

Tom Stefani Eulogy
10/13/07

Good afternoon. To the Stefani family – Steve, Barbara, Dan, John, Grandmother Carole, and Special Friend, Jessica – I want you to know that today, our nation joins with you in grief. Tom served us well, and we are a grateful country.

But for you, he was family. And for so many of you here today, Tom was a neighbor, a co-worker, and a friend. You knew him in ways the rest of America could not. And although we share your grief, we know your pain – the pain of losing a child, a brother, a friend -- that pain is unimaginable. While we know that, we cannot undo it. That is God's work.

I firmly believe that God's work will be done. I believe this because Tom was doing it in Afghanistan -- bringing freedom, Liberty and the rights of democracy to a people long denied these gifts from our Creator. Tom, like these people, was willing to risk all to earn and enjoy these gifts.

You have lost much, but you have not lost everything. And certainly not lost America, nor the Forest Service, Tom's second family. For we will stand with you for as many tomorrows as it takes.

The hurt we all feel today is valid, but we must not allow it to embitter or paralyze us. Instead, we must pay tribute to Tom by continuing to do the things he left undone, thus assuring that he did not die in vain.

Yesterday, Forest Service Chief, Abigail Kimbell; Agriculture Secretary Chuck Conner; and I discussed what we should do in memory of Tom. We decided that we will plant a tree in his memory on the Agriculture Department grounds in Washington, DC. We have chosen an American Chestnut -- A species once obliterated by disease, but now recovered through genetic research conducted by the Forest Service and cooperating scientists.

By taking this action, we embrace the lesson of the Psalms that "The life of a good person is like a tree whose leaf does not wither."

A Chestnut Tree takes a long time to grow, just as wounds take a long time to heal. But, we must together begin. Tom is lost to us now, as he belongs to God. Someday we will be with him. But, until then, his legacy must be reflected in how our memories of him influence our lives.