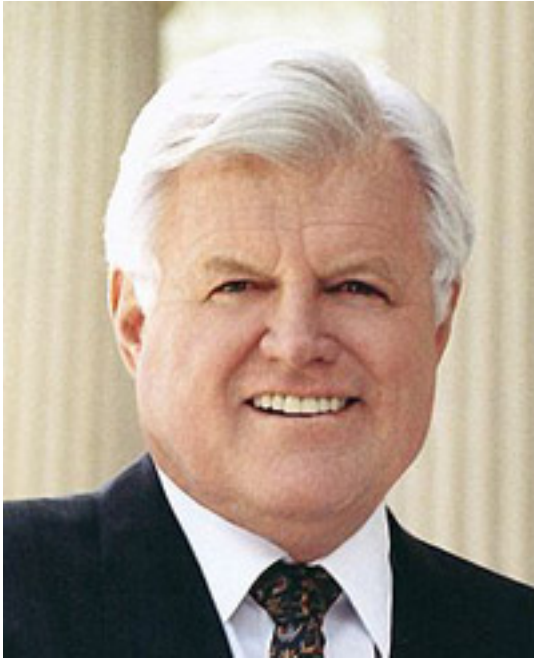


## Senator Ted Kennedy fought to achieve the greatest good across race and class

Written by Janice S. Ellis  
Friday, 28 August 2009 17:04

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Senator Ted Kennedy certainly epitomized Aristotle’s “Man of Practical Wisdom” when it came to fulfilling Plato’s vision of what government should be about, “seeking the greatest good for the greatest number.”

That was Ted Kennedy’s public life.

He spent his life working for and passing public policies that benefited his fellow citizens—an accomplishment that exceeded that of any other Senator in U.S. history and more than most presidents of the United States.

His passion and compassion, power and prowess, prudence and patience were applied in great measure as he fought to guarantee equality for everyone irrespective of race and socio-economic class, which resulted in the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. His work did not stop there. He worked to pass the Voting Rights Act and Immigration Act in 1965, the Refugee Act in 1980 and many others.

Throughout his career of public service, he fought for other critical far-reaching issues, among them educational equality, and of course his life-long fight for health care reform.

Many organizations whose work has been for the disenfranchised, the poor and often forgotten know in a poignant way that they lost a champion today. It was expressed in statements issued by organizations like the National Urban League, [www.nul.org](http://www.nul.org), the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, [www.civilrights.org](http://www.civilrights.org), the Asian American Justice Center at [www.advancingequality.org](http://www.advancingequality.org) and America’s Voice at [www.america’svoiceonline.org](http://www.america’svoiceonline.org).

Karen K. Narasaki, president and executive director of the Asian American Justice Center,

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perhaps said it best in a statement she issued on the passing of Sen. Kennedy:

“Sen. Kennedy was the Senate’s extraordinary advocate for equality. He believed in, and fought doggedly to protect, the civil rights of all Americans. The immigrant community is especially grateful for his years of service and commitment, and for being one of its staunchest advocates.

Asian Americans in particular honor him for his work in 1965 when he led, and won, the battle to pass that year’s Immigration Act, which lifted the 1924 racial restrictions on immigration from Asia and abolished immigration quotas. He led the fight for the Refugee Act of 1980, which ensured humanitarian protections for refugees in overseas camps or seeking asylum. The Asian American community would not be as large or as diverse as it is today without his championing of immigrants and refugees.

From the seminal Civil Rights Act of 1964 that attacked segregation, to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that sought to eliminate minority discrimination in voting, to the 1968 Fair Housing and Bilingual Education acts, Kennedy was an indispensable figure in ensuring that minorities truly be treated as full citizens.

More recently, he was the chief sponsor of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 and was integral to the 2006 reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act. Even while he was battling brain cancer, he never stopped fighting for others. Earlier this year, Kennedy was key to passage of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which restored the right of employees to challenge wage discrimination and which was the first law President Obama signed. He was in the middle of trying to get long sought hate crimes legislation and immigration reform enacted. Lastly, we are saddened by his absence from the health care reform debate, a cause that he took up early in his career and never dropped.

...We mourn the passing of this courageous and compassionate champion who was a legend long before today.”

Even with the passage of these major pieces of legislation, they only represent a portion of Kennedy’s life’s work.

Had Senator Kennedy lived, there is no doubt he would have worked until we achieved meaningful healthcare reform and immigration reform—two of the most important, far-reaching and contentious issues facing the nation today.

How can we best honor such a public servant’s work and legacy? As Vice President Joe Biden expressed in his remarks today, like Senator Kennedy, we must never become cynical about what we as Americans can achieve if we work hard and unselfishly to achieve it.

Oh if current and future leaders could be so inspired by Ted Kennedy the public servant, America could surpass any greatness already achieved.

As Senator Kennedy once said, “There is no safety in hiding.” I might add, “... and in doing nothing.”

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