

visitors face with regard to our Nation's entry and screening processes, including the issuance of visas.

To address these problems, the Senate has already passed legislation that establishes a "Model Ports" program at the 20 busiest international airports in the United States. This program should reduce bottlenecks to safely and efficiently move travelers through the screening process.

The legislation we introduced yesterday, the Travel Promotion Act, would establish a nonprofit corporation to promote travel to the United States. This entity would not use one cent of taxpayer funds.

Instead, this corporation will be funded by fees paid by travelers who enter our country and matching contributions from members of the travel and tourism industry.

The corporation would be led by experts in the travel and tourism industry, appointed by the Secretary of Commerce, and held accountable by Congress. This essential step will let foreign visitors know that our country is open to tourists.

The travel and tourism industry plays an important role in every State. Those of us in Congress should take steps to resolve these pressing issues and encourage tourists to visit America.

In my home State of Alaska, the travel and tourism industry is the second largest private sector employer. More than 24,000 Alaskans hold tourism-related jobs, and the industry contributes more than \$2 billion to our State's economy each year.

I look forward to working with my colleagues on this legislation.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

TECHNICAL SERGEANT RYAN A. BALMER

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I rise today to pay humble tribute to TSgt Ryan A. Balmer, who died of injuries sustained after the detonation of an improvised explosive device in Kirkuk, Iraq. A native of Mishawaka, IN, Sergeant Balmer was a member of the Air Force Office of Special Investigations and assigned to Hill Air Force Base, UT.

Sergeant Balmer was truly a special man. He was an individual deeply loved by all who knew him for his kindness, his positive outlook on life, and his infectious smile. Friends close to Special Agent Balmer say he was someone you always wanted to be around. They remembered a man who possessed the unique gift of being able to bring out the best in everyone and at 6 feet 2 inches tall he commanded respect wherever he went.

I understand that Sergeant Balmer was scheduled to come home only days after his passing. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my most heartfelt condolences to his wife Danielle and to his three children. I want to reiterate what they already know, that he saved lives and by his

sacrifice that we, as a Nation, enjoy the great blessings of freedom so often take for granted. TSgt Ryan A. Balmer is an American hero in every sense of the word.

The sergeant and his family will be in my prayers forever.

SERGEANT JESSE A. BLAMIRE

Mr. President, today I rise to pay tribute to one Nation's fallen sons, SGT Jesse A. Blamires. Sergeant Blamires was a native of Sandy, UT, and a member of the 82nd Airborne Division. He was killed in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan.

Sergeant Blamires had a lifelong connection to our Nation's military. His father Craig Blamires, with whom the sergeant enjoyed camping, also served his country in the Army. Eager to pursue his dreams of service, Sergeant Blamires followed his father's footsteps and joined the U.S. Army.

The sergeant was known as a man dedicated to reaching his goals. This was reflected by his recent promotion to crew chief. One day he hoped to become a helicopter pilot, a goal I am certain he would have accomplished.

His service in Afghanistan was not the first time Sergeant Blamires had been in harm's way. In 2005, he served a tour in Iraq. Well-respected by his commanders and fellow soldiers, Sergeant Blamires was known for his ability to make others laugh and his willingness to help others in need.

However, undoubtedly, his most important life's work was as a family man. In addition to two caring parents and five supportive brothers and sisters, Sergeant Blamires is survived by his wife, Kim and their two young daughters.

Sergeant Blamires was a man who truly lived an abundant life. Although his calls to service often required him to be away from the family he loved, there was nothing Sergeant Blamires desired more than to be with his family. Fellow serviceman, SSG Ronald Walton recalls that Sergeant Blamires, "dreamt of being a better husband and father to his two girls and he talked of it often."

What a fine man.

What an extraordinary life.

We will always remember his dedicated service to our Nation, and it is my fervent hope that he and his family remain in our prayers.

STAFF SERGEANT VIRGIL C. MARTINEZ

Mr. President, I stand here today to pay tribute to a hero, SSG Virgil C. "Chance" Martinez. Sergeant Martinez was a member of the 1st Infantry Division's 1st Battalion, 7th Field Artillery Regiment and recently gave his life while serving his country in Iraq.

From the time Sergeant Martinez was a 5-year-old boy, he felt a duty-bound responsibility to follow in the footsteps of his stepfather and answer his country's call to service. His sister Kim Austin-Oliver said of her brother "We knew at a very young age that he was going to be a soldier. It is who he has always been."

As a teenager, Sergeant Martinez enjoyed playing on his high school ski and football teams. Shortly after graduating from high school in 1992, he would achieve his life long ambition and join the U.S. Army.

I understand that Sergeant Martinez was a man deeply devoted not only to his country but also to his family. When speaking of his lost stepson, Daniel Oliver noted, "Chance would do anything and everything for his children and for his mother . . . he was like the Disneyland father—wanted to show his children everything." Sergeant Martinez was the husband to wife Mandy and father of five beautiful children.

I would like to close my remarks by highlighting an observation made by Sergeant Martinez's sister. Kim Austin-Oliver commented that Sergeant Martinez died doing what he had always wanted to do, and that is, serve his country.

I can think of no truer definition of a hero. Sergeant Martinez and the family he has left behind will forever remain in my memory and in my prayers for his selfless service to our Nation.

CORPORAL MICHAEL A. PURSEL

Mr. President, I rise to pay tribute to one of Utah's fallen sons, CPL Michael A. Pursel. Corporal Pursel, a member of the 2nd Infantry Division, recently lost his life in Baqubah, Iraq. He was 19 years old.

Corporal Pursel is actually a two-time volunteer. His service began when he joined the Army and he then volunteered to replace other soldiers from the 2nd Infantry Division. In fact, Corporal Pursel not only answered that call, but was one of the first to offer his service.

I have been informed that Corporal Pursel belonged to a family of great patriots, many of whom have served in the military themselves. This includes both of Corporal Pursel's parents. His mother Terry Dutcher, who is a Captain in the Air Force Reserve, said of her son, "Michael was doing what he always wanted to do . . . he died living his dream."

In memory of the life of this great soldier would submit to you that the dream of serving one's country—the dream that CPL Michael A. Pursel achieved—is a dream that more Americans must embrace. Although young in years, Corporal Pursel understood the premise that to serve one's country extends far beyond the notion of being active in one's military duty. To serve one's country enables the rest of us to enjoy our Nation's greatest gift: freedom. This was at the very core of his service and how Corporal Pursel lived his life, the life of a hero, the life of one who will forever be remembered in my prayers.

This country owes CPL Michael A. Pursel a great debt of gratitude. He shall forever be remembered and honored for his service to our Nation.