

U.S. SENATOR JOSEPH R. BIDEN, JR.
SENATOR STENNIS BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION
DE KALB, MISSISSIPPI
SATURDAY, AUGUST 3, 1985

THANK YOU VERY MUCH, GOVERNOR, FOR RECOGNIZING THAT DELAWARE IS IN FACT A STATE.

MANY PLACES I GO OUTSIDE THE MIDDLE ATLANTIC STATES, THEY ASSUME I'M FROM SOME COUNTY IN ANOTHER STATE, SO I DO APPRECIATE YOUR COMMENT.

AND IT'S ALSO NICE TO BE HERE, MR. CHAIRMAN, ON THE DAY THAT STROM THURMOND RE-ANNOUNCES FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

I ALWAYS THOUGHT YOU ALL WERE DEMOCRATS, BUT YOU VOTED FOR GOLDWATER AND YOU'RE VOTING FOR THURMOND.

I'M NOT SURE, I THINK MAYBE STROM HAD THE RIGHT IDEA, OF LEAVING WHEN HE DID, BECAUSE NOW, YOU KNOW, HE'S CHAIRMAN OF THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE, AND I SERVE AT STROM THURMOND'S BIDDING,

SO I'M SURE, AFTER THAT CRACK I JUST MADE ABOUT PRESIDENT, WE'VE GOTTEN THE LAST FEDERAL JUDGE DELAWARE'S GOING TO GET IN A LONG TIME.

I REALLY WANT YOU TO KNOW WHY I CAME DOWN TODAY, MR. CHAIRMAN.

I CAME DOWN TODAY NOT ONLY TO PAY MY RESPECTS TO YOU, BUT TO WITNESS FIRST-HAND WHERE ALL THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FROM DELAWARE WENT, AND I'VE SEEN IT.

YOU HAVE STOLEN IT ALL, AND I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU'RE PUTTING IT TO VERY GOOD USE.

YOU KNOW, WHEN I FIRST GOT TO THE UNITED STATES SENATE, I HAD SEVERAL LIABILITIES. I STILL HAVE MANY, BUT I HAD SEVERAL MORE AT THE OUTSET,

ONE OF WHICH WAS I WAS ELECTED WHEN I WAS 29 YEARS OF AGE, AND I LITERALLY HAD TROUBLE GETTING ON THE ELEVATORS. HONEST TO GOODNESS, THE PAGES WOULD NOT LET ME ON THE ELEVATORS.

AND SO IT DIDN'T COME AS A SURPRISE TO ME WHEN I SPOKE ON THE FLOOR OF THE SENATE, NO ONE PAID ATTENTION.

BUT WHAT DID COME AS A SURPRISE TO ME WAS THE FIRST NINE MONTHS I WAS THERE, AND THE FIRST REAL DEBATE --

AND THIS IS A TRUE STORY, AND IT'S ONE OF THE REASONS WHY I'M SO INDEBTED TO SENATOR STENNIS --

ONE OF THE FIRST DEBATES I WAS EVER IN, A WHOLEHEARTED GENUINE DEBATE, WITH ONLY SEVERAL SENATORS ON THE FLOOR OF THE UNITED STATES SENATE, ABOUT 20 MINUTES INTO THIS TWO-HOUR DEBATE, SENATOR JOHN C. STENNIS WALKED ONTO THE FLOOR OF THE UNITED STATES SENATE.

AND HE CAME OVER AND HE PULLED UP A CHAIR ABOUT FOUR SEATS FROM WHERE I SAT, AND HE JUST TURNED HIS CHAIR AROUND AND HE LISTENED TO ME.

AND HE SAT THERE THE WHOLE TIME, AND AFTER IT WAS OVER HE WALKED UP TO ME, A MAN WHO IN FACT EVEN THEN TO ME WAS A LEGEND,

WALKED UP TO THIS 30-YEAR-OLD KID WHO HAD JUST BEEN IN HIS FIRST DEBATE, AND PUT HIS HAND OUT AND HE SAID, "SENATOR, YOU'RE GOING TO DO WELL, THAT WAS A FINE SPEECH."

AND THEN HE WROTE ME A LETTER THAT I HAVE HANGING ON MY WALL, AND I'VE SHOWN IT TO HIM, IT'S FRAMED.

HE SAID, "TODAY, IN THE UNITED STATES SENATE, I WITNESSED A YOUNG MAN WHO HAS BECOME A SENATOR. YOU STOOD LIKE A STONE WALL."

AND, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WHEN I THINK OF JOHN STENNIS, I THINK OF HOW HE BEFRIENDED ME THAT FIRST YEAR I WAS THERE, AND I'M REMINDED OF A COMMENT THAT WAS MADE ABOUT STONEWALL JACKSON THAT COULD BE EASILY AS MUCH READ AND SAID ABOUT JOHN C. STENNIS.

IT WAS SAID OF STONEWALL JACKSON, "HE IS AN AVALANCH FROM AN UNEXPECTED QUARTER, A THUNDERBOLT FROM A CLEAR SKY, AND YET HIS CHARACTER AND WILL MAKE HIM A STONEWALL AND MORE OF A STONEWALL THAN ANY MAN I'VE EVER KNOWN."

AND, MR. CHAIRMAN, WHEN YOU STAND ON THE FLOOR OF THE SENATE AND YOU POINT THAT FINGER AND YOU RAISE YOUR VOICE, IT'S LIKE A BOLT FROM A CLEAR SKY, AND WHEN YOU SPEAK, EVERYONE LISTENS.

AND AS ALL OF MY COLLEAGUES HAVE SAID HERE TODAY, AND YOU'LL HEAR OTHERS SAY MORE OF, HE TRULY DOES STAND LIKE A STONE WALL, HE IS THE ROCKBOUND INTEGRITY OF THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS.

THE FIRST CAUCUS THAT I ATTENDED, IT WAS A SERIOUS TIME IN THE AFFAIRS OF THIS NATION. THERE WAS DISCUSSION OF THE IMPEACHMENT OF A PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

AND THAT SAME PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, KNOWING OF JOHN STENNIS' INTEGRITY AND HOW MUCH IT WOULD MEAN IF HE STOOD THERE, CALLED UPON HIM.

AND MANY OF US WONDERED WHAT JOHN STENNIS WOULD DO, AND WE HAD A CAUCUS OF THE DEMOCRATIC UNITED STATES SENATORS, AND JOHN STENNIS ROSE SLOWLY AND SPOKE TO ALL OF US AND SAID, "THE ISSUE IS, ARE WE SENATE MEN OR ARE WE PRESIDENT'S MEN?"

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY MEN HAVE THAT MUCH INTEGRITY, I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY MEN COULD STAND WITH MEN OF STATURE, OF EQUAL STATURE LIKE GOLDWATER AND THURMOND AND HUMPHREY AND OTHERS, AND PRESUME TO DO WHAT WE ALL KNEW HE COULD ONLY DO --

REMIND US OF WHO WE WERE, AN INSTITUTION -- AND THAT'S WHAT THE UNITED STATES SENATE IS -- IS LITTLE MORE THAN THE LENGTHENED SHADOW OF A MAN.

AND JOHN STENNIS HAS CAST A SHADOW THAT STRETCHES FAR AND WIDE, AND MADE THE INSTITUTION THAT I'M PROUD TO SERVE IN WHAT IT IS.

HE'S AN OPPONENT WITHOUT HATE, A FRIEND WITHOUT TREACHERY, A STATESMAN WITHOUT PRETENSE, A VICTIM WITHOUT ANY MURMURING, A PUBLIC OFFICIAL WITHOUT VICE, A PRIVATE CITIZEN WITHOUT WRONG, A NEIGHBOR, AS YOU ALL KNOW, WITHOUT HYPOCRISY, A MAN WITHOUT GUILT --

A SENATOR WHOM FUTURE SENATORS CAN STUDY WITH PROFIT FOR AS LONG AS THERE IS AN AMERICA.

WHEN I ARRIVED AT THE SENATE, IT WAS NOT THE HAPPIEST TIME OF MY LIFE. MY WIFE AND DAUGHTER HAD JUST BEEN KILLED IN AN AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT.

AND JOHN STENNIS, WHO KNEW LITTLE OF THIS NORTHERN BOY WHO WAS SUPPOSEDLY A LIBERAL, WHO IN FACT HE NEVER HEARD OF, JOHN STENNIS BEFRIENDED ME.

JOHN STENNIS MADE A DIFFERENCE IN MY LIFE AS HE HAS IN MANY OF THE MEN YOU'RE GOING TO HEAR FROM TODAY.

I HAPPEN TO BE IRISH, SENATOR, AND WE IRISH HAVE A TOAST ON BIRTHDAYS. WE IRISH HAVE A LOT OF THINGS THAT ARE VERBAL, AND WE LIKE OUR TOASTS, BUT THE ONE I'D LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU ON YOUR BIRTHDAY GOES LIKE THIS --

MAY YOU LOOK BACK ON THE PAST WITH AS MUCH PLEASURE AS YOU LOOK FORWARD TO THE FUTURE, BECAUSE YOU'RE ONE OF THE FEW MEN WHO KNOWS THE PAST BUT IS ALWAYS LOOKING TO THE FUTURE.

I'M HAPPY TO BE HERE, MR. CHAIRMAN.