

TRIBUTE TO FORMER SENATOR TOM EAGLETON*

CLAIRE McCASKILL**

[As] a young prosecutor, I was very fortunate to have a man who was a mentor to me and continued to be a mentor until, very sadly, the end of his life just a few days ago. He was a great politician, and there is no place he would prefer to be called that than on the floor of the Senate.

There is a hole in the heart of Missouri with the death of Senator Tom Eagleton. He was a giant among leaders and leaves a legacy that should guide public servants and Senators for generations to come.

Beginning in 1956, at the age of [twenty-seven], he also became a prosecutor. He was elected the prosecutor of St. Louis city, a circuit attorney. In a brief [twelve]-year span, he became elected prosecutor of St. Louis, went on to be elected to the attorney general's position and then on to Lieutenant Governor and on to U.S. Senate—a whirling dervish of energy, intellect, and ambition.

In 1968, when Missourians sent our “boy wonder” to Washington, we knew he would achieve greatness, and he certainly didn’t disappoint us. Within his first term, he had already begun to turn the tide on the environmental damage that had ensued within the half-century after the industrial revolution by helping craft the Clean Air Act of 1970 and the Clean Water Act of 1972. He was a strong advocate for children with disabilities and created the National Institute on Aging.

While much of what Senator Eagleton did in the Senate made a true impact on America and the world, no action may have been as great as his handwritten

* The following speech was delivered by Senator McCaskill on the floor of the Senate in the days after Senator Eagleton’s passing. Senator McCaskill’s words are reprinted here as they appear in the *Congressional Record*. 153 CONG. REC. S3239, S3264–66 (daily ed. Mar. 19, 2007).

** Claire McCaskill is a United States Senator for the state of Missouri. She earned her bachelor’s and juris doctor degrees from the University of Missouri in Columbia. She went on to clerk for the Missouri Court of Appeals in Kansas City and then worked as an assistant prosecutor in Kansas City. In 1982, she won a seat in the Missouri Legislature and served until 1988. In 1993 she became the first female Jackson County Prosecutor, a position she held until she was sworn in as Missouri Auditor in 1999. In 2006, McCaskill became the first woman elected to the United States Senate from Missouri. She currently sits on five Senate Committees, including Armed Services, Commerce, Homeland Security and Government Affairs, Aging, and Indian Affairs. McCaskill was also named as one of the select Senators to sit on the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, formerly known as the Truman Committee.

amendment that stopped the bombing in Cambodia. This courageous act changed the course of history by subsequently ending the Vietnam [W]ar. His complete grasp of the complexities of foreign policy continued until his death.

As he talked to me in February of 2005 and tried to convince me to run for the Senate, he said to me: “[C]laire, this war in Iraq is a disaster and, believe me, it is going to get much worse before it gets better.”]

Even in the later years of his life, he was a virtual fountain of information about foreign policy across the world. Despite the fact that Senator Eagleton was a scholar at Amherst College in Massachusetts and Oxford and a cum laude graduate from Harvard Law School and prominent attorney and politician, he could relate to anybody. “Just call me Tom,” he would always say, with a warm grin and a firm handshake. That was his style—plainspoken, genuine, and usually the funniest man in the room.

His ability to be the voice of everyday Americans was the reason he was elected to three terms in the U.S. Senate and the same reason it was so hard for him to leave public service in 1986. But, characteristically, he left office with very modest words. He said: “There is no sadness in leaving public life while you still have something worthwhile to do and the time and motivation to do it.”

And that he certainly did. In the famous style and personality that was Tom Eagleton, he went from public office but not from public life. A university lecturer, political commentator, writer, philanthropic fundraiser, community advocate, sports enthusiast, Tom continued to pursue dreams of a different kind.

While Tom shied away from claiming due credit, his good friend and colleague from the other side of the aisle, Senator John Danforth, summed up his amazing political career by saying: “What has set Tom Eagleton apart from the rest of us is not his intellect and his energy, as impressive as they are. It is his moral passion, his capacity for outrage, his insistence that justice be done, that wrongs be made right.”

More than what Americans gained from his victories, achievements, degrees, and accolades [are] the lessons we find in his words that we can take into the future: “Be civil and modest. Act with courage and integrity. Pursue your dreams and do right by your neighbors. And most of all, don’t take yourself too seriously.”

His memorial service was a wonderful tribute to Tom Eagleton. We all laughed and we cried. Some giants from the Senate were in attendance, and some Democratic ward workers from a nearby political ward who had been working the phones and putting up yard signs for [thirty], [forty] years—all sat together and listened to great stories about a great man.

We all appreciated the fact that Senator Tom Eagleton wanted the last word. So, a year before his death, he wrote a letter—I would like to make it part of the *Record* today—that everyone who attended the memorial service

was lucky enough to receive. It talks about his life, it talks about his service in the Senate, it talks about the things that were important to him, and about his family—which was most important to him. But you got the sense of the man even from his farewell address, and I will close today by using the last line he used in the letter he wrote that he wanted distributed at his memorial service: “So go forth in love and peace—be kind to dogs—and vote Democratic.”

I ask unanimous consent the letter be printed in the *Record*.

There being no objection, the [following] material [from STLtoday.com, March 11, 2007] was ordered to be printed in the *Record*, as follows:

Thomas F. Eagleton Farewell Address

Senator Tom Eagleton wrote the following words of farewell in May, 2006, with instructions that they be shared with his family and friends at Saturday’s memorial service.

Barbara, Terence, Christy, Michael, grandchildren Barbara, James and Greg, and friends all:

This is my last audience and, thus, I think I am entitled to the last word.

Using Lou Gehrig’s famous quote, “I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth.”

I have had a wonderful, understanding wife. She has endured all of my foibles and I love her for it. I have been an absentee father. Politics is an all-absorbing, all-consuming profession. It takes a total, exclusive grip on one’s life. So I apologize to Terence and Christy and express how much I love them.

I most fondly remember my mother. I was her favorite. I am reluctant to use Nixon phraseology, but my mother was a saint. She was a gentle woman and had the strength to put up with such determined personalities as my father, my brother[,] and me.

From early days, I wanted to be a senator. My father would have made a great one. He was a magnificent trial lawyer. He was, in my mind, as great a speaker as FDR. He did not do so well in politics because he insisted on making every campaign decision by himself. I think, in a subliminal sense, I oozed into politics because I knew I could not be as great a lawyer as him and maybe I could prove to be a good politician.

My father was one of my three idols along with FDR and Eugene Hecker, my English teacher at Country Day School. Mr. Hecker thought every American should be able to read, write[,] and speak the English language—including his students.

My dad did not think in insular or parochial terms. He thought a youngster should be exposed to all sorts of views. Once he took me to the old Coronado Hotel to hear Norman Thomas, the frequent Socialist candidate for [P]resident.

Another time he took me to see a Gerald L.K. Smith protest at Kiel Auditorium. Smith was a racist “preacher” in the style of Bob Jones of Bob Jones University.

Until 1944, dad was a Teddy Roosevelt Republican. He took me to the 1940 Republican convention in Philadelphia where Wendell Willkie was nominated. Dad thought Willkie was the “second coming” of Teddy Roosevelt.

In 1938, dad drove me by a German Bund (pro Nazi) meeting at Grand and Lafayette and explained the dangers of Hitler and anti-Semitism.

He did not take me, but he arranged to have someone else take me to Winston Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri. I wrote up the speech for the Country Day News, but left out the “Iron Curtain” part as being lesser importance than other portions of his speech.

Let me make it clear that my father did not push me into politics. His advice to me was to first get established as a lawyer and then consider politics. When I ran for Circuit Attorney at age [twenty-six] he said, “You are making a mistake. Wait a few years.”

In the Senate, I tried my best to express and vote my conscience. I confess to several “hold your nose” votes, like support for the dreadful price support program for cotton which, at one time, was the crop of choice in the Bootheel of Missouri. I think Senator Phil Hart, Senator Mike Mansfield, my wonderful friend Gaylord Nelson and Jack Danforth were amongst senators who voted their true conscience on every vote.

You may wonder why I mention Jack Danforth. There is a possibility that God is a Republican, and at this point I feel it best to cover all my bases.

I am most proud that the “Eagleton Amendment” was the legislative act that finally ended U.S. participation in the dreadful Vietnam War. I am proud of the original version of the War Powers Act which, had it been enacted as the bill left the Senate, would have re-established the shared powers of the President and the Congress when our nation went to war. This is what our Founding Father envisioned.

I am proud that, when Senator Muskie ran for President in 1972, he directed me to take over our Environmental Subcommittee and we passed the first major Clean Air and Clean Water Acts. By Muskie’s anointment, I was the first Vice Chairman for a standing committee in the Senate.

After leaving the Senate, I never missed being there — except for the debate on the nomination of Bork and the horrible, disastrous Iraq War. That war will go down in American history as one of our greatest blunders. It will be remembered, in part, as a curse to our Constitution when Attorney General

John Ashcroft attempted to put a democratic face on torture. Vice President Richard Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld also will go down in history for their total lack of planning for post-war Iraq.

I think, frankly, people stay too long in Congress. The world changes so rapidly that I think there should be a consistent and continuing infusion of new blood and fresh brain power into the legislative process. Eighteen years for me was enough.

I set forth my own critique of my Senate service. I could and should have done more. I had the energy. I had the desire. In analyzing myself, I blame it on my quickly moving attention span. Ted Kennedy has spent [thirty] plus years on National Health Insurance. I could not do that. I was too impatient. I wanted quick action and if I didn't get it in a few years, I would move on. That is a major fault for any legislator.

Finally, a word about the Catholic Church. This may seem to be a strange topic to be raised by me, but we are here in church and this is my final word. I do not pretend to be the world's greatest Catholic. Nevertheless, I think the Catholic Church is a vital part of American life, conscience[,] and thought. Just as our Constitution is a remarkable, living code of governance and made relevant to the time in which we live, so too the doctrine of the Catholic Church is a living code of moral behavior and belief which must be relevant to the time in which we live. Its timeliness relies upon its capacity to adapt.

I am a Pope John XXIII and an Archbishop John L. May Catholic, believing in what they said and what I believe they would have said had they lived longer.

The outreach of the Catholic Church from Pope Pius IX to Pope Pius XII was not the outreach of Pope John XXIII. It is John XXIII who made the Catholic Church relevant to the 20th Century and future popes must make it relevant to the 21st Century. It was Archbishop May who made the Catholic Church relevant to the 20th Century in St. Louis. In the era of a Christian right, we seem to have merged God's power into political power.

I am an optimist about death and believe there is a there there. Somehow, in some manner, I will be meeting my parents, my brother[,] and my friends. Somehow, Bob Koster will be waiting for me to tell me where I can buy everything 10% off.

So go forth in love and peace — be kind to dogs—and vote Democratic.

Tom E.

