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Mark Begich

U.S. SENATOR FROM ALASKA

TRIBUTES

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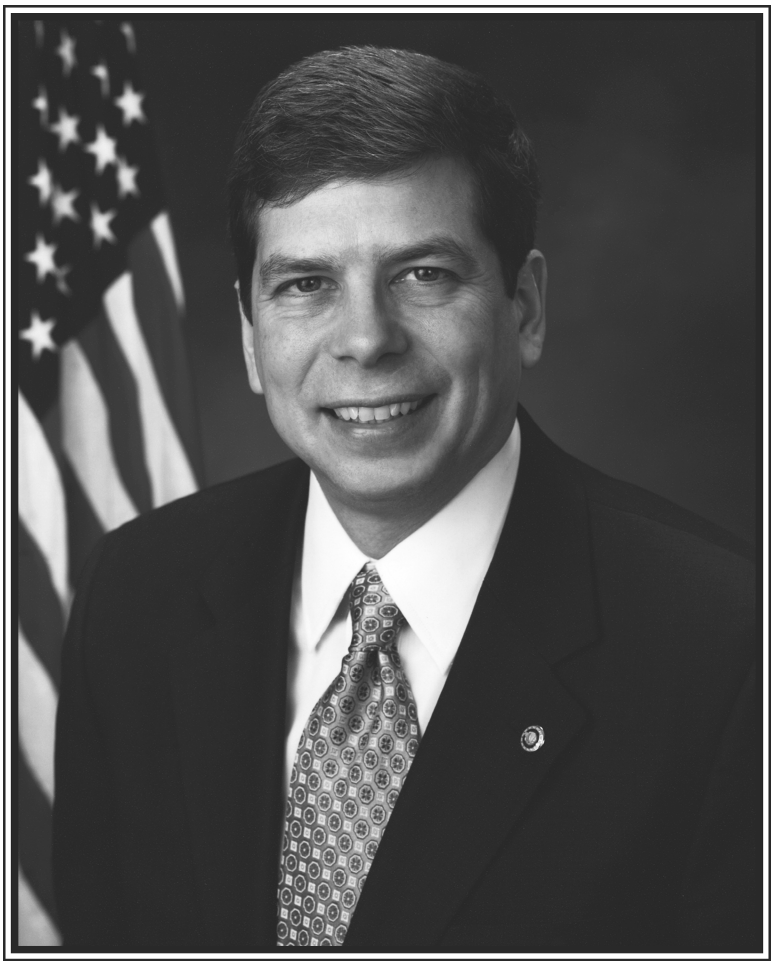

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Mark Begich

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Tributes
Delivered in Congress

Mark Begich

United States Senator
2009–2015

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BIOGRAPHY

Senator MARK BEGICH represented Alaska in the U.S. Senate, where his primary focus was building a strong Alaska economy.

During his tenure as U.S. Senator for Alaska, MARK BEGICH earned the reputation of a hard-working, pragmatic problem-solver who was willing to work across party lines to get things done.

Quickly rising to leadership positions, MARK BEGICH was chairman of both the Steering and Outreach Committee and the Oceans Subcommittee. He also served on a number of other important committees including Appropriations, Commerce, Veterans, Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Armed Services, and Indian Affairs.

In addition, MARK BEGICH was appointed to the President's Export Council, the national advisory board to the White House on important export and trade policy. MARK BEGICH was also named chair of the bipartisan U.S.-China Inter-parliamentary Group aimed at improving trade relations between the United States and China.

Senator BEGICH was elected to the Senate in 2008 after serving as mayor of Anchorage for nearly 6 years. Born and raised in Anchorage, Senator BEGICH's other priorities included reducing the national deficit, tax reform, and building a national energy policy that emphasized Alaska's oil and gas resources, an Alaska natural gas pipeline and the State's many renewable resources.

In 1988 at age 26, MARK was the youngest person ever elected to the Anchorage Assembly where he served for nearly 10 years. During that time, his colleagues three times elected him chairman, Anchorage's second highest political office, and he also served as chair of the budget committee. During his time as mayor, Anchorage went through the biggest building boom in a generation, attracting millions of dollars' worth of public and private investment. Through MARK BEGICH's leadership, Anchorage voters supported the building of the new Dena'ina Civic and Convention Center, a $100 million expansion of the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, and a multitude of other projects that strengthened the

city's economy. In October 2008 both the Wall Street Journal and Business Week recognized Anchorage as a city well positioned to weather the international economic crisis, and the city's bond ratings were upgraded due to improved fiscal stability.

Outside of public service, MARK BEGICH earned recognition not only as a successful businessman, but also as an engaged member of the community. He served on the University of Alaska Anchorage Board of Regents, as the chair of the Alaska Student Loan Corporation, and with the Alaska Commission on Post Secondary Education.

MARK's parents, Pegge and the late Nick Begich, came to the territory of Alaska in 1957 as teachers. Following a career as a teacher and superintendent of military schools on Ft. Richardson, Nick was elected Alaska's third U.S. Congressman. While running for reelection in 1972, Nick Begich's airplane disappeared in the Gulf of Alaska when MARK was 10 years old.

From his parents, MARK learned the values of hard work, strength of farnily, and commitment to community, which are the values he has applied to a successful business career and a long record of public service.

Senator BEGICH is married to Deborah Bonito, a successful businesswoman. They have a young son, Jacob. The Begich family enjoys spending time together reading, traveling, and enjoying the many great things Alaska has to offer.

Farewell to the Senate

Thursday, December 11, 2014

Mr. BEGICH. I thank the Presiding Officer for allowing me to speak on my 6 years of serving in this body. It has been a true honor to serve with the Presiding Officer in the short time he has been here and to serve with all of my colleagues, but it has been an even bigger honor to serve my fellow Alaskans.

Alaska is a huge State—660,000 square miles. More than—to my friends from Texas and California, please don't take this personally—double and triple the size of States such as Texas and California.

But Alaska is a very small place in many ways. People make personal connections with their elected officials. At the end of the day, we pretty much know everybody one way or another. Alaskans will more than likely see me at a checkout stand at Andy's Hardware or Home Depot or hanging Christmas lights at my wife's store or doing errands with my son Jacob that at times he is not very anxious to do. It is a small State, and they will more likely see me doing that than on the floor making speeches or on C–SPAN.

When Alaskans contacted me with an idea or complaint or problem, we made sure we responded. After 6 years in the Senate, I am most proud of the work with helping Alaskans and their families. My office responded to more than 360,000 individual letters and emails and phone calls from Alaskans. To put it in perspective, 360,000 is roughly half the population of the State.

Much of my staff is here with me on the floor today. I thank them for their unwavering service to their fellow Alaskans. Truly I have the best of the best. Some of them worked with me when I was mayor and are now working for me as a Senator. Many will go on and continue to do incredible work not only for Alaskans but for this country. I thank them.

We took on 3,000 individual casework cases to help Alaskans navigate the Federal Government. We helped them get their Social Security checks, made sure the local post office

actually delivers the mail, and in Alaska that is important. We fought for benefits for individual veterans.

I am also proud of the great policy work we did. When I say we, it is because sometimes ideas came from Alaskans, sometimes they came from this body, sometimes I would have a crazy idea I would write down on a sheet of paper, but at the end of the day it was my staff that did the work.

Opening Alaska's arctic lands and waters to responsible resource development—NPR–A, CD–5, Beaufort and Chukchi. We also helped to convince the EPA to free up permits for Kensington and Greens Creek mines.

The Arctic. When I first came to the office, I have to say that not everybody knew where the Arctic was. Some didn't even know it was an ocean, to be frank with you, but that is not the case today. Some of my colleagues probably got tired of hearing me always talk about Alaska no matter what they were discussing.

I see my friend Al Franken is here, and I know he remembers this story. He draws incredible maps of the United States, and he does it all freehand. I remember him drawing a map one day, and I said, "You missed two things, Alaska and Hawaii."

He said, "Well, when I drove around the country with my parents, they were not States, they were just territories, and the maps they bought were maps of the lower 48." So I sent him a dot-to-dot of Alaska, and he sent me back a nice letter with a map of Alaska he had drawn.

No matter what conversation my colleagues might be having on an issue, I would manage to weave in Alaska.

The Arctic has unbelievable potential. We just touched the tip of the iceberg and there is more work to be done.

Working on defense is important to Alaska. It is important that we keep our military bases secure by saving F–16s at Eielson and getting F–35s next. We need to make sure that the benefits for those who are serving continue to be there for them.

It is incredible to hear stories from veterans when they talk about the new model of care we developed over 2½, 3 years ago. Our State has 77,000 veterans. When I was campaigning in 2008, I had an idea that I called the Hero's Health Card, and I remember when I got into office, people said it will never happen. People who know me know that when you say never or no, that means yes, they just didn't spell it properly, and I have to figure out what to do.

Today in Alaska it doesn't matter if you are a veteran in the smallest rural communities or the biggest cities, you will get health care and access to it through our tribal health care delivery system—the first in the Nation.

One time when I was in Bethel, this gentleman who was a veteran came up to me when I was in the VFW Hall. A lot of us have been in VFW Halls, and you know that when someone comes at you at an aggressive pace, it is probably not a positive situation, but you have to engage them in a conversation. He held his hand out and showed me his scars, and he said that he had to go to Anchorage to get this taken care of, and you told me I could go down to my clinic and get it taken care of, but it didn't happen. I was about to say something, but before I could get a word out, he said, "Do you know what I get to do because of what you did? Every single week now when I need therapy, I can go down the street in Bethel instead of flying to Anchorage to get it done." That is a model of how to do the right thing.

Alaska is well known for fisheries. I don't mean to pick on Senator Franken, but I remember him coming up to me because we coined a phrase on modified engineered fish which we called the "Frankenfish." It was not about the Senator, but it was about this fish that was chemically enhanced and would really destroy the fisheries in Alaska and would be bad for the market and bad for consumers. We fought over that issue because Alaskans brought it to our attention every single day.

I just mentioned some of the things we did for Native rural health care, which was not just about Alaska. When we discussed an issue in our office, we asked: Can we do it for Alaska, and does it have an international impact? Will it impact the rest of the United States in a positive way?

I remember hearing and reading about the money the Federal Government owed to our tribes which had not been paid for two decades. It was money for clinical services they produced. We did some things, and the net result was Alaska received over $500 million in settlements over the last year. On top of that, many tribes across the country now have almost three-quarters of a billion dollars, money owed by the government for services delivered to individuals. Earlier this week we were able to pass another piece taking away the restriction on our tribes in Alaska so they now, under the Violence Against Women Act—and we hope the House passes it—will be able to dispense and do tribal government in the sense of our justice system improving the situation on the

ground when it comes to sexual assault, domestic violence, and substance abuse.

There are a lot of examples. It is hard when we talk about these because there are a lot of great things that have been done, not just individually but collectively. In this place we spend a lot of time talking about doom and gloom and how the sky is falling and always the worst-case scenario.

We have come a long way in the last 6 years. The people who know me know I don't care how bad the situation is, I am positive about it because there is always another day to solve these problems and make things happen.

I think about where we were when I came to the Senate. I remember coming on this floor as a freshman in 2009, and the chaos of this economy was unbelievable. We were losing 600,000 jobs a month—equal to the whole population of my State—unemployed, boom, gone. Unemployment was around 10 percent. The stock market was at 6,500. Two of the largest automobile companies in this country were flat on their backs. No housing starts were happening. The market was crashing. The deficit was $1.4 trillion per year. As a new Member, I wasn't sure what I had gotten myself into, to be frank. Some of the Members who came with me were trying to figure out, What did we get? But we didn't sit around.

I know we always hear this doom and gloom out there. When we look back over 6 years, we remember we had some battles here, and most people think we don't do anything. But where are we today? We are 17,000-plus in the stock market today.

I can tell my colleagues that Alaskans saw this because every year—I know I hear from other Members who ask me this question all the time—we get a permanent fund check. It is based on investments we make, and it is based on revenues we receive from oil and gas. That permanent fund check doubled this year from $800 to over $1,900. Why did it double? Because it is based on the stock market average of the last 5 years. We dropped off 2009, so the market was doing better. Every Alaskan felt what this economy has done. So when the naysayers are out there speaking, it is just not accurate.

GM and Ford and Chrysler have added over half a million good-paying jobs. Unemployment is at 5.8 percent—almost a 50-percent drop. Over 10 million new jobs and the longest stretch of private sector growth on record—56 months. Just last week—I know we always hear it is not good enough. Of course, but it is a heck of a lot better.

I remember the chaos on this floor during those 3 or 4 months and as a new Member what we had to go through.

The deficit has dropped by $1 trillion a year. We are down to about $480 billion now. We have sliced off $1 trillion a year from the deficit.

In Alaska we have seen some incredible things. Anchorage unemployment is at 4.9 percent. There are more jobs in mining and timber than ever before. Tourism has risen to nearly 1 million visitors. There are 78,000 people in the fishery industry.

It is important to remember that this is just a moment in time of challenges we have as a body and as a country. It is important to remember that there is a lot of work ahead of us. But we have accomplished a lot. We spend a lot of time on this floor debating what is bad about this country.

Many of us are coming to the floor and giving our farewell speeches and talking about good things. There are a lot of good things we should be proud of as a country. I am proud of what we have done over the last 6 years. This country is back on track. We have more work to do to make sure people's incomes rise, but that is starting to happen now.

The challenge for my colleagues who are still here and for this country is—it has been an incredible honor to be in this body, but we need to make sure we move forward so we don't have this as a platform of negative attitudes and views but about opportunity and possibilities; not about things that we sit here and try to figure out how to kill but what we try to do to improve and give new ideas a chance.

I said it earlier: I am a very optimistic person. I believe what is possible today can be even better tomorrow. But it is incumbent on people to believe it, to want to do it, to put aside their differences where we can. I will tell my colleagues, that is why fewer Alaskans are party registered and more are nonparty registered in our State than in most States—because our view is that we don't care about the party; what we care about is getting things done. We are trying to find the answer to yes rather than trying to find the way to no.

I have a great staff, as I said earlier, some from Alaska, some from here, and some from across the country, people who I don't understand why they continue to subject themselves to working for me after the mayor's office, and then they came here. I always told them that what mattered was not who sponsored the bill but whether it is a good idea. If

it is a good idea, then let's move forward, try to find an answer, try to solve the problem.

The positive attitude we have to have is not only important for this body, but it is important for this country. In a weird way, they love us and they hate us. The poll numbers show they don't love us too much—13 percent. But on the flip side, they look to us. They look to us for certainty and guidance and where we might take them. The pundits are different, but the people look to us. I see it when I go to stores, when I am out and about. People may be angry with us, but they want to know what we are going to do to solve these incredible problems, and it will be incumbent upon the next Congress to sit down and work together. It is going to be tough because the politics of the day are about the moment in time, not about the long term. This is an incredible challenge that has to be dealt with in some way.

I have spent a lot of time trying to, as I said, do what I can; it didn't matter whose idea it was. I listened to Senator Coburn speak. I remember one day we were working on an issue—essential air service. Some of us have that in our States. Senator Coburn was against it. I remember having a conversation with him and trying to explain that between one airport and the next is 1,200 miles. There is no road. There is no way to get to it. At the end of the day we were able to resolve that issue and move forward.

I think of all the things that have been accomplished in this body but how little people know about it. In an odd way, over these last few days more of the positive issues are out there. I hope the press covers them. We will see. But we live in a world where it is better to talk about the negative because that seems to be what thrives. I hope that changes.

Let me end by sharing a couple of other quick thoughts. There are a lot of great stories about being here in the Senate. Someone asked me one day, "Do you write these down?" I said, "no."

I remember I was in Sitka, AK, and I was headed to the airport. I got to the airport, and the attendant there was checking my ticket, and he said, "Oh, wait, Mr. BEGICH. We have something for you."

It was a wrapped gift at the airport.

I said, "Great."

Now, people who care about the TSA, please ignore what I am about to say. They just handed it to me. I took it. I opened it, and it was one of those empty books that say:

Please write down your thoughts and your notes. They are incredible thoughts.

I remember I was coming through—people will remember when it snowed like crazy. Well, people from DC thought it snowed like crazy. I did not. I knew one thing, and that is about how the plows work, being a former mayor. I thought to myself, I can't leave my car on the street because they will plow me in, especially in this place, or they will attempt to. So my son Jacob and I—we got our snow shovels, did our shoveling, and then drove the car to another area. Then I realized—we were dressed in what I call Alaska good garb—that I had to get back to the house because I had this snow shovel and he had a snow shovel. It was on the other side of the Capitol. So what did we do? People who know me know I don't really follow all the rules around this place. We started walking through the Capitol with our snow shovels over our shoulders. The place was empty. I realized what an incredible place this is. First, we were allowed to walk through with snow shovels. It was dead silent. If my colleagues have never done that, they should. You walk through the Capitol and you just see the history, and in a small way, we were a part of it.

I did break another rule. This is confession time. I am a Catholic, I can do that. We came into this Chamber. I had the corner desk over here. Why did I pick that desk? A lot of people don't know this story. Why did I do that? No. 1, I was a junior Member, but No. 2, I wanted that desk because that is where the candy box was, and I knew every Member would have to go there sooner or later, and I thought I could spend some time talking to them. And maybe I would have a candy box, which I did. I had special candies from my wife's store.

One day I came in here late at night with my son, and we sat right there. I know the security guards probably didn't see us. We took a photo. Yes, I broke the rules. I took a photo of my son sitting there, and I will cherish that photo forever.

As my son once said—and I said it on this floor one time—about how important it is to get things done and the battle we were having. I remember I actually quoted my son on the floor, and I think I shocked somebody. I was talking to him about something, and he said, "Dad, just suck it up." I thought, only from a young kid do you hear what you have to do sometimes.

Now, I didn't forget my wife; I just wanted to wait until the end. I know I am breaking the rules, but my wife is right up there. I am pointing to her. Yes, I am, Sergeant at Arms. Too bad. I am acknowledging her. She has been incredible. She has allowed me to do my public service, to fly those 20 hours every weekend to and from Alaska. She has taken care of Jacob when I couldn't. I love her dearly. Thank you.

To end, I will just say this: It has been a true honor to serve in the U.S. Senate, to serve the people of Alaska, and to know every day we—me, my staff, and my colleagues who work with me—contributed a little bit to making life better for Alaska, for Alaskans, and for this country. There is no experience like serving in this body and doing what I could to make a difference.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

(Applause, Senators rising.)

TRIBUTES

TO

MARK BEGICH

Proceedings in the Senate

TUESDAY, *December 9, 2014*

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I would like to take a few minutes to salute my colleagues who are departing the Senate at the end of this year with the conclusion of the 113th Congress: MARK BEGICH of Alaska, Saxby Chambliss of Georgia, Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, Kay Hagan of North Carolina, Tom Harkin of Iowa, Mike Johanns of Nebraska, Tim Johnson of South Dakota, Mary Landrieu of Louisiana, Carl Levin of Michigan, Mark Pryor of Arkansas, Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia, Mark Udall of Colorado, and John Walsh of Montana.

They have all worked hard, ceaselessly giving their energy and considerable time and service to their constituents, to their home States and to our country. I want to thank them for their service and for their kindness to me over many years in so many cases. In particular, I want to say a few words about these colleagues.

MARK BEGICH and I worked together to address the challenges facing the fishing industry, which is vital to both of our States. He has continually fought to address the unique challenges facing Alaskans, particularly with respect to access to VA health care. I salute him and wish him the best. . . .

Along with all of my other colleagues who are leaving us at the conclusion of the 113th Congress, let me thank them for their service, their dedication to improving the lives of Americans, and on a very personal level for their friendship. I wish them all well.

WEDNESDAY, *December 10, 2014*

Mr. DURBIN. I have some tributes here for my colleagues who are retiring, leaving the Senate. It is a lengthy list of tributes. . . .

I can't imagine how the Senator from Alaska handles that commute back and forth, but he did it. I said the other day when we spoke about his service that many people don't realize his father was a Congressman before him and he died in a plane crash with Hale Boggs when they were flying back to Alaska to appear at an event. That plane was lost and never recovered. When MARK BEGICH came from Alaska to serve the United States, he completed the journey his father never could complete. His 6 years of service to Alaska have been extraordinary.

Before he got into politics, though, MARK was a whiz kid entrepreneur. When he was just 16 years old, he got a business license and he and his brother opened two businesses: a nightclub for teens and a vending machine operation. The business world's loss was our gain.

Senator BEGICH started his political career working as an aide to then-Anchorage Mayor Tony Knowles. At 26, he was elected to the Anchorage Assembly, or city council. In 2003, he became the first native-born Alaskan to serve as mayor of Anchorage.

In 2008, he dared to take on an Alaska legend: Senator Ted Stevens. When the votes were counted, MARK had become the first Democrat since Mike Gravel in 1981 to represent Alaska in the U.S. Senate.

As a Senator, MARK BEGICH has been a voice for working families in Alaska and across America. He has diligently and doggedly pursued commonsense, bipartisan solutions to big challenges. In all things, MARK's heart is always with Alaska. He has helped to protect Alaska fisheries, promoted renewable energy development in the State, and made sure Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson remains strong and active.

Here is something about MARK my colleagues may not know. In 2011 he was part of a four-man team in the Hotline's live annual trivia contest. His teammates were three House Members: Dennis Ross, Tom Davis, and Martin Frost. They were up against a formidable team that included Chuck Todd and Amy Walters. No one gave MARK's team a prayer of winning. But once again, MARK BEGICH scored an upset victory. He is to DC political trivia what Ken Jennings is to Jeopardy: A memorable champion.

But the actions for which he will be remembered are very far from trivial. When MARK BEGICH and others in the class of 2008 arrived in the Senate, America's economy was in free-fall. Millions of families had lost their homes to foreclosure—the worst foreclosure crisis in America since the

Great Depression. America was fighting two wars. Our military is the finest in the world. Many of its members were exhausted from multiple deployments. On top of that, an outdated policy of "don't ask, don't tell" forced some servicemembers to lie about who they were in order to serve the Nation they love. Time after time, Senator MARK BEGICH took brave and principled stands that have made America better and stronger—militarily, economically, and socially.

This son of one of Alaska's great families has well earned—and will always hold—a place in our Senate family.

Mr. COONS. . . . As I close, I would also like to thank those of our colleagues who will be leaving the Senate after the New Year.

It is an incredible privilege to work in this Chamber and to represent the people. Every day I am awed by the dedication and talent of many of my colleagues, public servants who come to work to fight for their States and their government.

To those who are ending their service in the Senate, know that I value your friendship and partnership. It has been an honor to work with you, and I thank you for all you have done for our Nation.

ORDER FOR PRINTING OF SENATE DOCUMENT

Mr. BENNET. I ask unanimous consent that the tributes to retiring Senators be printed as a Senate document and that Senators be permitted to submit tributes until December 23, 2014.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THURSDAY, *December 11, 2014*

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Walsh). The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I know a number of my colleagues are going to want to talk about our friend MARK BEGICH. When we came to the Senate—I see a number of folks here—we came in 2008. I see a lot of other Members who are newer Members as well. I think when you come in with a class, you get kind of confused about what is going on and you form a bond.

I remember my first—our first—Senator Franken wasn't here yet, but Senator Merkley, Senator Hagan, Senator Bennet, and a number of others were here. We were in Senator Durbin's office. There was still a question about what was going to happen in the election because there were thousands of votes out. So being giddy new Members, we got on the phone to call Senator BEGICH to say we wish him well and we are counting on him. He said, "Hey, Jacob and I are leaving on vacation because I already know where the votes are coming from. I am going to be there."

He knew his State that well.

As someone who is a former chief executive and as some others here who are former chief executives, I remember him coming here, and many of us new Members were kind of scratching our heads about the notion of how this institution would work or didn't work sometimes. But, as Senator BEGICH mentioned and as Senator Murray mentioned at our dinner the other night, there are a lot of people in this body who are chronic optimists. I am blessed to have an optimist in my colleague Senator Kaine. I don't always fit in that category. But Senator BEGICH, week in and week out, would always try to remind us that it is not quite as bleak as it might seem at the moment, that there was good news and there was progress being made.

I think, looking back, I am not sure some of us fully realized, particularly that first year and a half or two when so many things happened—controversial things and things that are still being relitigated in many ways but that have allowed this country to make progress—and Senator BEGICH was an incredibly important part of that.

He was also, as one of the newer Members, liaison to management. So whenever anything didn't happen right with leadership, it was always the fault of Senator BEGICH.

But I just want to say—and I know Senator Hagan was here a little bit earlier—I fear at times that our elections are almost becoming like parliamentary elections in the other countries where people are voting for or against a leader not based upon what a leader has done individually—such as Senator Landrieu and all the things she has done for Louisiana, Lord knows—but, as Senator BEGICH just mentioned, there was not a bill or an issue where he didn't find an Alaska connection and where he didn't make a difference for the people of his great State.

So I know I am just the first of many who want to say to my colleague, to my friend, to a great Senator, Godspeed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. FRANKEN. Mr. President, I was a part of that class. I was a little late getting here, my colleagues will recall. But I was part of that class and campaigned with the class, and I remember being with Mark Udall and Tom Udall and MARK BEGICH at a campaign event, and they kind of looked at me and said, "So your dad wasn't like a public servant."

I said, "No."

They said, "Well, that is unusual."

"No, no, that is fine."

What a lot of people don't know about MARK is his father died very famously in a plane crash.

MARK is the only Member of this body, I believe, who did not graduate from college, did not go to college.

There are a lot of things about MARK—and Mark Warner just referred to it—he was a chief executive.

We need more mayors here. Sometimes we say we need more diversity. Sometimes we say we need more women. God knows we need more satirists—but mayors, wow. Having that mayor's perspective—Cory Booker looking a little smug—is very useful.

Mike Enzi, a mayor—am I forgetting a mayor?

Mr. BEGICH. Tim Kaine, Richmond.

Mr. FRANKEN. Bob Corker.

Whom are you pointing at? Tim, were you a mayor?

Mr. KAINE. Richmond.

Mr. FRANKEN. Oh, Richmond, you just kept saying Richmond. I don't know anybody named "Richmond."

Mr. WARNER. He was also a Lieutenant Governor.

Mr. FRANKEN. So he was a Lieutenant Governor too—OK. So he is the most qualified.

This is what it is like when we are together. Being a Senator, a lot of people ask, "Is being a Senator as much fun as working on Saturday Night Live?" The answer of course is no. It is not close, but it is the best job I have ever had.

It means so much to us what we can do for our State, and no one knows more about his State—and I know Mary Landrieu is sitting here, no one knows more than Mary and MARK—and that is an incredibly long flight he took every weekend to go back to Alaska.

Minnesota had a happy warrior, one of the great Senators who has ever served this body, Hubert Humphrey. We may

have noticed during MARK's speech he teared up a few times, the most when he was talking about his wife.

That is good for you. That works out well.

Hubert Humphrey said, "A man who has no tears has no heart."

This man has a tremendous heart. Humphrey was a happy warrior, and this guy is a happy warrior—and you brought joy, humor, and optimism to this body, and I thank you, my friend, for that.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Ms. LANDRIEU. I rise to say a word about my dear friend MARK BEGICH and to add some words on behalf of him.

We saw, when he presented himself in his final remarks to this body, his compassion, his heart, and his emotions were clear in relation to his family, his son, and to us—because he was truly an amazing friend to many. He is always in a good humor, always upbeat.

As the Senator from Virginia said, we could never quite understand it, but he was—and still is—an amazingly optimistic and positive person.

Having served as mayor, as a small business owner, as a passionate champion for Alaska, what he didn't mention—I thought I might because it might be too hard for him to remember today—but I want this body to remember that MARK comes from a distinguished line of public service.

A lot of us say that, but in MARK's case his father literally gave his life to Alaska. His plane went down on October 16, 1972. The plane has never been found.

So when MARK walked in the first day I met him, I don't know what I was expecting, but I was expecting someone to have a heavy burden on his shoulders because of that. As the eldest daughter of nine children, I take responsibility so much for my brothers and sisters, and I don't know how I could have gotten where I have gotten without both parents literally lifting me up every day.

So as I have sat across from MARK all these years in very close leadership meetings on Tuesday mornings—and he has walked in with such optimism, such extraordinary confidence in himself, in what he is doing, and in encouraging us—I was always just so struck by the fact that he grew up with a large family, six children. His mother was widowed at a young age. He took on so much responsibility, and yet he came to the Senate ready to serve.

I know his father is truly honored that he didn't get bitter, he wasn't angry. He grew up to be a man who accepted that as God's will, which is a hard thing to accept.

He did so much for the community that his father loved and the State that his father loved. I wanted to add that to the Record because a lot of people watching us think we are one-dimensional robots and that there are no other dimensions to our lives and our family.

But it always struck me, MARK, that you have been such a man of courage, such a great inspiration to your family, and truly an inspiration to all of us.

I know your parents are very proud, both of them.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. I wish to add a word to honor my good friend Senator MARK BEGICH. I think there is a special connection with those of us who were elected on the same day.

We share something else in common, which is on that election day in November 2008 neither one of us knew if we had won. We both had to wait some length of time—in my case 2 days and in Senator BEGICH's case a couple of weeks—but it kind of makes us ponder the future: Are you going to serve or are you not going to serve and how will you utilize that opportunity.

There is another connection that comes from being Western Senators. When we talk about salmon—and MARK BEGICH mentioned a while ago "Frankenfish." Well, we are very concerned. We have a collective concern about the health of our salmon runs.

It is not just a fishing economy, although that is very much a part of the economy of our States, it is about the soul of our States, the traditions of our State, the natural resources of our States.

When we talk about timber, we have a connection. Sitka was mentioned. Sitka spruce is a common tree in our State of Oregon.

When we get concerned about the rescues off the Oregon coast because the water is so cold one can't be in it for very long without dying—which makes it much more important to have advanced helicopters, and just last night we were able to keep a key helicopter on the coast due to Senator MARK BEGICH's considerable involvement and advocacy. Thank you so much for doing that.

Why is our water so cold off the coast of Oregon? Because it is coming down with the currents from Alaska. In so many ways our States are tied together.

As I have served this first 6 years, I have turned to my friend from Alaska for advice and counsel time after time. His seasoned policy judgment and his core political instincts are on a par with any other Senator in this Chamber and certainly far in advance of my own.

I say to the Senator, I appreciate your friendship. I appreciate your sharing your judgment, and I appreciate your buoyant spirit that reminds us, when we are discouraged, that so much can be accomplished. What an honor it is to have a seat in the Chamber of just 100 Senators, where we can add our voice to a conversation about truly how to make this a better world.

Thank you, my friend, for your service. We will miss you greatly.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. King). The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I just want to add my words to what my other colleagues have said about someone I am going to miss dearly. Senator MARK BEGICH and I worked together on many things. When I passed the reins from the steering and outreach committee and suggested to our leader that he should seriously consider Senator BEGICH for that responsibility, he made us all proud as part of the leadership in presenting a very important perspective every single day.

I have frequently referenced an Energy Committee trip I took to Alaska with Senator BEGICH where—I thought Michigan was big. Michigan is big. But we not only had to travel a long way to get to Alaska, once we were in Alaska we had to travel a long way from one end to another.

I remember I ran into a number of people from Michigan because in our Upper Peninsula we also have a lot of snow, and we have a lot of people who were working there. But everywhere we went—and we traveled to Native American villages. We flew to Barrow. We were in every part of the State. Some areas you could only get into by helicopter.

We would get there—we went to a Native village that needed a new post office. Senator BEGICH took me out. We had boots on because there was water coming up. We looked at this little, tiny post office that was maybe a little bigger

than a closet, not much. We came out. The whole community was there to urge us to support this post office.

To see not only the information, the depth that Senator BEGICH had about that before we got there, but the way he interacted, his commitment to them—everywhere we went he knew about that community, the leaders in the community. He had a relationship with them.

This is somebody who loves Alaska. In his bones, in your DNA, MARK, is your State. I love seeing that. It was so inspirational to see that. I know the Senator has wonderful family support at home. It has been my pleasure to be at your home for dinner and to watch your son. He is growing up. I know we have a lot more that we will benefit from, from your leadership. I know you have a lot more to contribute to Alaska, to our country.

Just know you are leaving with incredible respect from colleagues and love and affection. We wish you every Godspeed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I rise to add my sense of gratitude and appreciation to someone who has become a dear friend. I am his newest colleague and have had the privilege of working with him for these past 13 months. I just want him to know and state very publicly that he was one of the anchors to me as I was getting to know a very different place from being a mayor of a big city.

Your sense of fierce pragmatism was a light to me, coming down into a place known for partisanship and gridlock, and demonstrated to me your ability to bring people together and get things done, but even more than that, being a model for me, a role model for me in the early stage of my career in the Senate.

I have to confess, and do it with pride, that I love this country with the depth and the core of my being. My parents taught me that sense of pride. But you expanded that, incredibly, by bringing me out to Alaska. Of all my experiences in these 13 months, that was one of the highlights. It taught me a lot when I saw that a Senator still had such a powerful touch and connection and knowledge and love of the people of that State. You have made me love Alaska even more and know Alaska in my heart.

What was extraordinary to me, in knowing you in your short career, was how much you got accomplished, how steadfast you were in pursuing the interests of your State

and this Nation. One thing I have to say, I felt uncomfortable as I saw you—I will never forget being at Bartlett High School, with the Bears, and seeing your love and connection to those kids. It made me feel very uncomfortable, the negativity that was being hoisted upon you during a campaign.

It made me think of something as I was out there, and I thought about it again as you talked of history. There is a very famous poet named Maya Angelou, who said these words:

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I rise.

The truth is, you are one of those people who are at your ascendancy. You have risen above it all. You have risen above the things in Washington that try the spirits, not just of those of us here but of the Nation. You have risen to a level of accomplishment in your life that is extraordinary and as awesome as some of the vistas I saw in the State of Alaska.

The beauty I have right now, the confidence and the joy I have right now, is the simple fact that I know that God ain't finished with you yet.

Thank you. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. President, I just want to rise, similar to others in our class, and many other Senators have risen, to talk a little bit about MARK BEGICH and his service to Alaska and praise him for his service, because I think he has been—since I have been here, the 6 years I have served with him; he was in my class—I have seen a remarkable Senator who truly cares about his State and has been an incredible advocate for his State.

I was not here for his entire speech, but I turned it on. The good thing about our offices is you can tune it in. I caught the point where he got a little bit choked up about Deborah and Jacob. I got choked up, too, in the office. I can cry but not in public. In any event, the first thing I know about MARK is how much he cares about his family and how much the toll of serving in the Senate takes on that family.

His travel—I am a Westerner, and I have to travel out 5 hours, 6 hours, 8 hours to get home. His flight is always long—we heard the description the other day from Senator

Murray. He flies all the way out to Seattle at the end of the day. It is 12:30 our time when he arrives there. Then he gets on another flight for another 4½ hours up to Anchorage, just to get home. It is not a very long weekend. Then he has to get on a flight and come back.

His family is so important. I have seen him with his son Jacob. We live just across the alley from each other. I can look out my back window and look down and see the light—just four houses down—and know whether MARK and Deborah and Jacob are in town. We have spent many good times in his house there. That is the first thing I would like to say.

The second is—I have seen this over and over again with Senators. You are one of the best at it—taking the issues that are involved with Alaska and that Alaskans care about and that you knew so well when you were a mayor and fitting them into this vast Federal landscape and making sure Alaskans are heard. I think you are one of the best at doing that. You stepped out on so many different issues. I remember the Native American corporations and how you would reach out in a number of areas with Senators throughout the Senate and try to reach some compromise there.

I have a large Native American community. We, too, have the same kinds of issues on that front that you do. We also share many Native American tribes. As the Senator knows well, it was my father and my uncle who stood up in the 1960s and 1970s to make sure the Natives got a fair shake in Alaska. MARK—that is the way he serves when it comes to Native Americans, caring about them, caring about their issues, going up to the North Slope where it is cold.

My understanding is that during this campaign he got frostbite on one occasion, being out in that terribly tough environment. Thank you for that and for working with me and working with everyone else who tries to make sure Native people get justice. They look to Washington for justice. They look for justice at the Supreme Court. They are not getting much of it over there at the Supreme Court any more. We are the last refuge. We served together on the Indian Affairs Committee.

One final thing to talk about. I have been working on the Chemical Substances Act for the last couple of years with Senator Vitter. We have tried to do everything we can to bring people together—12 Republicans, 12 Democrats—on this extraordinary piece of legislation.

We have been working to make it better. We have had Senators start joining us on both sides of the aisle. MARK,

you were one of the key people to work on that. As Senator Warner said earlier, you were our liaison to the leadership. You were in all of those leadership meetings. Whenever I told you there was a problem, you would surface it, whether or not it was going to blow up the meeting. You stuck in there when it came to truly caring about issues and caring about getting things done.

I think if anything is your hallmark, it is wanting to put aside the partisanship and trying to get things done. So that is something that you should be tremendously proud of.

Just as a final word, I love your State of Alaska. I have climbed your highest mountain. My cousin, Mark Udall, has also done the same thing, climbed Mount McKinley, which has now returned to its Native name, called Denali. I remember going up to your State as a State attorney general. It was the only State in the Nation that put in money for our conference of attorneys general and put us on an 8-hour train across Alaska so we could see all of Alaska.

Alaska is a terrific State. You and I have some disagreements on what we protect in Alaska, but the wonderful thing is we understand each other's position. We are still very good friends. It has been a real honor to serve with you. I wish you and Deborah and Jacob the very best. Wherever you land—I hope to see you in Alaska again because I know I am going to come up there. But wherever you land, our door will always be open to you.

Thank you and God bless you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, we have heard a lot of people honoring our wonderful colleague Senator BEGICH today. We are all going to miss him dearly. We are especially going to miss him in Minnesota. I have heard many positive statements about Alaska today, but no one can come from a State where they can say they have one of the main streets in Anchorage named after them; that is, Minnesota Street in Anchorage.

That is because there are many Minnesotans in Alaska. Believe it or not, it was not cold enough in Minnesota so they moved to Alaska. One of those people who moved to Alaska was MARK's dad. MARK's dad actually grew up about 30 miles away from my dad. It is rough-and-tumble country up in the Iron Range of Minnesota. MARK still has relatives in northern Minnesota, and particularly he has an uncle named Uncle Joe—Joe Begich—who served in the legislature for

many years and also is a Korean war vet and was truly the heart and soul of the Iron Range delegation in the Minnesota State Legislature.

For any of our colleagues who think MARK BEGICH is a character, they should meet his Uncle Joe. I know Uncle Joe. I hope he is watching because nothing made him happier than the day MARK BEGICH got elected to the Senate. When MARK once came up there with me and we were greeted by Uncle Joe, it was like a hero's welcome when MARK BEGICH appeared on the Iron Range of Minnesota. People came out, and we did an event with veterans. Then, of course, the problem was we went to a bar, and we could get no pictures that didn't have a Budweiser sign on them.

MARK is a hero up there, and he is a hero across our State just for the work he has done for rural communities. When I say we have rural communities in Minnesota, he always says we have extreme rural communities in Alaska.

He has done work in conservation, which we care about so much. He has done work on tourism. We are cochairs of the tourism caucus, and I still remember the hearing we had right in the middle of the downturn, where every Senator came to talk about all of the things that were happening in their States with tourism. MARK was actually able to cite the price of cruises you could take in Alaska. It was written up in the Washington Post about all the Senators hawking their States, but no one was prouder to hawk Alaska.

The other thing about MARK, which I know was mentioned, is he doesn't believe politics is about standing in the opposite corner of the boxing ring. He believes politics is about working together in the middle and trying to find common ground.

The last thing I will say is how much we love Deborah and Jacob, and we know we will see them around and they are not going to go away.

One time Deborah, Jacob, and MARK came over to our house for brunch. My daughter is about 6 years older now. She was about 13. Jacob and my daughter were playing a game in the other room, and the adults were talking over breakfast. I will never forget Jacob Begich. From the other room, he heard his dad talking about him and, as any politician's kid would do, he said, "Stop talking about me, Dad." So that kid has inherited that MARK BEGICH sense of fierce independence. When he left, my daughter said, "I love that kid, Mom. He knows how hard it is to be a politician's kid."

MARK has left here the legacy of Alaska, the legacy of good work, the legacy of a great staff, and the legacy of a great family. We will see you around, and thank you for your service.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, we will be losing a good friend, MARK BEGICH. MARK and I served on the Armed Services Committee together for a number of years. We were very active. I was ranking member and he was chairman of the Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, dealing with missile defense, which Alaska was deeply involved with as a State.

MARK was an expert on those issues. We dealt with nuclear issues and outer space and satellite issues. That was a particularly good time together. I believe every committee—every decision we reached—was a bipartisan decision that came out of committee. We supported the subcommittee report that was made a part of the Armed Services bill and then became law. For the most part I think not too many changes were made in it.

I think a lot of people may not appreciate that Senators do get along. We do work together on issues important to the country, such as space and military space necessities that are so valuable to our men and women as they are in harm's way, to be able to produce a missile defense system that ensures that this country is not vulnerable to attack by a missile from an adversary.

That system is up, standing, and operating today. It was great to work with MARK in establishing it. He is a delightful person to work with, always with a positive attitude. I know he will be successful in whatever future endeavors he undertakes. He was mayor of Anchorage. Anybody who has been a mayor has learned some things and has had to deal with constituents face to face. He loved actually meeting his constituents and talking with them.

I wish MARK every success in his future endeavors and would like to express my appreciation to him for the courtesies he has shown me and the effort we made together to improve the defense of the United States.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

Ms. HEITKAMP. Madam President, I pay tribute and recognize the accomplishments of a trusted ally and dear friend, Senator MARK BEGICH, who will be leaving the Senate at the end of the term. MARK has been a tenacious and steadfast advocate for his constituents and the State of Alaska and a strong moderate voice during his years in the Senate.

I have had the honor and privilege to work with Senator BEGICH on both the Indian Affairs and Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committees. As someone who represents one of the most rural States in America, he has an impressive understanding and compassion for the unique challenges rural communities face.

As a member of the Homeland Security Committee, he played a major role in postal reform negotiations. He understood rural citizens rely most on the Postal Service for critical deliveries of prescription medicines, time sensitive bills, and other important communications. He knew that without a rural post office, many small, rural communities would cease to exist.

During his tenure on the Indian Affairs Committee, he was dedicated to confronting and addressing the unpleasant truths about the Federal Government's treatment of Native people in our country. He understood the threats facing subsistence rights, Native languages, and rich cultural traditions, and fought to ensure they were given parity and respect. Senator BEGICH also knew far too many Native women today experience violence and sexual assault, particularly in remote areas, and so he fought for the tribal provisions in the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act—VAWA—and advanced his Safe Families and Villages Act to extend those protections to Native women in Alaska. He has also been a fighter for American Indian and Alaska Native veterans and worked hard to increase their access to care at both Indian Health Service and Veteran Affairs facilities. His compassion for indigenous issues extended to tribes in the lower 48 States and Native Hawaiians, and I know Native people across the country feel they have lost a true champion with his departure.

Anyone who knows Senator BEGICH knows he is an intellectually curious and energetic person. He always approached issues from a solutions-oriented mindset, which meant he was more tied to outcomes than to rhetoric, and the Senate was well-served by his presence. Senator BEGICH

is also a devoted family man to his wife Deborah and young son Jacob. I remind myself that our loss is their gain, as I am sure they are excited to have him home more. I truly enjoyed working alongside him and look forward to when our paths cross again. I wish him incredible happiness and success in the next chapter.

MONDAY, *December 15, 2014*

Mr. REID. Mr. President, Alaska is a State unlike any other State in the country. Often referred to as the "last frontier," Alaska's landscape is as breathtakingly beautiful as it is immense. Its residents are some of the most kind and accepting people one would ever meet. Any person who represents the State of Alaska must possess a true love for the exceptional beauty of this region and the vastness of it. It is so far away from everything. The capital Juneau, you can only get there in an airplane. That is the only way you can get to the capital of the State of Alaska. So I am going to spend a little bit of time talking about Senator MARK BEGICH and his faithful service to the people of Alaska.

There is no surprise that he is dedicated to Alaska and the people of Alaska. His father, Congressman Nick Begich, was dedicated to Alaska, as has been his mom Pegge. They moved to the then-territory of Alaska in 1957 to teach school. Congressman Begich became involved in Alaskan politics and successfully ran for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Tragedy struck. The whip of the House, Hale Boggs, and he were in Alaska campaigning and they were flying to an event. The plane disappeared. They searched, they searched, they searched. After 2 months, Congressman Boggs, Congressman BEGICH, and the pilot were declared dead. Their plane and bodies to this day have not been found. They are hidden someplace in the vastness of Alaska, in one of the mountains or the many bodies of water. We don't know.

In spite of this heartbreaking loss, the Begich family has pushed on. His mother continued to raise six children alone while managing real estate properties and being active in local politics.

By the age of 17, MARK had already acquired his mother's business acumen, starting his first business, a jewelry venture, and also owning and managing real estate. One reason

Senator BEGICH has been a good Senator is because of his innate business acumen.

At age 26, he was elected to the Anchorage Assembly, which is the city council, a position he held for 10 years. Then in 2003 he was elected mayor of Anchorage. He served two terms before running for the Senate.

Now, 2008 was a dark time for Alaskan politics, but MARK's Senate victory brought a fresh face and new hope to the State. From the time he stepped foot on the Senate floor, he has not let the people of Alaska down. He has fought to expand economic opportunity, to defend the rights of Alaska Natives, and to fortify rural Alaska. Senator BEGICH's efforts to reform the Alaskan veterans health care system was exemplary, and it is a blueprint for a bipartisan solution that the Senate reached this year to reform the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Senator BEGICH has made tremendous contributions to the Senate over the past 6 years. I know he will continue to fight for what is best for Alaska as he transitions into the next stage of his life. I hope public service is somewhere in MARK's future. Every State needs a man of his quality. He will always have his wife Deborah and his son Jacob by his side.

I can remember the first time I saw Jacob was right behind us by the Ohio clock. President Obama walked by and that little boy yelled "Obama!" So his little boy loves politics.

It has truly been an honor to serve with Senator BEGICH. I am glad he has been part of our leadership team as head of the steering committee. He has done a remarkably good job. I thank him again for his service to the Senate and certainly to our country.

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, Senator MARK BEGICH comes from a long line of public servants. In his 6 years in the U.S. Senate, he has been a strong advocate for the people of Alaska. Senator BEGICH has worked tirelessly to promote Alaska's economy and business. During his Senate tenure, he has been a partner on such issues as voter protection, the USA PATRIOT Act and FISA reform, and empowering the National Guard.

Alaska has more veterans per capita than any other State. As a member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Senator BEGICH has fought to improve veterans access to care, increase funding for the VA, and for research to better understand mental illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, and traumatic brain injury, TBI. These are

priorities I share as well. He has also worked through the Commerce Committee to ensure that Alaska's many fisheries and their booming industry remain sustainable. His commitment to his constituents similarly extended to his work on the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, where he fought to protect Native voters from discrimination and to ensure that laws reflect and respect their needs and traditions.

I have appreciated the opportunity to work with Senator BEGICH on some of the unique challenges that face rural States like Vermont and Alaska. Senator BEGICH has consistently worked to improve rural schools through legislation such as his Investing in Innovation for Education Act, which I was pleased to cosponsor and which would have given 25 percent of its grants to rural schools. Senator BEGICH has supported legislation to facilitate rural Alaskans' access to quality health care. And he has supported measures to address the high heating costs facing our northern constituents.

He is a man with an unfailing optimistic outlook on life. I wish Senator BEGICH, his wife Deborah, their young son Jacob, and his entire family best wishes.

TUESDAY, *December 16, 2014*

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, as we wind down the final days of the 113th Congress, it is a good time both to reflect on the past and to look toward the future. I have been very moved as I listened to the farewell speeches of our departing Senators, and I wish I had time to pay tribute to each one of them. They have all been wonderful colleagues, and I enjoyed working with and getting to know every one of them. I wish them all the very best in all their future endeavors. They will most certainly be missed. . . .

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, before this Congress ends, I wanted to pay tribute to several of my colleagues who will not be here when we convene next year. Some chose not to run again, and others unfortunately lost their reelection campaigns, but we will miss them all next year. I begin in order of seniority. . . .

Mr. President, Senator MARK BEGICH arrived in the Senate in 2008, having previously served as mayor of Anchorage. MARK worked hard and accomplished a lot in his 6 years here, but what I will always remember is MARK's commit-

ment to our veterans. Alaska has more veterans per capita than any other State in our Nation, and through his position on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, Senator BEGICH has been their champion. I thank MARK for his public service and his commitment, and I wish him and Deborah well.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize my fellow Senator from the class of 2008, Senator MARK BEGICH of Alaska.

Senator BEGICH's career in public service began earlier than most at the young age of 19, when he was hired by the Anchorage city health department. By that time, Senator BEGICH was also well on his way to establishing himself as an enterprising businessman and entrepreneur. Born and raised in Anchorage, AK, MARK BEGICH would go on to serve in the Anchorage Assembly where he was the youngest member ever elected, before successfully running for the post of mayor in 2003, a role in which he served until his election to the Senate.

Here in Washington Senator BEGICH has used his position as chair of the Commerce Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard, as well as his extensive knowledge of the Alaska economy, to advocate for Alaska-first policies. As a Senator from a State with one of the highest populations of veterans per capita, Senator BEGICH has also been a passionate defender of our Nation's military. I also have had the pleasure of serving with Senator BEGICH on the Senate Appropriations Committee and have greatly appreciated his contributions.

I would like to thank Senator BEGICH for his years of dedicated service both to Alaska and the Nation.

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I recognize the accomplishments of Senator MARK BEGICH, our colleague from the State of Alaska. These last 2 years, I have had the privilege to work with Senator BEGICH on a range of issues—from Native adult education and health care to fishing rights—and I consider him a good friend. Senator BEGICH is not only someone who is easy to work with as a reasonable, open-minded legislator, but is also someone who truly cares about the people of his State and embodies the values of the Senate.

In his farewell remarks last week, Senator BEGICH commented on the relative size of his State, which, at 660,000 square miles, is more than twice and three times as large as other large States such as Texas and California geographically.

That is 164 times larger than my home State of Hawaii. It also gets a lot colder. Despite the differences between our States, as the two noncontiguous U.S. States, Hawaii and Alaska have always had a special bond.

That bond was forged by Senators Inouye and Stevens—two of the Senate's giants. Those two men, who were from different parties and very different States, looked out for one another. They did a lot of good for our States, and all who come after them have sought to emulate their example of working together and looking out for each other.

MARK did that for me even before I was sworn in to the U.S. Senate. As many of my colleagues may know, Senator Inouye passed away just weeks before I was to be sworn in. At the time I would been assigned to the Energy, Judiciary, and Veterans' Affairs Committees. However, with Senator Inouye's passing—and I have to thank our leadership here as well—I asked for a seat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, an appointment critical to Hawaii, where military activity is a vital part of our economy.

MARK BEGICH gave up his seat on the committee to open a slot for me. Not to shortchange Alaska, MARK got a seat on Appropriations. But I will never forget that he recognized how important the military was to Hawaii and how he agreed to help me out.

Not only was MARK reinforcing the long-lasting Hawaii-Alaska bond, but it was also characteristic of MARK's desire to help—something that his constituents know all too well.

As Senator BEGICH mentioned in his farewell remarks, "Alaska is a very small place in many ways. People make personal connections with their elected officials."

Whether it is answering constituent letters, or helping people navigate the Federal bureaucracy, Senator BEGICH has been there for Alaskans. He has also taken their concerns and made sure that everyone in Washington knows about them—whether it is the situation in the Arctic, fishing, energy development, or the challenges of Alaska Natives. There is not a Member of this body who has not heard Senator BEGICH talk about Alaska's unique challenges.

As he also mentioned, most people in his State pretty much know each other.

In a State like Alaska—much like Hawaii—you can't "go Washington." You have got to stay grounded in the day-to-day concerns of the unique local communities back home. Sometimes this can be tough, but MARK has always kept Alaskans first and foremost in all of his work in the Senate.

I have had the privilege of serving with MARK on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, and have seen first hand how hard he has worked on behalf of Alaska's veterans. He has been tenacious in working to see that Alaska's veterans and Natives have access to health care—and creatively, worked to see that veterans can access the tribal health care delivery system. As he has put it, if the clinics are there for some, why not have them be available to all?

This is the kind of commonsense solution that is a hallmark of his time in the Senate.

I will miss his good humor and his hard work. It has been a pleasure serving with MARK and I wish him and his family all the best in their next chapter.

Aloha MARK and a hui hou, "until we meet again."

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I wish to celebrate and thank the 13 outgoing Senators who have worked tirelessly to represent their home States in the Senate: Senator MARK BEGICH, Senator Saxby Chambliss, Senator Tom Coburn, Senator Kay Hagan, Senator Tom Harkin, Senator Mike Johanns, Senator Tim Johnson, Senator Mary Landrieu, Senator Carl Levin, Senator Mark Pryor, Senator Jay Rockefeller, Senator Mark Udall, and Senator John Walsh.

I have worked side by side with these men and women for years—some for decades—and witnessed first hand their extraordinary commitment to public service and to the people they so proudly represent.

Even when we didn't see eye to eye on every issue, I always deeply respected and admired their service to our Nation and their dedication to fight for what they believe in.

It has been a privilege to serve alongside each and every one of these extraordinary colleagues. I will miss their leadership and their friendship, and I wish them all the best as they embark on the next chapter.

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