

**REMARKS DELIVERED AT THE MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR  
SENATOR THOMAS F. EAGLETON\***

JOHN C. DANFORTH\*\*

Barbara, Terry, Christy. Thank you for the chance to speak for the many people who hold you in our hearts and who loved Tom.

A lot of us are wondering what we will do with our extra time now that we won't be getting all that mail from Eagleton. Like many, I have been rereading my stack. Much of it is very funny, for example:

To Rev. John C. Danforth

Dear Rev:

I am a senior citizen on Social Security. I have some time available. I heard that you were looking for a new Bishop. I would like to inquire about the position. I think I could get some endorsements if that would help—for example, the Clayton Township Democratic Club. Please advise.

Or this: "Is Danforth Quayle named after you or Bill? Did he go to Country Day or Burroughs?"

Or this comment on a claim that Purina Puppy Chow relieved a hip condition in dogs: "For 18 years and 9 months, my late dog, Pumpkin Eagleton, ate Puppy Chow. Her hips were always perfect. In fact, she was doing so well in her late years that I started eating Puppy Chow. My hips are perfect."

Then there were serious letters, giving his views on politics, St. Louis, Iraq, whatever subject was on his mind.

Tom Eagleton was a person of strong convictions. He spoke with great passion, memorably when he urged the Senate to expel a liberal Democratic colleague who was involved in the Abscam scandal. Tom said that party and

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\* St. Francis Xavier (College) Church, St. Louis, Missouri, March 10, 2007.

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ideology were beside the point. The standards of the Senate compelled expulsion. I remember Fritz Hollings's comment as we left the Senate floor: "I don't know how this whole mess started, but I know when it ended—with Eagleton's speech."

Over this past week, much has been written about Tom's political career, about his philosophy, about his stands on various issues and about his passion for his principles. All of that is important to history. But none of that is what brings us here today. For us, he was more than an admirable career or a bundle of issues. We come here with our own memories of this man we knew and cared about, and who cared about us. We will keep these memories for a long time to come.

Seven years ago, I had the chance to tell a large crowd what I thought of Tom. The occasion was the dedication of the Thomas F. Eagleton Courthouse. It was a great day on the courthouse steps under blue skies. I said:

He set the tone for our relationship on my first day as a Senator. That night, we had a small dinner party in a private dining room of a Washington hotel. My family was there and a handful of close friends including the Eagletons. During a quiet moment, Tom said, "I know you wish your father were alive."

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People say that politics is "a contact sport." But Tom's comment that night told me that for us it would be different, a relationship based on the soul of the senior senator.

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I don't know of any senators from the same state who had a better relationship.

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Those who promote the intense partisanship that characterizes American politics would not appreciate or even understand the partnership of Tom Eagleton and Jack Danforth. But we don't appreciate or even understand them. And I think that our way worked well for the people of Missouri. Of course, I'm not objective.<sup>1</sup>

That's what I said seven years ago, and what I repeat today. No, as I said, I certainly wasn't objective. Wasn't then—am not now. Not where Eagleton is concerned. I'm proud I was his partner in public life. I always will be proud of that.

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1. Videotape: Thomas F. Eagleton United States Courthouse, St. Louis, Missouri: Dedication Ceremony, September 11, 2000 (on file with the U.S. Court Library, Eighth Circuit).

In his book, *What Jesus Meant*, Garry Wills writes, “People often wonder how they should imagine life after death. Jesus used the imagery of the scriptures, presenting it as a great welcoming banquet. . . . [A] wedding feast, which unites . . . family and friends.”<sup>2</sup>

A great banquet. The uniting of family and friends. What the Creed calls, “The communion of saints.”

That thought of Garry Wills makes sense to me, especially as we remember Tom Eagleton. I imagine a glorified Beffa’s with Tom in the middle of things and all of us gathered around him. He is holding forth as always, giving us his opinions on politics and baseball. His hearing is perfect. We don’t have to shout. God willing, I’m there too, present at the Banquet, taking in all Tom’s words, disagreeing with half of what he says, just as I always did, and loving every bit of it.

That, for me, would be heaven.

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2. GARRY WILLS, *WHAT JESUS MEANT* 128–29 (2006).

