

Republican Party in the State, and his vision continues to be realized as the party continues its growth in the State.

“John Paul” is a name that is just as familiar in Arkansas as it is to my colleagues in the Senate who served with him before serving in this Chamber as well as the many Members in the House who worked alongside him during his years of elected service and through decades more of providing assistance to his beloved Arkansas.

You would have been hard-pressed to find a kinder, gentler man than John Paul Hammerschmidt. As a mentor and friend, John Paul’s wisdom and counsel have shaped my Washington experience more than anyone else. When I ran for Congress in 2001, I sought John Paul out for advice. I quickly learned, as a newly elected Member of Congress for the Third District of Arkansas, how fond his former colleagues were of him. Senior Members of the House of Representatives had so much respect for him that they welcomed me into their inner circle because he had given his approval.

It was John Paul who taught me that after the election is over, there are no more Republicans, no more Democrats, there are only the people of Arkansas. His dedication to his constituents during his career of public service was unmatched and is a marker we should all strive to meet. During his time in Congress, he served in the minority, but he would disagree without being disagreeable.

I always valued John Paul’s friendship and his continued advice.

John Paul set the standard for helping Arkansans. That bar is something members of the Arkansas congressional delegation continue to strive toward today.

His vision to improve life for Arkansans led him to serve on the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee as well as the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. By the time he retired, he served as the latter’s ranking member.

Using his position on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, he helped secure funds for roads and infrastructure projects, including Interstate 540, which now bears his name, the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport, as well as protecting the Buffalo River and getting a designation as the first national river.

John Paul left big shoes to fill. He believed he could make a difference in the lives of Arkansans because he believed in loving his fellow man. We are capitalizing on the benefits he helped provide—a testament to his time in Washington.

From all Arkansans, I thank John Paul for his devotion to public service, his leadership, and his dedication to Arkansas. His example is something we should continue to strive for in Washington.

REMEMBERING SERGEANT EDWARD GOBEL

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the life of SGT Edward Gobel, a long-time resident of Las Vegas, NV, who passed away on April 1, 2015. Ed Gobel was a man whose strong sense of duty to his Nation drove him to continuously seek new ways to help others and improve his community, and I am grateful for his years of service. He will truly be missed.

Sergeant Gobel proudly served in the 101st Airborne Division during the Vietnam war. After his military service left him confined to a wheelchair, he drew from his personal experiences to help enact positive change in Las Vegas. He became a leading advocate for military veterans and the disabled in Nevada. Recognizing the importance of being involved in his community, Sergeant Gobel took on numerous roles, from director of the Council of Nevada Veterans Organizations to State commander of the Veterans of the Vietnam War. His tireless efforts to push key bills through the Nevada Legislature, such as a bill to create Nevada’s first veterans home, earned him the Jefferson Award for Public Service in 2003. And in 2014, he was honored with the Chapel of Four Chaplains Legion of Honor Gold Medallion for his giving nature and commitment to service. I am impressed by Sergeant Gobel’s investment in the people and issues that mattered most to him and by his continuous belief that change was possible.

Sergeant Gobel is survived by his wife of nearly 40 years, Caryl Gobel, along with his sister, children, and grandchildren. My thoughts are with his family as they celebrate him and a life well lived.

MARRIAGE EQUALITY CASES BEFORE THE SUPREME COURT

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, this morning, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments on the marriage equality cases. The legal principle at stake is whether the 14th Amendment to the Constitution protects marriages between individuals of the same sex. But at the heart, these cases represent something more fundamental. They are about the right of every American to marry the person they love and to have their relationships treated with the respect and dignity to which every American is entitled.

I am proud that my home State of Vermont has embraced love, equality, and freedom in its active and leading role on marriage equality. In 2000, Vermont was the first in the Nation to provide for civil unions. As the years went by, Vermont came to see that civil unions were insufficient to provide the protections all American couples are entitled to, and in 2009, the Vermont Legislature on a bipartisan vote was the first State legislature to enact marriage equality into law.

Vermont, which has led by example, is now one of 37 States and the District of Columbia that recognizes marriage equality.

While the arguments in the cases today analyzed legal principles and precedent, we should remember that they are ultimately about love and recognizing the extraordinary commitment between two people. Jim Obergefell had been with his partner, John Arthur, for over 20 years. They wanted to marry, but the marriage laws in their home State of Ohio would not allow it. Bedridden and incapacitated with ALS, John could neither drive nor fly commercially to get married in another State. It took the generosity of friends and family, along with the kindness of coworkers and others, to cover the cost of a \$12,700 chartered, medically equipped private plane.

After more than 20 years together, Jim and John finally married during a seven and one-half minute ceremony in an airplane at a Baltimore airport. Upon their return to Ohio, the State refused to recognize their marriage. And John passed away just a few months later. Jim, now a widower, should not have to live in a State like Vermont to be able to have his 20-year relationship validated and recognized by the State. He should not have had to fly to another State to say his vows and pledge his commitment to his partner. Jim’s current fight—and our current fight—is to show that relationships like his should be treated with the same respect and dignity that has been accorded to all other Americans. It is to persuade the Supreme Court to live up to the motto engraved in Vermont marble above its own building, which declares “Equal Justice Under Law.”

Nearly five decades ago when the Supreme Court decided *Loving v. Virginia*, the Court recognized that:

Marriage is one of the ‘basic civil rights of man,’ fundamental to our very existence and survival. To deny this fundamental freedom on so unscriptable a basis as [] racial classifications . . . is surely to deprive all the State’s citizens of liberty without due process of law. The Fourteenth Amendment requires that the freedom of choice to marry not be restricted by invidious racial discriminations. Under our Constitution, the freedom to marry, or not marry, a person of another race resides with the individual, and cannot be infringed by the State.

In the marriage equality cases heard today, the Court has a simple job to do. It need only apply these same constitutional principles to hold that the same principle applies equally regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

When the Supreme Court issues its decision this summer, I am hopeful that it will be another landmark moment demonstrating that ours is a more perfect union when it is a more inclusive union. And that the name Obergefell will come to signify love, equality, and freedom the same way it does when *Loving* and *Windsor* are invoked.