

**Remembering Senator John McCain  
Senator Lisa Murkowski  
September 4, 2018**

Mr. President there have been several words that have been spoken about our friend Senator John McCain and I want to join with the many words, the tributes that have been shared in these recent days since his passing.

We all know the background. We all know the bio. John McCain served our nation for sixty years. Starting as an officer in the United States Navy. As a prisoner of war, in unspeakable conditions. And of course during his terms in the House of Representatives, and here in the Senate for some 30 years.

That is the biography of the man, but it really just is the start of who he was and the mark that he made. That he made not only in the lives of here in the Senate but really in the lives of Americans all over the country.

John McCain was a beloved colleague. He was a patriot. He was truly an American hero.

He had remarkable intellect. He had an iron will most certainly. His unquestionable integrity. Courage that was absolutely unwavering.

When I think about John and how John approached issues. John was one who always did what he thought was right. And when he thought he was right, there wasn't much arguing with him. He was right. But even then, we would engage. We would go back and forth and I think that often times it was those arguments

that caused us to certainly either gain greater respect or perhaps greater fear depending on where you were in the process.

But John was one of those guys who favored straight talk, and so I don't think he would have any hard feelings about any of us our relationship with him over the years. We didn't always agree and sometimes we maybe didn't even get along, but the truth of the matter was John McCain would always made sure to let you know where he stood. And John was very clear that you had to earn his respect. Respect was not something just something that came with the title because you were a United States Senator. It didn't mean that you had earned his respect. And I know because I felt that in my early years here in the Senate.

I came through an appointment. And I think John McCain was just going to wait to see if I was able to prove myself. He ultimately decided apparently that I had. He came up to me one day, we were actually walking down the aisle there and he comes up and he says, 'You know, you are okay kid.' And for that, that was high praise.

Now we have all heard some of the legendary stories of when individuals kind of came head-to-head or toe-to-toe with John McCain. Certainly there were some areas where we disagreed – we had a little bit different view on earmarks. And that was not just my relationship with Senator McCain but previous Alaska Senators as well, but I think we all agreed that our disagreements were principled in nature.

I remember one very interesting and heated exchange over the merits of Essential Air Service. John was on one side of the issues, and I was an advocate of Essential

Air and I said, we're literally nose to nose and I said, 'Don't you understand when it's called essential air because it's essential, because we don't have roads to these places.' And he kind of growled at me and said, 'well, I don't know why we need to have it.' Legendary back and forths. And sometimes you won. Sometimes John won but it was always with a great deal of passion that these exchanges moved forward.

At then there was other end of the spectrum, those times where John and I were voting together, sometimes against the majority of our party. Healthcare and the ACA vote last year was a prime example of that. That was a tough vote. That was a tough vote for our conference. It was a difficult vote but I will tell you it was comforting to have some solidarity with my friend John McCain, even when it was clear we disagreed with many of our colleagues. But John was one that when he had made his mind up, he had made his mind up and you respected that.

John has visited Alaska and it helped validate his view that climate change is real. It's something that we have to deal with, that we have to take practical steps to address it. And I agree with John. I don't need any convincing and that and I will be proud to help achieve that goal.

I valued John's work on campaign finance reform and comprehensive immigration reform. I was never part of the "gang," on immigration but my votes clearly marked me as a fellow traveler.

We also had a strong respect for our Native peoples. Both Arizona and Alaska have many tribes and large concentrations of indigenous Americans. And his decades of work to advance the cause of Native people were really legendary.

And because John accomplished so much during his time here, we all talk about his time spent on the international front, working on defense issues, but I think often times the issue area with Native Americans and Indian issues was overlooked, so let me just comment on this for a moment.

Back in the 1990s, John joined with Senator Dan Inouye of Hawaii on amendments to the Indian Self-Determination Act providing for tribal self-governance compacting. This opened up a whole new era of opportunity for Alaska tribes. It laid the groundwork for Alaska tribes to take over the delivery of Native healthcare from a failing federal bureaucracy.

And now around the state, whether you are up in Utgiagvik or down in Ketchikan, they enjoy award-winning, world-class healthcare in a system that the Native people control. And that really would not have been possible without people like John McCain fighting for our Native people.

I think that John would have been proud of me on the afternoon that he passed. I was in the village of Savoonga, which is a small community, about 800 people on St. Lawrence Island. About forty miles from Russia in the Bering Sea. One of the most remote places in Alaska. I was there to conduct a field hearing of the Indian Affairs Committee focused on poor housing conditions – overcrowded housing – where our Native people are forced to live in extraordinarily difficult homes with difficult sanitation problems in these very remote Native communities.

John was a champion for ending the third-world living conditions that too many of our Native people still endure. And we've got a lot of unfinished work on that front, and I plan to attack it with the same vigor that John brought to the fight.

I mentioned John's love for our military, for our veterans. He will long be remembered for his efforts to bring our military back from years of neglect and devastating pain of sequestration. The story that we all know, John working on major defense budgets and being an extraordinary advocate for all of our defense, my story in how it intersects with a very, very small group of elderly Alaska warriors I think demonstrates that this big, strong gruff guy who was truly taking on the world had a very soft spot in his heart and the kindness that he showed to these few elderly Alaska Native Guard veterans is something that is worthy of sharing.

After Senator Ted Stevens left the Senate in 2009, the Pentagon had tried to cut off pension payments to two dozen elderly men who served in the Alaska Territorial Guard during World War II. And Stevens had worked really hard to get their service counted as military service and to grant them veteran status. And not unlike the way Ted did things, he took care of it in the appropriations process, and so it was an earmark. Over the Christmas holiday, the Pentagon worked to reinterpret the earmark.

And needless to say, Ted is gone, this is an important issue to these twenty-four elderly veterans and so I moved an amendment on the defense appropriations bill to reverse it. And I talked to John, who was initially skeptical at first because it was an earmark. But then he asked, he asked whether or not these Native Guardsmen, these Eskimo scouts had actually seen war. And I was able to share

with him the story of those who had stood lookout on the homeland, in the Aleutian Islands, the reminder that in Alaska we were the only American soil that was occupied by the Japanese in World War II and it was these Native warriors who were standing guard, standing lookout. So, long story short, John knew that supporting these elderly veterans was the right thing to do.

So many things that we can share about John, but really when I think about his legacy going forward, whether he is “Project Maverick” as my friend from South Carolina said, or however we choose to remember him, I do hope that history will remember John as an institutionalist in the highest tradition of the Senate.

He was committed to thoughtful debate and regular order. He was an effective committee chairman, respecting the interests of members on both sides. He managed his bills on the floor, working hand-in-hand with the other side. These were tough bills. The annual defense authorization bill draws something on the order of 600 amendments.

He was always protective of committee prerogatives. He was known to put his foot down when appropriators sought to muscle out the authorizers. And he was always looking towards compromise and bipartisanship.

And he fought for our institution because he never lost sight of the fact that the legislative branch is a co-equal branch of government. Not subordinate to the White House. And he took no guff from the administration, we all know – no matter who was in charge. That wasn’t just because John liked to flex his Senatorial muscles. It was because he was a true believer in the Constitution and

in its checks and balances. He was a true believer in the institutions of government. And a true believer in democracy.

John certainly made his share of history—and has earned his place in it. And I think we all know how much we will miss him. His passion, his courage. His loss leaves us sad. But at the same time, I think that it offers us a beacon of hope here in the Senate as we reflect on his life and his contributions.

Senator Graham has observed that John will not be replaced by any one Senator. It's going to take all of us, working together. It's going to take all of us to really accomplish what John knew we were capable of and by coming together, respecting one another, one another's principles – even when we disagree – and working through these disagreements. To compromise, that's how we really honor John's legacy.

There's a lot of words and these words will come and go but the way to truly honor him is to live out what he believed this Senate is capable of doing. We were reminded that there's a little John McCain in all of us. I think it would be good for us to remind one another of that, to urge the inner John McCain in each of us to present itself, to present itself in a way that betters our institution.

So on behalf of the people of the 49th state, the great state of Alaska, I thank you John McCain. I thank the family for the years that you gave him to us, to his country. We will take it from here, inspired by your service John McCain, by your intellect, by your integrity, and by your determination to do right.

May you rest in peace John McCain.

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