

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

The Senator from Maine.

Mr. COHEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to proceed for an additional 10 minutes.

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

#### LITTLE TIME TO GRIEVE

Mr. COHEN. Mr. President, last Sunday I had occasion to address a memorial service that was held for Senator Muskie at Bates College in Maine to comment about his life in the U.S. Senate and beyond when he served as Secretary of State. It was a very moving testimonial that highlighted his enormous accomplishments during a career of public service, including his time as Governor of Maine and his service here in the Senate and as Secretary of State.

Last week, at about this time, I also had occasion to stand on the Senate floor and offer my condolences and a brief eulogy to Gayle Cory, a woman who had served Senator Muskie for some 21 years as a very trusted and loyal aide and then went on to serve his successor, Senator Mitchell, before she became head of the Senate post office.

It seems, and I recall this so very well, when Vaclav Havel addressed a joint meeting of Congress, he made a statement about events that were taking place in the world. He said, "Things have been happening so rapidly that we have little time to be astonished." That quote keeps coming back to me in terms of so many tragedies that occur in so rapid a period of time that we have very little time to grieve.

When I first came here, I was joined by my colleague from Wyoming, AL SIMPSON. He told a story during one of our initial meetings about the time that he was advised that a very close friend of his had died. He sat down and penned a very personal letter to the wife of his close friend saying what an extraordinary human being he was and talking about some of the great times that they had together, and really expressing a wellspring of feeling about his relationship with that friend.

He sent the letter off in the mail, and lo and behold, he was advised that the report was a mistake, that his friend actually had not died. He was desperate to call the wife of the friend and say, "Please don't open the letter." The essence of the story was, from Senator SIMPSON at least, why do we wait so long, why do we wait so long to tell someone we love them? Why do we wait until it is too late? Why do we wait until they die to express all the eulogies?

This statement of AL SIMPSON came to mind as I was reading a column by William Raspberry, dated April 15. I am going to read just a portion of it. Raspberry cites an article he had read, actually a letter to the editor of USA Today written by a man named Barry Harris of Montgomery, AL.

He said:

"It's nice to see the tributes to the work of the late Commerce Secretary Ron Brown and all those who perished in the tragic events of a few days ago," he wrote. "But I'm wondering why we didn't see such reporting before their untimely deaths.

"It seems that the media spend so much time on criticism of public servants that there's little time or space to comment on their accomplishments on behalf of our country. That is a disservice which only contributes to the climate of governmental cynicism perpetrated by primarily selfish forces."

Indeed, I asked myself the same question. Why do we focus on all of the negative aspects of those who are willing to serve the public and then heap praise upon their caskets like so many flowers? We tend to judge our colleagues, and those who serve in the executive branch, on surface qualities. We talk about the quality of their clothes, the cars they may drive, their mannerisms, all the superficial aspects of an individual, without really touching upon the heart and soul of that individual.

Washington can be a very cruel city. I recall something from the very first book I ever read about Washington, Allen Drury's novel "Advise and Consent," which came out in the late 1950's.

It struck me, as I recall the imagery created by Drury's wonderful pen. He said:

They come, they stay, they make their mark, writing big or little on their times, in that strange, fantastic, fascinating land in which there are few absolute wrongs or absolute rights, few all-blacks or all-whites, few dead-certain positives that won't be changed tomorrow; their wonderful, mixed-up, blundering, stumbling, hopeful land in which evil men do good things and good men do evil in a way of life and government so complex and delicately balanced that only Americans can understand it and often they are baffled.

That is a wonderful description of this city, a very tough and cruel city. As Vincent Foster, who committed suicide a few years ago, reminded us, many times Washington politics is such a blood sport.

Mr. President, I say that there is a general decline in civility and common decency, not only in politics, but in many aspects of our lives today. I do not intend to take the time to try to catalog the words, the deeds that pollute our conscious moments with trash and filth and violence.

I say this by way of a preface to a few comments I will make about Ron Brown who was a close friend. It has been nearly a month now since he and more than 30 people perished in that plane that was flying into Croatia to try to help rebuild and reconstruct that tortured land.

We have, I think, forgotten the significance of what he meant to so many of us, what an extraordinary human being he was, what a life-enhancing spirit he possessed that he bestowed on anyone he came into contact with.

I recently watched a program with my wife of a speech that he gave that

took place on February 15 at Howard University. He spoke to what appeared to be an entirely black audience. He did not speak of hate or anger. He talked about hope and strength and courage, the will to overcome adversity, to know in advance that because racism is not a dead thing of the past, but alive and flourishing in so many overt and subtle ways, that those students would have to be twice as good as their competitors in order to win—twice as good—because we still hold on to the fiction that America has progressed to the point that society is race neutral, that it is colorblind.

The fact is, Mr. President, that is a fiction. I picked up the Washington Post today, and I saw an item about a young woman who had moved into the home of her dreams in Philadelphia. She had to abandon that hope, which has turned into a nightmare, because she has received not only threats to her own safety, but threats to kill her two daughters. So she has given up the dream.

A few weeks ago I saw in the Washington Post a story about a man in Chicago, a black man, who could not and would not drive a fancy car, a colorful car, or he would not dare to wear his beret because the moment he put the beret on or drove a red car, or something that was a sporty car, he was sure to be stopped and harassed. So he took the beret off, and he drove a plain, gray, dull ordinary-looking car with the hope that he would not be harassed by the local police officials.

These are not extraordinary events. They happen every day, day in and day out, for those who do not happen to enjoy the benefit of being white in our society.

I have been reading Colin Powell's work. He is someone who is looked upon with great admiration in this country. Many of us hope that he will reconsider his announced decision not to become involved in politics, at least for the foreseeable future. But in Powell's book "My American Journey," he talks about the time when he was in high school and serving in ROTC. He went down to Fort Bragg in North Carolina. At the end of his 6 weeks—he said:

... we fell out on the parade ground for presentation of honors. We were judged on course grades, rifle range scores, physical fitness, and demonstrated leadership. I was named "Best Cadet, Company D." These are the words engraved on the desk set that was presented to me that day and that I still treasure. A student from Cornell, Adin B. Capron, was selected Best Cadet for the entire encampment. I came in second in that category.

I was feeling marvelous about my honor. And then, the night before we left, as we were turning in our gear, a white supply sergeant took me aside. "You want to know why you didn't get best cadet in camp?" he said. I had not given it a thought. "You think these Southern ROTC instructors are going to go back to their colleges and say the best kid here was a Negro?" I was stunned more than angered by what he said. I came from a melting-pot community. I did

not want to believe that my worth could be diminished by the color of my skin. Wasn't it possible that Cadet Capron was simply better than Cadet Powell?

Then he goes on to talk about his experience upon leaving Fort Bragg, about not being able to go to the same church and sit in the same pew with his white colleagues, not being able to go into the same bathrooms in order to relieve himself on the way back, not being able to sit at the same counter to enjoy a meal, notwithstanding the fact that he might have to fight and die in the same trenches as his white colleagues.

I want to conclude my comments about Colin Powell with a reference that he made and that I think applies to what I am talking about as far as Ron Brown is concerned.

He said:

Racism was still relatively new to me, and I had to find a way to cope psychologically. I began by identifying my priorities. I wanted, above all, to succeed at my Army career. I did not intend to give way to self-destructive rage, no matter how provoked. If people in the South insisted on living by crazy rules, then I would play the hand dealt me for now. If I was to be confined to one end of the playing field, then I was going to be a star on that part of the field. Nothing that happened off-post, none of the indignities, none of the injustices, was going to inhibit my performance. I was not going to let myself become emotionally crippled because I could not play on the whole field. I did not feel inferior, and I was not going to let anybody make me believe I was. I was not going to allow someone else's feelings about me to become my feelings about myself. Racism was not just a black problem. It was America's problem. And until the country solved it, I was not going to let bigotry make me a victim instead of a full human being. I occasionally felt hurt; I felt anger; but most of all I felt challenged, I'll show you!

That is precisely what Ron Brown's life was all about. It is what he did his entire life—take any portion of the field and be the best in that field, be twice as good as the competition. He did it with grace and humor and a great sense of humanity.

I recall when he was named to be the chairman of the DNC. I see my colleague from Arkansas who is here. When he was first proposed to be chairman of the Democratic National Committee, there were some people who worried about that. "Wait a minute. We're going to name a black man to be chairman of the Democratic National Committee? What's going to happen to our white base in the South?" But Ron Brown built bridges. There are some people in our country who want to put up walls around the country. Ron Brown's life was dedicated to seeking the best in people and not exploiting the worst. He possessed such an abundance of humanity that he took the time to read to Lee Atwater. When Lee Atwater was dying, it was Ron Brown who went beside his bed and read to him. How many of us have such a generosity of spirit? How many of us, day in and day out, would be capable of going to the other side, to people that we argue and debate with, challenge

and fight with over political issues and in their time of torment and need take the time to read to someone who is dying?

After all that he did to get Bill Clinton elected as President, I think he should have been given any choice of any Cabinet position, not because he was black but because he was the best. It did not happen. He was offered the position of Secretary of Commerce. He took what was offered to him and he did what? He did exactly what Colin Powell and so many other black Americans have done and had to do throughout history. He became the best on that portion of the field that he was allowed to play on.

Mr. President, I know there are some who would like to abolish the Commerce Department as a symbol of our need to reduce the size of Government in Washington. I could perhaps understand it if Ron Brown were antibusiness. There might be some merit to that. But he was one of the most probusiness Secretaries of Commerce we have ever had. I do not recall our effort to dismantle the Department of Commerce when President Nixon was in office, President Ford, President Reagan, or President Bush. But apparently there is a need to dismantle some offices and agencies, and that is one we settle on.

I do not understand it, but let me just say that I think that Ron Brown will be remembered as one of the finest Secretaries of Commerce we ever had. He was out there the day that he died promoting business on behalf of the United States of America.

I conclude my remarks with a quote taken from Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., something I think applies to Ron Brown:

Through our great good fortune, in our youth our hearts were touched with fire. It was given to us to learn at the outset that life is a profound and passionate thing. While we are permitted to scorn nothing but indifference and do not pretend to undervalue the worldly rewards of ambition, we have seen with our own eyes, beyond and above the gold fields, the snowy heights of honor, and it is for us to bear the report to those who come after us. But, above all, we have learned that whether a man accepts from Fortune her spade, and will look downward and dig, or from Aspiration her axe and cord, and will scale the ice, the one and only success, which it is his to command is to bring to his work a mighty heart.

Ron Brown in whatever capacity—as a lawyer, lobbyist, DNC chairman, Secretary of Commerce—brought to his work a mighty heart. While there are those in our society who would like to point to all the negatives, point to all the deficiencies or character flaws, or the superficial qualities, there are those of us here who believe that Ron Brown's humanity, his courage, his determination to succeed on that portion of the field that he was allowed to play on, brought to his work a mighty heart. I for one am going to miss him deeply.

Mr. BUMPERS. Mr. President, while the Senator from Maine is still on the

floor, let me say that his magnificent accolade to our departed brother, Ron Brown, is one of the reasons so many of us are very sad that he has chosen to leave the Senate. Those remarks were eloquent. I hope they were heard by everybody in the Senate on this slow, Friday afternoon.

Senator COHEN has always been in the forefront of issues that really matter, where partisan politics do not have any role. He has, without fail, been a giant in this body. Those remarks prove conclusively that a lot of people are still in this business because public service is a noble calling.

As I say, I do not know of anybody on either side of the aisle that has not expressed profound regret at Senator COHEN's decision to retire at the end of this year. He alluded to the press and how they can very seldom find anything nice to say about a public servant until after they die or retire. Jim Fallows discusses this phenomenon in his book, titled "Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy." It is a magnificent book, and I recommend it. Fallows has made a couple of speeches in which he talks about this problem. For example, in the weeks before Ron Brown died, the New York Times editorial page was castigating him and a couple days after he died he was praised on that same editorial page.

I talked to a Senator yesterday afternoon who decided in 1994 not to run again. He said the major newspaper in his State had never said a kind word about him that he could remember until he announced his retirement. He said he then got more accolades over the next 6 months than he had had in his entire public career.

I suppose you could attribute that to human nature. It is a natural thing. It would be nice and it would be gratifying if there was some recognition for a few people who labor in the vineyards year after year because they believe in this democracy and they believe in our political system and they want to operate within it, not like the Freemen of Montana. It would be very helpful if somebody said something nice.

Most of us get enough accolades to keep our ego fueled. But I just want to again say, Mr. President, Senator COHEN and I have teamed up on several causes since we both have been here together. I will miss him greatly. One of the reasons is because of the statesmanship he demonstrated this afternoon.

Mr. President, I think that I can say what I want to say about the gas tax within 10 minutes, but rather than interrupt my remarks, let me ask unanimous consent I be permitted to proceed for such time as I may use.

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

#### THE GAS TAX

Mr. BUMPERS. Mr. President, if we do not hurry up and get the Presidential race over with, I do not know