

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Madam President, I rise and second what my friend and colleague from Arizona said.

It has been a privilege of mine to serve in this body for 12 years—and I will be making some comments about that tomorrow—but during my early years in the Senate the Secretary of Agriculture was Secretary MIKE JOHANNIS.

Being a very active member of the Agriculture Committee and being chairman for 2 years during then-Secretary JOHANNIS's tenure, I had the opportunity to work with MIKE on a day-to-day basis and, boy, what a pleasure it is to work with one of the finest gentlemen and public servants I have ever known. He is smart, and he is political when he needs to be political, but he has as much or more common sense as, again, any public servant I have ever known.

For the past 6 years, he has been my next-door neighbor in the Russell building, so we see a lot of each other coming and going and have the opportunity to visit on a regular basis.

As I leave at the end of this term, one of the real Members of the Senate I am going to miss is MIKE JOHANNIS. I publicly thank him for his service and thank him for his commitment. I wish him and Stephanie the best, but what I really thank him for is the great friendship he and I developed over the years.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Madam President, I join the Senator from Arizona and the Senator from Georgia—my senior Senator, Mr. CHAMBLISS—to rise for a minute and talk about MIKE JOHANNIS.

I want to amend that. I don't want to just talk about MIKE JOHANNIS, I want to talk about him and Stephanie Johannis.

In the South what we have is what we call a two-for. MIKE and Stephanie are a two-for. They are a great pair for America, and they are a great pair for the State of Nebraska.

As a Senator from an agricultural State, I know the value that MIKE brought to the Cabinet of the United States when he was Secretary of Agriculture.

I know from his serving the State of Nebraska when he was Governor what a great job they did. I know the past 6 years, working side-by-side with MIKE JOHANNIS has been a real treat. He is a gentleman, and he is a scholar. He doesn't do anything where he doesn't know what he is doing, and if he is not always right, he is almost always right because he always has Stephanie there to guide him in the right direction.

I pay tribute to a great Senator, and a great personal friend, MIKE JOHANNIS, and his lovely wife Stephanie.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

FAREWELL TO THE SENATE

Mr. JOHANNIS. I wish to start by saying I so appreciate the kind words by Senators MCCAIN, CHAMBLISS, and ISAKSON. I see there are others in the Chamber who may weigh in and offer a thought or two. I can't express how much I appreciate it.

I would like to offer a few thoughts—my farewell thoughts—today.

I rise, first, to convey a very deep and sincere appreciation to the people of a really great State, the State of Nebraska. They have entrusted me with the high privilege and the solemn responsibility of representing them in this body.

I am honored to have served as a Senator from Nebraska, and I hope and pray that I have done so in a manner that upholds the high standards that Nebraskans have rightly established for their elected office holders.

If I could turn back the clock 32 years I would do it again—from my first day as the county commissioner, throughout my service as a Lincoln City Council member, as mayor of our capital city, Lincoln, as the Governor of Nebraska, in President Bush's Cabinet, and now as a Senator. No doubt about it, if I could turn back the clock, I would just do it again.

I am so grateful for the trust placed in me and the support of so many people who have made this service possible.

Let me start with the top of the list, and that would be my family. My wife, Stephanie, has been an incredible pillar of support.

One of my best friends refers to her as "spirited." That would be an understatement. She is a true partner. She has given her whole heart to public service—both her own service as a State senator and as a county commissioner when we first met—and to mine.

I thank my children, Justin and Michaela, who are now grown up. They have their own families. We have five beautiful grandchildren. They have been a source of true joy and pride. They too have cheerfully supported me despite the sometimes long hours and the missed birthdays—I could go on and on. It cut into that dad and grandpa time.

I offer a special word of thanks to the hundreds or thousands of volunteers whom I could never thank individually. They went out there, pounded the yard signs, walked the precincts, worked the phone banks, and they probably wrote checks when the bank account was pretty low. Their belief in me is what has been inspiring in those campaigns.

Another group of people near and dear to my heart are my current and former staff, campaign or government related. We have always called ourselves Team Johannis. It is an extended family and for good reason. Their hard work, their commitment, and their professionalism enabled me to represent and serve our great State and our country.

I have not only been truly blessed by the privilege to serve, but I have been

blessed by the privilege of meeting some very extraordinary people.

In my various roles I have been with world leaders, spiritual heads, cultural icons, Presidents, Vice Presidents, Prime Ministers, Queens, and Kings—all memorable experiences to be sure. But I will say they are not the extraordinary people I speak about today. My real inspiration comes from ordinary people whom I have observed and watched do remarkable, extraordinary things.

Each year for the past 6 years, I have had the privilege of selecting a Nebraska family to be honored as "Angels in Adoption." Each year their stories of unconditional love show the limitless capacity of the human heart.

One family, the Welchels of Harrisburg, NE, went from two children to seven. They adopted five children, all with special needs, but their selflessness did not stop there. They created a camp where these very special kids could share life's journeys. How powerful is that?

I have learned that heroes walk among us daily whose courage is revealed in split-second decisions, and in that split second they put the lives of others in front of their own.

Two Nebraskans did exactly that in 2012. A school bus had collided with a semitrailer on a rural road near a community called Blue Hill, NE. These individuals, Ron Meyer and Phil Petr, arrived on this horrific scene. They bravely ran onto that burning bus and pulled five children to safety. A witness who was there at the scene expressed absolutely no doubt those five children would have perished, as others sadly did, if not for the remarkable courage of Ron and Phil.

I have been so moved beyond words by my conversations with the parents of our fallen men and women in uniform. I would call them to offer them my condolences, and I have found their strength to be so astounding. To a person, they speak with such passion about love of country and pride in their loved one's service, despite sorrow. They honor their children with their patriotism. They honor their children with their fortitude. Their grace through incomprehensible grief inspires immeasurable gratitude. May God bless them and all of the families of the fallen.

Walking the streets of a tornado-ravaged community—and I have done that too many times as Governor and as a Senator—I saw ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

One stands out especially in my mind. I watched in amazement as Kim Neiman, the Pilger, NE, city clerk, attempted to take care of every conceivable need of every single resident following a devastating tornado that literally leveled this Nebraska community.

Her tireless advocacy, her raw determination was focused entirely on the community she loved. She had virtually no regard for her personal loss.

You see, her home was destroyed, and her life was turned upside down by this tornado as well. But for Kim, community came first.

These are good people, and there are so many more like them. They inspired me, and they have motivated me to search for solutions to break through partisan rancor that too often dominates this government.

But they also fuel my optimism for the future. You see, I believe that America's strength is in the fabric of which we are woven. The threads of this fabric include both the character of our people and the wisdom reported in our Constitution.

It is a very strong and very durable fabric that withstands the overreach of any one President and the misguided policies of any one administration.

That is why I look back, not with any regret—I would do it all over again—but with gratitude. There were victories won during my time here, and I am pleased to have lead some of those charges. But I have to admit many battles remain.

I would be dishonest if I denied some feelings of frustration about the absence of the will to address issues of paramount importance to our country, but I know that no issue is powerful enough to shred the fabric of this great Nation. Rather, these challenges are overpowered by the ordinary people who do extraordinary things, by the character of our people, and by the wisdom of our Founders. So I reject the prophecy of hopelessness.

As the challenges we face grow more urgent—and they will—so grows the collective fortitude to address them, and I believe that is about to intensify.

On January 3, I will officially pass the baton to Senator-elect Ben Sasse, and I wish him the best. With the 114th Congress, there will be a new day in this Chamber, a new majority, and a lot of new faces. I hope they embrace the new opportunities to exemplify true statesmanship.

Although confidence in our Nation's ability to solve problems may be shaken, I still believe ordinary people can do extraordinary things—even here in Washington, DC. May God guide those efforts and may God bless this great country, the United States of America.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader.

TRIBUTES TO MIKE JOHANNIS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I had an opportunity to address the extraordinary career of the Senator from Nebraska the other day, and he was on the floor, which was welcomed, and his staff was in the gallery. I wanted to say again, in a much shorter version, how much we all appreciate his remarkable contributions to our country, to his State, and to the Senate and wish him well in the future.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

Mrs. FISCHER. Madam President, I rise today to celebrate the legacy of my dear friend, my colleague, and my fellow Nebraskan, Senator MIKE JOHANNIS.

Senator JOHANNIS has dedicated more than three decades of his life to serving the people of Nebraska and also this Nation. His career in public service began at the local level, where he was elected to the Lancaster County Board of Commissioners. He later joined the Lincoln City Council, and eventually became mayor of Nebraska's capital city where he served for two terms.

Perhaps the most infamous decision Senator JOHANNIS ever made throughout his career in public service was in his days as mayor of Lincoln. After an early season winter storm dropped more than a foot of heavy wet snow on Lincoln in late October, Mayor JOHANNIS decided to cancel Halloween. He cited power outages and hazardous downed power lines.

As you can imagine, this news was not received well among some of those Lincolniters. To this day, constituents haven't forgotten and they still occasionally remind him of how he deprived an entire city of trick or treats on that fateful October evening. He made up for it, though, when he and his wife Stephanie treated children who came to trick or treat at the mansion.

Fortunately, this incident didn't deal a death blow to Senator JOHANNIS' political career. He went on to serve as Governor of Nebraska and was re-elected to a second term.

As Governor, he focused on fiscal discipline and the responsible use of limited State tax dollars, principles he upheld here in the Senate as well. At one point, as Governor, he even vetoed an entire 2-year budget proposal because it raised taxes to expand government power.

He also championed ambitious mental health reforms that allowed patients to receive care in the stability and in the security of their own communities where they could be near their loved ones. A decade later, these reforms in Nebraska are still regarded as a major milestone in improving mental health care.

Before he was a Senator or a Governor or a mayor or a city councilman, he worked on his family's dairy farm. That is not easy work. And as MIKE puts it, it is a job that builds character and humility. Growing up on a dairy farm, he would milk cows every day before school, sometimes even taking the tractor halfway to town in the winter months when the roads were so bad that the schoolbus couldn't get out to his farm.

This upbringing gave Senator JOHANNIS a great appreciation and a deep understanding for the needs of our Nation's ag producers, so it was no surprise when President George W. Bush selected him to lead the Department of Agriculture as its Secretary. MIKE dutifully served in this role, overseeing a new reform-oriented farm bill and

opening doors to new global markets for our Nation's ag producers.

As Secretary of Agriculture, he saw firsthand the challenges facing hungry nations. It was in this role that he fell in love with the people of Africa, and he has worked here in the Senate to develop food aid programs that not only feed but also empower hungry populations around the world.

Senator JOHANNIS has tirelessly worked for our State and our Nation. He brought to the Senate a unique perspective, having served virtually every level of government. His well-rounded approach to his work here reflects that rare wisdom. Many of us here have had the pleasure of working closely with him because he always makes a point to work with his colleagues regardless of party affiliation, whether it be on complex legislation or that annual Senate secret Santa tradition.

We are all familiar with the confident, peaceful demeanor he brings to the Senate, and his plain-spoken clarity will truly be missed once he leaves Congress. This is who MIKE JOHANNIS is. It is who he has always been: a quiet workhorse with a soft spot for the world's most disadvantaged, and a burning desire to help wherever he can. Friends back home who have known him since before he began his career in public service will tell you that he is the same man today he was back then—never losing sight of his goal of helping people, never getting a big head, and always putting Nebraska first.

The Senator's wife Stephanie has been by his side throughout every step of this tremendous journey, always supportive and steadfast. Anyone who knows MIKE knows he and Steph are inseparable. I am sure they are both looking forward to having more time to spend with family next year.

MIKE, you are a statesman and a model citizen. I am thankful for all the work you have done for Nebraska and for the entire Nation. You have set such a great example for your fellow Senators, and we all appreciate your dedication over these past 32 years. You have served Nebraska with dignity and integrity. Good luck. I wish you and Stephanie all the best. God bless you both.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Madam President, this is a bittersweet time for all of us. As you have heard, as we close the book on one term of Congress and look forward to the next, we are here to say goodbye to one of our esteemed colleagues who is finishing his service in the Senate. It is always tough, but it is especially hard for me with regard to Senator MIKE JOHANNIS—a guy I consider a fine Senator, also a good friend, and sort of the perfect example of the statesman. Through his impressive career as mayor, Governor, Cabinet member, and Senator, as his colleague has just said, he has displayed that.