

Senator Edward Kennedy 15,000 Vote Tribute
Remarks of Leader Mitch McConnell (*as prepared*)
Sept 4, 2007

“More than half a century ago, a right end on the Harvard football team caught the eye of the head coach of the Green Bay Packers. The coach wrote the young man to ask if he might consider a pro career, but Edward Moore Kennedy had other ideas. He responded that he was flattered by the attention, but that he’d already decided to go to law school and then go into another contact sport — politics. I rise this afternoon in tribute to a man who is known to most people for his famous name, but who is famous among his colleagues in the Senate for his warmth, good humor, and his simply astonishing ability and will to get things done.

“Senator Kennedy cast his 15,000th vote just before we broke for recess, solidifying his place as the third-most prolific voter in the history of this body. It was just the latest milestone in a storied 45-year career marked by countless others. And it surprised no one who’s ever witnessed him speaking on the floor or off on the issues he cares about. The Senate has been his arena for more than four decades, and in the course of pushing thousands of pieces of legislation, he has worn out hundreds of staffers, committee members, and stenographers. He ignites every debate and every issue he decides to touch. Let no one ever accuse this man of simply punching the clock.

“Thousands of visitors to the Capitol have instantly known that this is a place of momentous deeds when they’ve seen Senator Kennedy jabbing the air or wheeling around, voice rising, even in an empty chamber, to make a point. He is not a man who ever depended on a microphone to get his point across.

“His reputation as an aisle-crosser is well known. Less well known is his graciousness off the floor, as when he accepted an invitation of mine to speak to the students at the McConnell Center in Kentucky last year. Or when he

insisted that Senator McCain accept an award in Boston despite the fact that it was his son's 11th birthday, assuring him that he'd make the day special for him and his son — which he did, with a personal Coast Guard tour around Boston Harbor and, according to Senator McCain, at least two birthday cakes.

“Senator Kennedy is one of the most visible men of our time. He has every reason to let people come to him. Yet when we held a reception earlier this year for our most recent Republican member, Senator Barrasso, it was Sen. Kennedy who approached Senator Barrasso, and sat with him and his family, talking, sharing stories, and welcoming them with all the warmth and affection of a grandfather long after the other senators had cleared the room.

“Senator Kennedy is a famous storyteller. But one of the greatest stories in American politics is his own. We honor him today for reaching yet another milestone along the way. And we wish him many, many more.

“One of my own personal political heroes, Ronald Reagan, was for eight years a great political nemesis of Senator Kennedy's. And yet Senator Kennedy always said he admired our 40th President because, as he once put it, “Ronald Reagan stood for a set of ideas, and he had something to communicate.”

“Senator Kennedy's friends on the other side admire the same quality in him. We may disagree with his policies, and we do. But we respect him for his remarkable commitment and persistence in pursuit of those ideas, those principles. And we honor him today for this particular and impressive achievement.”

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