senate returns after the recess.

Let me start with a few words about Beth Cobert. I don't know if the Presiding Officer has had a chance to meet with her. She is one of the most impressive leaders of this administration or any administration whom I have had the privilege to know. She is an excellent nominee to head OPM. Right from the start, I have been very impressed with her work, with her leadership, with her work ethic, and with her ability to get people to work together at OMB and now during her time at OPM in this acting capacity. Before that, she was Deputy Director for Management within the Office of Management and Budget. I just think we are really lucky in this country that she is willing to continue to serve in this capacity as well as serving in her previous capacity. She comes out of the private sector, from McKinsey & Company, a brand new California operation. She did that and had a number of senior positions within that company and a great career.

The Office of Personnel Management performs critical functions affecting the entire Federal workforce. What they do every day has a direct impact on the quality of work at all executive branch departments and agencies. As my colleagues know, Ms. Cobert's time at OPM began in the aftermath of one of the worst cyber attacks committed against our government last year. One result of that incident has been a major effort to overhaul the information technology infrastructure, which

requires great levels of management attention and expertise.

Even before she came to OPM, Ms. Cobert was deeply involved in the OPM response to the breach from her Senate-confirmed role at OMB. If you look at her management and technology experience in the private sector, her experience at OMB, and the time she has already spent leading the Office of Personnel Management, she is the ideal candidate to lead OPM at such a critical time. I am only one of many who have been impressed by Ms. Cobert. In addition to receiving a unanimous vote from the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on her nomination to lead OPM, she has the support of Chairman JASON CHAFFETZ at the House and of Ranking Member ELIJAH CUMMINGS, who lead the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. Representatives CHAFFETZ and CUMMINGS sent a letter to Majority Leader MCCONNELL and Minority Leader REID supporting Ms. Cobert's confirmation.

Here is a taste of what they had to say about her: "[Ms. Cobert] is a qualified and competent choice to lead OPM, which is in need of strong leadership, and we urge the Senate to approve her nomination swiftly."

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the full letter.

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

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM,

Washington, DC, March 3, 2016.

Hon. MITCH MCCONNELL,
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

Hon. HARRY REID,
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MAJORITY LEADER MCCONNELL AND MINORITY LEADER REID: We write in support of President Obama's nomination of Beth Cobert to serve as Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). She is a qualified and competent choice to manage OPM, which is in need of strong leadership, and we urge the Senate to approve her nomination swiftly.

On February 1, 2016, the Inspector General of OPM, on his departure from federal service, sent a letter to President Obama praising Ms. Cobert's leadership:

"I am also comforted by the fact that Acting OPM Director Beth Cobert appears to have wrapped her arms around the multitude of challenges currently facing OPM. Further, she seems to be arduously striving to institute high standards of professionalism as she works to reinvigorate this great agency."

We further expect that as Director, Ms. Cobert will continue to assist the Committee's ongoing investigation of the data breach that OPM announced in 2015, which resulted in the loss of personally identifiable information for over 21.5 million individuals. On February 3, 2016, the Committee issued a subpoena to Ms. Cobert—who has served as OPM's Acting Director since July 10, 2015—for documents related to the data breach investigation. The agency produced some responsive documents by the February 16, 2016, deadline and has agreed to produce outstanding documents on a rolling basis; how-

ever, there are still outstanding documents that have not been produced to the Committee. We expect the agency to fully comply with the subpoena and produce all outstanding documents.

Please contact Katie Bailey of the Chairman's staff or Tim Lynch of the Ranking Member's staff with any questions. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

JASON CHAFFETZ,
Chairman.
ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS,
Ranking Member.

Mr. CARPER. Ms. Cobert is a highly qualified nominee. We are fortunate indeed that she is willing to serve in this capacity and take on the many challenges that are currently facing OPM.

I urge my colleagues to quickly confirm her so she can continue to do the good work that she is doing at OPM.

I have known people who are show horses and folks who are workhorses. This woman is a workhorse—I like to think people look at us as workhorses as well—but she is focused on getting the job done. She is especially good at surrounding herself with terrific people. She did that at OMB, she did that at OPM, and she did that before when she was in her very significant position at McKinsey & Company.

Let me just turn the page and talk about Michael Missal. I want to talk about him and thank him for his willingness to step up and serve as the inspector general for the Department of Veterans Affairs. He served 5 years of Active Duty in a hot war as a naval flight officer in Southeast Asia and another 18 years as a P-3 aircraft mission commander in the Navy right up to the end of the Cold War.

As Governor for 8 years in Delaware and commander in chief of the Delaware National Guard, we send people from Delaware. Right now we have people in Afghanistan. We have sent people over the years to any number of places where they are in harm's way.

I care a lot about veterans. My dad was a veteran. A bunch of my uncles were veterans. One of them got killed in World War II, the victim of a kamikaze attack on his aircraft carrier in the western Pacific. So veterans' concerns run deep in my family.

As we all know, our inspectors general play an extremely important role in our government. Their work helps us to save money while also revealing and prosecuting wrongdoing, promoting the integrity and efficiency of our government, and hopefully increasing the confidence and faith that the American people have in their government. I believe the work of inspectors general, along with that of GAO, is invaluable with respect to the work of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, in which I am privileged to serve, and the whole Senate as we look for ways to get better results for less money and further reduce our Federal deficit down from \$1.4 trillion a half dozen years ago to about close to a quarter of that—which is still too much. We are making progress, but we

need to make more. The IG is a big part of helping us to meet that goal. I think it is critical that we have qualified, experienced people in place to serve these important roles. This is tough work. We are blessed by the many IGs we have.

We have seen far too many IG positions, including the one Mr. Missal has been nominated to fill, sit vacant or be filled by someone serving in an acting capacity for far too long. In fact, the VA, of all agencies, given the concern we have heard and seen across the country in recent years—the IG vacancy at the VA—has been without a permanent, Senate confirmed inspector general for more than 2 years. In the past several years, I have joined all the members of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee in sending letters to the President, urging him to nominate people to fill all the IG vacancies, including one letter that specifically pointed out the importance of the one I am talking about today, the inspector general position at the VA.

Our committee held a hearing last year on IG vacancies and pointed out the importance of having permanent IGs in place to ensure the independence of this office.

I want to thank the President for responding to our committee's letters. He has done this by sending the Senate a number of well-qualified nominees, including Mr. Missal, for our consideration. These words have been heard in the last couple of weeks. He is doing his job, and now it is time for us to do our job with respect to these nominations.

I was pleased that both the Veterans Affairs' Committee and our committee, the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, were able to move quickly to consider Mr. Missal's nomination. I want to thank my colleagues on our committee for making it a priority.

However, since early this year, there has been no action by the Senate on Mr. Missal's nomination. This is an inspector general vacancy in Veterans Affairs, where we know there have been hospitals and facilities across the country that are troubled, and we need the best leadership we can find at the VA in this position. Again, I think the President has given us a very good person. He is willing to do the job. We need to get him confirmed.

As we know, the VA has been facing significant challenges over the last couple of years. I believe that confirming a permanent IG at the VA will help provide much needed oversight, while helping to point out and resolve some of the problems at the VA that are negatively impacting the lives of our veterans every day.

Leaving this position vacant impedes much needed progress on identifying and addressing serious issues at the VA that impact our veterans. If we want to do more to fix the VA, we need a strong

and independent inspector general to be our partner in that effort. Delaying this nomination also delays improvements to the services that our veterans receive.

Permanent leadership of the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General is long overdue and will go a long way toward providing stable leadership and oversight of the agency. I urge my colleagues to quickly confirm Mr. Missal so he can go to work on behalf of our veterans and the American people—not in a couple of months or later this year; we can do it now, as soon as we come back from the recess that begins tomorrow.

ZIKA VIRUS

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I wish to take this opportunity to talk about an issue that is both concerning and tragic; that is, the rapid spread of the Zika virus in Central and South America in recent months. This is a virus we have known about ever since I was born, and that has been about 69 years. I think the first time somebody detected this was maybe on an island in the South Pacific. It has ebbed and flowed over the years, and now it is flowing big time.

Every day researchers are discovering more about this virus and its potential impact, particularly on pregnant woman and their unborn children. The findings are not good. In fact, they are deeply troubling. There are strong indications that the virus is connected to a developmental birth defect that can lead to underdeveloped brains. We have seen the photographs of smaller heads in too many children.

Additional studies are also examining a potential connection between the Zika virus and other health concerns. With the World Health Organization estimating that as many as 4 million people could be infected in the region this year, it is clear that we must act swiftly to combat this threat. That is why I was pleased to see President Obama and his administration take an early and proactive role in addressing the Zika virus. For example, a coordinated Federal response led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is working with State, local, and international public health partners to step up mosquito control efforts and to ensure that health officials have the equipment they need to test people for this disease.

To further these efforts, President Obama has recently submitted a supplemental funding request to Congress. These funds would go toward developing vaccines, mosquito control efforts, and diagnostic testing, among other things. The Senate should take a long, hard look at the President's request in the coming days and weeks and consider what measures we need to take to ensure we are ready for Zika and for other future outbreaks.

TRIBUTE TO FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, in closing, I want to do something I think the Presiding Officer has heard me do before. I try to come to the floor once a month and talk about some of the employees who work at the Department of Homeland Security. They work for us across this country and really around the world.

This is the youngest Department, if you will, that we have in the Federal Government. It is about 12 years old. It sort of formed on the heels of 9/11. Twenty-two agencies that have some commonality in their focus or the way they touch the security of our homeland and the people who live in it kind of glommed together.

The morale in the Department has not been good. There has been a great, sustained effort—and certainly we are trying to support it in our Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs—to turn a corner and let people know that not only is the work they do important, but we appreciate their efforts.

I wish to say a few words today about some of the men and women who work tirelessly to keep us safe and secure, often without a lot of recognition and thanks. I am talking about the good people at the Transportation Security Administration, now led by retired Coast Guard Admiral Neffenger, Peter Neffenger, a very able and impressive leader.

As the Easter holidays approach, many Americans will be traveling to spend time with their families around the country and even around the world. If you head to an airport, as many of my colleagues, their colleagues, and their constituents will be doing very soon, chances are you will interact with some of the hard-working men and women of the TSA who keep our skies safe. Nearly 59,000 people work at TSA. Many are focused on securing our aviation system, while others work to protect our service transportation networks, such as the train I took to work this morning and will be jumping on later today to go home.

TSA's work is not only carried out by frontline employees whom we see at the airports as we check in and go through security, have our bags checked, our bodies checked, there are also many dedicated people who are hard at work behind the scenes. We never actually see them, but they are there keeping us safe too. These men and women perform the critical work of gathering and analyzing intelligence in order to identify potential threats to our transportation system and to mitigate them in real time.

I would like to use the remainder of my time to highlight the outstanding efforts of some of these individuals. I learned about them yesterday while meeting with Admiral Neffenger, who happened to be in a meeting that we had in my office and was with me again today for a secure briefing in the SCIF.

He shared with me something I was very happy to learn about. He told me of six members of the current intelligence team within TSA's Office of Intelligence and Analysis and how they recently received the 2015 Intelligence Community Counterterrorism Award for Education and Training from the Director of the National Counterterrorism Center. That is a mouthful, but it is quite an award, quite a recognition. These six individuals—three men, three women—developed a counterterrorism threat briefing for all frontline employees who man our checkpoints and transit systems so they can better understand the connection between intelligence and TSA security operations.

In essence, these individuals are helping TSA frontline officers understand the “why,” if you will, behind their work. According to the Director of the National Counterterrorism Center, these six or seven men and women “exemplified the essential attributes of the counter-terrorism community: expertise, integration, collaboration, and information sharing.”

While I cannot state their names here, maybe for obvious reasons, I do wish to say to all of you out there—you know who I am talking about—thank you for the work you do every day to ensure that your fellow Americans, people who work here and the people we represent, can travel safely and that our transit systems are secure. Thank you for the work you have done to ensure that your fellow TSA employees have the tools they need to carry out the critical work they do. Your dedication and your invaluable service are appreciated by me, by all of our colleagues in the Senate, our staffs, and by millions of Americans who travel throughout our country every single day.

With that, I have probably said enough. I will say to the Presiding Officer, the staff, and everybody who might be tuned in, happy St. Patrick's Day. We hope good fortune shines on all of us and on our country, not just over this holiday and upcoming recess and a special day today but for a long time after that.

Some of the people we have talked about today—their job is to make sure we are not just lucky, but that we are safe, secure, and successful going forward. There is an old saying: The harder I work, the luckier I get. I am talking about some people who work very hard so we can be fortunate and blessed in this country. I bid you a happy St. Patrick's Day.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). Without objection, it is so ordered.