EULOGY OF RUSSELL LONG

Mr. BREAUX. Madam President, I rise today to comment on the unfortunate and untimely passing this Friday evening of a great American, a former colleague of many of us in this body, the former distinguished Senator from my State of Louisiana, Senator Russell Long.

One man once observed that “the greatest truths are the simplest, and so are the greatest men.” This, indeed, was Russell Long, a simple man who loved his family, his God, his country, and our State of Louisiana. He was a man who always answered the call of duty and who, to quote Russell, always “did the best he could as God gave him the light to see.”

Russell Long was my colleague. He was my partner in the Congress, he was my teacher, and he was also my friend.

Russell Long was a Senator in the last days of his life, his vision, his ideals, and his views on how a government should work will last as long as history is recorded.

I do not think it is an insult to say that Russell Long was a simple man who answered the call of duty by answering the call of duty. Knowing him as I did—and many of us did—I believe he would proudly accept that description.

As a boy of only 16, Russell watched as his father died from an assassin's bullet and then dutifully accepted the call to fulfill and complete his father’s unfinished work. Anyone who knew Russell understood how much he loved his dad and how much his father’s legacy meant to him.

Some might have regarded that legacy as an awesome and unwelcome burden. Russell, himself, sometimes strained under the weight of high expectations and the harsh reviews that historians and journalists wrote about his father. But he never forgot that he was Huey Long’s son. And, so, he dutifully dedicated his life to the work his father had started. The result, as we all know, was the body of law that created employee stock ownership plans. Those of us who knew him understood that this was Russell’s most passionate work and, to him, a modern version of Huey’s “Share Our Wealth” program.

Just as his father was a champion for the poor and dispossessed, so did Russell become one of the most effective advocates of the notion that every American has a right to share in the great wealth and opportunity of the United States.

Just as he answered the call of duty when it came to his family legacy, Russell also answered the call of duty when it came to serving his country. In 1942, during the darkest hours of the Second World War, Russell volunteered to serve his Nation in the Navy. During the war, he distinguished himself in battle as the commander of a landing craft in the Mediterranean Sea during the Allied invasions of North Africa, Sicily, Italy and Southern France. Russell Long was truly among our greatest generation—one of courage, valor, faith and compassion—a patriot and a true American hero.

Russell answered the call of duty to his country in other ways. In 1948, when Senator John Overton died, Russell was one of the first to enter into the U.S. Senate. He was sworn into office alongside other men elected that year—giants such as Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, Robert Kerr, and Paul Douglas. In a body that had disdained his father, Russell—he was only 30 years old at the time—began a remarkable 38-year career during which he worked tirelessly and effectively on behalf of the poor, the elderly, and average Americans who wanted a chance to achieve the American dream.

As there are 100 Russell Long stories, from Uncle Earl to his father Huey, to Russell’s theory of fair taxation summarized in his immortal words, “Don’t tax you, don’t tax me, tax that fellow behind the tree.”

Were I to list Russell’s legislative achievements, we would be here all afternoon. But I don’t think it is an overstatement to say that few people in our Nation’s history have had more impact on our Nation’s laws than Russell Long. Tens of millions of elderly people have literally been saved by Medicare—the health care system that Russell and Lyndon Johnson crafted and enacted in the Senate in 1965. Millions more hand-capped people today have a better quality of life because Russell Long thought it important to expand the Social Security system to include the disabled. That happened in 1965 and it was the first major expansion of the Social Security system—and it would not have happened if not for Russell’s tenacity in seeing it through to passage.

Millions of poor working Americans today have Russell Long to thank for the Earned Income Tax Credit, an idea he developed and passed into law in the early 1970s. Then and now, the EITC remains the cornerstone of our Nation’s effort to give the working poor a better chance at a decent standard of living. Providing television coverage to a rural State like South Dakota is no small challenge. The severe weather and vast distances make it difficult to get the airwaves into the homes of viewers, let alone to provide them with