

find some of the gems of our campaign, like Sweet Corn Charlie. On both campaigns she was always willing to do whatever was needed at any level from literally boosting me up onto an RV so we could grab a picture of our “McCaskill for Senate”-wrapped RV in front of my family’s old flour mill in Houston, MO, to walking into a field office unannounced one day and saying she was there to go door-to-door, despite her senior role on the campaign.

She is a take-charge kind of woman but taking charge by immersing herself in a subject. That became her trademark. We all grew to expect her remarkable technical competence on very complicated issues and her penchant for digging deeper to find the real answer. Of course, at times, she let her desire to dig deep bleed into her personal life, too. Just ask her new husband Ryan what her first two responses to his marriage proposal were: “Are you serious?”

Because of this knack for asking the right questions and learning the detailed answers, I always listened to what she had to say—I did not always agree, of course, but listened nonetheless. As one of her male colleagues said, “She looks tiny and sweet, but everyone is a little terrified of her because she’s tougher and smarter than most everyone out there.” And have no doubt, when Nichole believes something, she will let you know, and she will fight for it. I cherish this attribute because in this kind of job you need people who aren’t just smart, aren’t just aggressive, but who are real and honest.

Now no one stays terrified of Nichole for too long because they figure out how genuine she is, and funny too. The gifted members of our staffs are both intense and blessed with great humor.

Our legislative correspondents have been lucky to have her as a mentor, as well—someone who expects a high level of performance, gives praise when it is due, and encourages professional development. It is no accident that one of the first LC’s to work for her grew into one of my staff’s most important legislative assistants today.

It is always bittersweet for me when these kinds of junctures happen—these times when you want your staff to blast forward and make you proud as much as you want them to stay—because they have been so essential to your work.

With Nichole now working as a senior advisor within the Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Relations at the EPA, she is providing the kind of public service that embraces intellect, curiosity, and precision. It is why they brought her on, of course. They quickly saw what we already knew. They are benefiting greatly from her deep vein of common sense and her refusal to stop working until she has asked every question and gotten every answer.

I am proud to say thank you to Nichole Distefano as 2013 comes to an

end, to express my deep gratitude for all she has done for me, for Missouri, and for our great Nation over so many years. I am proud to see her continue to grow and excel. I know she is doing exceptional things in her new position. She is my friend. She is a rock. And I miss her.

REMEMBERING PETTY OFFICER OBENDORF

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I am here today to pay tribute to the life of PO3 Travis Obendorf, a Coast Guard boatswain mate, who passed away on December 18, 2013, from injuries he sustained during the successful rescue of 22 individuals from the disabled fishing vessel Alaska Mist in the Bering Sea on November 11, 2013.

Petty Officer Obendorf, whose nick name was “Obie,” gave the ultimate sacrifice for his Nation, and in doing so he assisted in the rescue of 22 mariners who otherwise may have been lost to the sea.

Petty Officer Obendorf was a native of Idaho Falls, IA. He enlisted in the Coast Guard in 2004 and quickly became a leader within his boot camp platoon. He proudly served aboard the Coast Guard Cutters Alert and Waesche and deployed to Bahrain as member of Coast Guard Patrol Forces Southwest Asia. He also served at Coast Guard Station Boston, MA.

Upon reporting aboard Coast Guard Cutter Waesche on 26 June 2013, Petty Officer Obendorf quickly integrated into the Deck Division and began rapidly pursuing his qualifications. During Waesche’s shakedown cruise prior to an Alaska deployment, Petty Officer Obendorf qualified as a helmsman and lookout and made significant progress in all other qualification areas. One month into Waesche’s August to November 2013 Alaska deployment, Petty Officer Obendorf qualified in basic and advanced damage control, as boatswain’s mate of the watch, helicopter tie-down crewmember, and boat crewmember on all three of Waesche’s cutter boats. Less than a month later, Petty Officer Obendorf added boarding team member and antiterrorism force protection watch stander to his list of qualifications. Petty Officer Obendorf’s rapid qualification in a wide variety of watch stations resulted in him being significantly involved in almost all aspects of Waesche’s operations. His efforts as a boat crew and boarding team member were critical in the Waesche’s execution of over 40 fisheries and recreational law enforcement boardings during the 2013 Alaska deployment.

When Waesche was diverted for the search and rescue case involving fishing vessel Alaska Mist, Petty Officer Obendorf was selected as a boat crewmember for what would be a challenging rescue operation. Petty Officer Obendorf immediately began assisting his shipmates and preparing for the operation, which would involve removing 14 nonessential Alaska Mist personnel

as well as passing a towing line to the vessel in order to take it in tow.

Once on scene, Waesche launched Petty Officer Obendorf and the rest of the boat crew aboard a Coast Guard small boat to begin the rescue operation. As the Coast Guard small boat came alongside Alaska Mist, one boat crewmember went aboard the vessel to brief the crew and rig the rescue ladder. Once this was complete, Petty Officer Obendorf began guiding Alaska Mist crewmembers down the ladder and into the Coast Guard small boat. Petty Officer Obendorf showed exceptional skill and focus as he timed the rolls of both vessels and a significant swell to ensure the safety of the crewmembers descending the ladder. Despite deteriorating weather conditions, Petty Officer Obendorf courageously and successfully guided five Alaska Mist crew members to safety.

The Coast Guard small boat returned to Waesche with the first group of passengers and entered the stern notch with Petty Officer Obendorf positioned on the bow to assist in securing the boat for recovery. During the recovery evolution, Petty Officer Obendorf received a severe head injury. Waesche completed the operation, ultimately rescuing 22 people and towing the fishing vessel to safety, but despite the lifesaving first aid of his shipmates and the excellent care of two medical centers, Petty Officer Obendorf succumbed to his injuries on 18 December 2013.

Petty Officer Obendorf will surely be missed by his family, loved ones, and shipmates. I am thankful for his service and honored by his sacrifice.

TRIBUTE TO NELLIE FREEMAN

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, staff turnover is part of life in the Senate, just as it is in any other institution. But some departures are particularly bittersweet. Today is the last day Helen Eleanor Freeman will be working in my office; she is retiring after more than 23 years of faithful—and joyful service—to me and to former Senator Paul Sarbanes, to the Senate, and to the people of Maryland.

Her name is Helen Eleanor Freeman, but throughout the Senate and beyond Capitol Hill, everyone knows her as Nellie. She is an avid volleyball player and her recreational activity led, through another player, to her first job in the Senate, with Senator Sarbanes, in 1989. When Senator Sarbanes retired and I was elected to replace him, he was adamant that I must hire Nellie as I filled out my Senate staff. He told me, “There is no one quite like Nellie,” and over the past 7 years I have been fortunate to have Nellie on my staff. I certainly have come to agree with that assessment. Nellie is unique. She is the “glue” that holds our office together. While I am happy for her, I am sad she will be leaving the office and I know the rest of my staff shares that assessment.

Nellie is an avid fan of the local teams, especially the Baltimore Orioles. So I will use a sports analogy from baseball. Nellie is like the super utility infielder—the person who can play any position well, the consummate team player. Name just about any task or function in the office, and Nellie has performed it—manning the phones, sorting and responding to constituent correspondence, helping to select, train, and supervise the interns—you name it and Nellie has done it.

So there are the official duties and there are the unofficial duties. With regard to the unofficial duties, Nellie has been the go-to person when it comes to organizing office parties to celebrate birthdays, afterhours social events, staff book clubs, and so forth. That is the “glue” I was talking about a moment ago. The Senate can be a difficult place in which to work, both for Senators and staff. Nellie has played a critical role in helping my staff feel more like a welcoming family and that redounds not only to my benefit, but to the benefit of the Senate.

Nellie is unfailingly calm, courteous, solicitous, kind, and happy. Her personality shines through and her cheerfulness is infectious, much appreciated, and an example for all of us. Nellie makes friends with everyone: constituents, colleagues, other Senate staff, Senators. She makes it easier and more pleasant for everyone to work here. That is no small accomplishment.

Nellie is retiring today, but she is far from having a “retiring” personality so I know she will remain as busy and engaged as ever. She has volleyball and book clubs and volunteer activities and the Orioles. During the season, I didn’t need to read the sports page to determine whether the Orioles had won the night before. If they had won, Nellie would be at work in the morning resplendent in black and orange attire.

Most of all, Nellie has her beloved husband Bob Ham and the rest of her large family—her parents Bob and Molly Freeman; her siblings David, Mary, Emily, and Teddy; in-laws Jessica, Andy, and Nadia; and her nieces and nephews Rachel, Zach, Francesca, Koby, Saul, Ben, Molly, and Amelie and most of them live in the area. It is a big, raucous family filled with the same love and good cheer Nellie exudes.

So to Nellie Freeman on the occasion of her retirement after more than 23 years of serving the people of Maryland and all Americans, thank you for your exemplary service and, above all, thank you for your friendship. Go O’s!

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM SUCCESS

• Mr. MURPHY. Madam President, as a longtime advocate for youth in the juvenile justice system during my time in the Connecticut State Legislature

and in Congress, I congratulate my home State of Connecticut on new evidence that its major juvenile justice reforms over the past 10 years have been a resounding success. These reforms are based on the principle that children are fundamentally different from adults, and they should not be criminalized just like adult offenders. While other States have begun to recognize this principle and put it into practice, my home State has led the way. I am proud to note that Connecticut has achieved the largest reduction in its confinement of minors of any state in the United States over the last decade.

Like many other States, Connecticut adopted tough-on-crime policies that drastically increased the number of children locked up through its juvenile court system in the 1990s and early 2000s. But in the mid-2000s, the State recognized that these policies were ineffective, costly, and worst of all, ended up harming children more than helping them. Connecticut began to reform its juvenile system, passing a law in 2005 that prohibited the detention of youth for violating a court order in any status offense case.

Then, in 2007, Connecticut passed Raise the Age, a law that has ended the prosecution of most 16- and 17-year-old teenagers in the adult criminal system and returned them to the juvenile system where they belong. Not an easy victory, Raise the Age took more than a decade of efforts by children and families, youth advocates, and State legislators to pass and fully implement.

Together with other State reforms, the status offense change and Raise the Age have led Connecticut to cut its rate of juvenile incarceration by 60 percent between 2001 and 2011. This drop—documented in a report by the National Juvenile Justice Network and the Texas Public Policy Foundation entitled “The Comeback and Coming-from-Behind States: An Update on Youth Incarceration in the United States” and released just this week—is the largest in the Nation. More than any other State, Connecticut has succeeded in locking up fewer children and turning to more effective policies instead, such as relying increasingly on community-based treatment and cutting back on law enforcement referrals for school discipline issues.

One of the key architects of the Raise the Age effort in Connecticut was Liz Ryan, a nationally known and leading juvenile justice advocate. Liz is the president and CEO of the Campaign for Youth Justice, an organization she founded in 2005, around the same time that advocates in Connecticut first formed the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance, CTJJA. Liz consulted with the founders of CTJJA to mobilize the Raise the Age campaign, and our State was one of the first to receive her expertise and support.

Throughout her career, Liz has worked tirelessly to build and strengthen the juvenile justice field by

guiding and supporting other advocates and organizations. She serves on the National Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention Coalition, cochairs the Act 4 Juvenile Justice campaign, and serves on the working groups for the National Girls Institute and the National Center for Youth in Custody. Along with these advocacy organizations, Liz has worked closely with us in Congress to raise the profile of juvenile justice issues and push for greater reform.

Unfortunately for the many who have worked with Liz over the years, she is now stepping down from her current role. While she is irreplaceable and will certainly remain involved in the advocacy field, I congratulate her on the work she has accomplished over the course of several decades. On behalf of those of us in Connecticut, I also thank Liz for her commitment to our State’s reform efforts. As was said best by the director of CTJJA, Abby Anderson, “If movements have best friends, Liz is the best friend of the Connecticut juvenile justice reform movement.”

Connecticut’s success in improving how it treats its youth is an example for the rest of the country. More and more evidence shows that my home State should be a model for other States as they look to reduce costs and improve outcomes for children. I will continue to highlight Connecticut’s success and to expand its best practices at the Federal level so that we can help support other States make these same commonsense and humane reforms.●

BATAAN CORREGIDOR MEMORIAL BRIDGE

• Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, today I wish to commemorate the dedication of Bataan Corregidor Memorial Bridge in Weatogue, CT, earlier this month.

Crossing over the Farmington River in Connecticut, this bridge will now honor the patriotism and courage of the brave men from Connecticut and across the nation who fought in the Battles of Bataan and Corregidor in 1942 in the Pacific during World War II. From January to April 1942, American and Filipino forces fought Japanese soldiers along the Bataan Peninsula and the island of Corregidor in the Philippines. When both fell to the Japanese, an estimated 10,000 American and Filipino troops were killed and 20,000 wounded. Another 15,000 American and 60,000 Filipino troops were taken prisoner and forced to endure the Bataan Death March.

Dan Crowley of Simsbury and Darrel Stark of Stafford Springs, who were there in combat, are the last two surviving residents of Connecticut who fought in these historic battles in the United States Army following the attack on Pearl Harbor. After Mr. Crowley fought in the Battle of Bataan, he refused to surrender and swam to the island of Corregidor where he was later