

Speaker Ryan: 11-year old Montanan light 2017 Capitol Christmas tree

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WASHINGTON—Tonight, House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) participated in the 2017 Capitol Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony on the West Front Lawn, where he was joined by 11-year-old Montanan Ridley Brandmayr, who helped flip the light switch for the holiday season. An annual tradition, this year's tree hails from the Kootenai National Forest in Montana and will be lit from nightfall until 11 p.m. each evening through New Year's Day. Below are Speaker Ryan's remarks as prepared for delivery:

"Thank you, Stephen. I just want to commend everyone who came together to make all of this possible. I know so much work goes into this, from start to finish.

"I want to thank all the members of our Montana delegation. One of our former colleagues, Secretary Zinke, is with us. Moments like this when you have the chance to show off your state mean so much.

"At the end of each year, no matter how short—or long—it may feel, there is always Christmas. Waiting for us is that sense of wonder the shepherds felt when the angels appeared in the night sky to herald the birth of a Savior. After hearing the news, the shepherds knew they had to go see for themselves what this was all about.

"'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened,' they said.

"That is the true spirit of Christmas, isn't it? Amid our cares and troubles, we gather

to see for ourselves that the light overcomes the darkness. We seek out the joy and the good in the world. We give back to those in need. We lend a hand to those in pain.

“We see that the glory of God shines all around us, and brings us closer to one another. These gifts never dim in our hearts. They are always there. All we need is a little light—and of course, a little Christmas—to guide our path.

“With that, we now come to the best part. It is clear that this year’s tree represents the full heart and spirit of the Big Sky State. From the gratitude of the driver who hauled it here, Larry Spiekermeier of Plains, who called it the ‘crown jewel’ of his career, to the hope and perseverance of our Official Tree Lighter, 11-year-old Ridley Brandmayr of Bozeman. Ridley, why don’t you come up here?

“With us tonight are Ridley’s parents, Emily and Brent, as well as his younger brother, Ross. Ridley is a sixth grader at Sacajawea Middle School. A big hello to all the students and teachers there. So it says here that Ridley enjoys fly fishing, skiing, hunting, soccer, competitive swimming, playing cello, and reading. Geez. Is that all?

“Tonight, on behalf of the good people of Montana, Ridley offers holiday greetings to all Americans. OK Ridley, let’s give everyone a five-second countdown...”