

Maholluck was cut off from Staff Sergeant Binnie and Staff Sergeant Feurst, so he radioed for help.

Back at the main perimeter, Brendan O'Connor got the call and put a team together to go get his wounded soldiers. When Brendan's team got to the area, the Taliban had taken positions along the route to the wounded soldiers, leaving Brendan only one path—an exposed field. Brendan instructed his team to take up positions to support the wounded and started on his mission to save the lives of these soldiers.

At first, Brendan started crawling through an open field with his gear on. He quickly realized this wasn't going to work. So under a hail of small arms, RPG, and machine gun fire, Brendan removed all his armor and crawled through an open field to get to the two wounded. Brendan couldn't locate the two soldiers by sight, only by calling out. And as he heard them, he would get closer and closer.

When he arrived at the two wounded, he had to make a quick decision about Joe's injuries, which were life threatening. Brendan quickly got Staff Sergeant Binnie taken care of and instructed him to crawl through a culvert to get to safety. Staff Sergeant Feurst wasn't so easy. He was unconscious and unable to move. Brendan pulled him down as far as he could into the culvert. He started to drag him, but he realized he couldn't drag him the entire way.

As if the actions of Brendan and his team weren't heroic enough at this point, the next part of this account will send chills down your spine.

At this time during the fight, it was estimated that nearly 300 Taliban fighters had engaged the approximately 15-member U.S. force. I say approximately because several Afghan Army members who originally accompanied Brendan's team had fled by this point. As Brendan's natural cover was coming to an end, he pulled Joe on to his shoulder, and he ran across an area while 300 Taliban fighters were shooting at him. God was watching Brendan that day. God saw one man risk his life to save another, and he saw fit to keep Brendan from harm as he carried a wounded U.S. soldier to safety. Unfortunately, Joe Feurst died soon after Brendan got him back due to massive blood loss. SSG Matt Binnie survived because of Brendan's leadership and courage under fire.

The battle that had gone on for nearly 3 days was coming to an end at this point. U.S. forces had air support, which escorted them out of the area. All told, the U.S.-led force killed 125 Taliban fighters and only lost 2 of their own, with 1 wounded. They weren't able to capture or kill the warlord that time; however, due to the losses to the Taliban that day in that strike, U.S. forces got him several weeks later.

For their heroics in combat, MSG Tom Maholluck and SSG Matt Binnie were awarded the Silver Star. SSG Joe

Feurst was awarded the Bronze Star. Brendan O'Connor was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his valor. It was the first time a member of the 7th Special Forces Group had been awarded the medal since 1964.

It is an honor to have Brendan and his family in Washington today. He is joined by his beautiful wife Meg and their children, Ryan, Colin, Darby, and Dillon.

It is this type of story that we rarely hear about on the nightly news, but this story was so amazing that "60 Minutes" felt compelled to do a piece on it after the soldiers arrived back home. MSG Brendan O'Connor is a person held in the highest regard by other warriors who have proudly served this country. He is a soldier who truly understands the price of freedom. The Senate salutes MSG Brendan O'Connor today.

I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2010

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of H.R. 2892, which the clerk will state by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2892) making appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2010, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

AMENDMENT NO. 1373

(Purpose: In the nature of a substitute)

Mr. REID. Madam President, I call up the amendment at the desk on behalf of Senator BYRD and Senator INOUE.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendment.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Nevada [Mr. REID] for Mr. BYRD and Mr. INOUE, and Mrs. MURRAY, proposes an amendment numbered 1373.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to dispense with the reading of the substitute amendment.

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

(The text of the amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "amendments Submitted.")

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, we now turn to the fiscal year 2010 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations bill. The chairman of the Homeland Security Subcommittee, Senator ROBERT C. BYRD, is home from the hospital and is improving daily and is

eager to return to the Senate as soon as he can.

He has been in regular consultations with his staff in the development of the bill that was approved by the Appropriations Committee on June 18 by a vote of 30-0. This is a bipartisan bill. I thank the ranking member on the Appropriations Committee, Senator THAD COCHRAN, and the ranking member on the subcommittee, Senator GEORGE VOINOVICH, for their cooperation in the development of the bill. I also thank the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, Senator DANIEL K. INOUE, for his support.

The establishment of the Department of Homeland Security after the devastating events of September 11, 2001, was one of the most ambitious Federal reorganizations since the Department of Defense was created following World War II. Regrettably, it was the official position of the Bush administration that the Department could be created at no cost to the taxpayer. This translated into a Department with aging assets, an inability to prepare for and respond to natural disasters and future threats, and significant management and employee morale problems.

In response, Congress, on a bipartisan basis, increased homeland security spending by an average of \$2 billion per year above the President's request. These increases were invested in border security, chemical security, port security, transit security, aviation security, and cyber security. Congress also ensured State and local partners in homeland security received adequate resources to equip and train our first responders. These investments have paid off, making our Nation more secure and making us better prepared for any disaster. But we have much more work to do.

The committee-reported bill totals \$42.9 billion of discretionary budget authority, an increase of 7 percent over fiscal year 2009.

Chairman BYRD has set five major goals for the bill: No. 1, securing our borders and enforcing our immigration laws; No. 2, protecting the American people from terrorist threats and other vulnerabilities; No. 3, preparing and responding to all hazards, including natural disasters; No. 4, supporting our State, local, tribal and private sector partners in homeland security with resources and information; and finally, giving the Department the management tools it needs to succeed.

To meet these goals, the bill provides \$10.2 billion for Customs and Border Protection, including an initiative to combat drugs and violence on the Southwest border; \$5.4 billion for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, including increased funds for the Southwest border initiative, and the Secure Communities and Criminal Alien Programs, which identify dangerous criminal aliens for deportation when they are released from prison.

It includes \$7.7 billion for the Transportation Security Administration, including a \$513 million increase for the

purchase and installation of explosives detection systems at airports. And funding is included for 50 additional air cargo inspectors to help meet the August 2010 mandate in the 9/11 act for 100 percent air cargo screening.

The bill also provides \$143 million for surface transportation, including 100 additional inspectors and 15 additional security teams to improve security on our transit and rail systems, and \$8.9 billion for the Coast Guard, including funding to complete national security cutter No. four and provide long lead materials for NSC No. five.

The bill also funds 4 fast response cutters, 2 maritime patrol aircraft, 40 medium-sized response boats, and includes funding for interagency operations centers, which are required by the Safe Port Act. And \$4.2 billion is provided for first responder grants, including \$800 million for fire grants, \$887 million for urban area security grants, \$950 million for State homeland security grants, with \$350 million for emergency management performance grants.

Port security grants receive \$350 million and transit/railroad/bus grants receive \$356 million.

The bill also includes \$399 million to combat the evolving cyber security threat.

Since its inception, the Department has had significant management problems.

The committee bill includes funding increases and clear direction to strengthen financial, procurement, and information technology systems at the Department of Homeland Security.

This is a good bill. By focusing on the five goals that Chairman BYRD established for this bill, we provide the resources and the information necessary to build confidence in our ability to secure the homeland. I urge adoption of the bill.

I yield the floor to the ranking Republican on this appropriations subcommittee, Senator VOINOVICH of Ohio.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio is recognized.

Mr. VOINOVICH. Madam. President, I thank Senator DURBIN. I would like to acknowledge the cooperation we received from Senator BYRD and his staff. We are pleased Senator BYRD is out of the hospital and recuperating at home. I appreciate the fact that the Senator from Illinois has stepped in to pinch-hit for him this morning.

I think the Senator from Illinois has done an outstanding job of covering the details of the bill. I would like to concentrate on some of the highlights I think need to be underscored.

The bill recommends a total of \$44.3 billion in appropriations to support programs and activities of the Department of Homeland Security. Of this amount, \$42.7 billion is for discretionary spending. This is roughly \$145 million less than the President's total discretionary request and is consistent with the subcommittee's spending allocation.

In addition, \$1.4 billion is provided for Coast Guard retired pay—the only mandatory funding in the bill—and \$241.5 million is provided for Coast Guard overseas contingency operations, the same amount as requested by the President in the Department of Defense budget to be transferred to the Coast Guard and instead of being appropriated in the Defense Appropriations bill is being appropriated here.

The bill includes significant resources: for border security and enforcement of our immigration laws, for continued improvements in security at our Nation's airports and modes of surface transportation, for the Coast Guard's operations and Deepwater Program recapitalization efforts, for helping our citizens prepare for and recover from natural disasters, and for equipping and training our Nation's first responders.

As Senator DURBIN has indicated, there is much in this bill to recommend. I am pleased the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security understands we have done our best to fund her priorities. I will not list all the bill's funding recommendations, but I do want to note some.

Full funding is provided for border security, including the funds to support 20,063 border patrol agents; 21,12 customs and border protection officers; 33,400 detention beds; and \$800 million for continued work on the virtual border fence and improved radio communications.

Starting in fiscal year 2005, significant increases have been provided for border security and immigration enforcement. This bill alone provides an increase of \$880 million from the fiscal year 2009 level, excluding emergency appropriations. Progress has been made with these investments.

Fewer people are illegally crossing our borders. This can be seen in the decrease in apprehensions of aliens along our borders—from 1,198,075 in fiscal year 2005 to 723,825 in fiscal year 2008. In other words, we have made it more difficult for 474,250 illegal aliens to cross our borders. More fencing, roads, and personnel have allowed the border patrol to increase the number of miles over which it has effective control—from 241 miles in October 2005 to 625 miles in October 2008. Additional agents and detention beds have allowed U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to increase total removals of aliens—from 246,431 removals in fiscal year 2005 to 347,184 in fiscal year 2008. We are making progress but we still have a long way to go and at great expense.

In particular, I am pleased that the bill includes funds above the request to implement a biometric air exit capability. As the chief Senate sponsor of the Secure Travel and Counterterrorism Partnership Act of 2007, expanding and improving the Visa Waiver Program is one of my top priorities. The Visa Waiver Program has become an important national security tool be-

cause under that law, countries who participate in the program are required to share information on terrorists and criminals, report lost and stolen passports, and maintain high counterterrorism and document security practices. Since enactment of this law, 8 new countries have been accepted into the program and we are seeing improvements in the security practices of the 27 countries that were already participating.

I have just returned from Lithuania and Latvia, where I was joined by several other Members of the Senate, including Senator DURBIN. Lithuania and Latvia are two countries that were recently admitted into the visa waiver program. From a public diplomacy point of view, it has been a home run and has been well received by government officials and citizens alike.

I was off in Latvia. They pointed out to me that General Mullen was in Latvia, which should have been the biggest thing in the newspaper the next day, that he was there. The thing that blew him away was the fact that Latvia was approved for visa waiver status. It was so well received by the people of Latvia.

I must note however the two areas which continue to be of concern to me. One is the way this administration has budgeted for disasters. The President's fiscal year 2010 request for disaster relief is only \$2 billion. We know now from FEMA estimates that this is not enough to pay for the declared disasters already on the books. Based on current needs, an appropriation of \$5.8 billion is required. I understand we cannot afford that within the discretionary spending limits for this bill, but I am hopeful this is addressed in future budgets.

This administration has worked hard to break the cycle of requesting emergency funding for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet no one has suggested fixing the way we budget for natural disasters. Last year alone, \$11.757 billion in emergency supplemental appropriations were provided for disaster relief.

We cannot continue to “kick the can down the road,” relying on supplemental emergency appropriations to pay for known costs. Hurricane Katrina was a catastrophic event. Exceptions were made to regulations and policies to speed assistance to those struggling to recover from the enormity of the losses. But now these are becoming the standard rather than an “exception to the rule,” and the Federal taxpayers are picking up an ever increasing share of disaster recovery costs.

It is kind of interesting that at the time of Katrina I commented we were doing some things we ordinarily do not do in a FEMA environment and predicted that what we were doing at Katrina would become the role model for other disasters that have been experienced by States. The fact is, more and more States are now asking for

more and more FEMA money, saying: You did it in Katrina, why can't you do it in Texas? Why can't you do it wherever else we have a disaster? This has to change if we are going to handle Federal spending and do something about the deficit.

In addition, this bill provides almost \$16 billion for border and immigration enforcement. That does not even include Coast Guard funding to protect our maritime borders. This is a 99.6-percent increase for U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and US-VISIT from fiscal year 2004 levels in the first Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act.

It is a significant increase. I think the citizens of our country should know that. They have been saying, for a long time, that we have not been doing the job in enforcing the security of our borders. I must tell them we are doing a much better job than ever before because we are allocating the resources to get the job done.

As we have increased the resources for border I have often wondered if there was another way we can secure our borders and deal with 11 or so million illegal immigrants other than by drastically increasing the resources for border and immigration enforcement. In fiscal year 2008, the Federal Government removed 347,184 individuals. In fiscal year 2009, \$5.6 billion is available to locate, detain, and remove unauthorized aliens. At the current pace of removals, it could require a further investment of \$272 billion and 31 years to locate and remove the estimated 11 million unauthorized aliens in the United States. We must ask whether we are willing or can afford to make that kind of investment in enforcement rather than investing time in comprehensive immigration reform.

I appreciate very much the courtesies of the distinguished Senator from West Virginia and his staff and all members of the Appropriations Committee during our preparation of this bill. I believe it reflects our careful consideration of the President's budget request for the Department and our best effort to address the Department's resource requirements of the Department for the coming fiscal year. I look forward to considering amendments which Senators may suggest to the bill and to work throughout the appropriations process to ensure the Department has the funds to carry out its duties and responsibilities.

In closing, I would point out that the President's budget was received on May 7 and the Appropriations Committee is working diligently to move forward on the passage of our 12 appropriations bills. Two of the 12 fiscal year 2010 appropriations bills were reported by the committee on June 18—including this Homeland Security bill—and 2 more were reported on June 25. Another five of the appropriations bills are scheduled to be considered and reported by the committee this week—

two this afternoon and another three on Thursday.

The House considered and adopted its version of the fiscal year 2010 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations bill on June 24. It is unfortunate that Senate consideration of this bill could not have occurred that same week, which would have put us in a position now to go to conference with the House.

Expeditious consideration of the fiscal year 2010 appropriations bills by the Senate is required if the Congress is to complete its work on all twelve of the appropriations bills by the October 1 start of the fiscal year. I have long been concerned about our failure to complete our appropriations work on time and the consequences of inaction, and I intend to speak at greater length on that during our consideration of this bill.

But, I do want to note here that a letter, dated March 24, 2009, to the majority leader, which included the signatures of all Republican Members, asked that the legislative schedule for this session:

... allocate an appropriate amount of time for the Senate to consider, vote and initiate the conference process on each of the 12 appropriations bills independently through a deliberative and transparent process on the Senate floor.

The letter goes on to point out that:

For a variety of reasons, over the past several years, the Senate has failed to debate, amend and pass each of the bills separately prior to the end of the fiscal year. Far too often this has resulted in the creation of omnibus appropriations bills that have been brought to floor so late in the fiscal year that Senators have been forced to either pass a continuing resolution, shut down government or consider an omnibus bill. These omnibus bills have not allowed for adequate public review and have clouded what should otherwise be a transparent process.

The letter further points out that President Obama, on March 11, 2009, said that he expects future spending bills to be

... debated and voted on in an orderly way and sent to [his] desk without delay or obstruction so that we don't face another massive, last minute omnibus bill like this one.

So let us proceed with this bill and debate and dispose of amendments Senators may wish to offer to it without unnecessary delay to allow us to complete our appropriations work this session. And, I would like to add that it is incumbent on our side of the aisle to make sure our amendments are relevant and germane.

I recommend this bill to my colleagues for their consideration and support, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii is recognized.

Mr. INOUE. Madam President, today the Senate begins its consideration of the Homeland Security appropriations bill which was passed by the House and marked up by the Senate Appropriations Committee late last month. This week the Committee on

Appropriations will meet, to consider five additional appropriations bills.

Over the next several weeks we expect to have many of these bills debated and hopefully passed by the Senate so that we can begin final conference deliberations on these critically important measures.

The bill before the Senate was prepared by our Homeland Security Subcommittee chaired by Senator ROBERT BYRD.

Senator BYRD along with this ranking member Senator VOINOVICH of Ohio and all the subcommittee members crafted this bill which provides \$42.7 billion in discretionary spending for the critical programs to defend our Nation, protect our borders and coastline, and respond to natural disasters.

The amount represents a 7 percent increase over the funding provided in fiscal year 2009, but is approximately \$150 million less than requested.

An additional \$241 million is also included in the bill for the overseas contingency operations of the Coast Guard. This sum was requested in the defense bill for the same purpose.

Our colleagues should thank Senators BYRD and VOINOVICH for completing their hard work on this bill. The bill was marked up by the committee 3 weeks ago and approved on a unanimous bipartisan vote.

As the Senate reviews this and the other spending bills which will soon follow I urge it to be mindful of the importance of this task.

It is imperative to the efficient operation of our Federal Government that we move to pass this measure and complete a conference with the House. For too long we have relied on cumbersome omnibus spending measures to fund our Federal agencies.

In order to break this habit, the Appropriations Committee will continue to report noncontroversial bipartisan bills which will be within the congressionally approved budget levels and should be considered expeditiously by the Senate. Passage of this bill quickly will demonstrate the Senate's ability to act responsibly and collegially in fulfilling its constitutional responsibilities.

The bill before the Senate deserves the support of every Member of this body. It is a clean bill free of unnecessary legislative riders. It is within the committee's spending allocation and \$150 million below the amount requested. I strongly recommend its approval.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama is recognized.

AMENDMENT NO. 1371 TO AMENDMENT NO. 1373

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I have an amendment at the desk, No. 1371, and would ask for its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Alabama [Mr. SESSIONS] proposes an amendment numbered 1371 to amendment No. 1373.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To make the pilot program for employment eligibility confirmation for aliens permanent and to improve verification of immigration status of employees)

On page 72, strike lines 8 through 14 and insert the following:

SEC. 545. Section 144 of the Continuing Appropriations Resolution, 2009 (division A of Public Law 110-329; 122 Stat. 3581), as amended by section 101 of division J of the Omnibus Appropriations Act, 2009 (Public Law 111-8; 123 Stat. 988), is further amended by striking "September 30, 2009" and inserting "September 30, 2012".

SEC. 546. Section 401(b) of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (division C of Public Law 104-208; 8 U.S.C. 1324a note) is amended by striking "Unless" and all that follows.

SEC. 547. The head of each agency or department of the United States that enters into a contract shall require, as a condition of the contract, that the contractor participate in the pilot program described in 404 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (division C of Public Law 104-209; 8 U.S.C. 1324a note) to verify the employment eligibility of—

(1) all individuals hired during the term of the contract by the contractor to perform employment duties within the United States; and

(2) all individuals assigned by the contractor to perform work within the United States the under such contract.

SEC. 548. (a)(1) Sections 401(c)(1), 403(a), 403(b)(1), 403(c)(1), and 405(b)(2) of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (division C of Public Law 104-208; 8 U.S.C. 1324a note) are amended by striking "basic pilot program" each place that term appears and inserting "E-Verify Program".

(2) The heading of section 403(a) of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 is amended by striking "BASIC PILOT" and inserting "E-VERIFY".

(b) Section 404(h)(1) of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-208; 8 U.S.C. 1324a note) is amended by striking "under a pilot program" and inserting "under this subtitle".

Mr. SESSIONS. This is an amendment to make permanent the E-Verify system that is supported by Secretary of Homeland Security Napolitano and would require that all governmental contractors who do work for the Federal Government use it before they hire people to ensure that the individuals they hire are Americans and not illegally in the country.

At a time when our unemployment rate is now 9.5 percent, this is more important now than ever.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

SENATOR-ELECT AL FRANKEN

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Madam President, today, a new Senator from Minnesota is being sworn in. It is my honor, along

with former Vice President Mondale, to escort AL FRANKEN as the new Senator from our State. I think it was AL who told me the third year of his campaign would be the best, and he was right.

I did want to thank my staff, first of all—some of them, many of them, are here—for the hard work they did in the past 6 months doing double duty. They never complained, they did it without extra resources, and they are as happy as can be this has finally been resolved.

I also wanted to say something about Norm Coleman. Last week, he made a difficult decision. He had the right to pursue a legal challenge, but he did what was right for Minnesota. Norm was my Senate colleague for 2 years. We often worked together on issues for Minnesota, and we all wish him and his family the best.

So despite a little delay, to be exact, 246 days since election day and 183 days since the Senate convened—why would I know that—AL FRANKEN now joins me in representing the State of Minnesota. I have gotten to know AL very well over the past few years. I know he will be getting acquainted with his fellow Senators in the coming weeks and the coming months. This is a special place with special people. I know AL looks forward to working with every Member of the Senate.

I also know AL arrived in Washington ready to get to work and ready to serve the people of Minnesota. He brings with him that same high energy and passion and idealism of our friend Paul Wellstone.

I was telling AL when I first came to the Capitol I was stunned at how many people would come up to me, when I said I was a Senator from Minnesota, and say: That is where Paul Wellstone was from. It was not just other Senators, it was people such as the tram operators, the secretaries at the front desk, the cops who work on the front line. They remembered Paul because of his dignity and how he treated people. And AL, I know, will do the same.

Before seeking elected office, AL had a full career. Among other things he was an Emmy Award-winning television writer and producer, a best-selling author with three of his books going to the very top of the New York Times Bestseller List. He was the host of a national radio show and a Grammy Award-winning satirist, who, with the USO, has gone overseas several times—seven times in fact. He went four times to Iraq to entertain our troops and to visit our wounded soldiers.

We all know AL spent some time in comedy, but during this long campaign, he has demonstrated to Minnesotans that he takes his job very seriously. I know he is taking his new job as a Senator incredibly seriously.

AL's heart is with middle-class families who work hard, live responsibly, and follow the rules. He knows their hopes and fears, their dreams and their struggles. He knows it because he has lived it.

When AL was 4 his family moved to the town of Albert Lea in southern

Minnesota. AL always tells the story about that move. His dad never graduated from high school and never had a career. But his mom's father owned a quilting business out East, and he gave AL's dad a chance to start up a factory in Albert Lea. After about 2 years the factory failed, and AL's family moved to the Twin Cities. Years later, AL asked his dad: Dad, why Albert Lea?

His dad said: Well, your grandfather wanted to open a factory in the Midwest, and the railroad went right through Albert Lea.

So then AL asked: Why did the factory fail?

His father said: Well, it went through Albert Lea, but it didn't stop in Albert Lea.

Eventually the family, including AL and his older brother, settled into a two-bedroom, one-bathroom home in the Minneapolis suburb of St. Louis Park. His father became a printing salesman and his mom was a homemaker and worked as a real estate agent. Because of the security and opportunity his family enjoyed living in America, he says he felt like the "luckiest kid in the world."

While AL likes to tell jokes, and he has some good ones, he is not one to make fun of family values because there is no husband or father who is more devoted to his family than AL is.

He met his wife—I see her right now up there in the gallery—Franni during his first year at college. They have been married 33 years, and together they have raised two children.

AL often tells the story about Franni's family. Her dad, a decorated World War II veteran, died in a car accident when she was 17 months old. Her dad left her mom suddenly widowed and alone with five children.

It was a lesson for the family, and it was an example of how one family pulled themselves up with help. He knows how difficult it is for so many families who are struggling to make it, squeezed over high health care costs, college costs, housing costs.

During the past 2 years, AL has traveled to every corner of Minnesota, from the Iowa border to the Canadian border. He has had coffee at the Main Street cafes, and he has spoken at local bean feeds. He has toured homegrown businesses, and he has stood with workers. He has been to veterans halls, and he has gone to college campuses.

He has been there day in and day out listening to the people of Minnesota. Now he has the honor and the responsibility to serve them in the U.S. Capitol. The Senate is an old and established institution. For any newcomer, it takes some getting used to the arcane rules and unique customs, but I am confident AL can adapt.

This is a big moment for Franni and their kids as well. AL and his friends and relatives have been waiting for a while. The State has been waiting. The Senate has been waiting. But, most importantly to me, Franni has been waiting.