

**SENATOR CLAIRE McCASKILL  
ACCEPTANCE SPEECH**

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Thank you to Karl and the Foundation Board of Directors, and especially my friends Bobby Epsten and Kevin Pistilli for your support of this important organization. A special welcome to the young students here today. Get ready! Your leadership is just around the corner.

I'm not going to be able to adequately explain how honored I am.

In the winter of 1978, I would walk down the steep hill behind the Plaza from my two-room apartment to the bus stop in front of Macy's to catch my bus to work at the Jackson County Courthouse. I was a brand-new lawyer and had a very small job at the Kansas City Court of Appeals, but there was a spring in my step, and optimism and ambition in my heart. You see, I had the pleasure of walking into Harry Truman's courthouse every single day. I had consumed his memoirs as a high school student, and it was already embarrassing what a fan girl I was of Harry S. Truman. For as long as I can remember, he was my role model; he was my gold standard. That young lawyer who was on the bus because she couldn't afford the parking space downtown had big dreams. But I never dreamed that I would be standing here receiving this incredible honor among the company of prior recipients. It is astounding.

To adequately thank you for this today I must take a page out of Harry Truman's book and not talk about me or my career, but rather talk about him. He wasn't that good about talking about himself and, while I confess that has never been my problem, I am going to follow his example today.

It was his character. That's what made him great. Like his personality, his character was straightforward and simple. But as our current President is showing, it doesn't mean it's easy. There are a few fundamental parts of Harry Truman's character that everyone should try to live by. First and most importantly, he believed in telling the truth. This one is especially timely. We can only imagine what Harry Truman would say about the current occupant of the White House. Here's what he said about Richard Nixon: "Richard Nixon is a no good, lying bastard. He can lie out of both sides of his mouth at the same time, and if he ever caught himself telling the truth, he'd lie just to keep his hand in." Harry Truman told the truth. Even when it hurt. And as he most famously said, "I never did give anybody hell. I just told the truth and they thought it was hell."

There are so many examples that demonstrate his humility. One of my favorites: In June of 1954, he was no longer President. He was back in Kansas City. He agreed to make a surprise

cameo appearance in a production at the Starlight Theater. He became ill, and the next day had surgery at Research Hospital to remove his gall bladder and appendix. There was a heat wave and no air conditioner. He got an infection and had to remain hospitalized. The temperature was ranging from 110 and 114, but when the Hospital Director wanted to put an air conditioning unit in his room he refused. He wanted no better than the rest of the patients.

One example of hundreds I could give. He didn't want his name in lights; he didn't long for power or money. He just wanted to do his best and try to do the right thing. Without self-promotion, with humility and plain speech, he was constantly underestimated by friends and foes. He had the confidence of a well-educated man with no formal education.

He was so proud to call himself a farmer. He only knew hard work. His pace was hard for younger aides to keep up with. Even after the Presidency, he worked every day. Whether campaigning for fellow Democrats, traveling the world, planning and funding the library, he kept up a torrid pace. Kansas City had a front row seat to witness the work ethic of a man that never embraced leisure, other than poker and a little bit of bourbon.

Once the Library opened, he did not pause. As David McCullough explained in his award-winning biography of Truman, which by the way every departing member of my Senate staff received from me as a departing gift: "He was always on the job early. Some mornings, at his desk before the staff arrived. He would answer the phone himself, telling callers what the library hours were, or, in reply to further questions, saying he knew because it was his library. 'This is the old man himself.'"

He had courage—especially to do the unpopular. President Harry Truman said: "I wonder how far Moses would have gone if he'd taken a poll in Egypt?" "What would Jesus Christ have preached if he'd taken a poll in Israel? . . . It isn't polls or public opinion of the moment that counts. It's right and wrong."

Firing General MacArthur, recognizing Israel as a state, the Marshall Plan ... I could go on and on. There is no better example of ignoring polls and doing the right thing than his bold and wildly unpopular move to integrate the military. It was an exclamation mark on his evolution from a Southern sympathizer to an equality champion. And it was even more notable because he did it in an election year, when he was already way behind in the polls and frankly written off by most of the political experts in the country.

He also spoke out as President against other race-based transgressions, even when his position was not the position of the day. As McCullough explained: "One August morning at Blair House, he read in the papers that the body of an American soldier killed in action, Sergeant John Rice, had been brought home for burial in Sioux City, Iowa, but that at the last moment, as the casket was to be lowered into the grave, officials of the Sioux City Memorial Park had stopped the ceremony because Sergeant Rice, a Winnebago Indian, was not 'a member of the Caucasian race' and burial was therefore denied. Outraged, Truman picked up the phone. Within minutes, by telephone and telegram, it was arranged that Sergeant Rice would be buried in Arlington

National Cemetery with full military honors, and that an Air Force plane was on the way to bring his widow and three children to Washington. That, as President, was the least he could do.”

Unlike today, he proudly claimed the title of politician. He liked and respected politicians, and he wasn't ashamed to be one.

Finally, President Truman understood an important fundamental in life. Friends. He always had close friends. Whether it was the boys from Battery D or the friends he made while he was bending a knee to Tom Pendergast right here in this hotel, he made friends. From the ward heelers in Kansas City to the powerful around the world, he had real friends.

He understood what it meant to be a friend, and he understood the value of friendship, both with people and the nations they represent. I know when he came to Washington he is credited with saying, “If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog.” But truthfully, Harry Truman had many friends—close friends that he treasured throughout his life. He was loyal, sometimes to a fault. He was slow to act when his friends abused his friendship. He always understood the value of friendship and he nurtured and cared for his friends. Notes, calls, letters—he was thoughtful. He made time for his friends even when he had none.

Harry Truman looked forward to coming home as a citizen after being the most powerful man in the world, partially because he stayed grounded by his family and friends. He enjoyed his daily walks to the Square in Independence, where he could greet strangers and friends alike. One of the reasons he was so comfortable leaving an office where the world revolved around him and coming back to live in a modest home in Independence was because he knew what was important: Family and friends.

His example helped guide me through my almost 40 years in public service. How blessed I am to have made so many friends along the way and this room is full of them. People who have held my hand through tragedy and triumph, people who have been there to lift me up when I was lower than a snake's belly. You, my friends and my amazing family, have made me happy and secure. And like Harry, I couldn't be more content to be a private citizen again.

I can name a number of elected officials who after retirement were lonely and unhappy because those elected officials did not bother, while bathed in the intoxicating light of power and public attention, to make and keep friends. The ultimate Good Neighbor is a friend.

God bless you all.