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## Senate

### NASHVILLE PILOTS COMPLETE HISTORIC JOURNEY

Mr. THOMPSON. Mr. President, I want to share with the Senate a courageous story about two female Tennesseans who recently succeeded in their quest to retrace a historic flight around the world.

Nikki Mitchell and Rhonda Miles landed their single-engine Maule M-5 plane at the Lebanon, Tennessee airport on Saturday, August 22, 1998. Their trip, dubbed the "Bridge of Wings Tour," was completed 49 days after they took off from the same airport.

Their flight commemorates the historical achievement of three female Russian pilots. That journey, known as the "Flight of the *Rodina*," was a story of courage and stamina in the tradition of Lindbergh and Earhart. It took place in 1938, when the three Russians flew non-stop from Moscow to the southeastern tip of Siberia.

The Russian pilots flew with virtually no radio transmission, through skies so overcast no landmarks were visible, yet they broke a world record and opened up the route across Siberia. They were cheered worldwide and received their country's highest award, the Gold Star of Hero of the Soviet Union.

Sixty years later, Nikki and Rhonda celebrated the accomplishments of the *Rodina* on the anniversary of its flight. A portion of their 15,000 mile trip included retracing the steps of the three Soviet women from Moscow to the southeastern tip of Siberia. And for this leg of the route they were

joined by two Russian women who flew their plane side by side with the American aircraft in a unified flight of honor and goodwill.

As they flew over Russian territory, Nikki and Rhonda were met by crowds and cheers in villages across the Russian Far East. The level of excitement was such that a commercial airline canceled a flight so its fuel could be used for the continuation of their flight.

Before returning to Tennessee, Nikki and Rhonda were also warmly welcomed in Alaska, Canada, and Des Moines, Iowa. It goes without saying that upon arrival in Lebanon, Tennessee, they were given a welcome fit for heroes.

Nikki and Rhonda, dressed in blue flight suits and holding flowers, couldn't contain their excitement as they stepped out of the plane. Nikki showed how happy she was to be back in the Volunteer State by immediately kissing the Tennessee soil. Also thankful to be home, Rhonda could not stop smiling as friends rushed to greet her.

Mr. President, I know my colleagues in the Senate join me in saluting Nikki and Rhonda for their courageous journey. These Tennesseans have recreated one of history's most daring and remarkable flights. Their trip will always be remembered as an international effort to honor one of aviation's most exciting moments. I have no doubt that the example set by these women will inspire others to strive toward achieving their own ambitions and goals.

Thank you, Mr. President.