

## Remembering Senator Kennedy

Michael Sean Winters | Aug. 26, 2009 NCR Today

No one gave a speech like Ted Kennedy. He could speak without notes and bring a room full of people, from the most educated Harvard alums to a room full of union workers, to their feet. His themes did not need to be on the page. They were in his life's work.

In 2004, I was working on the congressional campaign of Jim Sullivan who was running in Connecticut. Two weeks before the election, Sen. Kennedy came to do an event for our campaign at a union hall near the Electric Boat shipyards in Groton. I had the unenviable task of writing a speech for my candidate, who is a great public speaker, but what do you do for an encore after Sen. Kennedy?

An hour or so before the event, my cellphone rang. "Michael, this is Sen. Kennedy," he said, his voice as gravelly on the phone as I had heard it on the television. He wanted to know what issues we wanted him to address. There was not a whiff of officiousness in his speech or demeanor. He had nothing of the *prima dona* about him, a trait that distinguished him from many of the lesser politicians we had to deal with whose flattering self-image usually masked a bundle of insecurities. Sen. Kennedy knew who he was. He knew what he had endured in his life. He had no need of, and no time for, the obsequiousness that often attends powerful persons.

Sen. Kennedy delivered a stem-winder. (So, too, did Sen. Chris Dodd who learned many things from his friend in the Senate, not least how to rile up a room full of Democrats.) Then my candidate gave his speech. When he was done, Kennedy turned to Dodd and said, "He gives a great speech." We both felt like we had been told we were formal by the Queen of England.

When I learned of Sen. Kennedy's death this morning, I remembered that autumn day in Connecticut when I got an up-close glimpse of this man so many are calling "a lion." I suppose he was a lion, but it was humanity that moved me, and a room full of workers, that day. And moves me still.

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