

Reprinted with permission from Southwest Nebraska News

### Nelson to Introduce Adoption Bill Inspired by Offut Military Family



**02/22/2005 OMAHA, NE**--Nebraska's Senator Ben Nelson will introduce a bill inspired by a Navy Lt. Commander stationed at Offutt Air Force Base with STRATCOM that will help make it easier for U.S. military families around the globe to adopt children.

The bi-partisan bill, co-sponsored by Senator Gordon Smith (R-OR), will grant the primary care giver in military families 21 days of additional leave to be used when the child is adopted.

"Speaking as an adoptive parent myself, I can tell you that it's important to bond with your child and to do everything possible to make sure they come into a happy home," said Nelson. "And speaking as a

member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I want to do everything possible to make the military as family-friendly as it can be in order to keep good personnel like the Kents on board without compromising military readiness".

Nelson's bill was born following a chance meeting in January with Navy Lt. Commander Thurraya S. Kent who is stationed with STRATCOM at Offutt Air Force Base. Lt. Commander Kent, whose husband, Lt. Commander Absolon Kent, who is also a STRATCOM officer stationed at Offutt, approached Nelson following a speaking engagement in Bellevue, explained the problem, and asked if he could help.

Kent was overjoyed when informed that Nelson will introduce the bill which will help all military families wishing to adopt. The Kents appeared at a news conference with Senator Nelson at Child Saving Institute of Omaha, which is arranging their adoption. "Adoption is a wonderful way to build a family, civilian or military," said Thurraya Kent. "Considering the military's adoption-friendly policies, it seemed to me like an oversight - not to provide leave for military parents when adopting".

Current Department of Defense policy encourages that leave be granted during an adoption but it is up to the discretion of the individual's commander. With Nelson's bill the leave will be automatic.

"It's tough enough to adopt a child in the military because of the cost and reluctance of some adoption agencies to begin the process knowing a family could be deployed during that time," said Nelson. "This removes one of the hurdles and assures that when a child is brought into a home he or she will have a mother or father on hand during those first critical weeks. Military families everywhere will have Thurraya Kent to thank for, what I will always refer to as, "Thurraya's Leave".

Senator Nelson's bill was introduced the week of February 28th. It will be referred to the Armed Services Committee Sub-Committee on Personnel on which he is ranking member which will help speed it through the process.

**Navy Lt. Commander Thurraya S. Kent is a member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.**