

units, of which 54,000 served low-income populations. During his August 27 visit to New Orleans, HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan emphasized the need to revitalize this housing and highlighted the importance of a placed-in-service extension.

With an extension, developers will be able to attract investors to their proposed developments, have adequate time to overcome financial barriers triggered by the current economic crisis, and create more opportunities for residents displaced by the 2005 hurricanes to return home. Without an extension, more than 6,000 units are unlikely to be completed. The loss of more than \$1 billion in economic activity—to the construction industry, suppliers, professionals, developers and others—would be a major blow to our states and the region.

Your initiative in helping the Gulf Coast to recover has been invaluable. It is our hope that the Senate Finance Committee will continue this leadership by including a placed-in-service extension in a tax extenders bill or other legislation this year. We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

MARY L. LANDRIEU,  
*United States Senator.*  
DAVID B. VITTER,  
*United States Senator.*  
ROGER F. WICKER,  
*United States Senator.*  
THAD COCHRAN,  
*United States Senator.*

#### CHRISTMAS OVERSEAS

Mr. JOHANNIS. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about those Nebraskans who will be overseas, in harm's way, this Christmas.

The job our young men and women in uniform do to protect our safety every day is magnificent. I have met with many of these young service men and women throughout my years of public service, and I know they represent the very best of America. During my time as Governor, it was truly an honor to command Nebraska's National Guard forces. They serve our country with immense valor, at the risk of their own lives. To them, we are all deeply grateful.

Christmas in wartime has always been a difficult time for troops and their families. The contrast is very great between Americans at home celebrating holiday cheer, and those on the front lines going about their regular day of danger. It is a contrast that we should be mindful of this season. I, and many of my fellow Nebraskans, will pause tomorrow to give thanks for the sacrifice of our troops, and pray that they get home safely. Their mission is just, and they are the most capable military in the world. Their presence is missed at this time more than any other but our pride, in them and their friends, is even greater than our sorrow at their absence.

So to those Nebraskans who are in harm's way this Christmas, and to all American forces, those who serve abroad to protect us here at home, I truly thank you. I hope it will be, in some small measure, a comfort on this Christmas, to know that so many of your friends, family, and fellow Americans are safe and secure due to your service, and praying for you.

So today, as always, I wish you all a safe return, and a very Merry Christmas.

#### AMERICAN HIKERS DETAINED BY IRAN

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I rise today to renew my appeal to the Government of Iran to immediately release the three American hikers—Shane Bauer, Sarah Shourd, and Josh Fattal—who were detained by Iranian authorities in July.

According to available information, the three young adults, who are all graduates of the University of California, Berkeley, inadvertently crossed an unmarked border into Iran while hiking in the Kurdistan region of northern Iraq.

Shane, Sarah and Josh have now been held in semi-isolation for over 140 days without charge, access to legal representation, or information on the current status of their case and future proceedings. This is deeply troubling and incredibly difficult for their families.

I recently spoke to the Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations on behalf of the hikers to reiterate my call for their release. I also asked that they be able to call their families and continue to be visited by Swiss consular officials.

During this holiday season, Americans from all walks of life are celebrating and renewing ties of family, friendship, and good will.

The extended absence of these young Americans from their families is particularly painful during such a festive time. As such, I call upon the Iranian authorities to immediately release Shane, Sarah and Josh so that their families can welcome them home.

#### 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

Mrs. HAGAN. Mr. President, this month, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, USASOC, celebrates 20 years of service to the Army and Nation. Having been at war for over one-third of that time, the men and women of USASOC continue to make great contributions worldwide with an operations tempo that has never been greater. USASOC remains committed to maintaining the world's finest ground special operations force. Its personnel take quiet professional pride in executing each mission with excellence, honor and valor.

I am proud that USASOC's headquarters are in North Carolina. USASOC Commander LTG John Mulholland has done a tremendous job in training, organizing, and equipping Army Special Forces units, capable of conducting global Special Operations missions. Army Special Forces units perform a variety of missions, including special reconnaissance, psychological, civil affairs, unconventional

warfare, foreign internal defense, direct action, counterterrorism, and counterinsurgency.

The principle units that make up today's USASOC include the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, U.S. Army Special Forces Command, 75th Ranger Regiment, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, 3rd and 7th Special Forces Group, 4th Psychological Operations Group, 95th Civil Affairs Brigade and the 528th Sustainment Brigade.

Since its inception on December 1, 1989, the pace of USASOC's operations has been extraordinary; operating around the world, often behind-the-lines, in some of the most remote and hostile regions on the planet.

At more than 27,000 personnel, USASOC is only 5 percent of the U.S. Army. However, USASOC is the largest of the service components that make up U.S. Special Operations Command, USSOCOM, and provides approximately 70 percent of the special operations personnel in Central Command's theater and approximately 63 percent of America's total overseas military commitments. USASOC provides trained and ready Army special operations forces to support the Geographic Combatant Commanders, GCC, the Theater Special Operations Commands, TSO, and Ambassadors throughout the world.

Today the operations tempo for Army Special Operations has never been greater, and is unlikely to decrease in the near future. USASOC currently has soldiers deployed on 103 Missions in 56 countries around the world, and is operating across the spectrum of operations.

Currently 222 of the Army's 228 Continental United States-based Special Forces operational detachments "A"—ODA—are committed to supporting operations worldwide, either deployed or preparing for deployment. USASOC's ability to manage the high operations tempo is directly attributable to the caliber of its personnel. The range of skills within USASOC is embraced by a spectrum of Army unconventional units.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the great contributions of USASOC units currently in theater, particularly the 3rd and 7th Special Forces Groups in Afghanistan, the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade and the 4th Psychological Operations Group in Iraq and Afghanistan.

President Obama has stated in his agenda for defense, "We must build up our special operations forces, civil affairs, information operations and other units and capabilities." The demand for special operations personnel, skills and training remain high. Faced with often desperate, unconventional enemies, our approaches for defeating them involve unwavering commitment combined with unique unconventional skills.

USASOC's expertise ensures the Army's special operations forces can execute the most lethal, highly complex and sensitive special operations,

wage unconventional warfare, conduct high risk helicopter operations, or prosecute civil military and influence operations.

For those in today's USASOC, the pace is fast, the challenges great, but morale and job satisfaction have seldom been greater. The command's motto, "Without Equal", captures the spirit of its personnel and their commitment to maintaining the world's finest ground special operations force.

The command's missions, however, have not come without a sizable cost in lives lost. In the 8 years since the start of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, 244 of USASOC's personnel have made the ultimate sacrifice. Their names are cast in bronze on a wall in USASOC's Memorial Plaza at Fort Bragg, NC.

In closing, the performance and contributions of Army Special Operations Forces in the Central Command theater of operations and around the world have been nothing short of magnificent. Whether in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Philippines, Trans-Sahara Africa or wherever friends and partners find themselves challenged by the forces of disintegration, oppression and extremism, Army Special Operators from across the Command's formations are unquestionably among America's most relevant answer to the threats our Nation faces.

#### TRIBUTE TO JIM PITCOCK

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, today I rise to honor the career of Jim Pitcock, a valuable staff member and more importantly a valuable part of the Arkansas community. Jim has been faithful and selfless in his service to the State of Arkansas, and his contributions will be sorely missed by me, my staff, and the many Arkansans who have had the great fortune of working with this wonderful public servant.

Jim has served on my staff from the very first day of my tenure as a Member of the U.S. Senate. His knowledge of the State of Arkansas and government has guided some of my most important decisions and for that I will be forever grateful. His wise, steady council is always held in high esteem. Jim has served several roles on my staff. His most recent role as senior caseworker has benefitted the people of Arkansas by assisting individuals, businesses and organizations that are experiencing difficulties with Federal agencies. Jim's leadership has set an expectation of excellence in constituent services.

Prior his work in the U.S. Senate, Jim was already a legend in Arkansas. He served as news director at Channel 7 in Little Rock for more than 30 years. During this time, Jim established an unprecedented system of archiving news coverage for historical purposes. Jim has witnessed and archived news from Governors Faubus to Huckabee and Presidents Johnson to Clinton. He also provided critical coverage of

major events in our State, such as the Damascus missile explosion, the Cuban refugee crisis and the great Arkansas Texas shootout football game of 1969. Following his departure from television, I was privileged to have Jim join my staff in the Arkansas attorney general's office in 2001 serving as the public information officer.

After so many years of faithful service to the people of Arkansas, Jim Pitcock has made a decision to retire from the Senate and his presence will be missed. He will continue to be a friend and adviser to me and I wish him all the best of luck as he begins this new chapter in his life.

Mr. President, I ask my colleagues to join me in celebrating the outstanding career and service of Jim Pitcock to the U.S. Senate and the State of Arkansas.

#### THREE SISTERS SCENIC BIKEWAY

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, too many of our communities are hemorrhaging jobs. That is especially true in rural areas, where industries have suffered and companies have had to let lots of people go. In Oregon, for example, changes in forest policy have hit rural communities particularly hard in recent years. I am constantly working to find solutions that will help those communities not just survive but thrive.

It is indisputable that many rural communities and small towns in Oregon contain some of the most beautiful scenery in America. When I look at their future, I see that the scenic beauty and solitude of beautiful places like Sisters, OR, which sits in the shadow of the Cascade Mountains, can be a big engine to drive the economy. Investments in amenities like parks and scenic bikeways can be valuable for communities because they aren't fleeting. They build infrastructure that lasts for generations. The beauty of nature, especially out in the countryside, attracts tourists—particularly bicyclists.

The League of American Bicyclists estimates that biking contributes \$133 billion per year to our national economy, provides 1.1 million jobs, and generates \$17.7 billion in Federal, State, and local taxes. They estimate that another \$46.9 billion is spent on meals, transportation, lodging, gifts, and entertainment during bike trips and tours.

Savvy entrepreneurs in Oregon have come together to capitalize on the benefits that being a destination for bicyclists can bring to a community. Cycle Oregon—called "the best bike ride in America"—attracted 2,200 people from 44 States and 11 foreign countries to its 2008 ride, which took hardy bicyclists through some of Oregon's most beautiful sites. But it is not just Oregon entrepreneurs who have figured this out. It is a nationwide phenomenon. Bloomington, Indiana's "Hilly 100 ride," for example, draws

5,000 riders and over \$1 million in lodging and food sales. And in Iowa, the week-long Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa has become so popular that last year, they had to turn people away after more than 9,000 applied to cycle across the State.

It is often through outdoor events like bike races that you will find a CEO or company leader visiting Central Oregon on a vacation and having the brainstorm that it would make a great place to locate a new enterprise. Many high-tech companies, for example, are locating in places with unique, scenic beauty to set them apart from their competition in the big cities and to give them an added bonus to attract the talent they need to succeed.

I thought there must be a way to tap the full recreation potential of central Oregon and create a model that could be replicated in other parts of the country. So, 2 years ago I asked recreation leaders in Deschutes County to look at how recreation could add value to its recreation assets, creating the strongest possible engine for economic development.

Since then, the Sisters area has decided that much of its economy is tied to broadening the set of recreation experiences they can offer to visitors. They have developed many miles of new, spectacular mountain bike trails in the cascade foothills of Peterson Ridge as part of that effort. They see the development of a better cycling route to Bend as a vital addition to the menu of recreation opportunities in the area.

Community and business leaders from across Deschutes County have worked for the past two years on ideas like those developed in Sisters. They came together recently to formally launch an effort to create the Three Sisters Scenic Bikeway—a scenic bike route connecting each of the cities in that county, via cycling-friendly routes that take you past spectacular scenery.

Government officials are pitching in too. The Oregon Department of Transportation and the U.S. Forest Service are working together to implement the committee's vision of a paved bike path connecting Bend to Sunriver. The Forest Service is about halfway through their decision making process on a paved path from Sunriver out to Lava Lands Visitors Center, and ODOT is pursuing a variety of funding options to get the work done while crews are still working on the major reconstruction of Highway 97 nearby.

As we rebuild our country's infrastructure and seek new ways to create jobs, we would do well to follow the lesson of Deschutes County and The Three Sisters Scenic Bikeway. It was an idea that was first proposed by concerned members of the community. It answers local needs and they have a lot of confidence it will work. And as representatives of those communities, my colleagues and I have the ability to help water the seeds of those ideas when government can help out.