

Edward M. Kennedy in Memoriam

What did he care about? It would take a book to list it all. But he spoke for what is best in America—what is best in us all—and his vision was broad:

- He cared about civil rights as “the still unfinished business of America.” He was instrumental in renewing the Lyndon Johnson Voting Rights Act in 1968, and in preventing Ronald Reagan from watering it down in 1982. He was a key player in passing the Fair Housing Law of 1968 “to unlock the doors of discrimination once and for all.”
- He cared about injustice abroad: He opposed South African apartheid, leading an illegal protest outside the prison where Nelson Mandela was held, and initiating a ban on American investments in South Africa. He won a ban on arms sales to the U.S.-sponsored Pinochet dictatorship in Chile.
- He cared about abuse of American power abroad: He vocally opposed the war in Vietnam beginning in 1967, calling it a “monstrous outrage.” He had the courage to oppose the cynical lies used to promote the war in Iraq—“My vote against this misbegotten war is the best vote I have cast in the United States Senate since I was elected in 1962.”
- He cared about peaceful and fair resolutions of conflict. He played a pivotal role in the success of the Northern Ireland peace agreement.
- He cared about social justice and fairness and creating opportunity at home:
 - He supported the Equal Rights Amendment.
 - He wrote the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act, requiring employers and public facilities to make reasonable accommodations for the disabled.
 - He supported the right of access to legal and safe abortions.
 - He co-sponsored with Sen. McCain the Immigration Reform Act of 2007 that would have provided legal status and a path to citizenship for the 12 to 20 million illegal immigrants currently in the U.S. The bill failed in the face of a Republican filibuster, but he had hoped to bring it up again in the current session.
 - He was instrumental in funding Meals on Wheels for the elderly.
 - He was a proponent of marriage equality.
 - Throughout his career he focused on public education, and the need to support it.
 - He was responsible for raising the minimum wage, and he supported unions and the dignity of labor—when students were demanding a living wage for Harvard employees, he called up the then president of Harvard and told him that the students were right.
 - Since 1974 he worked for universal health care—he was way ahead of many of us on this.

Born to wealth and a politically influential family, he could easily have fallen into a shallow get-along/go-along political career. But he took what he started out with, with all its contradictory aspects, and became the greatest United States Senator of his day.

Of *our* day. Many of us are his contemporaries, and we miss him. We miss his eloquence. We miss his sense of justice and fairness and compassion and humor. We miss his humanity.

He’s part of our history now—his life belongs to us all. A life to remember. A life of values that we can take as our own. A life of ideals that we can strive to bring to reality.

The Sudbury Democratic Town Committee