

Trump administration has spent only 6 percent of the \$1.7 billion Congress has appropriated over the last 2 years to build or replace fencing on the southern border.

Facts matter, Mr. President. The \$5 billion he is clamoring for would be better spent on real homeland security, such as Coast Guard boats that can save lives, grants to nonprofit churches and synagogues to secure themselves against shootings like those in Pittsburgh and Sutherland Springs, more Customs personnel and technology to seize the fentanyl that is fueling our Nation's opioid epidemic and actually killing our citizens. Let's remember, fentanyl is mostly coming through our legal points of entry and our mail facilities, not between the ports where the President wants to build his wall.

Perhaps in President Trump's alternate reality—where illegal crossings are at historic highs, migrant caravans of hardened criminals are invading our country, and terrorists are slipping past our Border Patrol agents every day—the need for a giant, concrete wall seems like an urgent necessity. But if, like everybody here, you live in the real world, where the facts and statistics mean something, his obsession with building a wall is exposed for what it is—a desperate attempt to please his base and protect his ego and to make us forget that he gave his word. He gave his word. He gave his word that Mexico was going to pay for it. Now we know that was a flatout untruth.

As stewards of American taxpayers' hard-earned money, we have a responsibility not to throw away billions of dollars in a project that is built on a foundation of fact-free fearmongering. To be clear, this is not the way we appropriate money. This is certainly not the way we fund and run the U.S. Government. If the President wants to shut down the government because he cannot muster the votes to fund his wall, as he says he does, the American people will see that he cares more about his misguided campaign promises and misstatements than he does about doing his job—the job of making the government work for the American people.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

FAREWELL TO THE SENATE

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, this is my farewell speech, and I thought it would do me well to think back to the very first speech I gave on the floor—my maiden speech.

My maiden speech was about a couple of months after my first time being sworn in. I had waited back then—this is 18 years ago. It was appropriate for freshmen Senators to wait a while, don't speak up right away. So I waited 2 or 3 months until it felt like it was the appropriate time, and I remember there was nobody out here. It was an empty Chamber. I picked a topic of the day. I think we were trying to balance the budget at the time—something that 18 years later we are still trying to do.

Then, in the course of the speech, I mentioned that it was my maiden speech. Nobody was out here except the Presiding Officer. All of a sudden, those doors swung open, and right then and there, in strides Senator Robert Byrd. I was standing at a desk over there on the other side, and Senator Byrd's seat was either here or here. So I finished my speech and he said: Will the Senator from Florida yield?

I said: Of course, I will yield.

Senator Byrd, for 30 minutes, gave an oration on the history of maiden speeches in the Senate. So you can imagine, nothing I said was memorable, but it was certainly memorable to this Senator that all of a sudden I would be treated to the corporate knowledge from one of the lions of the Senate in looking back on the history of this body.

I wanted you to know I am a Florida boy. My family came to Florida from Denmark in 1829. So many people come to Florida from the Northeast. Well, my great-great-grandfather was a sailor—a teenager on a sailing ship—and he ended up in New York in a barroom brawl. He was frightened that he was going to be arrested, so he ran to hide. He ran down to the wharf. He hid in a ship, and the ship cast off for Port St. Joe, FL, in 1829. So you see, my family came to Florida from New York also.

Five generations—on the other side of the family, I have a deed signed by Woodrow Wilson in 1917 to my grandparents after they had worked the land for the required 4 years. Under the Homestead Act, the government would deed you 160 acres of land. It is the act that pushed the frontier so much farther into the hinterlands, and we especially think of it westward, but that was also southward.

That 160 acres of land is, today, in the north end of the space shuttle runway at the Kennedy Space Center. I cannot imagine, in that 4-year period, my grandparents swatting mosquitos and fending off alligators and rattlesnakes, scratching out a living they could survive on out of the hard earth of the land. Yet that is the hardy stock from which this Senator comes.

Grace and I have been overwhelmed by the outpouring of support. I stand before you today, and I don't think anyone could have been more blessed. It is not easy when you take your leave from the people you love and the work you love, and it causes a time of intense reflection.

So I reflected back to the time in late 1985 and a series of events over the course of the next few weeks. It was a tense time in the first launch attempt of the 24th flight of the space shuttle. We went down to T-minus 8 seconds. I had braced my body for the ignition of the main engines at T-minus 6.6, and all of a sudden I heard them calling over the intercom: We stopped the count. We are recycling.

That launch was scrubbed that day. There was an indication by a sensor that a gimbal motor on the thrusters of the solid rocket boosters was malfunctioning. Had that been the case, 9 seconds later, we would not be going straight up. We would have been cartwheeled.

So we were let off for Christmas, came back into quarantine in the latter part of December, and tried the next launch attempt, only to go down to 31 seconds, and the count stopped. An alert supervisor on the consoles of the launch center had noticed the locks line was getting too cold. They checked, and a mistaken override of the computer had occurred and 18,000 pounds of liquid oxygen had been drained. Had we launched 31 seconds later, we would not have had enough fuel to get to orbit, and it would have taken the greatest ability of our commander, Navy Captain—now retired—Robert Gibson, to land a fully loaded spacecraft on a short runway at Dakar, Senegal, or Moron, Spain.

So we tried the third time. This time, the count was called off for some external reason. Each of these times, we were in the spacecraft strapped in, ready to go. At this point, I think the weather was not cooperating over in Africa and Spain. You have to have clear skies there in case you get into that transatlantic abort. So it was called off.

Well, that night, when they drained the tanks, they found that a temperature probe on the ground support equipment had flowed through the oxygen line and flowed into the vehicle and was stuck in a prevalue right next to one of the three main engines. Had we launched that morning—in this case, the third try—we would have gotten to orbit, it would have been time for the main engine cut off, and one of the three engines would not have cut off. It would have blown the rear end of the orbiter apart.

A few days later—it was a Friday—we tried for the fourth time. This time we are in the middle of a driving Florida rainstorm. We ran from the crew van to the launch tower to get into the elevator and out of the pouring rain. We were strapped in, ready to go, waiting for a hole to punch through. Now, the rainstorm had turned into a driving Florida lightning storm, and we were sitting on top of all that liquid hydrogen. They finally called off the launch the fourth try.

The fifth try was a Sunday morning. It was a beautiful day. We launched into an almost flawless 6-day mission,

only to return to Earth, and 10 days later, the *Challenger* launched and blew up high in the Florida sky, under circumstances of cold weather that almost exactly duplicated the first launch attempt back on December 19.

Intense reflection. Why was I spared? Now, upon intense reflection, I think I am beginning to see because it has been the great honor of my life to serve our country and the people of Florida—first in the Army, then in the State legislature, then in the Congress, then a State treasurer, and now, 18 years as Senator.

I have tried to serve our country admirably and with integrity because I believe a public office is a public trust. Through this journey, I have been so fortunate to have experienced so many neat corners of this country that all of us here love.

I have seen the Sun shine through the pine trees, the oaks, and the orange groves of Florida. I have hunted alligators and pythons in the Everglades. I have jogged the sands of just about every Florida beach from Pensacola to the Keys.

Of course, I strapped into a rocket, weighing 4½ million pounds, to launch to the heavens and see our planet from a way that very few others have. You have heard me talk about that as I describe our environment and how beautiful this planet is from the window of a spacecraft.

Of course, these experiences in this country—the American people, every one of us and our fellow citizens, the teachers, the soldiers, the factory workers, the moms, the dads, the students, the farmers, those are the ones who have inspired me to dedicate a life to public service. Those folks have been my strength as they are often your strength. It is the American people who have kept me going for the past 46 years of public service.

While I have experienced the highs and lows of serving in the Senate, it is often the small, unnoticed steps toward progress that have made this journey worthwhile. I am most happy with some of the work that has been done to help individuals. I want to mention just a few.

To Christine Levinson and her family, we have worked tirelessly to bring Bob Levinson home. I have come to this floor for 11 years and said that if Iran does not have Bob, they know where to find him. It is our responsibility to see that Bob—a man who served this country in the FBI for 30 years—is finally reunited with his wife and seven children and grandchildren.

In another example, it has been a pleasure to work with Rochelle Hamm, of Jacksonville, and with the families of the 33 crew members of the *El Faro* who perished at sea when their cargo ship sank while they sailed into the path of a hurricane in 2015. As a result of that terrible tragedy, we were able to enact into law key maritime safety reforms, including requiring ocean-going vessels to be outfitted with dis-

tress beacons and equipment to locate lost seafarers.

There are many ways to get things done around here. Sometimes it requires taking the bully pulpit and confronting people to correct an injustice. You will notice, as I said, that these are often little things that people don't notice.

Take the case of Bob "Peach Head" Mitchell, of Tampa, who was a part of the Negro leagues of baseball. For years, he fought to get Major League Baseball to provide compensation to former Negro leagues ballplayers, who were excluded from the majors because of their race. Yet they were some of the best players.

When Jackie Robinson integrated the majors in 1947, the rest of the majors were not integrated until 1959. All of those Negro leagues players had still been playing and had never gotten the compensation. It took 3 years of cajoling and haranguing to get the Major League Baseball Commissioner to do the right thing and give the elderly former ballplayers their due.

Sam Snow also comes to mind, who, for most of his life, had paid a terrible price for the injustice done when the Army had wrongfully convicted him and 27 other Black soldiers who had participated in a 1944 riot in Seattle that had resulted in the lynching of an Italian prisoner of war. Some decades later, when the Army had finally admitted its mistake, it had refused to give those soldiers compensation for their lost pay and for the time they had spent in prison. Once I heard about it, I kept on the Army until it paid the veterans their back pay plus interest.

We all deal in legislation. As for the business of legislation, think about some of the things that we wrote.

We in Florida wrote legislation to protect Florida's beaches, our tourism-driven economy, and our wildlife from the dangers of offshore oil drilling. We, the Democratic caucus, passed groundbreaking legislation that medically insured 22 million Americans in this country. In my State, it was over 1.7 million people. We ensured that they had healthcare and health insurance. Interestingly, because of our protecting preexisting conditions coverage, just in the State of Florida alone, 8 million people who have preexisting conditions are protected because of the law. It also eliminated the lifetime caps on coverage.

You know the fights that we have had ever since we started that day on the Finance Committee. It was after the dog days of August, when you couldn't have a townhall meeting in 2009 because of the disruptions. In September, we on the Finance Committee wrote that bill. It took every member of the Democratic caucus—60 strong then—to be able to pass it. Now millions and millions of people have health insurance who have never had it before, and untold millions more who have preexisting conditions are protected.

We wrote the blueprint that has reinvested our space program and brought new space companies and high-paying jobs to our country and to Florida. In our lifetime, we are going to see humankind set foot on other celestial bodies besides the Moon—legislation that could not have been passed without there having been a bipartisan effort.

We fought to help folks get the resources they needed to recover in the aftermath of the major hurricanes that savaged people's lives and property. We worked to make higher education more affordable by capping interest rates on student loans. We also secured billions of dollars in funding for projects all over America to preserve the environment and to help restore—and it is restoring—Florida's environmental treasure, the Everglades. The list goes on and on.

The setbacks temper the successes in that we have seen constant attempts to disenfranchise voters and to make it more difficult for all Americans to have their voices heard at the ballot box. Then, of course, the Court's 2010 decision opened the floodgates and allowed the wealthiest Americans to spend unlimited amounts of money to influence our elections and corrupt our democracy.

Also, what in the world has happened to civility and to humility in our Nation's public discourse? Where are our servant leaders who seek to serve instead of to be served?

So we still have much work to do. We need now, more than ever, to focus on building the kind of relationships here in Washington that can solve the great problems that our Nation faces. I caution our colleagues and caution those who will join this body to resist the pulls of partisan acrimony and the forces that seek to divide us. Tribalism is our problem, and if not corrected, it is going to take our country down.

I know I am just another Senator who is saying what a lot of Senators who are departing are saying. We all here remember—right over at that desk there—John McCain, in one of his last Senate addresses during which he could stand, saying the same thing.

Some of my fondest memories in the Senate have been with those who have sat on the other side of that center aisle. Because of this, I know that while Republicans and Democrats may disagree on policy, we have a lot to unify us in our values and principles that we share. My parting words are that there is no greater challenge for this Senate than to have the moral courage to choose country over party or over power, to choose justice for all instead of justice for the few, and to give others respect instead of condemnation.

Those of us who are fortunate enough to serve in this Senate are also confronted daily by a set of obligations that we have when we take on this title of U.S. Senator.

We have an obligation to the people of this Nation to do everything in our

power to uphold the country's democratic institutions and to insist that the truth guide our public discussions even if doing so comes at the cost of short-term political loss. As Senators, we have been uniquely given the responsibility to provide advice and consent to the executive branch, and we must take this charge seriously and with independence from another branch. We must uphold the rule of law. In doing so, we must affirm that no one person is above the law.

There are a great many challenges that our country faces. I call upon all of you who serve in this Senate to act with moral courage when these obligations come calling in the future.

As I depart, I am putting my trust in you. I trust you to work on behalf of the countless numbers who do not have a voice in this Chamber. I count on you to give a voice to our brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico, who are long overdue for representation. I trust you will fight to make healthcare more accessible and more cost-effective, keep rigs off of our coasts, and make higher education more affordable for everyone. I trust you will work to protect our environment from pollution and will continue the restoration of our Everglades. Above all, I trust you will act with integrity in uniting Americans for the common wheel.

For the people of America, you in this Senate must be a beacon of light at a time when it seems that darkness is increasingly gathering in our politics. You must remember that your voices and your actions will help to shape the future. You have the power to make our discourse more civil and to create change.

To our staff, both in the office and the Commerce Committee, you all are like family. You are like family to Grace and me, and I am grateful for the work you do day in and day out for the people of Florida. You are all hard-working. You are dedicated. You are loyal public servants. None of what we do around here would be possible were it not for each of you.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that a list of all staffers who have been a part of our Senate family over these 18 years be printed in the RECORD.

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

U.S. SEN. BILL NELSON PAST AND PRESENT
STAFF, FELLOWS & DETAILEES

Scott Aaronson, Alphonso Adams, Todd Adams, Meeran Ahn, Susie Ahn, Elizabeth Ahrens, Amy Akiyama, Stacey Albert, Sasha Albohm, Ihab Al-Dammagh, Artem Alekseev, Katherine Alexander, Amir Al-Kourainy, Kerry Allen, Jaime Allentuck, Amela Alomerovic, Sherry Alstatt, Melissa Alvarado, Digna Alvarez, Shakra Anderson.

Michael Anthony, Martine Apodaca, Barbara Arthur, Hazeen Ashby, Jill Ashton, Sheri Atkins, Rebecca Autrey, Yvonne Baker, Disha Banik, Jacquelyn Bannister, Michael Barbanera, Devon Barnhart, Jacob Barr, Matt Barranca, Jason Barrett, Michelle Barth, Peter Batty, Georges Bauer, Sean Beaudet, Anna Beecher.

DaMara Belson, Matthew Benham, Jeffery Benson, Kathleen Benway, Nicole Berckes, Lauren Berger, Owen Berger, Katherine Bergh, Hernan Betancourt, Jed Bhuta, LaWanda Billingslea, Renae Black, Danny Blum, Shawn Bone, Elizabeth Borders, Alex Borkholder, John Branscome, Lisa Brett, Jonathan Brill, Abbey Brown.

Alea Brown, Alicia Brown, Angela Brown, Celeste Brown, Ryan Brown, Ken Brummel-Smith, Kevin Brumback, Tiffany Bryant, Andrea Buck, Scott Bunce, Joy Burke, Douglas Bush, Philip Bye, Edly Calderon, Carrie Callaghan, Douglas Campbell, Lesley Campos, Christopher Caple, Catherine Carabine, Marie Carr.

Jessie Caudill, Jonathan Caverley, Kassandra Cerveney, Amanda Chadwick, Cheryl Chadwick, Richard Duane Chambers, Tom Chapman, Amanda Cherrin, Michael Chesnut, Courtney Chiles, Mary Chiles, Aurelia Chis, Myron Chivis, Taylor Christy, Courtney Christian, Randy Clarke, Sally Cluthe, Andrew Coates, Danielle Cohen, Rodrick Coleman.

Seth Collins, Julia Colvin, Mary Conklin Callow, James Connell, Peter Contostavlos, Jonathan Cooper, William Couch, Alec Coutroulis, Ana Cruz, Karen Cully, Michael Cully, Nicholas Cummings, Patricia Curran, Amin Cyntje, Roy Dalton, Paul Dampousse, Julie Dashiell, Holly Davenport, Joseph Davenport, Sherry Davich.

William Davich, Nona Dawson, Christopher Day, Edward Dean, Alison DeBose, Frank DeToma, Binita Devkota, Patrick DiBattista, Michael Dodson, Rachael Dollar, Ellen Doneski, Taylor Downs, Amy Drummond, Amanda Dugan, Martee Duhaney, Kate Dumouchel, Kirstin Dunham, Thomas Dunn, Shaun Easley, Casey Elbare.

Joel Eskovitz, Alexander Fabiszewski, Ryan Farris, Jeffrey Fatora, Monica Fernandez, Amanda Figueroa, Brandon Fisher, Stephen Fitzmaurice, Clare Flannery, John Flynn, Laura Forero, Janet Forlini, Erika Frantz, Melissa Fritsch, Mary Fritz, Scott Fuhrman, Erica Fuller, Christian Tamotsu Fjeld, Robert Gatehouse, Denton Gibson.

Celia Gisleson, David Gittess, Treon Glenn, Laura Glickman, Gregory Goddard, Ruben Goddard Jr., Laila Goharion, Adam Goldberg, Jonathan Goldman, Sara Gonzalez-Rothi, Ioana Gorecki, Jasmine Govan, Artena Greene, Ryan Grindler, Alexandra Grosswald, Jessica Gruse, Mary Guenther, Brendan Guess, Philip Guire, Bryan Gulley.

Peggy Gustave, LeAnna Gutierrez, Jessica Hafer, Daniel Hague, Kimberly Hall, Shawn Hall, Patrick Hanley, Christine Hanson, Michael Hardaway, Katherine Hardeman, Jonathan Hardy, Courtne Harris, Marcia Harris, Bryan Harrison, Caitlin Hart, Erin Hatch Neal, Nathanael Hauptkorn, Cathy Haverstock, Hilary Haycock, Alexia Heathcock.

Michael Henry, Lauren Herold, Mary Hester, Neal Higgins, Gretchen Hitchner, Andrew Holik, Tamara Holliday, Mary Tyler Holmes, Maria Honeycutt, Jason Hopkins, Aysha House, Felipe Hoyos, Robert Hubbard, Sharon Hudson-Dean, Andrea Hughes, Meghan Hunt, William Hupp, Dan Hurd, Eisele Ibarra, Jenny Jacobs.

Kalilah Jamall, Amy Jasperson, Naveed Jazayeri, Deborah Johann, William Johnston, Charlie Joughin, Madeline Joyce, Katy Kale, Erik Kamrath, Brandon Kaufman, Kelly Keefe, Matt Kelly, Ryan Kent, Christina Kilgo, Grace Kim, Oliver Kim, Elizabeth King, Jena Kingery, Sheril Kirshenbaum, Kenneth Kirtan.

Sarah Kleinman, Rachel Kline, Jesse Knapp, Harry Knight, Dolly Kobornat, Nancy Koepke, Mark Kopelman, Rhoda Krause, Pamela Krauss, Jessica Lamb, Rebecca Lange, Matt Lawrence, Willowstine Lawson,

Christopher Leacock, Carissa Lewis, Jeffrey Lewis, Julia Lee, Alexandra Lehson, Reginal Leichty, Jason Lemons.

Maria Lewis, Melissa Lewis, Andrew Lievense, Stephen Liles, Lauren Linsmayer, Kim Lipsky, Cynthia Lodge, Sue Loftin, Christopher Long, Juan Lopez, Kimberly Luckey, Robert Luke, Maureen Luna-Long, Greta Lundeborg, Anthony Lynn, Patricia Lynn, Doug MacIvor, Joshua Maddock, Peder Magee, Jillian Maggard.

Christina Mahoney, Keenan Mahoney, Corey Malmgren, Carlos Mancero, Josh Manning, Josiah Manzo, Arthur Maples, Lisa Marshall, Tom Marvit, John Maskornick, Ryan Matthews, Derek Mattioli, Connor Mautner, Leandra McComas, Ryan McCormick, Elena McCullough, Cornelius McFadden, Meredith McFadden, Carla McGarvey, Diana McGee.

Michelle McGovern, Jacqueline McGuinness, Candise McKeiver, Tyrik McKeiver, Daniel McLaughlin, Kenneth Meadows, Taleen Mekhdjavakian, Kathryn Melcher, Sydney Mengel, Jonathan Merlis, Stephanie Mickle, Deborah Miller, Helen Miller, Connie Mirrop, Anum Mirza, David Mitchell, Jack Mitchell, Pete Mitchell, Matthew Montgomery, Anne Morgan.

Patrice Morgan, Brenda-Lea Morrison, Carissa Moss, Lydia Mount, Colin Mueller, Joanelle Mulrain, Erin Strother Murray, Jonathan Murray, Courtney Mursell, Dorkina Myrick, Nadia Naviwala, Constantinos Nicolaidis, Beth Nielson, Sheila Nix, Brian No, Anna Normand, Mathew Nosanchuk, Mary O'Bannon, Clint Odom, Ryan Orgera.

Gilberto Osorio, Madeline Otto, Danny Pang, Steven Parker, Loren Parra, Kandi Parsons, Jeremy Parsons, Sydney Paul, Michael Pedersen, Brittany Penberthy, Christos Perez, Grace Pettus, Theresa Pezzeminti, Ingrid Piedrahita, Yariv Pierce, Hayley Pierre, Macline Pierre, Christian Pierre-Canel, Katherine Platt, Laura Ponto.

Karlee Popken, Sandeep Prasanna, Lizy Price, Matthew Price, Don Pride, Rachel Pryor, Samantha Purcell-Musgrave, Jean Quillo, Susan Perez Quinn, Shannon Rainey, Kaitlin Ramirez, Marcia Randolph, Matthew Rankin, Dawn Ratliff Ebony Reddick, Ilka Regino, Blair Reinerman, Timothy Rennie, Alexandra Riley, Jose Rincon.

Jessica Ritter, Samuel Ritzman, Valeria Rivadeneira, Charmaine Robinson, Kimberly Robinson, Laura Rodriguez, Maritza Rodriguez, Josie Rodriguez, Emily Rogers, Jason Rosenbaum, Anna Marie Ross, Katherine Ross, Kathleen Rubinger, Charles Runfola III, Nicholas Russell, Jessica Russo, Timothy Ryder, Benjamin Sack, Joshua Samek, Sheron Samuels.

David Sanchez, Sara Sanders, Edda Santiago, Jeff Scarpiello, Eugene Schlesinger, Grant Schnell, Michael Seely, Robert Seibert, Seth Seifman, Kelda Senior, Lea Shanley, Daniel Shapiro, Ben Sharpe, Lauren Sher, Kim Silverman, Karri Simpson, Rozann Skozen, Mara Sloan, Stacey Smith, Tiffany Smith.

Julia Snouck-Hurgronje, Christopher Snow, Nathaniel Sobel, Tristan Sola, Jennifer Solomon, Joseph Sophie, Connor Sorenson, Luis Soria, Jaime Soto, Michael Sozan, Robert Spasovski, Sue Speer, Maria Speiser, Stephen Stadium, Tim Standaert, Marin Stein, William Stein, Sean Stewart, Caroline Stonecipher, Christine Stowe.

Maria Stratienco, Brenda Strickland, Jennifer Suarez, William Sutey, Mohsin Syed, Charles Teague, Mary Templeton, Caroline Tess, Usha Tewari, Matthew Thomas, Petrina Thomas, Chris Thompson, Kareen Thompson, Kathryn Thorp, Kyle Thorp, Vanessa Thorrington, Monica Thurmond, Alexandre Tiersky, Alicia Tighe, Abigail Tinsley.

Bradley Torppey, Rebekah Torres, Joseph Towey, Wilson Trawick, David Troha, Yennie Tse, Mark Tucker, Alexander Tureman, Aprill Turner, Mayra Uribe, Maya Vaidya, Jackie Valladares, Mark Van Arnem, Jr., Mark Van Arnem, William Vaughan, Emilio Vazquez, Rupa Venkatesh, Darren Vierday, Pedro Villa, Patricia Wagner.

Carlie Waibel, Clarey Walker, Candace Walls, Dorothy Walsh, Mary Walsh, Alyssa Wang, Annie Wang, Kimberley Warden, Heather Wells, Shawn Whiteside, Laurence Wildgoose, Anthony Williams, Grant Williams, Matthew Williams, Michael Williamson, Kelsey Wilson, Desiree Wineland, Colleen Winstanley, Jennie Witherspoon, Joanne Woerner, Simone Wood, Brent Woolfork, Sue Wright, Muneera Zaineldeen.

Mr. NELSON. To my wife Grace and my children Bill and Nan Ellen, I am so grateful for the support you have provided throughout the years. The journey has been a joy.

I leave this Senate today filled with hope for the future and the fondest memories of my fellowship with great friends here, but I admit, it is hard to leave the friends and the work I love. I intend to keep fighting for all I have talked about in this short, final speech, and I intend to keep fighting for Florida.

When it comes down to it, I am just a country boy who has loved serving my State and our country for all of my life. It has been an incredible honor.

I yield the floor.

(Applause, Senators rising.)

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

TRIBUTE TO BILL NELSON

Mr. RUBIO. Madam President, we have just heard the words of the senior Senator from my State, and I wanted to just take a moment because it reminded me of a truism that came to mind as I heard him speak and as I reflected back on our almost 8 years of service here together.

Political divisions have existed in our country since its very beginning. What has changed is, there was a time not so long ago when Americans knew each other; when Americans had political differences, but they also served on the PTA board together; when we disagreed about whom to vote for, but we coached each other's kids in Little League or we were members of the same church and worshiped together or we lived side by side as neighbors.

When all you know about someone is whom they voted for or what their political positions are, it is easy to dislike them, but when you know them as a fellow parent, as a neighbor, as your children's coach, as someone you live side by side with, then you know them as a person. It is a lot easier to dislike a political opponent than it is to dislike the whole person.

I raise that point with you because I am very proud of the relationship, the working relationship, we have had in our 8 years here together. One of the things that made that possible is that

I knew BILL NELSON as a person. If all I knew about him was that he and I did not always vote the same way on every issue—that is what most people know about us who serve here. That is one of the challenges we so often face. The men and women we represent in our representative parties and in our representative political leanings usually only know about our colleagues in the 3 minutes they may see us in a television interview, but we get to know each other as people. We get to know each other outside of politics.

I knew BILL NELSON, and I know BILL NELSON, as a person and as a man. I am an enormous admirer of his knowledge of Florida. He knows every nook and cranny of the State. He might not remember this, but we were together on a Coast Guard aircraft after one of our storms, and as we overflowed the State from above, he was pointing out and identifying down at the street level every corner of the geography of the State. I remember thinking: I have been in Florida politics for awhile. I know the State fairly well, but he knew it down to the street level. So to try to keep pace, I went back and opened up the Atlas and tried to replicate 25, 30 years of State service to try to at least be in the same neighborhood as he is in his knowledge of our State. It is incredibly impressive. It wasn't something he memorized by looking at a book. It was because he had been to all of these places at some point during his time of service to our State.

I would say that certainly in the last quarter century, there has been no greater champion not just for Florida's space industry but for the space program; not just for NASA but for all of it, for the belief that great nations do great things; that they explore the heavens. There has been no greater champion for it.

His leaving the Senate will be a tremendous loss and will require all of us to work harder to ensure that America remains a nation active and engaged in space.

Above all else, I knew him—and know him—as a good man. I emphasize the word “man” because I think oftentimes in our modern culture we have developed a warped sense of what it truly takes to be a strong and good person.

We live in an era in which we celebrate pride and arrogance, but I have learned, through the example of watching him up close, that BILL NELSON is a man with the kind of humility that our common faith tries to instill in us.

He is a man that, at a time when it is so easy to be indifferent to the suffering of others, in his service here, has been a man of compassion.

He told you just a handful of stories. There are so many more real human beings with whom he has stayed engaged in cases involving them, without cameras, without press, without bumper stickers, without documentaries, or any sort of recognition that so often people seek in the political process.

We live in a time where being crude and abrasive is celebrated as strength, while decency is oftentimes ridiculed as weakness. BILL NELSON has been an example of decency. I cannot recall a single time in our 8 years of service together in which he did anything to harm me, embarrass me, or in any way create unnecessary conflict—in fact, any conflict—on a personal level. In fact, I would say the worst thing he ever did to me was he once, in front of an audience, accused me of being a moderate.

It goes further than that. Our staffs would travel together across the State. Sometimes people would be shocked by it. They would gasp when my regional director and his regional director would share a ride to wind up at an event together, as if somehow Republicans and Democrats are supposed to be allergic to each other, when, in fact, in the end, no matter how we view our politics, we are all going to be in this Nation for the rest of our lives, so we better figure out a way to work together on the issues that will impact us all.

I will greatly miss the opportunity to continue to serve with him. I know his service to our Nation and our State is not finished. I know he will find new endeavors. I know this simply because he is not one who is going to sit back and rest and reflect. He is going to keep working. I am excited to see what God's plans are for the rest of his years. I believe there will be many more because, despite the differences in our dates of birth—I am not saying he is old; I am saying he is older than I am—he could probably still beat me—in a pullup contest or a pushup contest. This is actually not an exaggeration. It is true, which is why I have never challenged him to one. I will greatly miss working with him in the Senate, but I look forward to working with him beyond it.

I will say this, and I think this is no exaggeration. When the history of Florida politics is written, the name BILL NELSON will be among the giants of Florida's political history, for few who have ever served at any level have done more for a longer period in the service of the people of the Sunshine State than the senior Senator who, moments ago, bid his farewell to a place and a Chamber where he has done so much good for our State, for our Nation, and for the world.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Madam President, I rise to honor our friend BILL NELSON.

As a member of the Commerce Committee, I have been able to see firsthand his leadership, and I have learned a lot from him.

I think we all heard his heartfelt remarks about what he loves. He loves his service. He loves Grace up there and his family. He loves his staff, and he loves everything about the State of Florida.