

outside of voting on the Iraq war 6 or 7 years ago. But this is probably the most important vote we will cast in our careers.

We have moved intelligently. I think we have moved cautiously. We are ready to move this bill forward, get it to the President's desk by the end of the year. It is going to make a difference in the lives of tens of millions of people in the country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BENNET). The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I see the Senator from Florida is on the Senate floor, so at this point I ask unanimous consent to reserve the remainder of the time on the majority side and yield to the Senator from Florida who will be recognized in morning business on the other side.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Florida.

FAREWELL TO THE SENATE

Mr. MARTINEZ. I thank the Senator from Illinois for his kindness and appreciate the opportunity to proceed with my final speech on the floor of the Senate, which is a unique moment in time for sure.

The opportunity to serve in the Senate is really the culmination of what has to be an unlikely journey from the place of my birth in a small city in Cuba to having journeyed to the United States and having had the incredible opportunity to be in the Halls of the most cherished institution of democracy anywhere in the world. It has been, indeed, a privilege and an unlikely journey, as I say.

I am really very grateful to the people of Florida for having given me the opportunity to represent them in the Senate, and I think of my time in the Senate as a culmination of my time in public service, the close of a fulfilling chapter in my own version of the American dream.

Having lived through the onset of tyranny in one country and played a part in the proud democratic traditions of another, I leave here today with a tremendous sense of gratitude for the opportunity to give back to the Nation I love—the Nation not of my birth but the Nation of my choice, which is a significant difference. It is a great nation with a proud tradition throughout its history of welcoming immigrants to this country and, in addition to welcoming, it has given us the opportunity to do great things for all who are a part of this country.

So that is why I consider serving my community, my State, and our Nation for the past 12 years a great privilege. It was a desire to give back, to make a contribution to this Nation that propelled me to enter a life of public service. As a mayor and Cabinet Secretary, and as a Senator, preserving opportunities for others to receive their own claim to the American dream has always been a mission for me.

I have worked during all phases of my public life with a sincere desire to make a difference, and today I prepare to return home knowing that I have done my best to advance the things that make our Nation great, prosperous, and free. We truly live in the greatest Nation in the history of the world, and throughout my life in public service I have been humbled to play a proud role in this democratic history of our Nation.

As mayor of Orange County, it was a real pleasure and privilege to lead the community that had done so much for me and for my family when we first arrived in this country. Then to have the opportunity to lead them as mayor was indeed a rare treat and a wonderful opportunity. We carried out an aggressive agenda and tried to do the that which would better the lives of everybody who lived in Orange County, and I am proud of some of the many things we accomplished there.

Upon my service as mayor, I received a call from then-President-elect George W. Bush to serve my adopted Nation as the first Cuban American to serve in the Cabinet of a President, which was, again, a rare privilege and a wonderful opportunity. The call to serve as HUD Secretary was unexpected and not only a source of pride for me and my family but especially for the entirety of the Cuban American community. I will always be grateful to President Bush for giving me such a historic opportunity.

My time of serving on the Cabinet was punctuated by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. These were sobering events. These were events that turned the focus of the Nation from a fairly carefree time dealing largely with domestic issues to a focus on the reality of what had occurred in New York and Pennsylvania and right here not far from this Capitol. It was part of my job as HUD Secretary to work on the reconstruction of Lower Manhattan. That and a number of other things were added as responsibilities for those of us in the administration at that time. Forevermore I will remember those days as having been a very significant part of my life in public service.

There is no question that it was a privilege to serve the President, but there is no greater honor than to have the people of Florida send me to Washington to serve them as a Member of the Senate. Aside from the debates and the speeches and all the work that goes into turning ideas into law, one of the most rewarding experiences has been helping Floridians resolve issues they have in their everyday lives.

In the short time I have been here, my office has assisted more than 36,000 Florida families through casework and written correspondence and countless more efforts. We made tremendous progress on many of the issues that face our State, including efforts to develop our natural energy resources while protecting the environment, seeking to modernize our military

through increased shipbuilding and ensuring we meet the Navy's goal of strategic dispersal—very important to our country but also to Florida—and working to protect our Nation's home buyers from bad loans, bad investments, and predatory lending practices.

It has also been rewarding to know our work can often impact the lives of those living outside our borders fighting for freedom and those things which we hold dear. I brought to my work a belief that it is always necessary to provide a voice for those who are silenced for attempting to advance the cause of freedom.

Having lived under Cuba's repressive dictatorship, I have always recognized the struggle of those who fight for freedom. That has always been, and will continue to be, a lifelong passion. I have taken every opportunity to recognize those engaged in Cuba's peaceful civic struggle for democratic change and those who stand up for their human rights. There are names such as Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet, Antunez, the Damas de Blanco—the “Ladies in White”—and also the victims of the Black Spring government crackdowns. It is my fervent hope that one day in the not too distant future the people in Cuba will live in freedom with dignity and hope for a better tomorrow. Freedom is their God-given right.

Even though I will no longer hold public office, I will devote myself to seeing the day when the people of Cuba can live in freedom. The preservation of all freedoms, whether they be in Cuba or around the world, call us to stand up wherever and whenever it is threatened.

One series of events will stand out in my mind as evidence of the power of an individual. A constituent of mine—a woman by the name of Cuc Foshee was falsely imprisoned in Ho Chi Minh's prison while she was visiting her family in Vietnam. This was a lady who fled Vietnam and who lived in Florida. She went back to Vietnam for a family wedding, and while she was there her views about the government of Vietnam were clear and well-known, so she was, for no particular reason, thrown in jail in Vietnam. When this matter came to my attention, she had been in detention for over a year. She was denied any of the basic rights that we understand and know. She had no opportunity to have contact with home, and she had no real hearing and no fair trial. Yet she was still in prison.

One of the wonderful opportunities I have had in my time here was to work for her release. It so happened that, working with President Bush and then-Secretary of State Rice, we had before the Senate the Vietnamese Free Trade Agreement. President Bush was planning a visit to Vietnam upon the completion of that agreement. So utilizing the resources all of us have in the Senate to ensure the consideration of that free-trade agreement was somehow connected to the freedom of this innocent woman, I was able to work with

Secretary Rice, leading our State Department at that time, as well as our President, to ensure that Cuc Foshee was freed.

I have never been more proud than the day we were able to get a phone call that she was on her way to San Francisco, and then have a wonderful reunion with her and her family in Orlando, FL. It is something I will never forget.

We did also strive mightily in this body to seek a solution to immigration reform, something I felt very strongly about. And being the only immigrant in this body, I believed I was dutybound to try to advance that cause. I am proud to say our efforts for immigration reform gave me the opportunity to work very closely with Senator Ted Kennedy, whom we are also honoring today, with nearly a half century of service in the Senate.

I can recall reminiscing with him one day near his desk. He came to the Senate in 1962. That was the same year I came here from Cuba. It was also immediately after we had a very serious confrontation involving Cuba—the Cuban missile crisis. I remember discussing with him how his family will be tied to that period of time, to the history of Cuba, and how deeply that had touched my life as well. In addition to the many opportunities to reminisce about things such as that with him, I hold dear the opportunity to have sat at a table and negotiated with him what I thought would have been a very good immigration reform package—a bill which I believed would be good for our country and good for many people in our country.

We didn't always agree. We didn't always have the same point of view. But we always found a way to get along and be very civil about our differences, and I admired greatly his ability to put differences aside and his desire to find consensus. What was most telling about working with Senator Kennedy is that he was committed to reaching an outcome. He wanted a solution, which then meant—and this might be a lesson for current issues today—that he could put aside the whole banana in order to get what he could.

I believe in working with him and then some other colleagues who have become such good and dear friends, such as Senator GRAHAM and Senator MCCAIN and many others; Senator KYL, who made an effort to get this legislation done—I must say I leave with a sense of regret that is not completed, but I do know that is an issue that will have to be addressed at some point in the future.

I would also quote from President Reagan on that issue. He talked about the idea that America remains a beacon of freedom to the world, when he spoke about the “shining city on the hill.”

In his farewell address to our Nation, he touched on the idea that the contributions of all individuals are what make our Nation great. He said:

If there had to be city walls, the walls had doors, and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here.

I believe those words to be as true today as the day he said them. I do hope, in the not too distant future, this Congress will address itself to that very important issue.

Whether it is immigration, budgets or Supreme Court Justices, I will also miss the debates. I thank my fellow Senators for their collegiality and their friendship. I know these friendships are going to be the hardest thing to leave here—on both sides of the aisle. I must say I have been very touched by the warm and gracious phone calls and other expressions I have received from my colleagues, as I say, on both sides of the aisle. It makes me feel good about my relationship with all of you, and I hope it will be a relationship that will continue.

I wish to especially take a moment to thank Senator MCCONNELL, Senator KYL, Senator ALEXANDER and the other members of our leadership team for their kindness and willingness to work with me and give me opportunities to participate in our great debates. I also wish to thank Senator REID and Senator DURBIN for their friendship and their willingness to work with me as well.

I have had a very special and close working relationship with my colleague from Florida, Senator BILL NELSON. We have known each other for long time, long before we came to the Senate. It has been a real privilege and pleasure to work with him. We worked together well enough to give Florida an excellent team here, and I am pleased to not only have had this fine working relationship with him but also that our staffs have worked together well. I thank his Chief of Staff, Pete Mitchell, and others in his office for the wonderful way in which they worked with us.

All of you have extended great kindness to Kitty and to me. I hope we will have an opportunity to see you in Florida, where we will continue to make our home. I wish to especially recognize some people in my staff who have made my office go. As all of you know, we rely on these folks to make us look good at times and always be dedicated to us. My State director has been Kevin Doyle, who has done a magnificent job; senior director Kate Bush; my communications director, Ken Lundberg; legislative director, Michael Zehr; my executive assistant, Terry Couch, who has been bouncing with me from mayor to Secretary to Senator, and I daresay may even continue to hang around with me in some way; my chief of staff and longtime friend Tom Weinberg. I thank him very especially. He worked with me as county administrator and then came to join me here.

There are a few folks who were on my staff initially but have now moved on: my first chief of staff, John Little; Kerry Feehery; and my former State director, Matthew Hunter, were also

very important in my work, and I appreciate them very much.

I have to say one of the most singular honors I have had in my service has been to work with the men and women who serve in our Armed Forces and to get to know them—whether it is people in their leadership such as General Petraeus, who now is a Floridian in the Central Command in Tampa, or some Floridians serving in the National Guard, having lunch with them in Kabul or Baghdad or other places and here in Washington or around the world. They are an amazing group of people. They have my respect and my deep-felt gratitude for the work they do as they serve our Nation in foreign, distant places—and their families who, with them, are part of serving as well.

While saying thank-yous, I also would like to say a thank you to my wife Kitty, who has been a wonderful partner and friend in my life of public service, as she has been in all phases of my life. I promise you, if it were not for Kitty, I would not have done half of what I have done in life so I am eternally grateful to the good Lord for the blessing of having a wonderful life companion.

I wish to tell you all in George LeMieux you will have a very fine person. I hope you will give him the same warm welcome you gave to me and will be willing to work with him. I think he will serve the people of Florida well. I wish to extend a warm welcome to George LeMieux as he joins this wonderful body.

I am humbled by the trust the people in Florida placed in me. It has not been easy to make a decision to move on, but it is a decision I have made and I do it with a heavy heart.

I also particularly wish to address myself to the Cuban-American community throughout our country but especially in Florida, who have had such great pride in me, who have put so much of their faith and hopes in my public life. I simply wish to say to them: me hicieron suyos y creyeron en mi. Compartimos el orgullo en lo que somos y lo que hemos logrado. Su apoyo entusiasta ha tocado mi corazón, y atesoraré estas memorias para siempre, which means simply that I am appreciative of the pride we share together and what we have accomplished. Your enthusiastic support has touched my heart and I will always carry that with me.

My time of service is only a fraction of the nearly two and a half centuries that have passed since our Founders charted our course as a free people, but the opportunity for someone such as me to serve speaks volumes about the promise they made and one our Nation continues to keep, even to this day.

I wish to close with a quote from Jose Marti, a Cuban patriot, a hero of mine and to all those who strive to further the cause of freedom. He said:

Liberty is the essence of life. Whatever is done without it is imperfect.

With that, I think I have tried to enjoy the fruits of this liberty that this

country has to offer, but I have also tried to extend it to others in every way that I could. I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to have served in this body. I am humbled by this moment, and I am grateful to my colleagues for your friendship and support.

I yield the floor.

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, as Senator MARTINEZ knows, the minority leader of the Senate could not be here this morning. I made some brief remarks yesterday, but let me say, just kicking off some comments I know others of my colleagues want to make, that in addition to the other attributes that Senator MARTINEZ has brought to the Senate representing the people Florida, his personality, his engaging wit, and his love of people, his spirit, his friendliness, and his genuineness, all have been appreciated by all of us, I know, very much. So it is even more difficult for us to see him leave because, in addition to being a good colleague and a great Senator, he has been a wonderful friend.

I think all of us appreciate that quality of genuineness, which is not always the order of the day when it comes to people in politics. With Kitty and MEL MARTINEZ, it is. We appreciate and love them very much and we will miss them.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois is recognized.

TRIBUTE TO SENATOR MEL MARTINEZ

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I wish to say a few words about my friendship and my admiration for the retiring Senator from the State of Florida. I didn't know Senator MARTINEZ before he came to the Senate. I think the first time I had an insight into who he was and what he brought to the Senate was at a Prayer Breakfast, when Senator MARTINEZ explained to a number of us how he happened to be an American. He was one of the fortunate few who escaped from Cuba under the tyranny of the Castro regime and was given a chance to come to Florida. He told me and others how difficult it was, struggling with a language he didn't know. He explained that one of the real saviors for him was the fact that he was a good athlete so he was able to play many sports, make many friends, and learn English in the process. He became not only an integral part of that community in Florida but an integral part of America's political future.

In his story of growing up in Florida, his family—his wife Kitty and his children—mean the world to him. When I heard he was retiring, I called from Illinois to reach him and wish him the best. I asked, as everyone would: Why? He said: It is all about my family.

I wish to tell the Senator I salute him for that. It takes an extraordinary amount of courage for a person to give up the adulation and the heady atmosphere of the Senate, to remember what is most important in their lives.

I also thank him for his extraordinary courage and helpfulness on so many issues, particularly when it came to issues of immigration. I know Senator MARTINEZ feels this personally. This is something that he has been through himself and he knows so many others alike who are looking for that chance to prove to America that they can make a contribution.

Senator MARTINEZ has been an outspoken supporter of the DREAM Act, which was an opportunity for younger people to have their chance in America. I thank the Senator for that. I know it was not easy because there are many critics, as the Senator you told me, who would come forward and tell him what a bad idea it was. But the Senator's courage in standing for that is an indication of the kind of person he is.

Florida is going to lose a great Senator in MEL MARTINEZ. America is going to lose an important voice in the Senate. But I don't think we have heard the last of MEL MARTINEZ. I think his contribution, whether as a citizen or some other walk of life in public service, is in the future.

I am honored to count you as a friend and colleague in the Senate. I wish you and your family the very best.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee is recognized.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I often think how the best stories in the Senate are not the political stories. We can all recount them—Senator INOUE's bravery in World War II, leading to a Congressional Medal of Honor; the former majority leader, Bill Frist, performing open heart surgery on General Petraeus when he was accidentally shot in Fort Campbell; Ben Nighthorse Campbell on the Olympic judo team; JIM BUNNING in the Hall of Fame; JIM INHOFE circling the world in an airplane the way Wiley Post did; Ted Stevens flying the first cargo plane into Beijing in 1944 at the end of World War II; and then after the elections of 2004, we had Ken Salazar from Colorado, 15th-generation American, whose family came to this country so early; we had Barack Obama with his incredible story; and then we had MEL MARTINEZ in the same year.

Despite the emotion of all those stories, the story of MEL MARTINEZ stands out to me. As the Senator from Illinois said, imagine growing up in Cuba—a good life. Not a rich life, but a good life—so well recounted in this book, "A Sense Of Belonging," that Senator MARTINEZ wrote. Suddenly the Castro regime comes, it is 1958, and one day your parents put you on an airplane and send you to Miami, not knowing whether they will ever see you again. Then foster homes, then bringing your parents over, going to Florida State, meeting Kitty, becoming the first Hispanic lawyer, I guess, in Orange County, and then the mayor and then a Cabinet member, then Senator, then Republican National Committee chairman—what a terrific story, so well told in this book.

One thing about our country that is unique is we believe anything is possible. The rest of the world looks at us and thinks that we Americans are very naive, but constantly we prove that anything is possible, over and over again—often with the election of a President from unusual circumstances, as we just had. But the story of MEL MARTINEZ, his escape from Cuba's communism, his coming from that, speaking no English, to what he has already accomplished, and now moving on to yet another career, this one in private life, is an inspiration for our country. He has enriched this body. He says in his book:

My journey has taught me that it is not an empty cliché that this country is a land where dreams can and do come true.

His life shows that. We have enjoyed his friendship. We appreciate his example for the country, and we wish him and Kitty well for the next chapter in their lives.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I join my colleagues in congratulating my friend from Florida for his service to our country. He has served in so many different ways as has already been noted. But he is truly an example of the American success story, someone who came here, established himself, and has risen to the very highest, I guess you would call it, echelons of this country in terms of public service and his contributions to the private economy in this country. So it is with great regret that we say goodbye to him as a Senator but continue to maintain the strong friendships we have built and developed during his service here.

They say that someone is measured not by the days in their life but by the life in their days. While Senator MARTINEZ has maybe not served here as long as some other Senators—he and I came into this Senate together back in 2005—he may not be measured by his days of life in the Senate, but he is certainly measured by the life of his days in the Senate because he has added vitally to the debate here. He is an incredibly thoughtful Senator, someone from whom I have to say I have learned a lot—not just in our personal friendship but professionally—because he brings so many insights and such a thoughtful way in the way he looks at issues—domestic issues, foreign policy issues. I have learned a lot about Cuba. I have learned a lot about Latin America.

I have learned a lot about the Hispanic community in this country. And those are insights and contributions that he has made that no one else could make. It is very rare, indeed, to have someone of his experience and life experience and his quality to serve in the Senate and be able to rub shoulders and learn every single day from those experiences.

I congratulate Senator MARTINEZ and his family. As he said, like myself and many others of us, MEL married over