

CELEBRATING WEST VIRGINIA DAY

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, I call to the Senate's attention that on June 20, 147 years ago, a 35th State was added to our great Nation: West Virginia, whose birthday is a time for us to remember proudly our state's rich history, culture and unique qualities.

Nearly 150 years ago, West Virginia became the only State to have seceded from a Confederate entity to join the Union. Each year after, West Virginia has continued to develop its own identity and contribute to our Nation's fabric. Our State's history, past and present, is rich with development and progress that fills West Virginians with pride every day.

West Virginia's mountainous terrain, countless river valleys, and rich natural resources have driven our State's history and economy, and draw visitors from across the globe. Our State possesses timeless landmarks and attractions, and has an abundance of natural beauty to share.

President John F. Kennedy once said, "The Sun does not always shine in West Virginia, but the people always do." This statement is a true testament not only to the kind and hospitable nature of our citizens, but also to our fortitude, determination and abiding faith.

Though a "stranger to blue water," West Virginia has been no stranger to turmoil throughout its history. We have been and will continue to be undaunted in overcoming the challenges of yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

This year we stood together to face the tragic explosion at the Upper Big Branch mine that claimed the lives of 29 miners and left a community and our whole state in mourning, calling again on the steadfast spirit of our people. The devastating effects of the explosion left mining families holding their breath for news of loved ones. Rescue teams and the State's Red Cross and Salvation Army expeditiously rose to the challenge to offer much needed support. True to custom, West Virginians across the State were ready and remain eager to lend a helping hand to their neighbors affected by the disaster.

And this year, like so many others before, we have called on the West Virginia National Guard to serve the State when we need them most, and to perform invaluable duties outside our borders—providing security on a global scale. Our West Virginia National Guard has garnered top rankings for readiness for many years, showcasing the motivation and commitment behind each one of our men and women serving our country.

West Virginia possesses the unique ability to make the traditions we have historically treasured as much a part of our bright future as our accomplished past. Our State continues to retain its culture as an integral part of our identity. Festivals and events, like Bridge Day at the New River Gorge

Bridge in Fayetteville and the Vandalia Gathering in Charleston, bring older and younger generations together to enjoy State treasures and traditions. Blues festivals can be found across our State, and from Martinsburg to Mullens you can find world-class artisans and craftsmen in the fields of glass blowing, classic woodwork, and folk art.

Thanks to West Virginia's dedication to education, our academic institutions consistently bring new discoveries to the fields of science and technology. And, our athletic programs continue to rank among the best in the country. West Virginia University's men's basketball team reached the Final Four in this year's NCAA Basketball Tournament representing the state on a national stage. And, football fans across our state eagerly await an upcoming football season that promises to be successful for all of our programs in West Virginia.

There is so much to honor, celebrate, and be thankful for on West Virginia's 147th birthday. Our past, present, and future are as colorful as our Appalachian hills in autumn. Our people know and live well by our motto—Montani Semper Liberi—"Mountaineers are always free," and our strong work ethic, one of God and family, and indubitable spirit makes our country and our State great. With these words ever present, and on behalf of myself and my fellow West Virginians, I proudly wish the happiest of birthdays to my home State, West Virginia.

TRIBUTE TO STEVE KIMBELL

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I want to honor Vermont's leading policymaker, Steve Kimbell, who announced his retirement on May 20 of this year. For over three decades, Mr. Kimbell has been a major presence within the political world of Vermont and is noted as the most respected and influential policy maker to walk the halls of our Statehouse.

Mr. Kimbell started his career as a lawyer at Vermont Legal Aid after completing his juris doctor from the University of Michigan Law School. Only a few years later, he was hired as lieutenant governor candidate Madeleine Kunin's campaign manager and went on to be her State planning director after she was elected Governor. Mr. Kimbell then partnered with Governor Kunin's former press secretary Bob Sherman to form Kimbell Sherman Ellis, a government and communications company that has grown into the most successful firm of its kind in the State. Kimbell Sherman Ellis developed a nationwide clientele and has additional offices in Washington, DC and Massachusetts. Along with advising and policymaking for Vermont State government, the firm provides legislative and regulatory strategy in government affairs and manages marketing and public relations campaigns nationwide.

Steve Kimbell has been credited with helping to shape almost every piece of major legislation to pass through the Vermont Statehouse. I offer my congratulations to Mr. Kimbell upon his retirement. I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD an article from the Rutland Herald that depicts the contributions that Steve Kimbell has made to the State of Vermont.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Rutland Herald, May 30, 2010]

POLITICIAN'S POLITICIAN

[By Peter Mallary]

Steve Kimbell can be tightly wound. But the other day sitting in his office at Kimbell, Sherman & Ellis—the Montpelier-based government and communications firm he started with Bob Sherman back in 1987—he looked completely relaxed. It is a small office, which he shares with his partner's son, Nick Sherman. Kimbell's chair was kicked back. His smile was broad and available.

Steve Kimbell just quit his job.

"I never expected to work forever," he said.

Well, you could have fooled most of us.

And he has.

In most cases more than once.

Kimbell is the politician's politician, a lobbyist and counselor who has built relationships unlike any other in Vermont's political world.

He started out as a Legal Aid lawyer.

"I spent my time suing state government," he said. "Mostly welfare and Medicaid cases."

And he remains a government skeptic.

"My underlying personal philosophy is that government is very dangerous," Kimbell said. "It's a huge operation. And it breaks the law every day. This is the foundation of my advocacy for every client. All citizens need to be watchdogs. But we get paid to do it."

No shock to any who know him—Steve Kimbell's decision to retire is a political one. He tied it to Jim Douglas' decision not to run for a fifth term. He pointed out that a political shift like the one we may see this election cycle only comes along every decade or so. Whatever happens there will be a new political cast. So it seemed to him like the right time to give a different generation a chance.

There was nothing sudden about his decision. The partners in the firm have been planning for this for a year. But wary of making Kimbell a lame duck in his final legislative session they kept the story close, a remarkable accomplishment in a town that does not guard political secrets particularly well.

Not at all, most of the time.

I asked him if he could really quit.

"I have gotten up and gone to work for 40 years," he said, "either working for myself or somebody else. It will be a major change but it's worth a shot."

He says he is going to tend the farm in Tunbridge.

I am not 100 percent convinced.

Kimbell's career spans the terms of every governor since Tom Salmon—Salmon, Snelling, Kunin, Snelling again, Dean and Douglas.

He reflected.

"Governors are not noted for their sense of humor," Kimbell said, referencing a quality he values in politicians—politicians like Art Gibb, Bob Gannett and Ralph Wright.

"Snelling made an art form of being the intimidating presence in the room."

Not very funny.

"Howard was frantic. Not much time for levity."

But Salmon, Kimbell said, was funny.

"He would hop into his state police car and say 'Let's go to Boston.' And he'd go to see a Red Sox game."

Kimbell first got directly involved in electoral politics in almost as off-hand a manner.

"After the '78 session I was leaving the Statehouse with Madeleine [Kunin]. She was chair of the Appropriations Committee and running for lieutenant governor. 'I need a campaign manager,' she said. I got paid \$150 a week. She beat Peter Smith by 2,500 votes."

And he recalled how Kunin won.

"Within earshot of reporters, Peter Smith said that 'all the broads' were going to vote for Madeleine. That ill-advised comment is what swung the election."

When Kunin was governor Kimbell served for two years as her state planning director, the person in charge of the administration's legislative program.

"I found that I didn't really like working inside the government," he said. "I got out and went back to my private practice."

Then came the partnership with Kunin's press secretary, Bob Sherman.

"We went to Seyon Pond fishing and talked about what we really ought to do. We concluded that combining law and journalism in a firm to do advocacy was a good idea."

And to call it just that is an understatement. Kimbell Sherman & Ellis has no peer in Vermont. Not only is it the most successful lobbying firm in the state, it has also built an out-of-state client list which now represents about half of the business. It has offices in Washington and does business all over the country, tracking and reporting on issues and also specializing in crisis management.

When I asked Kimbell about the most dramatic moment in his political memory, he recalled the death of Richard Snelling in August of 1991.

"How many times does a sitting governor just drop dead," he said.

Howard Dean was in touch almost immediately.

"Howard called Sherman and said 'I need a speech within an hour,'" Kimbell recalled. "And we helped the new governor make the transition. He was here for a lot of meetings. And we took some heat. The press said 'How can these lobbyists advise the new governor.' A lot of the criticism was probably warranted, but sometimes you just have to do things."

And Howard Dean is not the only politician to have beaten a path to Steve Kimbell's door. For a couple of decades now candidates and potential candidates have come to Kimbell & company. They want to know—from someone who does—if they should or if they shouldn't.

"We are in the business of politics," Kimbell said. "It doesn't matter where they come from. If they want to talk to us, we give advice."

And Steve Kimbell has brought this sort of matter-of-fact attitude to all his efforts. Despite his highly visible work for civil unions and gay marriage, he insists that his approach is always the same.

"I'm an advocate," Kimbell said. "I take a hard-nosed approach. To do this job you have got to be well prepared, emotionless and tenacious. Gay marriage was a hugely emotional issue. I worked very hard to be analytical and strategic. It is my personal belief that that is what people pay us for."

Hard-nosed. True enough.

Savvy. Unparalleled.

Matter-of-fact. Certainly.

Passionate. Despite protestations.

And funny.

The politician's politician.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO PATRICIA J. COVINGTON

• Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, it has been nearly five decades since Patricia J. Covington, Director of VA's Congressional Liaison Service, began her public service, and nearly all of it has been with VA, first when it was the Veterans Administration, and, since 1989, as the Department of Veterans Affairs. Although she served in various capacities, it is in connection with her long and distinguished tenure at the Congressional Liaison Service that my colleagues and I, along with our staffs, know her. I am sure that there is not a Member's office in the U.S. Senate that does not regularly call upon her services. Over the years, Pat has worked tirelessly to ensure that our requests for information about VA or for help for veteran constituents are handled in a timely, thorough, and nonpartisan manner. On the occasion of her upcoming retirement, I call on my colleagues to join me in thanking her for assistance to us and to countless veterans, most of whom will never know the critical role she has played in our efforts to improve their lives.

Pat entered public service in 1963. After an initial period of employment with another Federal agency, she moved to VA where she gained experience at the Board of Veterans Appeals with the appeals process for denials of disability claims. She also helped administer the Presidential Memorial Certificate Program, established by President John F. Kennedy to honor the memories of deceased veterans. As my colleagues know, each certificate bears the President's signature and conveys to the families of deceased veterans the Nation's gratitude for their service.

After gaining a hands-on understanding of many VA benefits and services, Pat joined the Congressional Liaison Service in 1971. The Committee on Veterans' Affairs, which I have the privilege of chairing, was established that year, marking the Senate's heightened commitment to addressing the then-emerging challenges facing veterans of the Vietnam war. I was not in the Senate at that time, but looking back at the large and impressive work of the early days of the committee in responding to a host of complex issues, along with the fact that there were thousands of new veterans seeking assistance from their Federal elected officials, it must have been a very challenging time in Pat's new assignment. From the start, she nevertheless kept pace with the unprecedented number of demands, deepening her knowledge about VA as she took on new respon-

sibilities. In fact, Pat was so good at her job that over time she was repeatedly tapped to serve as Acting Director of the Congressional Liaison Service. In 2002, she was appointed as Director, and has continued to excel in that position.

Not long after I became committee chairman in 2007, a veteran arrived at the committee to seek help after being turned down by VA for additional benefits in connection with post-traumatic stress disorder. He had driven thousands of miles and related to committee staff that he had struggled with suicidal feelings. At the time, although VA had not begun to reckon with the rising tide of veteran suicides, Pat knew who to contact to provide counseling and other suicide-prevention services to the veteran and promptly secured a thorough review of his claim. Her compassionate and deeply informed assistance to this veteran was in keeping with her longstanding excellent work.

Committee staff and I have relied on Pat and the excellent staff she oversees for information about a wide range of matters relating to the large and complex dimensions of VA's mandate. From disability compensation to health care, construction and cemeteries, home long guaranties and the new G.I. bill, her office has consistently responded with the highest professional standards. With a war on two fronts and increasing numbers of returning servicemembers from Iraq and Afghanistan, along with serious issues facing veterans from earlier wars, her contributions have never been more valued nor her services more needed. Yet to everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. Pat is ending this chapter in her life and will soon open a new one. Again, I thank her for her long service to the committee and her unsurpassed commitment to the veterans of the Nation. I wish her every happiness in the days to come. We shall miss her.●

WILDROSE, NORTH DAKOTA

• Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, today, I am pleased to recognize a community in North Dakota that is celebrating its 100th anniversary. From July 2-4, the residents of Wildrose, ND, will gather to celebrate their community's founding.

Wildrose, ND, is a Great Northern Railroad town site founded in 1910 in Hazel Township of Williams County. The post office for Wildrose was established on July 13, 1910. The site for the town was platted in 1910 and became an incorporated village in 1913. Until 1916, Wildrose was the terminus of the railroad line and billed itself as the largest primary grain market in the United States. Wildrose reached its peak population of 518 in 1930.

Grace Lutheran Church, located in Wildrose, will also celebrate its 100th anniversary on July 4. Wildrose Lutheran Church was founded in 1910.