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Tribute to Senator Russell B. Long

Frank J. Polozola*

Editor's Note: The following speech was given on November 3, 1994 by U.S. District Judge Frank J. Polozola to commemorate the dedication of the Russell B. Long Federal Building and United States Courthouse.

In 1983, a poem, written by Thomas Wolfe, was published in the Congressional Record. It stated:

So then, to every man his chance—
To every man, regardless of his birth,
His shining, golden opportunity—
To every man the right to live,
To work, to be himself,
and to become
Whatever thing his manhood and his vision
Can combine to make him—
this, seeker,
Is the Promise of America.¹

This poem could have been written about the life, career, mission, and accomplishments of Senator Russell B. Long. It is very similar to a statement issued by Russell B. Long on July 2, 1948 when he announced his candidacy for the United States Senate:

I promise to always strive to be loyal to the cause for which my father gave his life—that none shall be too rich and none too poor, and that everyone shall have the opportunity to lead a prosperous happy life in this land of plenty.²

Thus began a distinguished career which lasted 38 years in the United States Senate. During this period, Senator Long won seven statewide elections, and served under and, in many cases, was counselor to Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan.

Today it is appropriate that on Senator Long's seventy-sixth birthday, we dedicate the Russell B. Long Federal Building and United States Courthouse.

Today we acknowledge and thank a distinguished public servant who served his country and the citizens of this state with honor, integrity, and dignity; a man who is known for his fairness and compassion; a senator who earned the confidence and respect of eight presidents, his colleagues in the Senate, and the

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1. Thomas Wolfe, *Burning in the Night, in A Stone, A Leaf, A Door* 158, 165 (1987).

2. Robert Mann, *Legacy to Power: Senator Russell Long of Louisiana* 84 (1992).

citizens he proudly served; one, who despite the enormous pressures and responsibilities of a United States Senator, took care of the personal needs of his family as a husband to his wife Carolyn, a father to Kay and Pamela and a grandfather to Katherine, Russell, Kirk, and Audra. He is the proud son of Huey and Rose Long, who like him, served in the United States Senate. To many he is a devoted and trusting friend and confidant. To the elderly, the disabled, the sick, and the working poor, he is a champion.

These beautiful grounds and this magnificent building form an appropriate setting to briefly review the life and career of Senator Long. As we sit under these stately oaks and tall magnolias, we remember Russell Long as a student at Louisiana State University ("LSU"). There he was elected student body president, served as a member of the university's debate team with Hubert Humphrey, who was later to serve as a colleague in the United States Senate and as Vice-President of the United States. Senator Long was a member of the 1942 law class which included his close friend and law partner, E. Gordon West, the first Chief Judge of the United States District Court for the Middle District of Louisiana; Alvin B. Rubin, a federal district judge who was later appointed as a judge on the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals; Harvey Posner, who served as a United States Bankruptcy Judge for this district; and John J. McKeithen, who was elected as Governor of the State of Louisiana. It was at the LSU Law School where young Russell Long's extraordinary character, his unselfishness, and his strong sense of leadership and justice became known. Finishing as one of the top three students in his class, he was eligible to be elected as valedictorian by members of his class. Russell Long chose not to run for valedictorian because he believed that Alvin Rubin had earned the right to be valedictorian since he had finished first in the class. Concerned that Alvin Rubin might be discriminated against because he was Jewish and concerned what effect that would have on the law school he loved, Russell Long withdrew from the race and supported Alvin Rubin, who was easily elected as the class valedictorian. This incident would be the first of many occasions where Russell Long spurned personal ambition in favor of what was best for the common good of the people he served, his friends, or his family. Last year, the LSU Law School honored Senator Long as its Outstanding Alumnus.

These beautiful grounds which were once known as "Victory Park" and served as the home of the American Legion Nicholson Post No. 38 are a vivid reminder of the Senator's military service during World War II. Like many of his classmates, the winds of war delayed his law practice. Russell Long enlisted in the United States Navy and served with distinction in the Mediterranean, Northern Africa, Sicily, and the French Coast as a commander of a landing craft tank vessel until his discharge in November of 1945.

Upon his return to Baton Rouge, Senator Long began his law practice with Gordon West. His appetite for the political scene began almost immediately when he campaigned in support of his Uncle Earl's successful run for Governor. As 1948 approached, a vacancy occurred in the United States Senate when Senator John Overton died. Though only twenty-nine years old and too young

to meet the constitutional age for a United States Senator, Russell Long won the election one day before his thirtieth birthday. On December 31, 1948 he took his first oath as a United States Senator. Thus began an extraordinary career of legislative achievements that lasted thirty-eight years. In his first year in the Senate, he was named one of three outstanding senators, and Redbook magazine declared Senator Long as "potentially the most powerful member of the United States Senate" in its December 1951 edition.³ History proved the magazine's prediction to be accurate. Senator Long soon earned the respect, trust, and confidence of his fellow senators, and though low in seniority, was soon placed on some of the most important committees in the United States Senate. For thirty-four years, he served on the powerful Senate Finance Committee and served with distinction as its chairman for fifteen years. He was elected assistant majority leader for four years, served as chairman of the Surface Transportation Subcommittee of the Committee on Commerce, and as a member of the Senate Ethics Committee and the Joint Committee on Taxation. At the time of his retirement, only three senators had served in the United States Senate longer than Senator Long.⁴

His legislative achievements were many; his leadership well known; and his fervent desire to serve all of the people of Louisiana and this great nation was deeply ingrained in his heart. Thousands of the elderly, the working poor, the sick, and the disabled had their benefits increased because of Senator Long. His legislation to promote Employee Stock Ownership Plans enabled more workers to participate in the profits of the companies for which they worked. Under his leadership, nineteen separate pieces of legislation were enacted advancing employee stock ownership.⁵ Other workers and the business community were helped through the Earned Income Tax Credit and employer tax credits for hiring the hardcore jobless. He supported legislation which supported industry in Louisiana because he felt that if it was good for industry, it was good for Louisiana.

It has been said that Senator Long's knowledge of the tax laws is unparalleled. Indeed, there are very few people in the United States who know as much about the tax code as does Senator Long. It should come as no surprise that he received the strong support of business and labor, of the rich, the middle class and the poor, and Democrats and Republicans for the manner in which he chaired the Senate Finance Committee. Under his leadership, the American people received tax cuts in 1975, 1977, and 1978. He helped enact the 1972 and 1976 Federal Revenue Sharing laws, and the one-dollar-check-off for presidential elections. His brilliant knowledge of Senate rules and his ability to work with other Senators enabled him to be an effective and productive Senator. Senator Long is also known for his humor, which also enhanced his ability to obtain

3. Redbook (Dec. 1951).

4. 132 Cong. Rec. S4563-01.

5. 133 Cong. Rec. S10051-01.

needed votes and to dilute opposition to legislation he supported. His definition of tax reform is widely known: "Don't tax you; don't tax me. Tax that fella behind the tree." When the Republicans won the Senate, he lost his chairmanship on the Senate Finance Committee to Bob Dole. On one of the first votes of the new committee, Senator Long voted as a committee member, and later when the vote of the chairman was called for, Senator Long voted again. His explanation to Robert Mann, the author of *Legacy to Power* was simple: "Senator Dole had not had the job long enough to realize that it was his turn to vote."⁶

Senator Long supported a strong military, advocated a conservative approach to foreign aid, and supported legislation that would bring equal treatment to all, regardless of race, sex or religion.

During his thirty-eight years in the United States Senate, Senator Long had an active role in shaping the federal judiciary in the State of Louisiana. He was a strong supporter of a separate, but equal and independent, federal judiciary. On a more local level, the Middle District of Louisiana was established because of his legislative skills and his strong desire to serve the people of this state. In 1971, Judge West expressed a strong personal desire to create the Middle District of Louisiana, which would be made up of the nine parishes of the Baton Rouge Division of the Eastern District of Louisiana. I was honored to work with Judge West on this project. Judge West sought and obtained the assistance of Senator Long. For reasons not relevant here, a Congressman from a northeastern state opposed the bill and placed a hold on it. Knowing Judge West's personal interest in having the new district created, and determined not to allow a congressman to stop a bill which he had a personal interest in, Senator Long used his skillful knowledge of Senate rules to achieve the result he wanted. It appeared that a bill had passed the House of Representatives and was pending in the Senate which would relieve an excess payment of \$547.52 which Sgt. Richard C. Walker, a United States Marine from Thibodaux, Louisiana, had received while he was on active service.⁷ Sections one and two of H.R. 3749 did just that: it forgave the overpayment and provided for a penalty against anyone who tried to collect the overpayment.⁸ Senator Long amended the house bill to add Section 3 which provided:

(a) Section 98 of Title 28 of the United States Code is amended to read as follows:

§ 98. Louisiana

Louisiana is divided into three judicial districts to be known as the Eastern, Middle and Western Districts of Louisiana.⁹

6. Mann, *supra* note 2, at 376.

7. Pub. L. 92-208.

8. Pub. L. 92-208.

9. Pub. L. 92-208.

In 1972, the Middle District was created. Senator, the bench and bar of the Middle District of Louisiana are grateful for your efforts in creating the Middle District.

Upon his retirement from the United States Senate, Senator Long received the accolades of Senators from both sides of the aisle and from editorial writers throughout the country. Some of these statements are set forth in your program. But I believe the strongest praise for the Senator's outstanding service as a United States Senator came from the citizens of the State of Louisiana when they sought to have Senator Long serve as their governor. What an amazing tribute to a public servant who had already served the people of his state for thirty-eight years and who, despite numerous votes on very controversial issues, still had an approval rate of over seventy-five percent from the people he represented. The press in Louisiana joined the voices of the people in encouraging Senator Long to run for governor. Although he had a lifelong ambition to serve as governor as his father and uncle did, Senator Long gracefully declined to enter the governor's race. In another of his many unselfish acts which were a true indication of his character, Senator Long chose to spend more time with his wife, his two daughters, and his four grandchildren.

Today we fulfill the final mandate of a bill actively sought by the judges of this court under the leadership of Chief Judge Parker to build a new federal building and courthouse in the Middle District of Louisiana—the dedication of the Russell B. Long Federal Building and United States Courthouse. Today we honor a true statesman and public servant; a man of honor, compassion and integrity; a sailor, a lawyer and a devoted husband, father, and grandfather; a true friend to all; a man who never gave up on the United States Senate, the American people or the United States of America; a man who has supported and defended the Constitution of the United States and who has a strong belief that the United States of America is the one nation under God with Liberty and Justice for all. This is the legacy Senator Long has left to the people of Louisiana and to the United States of America.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a distinct honor and personal privilege to present to you the Honorable Russell B. Long of Louisiana.

