

to a fallen paramedic from my State, Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue Lieutenant Rafael Vazquez.

Rafael's life ended prematurely this week; he died at the very young age of 42. But the memory of his dedication, hard work, and commitment to public service will live on for many lifetimes.

Rafael Vazquez led a life committed to public service. For the past 7 years, he worked at Station 28 in Royal Palm Beach, and this January he was promoted to the rank of rescue lieutenant. The men and women he supervised speak about him with great pride—describing him as a hard worker, a man with a sense of humor, and a loving father. This was a man whom they respected and considered a friend; they simply called him "Ray."

Rafael's coworkers knew him as someone who loved his Puerto Rican heritage. He often cooked Latin food for his colleagues. And even though he was born in Brooklyn, NY, after Rafael moved to Florida, as is our tradition in the Sunshine State, he immediately became a Floridian.

Rafael was also a family man—a devoted father and husband. He met his wife Michele while working at American Medical Response and cared for her deeply. In a recent news account, Rafael's wife Michele remembered her husband as, "... a jokester with a quick wit and an infectious smile who would help anyone in need." Michele added, "I thank God every day for giving me the 13 years that I had with him." The couple had a young son together and four children from previous relationships.

Floridians receive rapid medical care in times of emergency because of people like Rafael Vazquez. He loved his work and his contribution will be missed.

On behalf of Florida and the people of the United States, I thank and honor rescue lieutenant Rafael Vazquez for his service to his community and the safety he helped to promote.●

HONORING THE LIFE OF ELLEN PANEOK

● Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I wish today to honor the life of Ellen Paneok, who left us last Sunday, March 2, at the age of 48. So little time on this Earth, but Ellen made so much of it. The State of Alaska is much the better for all that she has accomplished.

How to characterize Ellen? I could speak of her work for Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Southcentral Alaska. Or her work to promote aviation safety at the FAA and as a volunteer in the general aviation community.

I could speak of the inspiring articles she has published. I could tell you that Ellen was a highly respected Inupiat artist working in ivory and scrimshaw.

I could speak of that fact that Ellen offered herself freely as a role model for Native young people.

I could speak to the kindness and loyalty she gave to her friends, including Pat Heller, a very special friend of Ellen's and mine. Ellen's friends returned that kindness and loyalty as they took responsibility for Ellen's care in her final days.

And I could speak of the fact that Ellen was one of the first women—not to mention one of the first Alaska Native women—to pursue the career of Alaska bush pilot. Careers just don't get more adventurous than that. And it was her achievements in the field of aviation that earned Ellen a place in our Nation's history.

Ellen started flying in 1976. She flew primarily out of Barrow carrying mail and supplies to the Native villages of northern Alaska.

Her life story was chronicled in the "Women in Flight" exhibit at the National Air and Space Museum in the nineties. Ellen was one of 37 women in aviation who were part of that exhibit.

On September 11, 1997, she delighted museum goers with stories about chasing polar bears off the runway before she could land, flying in Alaska's extreme weather conditions and restoring airplanes.

Some of her experiences were delightful, others were not. Like July 10, 1980, the day that the engine in Ellen's Piper Twin Pacer quit somewhere between Farewell and McGrath. The plane fell like a brick and crashed into a stand of trees. A day and a half later, after making a smoke fire from brush and engine oil to call attention to the downed aircraft, she was rescued.

That incident gave Ellen a new nickname, "the survivor." The chapter devoted to Ellen in Sandi Sumner's book "Women Pilots of Alaska" is entitled "The Survivor." But it goes on to note that surviving the July 1980 crash in the Alaska bush was one of many crises in Ellen's life from which she grew and thrived.

Ellen was born in Kotzebue, AK, a relatively large community, in Alaska's bush. Ellen's parents divorced when she was age 5. Her father left the picture following the divorce. Her mother was never around. The family moved from Kotzebue to the big city of Anchorage.

Ellen took on the role of mother to her two sisters at the age of 9 and carried on until the age of 12 when the State moved the children into foster homes, splitting the family up to Ellen's protestations. By 14 Ellen was living in a detention facility. She looked at a magazine with airplanes on the cover and said, "This is going to change my life."

Indeed, it did. At age 16, holding a dividend check from Cook Inlet Region, one of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act regional corporations created by Congress, Ellen went to Merrill Field, the general aviation airport in Anchorage, to take flying lessons. The rest is history.

When Ellen spoke to groups of at-risk kids, she could relate from her personal experience. She told them:

I was just like you. I got no encouragement. When you decide to do something don't let anyone or anything discourage you. It's up to you.

In aviation as in life, attitude influences altitude. With an attitude like this it is no wonder that Ellen will be remembered as a "heroine in aviation." That was the name of an exhibit sponsored by the Chicago Airport System which also chronicled Ellen's extraordinary life adventure.

On March 15, a celebration of Ellen's life will take place at the Alaska Aviation Heritage Museum in Anchorage. I regret that I will not be able to attend this event to commemorate the achievements of this truly Renaissance woman. So I am taking a few minutes of the Senate's time today to pay tribute to this individual who I so deeply respect.

I thank the Senate for allowing me to take a few moments today to speak of Ellen Paneok, one of many Alaskans whose contributions to the making of my home State will be repeated again and again in the run-up to the 50th anniversary of Alaska's statehood next January.

Sadly, Ellen will not be with us in person to celebrate that 50th anniversary, yet her inspiring life will not be forgotten. It is forever a part of Alaska's history.●

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR

The following bills were read the second time, and placed on the calendar:

H.R. 1084. An act to amend the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, the State Department Basic Authorities Act of 1956, and the Foreign Service Act of 1980 to build operational readiness in civilian agencies, and for other purposes.

H.R. 1424. To amend section 712 of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, section 2705 of the Public Health Service Act, section 9812 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to require equity in the provision of mental health and substance-related disorder benefits under group health plans, to prohibit discrimination on the basis of genetic information with respect to health insurance and employment, and for other purposes.

H.R. 5159. An act to establish the Office of the Capitol Visitor Center within the Office of the Architect of the Capitol, headed by the Chief Executive Officer for Visitor Services, to provide for the effective management and administration of the Capitol Visitor Center, and for other purposes.

MEASURES READ THE FIRST TIME

The following bill was read the first time:

S. 2734. A bill to aid families and neighborhoods facing home foreclosure and address the subprime mortgage crisis.