

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4502

July 11, 2005

Student Achievement and Advocacy Services
2421 18th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20010

Dear Students:

I was born in Montpelier, Vermont, our state capital, and grew up almost across from the state house building. Montpelier is the smallest state capital in the country, with only 8500 people, and everybody was interested in what the state government did. As a child, I even rode my tricycle through the halls of the state house and into the governor's office.

My parents rented rooms to legislators during the legislative session, because they could walk from our house to the state house in just a couple of minutes. I used to walk back and forth with them and listen to their stories, and I found the give and take of the legislative body extremely interesting. I also knew that they were dealing almost exclusively with state issues, and that there was a much bigger picture at the national level.

Throughout college, and then during law school in Washington, I always knew that a little state like ours would be equal to all other states only in the United States Senate. As I spent time on Capitol Hill as a law student, it became fixed in my mind that this was where I really wanted to be. I even told my wife on our first date that I wanted to go on to elective office.

I went back to Vermont after law school. I first worked in private practice, and then as our state's youngest prosecutor. I stayed there for eight years, and was selected as one of three outstanding prosecutors in America in 1974. I did not lose sight of my goal of being in the U.S. Senate. At the age of 34, I ran.

Our state had never elected a Democrat to the U.S. Senate or, since the popular election of senators, anyone under 50. I knew I faced real difficulty, but I had certain advantages. Vermont is small enough that it was possible to campaign throughout the state even though I had less money in a campaign account than anybody running for the Senate that year. I also had a wonderful wife and family who supported me every step of the way and made the race a family matter. My wife, the daughter of French-Canadian immigrants, had grown up speaking French, and campaigned in that language in a largely French-Canadian area of our state. My parents owned a small printing business in Montpelier (so small, we lived in the front of the printing shop), and they called on

decades of friends and neighbors from their area of Vermont to vote for me. Fortunately, they respected my family and did vote for me.

I still remember the joy of winning and the challenges of bringing a young family to Washington, as we divided our time between Vermont and Washington. It was interesting to learn that we could raise a family sheltered from the public glare, while at the same time carrying out a very public life. Very early on, we established a rule that family matters came first, and we turned down White House dinners, embassy parties, and the glittering part of Washington so that we could go to soccer and basketball games and school plays. I have never regretted the balance, and know that without my family, I never could have been elected.

The Senate has turned out to be all I had hoped it would. The hundred men and women here represent the views of all Americans in one form or another. It is the one place where we actually have a chance to affect the direction of our country and our policies. In my case, I have led a drive to ban the use of landmines, and we have used the Leahy War Victims Fund to help those injured by landmines throughout the world. I was also able to pass the first Organic Farm Bill in the nation's history for the growing part of our population who want organically grown food. Everyday, senators should, and often do, protect the individual liberties of all Americans—especially those who may be in the minority in a pluralistic society.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick Leahy", written in a cursive style.

PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator