

I can tell you that it is always, for any Senator, a moment that one has a conflicted heart when a man or a woman on their team who has contributed so much and has become part of the family, the Senate family, is ready to take on a new challenge away from these Chambers to develop their skills and to take their experience to a new extended conversation. It is a bitter-sweet moment.

We are proud of what our team members have contributed and proud of what they are going to contribute as they go off to a new responsibility.

Today, that member of my team is Louie Reckford. Louie, seated behind me, first came to my office in the fall of 2013 as part of that semester's intern class, and it wasn't long before he stood out, distinguished himself, and thus, when we were hiring a deputy scheduler the following March, Louie's name was at the top of the list, and he formally became a part of our team.

So for more than 5 years now, he has contributed. He has never stopped distinguishing himself, taking on one task and one position after another and excelling at every one of them. In his 2 years as deputy scheduler, Louie fielded thousands of requests for meetings, from constituents, from nonprofits, from local businesses and more, making sure that every detail was right. His attention to detail and to turnaround time made a very positive impression with all who contacted our office.

Over the last 3 years, he has been an invaluable member of my correspondence and foreign policy team, first as legislative correspondent and later as legislative aide. On top of sending out 181,000 pieces of constituent mail, mail from my office to my constituents, an average of 251 per day—on top of that, he has used his considerable leadership skills and subject-matter experience and strategic negotiating abilities to help pass a host of bills and resolutions in committee and here on the floor. When our foreign policy top staffer was transitioning into a new role as legislative director, he stepped up to fill the gap, helping to manage a team with two foreign policy fellows at that time. I could spend quite a lot more time extolling his list of accomplishments—his instrumental role in planning several international congressional delegations, his role in helping me carve out a new role on the Foreign Relations Committee, and, of course, that vital role of leading our office softball team.

I will just say that Louie will be deeply missed by all members of Team Merkley, and we wish him well in his new adventure with Foreign Policy for America, where he will continue to be an invaluable leader of a myriad number of pressing foreign policy issues confronting our Nation today.

Louie Reckford, we here in the Senate wish you all the best in your next chapter of contributing to solving the complex international issues that face our Nation.

Thank you, Madam President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, the Appropriations Committee staff was working until midnight last night, as they do so often, on the disaster supplement. We know that in January the House sent us a disaster supplemental appropriations bill to help communities across the Nation. These communities were dealing with the deadly aftermath of hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and volcanoes.

It has been my experience over the years that normally disaster bills sail through both Chambers of Congress. Every Member knows that one day it will be his State or her State that needs help recovering from a disaster.

I well remember when we had a terrible hurricane in Vermont; it created the most damage in generations in our State. The day after the devastation, I went with our Governor and the head of our National Guard in a helicopter to survey the damage. For many towns, the only way we could reach them was in a helicopter. The bridges were like a child's toy, twisted and gone. The roads totally disappeared. Houses were upside down in the river.

It was heartbreaking, but as we were going there, I received email after email. My Senate colleagues, many of them Republicans, said "Vermont stood with us when we had"—and they named the disaster. "We will stand with you." That is what we do. It doesn't make any difference whether you are a Republican or a Democrat; if there is a disaster, you stand together.

What I cannot understand is that in my 44 years here—it was different this time. When we brought up a disaster supplemental appropriations bill in January of this year, the President of the United States came out swinging against it. Why? Because the bill contained assistance for Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico had been hit by 2 back-to-back, category 5 hurricanes, and apparently providing assistance to 3 million Americans in need was a step too far for him. He did not want to provide aid to these Americans. "Not one more dime for Puerto Rico" he was reported to have said—shocking words for somebody who holds the highest office in the land, especially after they had nearly unprecedented back-to-back hurricanes.

From the beginning, I have said what my Republican colleagues and Democratic colleagues have always said. It is a role of the Federal Government to stand by all Americans in times of need. It should not matter whether you are a Georgia peach farmer, a California small business owner, or a child living in San Juan. If your community is devastated by a natural disaster, you are an American, and the American community will stand with you. That is what I have always fought for.

So here we are, 5 months later—5 months of negotiations, 5 months of talks—and we finally reach a deal on a disaster aid bill that helps all—*all* Americans. We don't pick and choose. It is a good deal. It addresses the need from Alabama to California and many States in between. But 5 months is too long to wait. It is far too long for the communities who are trying to rebuild their homes and their towns, so we have to act now.

The President has asked that we add \$4.5 million to the disaster supplemental bill to address the issues that we face at our southern border. I agree with the President that some of this money is badly needed. We don't dispute that. But everyone in this Chamber, Republicans and Democrats, knows that under this President, anything to do with immigration is controversial; it is going to be hotly debated. We have been working night and day to strike a compromise on the President's request. When we finished in the middle of last night, we were close, but we are not there yet.

I hope in the next few hours we can resolve our remaining differences, but if we cannot reach agreement, then at least pass the disaster bill without it today—not tomorrow, not next week, not next month—today. Five months has been too long for America to have to wait.

We have a deal on the disaster aid bill. It is a bipartisan bill. It is supported by Democrats and Republicans. It is ready to go. Let's pass it today, and let's show the American people we stand with them in times of crisis, just as Members of this body stood with my beloved State of Vermont when we were hit. We didn't say we are Republicans or Democrats. We said that we are Americans, and Americans have been hurt, and Americans stand together when we are suffering. Today, Americans are suffering across this country. Let us—as the conscience of the Nation, the U.S. Senate, let us stand with them, and let's get the disaster aid they need.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECESS

Mr. SASSE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess until noon today.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 10:57 a.m., recessed until 12 noon and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mrs. FISCHER).

MORNING BUSINESS—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.