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U.S. Sen. Joe Lieberman's farewell address

Tom Gallagher | Dec. 19, 2012 NCR Today

It's always valuable to listen to farewell addresses, especially those of significant people. When there are no more elections for which to campaign and one has "run the race," it is fascinating to hear the perspective of the outgoing. Of course, there will be legacies to be described and framed, but often, in between such messages, kernels of truth emerge that warrant our pondering, our reflection on the spoken word.

And so it is with retiring U.S. Sen. Joseph Lieberman [1] from Connecticut. An affable man, Lieberman made history by being the first Jewish candidate for the office of vice president and who, with Al Gore on the top of the ticket, collected about 500,000 more votes in the popular election only to be defeated by President George W. Bush with the help and nudge over the goal line by the U.S. Supreme Court decision [2] in the 2000 presidential election.

Lieberman was born in Stamford, Conn., on Feb. 24, 1942, and attended public schools there. He received his bachelor's degree from Yale College in 1964 and his law degree from Yale Law School in 1967. Lieberman was elected to the Connecticut State Senate in 1970 and served there for 10 years, including the last six as majority leader. In 1980, he returned to private legal practice for two years, and from 1983 through 1988 served as Connecticut's 21st attorney general. As attorney general, he took on polluters of Connecticut's environment, went after deadbeat dads by strengthening child support enforcement, and earned a strong reputation as a defender of consumers' rights.

Lieberman was first elected to the United States Senate in 1988, scoring the nation's biggest political upset that year by a margin of just 10,000 votes. Six years later, he made history by winning the biggest landslide victory ever in a Connecticut Senate race, drawing 67 percent of the vote and beating his opponent by more than 350,000 votes. In 2000, Lieberman was elected by another overwhelming margin to a third term.

In 2006, Lieberman was elected to a fourth term as an Independent because of the strength of his record and his accomplishments for the state. He won the general election by more than 100,000 votes. He remains committed to caucusing with Senate Democrats but is identified as an Independent Democrat.

Lieberman lives in Stamford and Washington with his wife, Hadassah. Together, they are the proud parents of four children and 12 grandchildren.

The child of Holocaust survivors who fled Hitler's regime to start a new life in the U.S., Hadassah grew up in Gardner, Mass., where her father became the community rabbi.

Lieberman's farewell address

Here are excerpts from Lieberman's farewell address [3]:

"What is required now is to solve the urgent problems we still have. And what is really required to do that leadership -- leadership of the kind that is never easy or common, but which we as Americans know we can

summon in times of need, because we have summoned it before.

"Today I regret to say as I leave the Senate that the greatest obstacle that stands between us and the brighter American future we all want is right here in Washington. It is the partisan polarization of our politics which prevents us from making the principled compromises on which progress in a democracy depends, and right now, which prevents us from restoring our fiscal solvency as a nation. We need bipartisan leadership to break the gridlock in Washington that will unleash all the potential that is in the American people.

And so I would respectfully appeal to my colleagues -- especially the twelve new Senators who will take the oath of office for the first time next month. I know how hard each of you has worked to get elected to the United States Senate, and I know that you work so hard, because you wanted to come here to make a difference for the better. There is no magic or mystery about the way to do so in the U.S. Senate. It requires reaching across the aisle and finding partners from the opposite party. It means ultimately putting the interests of country and constituents ahead of the dictates of party and ideology.

... Here, too, I appeal to my Senate colleagues, and again, especially those who will take the oath of office for the first time early in January: Do not listen to the political consultants or others who tell you that you shouldn't spend time on foreign affairs or national security. They're wrong. The American people need us, the Senate, to stay engaged economically, diplomatically, and militarily in an ever smaller world.

... Mr. President, I first set foot in this chamber almost exactly fifty years ago -- in the summer of 1963, inspired, like so many of my generation, by President John F. Kennedy and his call to service. I spent that summer right here in the Senate, as an intern for my home state Senator, Abe Ribicoff. He was and remains another personal hero of mine. And although I would never have admitted so publicly back then, because it was so presumptuous, I came away from that experience with the dream that I might someday, somehow, return to serve in this place.

Well, I have been blessed to live that dream.

And that is what America is about.

We have always been a nation of dreamers, whose destiny is determined only by the bounds of our own imagination, and by our willingness to work hard to realize what we have imagined.

Indeed, long before the United States came into being as a government of institutions and laws, it was a dream -- a dream, an implausible and incredible dream, of a country not defined by its borders or its rulers or the ethnicity of its founders, but by a set of eternal and universal principles -- that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are God's endowment to each of us.

That was the dream that gave us our existence and our purpose as a nation, and it is the dream that for more than two hundred years, through every passing generation, has been reinventing, renewing, enthralling, and surprising us -- the very dreamers who are living the dream.

I leave this chamber as full of faith in the dream called America, as when I stood here nearly a quarter of a century ago to take the oath of office for the first time -- and as when I first came here, nearly a half century ago, as a twenty-one year old, the grandchild of four immigrants to America, the son of wonderful parents who never had the opportunity even to go to college but made sure my sisters and I did, and gave us the confidence to pursue our dreams, which was their American dream for us.

America remains a land of dreams and a nation of dreamers. I know that my own story repeats itself today in millions of American families and their children. And as long as that is so, I know that our best days as a country are still ahead of us.

And so, Mr. President, I will end my remarks today where our country began a long time ago -- with a dream and a prayer: that God will continue to bless the United States of America."

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[1] http://www.lieberman.senate.gov/index.cfm
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