

Floor Statement Honoring Luis Montalvan
Senator Al Franken
(As prepared for delivery)

M. President, I rise today to honor a very special man, and one of my personal heroes, Captain Luis Montalvan. On Monday I received the news that Luis had died last Friday. This has been a difficult week, M. President, and I am grieving his death. But Luis deserves to be honored because he dedicated his life to helping other veterans cope with the same struggles he faced after returning from war. So I hope to do him justice because his story deserves to be told.

I was so inspired by meeting Luis and Tuesday that while I was waiting for my election to the Senate to be resolved in 2009, I spent a lot of time researching service dogs and the benefits they bring. And when I got into the Senate, the first piece of legislation I introduced – which was quickly passed into law – was a bill designed to increase the number of service dogs for veterans.

In 2011, after graduating from journalism school, Luis turned his story into a book entitled Until Tuesday that chronicled his journey after returning from Iraq. It was a candid and really deeply moving account of his struggle. I've always admired the bravery that it took for Luis to share it. In the years since the book first came out, he'd been traveling

the country, sharing his story with lots of people and giving speeches and interviews about his experience. He even got the chance to appear on David Letterman's show along with Tuesday, something I know that he loved doing. Luis wrote 2 children's books about Tuesday. His book Tuesday Takes Me There is one of my grandson Joe's favorite books. Luis wrote these children's books so kids could learn about how Tuesday changed his life by helping him through his daily activities.

This had been a tough year for Luis however. Despite Tuesday's steadying presence, Luis was still feeling pain in his leg when he walked, sometimes making it difficult to get around. To ease the pain, he had his leg amputated a few months ago, and was in an intensive therapy program to relearn how to walk with a prosthetic.

He had other physical difficulties though. I talked to Luis' parents this week to tell them how sorry I was for their profound loss. They told me that Luis had health difficulties, including suffering from severe heart problems. He was going through a very difficult period.

But M. President, I want to celebrate the legacy he leaves behind of helping veterans cope with life after combat. Because of Luis, more veterans are now able to access service dogs. So let me tell you a little

about these amazing dogs. Obviously service dogs can't do everything, but they do a lot to help. Service dogs raise their masters' sense of well-being. They help reduce depression, ward off panic attacks, assist when their owner needs help standing back up after falling, and do so many other things. For veterans living with service-related injuries, these dogs can mean the difference between a decent life and a very difficult one. My bill was a step in the direction to make sure that all veterans who need a service dog are able to get one.

Still, we must recognize that so many of our veterans still struggle mightily, sometimes years and decades after they come home.

And the hard truth is that in many ways, we are failing our vets. The VA estimates that upwards of 20 percent of veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan suffer from PTSD. 12 percent of Gulf War veterans, and 30 percent of Vietnam Veterans have suffered PTSD during their lifetime.

M. President, these statistics should serve as a sobering reminder of the pain that so many veterans are forced to live with. And it should remind us that unless you yourself have seen combat, there's really no way to ever fully understand what they've gone through. I know

certainly that I don't. But I do know that these men and women put themselves in harm's way in service to our country, and it is our obligation to do everything we can to help them when they come back. And as members of Congress, it is our responsibility—more than anyone else in this country—to do right by them. I don't have all the answers, but I do know that we can do better.

Luis was my friend. He was a good man who loved his country and wanted nothing more than to help ease the pain that so many of his fellow veterans experienced. I don't have the words to describe the sadness I feel knowing that he's gone.

There's a lot to learn from Luis' book about what these men and women endure when they come back from war. But learning about the relationship between Luis and Tuesday is really my favorite part. Here is one of my favorite passages. And remember that one of the things Tuesday could do for Luis is anticipate panic attacks. So here is the quote:

“...Tuesday quietly crossed our apartment as I read a book and, after a nudge against my arm, put his head on my lap. As always, I immediately checked my mental state, trying to assess what was wrong.

I knew a change in my biorhythms had brought Tuesday over, because he was always monitoring me, but I couldn't figure out what it was. Breathing? Okay. Pulse? Normal. Was I glazed or distracted? Was I lost in Iraq? Was a dark period descending? I didn't think so, but I knew something must be wrong, and I was starting to worry...until I looked into Tuesday's eyes. They were staring at me softly from under those big eyebrows, and there was nothing in them but love.”

Luis, I want you to know that while you're not with us anymore, I'm so proud of you. I'm so proud that you were brave enough to serve your country for 17 years, and then brave enough to share the story of the hardship you faced afterwards. I'm so proud of you for giving hope to other veterans who faced the same struggles you did. Your book still sits on my desk in the Senate. And it'll stay there as a reminder of the man I'm so proud to have called my friend.

Thank you, M. President.