

She was a light . . . She didn't worry about danger in her work as a flight nurse. She wanted to help people.

Paul Erickson was 33 years old and was the medic on the flight. Paul was a firefighter who worked on the Mercy Flight on his days off. He worked side by side with his wife Rachelle, who is the trauma coordinator for Benefits. They had a baby boy last July named Spencer Pilot.

Assistant fire chief Steve Hester said this of his colleague:

Paul considered it a service to the community. He was all about service to others. He knew that in rural Montana the only way you can get help sometimes is by air.

Vince Kirol was 58 years old and had been flying for 40 years. He was a Mercy Flight fixed-wing pilot for 13 years after working for Metro Aviation in Shreveport, LA. He is survived by his wife Diana and two sons. Vince's pastor noted that he loved the mountains and he loved skiing and hiking with his sons.

Billy Darnell, a friend of Vince's from his church, said this about him:

He cared about people. That's why he loved his job.

Darcy, Paul, and Vince selflessly put their lives at risk, transporting critically ill patients even in perilous weather conditions. They gave their own lives trying to save others. Their deaths are a tremendous loss to Montana. They were good servants, and they are heroes. Our hearts and our prayers go out to their families and to their friends.

Madam President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SALAZAR). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The senior Senator from New Jersey is recognized.

IRAQ

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Thank you, Mr. President.

I wanted to take just a few minutes to kind of review where we are here in the silence that abounds in this Senate. The question about what is going on is kind of mystifying for much of the public looking in and saying: What are they doing wasting time?

There was some talk about the terrible situation we are in in Iraq, and I spoke as one of those who say we have had enough. We have had enough there. We have lost over 3,000 people, and the Iraqis have lost substantial numbers. One would have to be really hard-hearted not to be moved when you look in the paper and you see a child weeping over a dead mother or a brother or a sister or people lying in the street dead from brutal attacks from this in-

ternal civil war while we are trying to figure out what we do to protect our people.

What is it that we want to accomplish with the votes that have been taken here? I think it is fair to say that what we would like on this side of the aisle, and I am sure there are many colleagues on the other side who feel as we do but would be out of step politically if they took the vote we want to take, to approve or disapprove of sending more troops into that death trap, to say how long we want to stay there.

What do we have to prove by supporting the President's order, the President's interest in the so-called surge? They try to disguise the word. The word is "escalate." It is not "surge." "Surge" can be interpreted many ways, but "escalate" is very clear: Put more people there. Put more people in harm's way. Put more people in an abyss from which there is no way, that anyone has told us, out of the situation.

We get the argument: Oh, you want to cut and run. No. Do you want to stay and die? Is that what the alternative is? Ask the families who have children, brothers, fathers, and mothers there. They come in to see me, people who have someone who is in Iraq, and they are scared to death about what kind of news they will get some night.

I had a woman in the office one day, with a group of other people, sobbing so hard that she couldn't talk. Why? Because her son had been wounded—a light wound but enough to earn him a Purple Heart—and he was being sent back on hazardous duty. He was willing to do it. His mother didn't want him to do it. But at what point do we say the pain is so excruciating that we can't stand it?

It has nothing to do with cut-and-run. I wore a uniform in World War I. Others here have worn the country's uniform, some in Vietnam, some in Korea. We have had a lot of experience with wars. But in each case, if we didn't have an objective, we fared very badly. That was true, unfortunately, in Vietnam, where we finally had to wrap it up and go home, leaving 58,000 of our brothers and sisters still there, if not physically, in sharp memory. And now we see what is happening here.

I bring to our attention the fact that in Iraq, in the month of January, we lost 83 of our bravest. Thus far in February, we have already lost 48 members of the American military. And the Iraqis have suffered deaths. Look at the number of people who have been murdered there with suicide bombs, roadside bombs, and brutal murders, with hands tied behind their backs and blindfolded. It goes on and on. If we could wish it away, if we could see an end to it, I would be more than willing to leave troops there to kind of monitor the last parts of a war that is one of the worst America has been in, but what we see is not only the numbers that are perishing daily, weekly, but

the tactics they are using now with shooting down helicopters. That wasn't something we saw before.

Suddenly now, in the past couple of weeks, three helicopters have been taken down by enemy fire. That changes the complexity of things because helicopters were an integral part of our capacity to fight back. If we can't do that, does that mean we have to put more people on the ground, that we have to lose more people? It ought not to be that way.

Last week, we took a vote here, and it was a vote that would limit debate. We, the Democrats, led the charge there because we wanted to get on with the issue of whether we wanted to send more troops than we have there now. The number, estimated to be at 21,000 in combat, means that 48,000, roughly, would be the total number because you need the support groups as well. That vote was disguised as something else, which is what our friends are doing today—disguising what their intent is. Their intent is to escape the responsibility they took when they voted against closing the debate the other day. That is what happened.

They have a lot of discomfort over there. I see my colleague from the State of Minnesota is here now, and if I am not mistaken, he was one of those who said: Let's cut the debate and get on with the issue. That is what his message was that day. And so there is abject discomfort with the vote that was taken because people at home interpreted that in a different way. They are not interested so much in our tactical maneuvering here or the process; they want to know: Do we want to send more troops into that inferno or do we want to try to figure out a way to get out of there as quickly as practicable? That is the question.

So they voted the wrong way. And now, Heaven forbid, we had something we could vote on, and that was voted on by way of closing the debate, which was developed by Senator CARL LEVIN of Michigan, chairman now of the Armed Services Committee, and supported fully by Senator JOHN WARNER, who himself was a veteran and served at the time of World War II, who agreed with him that we ought to show our displeasure. There wasn't anything radical in it. We weren't calling the other side names. We just said we want to stop this escalation. We don't want to put more troops out there in harm's way. We don't want to see more limbless veterans. We have almost 800 now, veterans who have lost one limb at least, and we have 25,000 who have been injured. And there are a lot of severe injuries that you can't see because they are internal injuries. They are injuries of the mind. They are injuries of the spirit. There are a lot of them; 30,000 with PTS, post-traumatic stress, in addition to those who have the physical, visible wounds we see.

So we want to get on with the vote. Let us have an honest count here about whether you are for escalation or

against it. Do you want to throw more into the Iraqi war? Do you want to put more sons and daughters there or do you want them to start coming home and reuniting them with their families? That is the question. Instead, it is dressed up here. If we voted to adjourn, it would be a sign that we are not supporting the troops. Baloney. We support the troops fully. Each and every one of them over there now is a hero to us, each and every one, because many of them disagree with the policy that got them there, the falsification of whether there were weapons of mass destruction.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's 10 minutes in morning business has expired.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. I ask unanimous consent for 5 more minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. COLEMAN. Reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. COLEMAN. I ask further unanimous consent that the additional time of the Senator not be charged against the minority. It was our time. I want to be sure his time is not charged against the minority so we can finish morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. I thank our colleague from Minnesota.

What we see is a deliberate attempt to avoid the question: Yes or no, how do you stand on the escalation of this war? How do you stand on sending more sons and daughters into that hell on Earth?

It is time to stand up and be counted and not to permit the public, across this land of ours, to be fooled by debate structures, by delaying tactics. It is time to stand up and be counted, but we cannot do that. The other side will not permit us to do it, and we know how to count votes so we know we do not have enough to do what we would like to.

But the House has taken the bull by the horns. The House is considering it, and it is very favorably being considered there—not yet voted—legislation that says we are against this escalation. Republicans as well as Democrats there are going to join. What we are saying here is let us simply vote on that. That is what has been asked for by our leadership.

I hope we will be able to conclude this debate, find out and let the American people know where we stand, each one of us. When we raise our hand, each one of us will be making a declaration: Do we think it is necessary to put more of our troops out there, to run them through there at the risk of their limbs, or lives, and disrupt family life, leaving children without a guiding parent on one side, to let the bills accumulate, worry about the mortgages? These are people, for the most part, who were reservists. They have served

once, served twice—a year each—and now a third callup is being talked about because the President has decided—against the will of many outstanding military experts, those who have served at the highest rank. They say no, it will not help. But the President of the United States is very stubborn on this issue, despite all of the opposition—opposition here, opposition across this country. The numbers are around 70 percent of the people do not want us to continue to do this, or send in any more troops. I hope we can resolve the truth here in short order.

I yield the floor with thanks again to my colleague from Minnesota.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. COLEMAN. Mr. President, I intend to speak in morning business and to talk about an issue of great importance in Minnesota, access to health care in rural communities, but I have to make one comment in response to my colleague from New Jersey.

Iraq is the most important issue facing America today. There is no question about it. I want to raise some concerns about the surge in Baghdad. I understand we are fighting a war against insurgency and foreign fighters in Anbar Province. If those commanders on the ground need more, I am going to give it to them. I have great concerns about the surge. We need to debate this. It is absolutely mind boggling to watch what is going on with this playing around with rules. The bottom line is Senators should have the right to debate. Senators should have the right to offer amendments and we should be voting on whether you support a surge, we should be voting on whether you support continued funding, we should be voting on whether there should be benchmarks. We should do what the Senate does, which is debate, have discussion, and then vote. What the majority is attempting to do is to forestall that, offering something that they know is something the Senate does not do, offering something they know the American public—the public wants us to debate this and vote on it. So instead they offer a resolution which, they know, will gather objection, a resolution on which they will allow no amendments, no discussion about other things other than a proposal that comes out from them. That is absurd. That is not the Senate. It is not the greatest deliberative body in the world. We should do better. The American public deserves better, and I hope our leaders can come together and figure out a way to structure a debate so opinions can be laid out and they can be discussed and then we can vote—not on one thing that a 51-person majority says, but the way the Senate does it: We put it on the table and vote.

I may disagree with some of my colleagues on this side of the aisle on some of that, but everyone has a right to lay out their amendments and their proposal, and we should do so on Iraq.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. COLEMAN. Let me focus on an issue of concern to me. I represent the State of Minnesota. They call it the "flyover country." They may say the same thing about Colorado on occasion. I saw a New Yorker's view of the world. No offense to my colleagues from New York. It is New York, Florida, L.A., maybe Chicago was in between. I didn't see Denver or St. Paul. There are smaller towns on there, but they are on the map and they are important.

William Jennings Bryan once said:

Burn down our cities and leave our farmland and the cities will rise up again like magic, but burn down our farms and grass will grow up in the streets of every city in America.

The Presiding Officer understands that. He comes from a family which has worked the land. He gets that. Like many great orators, there is some hyperbole there, but it still rings true, whether it is food, values, or leadership—all of America depends on what our rural communities produce.

So what happens in America's small towns is a big deal. I would like to take this time to speak on behalf of Minnesotans and other folks living in rural communities. These families face some daunting challenges when it comes to accessing health care.

The urgency of this issue is brought home to me by the upcoming closure of a rural hospital in Ivanhoe, MN. The town in southwestern Minnesota, county seat of Lincoln County, got its name from Sir Walter Scott's novel. Ivanhoe is filled with hard-working people who have survived generations of drought, grass hoppers, blizzards, and unreliable farm prices and policies. This is yet another difficult blow. As a result, this community will lose jobs, access to health care and part of their community identity.

There is an array of issues facing hospitals like Ivanhoe. For them, it was the declining number of admissions at the hospital and declining reimbursement payments that put them at a severe competitive disadvantage in the health care market—and ultimately led to the decision. Unfortunately, their story is not unique.

About 21 percent of the population lives in rural areas, but only about 9 percent of doctors work there. Only 2.4 percent of specialists work in rural areas.

Nearly half of all rural residents have at least one major chronic illness. Yet they average fewer physician contacts per year than those in urban communities.

I believe that access to health care should not be dependent on where you live. Every person in America deserves the same quality care.

Unfortunately, as it stands right now, many rural communities in Minnesota and across the country don't have the personnel capabilities, technology or money to provide their residents with the health care they need—