Nate's dream. ''It was a goal he'd always had and a goal he was able to achieve,'' he said. ''It allowed him to serve his country.''

Nate was, indeed, a proud and dedicated Marine. In a Mother's Day card that he sent to his mother, he explained his reasons for serving. This is what he wrote: ''I'm sorry I'm putting you through this, but I couldn't sit on the sidelines and watch Marines being hurt on the TV.''

This was Nate. He always wanted to be involved—he always wanted to be there for his fellow Marines. That was the type of man he was.

As his father Tim said, ''He was proud to be a Marine—to be serving his country. He was true to his duty and true to his men.''

SGT Brian Casagrande served with Nate and the other fallen members of his unit. In a eulogy for them, he had this to say about Nate:

> Nate Rock was a Marine who made his presence known wherever he was. Before the platoon left for Twenty-nine Palms, he was incorporated into my team, and I quickly came to respect him as a man and a Marine. After arriving in country, he led his own team. We soon became friends and came to know everything about each other. He will not only be missed by me and the platoon, but by his family that he constantly talked about and his fellow police officers who he served with in Martin's Ferry, Ohio.

I had the privilege of meeting Nate family and speaking with them at Nate's calling hours. He was a courageous young man—someone who valued his friendships and loved his family dearly, as they loved him.

Nate's death has been a loss to his entire community. One of his former teachers, Roy Golec, remembers Nate for the rare sense of integrity and purpose he had even as a teenager. ''He could do just about anything he put his mind to,'' Roy said. ''He had his head on straight, and he knew what he wanted to do.''

Joe Neeper, Nate's neighbor, had known him all his life. According to Joe, Nate was the epitome of professionalism and loved being a Marine. He was always disciplined, committed, and ready to serve. As Joe said, ''When you talked to Nate, you noticed he had the Marine Corps attitude.''

In Nate's memory, the Northeast Ohio Dog Training Academy gave the Martins Ferry Police Department a new drug dog. He was named ''Rock,'' after their fallen officer.

One of Nate's fishing companions and brothers-in-arms, John Howard, reflected on his friend in the following message:

> Every time I cast my line out, I am overwhelmed with great memories of the good times Rock and I had while fishing the Potomac River. The last summer of our active service, it became a nightly ritual to throw the rods and tackle boxes into Nate truck and head down to the dock for catfishing. Even when the fish weren't biting, our stories would keep us occupied.

And Joel Andrade, who served with Nate in the Marine Corps from 1998 to 2001, said this about his fellow Marine:

> Nate stood out from the rest. I remember him as a quiet, polite guy, who was respected by everyone. He was always willing to help anybody who needed help and always greeted you whenever he saw you.

The world is a better place because of Nathaniel Rock. He intuitively understood the importance of service. He loved his family. He loved his country. He was a dedicated, committed marine, who is missed by his family, friends, comrades, and community.

My wife Fran and I continue to keep Sergeant Rock family in our thoughts and prayers.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I come to the floor with several objectives. We will be voting later tonight. We are still waiting for the bills to come over from the House.

TENNESSEE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, as we serve in a class of Senators, we have several roles. We wear several hats. Probably the most important one is to represent the people who elected us, and that is our constituents back home in our home States. That has been for me a real honor over the last 12 years, to serve the people of Tennessee.

In addition to that, of course, we serve America as 100 individuals representing this entire country. That is a real privilege. If you are elected to leadership, you have other responsibilities.

Twelve years ago, the people of Tennessee entrusted me with the responsibility to serve their interests in the Senate. I have done my best each and every day to meet the Volunteer State's needs and to serve the people of my home State with dignity and honor. What an honor it has been to follow in the footsteps of former Senators Howard Baker and Bill Brock. What a tremendous privilege it has been representing the interests of the people of Tennessee.

And serving along side true statesmen such as Fred Thompson and Lamar Alexander—men who have dedicated so much of their lives to the people of Tennessee—has been a remarkably rewarding experience.

When I first stood for election in 1994, I pledged to all Tennesseans that I would serve two terms in the Senate and then return to home to live under the laws I had helped enact.

I made that commitment because I believe strongly in the concept of the citizen legislator—spending years developing real world experience outside the political arena as I did in medicine and then bringing that expertise to the legislative process for a period of time . . . only to make way for the next citizen with his or her fresh perspectives and new ideas.

As the time comes to resume my private life in the Music City, I have spent countless hours reflecting on the milestones in my service to Tennessee from which I derive particular pride.

I think about accomplishments such as establishing a prescription drug benefit that provides quality, affordable coverage for more than 700,000 beneficiaries in Tennessee.

I think about the State sales tax deduction, which I hope we will soon extend for 2 more years. Enacting that provision corrected a 15 year inequity in the Tax Code by allowing Tennesseans to deduct their State sales tax expenses from Federal income tax returns—and it resulted in additional savings of nearly $500 in taxes for more than 530,000 families across the State.

I recall the hours spent combating methamphetamine, a drug epidemic that has plagued Tennessee and dozens of other States.

I helped develop minimum Federal standards restricting access to the ingredients that produce methamphetamine, the drug our Nation's local law enforcement officials have ranked as our greatest problem.

I also enjoyed working with other members of the Tennessee delegation to establish a statewide methamphetamine task force and develop a statewide crime tracking system—all in an effort to eradicate this devastating drug from our communities.

During my time as majority leader, we also enacted a tobacco buyout that ended an outdated quota system that hurt Tennessee's farmers by providing fair compensation that will bring a total of $767 million to tobacco communities in the State over the next decade.

And we passed my National Park Fee Equity Act, a law that provides the Great Smoky Mountain National Park with an additional $200,000 to $300,000 each year by allowing the park to keep 100 percent of the user fees it collects.

I was also pleased earlier this year when the Senate confirmed the final member of a TVA board modernized by legislation I nursed through the legislative process over a 9-year period—legislation that resulted in the first African-American board member, the first west Tennessee board member, and the first chief executive officer in TVA history.

In addition, we passed legislation I authored allowing TVA to refinance its debt at lower rates, thus saving roughly $100 million per year.

These reforms will help increase accountability and oversight at TVA, which benefits both the utility and its ratepayers.

I have also worked extensively with my colleagues on the HELP Committee to extended health care and support services to Nashville, Memphis, and

other emerging metropolitan communities disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS through reauthorization of the Ryan White CARE Act.

The CARE Act provides funding for low-income, uninsured and underinsured individuals affected by HIV/AIDS, but none of Tennessee's cities met the legislation's original criteria to receive support—a fact I knew we had to correct and one which we rightly remedied.

I have dedicated significant energy to strengthening Tennessee's research infrastructure, and bringing both the Spallation Neutron Source project and the National Leadership Computational Facility to Oak Ridge demonstrates our State's leadership in advanced science and technology.

I was also pleased to play a central role in the development of the Memphis Bioworks Foundation and the revitalization of the Central Medical District in Memphis by securing $8.1 million for these efforts.

And to ensure that we encourage the bright young men and women of our State to pursue an education in these fields that are vital to America's competitiveness in the 21st century's global economy, I also created the SMART Grant program—a $3.75 billion initiative that provides financial assistance to students seeking degrees in math, science, engineering, technology, and foreign languages critical to national security.

I have tried to encourage economic growth in other ways, however, working closely with communities throughout Tennessee to provide the Federal assistance that can often enable local governments to pursue opportunities that will benefit their citizens for generations.

I secured $100 million to construct sections of Interstate 69 in Tennessee from Dyersburg to Memphis—a highway that will one day serve as an economic engine for much of West Tennessee.

When community leaders in the Chattanooga area asked for assistance with the crumbling Chickamauga Lock and Dam, a structure providing access to hundreds of miles of waterway used for economic economy in East Tennessee, I helped ensure the authorization of a new 110 ft.-by-600 ft. replacement lock.

Construction funding for the replacement structure has been successfully secured in each year since 2003, and after a long period of hard work and difficult discussion, the White House agreed to include the project in its most recent budget request.

Several years ago, violent tornados ravaged Jackson, and local leaders sought my assistance in rebuilding badly damaged neighborhoods and city infrastructure.

I was honored to secure almost $11 million from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to rebuild public housing lost as a result of the devastating storms and an additional $2.1 million for the city's police department to improve communications during such emergencies.

Nashville long sought a light rail system that could help alleviate the burden placed on its roadways and improve the flow of consumers into downtown—the heart of its economic marketplace.

So I went to work and eventually secured $24.6 million in funding necessary to start and complete the Music City Star East Corridor Commuter Rail Project, which allowed Tennessee's first commuter rail passenger service to begin between the Riverfront Station in downtown Nashville and the city of Lebanon in Wilson County just 3 months ago.

And when the city of Memphis began redeveloping its riverfront, I lent my support to the cause and secured nearly $8.7 million for the Cobblestone Landing and Beale Street Landing projects.

To help advance this work, I facilitated an agreement that will allow the University of Memphis Cecil Humphreys School of Law to relocate to the Postal Service Front Street Station in downtown Memphis—a move that will act as a cornerstone of riverfront redevelopment and reshape the law school's future.

I have also tried at every turn to provide steadfast support for Tennessee's brave men and women in uniform as a sign of my gratitude and respect for their extraordinary efforts on behalf of our Nation.

Because they deserve only the best facilities, I secured $32 million to construct a new headquarters facility for the Tennessee Army National Guard in Nashville and an additional $31 million to consolidate personnel previously located in 22 different buildings into a single, state-of-the-art command headquarters for the 101st Airborne and other units at Fort Campbell.

Because they and their families deserve basic economic fairness, I helped secure passage of the Fort Campbell Tax Fairness Act, which now ensures Volunteer State residents working at Fort Campbell are spared from a State income tax like all other Tennesseans.

I could spend many hours on the Senate floor recalling the countless ways in which I have worked to meet Tennessee's needs during my 12 years as a Member of this body.

But instead, I would rather thank the people of Tennessee for the opportunity.

I will forever treasure the experience—and the many individuals I have had the privilege of befriending across our great State along the way.

Electing me to serve two terms in the Senate is the greatest honor the citizens of Tennessee could have ever given me.

No words could ever express my deep appreciation.

I look forward to returning home and continuing my efforts to repay their generosity in the years to come.

FULFILLING DUTY, PRESERVING LEGACY: NOMINEE CONFIRMATIONS

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, this week, among other agenda items, the Senate considered the nomination of Robert Gates as Secretary of Defense. It puts me in mind of similar high-level nominations we considered earlier this year, and throughout the 109th Congress. Namely, Chief Justice John Roberts, Justice Samuel Alito, and a host of other judicial nominees and presidential appointees.

When I consider these nominees I am reminded of the progress we've have made—the remarkable strides we've taken—to ensure continued fulfillment of our constitutional duty as United States Senators. Whether we recognized it or not, the 109th Congress had the potential to become a pivotal turning point in our Nation's history—with repercussions reaching far into the future.

Over the past 30 years, the Senate's confirmation process has slowly but steadily deteriorated. We faced the confirmation of fewer and fewer judicial nominees. During the Carter and Reagan administrations, the Senate confirmed 9 out of 10 appeals court nominees. But in the first term of the current administration, the Senate blocked one out of every three appeals court nominees.

Those that were confirmed took longer and longer. In the Carter and Reagan administrations, the Senate took an average of about 60 days to confirm a Federal appeals court nominee. But in the first term of this administration, we took an average of nearly 300 days.

And as the judicial nominations process deteriorated, so too did the quality and civility of debates. Bitterness and acrimony seeped in, threatening to poison the Senate's legacy—and our nation's future.

The 108th Congress marked the low point. For the first time in history, a minority of Senators obstructed the principle of a fair up-or-down vote on judicial nominees. That was unprecedented. Never in 214 years of Senate history had a judicial nominee with majority support been denied an up-or-down vote.

Two years ago, I faced a decision. I could ignore the events of the 108th Congress. Through passivity, I could permit the active obstruction of Senate duties—and the active destruction of Senate traditions.

Or I could do something to halt the unchecked downward spiral. I could protect the Senate's history of fulfilling our constitutional duty. I could help restore our legacy.