

Tribute to Senator Dan Inouye

Delivered by Jennifer Sabas, Chief of Staff to Senator Inouye, at his memorial service at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific

<http://www.inouye.senate.gov/news/press-releases/tribute-to-senator-dan-inouye>
Sunday, December 23, 2012

It has been my great privilege to work for, and with Senator Dan Inouye for more than 25 years. It has been the most incredible living lesson on leadership. His only instruction – to make life better for everyday people. So simple, yet oftentimes, very difficult.

I had many hours to reflect on the past 6 days during the long plane ride home. I had the bittersweet honor of accompanying Irene, and bringing our Senator home.

Senator Inouye left us on Monday, December 17th, in the same way in which he lived his life – in control, peacefully calm, and giving out clear instructions, until the very end.

His final act was to call in the medical staff at Walter Reed Military Hospital to thank them for their heroic efforts. He penned “Aloha,” and went on to a better place.

It reminded me of one of the stories he often shared about his father taking him to Chinatown to buy a koi, or carp. They picked out a fish, put it in a burlap bag, brought it home and threw it in into a large bucket of water. The koi thrashed about violently, attempting to elude capture. But once his father was able to catch the fish and put it on the cutting board, the koi lay still.

Our beloved Senator fought gallantly to beat his health challenges over the past 6 months. He fought like a warrior. But, when it was time, he went like the koi – with discipline and dignity.

His Senate and House colleagues paid him the greatest tribute by unanimously passing a Joint Resolution on Tuesday, December 18th, to allow his body to lie in state in the rotunda of our nation’s capitol. Senator Inouye is only one of 32nd Americans to receive this high honor. His casket lay on the wooden foundation built for President Abraham Lincoln.

Think about it – A century and a half later, a boy from McCully/Moiliili, deemed an enemy alien by his country, goes on to receive the Medal of Honor from President Clinton, and becomes the President Pro Tempore of the Senate – and he lies on the foundation built for the President who abolished the most egregious and reprehensible form of racial discrimination, which nearly severed our nation in two.

Thank you, Mr. President for your beautiful tribute at the National Cathedral. Your comments about our generation definitely hit a chord. Similar to you (although I am younger!), I was just over a year old when Dan Inouye became Hawaii’s Senator. Our generation and those which followed have only known life with Senator Inouye.

If there was a problem, let’s call Senator Dan. If there was an opportunity to be seized, let’s call Senator Dan. And, even if you didn’t actually call, you knew you always could.

It didn’t matter if you were rich or poor, Democrat or Republican, or from which island you came. The people of Hawaii had Dan Inouye on speed-dial. More often than not Dan delivered. He was our security blanket.

Hawaii is grieving from a monumental loss. There is sorrow, despair and a fear about facing the future without him.

I am reminded of comments so kindly and personally conveyed to Irene ene the day after the Senator's passing by Vice President Biden and Senate Leader Reid.

They both basically said the same thing -- that "Dan encouraged me to do things, to pursue things I didn't think I could do. He had more confidence in me oftentimes, than I had in myself. And, he supported me every step of the way."

As I thought about it, Senator has done exactly that with the hundreds of men and women who were fortunate enough to call him simply and affectionately "Boss," He also infused a similar confidence in countless business, government and community leaders throughout Hawaii. Convincing them that they were good enough, tough and smart enough to compete and be successful.

It is our turn, Hawaii -- to step forward and demonstrate that we were listening and paying attention to his lessons on leadership and humanity (because you know he is watching us).

My friends, this is Dan Inouye's legacy -- it is not simply all the stuff that he delivered for 50 years. It is also that fighting spirit, that risk-taking confidence, ever filled with hope that he has infused in each of us.

So, let us pick up the baton that he left at our feet, and carry it forward in his name, and for our beloved Hawaii.

"Aloha" Boss. A hui hou. Until we meet again.

Press Contact

Jennifer Sabas (Inouye): 808-541-2542