

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Statement on the Death of Ethel Kennedy

October 10, 2024

Ethel Kennedy was an American icon, a matriarch of optimism and moral courage, an emblem of resilience and service. Devoted to family and country, she had a spine of steel and a heart of gold that inspired millions of Americans, including me and Jill. We were blessed to call her a dear friend.

Growing up in an Irish Catholic family, I often looked to the Kennedy family for proof of America's promise. Ethel's husband, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, was one of my heroes, inspiring an entire generation to make real that promise for all Americans. Together, they were guided by values that were the same as those my grandparents and parents taught me around the kitchen table: Everyone is entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. We each have an obligation to one another, to give hate no safe harbor, and to leave no one behind.

After his shattering death, Ethel showed our whole Nation a way forward, turning pain into purpose and continuing his march toward civil rights and social justice, an end to poverty at home, and securing peace abroad, all while raising their 11 children. Four years later, when I lost my own wife and infant daughter, Ethel was always there for me and my sons. She helped us find strength and perseverance. She taught us how to channel grief into the service of a greater good.

When I moved into the Oval Office as President, I placed a bust of Robert Kennedy by the fireplace, as he and Ethel always had a place in my heart. I cherish the cards she would send me and my family. And when Ethel presented me with the RFK Ripple of Hope Award in 2016, it was one of the greatest honors of my life because I received it from a hero in her own right. For over 50 years, Ethel traveled, marched, boycotted, and stood up for human rights around the world with her signature iron will and grace. Through it all, Ethel's story was the American story.

Jill and I send our love to her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren; to her nieces and nephews and the entire Kennedy family; and to the millions of people around the world touched over the decades by her remarkable life of strength and service.

May God bless Ethel Kennedy, a dear friend, and a great American.

Categories: Statements by the President : Ethel Kennedy, death.

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