**Farewell Speech**

Madam President, I rise today with gratitude to address my colleagues and members of my staff and to reflect on one of life’s greatest honors — serving the people of the great state of Nevada.

I would like to begin by thanking them for giving me the profound honor of representing Nevada in the United States Congress for twelve years and in the United States Senate for the past eight years.

Nevada — thank you for granting me the privilege of working every day for a state that I am so proud to call my home.

And, of course, I would like to thank my immediate family, especially my wife, Lynne, for being at my side during nearly thirty years of public service.

To my children - Hilary, Harris, Drew, and Emmy. To their spouses - Eddie, McKenzie, and Collin. Thank you for your patience, your understanding, and your tolerance of this process.

I’d be remiss if I didn’t thank my parents, Jack and Janet Heller for setting the right example and religious tone in our home growing up.

To my father-in-law, Richard Brombach, and all of my wife’s family, thank you for raising such a wonderful daughter, sister, cousin, and aunt.

Madam President, I have five brothers and sisters.

All of them played vital roles in my upbringing. So thank you to Jack, Tamie, Mac, Sara, and Bryan.

All of these individuals that I have mentioned gave me their steadfast support and have made my journey from the Nevada Legislature to the Secretary of State’s office to the United States House of Representatives...to the United States Senate...possible.

I could count on them every step of the way.

Now, Madam President, we all know how important our staff is to us, and I’m not an exception. I’ve been fortunate to have two staff members with me my whole tenure in Congress. I’d like to highlight both of them.

Mac Abrams, my chief of staff, hails from North Carolina. I know more about North Carolina than I thought I ever would. Mac came to me from Senator Vitter’s office. After 12 years, we muse about writing a book together. Together, we’ve seen a lot. From the Great Recession’s impact on Nevada, the visits from Senator Reid to my house office, to Senator Ensign’s resignation, the Governor’s appointment, Obamacare, Dodd Frank reforms, immigration reform, tax reform, changing the courts, to name just a few, Mac was always there. In these chambers, there are a lot of slings and arrows and it takes an expert to walk these mine fields. No one does it alone. I always had Mac Abrams by my side. So I thank him for his service to me, but more importantly for his service to Nevada.

Scott Riplinger has also served the office with distinction. Those who know him and who have worked with him know that he is a problem solver. It didn’t matter which hat he was asked to wear, he wore it with pride. I will miss his hard work, his work on the Banking Committee, his loyalty, and his great sense of humor. Every office needs a Scott Riplinger.

Madam President, I would like to mention two more. Sarah Paul has become a dear friend of mine. Joining my staff seven and a half years ago, I’ve leaned on her heavily to help navigate very complicated issues. From gaming, to mining, to technology, nobody could grasp an issue like her. During the last campaign, she served as my chief of staff as others were relegated to Nevada. So thank you, Sarah, and congratulations. On Thanksgiving Day, she introduced Liam Milliner Paul to the world. Again, congratulations to Sarah, Raymond, and big brother James on the new addition.

Finally, I would like to recognize Ashley Jonkey. Ashley oversees our state operation and she has been with us since my early days in the House of Representatives. Whether it’s putting together the Tahoe Summit or keeping me up to speed on a local issue, Ashley is someone who I can always count on. In fact, over the past decade that I’ve known Ashley, she’s become like family to me and more importantly - Lynne. She’s based in Reno, but we’re fortunate to have her here in Washington, D.C. today so I’d like to recognize her along with Mac, Scott, Sarah, and the many members of my staff who are here on the floor of the U.S. Senate.

We have a great team, top to bottom. A team that includes naturalized citizens whose families came to this country seeking a better life, professional social workers, and multiple combat veterans. Every member of my team in Reno, Elko, Las Vegas, and Washington DC. has worked tirelessly to make a difference in the lives of Nevadans.

Madam President, my staff’s dedication, enthusiasm, and work ethic goes unmatched. I ask unanimous consent have the list of current and former staff, and their names, printed in the record for this legislative day.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows: CURRENT STAFF: Mac Abrams, Sarah Paul (Timoney), Ashley Jonkey, Meron Bayu, Scott Riplinger, Megan Taylor, Gretchen Andersen, Annie Sedgwick, Scarlet Doyle, Andrew Williams, Joe Boddicker, Blair Bjellos, Rachel Green, Lindsey Parobeck, Jazmine Kemp, Adam Miller, Hayley Brower, William Yepez, Meagan Devlin, Elizabeth Lloyd, Michael Lienhard, Katie Pace, Rocio Meza, Lauren Morris, Eduardo Martinez, Brett Pollak , Mark Sutliff , Donna Bath, Kike De La Paz, Andrew Lingenfelter, Christy Guedry, Devyn Hartmann, Bruno Moya, Ryan Dutiel, Marcie Zajac, Andrew Thomas, Andrew Holbert. FORMER STAFF: Emy Lesofski, Leeann Gibson (Walker), Josh Finestone, Hayley Douglas, Stewart 'Mac' Bybee, Michawn Rich, Pat Garrett, Alli Collier, Tom Ferraro, Stephanie Beverly, Mari St. Martin (Nakashima), Corrine Gianpaolo (Zakzeski), Katie Carr, Alison Gaske, Stephanie Ferguson

Karen Paulson, Paula Carroll, Amber Heinz, Ryan McBride, Victoria Glover, Emily Wilkenson, Jeremy Harell, Kristen Elias, Kristen Pierce (Casey), Luke Burns, Spencer Armuth, Laura Hutson (Bland), Greg Facchiano, Chandler Smith, Neal Patel, Lauren Ann Rehrauer, Ryan Leavitt, Chana Elgin, Matt Morris, John Knobel, John Blum, Mallory Nersesian, Robert Jackson, Eric Duhon, Erin Collins, Christine Atchian, Daniel Giudici, Britt McManus Chapman, Veronica Charles, Josh Marin-Mora, Chloe McClintock, Sam Crampton, Glenna Smith, Lucero-Gomez Ochoa, Stephen Sifuentes, Michael Mendenhall, Margot Allen, Terri Fairfield, Leonardo Benavides, Matt Morris, Andres Moses.

Madam President, I would like to shift gears for a moment to mention several topics that demanded a lot of my time and energy. When it comes to our legislative successes, I am most proud of what we accomplished to help the 300,000 veterans who call Nevada home.

I think that everyone in this chamber will agree that while we can never fully repay our debt to our nation’s heroes, we can do everything in our power to show our gratitude for their selflessness and sacrifice.

Once these men and women return home after leaving their families to fight for our country, it is our turn to fight for them. To make sure that each and every Nevada veteran receives the treatment they need, the services they need, and the skills they need to get a job and take care of their families. I see that responsibility as a duty and a privilege. In fact, I’ve said this before, and I will say it again: the greatest compliment that I have ever received was when I overheard one veteran say to another veteran, “if you need help, call Senator Heller’s office.”

As a senior member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, I have had the opportunity to give our veterans a strong voice in Washington, D.C. Under Chairman Johnny Isakson’s leadership, we have made great strides toward bringing greater accountability to the VA and improving the benefits, the care, and the support that our veterans have earned.

For example, earlier this year, we pushed the historic VA MISSION Act over the finish line. This new law directs more than $50 billion to our VA health care system so that the VA can hire more high-quality doctors and allow veterans to get the care they need, near their homes, and on their schedules.

We also expanded the VA Caregivers program, which provides a stipend to the families of severely disabled veterans who require a caregiver in their homes. Previously, only post-9/11 veterans were able to apply, now veterans from every era are eligible. This was particularly important to many veterans in Nevada who told me how critical it is that we give more veterans access to this program.

These are just a few examples of a fix to a problem that came up during my discussions with my Veterans Advisory Councils. I established these groups of veterans in the northern and southern parts of the state to speak frequently and directly with them about the challenges they’re facing and the problems that needed to be fixed.

For instance, just a few years ago, the Reno VA was one of the worst ranked offices in the nation. This was at a time when veterans were waiting on average more than 400 days for their disability claims to be approved. This was not acceptable, so I teamed up with Senator Bob Casey from Pennsylvania to hold the VA’s feet to the fire, and as a result of the implementation of the 21st Century Veterans Benefits Delivery Act**,** the backlog has been reduced by approximately 85 percent and 500,000 of our military heroes around the country are no longer waiting for their health benefits.

We also provided accountability through expedited firing authority of bad VA employees, and overhauled the VA appeals process so veterans do not have to wait years for a decision. The President signed this bill into law in Reno last year.

Expanding veterans’ access to care has been one of my top priorities. For veterans living in Northern Nevada, I worked to authorize construction of the Reno VA hospital and deliver $33.5 million in federal funding for it so that veterans in the north don’t have to drive 500 miles to Boulder City to access the State Veterans Home. I walked through the construction site when I was in Sparks about a month ago, and I look forward to the completion of this state-of-art facility. I did the same for the veterans in southern Nevada. I worked for 10 years to secure the approval of the new, larger clinic in Pahrump.

For veterans who faced barriers to trying to get an education so that they can earn a good living, I introduced a bill that increases the education benefit for Guard and Reserve members and ensures the G.I. Bill is available to veterans for life.

And after Nevada was ranked second among states with the highest rate of veteran suicides and experiencing a doctor shortage, I authored a new law that gives veterans more access to mental healthcare services and treatment.

I am grateful for the opportunity to work with Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Tester, Senate Leadership, and this administration to enact laws that provide our veterans with the support and benefits they are owed.

While we have made progress, we can and we must do better, and it is my hope that the next Congress, Republican and Democrats can continue to work together things done with our veterans.

Now Madam President, on another topic— tax reform.

When I delivered my maiden speech on the floor of the U.S. Senate, Nevada was struggling after being knocked down by Great Recession. A time when Nevada led the nation in home foreclosures and when we had double-digit unemployment.

Today, Nevada is leading the nation in private sector job growth, the housing market has recovered, and home prices are increasing. Now we are one of the fastest growing states in the nation.

Nevada is booming, and it is because this Congress delivered tax cuts that put more money in Americans’ paychecks, pocketbooks, and pensions, and we advanced pro-growth policies that have led to more jobs, higher wages, and more opportunities for Nevadans.

As a member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance, I am proud to have authored provisions in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act that include doubling the child tax credit from $1,000 to $2,000 per child. Since the law was enacted, tens of thousands of jobs in the state of Nevada have been created, and recently, Nevada’s unemployment rate hit an 11-year low – the lowest level since before the 2008 economic downturn.

As a direct result of this new law, tens of thousands of Nevadans have benefited from bonuses, raises, and expanded benefits on top of bigger paychecks and strengthened pensions. For example, South Point Hotel & Casino doubled its full-time workers’ bonuses, developers of a stalled project on the Las Vegas Strip committed to creating over 10,000 jobs, and the Prospector Hotel in Ely gave its employees bonuses and raised starting wages. All of this was the direct result of tax reform.

Nevada’s economy is back on track, and I hope that this Congress will continue to advance policies that keep us on that path and help Nevada workers and hardworking families get ahead.

Since coming to Washington, D.C., my number one focus has always been the people of Nevada and putting our state’s priorities first.

For example, I worked with Senator Martin Heinrich from New Mexico to level the playing field for the development of new, alternative energy technologies to support Nevada’s energy diversification.

Earlier this year, I was proud to host the bipartisan annual Lake Tahoe Summit, and I have worked with Senator Feinstein throughout my career to deliver resources to protect the Tahoe Basin and fight devastating wildfires.

And when Congress came together to approve a five-year highway bill, I was able to secure my top infrastructure priority – the expansion of Interstate-11 up to northern Nevada.

Whether it’s leading the Republican charge to extend unemployment benefits in 2014 when Nevada’s unemployment rate was nearly double what it is now, or breaking with my party to pass the Violence Against Women Act, I have always been willing to work with anyone who has good ideas to help move Nevada’s families and communities forward.

While I am pleased that I have been able to work with my colleagues to turn these ideas into over 100 pieces of legislation that are now law, there is much more to this job than just advancing good policies.

It is about helping people – that is what is most important.

I work for Nevadans, and when someone comes to me with a problem or calls one of our offices for help – we drop everything to do all that is in our power to help them.

When the VA refused to pay a homeless veteran $40,000 after he won his appeal, we made sure that veteran got paid so that he could get back on his feet.

When a constituent who had a liver transplant was denied coverage and left without insurance, he enrolled in the Marketplace Exchange. When the time came to re-enroll, the Exchange denied him and forced him to go without insurance until we intervened.

Or take the example of a woman who came to us after being charged a Medicare penalty of about 40 percent each month. My staff worked with the local and regional offices to secure reimbursement of $1,000 and adjust the monthly premium to save that constituent potentially thousands of dollars.

And when a constituent spent nine months trying to get her Social Security retirement benefits, we were able to get her a resolution to promptly begin receiving her payments.

Finally, when a Navy veteran was in jeopardy of losing his home when he was temporarily out of work, we contacted the lender of his mortgage on his behalf and ensured that he was able to keep it.

These are just a few examples of what this job is really all about. Making life better for the people you work for.

And Madam President, I know that I am not alone. I truly believe this is what drives all members of Congress to serve their constituents. No matter your party. No matter your state. No matter what you did before you got here.

So, before I got here, I grew up with two parents and five siblings who, like many Nevadans, embody the Battle Born spirit.

I’d like to pay tribute to not only my family, friends, and mentors who have helped me along the way, but all of my constituents by talking a little bit about what makes Nevadans different.

Nevadans are pioneers.

We are not afraid to take risks, to dream, to put in the hard work and start from scratch.

We are self-starters, builders, and trailblazers.

We laid down the tracks to connect railroads and mined for gold and silver in the North.

We shoveled mud, drilled through rock, and scaled concrete to construct the Hoover Dam.

And in the Mojave Desert, we created the Entertainment Capital of the World.

But one characteristic outsiders may overlook is this: we are fighters**.**

And no other event in our history best serves as an example of that trait than in the aftermath of the October first mass shooting in Las Vegas, a tragedy that truly shook our state.   
  
I have spoken before on the Senate floor about the incredible, heroic people who helped lead concertgoers, and in turn, the whole community, out of that darkness. Whether these individuals wore uniforms or not, they stepped up to help others and their actions helped us grieve, and start to heal, together.

The immeasurable pain, suffering, and devastation inflicted by one man elicited a profound, innate, and immediate human response from Nevadans across the state. Like many Nevadans, I saw firsthand the strong sense of family, faith, and strength in the wake of October first. And when I leave here, I will carry those extraordinary moments of unity and generosity with me.

During his 1989 inaugural address, Former President George H.W. Bush once said,

“We know what works: Freedom works. We know what's right: Freedom is right. We know how to secure a more just and prosperous life for man on Earth: through free markets, free speech, free elections and the exercise of freewill unhampered by the state.” 

Regardless of what party you affiliate with, I think we can all agree with those words.

We can all agree that we are fortunate to live in a great country defended by men and women who stand guard to defend our way of life.

We can all agree that are fortunate to live in a great country in which every aspiration or dream is possible to achieve.

We can all agree that it is because freedom works. Freedom is right.   
  
No, not everything comes easy, and I would be lying if I said that others didn’t have to fight harder than some. But that job you want to get, that school you want to get into, that business you want to start, or that idea you want to see come to life…it is possible in America. 

A country where the son of an auto mechanic and school cook had the opportunity to deliver the newspaper to then Governor Mike O’Callaghan, go to Sunday school with then Lt. Gov Harry Reid’s sons, get his education at the same public high school as late Senator Paul Laxalt, and play basketball with Governor Brian Sandoval.

A place where that same kid could grow up to serve Nevada in the United States Senate.

My goal has always been to make Nevada a better place today than it was yesterday. A better place to raise a family and not only one where you can find a job, but a place where you can have a long-term career. 

Madam President, I would like to end with this. My daughter Hilary and her husband adopted a young child from China. Abandoned as an infant at a bus station. Her name is Ava. She was raised in an orphanage for her first two years. When my daughter and her family first met Ava:

She did not cry when she was hungry.

She did not cry when she was tired. 

She did not cry when she needed to be changed. 

She did not cry when she was hurt. 

Why? Because it did not matter, she was always on someone else’s time.

But, she did cry when they took off her shoes to put her bed.

You see, in an orphanage kids sleep with their shoes on so they don’t get lost.

Ava had never slept without her shoes on. 

She did cry the first time when they bathed her in a tub of water.

In an orphanage, you take cloth baths. Ava had never been in a bathtub. 

Today, when Ava falls...someone is there to pick her up. 

Today, when she cries...someone is there to wipe away the tears. 

Today, when she is hungry...someone is there to feed her. 

Today when she is tired...someone is there to tuck her into bed. And when Ava grows up in this country, there will be plenty of doors that she can open that would have otherwise been closed.

I will never forget seeing my newest granddaughter in the arms of the Vice President. Knowing her life had changed forever. This is the job at hand—to uphold this country’s longstanding reputation as the land of opportunity.

I am an optimist, and I will remain one after leaving this great chamber because I have seen remarkable moments here in Washington.

This body has come a long way from its earlier days when Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John Calhoun were navigating a divided union and fighting to save our young democracy.

I believe that our nation’s future is bright, and that Nevada’s future is bright.

My heart has and always will be in Nevada, a state that I love and a place that I am so proud to call home.

Nevada – thank you for giving me the opportunity to work for you.

Thank you Madam President. I yield the floor.