

who lost their lives in the line of duty, the grief and the loss are very real. The survivors of fallen law enforcement officers command our sympathy and our prayers.

Yet after the funeral is over and news of the tragedy falls off of the front pages of the daily newspaper, the very hard and often solitary process of adjustment begins. In many cases, that process can last for years and years after the loss and during that lengthy period, our police survivors need support in more tangible ways.

On May 14, 2003, on the eve of the National Peace Officers' Memorial Service, 10 widows of fallen law enforcement officers came together at dinner to ask the question, "What about us?"

At the National Police Week gatherings, everyone focuses on the loved one whose life is lost, but it is also important to focus on the needs of survivors who must rebuild their lives from the ashes.

From this dinner conversation came the birth of a new national organization called "Concerns of Police Survivors." The acronym is "COPS".

One year later, COPS was formed at the first National Police Survivors Seminar which drew 110 law enforcement survivors.

Suzie Sawyer, a former President of the Fraternal Order of Police Auxiliary was selected as COPS' first Executive Director. She is also the only person to have served as the group's executive director.

Today, COPS provides healing, love and the opportunity for a renewed life to over 15,000 families through a network of 48 chapters around the country.

Over its 22 year history, COPS, as it is called, has expanded its offering of programs to include: peer support and counseling for survivors every day of the year, assistance in obtaining death benefits, assistance in coping with parole hearings, and scholarships for surviving spouses and children.

It offers special programs for parents, siblings and spouses of fallen officers as well as a summer camp for young and teenage children.

COPS also trains police agencies on how to cope with a line of duty death.

But one of the most important activities COPS offers is the Annual Police Survivors Seminar. This weekend at a hotel in Alexandria that is closed off to the public and the media, survivors from across the country will find a safe place to vent, to cry, to laugh, to think, and to heal.

COPS has played a pivotal role in helping the families of Alaska's survivors rebuild their lives. COPS was there for Laurie Heck Huckeba, the widow of Alaska State Trooper Bruce Heck, slain on January 10, 1997. Laurie went on to become a member of the COPS national board of directors, and facilitates sessions at the National Police Survivors Seminar.

Survivors helping survivors—that's what COPS is all about.

And COPS was there for the family of slain Kenai Police Officer John Watson, who tragically lost his life on Christmas Day, 2003, while checking on the welfare of another. Officer Watson is the last Alaska officer to lose his life in the line of duty.

COPS will be there for the family, co-workers and friends of Vicki Armel, the Fairfax County Detective who was senselessly slain by a sniper outside the Sully District Police Station this week.

And it will do the same for the survivors of slain Philadelphia Police Officer Gary Skerski, also shot to death this week after responding to a robbery call at a bar. The perpetrator told patrons that he planned to kill an officer. Eleven Philadelphia officers have been shot in the last 25 months, according to the Fraternal Order of Police. Every one of those incidents takes an emotional toll on so many others.

Thanks to the work of Suzie Sawyer and COPS, all of those affected by a police line of duty death no longer need to ask the question, "What about us?"

They refer to law enforcement as the "thin blue line." Thanks to COPS, that thin blue line of support for our law enforcement families is tens of thousands of people thick.

In honor of our police survivors and the vital work that is undertaken by COPS, I joined with my colleagues earlier this week in offering Senate Resolution 473 which designates May 14, the anniversary of the founding of COPS, as National Police Survivors Day. The resolution is intended to engage all of our fellow citizens to lend their hearts and to lend a hand to the survivors of our police heroes.

I am pleased that the Senate adopted Senate Resolution 473. I appreciate the support of our colleagues in moving this resolution through swiftly. It is especially timely given the unfortunate events that occurred this week in Fairfax County and in Philadelphia. How tragic that these events occurred on the very eve of National Police Week.

I also want to acknowledge the leadership of my colleague, Mr. TALENT, in whose state of Missouri COPS is headquartered, and my colleague, Mrs. LINCOLN, our lead co-sponsor on the Democratic side, who worked with me to put forward this resolution.

In the United States, one law enforcement officer dies in the line of duty every 53 hours. Each year somewhere between 140 and 160 lose their lives in the line of duty.

As we remember the heroic deeds of the 17,535 law enforcement officers whose names are carved into the marble wall on Judiciary Square, let us also take a moment to reflect on those who are left to carry on. Let's do this on May 14—National Police Survivors Day.

GULF OF MEXICO RESTORATION AND PROTECTION ACT

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I have been pleased to join with my distinguished

colleagues, Senator MARTINEZ and Senator LANDRIEU, in introducing bipartisan legislation that will take a very significant step forward in restoring and protecting the Gulf of Mexico.

I want to highlight how important the Gulf of Mexico is to our country. The Gulf of Mexico is the ninth largest body of water in the world, and the Gulf region covers approximately 600,000 square miles. The Gulf of Mexico contains 7 of this Nation's top 10 ports in terms of tonnage or cargo value, 4 of the top 7 fishing ports in the Nation, yields more finfish, shrimp, and shellfish annually than the south and mid-Atlantic, Chesapeake, and New England areas combined, and supports a \$20 billion annual tourism industry.

Sadly, over many years, the resource productivity and water quality of the Gulf of Mexico and its watershed have been diminished by nonpoint source pollution largely resulting from pollutant transport along the nearly 2,300-mile-long Mississippi River. I believe many Americans would be surprised to know that the Environmental Protection Agency's Gulf of Mexico Program, the only Federal program solely focused on protecting the health and productivity of the Gulf of Mexico, is neither authorized nor adequately funded to perform critical program functions vital to protecting and restoring one of this country's greatest natural resources.

The Gulf of Mexico Restoration and Protection Act will authorize the Environmental Protection Agency's Gulf of Mexico Program to undertake specific nonregulatory functions, and authorize annual appropriations to support activities designed to improve Gulf of Mexico water quality and marine resource productivity. With an 18-year track record of success, the Gulf of Mexico Program proves that it is not only possible but also practical to manage our natural resources through collaborative, nonregulatory approaches that leverage support, resources, and capabilities from Federal, State, non-profit, and private sector partners. Unfortunately, the Gulf of Mexico Program is struggling with a very limited budget and a staff comprised largely of people "on loan" from other Federal agencies. The historic storm season of 2005 gravely worsened the situation by placing increased demand on the program's technical services, and I expect this pressure will continue to rise as the gulf coast rebuilds.

I commend the EPA Gulf of Mexico Program and its Federal, State, non-profit, and private sector partners for doing so much with so little for so long. However, it is impractical to expect this to continue in perpetuity. Now is the time to take actions to ensure the Gulf of Mexico is protected for continued economic productivity, recreation, and to make certain this great water body remains a place of beauty and enjoyment for current and future generations.