

quickly as we could get to them after that, we would want to do that.

I might say, I am expecting that we will be in session obviously on Monday. We do have the Jewish holiday to honor on Friday, September 29. But we will expect to be here on Monday, October 2, and could be having votes on these conferences that Monday.

I want to give Senators as much notice as we can, although we have indicated for quite some time that that first week in the new fiscal year, obviously we will have to be prepared to be in session the whole week and into the night, if necessary.

Those are the issues we now have identified. There are a number of other issues that are being worked on. The Finance Committee has been doing some work on the railroad retirement bill and on the community renewal legislation, two issues in which I know there is a lot of interest on both sides of the Capitol. I will give the Senator that list, and, hopefully, we can begin to work together to move a number of these. I believe I sense that opportunity now, when maybe it hadn't been quite ready for that earlier.

#### HEROISM OF WILLIBALD C.

##### BIANCHI AND LEO K. THORSNESS

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, the state of South Dakota has just dedicated a very special park at my alma mater, South Dakota State University. This park holds two new granite markers, each honoring a former SDSU student who won the Congressional Medal of Honor, our nation's highest award for valor in action against an enemy force.

Today I offer my solemn appreciation to these great Americans: First Lieutenant Willibald C. Bianchi, whose heroism occurred in the Philippines during the first weeks of World War II, and Lt. Colonel Leo K. Thorsness, who was decorated for his feats as a fighter pilot over North Vietnam.

First Lieutenant Bianchi, a Minnesota native, was a football player at SDSU and graduated in 1940 with a degree in animal science. During World War II, he served in the 45th Infantry, Philippine Scouts, one of the largest units in the Philippines during the Japanese invasion of December 1941. The invasion was brutally effective and, after less than a month, our Filipino and American troops were forced to retreat onto the Bataan Peninsula where they mounted a final stand against a numerically superior foe.

For three desperate months, the Americans and Filipinos battled the Japanese in a sweltering, mountainous jungle. Food was limited and medical supplies scarce. About a month into the fight, however, First Lieutenant Bianchi participated in a crucial series of battles that helped eliminate a pocket of Japanese troops behind the American line.

Four days after the Japanese incursion, our forces targeted "the Big Pocket" in a coordinated infantry-tank attack. A tank was lost and only slight gains made. On February 3, our forces tried again. Although he was assigned to another unit, First Lieutenant Bianchi volunteered to join a rifle platoon that was directed to destroy two machine gun nests. While leading part of the platoon, First Lieutenant Bianchi was struck by two bullets in his left hand. Refusing to pause for first aid, he dropped his rifle and began firing a pistol. He located one of the machine gun nests and silenced it with grenades. When wounded again, this time by machine gun bullets through his chest muscles, First Lieutenant Bianchi climbed atop an American tank, seized its anti-aircraft gun, and fired into another enemy position until he was knocked off the tank by a third severe bullet wound.

This story has a sad ending. First Lieutenant Bianchi survived that day and returned to the fight a month later. The American-Filipino forces crushed "the Big Pocket" about a week after his heroics. But the Japanese would take Bataan in the end, and First Lieutenant Bianchi was sent off on the Bataan Death March. Though he survived the march, he died on January 9, 1945, when an American plane bombed a Japanese prison ship, not realizing that it held Americans.

The other hero memorialized in Brookings is Lt. Colonel Leo Thorsness, with whom I share some history. We both studied at SDSU, we both served in the Air Force, and we both ran for South Dakota's 1st Congressional District seat in 1978. While I prevailed, it was only by the skin of my teeth—110 votes out of more than 129,000 total ballots. And from that struggle, I gained a first-hand appreciation of the spirit, determination and patriotism of Leo Thorsness. For me, that experience enhances my appreciation for the remarkable story of a 35-year-old Air Force major who, in the words of his strike force commander, took on "most of North Vietnam all by himself."

Lt. Colonel Thorsness had served as a pilot for about 15 years when he was assigned to the 357th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Takhli Royal Thai Air Base. Lt. Colonel Thorsness was sent in just months after the Soviet Union began supplying North Vietnam with surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), and his mission was a new and dangerous one—distract and destroy the SAMs so that U.S. bombers could deliver their ordnance.

At one o'clock in the afternoon on Wednesday, April 19, 1967, his F-105 screamed off the runway, headed for the Xuan Mai army barracks and storage supply area, 37 miles southwest of Hanoi. Lt. Colonel Thorsness and his wingman attacked from the south,

while another pair of F-105s attacked from the north. He silenced one SAM site with missiles, and then destroyed a second SAM site with bombs. But in the attack on the second site, Lt. Colonel Thorsness' wingman was shot down by intensive anti-aircraft fire, and the plane's pilot and electronic warfare officer were forced to eject over North Vietnam. Lt. Colonel Thorsness circled their parachutes and relayed their position to search and rescue crews. While he was circling, a MIG-17 was sighted in the area. Lt. Colonel Thorsness immediately initiated an attack and destroyed the MIG, but he was then forced to depart the area in search of an aerial tanker for refueling.

After learning that rescue helicopters had arrived, but that no additional F-105s were arriving to provide cover, Lt. Colonel Thorsness returned alone, flying back through an area bristling with SAMs and anti-aircraft guns to the downed flyers' position. As he approached, he spotted four MIG-17 aircraft, which he attacked, damaging one and driving away the rest. Soon it became clear that Lt. Colonel Thorsness' plane lacked sufficient fuel to continue protecting the rescue operation and that he would have to find an aerial tanker. On his way to the tanker, however, Lt. Colonel Thorsness received a distress call from a fellow F-105 pilot who had gotten lost in battle and was running critically low on fuel. In response, Lt. Colonel Thorsness allowed that pilot to refuel at the tanker, while he himself flew toward the Thai border, a decision that may have saved the other plane and the life of its pilot, according to the Medal of Honor citation. Lt. Colonel Thorsness managed to return to a forward operating base—"With 70 miles to go, I pulled the power back to idle and we just glided in," he would recall later. "We were indicating 'empty' when the runway came up just in front of us."

A week-and-a-half later, on a similar mission, Lt. Colonel Thorsness was shot down over North Vietnam by a heat-seeking missile from a MIG-21. He spent the next six years as a North Vietnamese prisoner of war. He was released on March 4, 1973, and in October of that year, the President of the United States draped the light blue ribbon of the Congressional Medal of Honor around Lt. Colonel Thorsness' neck.

The official citation says: "Lt. Colonel Thorsness' extraordinary heroism, self-sacrifice, and personal bravery involving conspicuous risk of life were in the highest traditions of the military service and have reflected great credit upon himself and the U.S. Air Force." I could not have put it any better myself.

With this statement before the United States Senate, I join in saluting First Lieutenant Bianchi and Lt. Colonel Thorsness. As Congressional Medal