

SENATOR EDWARD KENNEDY: A PERSONAL APPRECIATION

Higher education lost a champion this week and so did the Advisory Committee. Senator Edward Kennedy was a strong supporter of the Committee for over two decades. He and his staff were always there to guide our work, ensure its quality, and make use of the best of our data and recommendations to advance the cause of access and persistence for low- and moderate-income students.

We join all of you in mourning his passing. A tireless soldier in the effort to ensure equal educational opportunity for all Americans, he will be sorely missed.

We have asked Clare Cotton, former Advisory Committee Chair and longtime friend of Senator Kennedy to offer a personal reflection.

Scott Giles, Chair
Allison Jones, Vice Chair
Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance

Early in his Senate career, Senator Kennedy had the opportunity of going on either an appropriating or an authorizing committee. He chose authorizing — the Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions Committee (acronym, naturally, HELP). Appropriations have enormous powers through funding to shape or kill programs, but programs are created and nurtured by authorizing committees. The Senator's early choice prefigured his entire career from its start in 1961 through 2009.

Three issues were at the heart of his passionate politics for the 48 years he served. His maiden speech in 1963 dealt with one of those, civil rights. Education, particularly higher education, and health care were the other two from the start. All personal issues. A citizen can vote freely in fair elections; every citizen and child is entitled to access to quality health care; every citizen and that citizen's children to access to quality education. Senator Kennedy's concern in the education arena was congruent with the Committee's in its focus on equal access for all qualified students without regard to family financial resources.

All these issues were for Senator Kennedy personal ones and were discussed by him in terms of individuals. A 1992 hearing in Boston on FAFSA complexity heard testimony from a Chinese-American student who explained that her storekeeper parents could not speak or read English, so she did her own FAFSA and her parents' IRS 1040 income tax return. Income tax, she said, was easier. For years, every time student aid red tape came up, he would say: Remember the girl in Boston?

During a small lunch meeting of staff, advisors, and finance experts to review the direct lending proposal, he focused on two questions: did the proposal represent the best loan terms we could get

for a student?, and what would be the impact on community colleges and their students? That day, the Senator was also managing part of the conference on the current civil rights proposal and was called away from the meeting three times to deal with some aspect of the civil rights bill. Each time, he returned to the table and resumed the loan discussion where he had left it. Not once did he have to ask, where were we?

Longevity in a political career is obviously a function of election and re-election. You could begin to grasp the phenomenon of Ted Kennedy, master politician, in a campaign event such as a visit to a senior center. He would seek out a lady to play the piano, get her seated and playing; then he would start leading everybody in singing Irish songs. He loved those old songs, sang them well in a good high baritone voice, would dance with the ladies, finish with a fond farewell and off to the next event. The whole of the man was there; the candidate was left behind. His joy at being with the people, his people, was palpable.

In his monumental *History of the United States Senate*, Senator Robert Byrd, the longest serving current Senator, comments: "Sen. Edward M. Kennedy would have been one of the outstanding senators in any era of the Senate's 200-year history." Millions of Americans who have used Federal programs to pay part of their college costs would agree.

Clare M. Cotton