

## ***Kennedy's Greatness: Not Who He Was But What He Did***

**A DailyKos.com Diary Entry, a My.BarackObama.com Blog Entry,  
An OpEdNews.com Article, and an E-Mail to Progressive Activists**

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Love him or loathe him, Sen. Edward M. "Ted" Kennedy was an undeniably great public figure. But his greatness did not spring from who he was—the surviving one of four, larger-than-life brothers of a powerful American family—but from what he did—champion the rights of all Americans, including those not born to such wealth and privilege.

Ted Kennedy was not African American, Hispanic American, Native American, or Asian American. But he championed the Voting Rights and Fair Housing laws, immigration laws, and other legislation advancing civil rights, what he called "the still unfinished business of America."

Ted Kennedy was never a person of color in South Africa. But he championed the fight against Apartheid.

Ted Kennedy was not gay or lesbian. But he championed legislation protecting the rights of homosexual Americans and funding AIDS research.

Ted Kennedy was not a girl or a woman. But he championed women's reproductive rights, health

and nutrition programs for pregnant women and infants, and Title IX.

Ted Kennedy was not born into nor did he die in poverty. But he championed the minimum wage, Meals on Wheels, and countless other programs helping those far less advantaged than he.

Ted Kennedy was never a working class laborer or even a middle class wage earner. But he championed the Family Leave Act, OSHA, and the rights of labor unions.

Ted Kennedy was never denied a good education. But he championed No Child Left Behind (which President Bush failed to fund as promised) and higher education for all.

Ted Kennedy was never a serviceman in harm's way. But he came to champion the fight against the Vietnam Conflict, which he called "a monstrous outrage"; he pushed to abolish the draft and give 18-year-olds the right to vote; and he voted against the 2002 authorization for Bush to take us to war in Iraq, which he called "the best vote I've made in my 44 years in the United States Senate."

Ted Kennedy was never a victim of gun violence, like his brothers John and Bobby. But he championed gun control legislation.

Ted Kennedy was never mentally disabled, like his sister Rosemary, or until the end afflicted with cancer, like his son Edward Jr., who lost a leg. But he championed the Americans with Disabilities Act.

And as we saw towards the end, Ted Kennedy was never denied any medical care he needed. But for four decades, he championed community health care centers, cancer research, health insurance portability, the Mental Health Parity Act, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and other legislation that might lead to universal health care for all Americans, which he called "the cause of my life."

Let health care reform and all the other "progressive"—intelligent, compassionate, and just—causes that Sen. Kennedy devoted his legislative life to be our causes as well. What Sen. Kennedy said in his famous 1980 concession speech about the conclusion of his presidential aspirations can be said now, about the close of his life: "For me, a few hours ago, this campaign came to an end. For all those whose cares have been our concern, the work goes on, the cause endures, the hope still lives, and the dream shall never die."