TRIBUTES TO HON. MEL MARTINEZ

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Mel Martinez

U.S. SENATOR FROM FLORIDA

TRIBUTES

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Tributes
Delivered in Congress

Mel Martinez

United States Senator
2005–2009

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BIOGRAPHY

MELQUIADES RAFAEL "MEL" MARTINEZ was sworn in on January 4, 2005, and made history as the first Cuban-American to serve in the U.S. Senate. He previously served as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development under President George W. Bush.

MEL MARTINEZ has called Florida home since the age of 15, when he came to the United States from his native Sagua la Grande, Cuba, as part of "Operation Pedro Pan," a humanitarian program that helped Cuban children escape Communist Cuba. He lived with foster families who generously opened their homes to him until he was reunited with his family at age 19. This experience has had a lasting effect on him, and instilled a strong sense of community and the need to give back to this country.

After earning undergraduate and law degrees from Florida State University, he worked as a trial attorney in Orlando for 25 years. Following a successful legal career, he was elected mayor of Orange County. While in that role, he instituted what has become known as the "Martinez Doctrine," which ensured that no new development could take place until local schools were able to absorb the rapid growth being experienced in Central Florida.

As Senator, Mr. MARTINEZ is committed to ensuring Americans are provided with every opportunity to achieve the American dream. Since 2005 he has been a leader on many issues impacting Floridians by advocating for veterans benefits, quality health care, and protections for Florida's environment. MEL MARTINEZ was a member of the Senate Armed Services; Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs; and Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committees. He also served as the ranking member of the Senate Special Committee on Aging.

Senator MARTINEZ is a published author, an avid outdoorsman, and sports enthusiast. He resides in Orlando with his wife Kitty. They have three children and three grandchildren.

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Letter of Resignation

Wednesday, September 9, 2009

U.S. SENATE,
Washington, DC, September 2, 2009.

Hon. JOSEPH R. BIDEN, JR.,
President of the Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: I hereby give notice that I will retire from the Office of United States Senator for the State of Florida. I, therefore, tender my resignation effective at 5:00 p.m. on September 9, 2009.

Sincerely,

MEL MARTINEZ.

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Farewell to the Senate

Wednesday, September 9, 2009

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

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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 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.

While I was mayor, I received a call from then-President-elect George W. Bush asking me to serve my adopted Nation as the first Cuban-American to be on 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 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 represent 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 other efforts. We made tremendous progress on many of the issues that face our

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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.

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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 had 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

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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 it 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 a 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

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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 on my staff who have made my office run well. 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 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 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 that 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

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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 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 atesorare 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 José Martí, 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.

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TRIBUTES

TO

MEL MARTINEZ

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Proceedings in the Senate

TUESDAY, *September 8, 2009*

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, I want to say a couple of words about our colleague MEL MARTINEZ from Florida who will be leaving the Senate on this coming Thursday. He has been an admirable public servant, both in this body and as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. To each position he brought his considerable talent and devoted himself to solving problems in a practical, thoughtful, and bipartisan way.

Senator MARTINEZ never sought the limelight; he simply wanted to make a difference. He was disappointed, I know, that he was unable to move immigration reform forward. But we will try to apply what he has taught us about that issue. His positive influence here in Washington will be greatly missed.

A farewell to Senator MARTINEZ would not be complete without a note about his compelling life story and about his wife Kitty. As a Cuban emigree who came to America with few ties, Senator MARTINEZ represents one of the most inspiring aspects of American life: that talent and hard work unlock the door to great success. He has not forgotten those who helped him, just as all of us will not forget him. His wife Kitty has, likewise, made many friends in Washington and will also be missed.

Although I know he will not need it, I wish him all the best in his future endeavors, and I know he will remain an important voice in our party and on issues important to all Americans.

WEDNESDAY, *September 9, 2009*

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

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Senator MARTINEZ has brought to the Senate representing the people of 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.

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 like him 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

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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 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 Inouye'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 came, it was 1958, and one day his parents put him on an airplane and sent him to Miami, not knowing whether they would ever see him 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

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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 said in his book:

> My journey has taught me that it is not an empty cliche 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 thoughtfulness 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

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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 his head. He has a wonderful wife and family. And I hope that now, when he is not a Member of the Senate, we will get to see a little bit more of him in the State of South Dakota, because his son John married a South Dakota girl.

I have been trying to hunt pheasants. He has made trips up there, but it is always a little bit later in the season when that time of the year comes around, and the climate tends to change in South Dakota. But I hope that now that he has a little bit more time to enjoy those types of things, we will get that chance.

I want to express my great appreciation to the Senator from Florida for an extraordinary run here in the Senate. He truly is the kind of person where what you see is what you get. That is rare in politics today—genuine, thoughtful, sincere, kind, generous, the kind of person who serves whom I want to see more of in public life.

It has been a pleasure and an honor to have had the opportunity to serve with him in the Senate and to call him a colleague. But it is even a greater privilege and honor and opportunity to have been able to call him my friend.

So, MEL, best wishes. Whatever you do, you are going to do well. We are proud of you. And thank you for your great contributions to our country. God bless you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina is recognized.

Mr. GRAHAM. This is the time in a person's career you are supposed to lay it on thick. But there is no need to do that in MEL's case. I think everybody here speaking on both sides of the aisle is trying to say thank you for your friendship, and there are a million ways to say it. To Kitty, again, thank you for being part of our lives here. We are going to continue this relationship.

I think all of us have got stories about MEL. I first heard about MEL by reputation. He was a Republican trial lawyer. That intrigued me. There are not many of us. We can meet in a phone booth. I got to know MEL during his campaign and did some events for him. I think that experience of representing people in court made him a good Senator because he understands that there are two sides to every story, and sometimes a person needs the best advocate they can get,

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even though their cause may not be so popular at the moment.

I got to know MEL during the immigration debate. That is a hell of a way to meet someone. You will learn quickly when you are talking about politics at that level, that emotional, and MEL was going to be part of that debate whether he wanted to or not because of who he was. You could not talk about immigration and not think about MEL MARTINEZ. He was the first one to show up and he was the last one to leave, and we will get that bill passed one day. It will be a tribute to MEL and Senator Kennedy that the guts of the bill will be the solution that will be embraced down the road.

That was tough politics. We would reminisce at night. And Saxby was involved. We would meet every morning in the room over there, the President's Room, with Senator Kennedy and Senator McCain, trying to figure out where we were based on what happened the night before. Usually we had lost ground, but we kept plugging. But a lot of stories were told about what was going on in MEL's life.

There is a lot of hatred out there, quite frankly. There are a lot of people who should be upset about the immigration system not working and broken borders and legitimately concerned about the solution we were offering. But there were some people who were, quite frankly, hateful. I think MEL took the brunt of that more than anyone else. It did not get a lot of publicity, and probably it should not. But I know what he and Kitty went through to try to fix a broken immigration system. I will be forever grateful for their effort, because it was personally very difficult.

When MEL left a repressive place, he came to a hopeful country, and during that debate he never lost sight of what America is all about. America will never be defined by the people who hate. America will always be defined by people who love and care. I have never met two people who love and care more than Kitty and MEL. You will be missed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas is recognized.

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, I too join my colleagues in recognizing MEL MARTINEZ and his great contribution to this body and his friendship. I think most of those things have been said.

One of the things I learned from a leader in the Senator's State was a saying that he gave to me that: "We get into trouble when we look at people as problems and not as peo-

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ple." I have thought about that for a long time, because you can go back in our history, and generally when we have looked at people as problems and not people, that is when we have gotten into trouble. When you look at various situations we have had, and even the immigration debate would be one: "Well, this is a problem." "No, this is a person." Or you can look at our debate on abortion in this country and say: "Well, we have got a problem here." "No, we have a person here."

The consistency of what I have seen in MEL's policy position has been very much, "no, this is a person." It is not just a person, this is a great person, and not just a great person, this is an unusual individual. He celebrates that with everyone. That is a beautiful thing to do and it is a beautiful thing to have, and it is a beautiful thing to see, because then that carries over into his friendships. So whenever he is talking with someone else, it may be a colleague or another individual, normally you are thinking "OK, I need to get something done through this person." But I do not usually find that in a conversation with MEL. Normally what I find is: Well, yes, I need to get something done, but what I am interested in is you and what you are thinking and who you are. And this is not an opportunity for me to get something, this is an opportunity for me to celebrate another beautiful soul who is standing right there and staring at me and talking to me, and I have this unique opportunity to engage them.

How much better we all are when we look at people as people and not as problems or as opportunities or as obstacles to get through. That is where I find what he embodies does in this way he works. I am going to miss you, MEL. We are going to miss you an awful lot. We appreciate you. I appreciate the lessons you have taught me by the way you live and by the way you serve. God bless you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I speak with a good degree of regret, because he knows the heartfelt sentiments I am going to express, because I have tried for now the better part of 3 months to talk him out of this particular day. I did not want him to resign.

It has been good for Florida the way the two of us have worked together professionally, because it is built on a personal friendship that goes back over 30 years. There was not a day we were in session here that MEL and I did not talk.

Of course, this floor of the Senate is the place that you can get away from the other distractions, and, in fact, can come

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together and have those conversations you want. And that was so important in us looking out for the interests of Florida.

So it is with a great deal of regret that this day has come. I think it is important that the two Senators from a State get along, and that is particularly true of two Senators who happen to be from different parties.

It is my hope that the kind of relationship that we had both privately and publicly as the two Senators from Florida sends a message to our people that you can transcend partisan differences in order to get things done. I believe that is the relationship we have had now going on in the Senate for a little over 4½ years. I only wish that relationship were going to continue for another year and a half, to the remainder of Senator MARTINEZ' term. But for personal reasons he has made this decision.

It is incumbent upon me as the senior Senator of Florida and the newly appointed Senator to have the same kind of relationship for the good of our country, for the good of our State, to transcend political differences, to have a good personal relationship so we can get work done in a bipartisan way. I intend to do that. I assume that the new Senator will do likewise. Let me say that a lot of you do not know, with regard to Senator MARTINEZ, that 30—now going on 31, 32 years ago when we were a lot younger, he was already back then a very prominent trial lawyer. I was a pup State legislator trying to run in a congressional district that included the east coast of Florida and the interior, including Orlando. MEL was one of those high profile, very respected attorneys in Central Florida. And lo and behold, MEL and his wife Kitty, as I campaigned for that congressional seat in 1978, went out and went door to door for me. We have kept up that relationship over the years.

So it has been my privilege to have had that personal relationship turn into the professional relationship as colleagues in the Senate.

I say to MEL MARTINEZ and to Kitty, Godspeed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, this is one of those times that none of us in the Senate looks particularly forward to—when we have to come and speak about a dear friend who is leaving the Senate. But I am excited for MEL and Kitty in a number of ways and very appreciative of the great rela-

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tionship that we have made from a personal and collegial standpoint.

I am very appreciative of the great work MEL MARTINEZ has provided to our country over the last several years. Our friend Lamar Alexander, who spoke a little bit earlier, often talks and has got me talking back home, particularly to young people, about what it means to be an American.

MEL MARTINEZ has a greater appreciation about what it means to be an American than anyone in this body because of the fact that he is the only immigrant who is a Member of the Senate. I know how hard he worked to become a citizen, and that he has a great appreciation for what it means to be an American.

What a great story it is, MEL, of you dodging bullets in Cuba, escaping communism and ultimately coming to the United States, being separated from your parents, being somewhat lost in a strange land you knew something about but did not know any people.

As a 16-year-old young man, thrust into that situation, most of us would panic to some extent. MEL never did. And through the raising in orphanages and foster homes, and ultimately being reunited with his parents after his brother Ralph came over here, and being reunited with him before he was reunited with his parents, it is such a great personal story, and such a touching story.

But all of that served to develop a foundation in MEL MARTINEZ that America has been the beneficiary of, and certainly those of us in this body who have come to know MEL and Kitty are the beneficiaries of. I guess the ironic thing is when you read MEL's book, "A Sense of Belonging"—which I would recommend to everybody who is listening out there today; what a great book; it is a short read, but you will have a lot of fun reading it and it will be of great interest to you—what you realize is when MEL got here, there were several things that allowed him to transition into American society.

First of all, he was a bright young man. He did not know the English language when he came here, but he committed to learn it, and he did learn it. Second, he was a very affable person back then, just as he is now. He made friends very easily, and that helped him make that transition. Third, he was a good athlete, maybe even a great athlete. In fact, if he could have hit the curve ball he might be representing the Florida Marlins today instead of the State of Florida. But it is a great way to look at the history of America when we

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look at the history of MEL MARTINEZ and his transition all the way from rural Cuba to the Senate.

But I guess the most important thing I could say about him is what has already been alluded to by the assistant majority leader; that is, MEL came to the Senate for all the right reasons. He came into public service for all the right reasons. He is leaving for all the right reasons. I know because of the many conversations he and I have had about our families what a dedicated husband he is, what a dedicated father he is. He has seen his two older children, Lauren and Jack, come up and become very successful in their own right. Now he has Andrew. Andrew is a 15-year-old young man who is growing up in Orlando and is doing the things all young men do. Unfortunately, his dad is gone during the week and is home during the weekends, and that is the time when young men like to be with their friends. MEL is missing a lot of that. That is the reason he is going back home, and that is the reason all of us can stand here and say: "Wow, I wish I had the courage to do that."

I had a very similar experience during my days in the House. When I ran for the House in 1994, my son was a senior in high school. He played football on what ultimately became the State championship football team. There was no question from my campaign staff as to where I was going to be on Friday night. I was there to see my son. MEL is missing the experience of seeing Andrew play on Thursday nights because he is here doing what he was elected to do; that is, serve the people of Florida. He is going to now have the opportunity to experience with Andrew the same sorts of things he did with Lauren and Jack. For that, we can say great things about his service to our country, his service as mayor of Orlando or as Secretary of HUD, or his service in the Senate. But his service to his family is ultimately what is important, and, wow, what a public servant he is to his family.

So to him and his wife Kitty we say we thank you for the great service you have provided. We thank you for the great friendships you have provided to all of us as Members of this body. Whatever road you ultimately travel down in the days ahead, we know you are going to continue to be a success. We know you are going to continue to serve our country in your own special way. But, most important, you are going to serve God and you are going to serve your family.

So, MEL, thanks for everything you have done. Thanks for your friendship. God be with you and Godspeed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

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Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I think you know I spend very little time talking on the Senate floor, and I plan to keep it that way. But I do want to spend a moment paying tribute to my great friend, MEL MARTINEZ. I have had the privilege of sitting beside him on the Banking Committee. We commiserate about many things that happen in this body.

I love working with MEL MARTINEZ, and I am going to miss him. I consider MEL to be the epitome of decency in this body. I think he is a person who truly wants to do what is best for this country. I have seen him many times tormented over decisions we all make, which are very difficult to decide from time to time: What is best for our country over the long term? I value that in him so much.

I think this body will be diminished with him leaving. Having people like MEL, who, again, have such a sense of decency—which is, as Senator Chambliss mentioned, one of the reasons he will be departing soon—will be a loss for this body.

I have not met anybody here who I think is a finer individual, nor anybody who I will miss more than Senator MEL MARTINEZ. So I am happy for Kitty. I am happy for his family. I am sorry for us. But I am glad I have served in the Senate with somebody I consider to be such an outstanding person as MEL.

So, MEL, thank you. Thank you for the many confidential conversations we have had through the years, the frankness with which we have been able to talk about so many things.

Each of us brings something to this body that is unique. I think that is why it functions the way it does. I think your insights into our relationships with the countries of Latin America, to many of the things that were happening there from the inside because of so many of the relationships you have has helped all of us make decisions that are more sound.

So that peace will go with you as you leave. Surely somebody else over time will help fill in that vacuum, but I value the many things you have shared with me that have helped me to think in a more thoughtful manner, and I look forward to talking to you in the years ahead about what is happening in your life. I thank you for what you have done in mine.

I thank the Chair.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I rise today to give tribute to my colleague and friend, Senator MEL MARTINEZ. During his

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time in the Senate, MEL has served the State of Florida and our country well.

Overcoming great odds, MEL and his life's journey is an inspiration to all. At age 15, he fled his native Cuba as part of a Catholic humanitarian effort. Alone, and speaking virtually no English, MEL was placed in temporary youth facilities. Later, he lived with two foster families, for whom he has great appreciation and affection. In 1966, he was happily reunited with his own family members in Florida.

These experiences strengthened MEL and shaped his views. He went on to earn graduate and law degrees from Florida State University and practice law for 25 years before serving as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development and then joining us here in the U.S. Senate.

During his tenure, I appreciated MEL's leadership, particularly working on the U.S. Senate Republican Conference Task Force on Hispanic Affairs—a task force I formed in 1987. I have long felt that we should not try to put this vital and growing segment of our population in a box because they care about the same things we all do—having a safe Nation, strong families, a good education for all our children, and good jobs that provide well. At the same time, I recognized that Hispanics and Latinos bring unique and important perspectives to the issues we face in Congress.

MEL worked to advance the mission of the task force to promote greater participation in the democratic process, to create more job opportunities, ensure better access to health care, and educate our children.

While there is much talk on both sides of the aisle of strategy and outreach to try to "woo" Hispanics and Latinos, we should actively listen to their concerns and encourage their participation. That is true of all segments of our population. That is what I have tried to do and that is what MEL has done, too. I understand we have MEL's firm commitment to continue this important work.

Our colleague from Florida has taken strong positions on a number of issues that have come before this body. MEL has supported prodemocracy movements in Cuba while urging that its dictatorship of abuse and misery is not legitimized by our Government.

As a member of the Armed Services Committee, MEL has been a strong supporter of our war on terror, especially as our brave troops combat terrorism overseas for the safety of our Nation.

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MEL has supported a reasonable and rational approach to ensuring our Nation's energy security. He has helped to highlight our Nation's lack of action to increase our production of nuclear energy—our Nation's largest sources of green, clean electricity. He recognizes that our domestic electricity supply must be based upon a major source of green baseload power, and that nuclear power holds the most potential to ensure that the American economy is fueled by an abundant, cheap, and clean source of energy.

MEL has worked with us on health care reform. This is not a Republican or Democrat issue—it is an American issue that needs to be addressed in a bipartisan and fiscally responsible manner.

Our colleague has worked to defeat card check because it reduces employees' right to a free and private election to choose if they want to unionize.

MEL has sought workable reforms to our system of immigration. He spoke out against the negative rhetoric that divided and polarized. He will be missed in this body as the immigration debate moves forward.

I know my friend is looking forward to writing the new chapter in the book of his life. I thank him for his service to our country and wish him well.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, we have had a chance today to recognize our colleague, Senator MEL MARTINEZ, who, sadly for most of us, is leaving the Senate. Today will be his last day. He had an opportunity to address the Senate this morning and give some final thoughts. I would like to take a few moments to give my final thoughts about Senator MARTINEZ. I expect to see him many times in the future as a private citizen, but my thoughts are about him and his contribution here and his life story.

Obviously, all of us have a story to tell, the story of a journey to this place. But in the case of Senator MARTINEZ, the journey certainly has more twists and turns than most.

MEL MARTINEZ first came to this country when he was 15. A political exile, he spoke no English, and did not know when—or if—he would ever see his family again. His journey from that point to now is proof of the boundless promise that exists in America.

More than 50 years ago in a small town in Cuba, an 11-year-old MEL MARTINEZ comforted his little brother as they lay on the bedroom floor while gunfire erupted in the streets. It was Fidel Castro's takeover, and life changed very quickly for the Martinez family and every Cuban.

When MEL's parents overheard Cuban militiamen threatening to kill their son for wearing a religious symbol, they had had enough. Through a humanitarian effort sponsored by the Catholic Church, MEL was sent to America to find a better life.

Eagerly embracing his adopted hometown of Orlando, FL, soon MEL came to feel part of America. He mastered English and earned both his bachelor's and law degrees from Florida State University.

And 4 long years after leaving Cuba, he was reunited with his parents in Florida after they too escaped Castro's regime—and they were so proud to see the brave young man their boy had become.

Because of this long separation from his parents, I can understand now when MEL says it is the tug of family ties that calls him back home to Florida. But those of us who had the pleasure of working with him in Washington are sorry to see him go.

In the Senate, MEL made his mark as a leading voice for greater democratic freedoms in Cuba. He has fought to strengthen Social Security and to eliminate fraud in Medicare and Medicaid.

He has given hope to millions of families by working to increase funding for research to cure Alzheimer's. And he has stood for America's defense in a dangerous world, and for the troops that so bravely take up the fight to defend us.

For 3 years as the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Senator MARTINEZ worked to increase home ownership. After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, his agency was charged with directing funds to rebuild lower Manhattan. He fulfilled his duties even as he, along with all of us, reeled at the senseless deaths of 3,000 innocents.

As the co-chair of the President's Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba, he played a leading role in the administration's efforts to bring freedom to the land of his birth.

While in Washington, MEL forged many friendships as well. I first got to know MEL during his days as a Cabinet Secretary. Elaine and I certainly enjoyed the company of MEL and Kitty.

My wife Elaine and MEL had one thing in common. I used to pose the following quiz to people: Who were the only Cabinet Secretaries who never missed a State of the Union? As everyone knows, it is typically somebody in the line of succession who misses the Cabinet meeting because the entire

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Government is up here on one night. MEL and Elaine never missed a Cabinet meeting because they were the only two members of the Cabinet who were not born in the United States and therefore were not eligible to assume the Presidency if an emergency required that.

We came to understand MEL's connection to his adopted hometown of Orlando, where for 25 years he worked as a successful lawyer. We learned how his election as chairman of Orange County—a job analogous to a mayor, and in one of Florida's largest counties—started a second career in public service to the country that had given him so much.

Now MEL will return to Florida, and I don't know what his future may hold. But I do know that he'll accomplish anything he sets his mind to. The incredible journey he has taken, ever since he flew on a DC–6 from Havana to Miami, is proof of that. MEL's life shows us that in America, any dream is possible.

MEL, it has been an honor serving with you, and it has been a pleasure for me and Elaine to get to know you and Kitty through the years. Whenever you may return to Washington next, please remember you will always have plenty of friends in the U.S. Senate.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I rise today to bid farewell and to express my gratitude to Senator MEL MARTINEZ as he retires from service in the U.S. Senate. During his time here, he established an admirable reputation for hard work, dedication to his State and our Nation, and a commitment to principles.

I have had the privilege of working with Senator MARTINEZ as a member of the Armed Services Committee and its Seapower Subcommittee. In addition, we worked together on the Special Committee on Aging, where he has served as ranking member.

Working with Senator MARTINEZ has always been rewarding. This has been especially true on the Armed Services Committee, where he brings to bear on defense issues both detailed knowledge and long-range vision. On the Seapower Subcommittee, he has been a strong ally in keeping our Navy preeminent and has been a highly effective advocate for continuing the DDG–1000 program, the next generation of destroyers.

Senator MARTINEZ' work on the Special Committee on Aging continued his long record of shaping policies important to seniors in Florida and throughout America. From local government to his service as Secretary of Housing and

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Urban Development and in the Senate, he has been a strong voice for ensuring that all Americans live longer, healthier, and more productive lives.

But the greatest legacy MEL MARTINEZ leaves the Senate is his inspiring life story. Born in Cuba, he arrived in America at age 15. He earned his undergraduate and law degrees from Florida State University, and went on to practice law for 25 years. He demonstrates the highest qualities of our Nation of immigrants, of the opportunities America provides, and of the character and determination of those who come to our shores. His desire to continue to work for expanded freedoms for the people of Cuba exemplifies his character and principles. I join my colleagues in wishing him and his family well, and in looking forward to many more contributions to the public good from this man of many gifts and accomplishments.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, today I rise to recognize and thank my colleague and friend from Florida, MEL MARTINEZ, for his service to this country and to wish him luck in the years to come. I am proud and humbled to have had the chance to work with MEL over the last few years on some of the most difficult and trying issues of our time, and I will miss his honesty, heart, and dedication when he leaves the Senate this week.

While many of my Senate colleagues are familiar with MEL's inspiring personal story I feel that it is important for the American people to know that MEL MARTINEZ' life has personified the American dream and teaches us what we can all accomplish through hard work, a love of God and country, and true dedication to a higher cause. MEL came to the United States in the 1960s as a young Cuban immigrant and became the first Cuban-American to serve in a Presidential Cabinet as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, and then the first Cuban-American U.S. Senator.

As a freshman Senator, MEL didn't shy away from the tough issues—he did not sit back and let others tackle the tough, controversial tasks—he dove in head first. Personally, the most memorable example of MEL's courageous work is his support of comprehensive immigration reform.

The 2006 and 2007 immigration debates were difficult times in the U.S. Senate. We had both political parties and an American public divided on an issue that I still believe will define the future of our country for generations to come. For many, it would have been tempting to sit on the sidelines, take the safe votes, keep your head down and just wait

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for this one to pass, but not MEL MARTINEZ. He took his strong personal convictions and put them in action. We spent many hours together, working in a bipartisan fashion to try to reach an agreement that could be acceptable to both sides of the aisle and ensure the security of our Nation. Every day, MEL MARTINEZ was in the trenches, on the floor, working to improve the bill, working to reach a bipartisan compromise and working for a better future for our country and our children.

I also had the pleasure of traveling with MEL to the Republic of Georgia where he met with Georgian leaders and spoke openly about the importance of U.S. support for freedom in all countries, both those distant and close to our shores. MEL spoke with conviction due to his early childhood spent in a country controlled by a repressive dictator.

Many in this Chamber will fondly recall MEL's leadership in the Senate and his work for the State of Florida. I will remember my friend, his courageous leadership on the tough issues, and his willingness to put the future of our Nation before his own self interest.

Mr. MARTINEZ. I feel appreciative for all of the kind comments on the floor today, especially the latest from the Republican leader.

Mr. REID. Before my friend leaves the floor, I was planning to come later with some prepared remarks, but let me speak from my heart about the Senator from Florida.

I have some affinity for the Senator from Florida because we were both trial lawyers. We have been to court, we have voir dired juries, we have argued cases to juries. I feel that as a badge of honor. Some people denigrate trial lawyers. But I feel that the people whom I have tried to help over the years were people who deserved to be helped.

My friend from Florida was the president of the State trial lawyers in Florida. He has a tremendously sound reputation as a trial lawyer, somebody who took good cases, worked them hard. Judges liked him, and his opponents liked him, which speaks well of this man.

But my feelings about Senator MARTINEZ go deeper than that. I have had the good fortune of being able to attend our Prayer Breakfasts on occasion here. I try to get to them as often as I can, every Wednesday morning when we are in session, at 8 o'clock.

I have heard my friend from Florida talk about his upbringing, his faith. He is a devout Catholic. He is proud of

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that. He is very proud of his heritage, Cuban-American, versus the difficulties that have been caused by the tyrannical government of Fidel Castro.

I also am impressed with Senator MARTINEZ as a result of his family ties. He speaks so highly of his relationship with his lovely wife. I have had the opportunity to know his family. On rare occasions he came and asked me if there was a way I could help him with a family member, recognizing the kind of person he is and the family associations that he has.

The people of the State of Florida are losing a good Senator, a good man. I will miss MEL MARTINEZ.

THURSDAY, *September 10, 2009*

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I rise to speak about my friend and colleague, MEL MARTINEZ, who is leaving the Senate this week.

Senator MARTINEZ has a story unlike that of any of us who serve in this body. He came to this country from Cuba without his parents at age 15 as part of a humanitarian effort. And as the first Cuban-American Senator, he has always maintained a thoughtful and unique perspective on Cuba policy, one that I have always enjoyed hearing and considering.

As chairman of the Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee, I was pleased to have Senator MARTINEZ as part of that panel. It is not often you get a Secretary of Housing and Urban Development sharing his expertise in a Senate committee.

He worked tirelessly to address the crisis of homelessness, and I have been proud to work alongside him on some of the housing measures we have passed over the past couple of years. He has been enormously helpful and cooperative as a member of my committee, and we will miss his perspective.

Senator MARTINEZ and I didn't agree on every issue, or even most issues. What we shared was a deep love for this amazing country, a deep respect for this institution, and a strong working relationship. Wherever Senator MARTINEZ' remarkable life takes him next, I know that the citizens of his beloved Florida are grateful for his service and will join me in wishing him and his family nothing but the best.

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PRINTING TRIBUTES FOR SENATORS KENNEDY AND MARTINEZ

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the tributes to Senators Kennedy and MARTINEZ in the *Congressional Record* be printed as separate Senate documents and that Senators be permitted to submit statements for inclusion until Friday, October 9, 2009.

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

THURSDAY, *September 17, 2009*

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, I wish to add my comments to a few other comments on MEL MARTINEZ whom we all loved so much. I do not think I have ever seen anyone since Jesse Helms who was loved by so many people as MEL MARTINEZ. He had a way of smiling, and in talking about things in a way that others did not understand. My colleagues have already come to the floor and talked about his escape from Cuba and how he came over and how then he was able to get his father over. It is a story that America will always remember. It will always be in our history books.

He was always such a great guy. He will be missed around here.

One of the things that was not said much about him was his sense of humor. I have to say I enjoyed being around him because he was, in his own subtle way, a very humorous person. I can remember, and I have had the occasion, probably more than any other Member, going into the areas in Iraq and Afghanistan and Africa where there were hostilities. But I was making probably my 12th or 14th trip into Baghdad on a C–130. It happened to be MEL MARTINEZ' first trip. So we were talking about: Once you get out, you are going to run over to the helicopter, and they are going to take you to the Green Zone, all of the things to anticipate. I said to him: "One of the problems we are going to have is that when we leave, we have these old C–130E models. They should be reengined. We should have J models, but we do not. Because of the cuts in the military, we have not been able to upgrade those systems."

So I said, "When we climb out of here, it is going to be in a C–130E model. We are not going to be able to climb as high and as fast as we want, and there are surface-to-air missiles out there that we have to be concerned about." And,

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of course, they are all set up. We have very capable pilots and crews in these C–130s. So I said, "We will be well taken care of if something happens." Sure enough, it happened.

The first thing you do when you get out of your helicopter in Baghdad to get on a C–130 to come back to Kuwait or wherever you might be going is you take off your helmet, your lifejacket, your vest, because they are so heavy and uncomfortable—you get in there and you take them off. Well, we all did that.

I was, as I do quite often, sitting up with the pilots, when all of a sudden the explosion came, the light was there, and we deployed the heat-seeking devices that are on a C–130. Of course, that is already very loud. Someone who has never gone through that experience before would assume we were about to go down.

I ran downstairs and I saw MEL MARTINEZ sitting there without his helmet, without his protective vest by him; he had put them back on. I said, "MEL, what are you doing putting your vest and your helmet back on?"

He said, "Well, I assumed that we were going to be shot down. And if Kitty (that is his wife) if she found out that I did not have my vest and my helmet on, she would kill me."

Well, that is MEL MARTINEZ. He had all of those jewels. I think he is going to be missed by a lot of us for all of the reasons we have articulated on the floor.

I yield the floor and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

MONDAY, *September 21, 2009*

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I rise today to honor my colleague, Senator MEL MARTINEZ, who recently resigned his Senate seat. Senator MARTINEZ has represented the State of Florida in the Senate since his election in 2004.

MEL MARTINEZ' inspiring personal story is an example of how the American dream can be attained through hard work and determination. Born in Sagua La Grande, Cuba, MEL fled to the United States when he was 15 years old after the Castro government came to power in his homeland. Arriving in Florida with one suitcase and limited English language skills, MEL spent the next few years in youth facilities and with foster families until he was later reunited with his parents in Orlando.

He went on to earn a law degree from Florida State University, and he practiced law in Orlando for over two dec-

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ades. In 1998 Senator MARTINEZ was elected chairman of Orange County. He went on to serve as the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development under President George W. Bush. Since 2004, MEL MARTINEZ served the people of Florida in the U.S. Senate.

Reforming our immigration system was an issue close to Senator MARTINEZ' heart. MEL worked vigorously with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to try to advance a solution to one of the most difficult problems confronting our Nation. As the only immigrant in the Senate, Senator MARTINEZ brought a unique perspective to the immigration debate. By striving for comprehensive immigration reform, he hoped to share the American dream.

Senator MARTINEZ was deeply concerned about advancing the cause of freedom in the most oppressive corners of the world. MEL experienced the loss of liberty that resulted from Castro's rise, and he often spoke out for those who lost their voices—not only for those in Cuba, but for those who suffered anywhere from tyranny and despotism.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and drought in the Midwest, Senator MARTINEZ and I worked together in an attempt to bring relief to America's farm and ranch families. Even though agricultural production in North Dakota and Florida is far from similar, we were able to unite to support legislation that would have provided much-needed disaster assistance to affected farmers and ranchers throughout the country.

I thank Senator MARTINEZ for his public service and wish him and his family the best in the future.

WEDNESDAY, *September 23, 2009*

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I was deeply saddened by the recent announcement of the distinguished Senator from Florida, MEL MARTINEZ, that he had decided to resign from the Senate. Although he had served in the Senate for a relatively short period of time—since January 4, 2005—he had become a very important influence in this body.

As the first Cuban-American to serve in the Senate, he shared with us his personal experiences and insights into his early life in Cuba, including his separation from his parents at a young age as he traveled to Florida to embark upon a very successful new life of learning and leadership in the United States. He earned undergraduate and law degrees

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from Florida State University. He served as a member of the Orlando Utilities Commission and was elected chairman of Orange County. President George W. Bush selected him to serve as a member of his Cabinet, as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. He was elected a U.S. Senator in 2004 and quickly established himself as an effective advocate for his State in the Senate.

MEL MARTINEZ quickly became an active and influential member of the Armed Services Committee as well as the Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee, and the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee. His constituents benefited in particular from his service as ranking member of the Senate's Special Committee on Aging.

Mr. President, I congratulate my friend from Florida on his very successful service and important contributions through his dedicated public service in Florida and in our Nation's Capital. I have enjoyed serving with him, and I wish him all the best in the years ahead.

TUESDAY, *September 29, 2009*

Mr. BUNNING. Mr. President, today I pay tribute to my distinguished colleague from Florida, MEL MARTINEZ, who retired from the Senate earlier this month.

I have worked with Senator MARTINEZ since he was elected to serve the people of Florida in 2004. He has served his country proudly in several different roles. Senator MARTINEZ also had the distinct honor to serve as the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development in President George W. Bush's Cabinet and as the chairman of the Republican National Committee. In both roles, it was not personal ambition that drove MEL. Rather, it was his passion to make his country a better place to live for his family and for all Americans.

I have also had the privilege of serving on the Senate Banking Committee with Senator MARTINEZ. As a member of this committee, MEL brought a greater understanding and perspective on housing issues facing the Nation than many Senators who have served on this committee. Floridians and all Americans have benefited from his vast experience in this area as well as his dedication to serve for the greater good. A person of this caliber will truly be missed in the U.S. Senate.

I am honored to know him and to have worked with him. I would like to thank Senator MARTINEZ for his contributions

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to the Senate and to the country we both love. I wish him and his family the best in all their future endeavors.

THURSDAY, *October 8, 2009*

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, it is always a bittersweet moment when we have to say goodbye to a colleague who is retiring from the Senate. We are sorry to see them go, but we are also very appreciative of all they have brought to our deliberations during their years of service to the people of their home State and the Nation.

MEL MARTINEZ is such a person—the kind who makes the Senate the great deliberative body that it is, for MEL has a great story to tell of his life and how he came to the United States to pursue his own version of the American dream.

If you would have told MEL when he was young that he would someday serve as an elected official in the U.S. Government, I am not sure he would have believed you. He began his life in a small city in Cuba, under the repressive regime of Fidel Castro. At the age of 15 he escaped and began to pursue his destiny in the United States. At every stage of his life he was determined to do everything he could to make a difference. Looking back, I think it's clear he has succeeded beyond his wildest dreams.

From the time he first arrived in the United States, MEL was grateful for the opportunities that were available to him, and he was determined to give something back to show his appreciation for them.

He began in his own backyard when he served as chairman of Orange County. As a former mayor myself, I know how difficult a job that can be. For MEL, it was a chance to make the lives of his neighbors and fellow citizens better, and that became his focus and his top priority.

He did a good job and quickly earned the respect and support of his fellow townspeople. He also caught the attention of then President-elect George Bush who was looking for someone to serve in his Cabinet who had experience dealing with housing issues and the problems that were facing our cities and towns. That is something that MEL had been dealing with in Florida, so he became the first Cuban-American appointed to a President's Cabinet when he was named to serve as our Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

Soon after MEL was sworn in he found himself in the middle of a challenge as great as any that had ever been faced

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by a Cabinet Secretary before. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, MEL was assigned the responsibility of working on the reconstruction of lower Manhattan.

Then, having served on both the local and national level, MEL then decided to take on another challenge—representing the people of Florida in the Senate. MEL proved to be more than up to the task as he has taken on a variety of issues and served on several different committees. Through it all, he has worked hard to put his principles and values into practice every day and he has a great deal to show for his service to the people of Florida in the Senate.

In the years to come, I will always remember MEL's remarkable life story that stems from the years he spent in Cuba living under a dictatorship. They were a matter of great interest to me when I was a student, but for him, it was his life. While I had only read about and watched the drama unfold during my years at George Washington University, MEL had lived it. It was a time that helped to shape his character and mold his destiny and make him appreciate the great gift of citizenship that far too many of us take for granted.

MEL has also impressed me as a man of great faith who takes his relationship with God very seriously. He shared his belief with us at one of our Prayer Breakfasts, and he impressed us all with his great sincerity and his unshakeable belief that God had placed him where He needed him and that was why he was in the Senate. He saw it as an opportunity to serve God and the people back home in Florida, as well as those he left behind in Cuba and many more just like them all over the world.

Too often when we say goodbye to one of our fellow Members, we forget that there is just as much life outside of the beltway as there is inside it. Our focus on Washington and our work in the Senate sometimes makes us think that this is the only place where we can pursue our dreams and make a difference in the world around us. MEL is proof positive that there are many ways that we can make this a better world and in the years to come, as this chapter in his life ends and another begins, I have no doubt we will see MEL continue his efforts to address the problems of this world to ensure that those who have lived for too long in fear and oppression in Cuba and all over the world will someday claim the rights and freedoms we all cherish.

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Good Luck, MEL. I hope you and Kitty enjoy the years to come. Together you have made a great team and we know there is still much more to come in this great adventure of your lives. Good luck and God bless.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I join my colleagues in appreciation and admiration of Senator MEL MARTINEZ.

MEL lived the first 15 years of his life under Communist dictatorship in Cuba. That experience gave him a special appreciation for the blessings of liberty. As MEL's own career in public service took him from Florida to Washington, he never forgot the people living under totalitarianism in his homeland. And he never wavered in his conviction that the people of Cuba deserved the same rights as the rest of us, especially the rights to choose our leaders, worship as we please, and live in freedom.

MEL distinguished himself as a lawyer in central Florida, then won elective office as chairman of Orlando, and was appointed by President Bush to serve as his first Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. Secretary MARTINEZ helped the people of lower Manhattan rebuild after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and he worked to expand opportunities for homeowners nationwide. MEL was proud that he was the first Cuban-American to ever serve in a President's Cabinet.

MEL was also the first Cuban-American to serve in the U.S. Senate. In this Chamber, he raised his voice to strengthen our national defense, especially the Navy's shipbuilding program. He supported the development of America's natural resources in an environmentally responsible way. He had a heart for victims of Alzheimer's disease and their families, and supported greater Federal research funding to help find a cure.

Senator MARTINEZ and I shared a concern about waste, fraud, and abuse in Medicare and Medicaid. So earlier this year, he and I introduced legislation to do something about it. The Seniors and Taxpayers Obligation Protection Act or the STOP Act would give Federal agencies greater tools and authority to detect waste, fraud, and abuse before they happen. The STOP Act has sponsors on both sides of the aisle, and I believe its provisions should be a part of our efforts to reform our health care system.

MEL served less than a full term in the Senate, but he has helped shape legislation that will govern our Nation for years to come. He and his wife Kitty are now back home in

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central Florida, and Sandy and I wish them both the very best.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I rise to remember a good friend who is leaving the Senate after a career of public service, Senator MEL MARTINEZ.

MEL MARTINEZ came to the Senate in 2005 after serving as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development under President George W. Bush. Senator MARTINEZ was the first Cuban-American to serve in the U.S. Senate. Born in Cuba, Senator MARTINEZ arrived in the United States at age 15.

During his tenure as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, MEL MARTINEZ addressed the National Congress of American Indians, pledging to strengthen the government-to-government relationship with tribes in the Federal Indian programs administered by his agency. He was keenly interested in ameliorating the third world housing conditions that exist in the Native villages of rural Alaska. Alaska's tribe and tribal housing authorities benefit greatly from Federal funding available under the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act and other Federal housing programs, which were strengthened under Senator MARTINEZ' leadership at HUD.

Despite the fact that the States we represent are as far away geographically as States can be, we have always been good friends.

I was proud to serve with Senator MARTINEZ on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Senator MARTINEZ was a close ally on energy issues, and he was always a fierce advocate for the interests of his Floridian constituents. We shared a common interest in promoting Federal energy efficiency standards, responsible nuclear waste storage, and we worked together on the 2005 Energy Policy Act. He was a tough bargainer on the more recent 2007 Energy Independence and Security Act as he aggressively pursued the interests of his constituents with respect to Federal Outer Continental Shelf energy development.

I wish MEL MARTINEZ and his wife Kitty the best of luck in their future endeavors.

Mr. BEGICH. I ask unanimous consent that the deadline for tributes to Senators KENNEDY and MARTINEZ to be submitted to the *Congressional Record* be extended until Wednesday, October 14, 2009.

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

WEDNESDAY, *October 14, 2009*

Mr. ENSIGN. MEL MARTINEZ came to the United States from Cuba at the age of 15 as part of a humanitarian effort called Operation Peter Pan. We are all familiar with the character of Peter Pan—he is careless and does not want to grow up. He is sometimes selfish and often conceited. It is ironic because MEL is the opposite of all of those attributes.

MEL MARTINEZ arrived on our shores with no family and only the hope for a better life. He had to grow up incredibly fast, and he did so with great determination. He worked hard to learn English, graduate from college and law school, and build a legal career and solid reputation.

And then he decided to selflessly give back to the community and country that had given him so much. He rose to the highest levels of our government as the 12th Secretary of Housing and Urban Development under President George W. Bush. He served from 2001 to 2003, an especially trying time in our Nation's history. But his agency's focus on rebuilding lower Manhattan provided necessary healing for a city and its citizens.

In 2005 MEL was sworn in as the first Cuban-American U.S. Senator. It was a privilege to serve with him and to join together on many legislative efforts. Most significant was our work on expanding freedom and democracy for the people of Cuba. Cubans have been stifled for too long by a brutal Communist dictator. They deserve a voice and an opportunity for a better life. Nobody knows that better than MEL MARTINEZ, and I look forward to continuing our fight to support pro-democracy efforts.

Most recently, I was pleased to work with MEL on legislation to promote U.S. tourist destinations abroad. Florida and Nevada miss out on vital international tourism dollars because the United States has no entity to promote our amazing tourism opportunities to other countries. I am confident that the Travel Promotion Act, co-sponsored by Senator MARTINEZ, will pass the Senate shortly and will represent another accomplishment by my former colleague to improve the lives of his constituents and fuel success for all Americans.

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I thank MEL MARTINEZ for his decades of public service in Florida and here in our Nation's Capital. He proved to us all that the hope for a better life combined with determination and the limitless opportunities here in America can make any dream come true.

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