

Republicans put forward an energy proposal, a plan that gets at the root of the problem rather than at increased dependence on OPEC. The Republican plan would increase the supply of American energy and bolster American jobs while lowering our dependence on foreign oil.

Meanwhile, Democratic suggestions for addressing high gas prices ranged from driving slower to more frequent oil changes. This is a debate we are eager to have. One wonders if the reason our friends are stalling on the FAA bill is that they are worried about exposing the fact that they have no plan for gas prices.

But Americans who are paying close to \$4 a gallon for gasoline do not particularly care which party comes up with the idea; they would like some action.

CYCLONE DEATHS IN BURMA

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, my prayers go out to the families of those killed in Burma in this past weekend's natural disaster. Initial estimates reported the cyclone killed more than 22,000 people and tens of thousands more are missing.

Yesterday, First Lady Laura Bush announced that the United States is prepared to provide assistance and supplies to Burma, but at this time the Government has not accepted our offer.

I urge the Burmese Government to move quickly and accept the offer of the American people and act in the best interests of the population.

CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL FOR AUNG SAN SUU KYI

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I had a chance earlier this morning to attend the signing ceremony for legislation to award Aung San Suu Kyi the Congressional Gold Medal. I wish to thank the President and the First Lady for their continued support on this issue.

For more than 20 years, Aung San Suu Kyi's support for justice and democracy has placed her at odds with the tyranny and oppression of the Burmese junta. She and her supporters have combated the brutality of the junta with peaceful protests and resistance. Suu Kyi has chosen dignity as her weapon, and she has found allies around the world to aid her in this struggle.

By awarding Suu Kyi the Congressional Gold Medal, we are letting the world know the American people would stand with her and the freedom-loving people of Burma.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

SERGEANT CHRISTOPHER T. HEFLIN

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today because there is a family in Kentucky that has lost their beloved son in this time of war. SGT Christopher T.

Heflin of Paducah, KY, was killed on November 16, 2004, during combat operations in the Al Anbar Province of Iraq. He was 26 years old.

For his valor in service as a U.S. marine, Sergeant Heflin earned several medals, awards and decorations, including the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, two Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals, the National Defense Service Medal, two Meritorious Masts and the Purple Heart.

Sergeant Heflin's mother, Meleasa Ellis, still remembers well the day Chris told her he intended to enlist in the Marine Corps. "When he was a senior [in high school], he came home [and] said, 'Mom, I need to talk to you,'" she says. "I want to join the Marines," he said. I said why? His response: 'I want to serve my country.'"

Before the Marines, there was football, Chris's first love as a child. He started playing in sixth grade and by high school had become the starting center on the team, wearing the No. 50 jersey.

"He was a young man who led by example . . . He played center and was always one of the hardest-working players I had," says Jeff Sturm, Chris's head football coach at Reidland High School in Paducah. "He was just a quality young man. I just hate to see it happen, but I'm proud that he was over there defending his country. That's the way he led his life."

Growing up, Chris also was a member of the National Hockey League Association of Ohio and of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Paducah. He had an afterschool job at Taco John's. He enjoyed riding his four-wheeler, which he called his "country Cadillac," and he had recently taken up deer hunting.

The vigorous life suited Chris, who was always on the go. "If he sat still, it was just because he had to eat," remembers his brother Cory Heflin. "If I had any problems, I could come to him. He was always there if I needed someone to talk to. We always stuck together. Now he's going to a better home."

Cory and other family members also remember how active Chris was in volunteer work. His favorite program was the Marine Corps Reserves' Toys for Tots, which collects toys for needy children at Christmas. Chris made sure to do his part every year.

"He missed a lot of Thanksgivings with us to make sure the kids had Christmas," his mother Meleasa recalls. "During Thanksgiving, he was helping wherever he was with Toys for Tots; he had a passion for kids. He would have been a great dad someday."

Chris graduated from Reidland High School in 1997 and signed up with the Marine Corps 5 days afterwards. He would go on to serve with them for nearly 8 years. By the time he deployed to Iraq, Chris was assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, based at Camp Pendleton, CA.

One of his first assignments put him behind a desk. Chris communicated his displeasure to his friend, the Reverend Larry Davidson, the man who had baptized Chris when he was a young teenager. "He said that was not what he wanted to be here for," the Reverend Davidson says. "He wanted to be on the battlefield."

Chris would move on to spend 3 years training reservists in weapons and equipment use in Moundsville, WV. While there, he worked with John Nanny, commandant of the Wheeling, WV, Marine Corps League.

Chris "was a Marine's Marine," John says. "He was always gung-ho and fired up about what he did."

In June 2004, Chris was deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. His mother Meleasa remembers the day Chris gave her the news, in April 2004.

Meleasa says Chris "told me he was leaving for Iraq. I could do nothing but weep," Meleasa says. "He told me, remember the reason I joined the Marines? I have to go and fight for our country. He fought till the last day, November 16, 2004."

Our thoughts and prayers are with the Heflin family after the tragic loss of this brave Marine. We are thinking of Chris's mother Meleasa Ellis; his brothers, Cory Heflin, Josh Hicks, and Derek Ellis; his grandparents, Marvin and Marie Salsbury; his aunts and uncles, Lisa and Pete Witenberger and Tim and Diane Salsbury; and many other beloved family members and friends.

More than 200 people turned out for Chris's funeral at the Mount Zion Baptist Church, officiated by Chris's friend, the Reverend Davidson. Later, at the Woodlawn Memorial Gardens cemetery, Chris was laid to rest with a 21-gun salute.

Two marines folded the flag that had draped over his casket and presented it to his brother Derek, who is also serving in the Marine Corps as a lance corporal.

When Chris was a small child, his grandfather, Marvin, would take him fishing. Chris had so much fun that when the visits were over, he would tell his mother to go get his clothes and bring them back to his grandparents' house so he could stay with them.

Marvin still remembers the last time he spoke to his grandson, just before Chris deployed to Iraq. "Son, I want to ask you something," Marvin said. "Are you right with the Lord?"

"Yes, Pa, I am," Chris replied, using the nickname for his grandfather he had used since childhood.

The loss that the Heflin family has suffered can never be fully healed. But it is my hope that every person who hears Chris's story is inspired by and draws strength from it.

The little boy Marvin once took fishing grew up to become a man, a patriot and a marine who stepped forward to serve his country. This Senate salutes SGT Christopher T. Heflin's service,