

Mr. Byrd: It is with great pleasure, great pleasure that I congratulate my very highly esteemed colleague and dearest friend, Senator Edward Kennedy upon his casting his 15,000th vote. Senator Kennedy has now become a member, an illustrious member of one of the most exclusive clubs in the whole wide world.

Throughout the entire history of the United States Senate, only two other U.S. Senators have cast 15,000 votes. I, and the late Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina. As a charter member of this exclusive club, I welcome Senator Kennedy aboard. This latest achievement is only one of many for this fine son of Massachusetts.

He has spent more than half his life in the Senate, and is the third-longest serving senator in U.S. history. As I have said before on this floor, history -- yes -- history will be kind -- yes -- to Senator Kennedy. I have no doubt that history will not only regard Senator Kennedy, Senator Ted Kennedy, as one of the most effective national legislators of the 20th and now the 21st century, but also as one of the great senators, one of the great senators ever to have graced this illustrious chamber.

Although born to a life of privilege, Senator Kennedy had dedicated his life to serving others. Senator Kennedy represents the heart and the conscience of American liberalism. Senator Kennedy is responsible for much indeed, much of the progressive legislation of the last four decades.

He is always a powerful, always a powerful and eloquent voice for the poor and the oppressed, expressing his view in sobering speeches and passionate struggles for the rights of labor, for health care reform, and for strengthening the social safety net for America's less fortunate. In the United States Senate, he has demonstrated that it is through public service, to paraphrase his brother, President John F. Kennedy, Americans can stop asking what their country can do for them and actually do something for their country. Senator Ted Kennedy gave me unstinting support during the years when it was my privilege to serve as the Senate Democratic Majority Leader and Minority Leader at different times.

When times got tough, I knew that I could always count on Ted Kennedy's advice and his support. It may have been a needed vote. It may not have been. It may have been assistance in building approval for a legislative proposal. But whatever, whatever, whatever's needed, Ted Kennedy was always there. And I was always grateful. Thank you, Ted. I shall always value Ted Kennedy's friendship not only to me, but to the great people of the great state, E Pluribus Unum, of West Virginia. And I am pleased and I am proud -- proud, Ted -- to have had the pleasure and the honor and the great privilege of serving with this extraordinarily great senator in the United States Senate.

Congratulations. Congratulations, congratulations, Senator Ted Kennedy on casting your 15,000th vote. But even more importantly, congratulations on being such a needed advocate for the powerless in our great and powerful country. Americans are a compassionate people, and the Senior Senator from Massachusetts has no intention of

ever, ever, ever letting the United States Senate forget that. Amen. Thank you, Ted.  
Thank you, Ted.