

Dear Friends,

It is my pleasure to share some thoughts on my personal background and my path to becoming a United States Senator.

From a very early age, my brothers, sisters, and I were raised with a deep respect for public service and human rights. My father, Thomas J. Dodd, served two terms in the United States Senate. Earlier in his career, he had been a prosecutor at the trials of Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg, where he helped bring to justice some of the most heinous criminals the world has ever seen.

Though my father taught his family the value of public service, he did not encourage us to run for elected office. None of my other siblings chose to do so. But as I grew up watching my father and his colleagues in the Senate, I began to take an interest in the political arena. When I was 17 years old, I worked as a Senate page. It wasn't particularly glamorous work – for the most part, I delivered letters and other documents from one place to another. But it gave me the extraordinary opportunity to watch, first-hand and up close, giants of the Senate like Lyndon Johnson and Everett Dirksen. It was an experience I will never forget.

After I graduated from college in 1966, I spent the next two years in the Peace Corps. I lived in Moncion, a small rural village in the Dominican Republic that was unlike any place I had ever seen. I was blessed to grow up in a family where we rarely wanted for anything. During my time in the Peace Corps, I lived among people for whom basic necessities like food, clean water, and housing were far from assured. I was fortunate to have received a fine education, attending Georgetown Preparatory School and Providence College. Many of the men and women I met in Moncion could not read or write. I became determined to use my life to try to better the lives of other people – people in places like Moncion, as well as people in Connecticut and across the United States.

When I returned from the Peace Corps, I managed my father's campaign for a third term in the United States Senate. My father was defeated, and that was a great disappointment for me. But it did not dampen my interest in public life. After I graduated law school in 1972, I spent two years practicing law in Connecticut before I ran for Congress. I was elected to the House of Representatives in 1974, and I served there for six years before I was elected to the Senate.

Any career is marked by both successes and frustrations, and I've had my share of both.

Some of the accomplishments of which I'm most proud are the passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act – a bill that allows working Americans to take time off from work to care for themselves, a sick loved one, or a new child – and the Help America Vote Act of 2002, legislation that takes new steps to guarantee every eligible American the right to vote and have his or her vote counted.

I've had disappointments and setbacks as well. I've worked on bills for weeks, months, and even years, only to watch them fail to win passage on the Senate floor. And one of my great regrets is that my father, who passed away in 1971, did not live long enough to see his son elected to Congress and the Senate.

Looking back on the nearly three decades I have spent in office, I can say with absolute certainty that it has been a rewarding experience. I urge all of you to consider devoting at least part of your lives to public service. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve."

Service can take any number of forms. You can work in a soup kitchen, or tutor underprivileged youngsters, or help clean up a local park. But I would also encourage you to spend at least some time in our Democratic institutions – our legislatures, our courts, our government agencies. It is through those institutions that we have taken the boldest, most courageous, and most significant steps in our history – from ending slavery to winning two world wars to putting a man on the moon. Our government, and our laws, will continue to be the instruments of change and progress in America for years to come. And the more Americans participate in our government, the more effective and responsive it will be.

I welcome you to learn more by visiting my website at <http://dodd.senate.gov>. You can also use that site to subscribe to e-mail updates about my work in the Senate. Thank you again for inviting me to share these thoughts with you.

Sincerely,

CHRISTOPHER J. DODD
United States Senator