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Senate

HONORING VETERANS

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the men and women who have defended America with their service and to bring to the attention of my colleagues some of the many outstanding ways in which citizens of Maine are honoring those who served and, in some cases, gave their lives for our country.

U.S. Marine Corps Maj. David Cote, a Maine native, recently established the Summit Project, a living tribute to remember and memorialize each Maine service member who has been killed in the line of duty since September 11, 2001.

As part of this living memorial, Major Cote has traveled across Maine to visit with the families of the fallen. He has asked each family to search for a stone to represent their loved one who gave his or her life so we could live in peace. From backyards and fishing holes to national forests and lakeside camps, these stones have been handpicked from across Maine to represent each fallen hero.

Beginning this Memorial Day and annually thereafter, Major Cote will lead commemorative tribute hikes, in which volunteers will each carry a stone in honor of a specific fallen service member. During these hiking expeditions, the memories of the fallen, recounted by widows, mothers, fathers, and friends, will be shared with the hikers embarking on their journey to the summit of mountains in Maine. The Summit Project was launched to help the families who have suffered such painful losses truly heal, and to ensure that the experiences of these heroes inspire a new generation of

patriots. It will honor the heroism and patriotism of those who gave all for our country since 9/11 and will ensure that their stories and sacrifices are added to Maine's proud history of duty to country.

In another unique effort, which started 23 years ago in Maine and which has now spread to include the entire United States and beyond, thousands of volunteers each year have the opportunity to recognize the ultimate sacrifice made by our brave service members by participating in Wreaths Across America. This annual effort, which provides holiday wreaths to mark the graves of fallen service members, was begun by Morrill and Karen Worcester of Harrington, ME.

On December 14, 2013, approximately one dozen tractor-trailer trucks laden with 143,000 "remembrance wreaths," all proudly made in Maine, were escorted to Arlington National Cemetery by the Maine State Police and Patriot Guard Riders. Numerous volunteers spent the morning placing the wreaths on the headstones of deceased veterans and reflecting on their courage, selflessness, and sacrifice. All told, Wreaths Across America shipped more than 470,000 wreaths to adorn veterans' graves in all 50 States and around the world.

The mission of Wreaths Across America is to "Remember, Honor, Teach." In addition to honoring America's fallen, the group seeks to promote awareness of the sacrifices made by service members through various veterans' events and wreath laying ceremonies at State Houses and the U.S.

Capitol. These solemn ceremonies allow us the opportunity to pause and remember the many men and women who have died to preserve our freedoms, and they encourage us to instruct younger generations so that those sacrifices are never forgotten.

For those veterans who have returned home from war, our Nation must ensure that we facilitate their transition to life as civilians. In many cases, these veterans have suffered severe injuries and need further assistance. The third effort I highlight today focuses on one veteran's effort to encourage other veterans.

U.S. Army SSG Travis Mills was on his third tour of duty in Afghanistan when he was critically injured by an improvised explosive device while on patrol. As a result, Travis lost portions of both legs and both arms. He is one of just five quadruple-amputees from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to survive their injuries.

While Travis recovered at Walter Reed Medical Center, he dreamed of providing a camp in Maine as a recreation center for disabled veterans and their families—an affordable place which would provide much-needed quality time for families to spend together. Through the assistance of Dean Lachance, executive

director of the Bread of Life Ministries,

Travis was connected with Joel and Crista Lavenson, co-owners of Kennebec Camp's Maine Golf & Tennis Academy.

Together, they transformed their vision into a reality, creating the National Veterans Family Center, where wounded veterans and their families can enjoy much needed rest and relaxation while participating in outdoor activities that include fishing, boating, and archery.

We must never forget the sacrifices that have been made by all generations of veterans, as well as those who still serve. I am proud that Maine has a long history of great patriots who have died in the service of their country. Low on ammunition and men, Joshua Chamberlain courageously led the charge at Little Round Top at the Battle of Gettysburg. MSG Gary Gordon demonstrated great bravery during the Battle of Mogadishu in 1992, which led to his receiving the Medal of Honor. The brave Americans who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom are no longer with us, but through efforts like The Summit Project, Wreaths Across America, and the National Veterans Family Center, we can honor their sacrifice and ensure that their legacies live on.