those assembled, people felt that anyone who knew James was truly blessed, and could find joy in simply being in his company. "He was very likeable and he was the type of person that once you knew him, it seemed like you knew him forever," said Sheriff Keesee.

Mr. President, at this time I would like to ask my U.S. Senate colleagues to join me in commemorating this fallen law-enforcement officer, and recognizing the legacy that he has left behind by making Elkhorn City, Pike County, and the Commonwealth of Kentucky a great place.

A news story on the tragic death of Sheriff's Deputy James I. Thacker recently aired on WYMT TV News of Hazard, Kentucky, and was published on WKYT.com. I ask unanimous consent that said story be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From WKYT.com, January 24, 2012]

SHERIFF REMEMBERS FALLEN DEPUTY

(By Angela Sparkman)

Pike County Sheriff's Deputy James I. Thacker died while on duty after a car crash Monday night near Marrowbone on U.S. 460.

Sheriff Fuzzy Keesee says Thacker was serving papers on his way home to Elkhorn City when the wreck happened.

State police spent most of Tuesday investigating the three-vehicle crash and say an SUV crossed the center line and hit Thacker's cruiser. Another vehicle also hit the cars after the collision.

The sheriff says Thacker will always be remembered for his service to Pike County.

"He was kind and compassionate, he treated everyone else like he wanted to be treated. He was that kind of person, just an excellent officer," Sheriff Keesee said.

Keesee says Thacker joined the department just last year but served as a constable for four years before becoming a sheriff's deputy.

A Pike County Sheriff's cruiser now sits in front of the courthouse, draped in black and a wreath on top in memory of 53-year-old James I. Thacker.

Sheriff Charles "Fuzzy" Keesee says Thacker always answered the call of duty to help people. Monday night, the call for help was for Thacker.

The Sheriff says Thacker was serving papers on his way home to Elkhorn City. He never made it.

The dozens of police who answered the call to help Thacker could not save him. He died at the scene. It was a scene the sheriff will never forget.

"His family was there. I talked to them, had a prayer with them. We were all saddened," said Sheriff Keesee.

State police are still investigating what caused the SUV to allegedly lose control and cause the crash. Troopers are reconstructing the wreck on U.S. 460.

Meanwhile, the Sheriff's department is coming together to remember their friend and fallen officer.

"It's going to be a great loss to the community around us," said Sheriff Keesee.

The visitation for Thacker starts Wednesday night at the Community Funeral Home in Coon Creek. His funeral is Friday at 1 p.m. at East Ridge High School.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

CALIFORNIA CASUALTIES

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I wish today to pay tribute to 15 servicemembers from California or based in California who have died while serving our country in Operation Enduring Freedom since November 15, 2011. This brings to 324 the number of servicemembers either from California or based in California who have been killed while serving our country in Afghanistan. This represents 17 percent of all U.S. deaths in Afghanistan.

SPC Sean M. Walsh, 21, of San Jose, CA, died November 16, in Khowst Province, Afghanistan, of injuries sustained after encountering indirect fire. Specialist Walsh was assigned to the 185th Military Police Battalion, 49th Military Police Brigade, Pittsburg, CA.

LCpl Joshua D. Corral, 19, of Danville, CA, died November 18 while conducting combat operations in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Lance Corporal Corral was assigned to 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Twentynine Palms, CA.

Cpl Zachary C. Reiff, 22, of Preston, IA, died November 21 of wounds suffered November 18 while conducting combat operations in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Corporal Reiff was assigned to 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Twentynine Palms, CA.

SSgt Vincent J. Bell, 28, of Detroit, MI, died November 30 while conducting combat operations in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Staff Sergeant Bell was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Pendleton, CA.

SFC Clark A. Corley Jr., 35, of Oxnard, CA, died December 3, in Wardak Province, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when enemy forces attacked his unit with an improvised explosive device. Sergeant First Class Corley was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Fort Bliss, TX.

SPC Thomas J. Mayberry, 21, of Springville, CA, died December 3, in Wardak Province, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when enemy forces attacked his unit with an improvised explosive device. Specialist Mayberry was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Fort Bliss, TX.

SGT Christopher L. Muniz, 24, of New Cuyama, CA, died December 11, in Kunar Province, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when enemy forces attacked his unit with an improvised explosive device. Sergeant Muniz was assigned to the 3rd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, Schofield Barracks, HI.

SSG Noah M. Korte, 29, of Lake Elsinore, CA, died December 27, in Paktia, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when enemy forces attacked his unit with an improvised explosive device. Staff Sergeant Korte was assigned to the 720th Military Police Battalion, 89th Military Police Brigade, Fort Hood, TX.

PO1 Chad R. Regelin, 24, of Cottonwood, CA, died January 2 while conducting combat operations in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Petty Officer First Class Regelin was assigned as an explosive ordnance disposal technician to Marine Special Operations Company Bravo. Regelin was stationed at Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit 3, San Diego, CA.

Cpl Jon-Luke Bateman, 22, of Tulsa, OK, died January 15 while conducting combat operations in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Corporal Bateman was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Pendleton, CA.

Cpl Christopher G. Singer, 23, of Temecula, CA, died January 21 while conducting combat operations in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Corporal Singer was assigned to 3rd Combat Engineer Battalion, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Twentynine Palms, CA.

Sgt William C. Stacey, 23, of Redding, CA, died January 31 while conducting combat operations in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Sergeant Stacey was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Pendleton, CA.

PFC Cesar Cortez, 24, of Oceanside, CA, died February 11, in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Private First Class Cortez was assigned to 5th Battalion, 52nd Air Defense Artillery Regiment, 11th Air Defense Artillery Brigade, 32nd Army Air and Missile Defense Command, Fort Bliss, TX.

PO3 Kyler L. Estrada, 21, of Maricopa, AZ, died February 14 as a result of a noncombat related training incident in Djibouti. Petty Officer 3rd Class Estrada, a Navy hospital corpsman, was assigned to the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit based at Camp Pendleton, CA.

PO1 Paris S. Pough, 40, of Columbus, GA, died February 17 during a port visit in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Petty Officer First Class Pough, a hull technician, was assigned to the USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70), home-ported in San Diego, CA.

FALLEN MARINES

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, California and the Nation are mourning the loss of seven courageous and dedicated marines who died last week in a midair helicopter collision during a routine training exercise in a remote mountain area in Imperial County, CA.

This is a tragic loss for our military and our Nation. It is also a reminder of the sacrifices that all our servicemembers make each and every day. These brave men and women put themselves in harm's way to keep us safe—whether they are engaged in combat, conducting humanitarian missions, or taking part in training exercises here at home.

I ask my colleagues to join me in paying tribute to these marines: Maj.

Thomas A. Budrejko of Montville, Connecticut; Capt. Michael M. Quin of Purcellville, Virginia; Capt. Benjamin N. Cerniglia of Montgomery, Alabama; Capt. Nathan W. Anderson of Amarillo, Texas; Sgt. Justin A. Everett of Clovis, California; LCpl Corey A. Little of Marietta, Georgia; and LCpl Nickoulas H. Elliott of Spokane, Washington.

Six of the victims were stationed at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton in San Diego County. The seventh was stationed at Marine Corps Air Station in Yuma, AZ.

At this time of great sorrow, my thoughts and prayers are with the families and friends of these seven marines. Nothing can fully account for the tremendous loss they have suffered, but I hope they can take comfort in knowing that their loved ones will be forever remembered and honored by a grateful nation.

COMMENDING SENATOR CARL LEVIN

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I recently had the privilege of speaking at an event sponsored by the Center for the National Interest which honored our colleague from Michigan, Senator CARL LEVIN, with their 2012 Distinguished Service Award. In addition to being my colleague, I am proud to call CARL LEVIN a dear friend, and I ask unanimous consent that my remarks honoring Senator LEVIN be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

REMARKS BY SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN IN HONOR OF SENATOR CARL LEVIN, DELIVERED ON FEBRUARY 15, 2012

Thank you. I'm glad to be here, and I'm grateful to the Center for giving me an opportunity to say a few words about your honoree, my friend, Carl Levin.

Carl and I have served on the Senate Armed Services Committee together since I first came to the Senate, which it pains me to recall, was over a quarter century ago. That's not as long as Carl has been there, however. I think you were elected shortly after the Spanish American War, weren't you, Carl? No? I thought I had read you had been on the committee when it refused to authorize Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet.

As you all know, Carl is a proud Democrat, and I'm not. That difference is quite obvious on any number of issues before the Senate. What I hope has always been just as obvious is how greatly I admire and respect the man.

We have our moments on the committee. Debate among the members can get a little passionate at times, though I hope never rancorous. The members are quite proud of the committee's tradition of bipartisan cooperation. I think we appreciate the gravity of our responsibility to help maintain the defense of our country, and the obligation we have to do right by the men and women of the United States Armed Forces, who have risked everything on our behalf. I think Carl and I both feel their example of selfless sacrifice would make us feel ashamed if we let the committee descend into the partisan posturing that often makes it hard for Congress to serve the national interest. When members disagree on the committee, even heatedly, more often than not, it's because we feel sincerely passionate about whatever issue is in dispute. And even then, I think we try to maintain civility and respect for one another, and we do not let it prevent us from completing the committee's business.

That we have managed to keep that reputation in these contentious times is a tribute to the man who has served as the Committee's chairman or ranking Democrat since 1997. He has kept the committee focused on its duties and not on the next election or the latest rush-to-the-barricades partisan quarrel that has momentarily consumed the Senate's attention. He does so in a calm, measured, patient and intelligent manner. He seems to become even calmer and more patient in moments of disagreement when tempers and emotions among the membership start to rise. He and I have slightly different leadership styles, of course. I'm much gentler and less confrontational. But Carl's style seems to work for him.

The committee has a heavy workload every year, and Carl manages to keep us all in harness and working together at a pace and in a constructive, results oriented approach that is the envy of the dozen or so lesser committees of the Senate. Our principle responsibility is to produce the defense authorization bills one of the most important and comprehensive pieces of legislation the Senate considers on an annual basis. The committee has never failed to report the bill, and the Senate has never failed to pass it. That's not an accomplishment that some of those lesser committees I just referred to can claim every year. And no one deserves more of the credit for it than Carl Levin.

When Carl first joined the committee, he explained his reason for seeking the assignment this way: "I had never served, and I thought there was a big gap in terms of my background and, frankly, felt it was a way of providing service." He might have never served in the military, but he has surely served it, and served it well. And he has served the national interests our armed forces protect in an exemplary manner that the rest of us would be wise to emulate.

He is a man of principle, ability, and serious purpose. He has the respect of his colleagues on both sides of the aisle. We all listen to him, and we listen closest to him on the occasions when we disagree with him. That's a great compliment from a Senator. It is a tribute paid to only the most revered members of the Senate. But the greatest compliment one senator can pay another is to credit him or her as a person who keeps their word. Why that's so rare in our work is a mystery. But I can attest Carl possesses the virtue. He has never broken his word to me.

We recently found ourselves in a dispute with the administration over how and where to prosecute detainees captured in the war on terror. Most people on my side of the aisle agreed with my position. Many people on Carl's side and in the administration disagreed with his. But he never wavered. He never backed out of a deal, and he argued our case far more effectively than I could. We did what we usually do on the committee under Carl's leadership. We found a way to settle the dispute without abandoning our responsibilities. Carl deserves most of the credit for that, too.

On a personal note, that controversy reminded me again of one of the great satisfactions in life. And that, my friends, is when you fight for a common cause with someone you haven't always agreed with, whose background, views and personality are distinctly different than yours, and you discover that despite your differences, you have always been on the same side on the big things.

Thank you, Carl, for your friendship and your example.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, today I wish to discuss the current judicial vacancy crisis. We have in many instances abrogated our responsibility to advise and consent in the nomination process. An estimated 160 million people live in districts with a courtroom vacancy that could have been filled last year with the cooperation of Senate Republicans. There are currently 20 nominees who have been approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee or are waiting a simple up-or-down vote which Republicans have historically supported. One of these nominees is Ronnie Abrams.

Ms. Abrams was nominated in July of 2011 by President Obama to serve as a Federal judge for the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. She is currently a lawyer with the law firm Davis Polk & Wardwell. She is also an adjunct professor at Columbia Law School, teaching a seminar on the investigation and prosecution of Federal criminal cases. Prior to her current positions, Ms. Abrams distinguished herself as a prosecutor, rising to deputy chief, Criminal Division, at the U.S. Attorney's Office of the Southern District of New York. As deputy chief, she supervised over 160 prosecutors in cases involving violent crimes, white-collar crimes, public corruption, narcotics trafficking, and computer crimes. In recognition of her service, she was awarded the Department of Justice Director's Award for Superior Performance as a Federal Prosecutor. Ms. Abrams is a highly experienced and exceptional attorney, who is extremely well qualified to serve as a Federal court judge. A nominee of this caliber deserves to be quickly confirmed by the Senate.

In particular, we should have a renewed, bipartisan commitment to confirming more women to the bench. Over the past three decades, an increasing number of women have joined the legal profession. In recent years, law schools have seen the number of female students increase. According to the National Women's Law Center, women now make up nearly half of all law students. But the number of women in the Federal judiciary has stagnated and women are woefully underrepresented. It is of critical importance to increase the representation of women and communities of color on the Federal bench. Today, women make up roughly 30 percent of the Federal bench. When women are fairly represented on our Federal courts, those courts are more reflective of our society.

What is disturbing about this vacancy crisis is that the total number of Federal circuit and district court judges confirmed during the first 3 years of the Obama administration is far less than for previous Presidents.