



For Immediate Release

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August 11, 2009

Enzi Statement on The Passing of Eunice Kennedy Shriver

I would like to express my deepest sympathy to my friend Senator Kennedy and to the entire Kennedy family on the passing of Eunice Kennedy Shriver. They have lost a very special presence in their lives, a woman of amazing strength of mind, heart and character who saw the needs of people with intellectual disabilities and devoted her life to making theirs better. All those whose lives were touched by her caring and concern have lost a great champion. Diana and I join with them and with all those who are mourning her loss.

Eunice Kennedy Shriver began her work to support those living with disabilities in 1946 when she became the director of the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation. The Foundation, which she established as a memorial to Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. had two major objectives: "to seek the prevention of intellectual disabilities by identifying its causes, and to improve the means by which society deals with citizens who have intellectual disabilities." To help achieve this goal, the Foundation supported a one-year Public Policy Fellowship in which people working in the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities were brought to work as interns in the House and the Senate so they might have an opportunity to learn about the legislative process firsthand. I had the opportunity to employ two fellows from this wonderful program.

For many people, that would have been enough, but not for Eunice. Troubled by the treatment of people with intellectual disabilities living in institutions across the country in the 1950s and 1960s, Eunice began inviting children with disabilities to a summer day camp at her home called Camp Shriver. In time, that experience encouraged her to launch the Special Olympics and provide an opportunity for people with intellectual disabilities the world over to take part in athletic competitions that would increase their self-esteem and self-confidence, improve their social skills, and celebrate their achievements and personal accomplishments. In July 1968 the first International Special Olympics Games were held in Chicago. There are currently more than three million athletes who are training for the games year-round in all 50 states and 181 countries. Those athletes learned at an early age the important message of Special Olympics – to expect more from themselves than anyone else would have ever thought possible.

Once again, what would have been enough for most people was not enough for Eunice. She next set her sights on the establishment of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, a government agency that conducts research on topics related to the health of children, adults and families. When many knowledgeable scientists were willing to write off people with intellectual disabilities because, they said, the Institute's funds could be better spent studying adult diseases, Ms. Shriver would hear nothing of it. In fact, the only thing that recommendation served to do was to double her determination to protect and preserve that vital research. Because of her, the Institute is what it is today – a beacon of hope and support for people everywhere with intellectual disabilities.

To recognize her work in this area Congress renamed the National Institute of Child Health and Development the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Development. The Institute, together with a network of university-affiliated facilities she also helped to establish now called the University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, have made a tremendous difference in more lives than we will ever know across the nation and around the world.

More recently the disability community benefitted from Eunice's strong advocacy efforts in the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008. Once again she was fighting for the inclusion of transition programs for students with intellectual disabilities. Eunice recognized that students with intellectual disabilities have the poorest post-school outcomes of all students with disabilities, have limited employment options, and rarely have the "college experience" that is available to numerous other youth with and without disabilities.

Fortunately, Eunice was there with a different way of doing things, an exciting and new approach. Now the appropriate programs are in place and there is more reason than ever before to believe that young adults with intellectual disabilities will have better outcomes that will include more rewarding jobs and careers and they will experience greater degrees of independence in their lives. None of that would have been possible without Eunice's determination to make it so.

Eunice will long be remembered for dedicating her time and her talents to the advancement of life, the protection of rights, and the promotion of increased opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities. Few Americans have ever played such a profound role with such a key and too often overlooked population. She is truly a great American who has played a unique role in advancing children's health, particularly in shaping how we treat individuals with intellectual disabilities.

The Special Olympics motto "Let me win but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt" seems to fit her especially well. Eunice was a gifted individual who was able to do both – she won great victories for her "special friends" and no matter the odds or the difficult nature of the challenge, she was always brave in the attempt – an effort that more often than not led to great success, not for herself, but for those she loved.

On the web page for the Special Olympics you will find some special words of wisdom from Eunice Kennedy Shriver about the games. "You are the stars and the world is watching you," she said. "By your presence you send a message to every village, every city, every nation. A message of hope. A message of victory."

In the end, that will be the legacy she will leave to all those who knew and loved her. She always led the best way – by example – and in so doing she sent a message for all to hear – a message of hope and victory – hope for a better tomorrow and the victory that only comes to those who refuse to quit, no matter the task that lies before them, no matter the chance of success. She will be missed by us all and she will never be forgotten. Diana joins in sending our thoughts and prayers to the Kennedy Family.

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