

telling us the truth. They are not telling us the truth. The truth is becoming increasingly apparent, and the problem is that as time goes by you can reach tipping points that are irrecoverable. It would be really tragic for us to look back and think, if we had been able to act on time, if we had listened on time to the signals of our Earth, our planet, the signals that are plainly in our face, we could have made a world that was better and safer for our children. But, instead, in our folly, in our greed, in our willingness to listen to the falsehoods of these polluters, we shot past that point, and there is no way to recover it now.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that we proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BLUMENTHAL). Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO MARY LEAHY

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I rise on the Senate floor today to pay tribute to Mary Leahy, director at the Central Vermont Adult Basic Education—sister, friend, and lifetime educator—who is retiring this month.

For 40 years, Central Vermont Adult Basic Education has provided free literacy services for adults and out-of-school youth. Thirty-seven of those years, Mary Leahy has been at the helm. In her role as codirector at Central Vermont Adult Basic Education, Mary dedicated herself to preparing lower skilled workers to meet the demands of the shifting economy.

Whether it was attending townhalls, community centers and libraries, or knocking on doors directly, Mary has spread the word. She has recruited members for this program all over the State.

I have seen the joy in the face of a grandfather able to read a children's story to a grandchild—something the grandfather was not able to do for that child's parent because he could not read when they were a child.

In a recent article honoring Mary in the Times Argus, Vermont Poet Laureate Sydney Lea said these kind words about Mary:

This has been way beyond a job for Mary; it's really a vision of humanity that she's been dedicated to. I have an admiration for her that is pretty close to boundless.

I agree with my friend Sydney. Mary's lifelong passion for learning has enabled countless Vermonters to gain the critical skills needed to participate in today's workforce. In our country today, 88 million adults face at least one educational barrier, such as no high school diploma or no college, and only 3 to 4 percent of the workers with the most limited literacy proficiencies receive the basic skills training from

their employers. Under Mary's guiding hand, Central Vermont Adult Basic Education has allowed Vermonters, young and old, to reach their full potential and to be successful both in the classroom and in the workforce—I might add parenthetically, also just in their everyday lives.

As her older brother, I have known Mary all her life. She is a loving, intelligent, and hard-working person. She has the soul and talent of an artist and the generosity of a saint in sharing her talent and commitment.

I am so proud of Mary, and I ask unanimous consent that the Times Argus article "Closing a Chapter" be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From The Times Argus, April 30, 2012]
 CLOSING A CHAPTER: MARY LEAHY ENDS
 CAREER AT ADULT BASIC EDUCATION
 (By David Delcour)

Pages turn, chapters end, books close, and Mary Leahy—a woman who has dedicated her life to literacy in central Vermont—knows that better than most.

On Tuesday, Leahy plans to put the proverbial "period" at the end of her 37-year career with Central Vermont Adult Basic Education. The Marshfield woman's name has become synonymous with the organization where she's worked for nearly four decades.

And Leahy will tell you she's treasured every minute of it.

"I'm surprised I'm leaving," Leahy said during a Friday afternoon interview at CVABE's office on Washington Street in Barre. "This is what I am because the work is every bit at the center of my heart."

For those unfamiliar with CVABE, "the work" involves providing "free, individualized and confidential academic services" to folks who range in age from 16 to 90-something.

Many are high school dropouts, some are immigrants struggling to learn English, and still others are challenged by a growing "digital divide" that didn't exist back in 1975 when a much younger Leahy ditched her job as a high school art teacher to try something completely different.

Seated in an armchair located in the shadow of a paper mache version of Barre's "Stonecutter" memorial—this one holding a book in an outstretched hand, instead of a hammer at his side—Leahy said she has never regretted enlisting as a foot soldier in one of the earliest fronts in the "War on Poverty."

"When this job opened up, I went for it and it's grabbed every single bit of imagination that I have," she said. "It has been endlessly interesting and incredibly rewarding."

It was also real work, according to Leahy. "Back then all of us were working out of our cars and going here and there and everywhere," she recalled. "I've tutored in barns, I've tutored in churches, I've tutored in restaurants . . . wherever people were and (wherever they) felt comfortable."

Leahy's initial assignment was to expand the then-loose-knit, Barre-based program into five communities in Washington, Orange and Lamoille counties.

"That meant literally going through the hills and knocking on doors and saying: This is a program, it's free, and do you know anybody . . . who would find it helpful?" she recalled.

Those trips, Leahy said, were as much a search for "students" as they were an at-

tempt to recruit volunteers, whom, she is quick to note, have long been the backbone of CVABE.

That outreach paid off, according to Carol Shults-Perkins, who joined CVABE two years before Leahy and is the other half of the organization's long-standing "executive team."

"We've been delivering, and committed to delivering community-based services here in central Vermont for more than 40 years now, but it really was Mary (Leahy) who began—community by community, town hall by town hall, library by library engaging individual community members . . . and ensuring that community partnership and community participation has been part and parcel of the community-based services we provide."

According to Shults-Perkins, who will soon assume the role as CVABE's first executive director, the thought of running the organization without Leahy sharing the helm is going to take some getting used to.

"We have worked as a team for 35 years," she said. "You can't replace Mary (Leahy)."

Shults-Perkins won't get any argument from Newberry resident and Vermont Poet Laureate Sydney Lea. Lea, an 18-year member of CVABE's board of directors and its current president, thinks highly of the woman who recruited him during a chance encounter in a hospital parking lot.

"This has been way beyond a job for Mary (Leahy); it's really a vision of humanity that she's been dedicated to," Lea said.

"I have an admiration for her that is pretty close to boundless," he added, noting when he had to pick someone to install him as poet laureate last year, he turned to Leahy.

"She (Leahy) was the first person who came to mind," he said. "No fellow poets, no academics, just Mary."

A soft-spoken, silver-haired woman, with kind eyes and a tendency to deftly shift the focus of a conversation away from herself, Leahy speaks passionately about the importance of adult education, the courage of those who avail themselves to the services CVABE provides, and the commitment of an ever-changing cadre of volunteers who "find the time in their busy schedules to make a difference."

It's a recipe that works, according to Leahy, who spent one of her last days on the job pitching the merits of a program that has been her life's work.

"We're really the earliest of early ed(ucation) programs," Leahy said. "If parents are really important to their children's academic success, then for the parents who missed out on their own education, it stands to reason their child is not going to be on an equal playing field with other kids . . . That's where we come in."

"If we can place ourselves in the public imagination as part of the warp and weave of the entire fabric of education, then we're there for people whose time is right," she said. "When they're ready to learn (and) they want to learn, we're here to help."

Leahy said she is in the process of sifting through an office filled with notes, letters, and student work that underscore the life-changing nature of a basic education.

"It's like a memory tunnel," she said. "I'm unearthing all these wonderful things."

One was a note from a then-newly computer literate woman who thanked her CVABE teacher for helping her master modern technology.

"She was 90," Leahy said of the woman.

Although Leahy believes it is time for her to retire from CVABE, she said she won't be going far and will likely add her name to the organization's roster of volunteers.

"I'll be around," she said.