

a.m., and we were starting off about 7 in the morning.

I came down the elevator, and as happened, the elevator door opened up. Across from me was Luther. He said: How did you sleep, Mr. Chairman? I said: As well as could be expected. Finally, I told him what happened.

After all of that, I had probably one of the best days in my service in the Senate, visiting a State I had not visited before. I talked to every commodity group, every farm organization representative. We went out to many different farms. I learned firsthand that a big export factor to China is peanuts. If we are going to be making friends with China—or at least getting to a situation where we have a better relationship with any country—as you know, agriculture can be a tool for peace. It is a stabilizing factor. It becomes a national security situation. We talked about this at length.

I must say I was very impressed with the folks I met there and the respect they had for you, Luther, for wanting to be on the Ag Committee, obviously, and for your record as attorney general and your public service. To a person, they were committed to you and thanking you for your service on the Agriculture Committee.

So wherever you go, whatever you do, I know you are an Aggie. I know you will continue to fight for your farmers, and, as you know, we are going through a pretty rough patch.

Personally, I want to thank you for your friendship, and, personally, I want to thank you for the message you gave to all Senators here, which I think should be mandatory in our quest to see if we can't achieve a better situation in working together to find solutions. The Senator from West Virginia and I feel the same way, and I know whatever you are going to do, you will do so with dignity and with respect and with strong leadership.

Thank you, my friend.

Mr. STRANGE. Thank you.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I rise today to bid farewell and to express my gratitude to Senator LUTHER STRANGE as he leaves the U.S. Senate. During his too-brief tenure here, he established an admirable reputation for hard work, dedication to his State of Alabama and our Nation, and a commitment to principles.

Senator STRANGE was appointed to the Senate last February to fill the vacancy created when Senator Jeff Sessions became Attorney General of the United States. From the start, it was clear that Senator STRANGE's pride in his home State was matched only by his humility at being selected to represent the State he loves.

Building on the reputation he earned as attorney general for Alabama, Senator STRANGE established himself here as a determined advocate for the rule of law and defender of our Constitution. From preserving the Senate traditions that foster full and open debate to supporting our veterans and

strengthening our national security and our economy, Senator STRANGE has worked on a number of important initiatives.

Senator STRANGE has met the obligations of his office with energy and dedication, and it has been an honor to serve with him in the U.S. Senate. I wish him and Melissa all the best in the years to come and look forward to many more contributions and accomplishments from this distinguished American.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, I just want to say on the record how much I have enjoyed serving with the Senator from Alabama. He has meant a great deal to this institution, to this body during his short time here, and it is sad to see him go.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session, as under the previous order.

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Joseph Balash, of Alaska, to be an Assistant Secretary of the Interior.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be 1 hour of debate equally divided in the usual form.

If no one yields time, the time will be charged equally.

The Senator from Minnesota.

FAREWELL TO THE SENATE

Mr. FRANKEN. Mr. President, a couple of months ago, I felt we had entered an important moment in the history of this country. We were finally beginning to listen to women about the ways in which men's actions affect them. The moment was long overdue. I was excited for that conversation and hopeful it would result in real change that made life better for women all across the country and in every part of our society.

Then the conversation turned to me. Over the last few weeks, a number of women have come forward to talk about how they felt my actions had affected them. I was shocked. I was upset, but in responding to their

claims, I also wanted to be respectful of that broader conversation because all women deserve to be heard and their experiences taken seriously. I think that was the right thing to do. I also think it gave some people the false impression that I was admitting to doing things that, in fact, I haven't done. Some of the allegations against me are simply not true, others I remember very differently.

I said at the outset, the Ethics Committee was the right venue for these allegations to be heard and investigated and evaluated on their merits; that I was prepared to cooperate fully and that I was confident in the outcome.

An important part of the conversation we have been having the last few months has been about how men abuse their power and privilege to hurt women. I am proud that during my time in the Senate, I have used my power to be a champion of women and that I have earned the reputation as someone who respects the women I work alongside every day. I know there has been a very different picture of me painted over the last few weeks, but I know who I really am.

Serving in the U.S. Senate has been the great honor of my life. I know in my heart that nothing I have done as a Senator—nothing—has brought dishonor on this institution, and I am confident the Ethics Committee would agree.

Nevertheless, today I am announcing that in the coming weeks, I will be resigning as a Member of the U.S. Senate. I, of all people, am aware that there is some irony in the fact that I am leaving, while a man who has bragged on tape about his history of sexual assault sits in the Oval Office, and a man who has repeatedly preyed on young girls campaigns for the Senate with the full support of his party, but this decision is not about me; it is about the people of Minnesota. It has become clear that I can't both pursue the Ethics Committee process and, at the same time, remain an effective Senator for them.

Let me be clear. I may be resigning my seat, but I am not giving up my voice. I will continue to stand up for the things I believe in as a citizen and as an activist, but Minnesotans deserve a Senator who can focus with all her energy on addressing the challenges they face every day.

There is a big part of me that will always regret having to walk away from this job with so much work left to be done, but I have faith the work will continue because I have faith in the people who have helped me do it.

I have faith in the dedicated, funny, selfless, brilliant young men and women on my staff. They have so much more to contribute to our country, and I hope that as disappointed as they may feel today, everyone who has worked for me knows how much I admire and respect them.

I have faith in my colleagues, especially my senior Senator, AMY KLOBUCHAR. I would not have been able to

do this job without her guidance and wisdom. I have faith—or at least hope—that Members of the Senate will find the political courage necessary to keep asking the tough questions, hold this administration accountable, and stand up for the truth.

I have faith in the activists who organized to help me win my first campaign and who have kept on organizing to help fight for the people who needed us—kids facing bullying, seniors worried about the price of prescription drugs, Native Americans who have been overlooked for far too long, working people who have been taking it on the chin for a generation, everyone in the middle class, and everyone aspiring to join it.

I have faith in the proud legacy of progressive advocacy that I have had the privilege to be a part of. I think I probably repeated these words 10,000 times over the years, Paul Wellstone's famous quote: "The future belongs to those who are passionate and work hard." It is still true. It will always be true.

Most of all, I have faith in Minnesota. A big part of this job is going around the State and listening to what people need from Washington, but more often than not, when I am home, I am blown away by how much Minnesota has to offer the entire country and the entire world. The people I have had the honor of representing are brilliant and creative and hard-working. Whoever holds this seat next will inherit the challenge I have enjoyed for the last 8½ years, being as good as the people you serve.

This has been a tough few weeks for me, but I am a very, very lucky man. I have a beautiful, healthy family whom I love and who loves me very much. I am going to be just fine.

I would just like to end with one last thing. I did not grow up wanting to be a politician. I came to this relatively late in life. I had to learn a lot on the fly. It wasn't easy, and it wasn't always fun. I am not just talking about today. This is a hard thing to do with your life. There are a lot of long hours and late nights and hard lessons, and there is no guarantee that all your work and sacrifice will ever pay off. I won my first election by 312 votes. It could have easily gone the other way. Even when you win, progress is far from inevitable. Paul Wellstone spent his whole life working for mental health parity, and it didn't pass until 6 years after Paul died.

This year, a lot of people who didn't grow up imagining they would ever get involved in politics have done just that. They have gone to their first protest march or made their first call to a Member of Congress or maybe even taken the leap and put their names on a ballot for the first time.

It can be such a rush, to look around at a room full of people ready to fight alongside you, to feel that energy, to imagine that better things are possible. But you, too, will experience setbacks

and defeats and disappointments. There will be days when you will wonder whether it is worth it.

What I want you to know is that even today, even on the worst day of my political life, I feel like it has all been worth it. "Politics," Paul Wellstone told us, "is about the improvement of people's lives." I know that the work I have been able to do has improved people's lives. I would do it all over again in a heartbeat.

For a decade now, every time I would get tired, discouraged, or frustrated, I would think about the people I was doing this for, and it would get me back up on my feet. I know the same will be true for everyone who decides to pursue a politics that is about improving people's lives, and I hope you know that I will be fighting alongside you every step of the way.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. FISCHER). The Senator from Alaska.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. SULLIVAN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that following the disposition of the Balash nomination, the Senate proceed to the consideration of Executive Calendar No. 167, as under the previous order.

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

Mr. SULLIVAN. Madam President, today I am gratified to be finally debating and voting on the nomination of Joe Balash to be the U.S. Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Lands and Minerals.

I have been coming to the floor, as have a lot of my colleagues, making the case about how it has taken too long to get good people into the Federal Government. I am sure I will have to give that speech maybe a few more times—I hope not—to finally get people who want to serve, who have been nominated by the President, to be confirmed by the Senate, to move them. It doesn't help the American people that we just delay well-qualified Americans who want to serve their country just for the sake of delay. It is happening, but I am not going to focus on that today.

I actually want to thank the Democratic Whip, Senator DURBIN, who was actually very helpful in trying to move this nomination, which has been stalled on the Senate floor for many weeks now. Joe Balash was nominated by the President in July. I appreciate the cooperative spirit from my colleague from Illinois, and I thank him again for that.

This is a very important position in the U.S. Government. The Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management entails supervision and overseeing the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, and the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement. It is very important for the entire country. It is particularly important for my State, the great

State of Alaska, and for so many others where Federal lands make up an enormous part of the State.

Yesterday, my colleague and friend, Senator LEE from Utah, talked to a number of us about how much Federal lands constitute different States in terms of the overall percentage. A lot of Americans don't know this. Usually, if you live on the east coast, you don't have Federal land as a big part of your State, but in Alaska, it is 61 percent; Idaho, 61 percent; Utah, 63 percent; Nevada, almost 80 percent. These positions in the Department of the Interior are enormously important.

This is a very important job, and I am glad to see we are finally getting to vote on it because it is important to help manage resources that we have in abundance but also protect the environment. We all love our environment. Alaska has the most pristine, beautiful environment in the world, and we know how to protect it. We also have enormous opportunities for jobs in energy on public land. What is in all the Federal statutes that Joe is going to be in charge of implementing is that you can do both. You can do both. You can protect the environment of this great Nation, and you can also utilize these incredible resources that we have on public lands. In essence, that is what his job is going to be all about.

I encourage my colleagues to look at Joe Balash's confirmation hearing and his background because he is probably one of the most qualified people to hold this job in the entire country—in the entire country. Joe Balash comes from a long, distinguished career of public service in Alaska. He was the commissioner of natural resources in Alaska, and he was the deputy commissioner of natural resources in Alaska, which manages one of the largest portfolios of land, water, minerals, oil, gas, and timber of anyplace in the world—not just in the country, in the world. Very few countries have more resources than we do in Alaska, and for years, Joe Balash was in charge of managing those. That makes him super well qualified for this job.

As DNR commissioner, he oversaw 100 million acres of uplands, State land in Alaska—this is obviously bigger than most States in America; 40 to 60 million acres of submerged lands and tidelands; and resources that included managing over half a million barrels of oil production a day. Joe oversaw a workforce of over 1,100 people as the commissioner of natural resources and a budget of \$170 million a year.

Joe understands how to build consensus, how to navigate State and Federal lands issues and interests, and, importantly, how to work to responsibly develop our resources and grow our economy, while always understanding that our lands sustain us and that stringent environmental safeguards are absolutely necessary for all Americans.

Let me say one other thing about Joe Balash. You can look at the bio, you can look at the experience, but you