

that has landed on the Senate's doorstep. He has championed domestic priorities, including everything from tax reform to confirming judges who actually will enforce the Constitution as written, as well as legislation to address the opioid epidemic. He has guided our work relating to global conflicts, for everything from the ongoing war in Ukraine to the difficult struggle for democracy in Burma. He is a champion of free speech, the Constitution, and the Senate itself.

You could write volumes about everything Senator MCCONNELL has accomplished as the Senate Republican leader, and I have no doubt that each of those books would arrive at the same conclusion: No one has done more to advance the conservative cause in a center-right country than MITCH MCCONNELL. He is the effective and humble hand at the helm of the conference, and it is a privilege to serve alongside him in the Senate.

So thank you, Senator MCCONNELL, for your leadership and your friendship. Congratulations on this historic and well-deserved accomplishment.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

The Republican leader.

TRIBUTE TO BEN SASSE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, normally when a new Congress convenes on the 3rd of January, the Senate has already said farewell to all of our departing colleagues, but this first week of the 118th Congress is also the last week we will get to enjoy the collegial and cerebral stylings of our good friend, the junior Senator from Nebraska, BEN SASSE.

I spoke earlier this morning about Senator Mike Mansfield, whose path to politics began in the faculty lounge. Well, so did BEN's, but, alas, the legislature's claim on Senator SASSE has proven temporary, and now the ivory tower is literally striking back.

A quick look at BEN's resume leaves no mystery about the intellectual formation of our sharp colleague from the Cornhusker State—valedictorian of Fremont High School, degrees from Harvard, St. John's, and Yale, and high-flying stints as a sought-after consultant in business.

As I understand it, it wasn't just brainpower that punched BEN's ticket through the Ivy League; it was also a bit of blunt force. Let me explain.

As the story goes, a childhood tumble out of a hay loft left our colleague with a big scar and some lasting numbness in his forehead. I am not literally making this up. Naturally, as a budding

competitive wrestler, our friend started to make a name for himself, turning a would-be handicap into a signature move: the head butt. Needless to say, college recruiters took notice.

This hardheaded practicality has combined with BEN's smarts and creativity to produce an interesting and impactful career, like using the wrestling mat as a springboard to a world-class humanities education; applying the skills of a business consultant to turn around a small, struggling, Christian university; being one of the Senate's most creative big thinkers while also staying attuned to working families' daily struggles; or writing a new bestselling book every few years while spending his summers waist deep—listen to this—in corn and soybean fields.

Now, I could be mistaken, but I believe there was one period where our colleague signed himself and his family's minivan up for a ride-sharing app so that he could pick his constituents' brains as he shuttled them to their destinations.

So, Madam President, just boring old business as usual.

In one of Ben's books, our colleague wrote about a practice that he and his wife Melissa have enjoyed incorporating into their family. He calls it their family canon—a collection of good books on big, consequential topics that are meant to be read and discussed together repeatedly.

So while Corrie, Alex, and Breck are growing up with the Sasse family canon, Ben's colleagues have spent the past 8 years with the Sasse Senate canon—eloquent arguments, new ideas on issues ranging from the future of work to the future of war, to the dignity of the human person.

Our colleague from Nebraska has been among this body's leading voices on data privacy, intellectual property, automation, the economic threats posed by the Chinese Communist Party, religious liberty, civics education—all in a day's work.

But behind the seemingly disparate interests, behind the fascinations with seemingly opposite things like new technology and ancient philosophy, I see a clear common thread: Senator SASSE is passionate about things that bear directly on the future of the American experiment.

That is the central passion that brought our colleague to this Chamber. Now, as he departs to head a major American university, it is the same passion that is taking him away from it. When it comes to protecting and strengthening our country's future, education is right up there with legislation.

And, anyway, I suspect many of us shared a hunch that, one way or another, this Renaissance man's diverse resume was probably not completed when he was sworn into the Senate 8 years ago.

This next adventure for the Sasse clan promises not just more sunshine but also more stability and family

time, thanks to the end of the weekly cross-country commutes.

So, look, I think I speak for all 99 of his Senate colleagues when I offer both our condolences on replacing committee hearings with faculty meetings and our congratulations on this exciting opportunity to lead an important institution.

So, Ben, your colleagues wish you and Melissa all the best as you go write the next interesting chapter to the Sasse family canon together.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KAINE). The Senator from Nebraska.

FAREWELL TO THE SENATE

Mr. SASSE. Mr. President, I rise to speak from this floor for the last time. Serving the people of Nebraska as their Senator has been a unique honor, and I will remain grateful for all that I have learned from the folks who do more to feed the world than any people anytime or place in all of human history, quite literally.

I know that I speak for my team as well—some here on the floor for the first time, some in the Gallery—in saying to Nebraskans: Thank you for these 8 years—8 years of us getting to be a part of a team much bigger than just ourselves. That is a special privilege, and none of the 32 of us now on the team, and the dozens who have already departed, take that for granted, and so we say thank you to Nebraska.

Running for office is a dangerous business. In asking someone to give you their vote, you are asking them to give you their trust, to put their trust in you that you will rightly prioritize and sequence their long-term interests.

You are asking them to trust your judgment, your conscience, and your common sense.

Our wrestling together—Nebraskans and me—over the last 8 years has had some marked ups and downs, as you gave me victories in all 93 counties when I ran for office the very first time in my life in 2014 and then made me the most censored public official in the history of Nebraska over the next 6 years; but then proceeded, 2 years ago, to reelect me again, again winning all 93 counties and securing the most votes of anyone in the history of our State. Many times it felt like a noogie and a slap and a head butt and a hug all at once.

Besides my State and my wonderful staff, I obviously want to thank my family—my three ladies and Breck—not just for supporting and encouraging me but for charging out to embrace learning across all of Nebraska with me—visiting all 93 counties many, many times; climbing all over combines and tractors; learning so much about cattle and pigs and seed corn. My kids can tell you more about artificial insemination and how to turn a breeched calf that you wouldn't be able to eat again for 72 hours.

They got to know a beautiful State from east to west, from city to country, and from old to young. They have

seen and learned more about—and respected—and learned to do more hard work. Ours is a special State.

Breck, our youngest, got to feed 2,000-pound bulls with names like Petrone. He got to bring home stray dogs and ranch animals, with or without permission. He got to live off of an RV for about 16 months, which I will now confess, given that there probably is less regulatory reach, that we probably violated a good bit of code on that RV.

He got to stand with me dozens of times as we sent soldiers off and welcomed soldiers home to the running embrace of their families.

Alex, our middle daughter, has given so many tours of this Capitol, and she knows the stories of our country and the tributes etched and strewn throughout this building, to people who preserved a Republic. These are experiences that bore a hole in her soul as she grew, and though she knows that America is imperfect, she knows to never take it for granted.

Corrie, our eldest, had a chance just this last summer to join me at the Polish-Ukrainian border, joining groups who were visiting soldiers in hospitals who had given their limbs to defend their homes, coloring and drawing pictures with orphans whose parents won't come back because of an evil man who thinks he can seize land that is not his. She drank vodka with Ukrainian officers.

And most importantly, Melissa, I have missed hundreds and hundreds of family dinners, both the good and the bad, the tears and the laughter at that table, and I want to thank you for loving me, for forgiving me for those missed dinners, for your giant brain and your bigger heart, for your conviction and your love of passing on an inheritance of liberty to the next generation, and for a shared growth mindset.

I know you will kick my butt if I tear up.

Melissa and I, as Nebraskans, understood from day 1 on the campaign bus back in 2013, never planned to spend a lifetime in Washington. That is not what our Founders envisioned for the people they would send to the Federal city. They envisioned, rather, Congressmen, Senators, and Presidents who thought of DC as a temporary stay, Washington as a place to do a good bit of neighbor-loving work but then to go back home to the more permanent work of life in flesh-and-blood, whole communities.

Americans in the 1780s, in their canon, actually knew well the story of Cincinnatus—they named some towns after him—who took up the burden of power in a shaky Rome, then exercised it responsibly to restabilize things, and then laid it down again to go back to his vegetable garden, which was the real world.

Our Founders envisioned citizens who would govern themselves, not be governed by a distant imperial city; who would, as George Washington said—and

then repeated here as we recite every year in the Washington Farewell Address—that folks would “sit safely under his own vine and fig tree” again.

We are a long way from that picture, of course. The vast majority of Americans now say it feels like we are in decline; 80 percent of folks on the left, north of 80 percent of folks in the middle, and fully 90 percent of folks on the right tell pollsters that they think the country is not just headed in the wrong direction but perhaps permanently in decline.

I am going to argue in a moment against the pessimism of our age, but we should first acknowledge that there are legitimate, big reasons that people are worried—fatherlessness, the epidemic of opioids, the deaths of despair, the loss of community, the foreign policy humiliation, the ugly inflation. It feels like we are inundated with terrible news. At a time when folks feel so disoriented, when the future seems obscure, when danger seems to be signaled from every direction, it is not surprising that false prophets of power would suggest that the only answer is more centralized power—I alone can fix it.

It is not surprising that five of the richest counties in the Nation now are the suburbs of Maryland and Virginia that touch Washington, DC—a city that has an entire industry that has grown up around the sprawling bureaucracy and its permanent political class. We seem to be in the process of exchanging a Republic of self-governing citizens and the virtues of federalism, in which States would tussle and compete, with the vices instead of administrative centralization, in which experts from Washington, DC, who don't have to stand for reelection, would try to impose uniform rules on a diverse continental nation of 330 million people. It seems so obviously silly.

We seem to be on a foolhardy path of trading the vigor of civic pluralism and consensus building with the disease of “my way or the highway” political zealotry. But we get distracted by the differing flavors of the zealotry. We get captivated by the declining brands “Republican” and “Democrat,” and we regularly think that the problem in the city might actually be that the policy divides are taken so seriously that the deep divide is red jersey screaming versus blue jersey screaming. That would be a mistake. It would be to misdiagnose what is actually happening in our time. For the prophets of despair, both right and left, are actually telling Americans a really similar story, and the story is this: We are weak. Whether they stand on my side of the aisle or the other side of the aisle as they yell, the political addicts who prize short-term power over long-term dignity and liberty are the ones who now dominate the Nation's conversation, and their story is roughly symmetrical: You are getting victimized by the other team. The things that are wrong are coming from the politicians on the other side.

The Nation is in decline. Give us more power, for we alone can fix it.

On the left, media personalities and activists often weirdly and ahistorically denounce the idea of America itself, calling the Founding racist and our institutions unjust. To them, our history is exclusively a story of victimhood and a narrative of oppression. There can be no redemption, no progress, and no hope. Political zealots on the left don't see much of anything worth conserving in America, and if you disagree with them, it must be because you are an irredeemable deplorable, clinging to some phobic backward-looking vision. There is no possibility of honest disagreement.

But on the right now, too, victimization is a story we trumpet. Demagogues denounce the idea that there could be anything left to conserve in America. According to these zealots, we lost the idea of America long ago, and it is naive to think it could be recovered. It is much better to burn things down than try to rebuild. Cynicism is supposedly cool. They shout that persuasion can't work, and the left will turn us into their victims if we don't stop them first. Persuasion is a crutch for the weak, for those who are too cowardly to fight.

The particular policy agendas obviously differ, but ultimately the message of all politics-first folks is basically the same: The only way to put an end to the culture war is to move beyond the outdated idea of a limited Constitution and instead grab more power for the good guys while there is still time. The left's plan is more unelected, unaccountable bureaucrats. The right's plan is now to give similar kinds of power to a strong man. But, ultimately, there is not much difference between these so-called plans. Anti-pluralists are against dissent. They are against minorities. They are against diversity. They are against place. They are against liberty and human dignity.

The factions differ on who should be Caesar, but beyond that there is much on which they agree.

They salivate on the idea of chaos in our disrupted age that can be the excuse for seizing more power. They foment anger and fear because they think if we are angry and scared enough, we will assent to some Caesarist solution.

These factions are dangerous, to be sure, but here is what we fail to appreciate most of the time: They are factions and they are small and they command nothing like majority opinion. When they appear to win, what they are really only doing is putting together a temporary majority coalition of folks, temporarily, who are disgusted by the other side's arrogant overreach. That is why in every midterm election—or almost every midterm election—for three decades now, we have seen a new President 2 years into his term lose the Congress.

Why does this happen every cycle? It isn't because the Congress is suddenly

popular. It is because the President, who usually won a “lesser of two evils” election in the eyes of the American public, then populated his White House with foolish folks who believe that they were elected with a sweeping mandate to transform America and they prompted backlash.

It is also the single-most obvious and important explanation of what happened in 2016. Historians are not going to look back on 2016 as about who won. What happened in 2016 was a race to the bottom by statistically the two most unpopular majority party candidates in the history of polling. One guy won simply because he was the second-most unpopular person in the history of polling. Go to any corner bar, and a supermajority of Americans already know this. By the way, we roughly did the same thing again 4 years later. Forget the nonsense about a new FDR administration. America elected a new guy because they were sick of the old guy. This is also the most basic and obvious explanation for the crap show that is happening at the other end of this building right now. NANCY PELOSI’s party, quite obviously, lost a referendum on the stewardship of the House of Representatives 60 days ago, but no one won, least of all KEVIN MCCARTHY. Nobody in America is crying out for ambition for ambition’s sake.

So let’s restate this overreach and repulsion hypothesis in a more positive way, because it turns out that the American people are quite ahead of the political classes. It turns out that the American people don’t like political addicts. They don’t like political zealotry. This is good news. To quote one correspondent to my office, literally this week, “the Senate today reminds me of a lunchroom full of insecure adolescents trying anything and everything to get attention—not everybody, of course, but the loud ones. But most of us eventually learn to grow up. Let’s hope that someday the electorate kicks the Senate out of its extended puberty by letting folks know that mooning each other really isn’t that cool.”

Nebraskans have a way with words.

Stated with a few less naked-butt examples, here is the good news that we need the ears to hear. Americans overwhelmingly don’t want power to be at the center of our shared experience. They don’t want a leftwing nanny state telling them how to live, and they certainly don’t want a rightwing potentate promising to crush all of our so-called “domestic enemies.”

We want America to be America again.

Americans don’t believe the Constitution is obsolete. They don’t believe that principled pluralism can’t work anymore. They don’t accept the notion that we are all so weak that we have no agency.

Yes, it is true that it is hard to look away from the addictive horror of the 24-hour news cycle. Rubbernecking is deep inside all humans. But what the

zealots preaching Jeremiah’s doom and decline don’t understand, even about America’s history or about Americans’ preferences, is that, despite some of the pessimism of our uncertain, technologically disrupted moment, Americans are fundamentally grateful to be here in the greatest nation the world has ever known. We are optimists by the miracle of our birthplace.

We know that politics won’t save us, but that doesn’t mean that we are hopeless. It just means that we know that what is best about America comes from outside the centers of power, same as it ever was.

We need to regain our bearings and to recall our original construction and our architecture. We don’t need Americans to be confident about self-governance for men and women who have been given a Republic to hold. We need to be able to see clearly the three immense and enduring reasons for our hope: the Constitution, our institutions, and, most fundamentally, the people themselves.

The U.S. Constitution is the greatest political document ever written. The central forming principles that undergird it, the universal dignity of human beings, and thus the rejection of absolute power, because souls cannot be compelled by force—this is the soul of America. When the country is at its best, we are making good on that promise, and no country has been more blessed with wise political arrangements than we—the separation of power both vertically and horizontally. It is a glorious inheritance, and despite attacks by demagogues, the Constitution endures.

At the convention in Philadelphia, George Washington called this document the “standard to which the wise and the honest can repair.” So long as the Constitution endures, we too can repair and recover and hope again in this system.

The second reason for our hope: Americans are institution builders. Building is in our DNA. We have built towns on the frontier, railroads across the continent, Hoover Dams and Empire State Buildings. But, more importantly than this important physical architecture and infrastructure, we built the human institutions that support and sustain us across institutions and generations.

We know that we are weak and fragile on our own, but the bonds of community enable us to flourish. Our institutions are the vital centers of our life together. Small and large, local and national, temporary and enduring, institutions are the gathering places where we find what we need to keep going: the churches that serve the needs of their communities, the schools that sharpen the minds of the next generation, the businesses that keep our households up and running, the Little Leagues, the ballet troupes, the Fourth of July parades, the Christmas carolers, the million and one other associations, organizations, and clubs and

groups through which we live and pass along our life together.

When our institutions are withering, America withers. But when our institutions bud anew, America is alive and new again. That is why America will always belong to the doers, not the whiners. America belongs to the man in the arena willing to spend himself in a worthy cause. America belongs to the parents who eat on the go so their kids can eat at the dinner table. America belongs to the inventors and innovators whose garage tinkering changed the world. America belongs to the neighbors who see someone in need and go out and launch a soup kitchen and a clothing drive and an after-school tutoring program. They don’t wait for this city. They move.

We have not thrived for two centuries because of power at the top and in the center. We have not thrived chiefly because of who was in office or because of the rules and regulations that are handed down from Washington. Rather, we have thrived because of the diversity in every city, in every town, and in every neighborhood. Though different, you find this sameness: the people who don’t want to be served but to serve, those who are not taking but giving, those who are not tearing down but building up. This is who Americans are, and it is a humble and beautiful thing for all of us to be a part of together.

And here is thus the third reason for hope—the American people themselves—for America does have a civil religion. It isn’t a precise theology, but it is, instead, a shared anthropology. It is about people important enough and with enough dignity that the state is not allowed in our system to get in the way of each of our individual needs to make sense of mortality and the afterlife, to make peace with God, and to consider carefully how we would redeem our days, for those days are numbered and finite.

Ultimately, then, our system, our faith in the Constitution and in our institutions flows from what we believe in common about people themselves and the universal dignity that the 330 million of us possess from our Creator, for we are one of a kind. You can come from anywhere in the world and be one with us.

Wild and wonderful and unlike any other country the world has ever known, we are equally characterized by a spirit of association and a spirit of enterprise. We have the audacity to be optimistic, even when things are the bleakest. We are brash and loud and reckless—kind of insane, to be honest. But there is a special vigor. We are the kind of people you want with you when things go sideways. We are the kind of people the world wants with it when things go sideways, the kind of people who get the job done and keep our word. That is who we are as Americans, far before the less important question of our policy debate preferences and what color partisan jersey we wear.

That is who we are as American pluralists, and that is why recovery from our current messes is not only possible but likely.

But recovery comes with preconditions, and it comes only if we acknowledge the truth that the outrage-and-fear industrial complex wants to obfuscate, and that is that the zealots and the tribalists and the grandstanders and the very online political addicts, they will not fix anything. They won't because they can't. Recovery can come only from civic pluralists.

Policy debates obviously matter, but the most important divide in American life today isn't red versus blue; it is pluralist versus political zealot. Recovery will come only from the pluralists, and here is what it will look like: citizens who resist the temptation to reduce fellow Americans to caricatures of political affiliation.

Recovery requires investment in things that outlast partisan preference. We must steward the age and play our small but vital part in the work of self-government because, yes, policy matters; and, yes, there must be important and vigorous debate; and, no, being polite for the sake of being inoffensive isn't the highest good; and, no, mushy-middle "Kumbayaism" will not be a strategy.

But more than debates about policy, we need Americans to believe they can build again. We need to believe that loving your neighbor is more important than the policy disagreements. We need to be invested in those actually central institutions that make the Nation vibrant.

And this is why the Senate matters so much. For the Senate doesn't build the other institutions, but more than any other single institution, more than any other place, more than any other room—more than any other room—this body, this place, and this floor has a special place to play in advocating for all of those other institutions where people actually break bread and provide care to the dying. The Senate has a special role to play in America's recovery.

Senators, colleagues and friends, each of us knows that this institution doesn't work very well right now. Each of us knows that we should be taking a look in the mirror and acknowledging that lives lived in a politicized echo chamber are unworthy of a place that calls itself a deliberative body, let alone the world's greatest deliberative body. Too many of the so-called "debates" here aren't debates at all, not in the way that Webster or Clay, Dirksen or Chase Smith could even recognize.

When we are being honest with each other, which usually means when we are in one of the very rare occasions when cameras aren't present, we all know that a big chunk of the performative yelling that happens here and in every hearing room is just about being booked for even more performative yelling at night on TV. It

might feel good temporarily—a little dopamine hit to fire off a clever tweet or get booked on a supposedly prime spot—but, honestly, almost nobody is watching, and the share is getting smaller. Run the numbers; 99 percent of political tweets come from 5½ percent of Americans. The prime-time lineups of the three biggest cable networks almost never hit 2 percent of the public. So much of the performative BS that happens around here is about getting invited on shows that don't have an audience. These small, narrowly-targeted programs run on outrage. It is infotainment fuel. Nobody goes viral for talking about policy tradeoffs, and hardly anyone gets booked for a nuanced debate. It is performative, and it is beneath the calling of those called to serve in this place.

A lot of us, behind closed doors, when the cameras are off, say we want a different Senate. We want a place that prioritizes long-term legislation that looks at the Nation's most fundamental challenges. A lot of us want an institution that takes seriously the rise of an expansionistic, militant, imperialist China, and debates are the best paths to attacking that challenge. And that does happen, but it happens in the Senate Intelligence Committee, which is both good but also a cautionary tale about our more fundamental problem.

Intel works largely because we have no cameras there to reward performative grandstanding. Intel works because it is classified and because it has the excuse of being classified.

So where will the meaningful, beyond-tribal debates about the hollowing out of local communities, about the increasing depths of despair? Where will we debate how we can more effectively address the crisis of family formation and the crisis of our long-term debt?

What we say we want and what we actually do here are worlds apart. Senators get cowed by threats from social media mobs, advocacy organizations, small-dollar donors and cable hosts. Senators learn when they are up for reelection that they are supposed to have kept their heads down, not rocked the boat, not talked about long-term issues, and take the path of least resistance to surviving the next election cycle. And that is making this body increasingly irrelevant, something none of us actually want.

But there really is no substitute for the Senate. If recovery is going to come, it will mostly be built in local institutions in a million different ways, but the Senate is an essential ingredient to enabling that. No other place can serve the purpose of this room.

Some people including, weirdly, some who serve in this body, think that the public square has migrated online, that you can substitute debate of humans who actually know each other and take a long-term perspective with social

media and with tweets. They are lying to themselves. Twitter is awesome for sports, to be clear, but if it serves any broader public purpose, it is basically just a public reminder of the lunatic asylum that is potential in all social contagion.

Digital space cannot recreate what this Chamber does, and hard thinking can almost never happen in 280 characters. We have always had angry people, and we have always had crazy people; but what is new in our time is that those who are politically addicted in being more willing to shout down more balanced people have new tools at their disposal to privilege the politically abnormal over the normies. It would be a disastrous mistake for the Senate to give similar, disproportionate voice to the loudest and the angriest, not just because the Founders created this institution largely as a warning against the dangers of zealous faction but, also, simply because the data clearly shows that the angriest are not at all representative. Most of our constituents don't like the loud and the angry. We are a bell-curve nation, and a tiny, tiny share at each extreme of the tail is getting almost all of the attention.

At one level, I am just making a boring, mundane argument for a certain kind of moderation, but I don't chiefly mean policy moderation. Let there be debates across the continuum from far left to center left to center right to far right. Debate policy with vigor. But we need a different kind of moderation. We need a Senate that is characterized by tonal and dispositional moderation, and tonal and dispositional moderation flow chiefly from humility and wisdom and from an awareness that we are ensouled and that souls cannot be coerced. A government that recognizes and respects us as souls should elicit from each of us great gratitude.

In this moment, what we need as a nation, more than anything else, is more gratitude, not more grievance. We Americans have been given so much to be thankful for. We are blessed with a limited government that exists to protect historic freedoms, stuff unprecedented on the world stage—the free exercise of religion, free speech, free assembly, a free economy. There are real injustices in America's past and in our present, and we cannot and should not overlook them. But the answer to injustice is never wallowing in or trying to inflame victimhood. The heroes of American history—the folks whom we have put in marble all around this Capitol—know that this country gets to write its own destiny. Generation after generation fought to make this a better and a freer and a more just place, and theirs is the example that we should follow. Folks like Abraham Lincoln, Susan B. Anthony, and Martin Luther King—they were too busy building. Let the same be said of those who would aspire to serve in this place. Let the Senate be the Senate again.

Thank you, Mr. President.
(Applause.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

TRIBUTE TO BEN SASSE

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, as we all heard, in just a few days, our colleague and my neighbor from Nebraska, Senator BEN SASSE, is retiring from Congress to become president of the University of Florida. I have to say that his leaving is a loss for the Senate, not least because the average educational attainment here will drop precipitously when he leaves. Ben has four—four—graduate degrees, three master's degrees, and a doctorate.

I have to say thank you to all of his many staff, who are represented both here and in the Galleries, and to his family—to Melissa and Corrie and Alex and Breck—for the sacrifices that you all have made so that he could serve here and be such an inspiration, I think, to so many of us who have had the opportunity to serve with him and to see not only his great intellect but his passion and his ability to get things done for the people of Nebraska and for the people of our country.

I will say that, when I hire people, I typically hire people on my staff—or at least I try to—who are smarter than I am. In my case, that is not hard. In his case, that is probably a little more challenging.

So your staff has got to be the Mensa caucus around here.

It is no surprise that he became the college president of Midland University at age 37, making him one of the youngest college presidents in the Nation.

But, seriously, the Senate will be a poorer place without BEN SASSE. He is incredibly smart, as I said. He combines that with being incredibly principled. He lives by his principles. He is always willing to do the hard things—the right things—even when they aren't popular.

During his time in the Senate, he has been notable for speaking out against oppressive authoritarian regimes; for standing up for the right to life of the most vulnerable and innocent Americans—unborn babies; for his interest in the future of work; for his commitment to building up our American community; and so much more. He is a big-picture thinker who oftentimes gets up at the early hours of the morning—at 4:30 in the morning—and just starts brainstorming on a big piece of paper. It is a quality that will serve him well as a university president, and I can think of few individuals more suited to leading a university.

Florida is lucky to have him, and I know how deeply committed he will be to the university, although I have to warn them that if the Cornhuskers ever approach BEN about the position of offensive coordinator, he may be out of there quickly—but, no, I don't think that will happen.

It has been a pleasure to serve with Senator SASSE. In addition to being a

tremendously smart and thoughtful guy, he is a very witty guy who always makes me laugh and, I think, many of his colleagues here laugh as well. He and I have a lot in common, being from neighboring States. I am going to miss him as a neighbor, as a leader, as a colleague, and as a friend. There is a lot to admire about BEN SASSE; but, ultimately, what I respect the most is that he is a man of strong faith. I know that wherever life takes him, his faith will continue to be his rock.

BEN, congratulations on your appointment at the University of Florida, and I look forward to seeing all that your vision will accomplish at the university. I pray that God will richly bless you and Melissa and Corrie and Alex and Breck in the years ahead.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

TRIBUTE TO BEN SASSE

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I wish that every American could have heard the speech that was just delivered by our friend and colleague from Nebraska, Senator BEN SASSE. It reflects his intellect, his intelligence, his integrity, his imagination. It demonstrates that he is both a historian and a visionary. It paints a portrait of where we need to do work in America, but it also holds out the promise of making our great country even better.

In his speech and in a recent op-ed in the Wall Street Journal, Senator SASSE said:

This country belongs to the optimists, the innovators and the builders.

Those words by BEN SASSE perfectly describe the qualities that he has brought to this Chamber and that he will bring to his new leadership position at the University of Florida.

As he leaves us to assume the presidency of the University of Florida, I want to thank my friend from Nebraska for his service and congratulate him on this exciting, new opportunity to make a positive difference once again.

BEN came to the Senate in 2015 with a remarkable record of accomplishment as an educator, as a consultant to businesses and nonprofit organizations, and as the president of a university. His work for the Departments of Homeland Security, Justice, and Health and Human Services prepared him well for the issues he addressed here. Consistently, BEN took a thoughtful approach that was defined by his commitment to the facts, by his genuine desire to understand opposing points of view and find common ground, and, most of all, by his integrity.

He is the author of two best-selling books that reveal much about his character. In one, he offers advice on how we can strengthen our children's self-reliance, work ethic, and civic responsibility. In the other, he provides remedies for the societal alienation that drives us apart—and of which he spoke

today—that infects everything from our local communities to national politics. In confronting these challenges, BEN does not scold his readers. Instead, he puts forth thoughtful, practical, inspiring solutions.

I was pleased to hear BEN mention today his work on the Intelligence Committee, and I have thought the same thing that he said today so many times. If the American public could see what goes on behind closed doors, I think it would restore their faith in this institution because there are no cameras; no one is performing; everyone is asking serious, thoughtful questions in trying to get to the answer—to the nub of a problem.

I have really enjoyed working with BEN on that committee, and I have always looked forward to hearing his very thoughtful, probing questions. He has been a leading advocate for improving cyber security to better protect government, businesses, and critical infrastructure from hostile actors. He has worked to remove unnecessary roadblocks and supply actionable intelligence to Ukraine to aid in its defense against the barbaric invasion by the Russians.

Here at home, BEN has stood firm against efforts to repeal the filibuster—eloquently arguing that it would destroy the spirit of consensus building and compromise that is the very heart of the Senate.

He was a strong ally in our bipartisan work to reform and modernize the archaic Electoral Count Act of 1887 to prevent the flaws of this outdated law from undermining future Presidential elections. In fact, I well remember the night before we were to introduce the bill. There were 15 of us, including, obviously, BEN, who had worked so hard to craft this legislation, including Senator Portman, who is standing right next to Senator SASSE on the floor. BEN, in being the thorough, careful Senator he is, had some deep, insightful questions, and I think I spent half the night answering them as we texted and called back and forth—he wanting to make sure that we were not infringing on the legitimate role of State governments or State courts as we attempted to strike exactly the right balance. And at 4:30 in the morning—which is when Senator SASSE gets up, but it is not when I am usually awake—a text that I welcomed very much came across my phone saying that he would cosponsor the bill. And I knew then that we had truly gotten it right, because he is so thorough in his approach, and I knew that he had read every single word.

As Senator SASSE departs us, it is my hope that the words that he spoke, the advice that he gave us today, will fill the hearts and minds of all who have the privilege to serve here. As he said, “now, perhaps more than ever, it is our job to stop giving ear to political arsonists who would burn down our institutions and intensify our divisions.