

find some of the gems of our campaign, like Sweet Corn Charlie. On both campaigns she was always willing to do whatever was needed at any level from literally boosting me up onto an RV so we could grab a picture of our “McCaskill for Senate”-wrapped RV in front of my family’s old flour mill in Houston, MO, to walking into a field office unannounced one day and saying she was there to go door-to-door, despite her senior role on the campaign.

She is a take-charge kind of woman but taking charge by immersing herself in a subject. That became her trademark. We all grew to expect her remarkable technical competence on very complicated issues and her penchant for digging deeper to find the real answer. Of course, at times, she let her desire to dig deep bleed into her personal life, too. Just ask her new husband Ryan what her first two responses to his marriage proposal were: “Are you serious?”

Because of this knack for asking the right questions and learning the detailed answers, I always listened to what she had to say—I did not always agree, of course, but listened nonetheless. As one of her male colleagues said, “She looks tiny and sweet, but everyone is a little terrified of her because she’s tougher and smarter than most everyone out there.” And have no doubt, when Nichole believes something, she will let you know, and she will fight for it. I cherish this attribute because in this kind of job you need people who aren’t just smart, aren’t just aggressive, but who are real and honest.

Now no one stays terrified of Nichole for too long because they figure out how genuine she is, and funny too. The gifted members of our staffs are both intense and blessed with great humor.

Our legislative correspondents have been lucky to have her as a mentor, as well—someone who expects a high level of performance, gives praise when it is due, and encourages professional development. It is no accident that one of the first LC’s to work for her grew into one of my staff’s most important legislative assistants today.

It is always bittersweet for me when these kinds of junctures happen—these times when you want your staff to blast forward and make you proud as much as you want them to stay—because they have been so essential to your work.

With Nichole now working as a senior advisor within the Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Relations at the EPA, she is providing the kind of public service that embraces intellect, curiosity, and precision. It is why they brought her on, of course. They quickly saw what we already knew. They are benefiting greatly from her deep vein of common sense and her refusal to stop working until she has asked every question and gotten every answer.

I am proud to say thank you to Nichole Distefano as 2013 comes to an

end, to express my deep gratitude for all she has done for me, for Missouri, and for our great Nation over so many years. I am proud to see her continue to grow and excel. I know she is doing exceptional things in her new position. She is my friend. She is a rock. And I miss her.

REMEMBERING PETTY OFFICER OBENDORF

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I am here today to pay tribute to the life of PO3 Travis Obendorf, a Coast Guard boatswain mate, who passed away on December 18, 2013, from injuries he sustained during the successful rescue of 22 individuals from the disabled fishing vessel Alaska Mist in the Bering Sea on November 11, 2013.

Petty Officer Obendorf, whose nickname was “Obie,” gave the ultimate sacrifice for his Nation, and in doing so he assisted in the rescue of 22 mariners who otherwise may have been lost to the sea.

Petty Officer Obendorf was a native of Idaho Falls, IA. He enlisted in the Coast Guard in 2004 and quickly became a leader within his boot camp platoon. He proudly served aboard the Coast Guard Cutters Alert and Waesche and deployed to Bahrain as member of Coast Guard Patrol Forces Southwest Asia. He also served at Coast Guard Station Boston, MA.

Upon reporting aboard Coast Guard Cutter Waesche on 26 June 2013, Petty Officer Obendorf quickly integrated into the Deck Division and began rapidly pursuing his qualifications. During Waesche’s shakedown cruise prior to an Alaska deployment, Petty Officer Obendorf qualified as a helmsman and lookout and made significant progress in all other qualification areas. One month into Waesche’s August to November 2013 Alaska deployment, Petty Officer Obendorf qualified in basic and advanced damage control, as boatswain’s mate of the watch, helicopter tie-down crewmember, and boat crewmember on all three of Waesche’s cutter boats. Less than a month later, Petty Officer Obendorf added boarding team member and antiterrorism force protection watch stander to his list of qualifications. Petty Officer Obendorf’s rapid qualification in a wide variety of watch stations resulted in him being significantly involved in almost all aspects of Waesche’s operations. His efforts as a boat crew and boarding team member were critical in the Waesche’s execution of over 40 fisheries and recreational law enforcement boardings during the 2013 Alaska deployment.

When Waesche was diverted for the search and rescue case involving fishing vessel Alaska Mist, Petty Officer Obendorf was selected as a boat crewmember for what would be a challenging rescue operation. Petty Officer Obendorf immediately began assisting his shipmates and preparing for the operation, which would involve removing 14 nonessential Alaska Mist personnel

as well as passing a towing line to the vessel in order to take it in tow.

Once on scene, Waesche launched Petty Officer Obendorf and the rest of the boat crew aboard a Coast Guard small boat to begin the rescue operation. As the Coast Guard small boat came alongside Alaska Mist, one boat crewmember went aboard the vessel to brief the crew and rig the rescue ladder. Once this was complete, Petty Officer Obendorf began guiding Alaska Mist crewmembers down the ladder and into the Coast Guard small boat. Petty Officer Obendorf showed exceptional skill and focus as he timed the rolls of both vessels and a significant swell to ensure the safety of the crewmembers descending the ladder. Despite deteriorating weather conditions, Petty Officer Obendorf courageously and successfully guided five Alaska Mist crewmembers to safety.

The Coast Guard small boat returned to Waesche with the first group of passengers and entered the stern notch with Petty Officer Obendorf positioned on the bow to assist in securing the boat for recovery. During the recovery evolution, Petty Officer Obendorf received a severe head injury. Waesche completed the operation, ultimately rescuing 22 people and towing the fishing vessel to safety, but despite the lifesaving first aid of his shipmates and the excellent care of two medical centers, Petty Officer Obendorf succumbed to his injuries on 18 December 2013.

Petty Officer Obendorf will surely be missed by his family, loved ones, and shipmates. I am thankful for his service and honored by his sacrifice.

TRIBUTE TO NELLIE FREEMAN

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, staff turnover is part of life in the Senate, just as it is in any other institution. But some departures are particularly bittersweet. Today is the last day Helen Eleanor Freeman will be working in my office; she is retiring after more than 23 years of faithful—and joyful service—to me and to former Senator Paul Sarbanes, to the Senate, and to the people of Maryland.

Her name is Helen Eleanor Freeman, but throughout the Senate and beyond Capitol Hill, everyone knows her as Nellie. She is an avid volleyball player and her recreational activity led, through another player, to her first job in the Senate, with Senator Sarbanes, in 1989. When Senator Sarbanes retired and I was elected to replace him, he was adamant that I must hire Nellie as I filled out my Senate staff. He told me, “There is no one quite like Nellie,” and over the past 7 years I have been fortunate to have Nellie on my staff. I certainly have come to agree with that assessment. Nellie is unique. She is the “glue” that holds our office together. While I am happy for her, I am sad she will be leaving the office and I know the rest of my staff shares that assessment.