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## The Future We Make: Ted Kennedy's Legacy in Fighting Cancer

"We know the future will outlast all of us, but I believe that all of us will live on in the future we make," said Senator Ted Kennedy in a speech he gave last December at Harvard University. It will be a long while before we see the likes of anyone who bettered the future as much as Ted Kennedy.

Throughout his 46 years in the Senate, Ted Kennedy was responsible for more than 2,500 bills, hundreds of which became laws. His body of work is simply astonishing. It advanced everything from civil rights to worker rights to women's rights to voter rights to patient rights. He raised the minimum wage and abolished the draft. Because of Senator Kennedy, we have the Americans with Disabilities Act and OSHA. And then there was his work in health care, something he described as "the cause of his life."

In the sea of tributes rightfully bestowed upon the lion of the Senate for all of his other accomplishments, all of us at Stand Up To Cancer would like to ensure Senator Kennedy is given due credit for his significant contributions in the fight against cancer -- not just because he was forward-thinking in the legislation he passed, but also because he encouraged bipartisanship and faced his own struggles with cancer with unparalleled determination. Innovation, collaboration and perseverance are words we, in the cancer community, hold dear. Ted Kennedy lived them.

In 1971, Kennedy addressed the Senate by saying: "The conquest of cancer is a special problem of such enormous concern to all Americans. We can quote statistics, but I think every one of us in this body, and most families across the country, have been touched by this disease one way or another."

That may be the first time an individual astutely pointed out that all of us are "touched by cancer" in some way or another. It is a phrase all of us in the movement to end cancer continue to echo daily. More importantly, the week of his address to the Senate, Kennedy pushed through legislation that quadrupled the amount of funding for cancer research and prevention and financed it with an independently-budgeted program within the National Institutes of Health.

Several years later, Kennedy's son, Edward, had his leg amputated after a bout with a rare form of bone cancer. This experience no doubt fueled Senator Kennedy's interest in lesser known cancers, ensuring those afflicted would benefit from federal money and awareness programs. The Kennedy sponsored

Hematological Cancer Investment and Education Act expanded blood cancer research including leukemia, lymphoma and multiple myeloma. This was forward thinking of the highest order. While approximately 10 percent of all cancer deaths are related to these types of cancer, less than 5 percent of federal funds for cancer research are dedicated to prevention and treatment of blood cancers. It was also the start of a large public awareness campaign to recognize the importance of these diseases.

In 1992, Kennedy laid the groundwork to help millions of women struggling with or trying to prevent breast cancer. Congress passed the Mammography Quality Standards Act, which Kennedy co-sponsored. The bill ensured the safety and accuracy of mammograms and promoted use of the procedure.

Senator Kennedy was the sponsor of the National Institutes of Health Revitalization Act of 1993, and its reauthorization in 2003. In addition to helping combat other diseases such as AIDS, this legislation resulted in important research for breast and ovarian cancers.

In March of 2009, Senator Kennedy and Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison introduced the 21st Century Cancer Access to Life-Saving Early Detection, Research and Treatment (ALERT) Act, a comprehensive look at the prevention, early detection and treatment of cancer.

On a personal note, Senator Kennedy was one of the kindest people I ever knew. In a passing conversation one day, he learned my mother was struggling with ovarian cancer. He had never met her and, yet, a couple of days later I got a call from my mother and she told me that Senator Kennedy had called her. "Who called you?" I asked. "Senator Kennedy. He told me to stay strong and that I will beat this thing," my mother said, beaming. He called my mother many more times just to check in. My mother was not the only one. There were surprise calls to many others who like my mother, just needed a boost. It could be said Senator Kennedy practiced "random acts of kindness" long before they were in vogue. It was Ted Kennedy's deep empathy for those who are sick and afflicted that will be his lasting legacy.

Perhaps symbolic of how extraordinarily grueling cancer can be is that the lion, in his own life, rebounded and triumphed after enormous tragedy to accomplish remarkable things such as bringing peace to places like Northern Ireland, but ultimately could not win the courageous war he waged against brain cancer.

That's why it is our job to further his legacy and fight cancer. We must carry his torch. We must channel the lion in all of us and bravely stand up to this disease. We must ask the tough questions, demand more funding, speak out and unite against this disease. So, when our friends, our neighbors, our husbands, our mothers and our children are burdened with cancer and all the debilitating side effects that come with battling this disease, we can say to them with an unwavering confidence, "the hope still lives and the dream shall never die."

I will miss my friend dearly. But I vow to continue his fight because that's what he would want all of us to do.

Stand Up To Cancer launched a star in honor of Senator Ted Kennedy, I encourage you to visit it.