

Kerry honors Kennedy for casting his 15,000th Vote in the Senate

Washington, DC – Senator John Kerry today honored his friend and colleague, Senator Edward Kennedy, for casting his 15,000th vote as a member of the United States Senate. Kennedy is only the third Senator ever to achieve such a milestone.

Text of speech as prepared for delivery:

Just before the Senate went into recess, our colleague Senator Kennedy cast his 15,000th vote—a remarkable milestone that speaks to a lifetime of hard work and unparalleled accomplishment. At moments like this one, it is only right to take stock of an individual's contribution to history—not just to the history of this institution, but to the history of our country.

Taking the measure of Ted Kennedy's work here, of such an unparalleled record of achievement, the public record is full of comparisons to the greatest Americans who have ever lived.

The Boston Globe wrote of our senior senator that "in actual, measurable impact on the lives of tens of millions of working families, the elderly, and the needy, Ted belongs in the same sentence with Franklin Roosevelt."

Time Magazine said that Ted Kennedy "has amassed a titanic record of legislation affecting the lives of virtually every man, woman and child in the country." And in that extraordinary book just a couple years ago, Adam Clymer wrote that Ted Kennedy is "a lawmaker of skill, experience, and purpose rarely surpassed since 1789." He's been compared to Henry Clay for his skill as a legislator and to Lyndon Johnson for his efforts in creating a more egalitarian, more inclusive America that leaves no one behind.

All of these comparisons are apt. But as Ted casts his 15,000th vote, he also joins company with a different kind of American icon: Cal Ripken, Jr.

Ted's athletic career probably peaked in 1955 when he caught Harvard's only touchdown pass in the 1955 Harvard-Yale football game. I hope my fellow Red Sox fan Ted Kennedy will forgive me for making this comparison, but 15,000 votes—like Ripken's streak—is a remarkable feat of endurance. They are the legislative equivalent of a marathon. Like Ripken's 2,632 games played, 15,000 is not just an impressive number—it stands for a lifetime of hard work, day in and day out, piling accomplishment on top of accomplishment until one day you have a record that is unparalleled in all of history.

It's a sign that you have played hurt and soldiered through pain, adversity, and disappointment, that you've put country and responsibility ahead of comfort and recreation. It is a greatness that comes not just from great talent, not just from seizing one moment, but from a consistent and dogged commitment to giving all you have in each moment and fighting for what matters to you.

15,000 is a sleek statistic that encapsulates countless legislative battles in the trenches, tough negotiations, thankless committee hearings, inspired ideas, setbacks, and—to a greater degree than any lawmaker alive-- laws that improve the lives of everyday Americans.

From his maiden speech in the Senate demanding an end to the filibuster of the original Civil Rights Act, there has not been a significant policy accomplishment in Washington over four decades that hasn't borne his fingerprints, and benefited from his legislative skill and leadership. His is the record of progressive politics in our era. On all the great fights that call us to stand up and be counted, from the minimum wage to Robert Bork and Sam Alito, Ted didn't just hear the call to duty he led the charge.

Run down the list -- the rights of the Disabled—who for far too long were left in the shadows or left to fend for themselves, Ted Kennedy wrote every landmark piece of legislation that today prohibits discrimination against those with a disability.

AIDS – when a whole lot of politicians were afraid to say the word, Ted passed a bill providing emergency relief to the thirteen cities hardest hit by the AIDS epidemic.

300,000 young people have summer jobs each year because of Ted.

Guaranteed access to health coverage for 25 million Americans who move from one job to another or have pre-existing medical conditions – wouldn't have happened without Ted Kennedy.

Without Ted Kennedy, there wouldn't have been a bilingual education in the United States for the 5 million students who today have a brighter future because they're learning English in our schools.

Without Ted Kennedy, we wouldn't have lowered the voting age to 18 and ended the hypocrisy that eighteen year olds were old enough to die for this country in Vietnam but not old enough to vote for its leadership.

Without Ted Kennedy, we wouldn't be the world's leader in cancer research and prevention.

Without Ted Kennedy, we wouldn't have had Title XI which opened the doors of competition and opportunity to a generation of women athletes all across our country.

Ever since he entered the Senate at age 30, Ted Kennedy has stood up, again and again, to be counted in support of his beliefs. He has stood up to be counted, and he stood up to lead, again and again, until he had secured his place as one of the greatest legislators in the history of our country. And then he celebrated by doing the very thing that made him such a legend in the first place: he rolled up his sleeves and went back to work.

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