

After graduation, to save for law school, he spent a year on a boat that supplied oil rigs in the North Sea. He pitched in on everything—did whatever it took to help the team—and helped the crew navigate the ship through choppy waters.

These qualities will sound familiar to everyone who has worked with LUTHER since.

He built a sterling reputation as an up-and-coming lawyer in private practice. He then set it aside to serve the people of the State he loves as Alabama's attorney general.

In the fine Alabama tradition of public servants, like his friends and mentors Jeff Sessions and RICHARD SHELBY, he combined a steel spine with a servant's heart. Whenever the people of the State needed defending—their businesses, their religious liberties, their Second Amendment rights—their attorney general was there for them.

Then as now, he fought fiercely when times required it and his principles demanded it, but no matter how important the issue at hand, from the Supreme Court to the Senate floor, LUTHER never loses his good humor or his conviction that we serve in order to help our constituents, not to aggrandize ourselves.

LUTHER STRANGE reminds us that character counts. He reminds us that deeply held conservative values do not in any way stand opposed to collegiality and common decency. To the contrary, our values require these things.

He reminds us that the American people need not choose between leaders who share their principles and leaders who dignify public service. They should hold their elected officials to a high standard and demand that we do too.

If you cannot tell, LUTHER's colleagues look up to him in more ways than one. We are sorry to see him go.

In the farewell speech that Senator STRANGE delivered on this floor, he challenged his colleagues to revive greater comity in this body. He implored us not to give up on bipartisanship or on building friendships that run deeper than policy disagreements. He reminded us that the Senate's Marble Room, across the hallway from this Chamber, used to be a popular gathering place. Senators from both parties would relax and get to know one another above and beyond the specific disputes of the day. Today, LUTHER pointed out, this room often sits empty.

His advice is well taken, and I have an idea how we could begin to put it into practice. All of us on both sides of the aisle could try to approach our work with more of the optimism, can-do spirit, and reverence for this great institution that LUTHER STRANGE has brought to work every single day.

Of course, the Senate's loss will be a happy gain for LUTHER's beloved family.

Despite the fact that his bright idea for a first date with Melissa was a trip

to the Talladega Superspeedway to take in the Talladega 500, he convinced her to marry him anyway. Their loving partnership has now spanned 36 years and counting. They have raised two sons. I hear that Luke is just an inch shy of his dad's height and that Keehn is an inch taller. In recent years, LUTHER and Melissa have become the proud grandparents of two young boys.

I have it on good authority that a certain black Lab named Sophie might be the most excited of all the Stranges to welcome the Senator back home to Birmingham.

Wherever LUTHER's distinguished career takes him next, I know he is glad it will involve more time with the people he loves most.

He has served with distinction in the Senate during a year of historic achievements. On behalf of Alabamians, he has made vital contributions on the Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry; Armed Services; Budget; and Energy and Natural Resources Committees. He has cast votes to help middle-class families and set America on a brighter trajectory for years to come.

We thank him and wish him every success in his future endeavors, and we salute him for the dedicated service he has rendered to his country and to the people of the great State of Alabama.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

WORK OF THE REPUBLICAN-LED CONGRESS

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, often here in Washington, it can be difficult to focus on what counts.

We live in an information environment which is increasingly atomized and persistently polarized. Almost all will inevitably focus on who is up and who is down in the endless cycle of partisan gamesmanship. News cycles come and news cycles go. Poll numbers jump, then fall, then jump again, and fall again, but nobody should forget that

what really matters around here, at the end of the day, is policy, and the first year of unified Republican government has delivered plenty of that.

In 2016, the American people faced a stark choice. The Republicans promised a new era of deregulation and limited government—a new policy approach that would entrust free markets and free citizens to drive us forward. The Democrats, on the other hand, renewed and restated their faith in the effectiveness of government, centered here in Washington, to direct and command the national welfare. The American people spoke loudly, and they spoke decisively. The Republicans were given the reins and were instructed to sort all of this out.

Nobody needs to remind me that elections are the beginning of the challenge, not the end. The Republicans may have prevailed in the campaign, but an election won is nothing more than an opportunity seized. It is nothing more than a charge to carry out the promises offered on the trail, and that is precisely what we are doing.

Here in the Senate, despite fits and starts, we are moving the ball forward. Notwithstanding often vicious treatment by the media and the constant obstruction of the Democrats here in Congress, we are getting work done. Promises made in 2016 have become promises kept in 2017. The American people were promised the removal of redtape and infuriating bureaucratic encumbrances on economic growth. As soon as we took office in early 2017, we moved to do just that.

We confirmed Neomi Rao as the Administrator of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs. Under her stewardship, the Executive has cut over a dozen old rules for every single new rule created. Regulation has been subjected to actual cost-savings analysis, and, likely, billions have been saved in the process.

Here in Congress we passed a dozen CRAs to cut down on costly and ineffective rules passed in the twilight hours of the Obama administration. The list of deregulatory items speaks for itself: restoration of free markets and free competition on internet, done; new environmental policy to unleash the potential of American energy production, done; reform of public lands designation and renewal of State and local control over western territories, done; Labor Department reform that restores bargaining power to employees and employers rather than unions and bureaucrats, done. On nearly every front, from education to justice issues and everything in between, there has been substantial progress.

Personnel are often the catalyst to policy, and we still have nominations in several agencies to come. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau is in good hands with Mick Mulvaney and will eventually be handed off to a capable permanent Director. Federal Trade Commission nominations should be arriving shortly, and just recently the

Senate Judiciary Committee unanimously reported the next Director of the USPTO, Andrei Iancu. As a long-time champion of intellectual property rights, and head of the High-Tech Task Force, I encourage my colleagues to swiftly confirm him to this post.

Overall, this President has delivered on his nominations, and his nominees have delivered on his promises. While I am on the topic of nominations, I want to talk about the judiciary. Controversy seems to be swirling, due to a few recent—and I would say unfortunate—bumps in the road, but we must not miss the forest no matter how much the press would like to harken on a few of the trees. The accomplishments of this administration and Senate in addressing the judiciary have been historic.

Neil Gorsuch was a superb choice for the Supreme Court. At a critical juncture for our courts, he stands poised to seize the mantle left by Justice Antonin Scalia and carry the cause of originalism and textualism forward for a new generation, but Justice Gorsuch was only the beginning. From the circuit courts to the district courts, judicial nominations across the board have really been outstanding. We have confirmed more circuit court nominees this year than in any President's first year in American history.

We accomplished this despite Democrats using their time-tested obstruction tactics and even coming up with some new ones. They forced us to take 18 cloture votes on judicial nominees alone this year, compared to just one cloture vote during the first year of all previous Presidents combined. Nevertheless, we got the job done. The results will be felt for decades to come.

Whatever our differences on other issues, conservatives across the board heartily approve of the way this administration has handled judicial nominations.

I will continue to work with my colleagues in the Senate Judiciary Committee, as well as Leader MCCONNELL, to confirm these judges. As the rest of our agenda gains steam, judicial selection will remain the vanguard. There are more judges to come this new year, and we are going to keep on confirming them. Each and every week, a new trial or appellate court judge will add to the ranks of a rapidly improving judiciary.

Finally, on the legislative front, this administration and Republican Congress have just delivered the most consequential and far-reaching tax reform package in 30 years. When other administrations and other sessions of Congress couldn't get it done, we did. Individuals will see their tax rates drop. Businesses, from large corporations that employ thousands to small businesses paying passthrough rates, will enjoy new capital for investment, expansion, and more. In fact, seemingly to the dismay of our Democratic colleagues, businesses are already responding to the good news with announcements of bonuses and new ventures, and that is just the beginning.

On top of it all, the individual mandate has been repealed and ObamaCare is now firmly on its way out, thank goodness. Despite earlier difficulties, we are well on our way toward repeal. As we move toward 2018, we can look forward to additional policy success on everything from entitlements to infrastructure to immigration.

In conclusion, I don't want to hear anyone claim that this President and this Congress have not gotten things done. Promises were made and promises were kept. Only a year into things, we are making good on our pledge for historic change in Washington.

NOMINATION OF RYAN NELSON

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, on another matter, I would like to offer a few words of support for the nomination of Ryan Nelson to be the Solicitor for the Department of Interior.

Mr. Nelson has a distinguished legal background. He has worked in both the private and public sector, including in all three branches of the Federal Government. Most importantly, he is respected by those members of the Idaho State Bar who know him best.

He has been endorsed by numerous colleagues representing a broad spectrum of political views. Mr. Nelson's exemplary legal background makes him ideally suited to serve as the Department of Interior's Solicitor, and we owe the people of Utah and the West the opportunity to confirm him at once.

Once confirmed, I am very eager to work with Mr. Nelson and Secretary Ryan Zinke to continue a shared mission of restoring trust between the Federal Government and the people of the West.

There have been some marvelous changes this year, and there will be even more if we could just work together and quit all the bumbling around here as though we hate each other. I am grateful for my colleagues on both sides of the aisle. I believe we have made important strides this year, and I think we can make even more. I am grateful for what we have been able to get done this year.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. CASEY. Thank you, Mr. President.

I ask to speak in morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is recognized.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I rise this morning to outline some ideas about our national security as we approach the end of the year.

Many Americans are heading into the holiday season with some very reasonable fears about the threats facing our Nation. In 2017, we saw an emboldened North Korean regime testing missiles and nuclear weapons. Terrorist groups

continue to execute attacks across the globe. Violent state and nonstate actors continue to destabilize Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Yemen, Nigeria, and others. We saw Russia continue meddling in elections, just as they did in ours last year.

This is a year of great volatility and uncertainty. However, we also saw the U.S. military leading an international coalition that is loosening the stranglehold ISIS had on parts of Iraq and Syria. We saw the recovery of American hostages, including constituents of mine, held captive for years by terrorists. In Europe, U.S. and NATO forces partnered to counter Russian aggression and dispel propaganda. U.S. development assistance projects helped hundreds of millions of people across the world, including 11 million farmers and 27½ million children under the Feed the Future Program.

Even when it seemed like there were many reasons to be afraid, the U.S. military, diplomats, and development professionals were responsible for a lot of good progress this year.

On Monday of this week, President Trump laid out his administration's national security strategy. I commend the work of the national security professionals who crafted the document which warrants a thorough review. It is a substantial body of work, but it paints a very dark picture of the world and our role in it.

A little more than 2 years ago, I stood on this floor and invoked the words of Senator Vandenberg—the Senator from Michigan back in the World War II era—for “maximum united effort” and Senator Vandenberg's admonition that politics should stop at the water's edge. When I spoke these words, this was at a time when it seemed the only response my Republican colleagues had to the Obama administration's foreign policy moves was categorical condemnation.

I will not categorically condemn the administration's new strategy, but I will pose a challenge to reject the false choice between investing at home and engaging abroad; utilize our diplomatic and development toolkit as much, if not more, than we exercise our defense capabilities; lead by example. The world will indeed become a dark place if we hide America's light under a bushel basket, to use words from Scripture.

In the face of our adversaries' aggression, we can choose between competition and cooperation. The new strategy outlined by the administration references competition nearly three times more than cooperation. I suggest to the administration the words of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who said: “Competition has been shown to be useful up to a certain point and no further, but cooperation, which is a thing we must strive for today, begins where competition leaves off.”

Mr. President, I yield to the distinguished Democratic leader.