The Scoop Jackson Style of Politics:
Lessons in relationship-building from one of the great U.S. Senators of the 20th century

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Do relationships still matter in American politics? The contemporary political scene gives plenty of cause for worry. Our discussions on social media and news comment sections have become uncivil. Political campaigns are measured in dollars and advertising, which often takes the form of attack ads. Some of our political leaders avoid working together. One thing is for certain: there was a time in our recent political past when relationships did matter, when many leaders valued civility, collaboration, and friendliness. No one exemplified this quality more than U.S. Senator Henry M. Jackson of Washington State. What were the keys to his leadership effectiveness, and what can Americans of the twenty-first century learn from the Senator best known as “Scoop?”

When Jackson died suddenly on September 1, 1983, thousands of people—famous politicians as well as ordinary citizens—mourned a friend. The weekend following his death, four thousand people visited the Solie Funeral Home in Jackson’s hometown of Everett to pay their respects to the fallen Senator. More than 1,700 came out for the public memorial service at Everett Memorial Colliseum on September 6, while over 1,000 packed into the Washington, D.C. service at National Presbyterian Church that day. For the funeral service in Everett on September 7, 65 Senators, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and the Vice President of the United States were in attendance. Articles in newspapers across the country, including small-town papers across Washington State, told of Jackson’s life and began to summarize his legacy. Beginning on September 12 on the floor of the U.S. Senate, Senators delivered heartfelt memorial speeches, and members of the House took to their floor as well to remember a beloved friend. The memorial speeches went on for days. Speakers talked about Jackson’s policy achievements, his work ethic, and his family, but most of all they talked about the kind of man he was.

The day after Jackson died, the *Tacoma News Tribune* described the late Senator as “neighborly.” He was a “people person,” a bank employee named Barbara Lindberg told Everett Herald reporter Ned Carrick while walking to work that day in Everett. Jackson, said former Congressman Norm Dicks of Washington State, was “one who always stopped on a street corner to offer a kind word; who never failed to mark a birthday, an anniversary, or send a get-well card to a list of personal friends numbering in the thousands.” He had, said his protégé on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee former Senator J. Bennett Johnston of Louisiana, “a special capability...of being able to attract friends to him to create personal relationships with them.”

As a result of these things, people of all kinds considered Jackson a real friend. “Senator Jackson made real friendships—many very strong and very personal—with countless Peninsula residents,” wrote the Olympic Peninsula’s *Port Angeles News* upon Jackson’s death in 1983. “He had a genuine interest in people here.”

Jackson often kept a small black book in his breast pocket. The book fit in Jackson’s coat, but as University of Washington International Relations scholar Kenneth Pyle recalls,

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1 Kaufman, 430-433
2 Government Printing
3 Government Printing, 215
4 Government Printing, 228
5 Government Printing, 351
6 Government Printing, 64
7 Government Printing, 340
it was “bulging.” The little book contained “the phone numbers of countless constituents,” said Pyle, “and when he had a spare moment he would get on the phone to someone in Colfax or Ritzville or Puyallup and talk to them about some concern they had raised.”

Ted Natt, publisher of the Longview Daily News at the time of the Mount Saint Helens eruption in 1980, was one of the people Jackson called from time to time. “What could he do? What were the priorities? How were people adjusting? he would ask. He visited regularly to see things for himself,” wrote Natt. “He used to call to check on what was happening locally,” wrote the Bothell Northshore Citizen, “and would sometimes volunteer a visit if someone could set up an early morning breakfast where he could meet people.”

Former Librarian of Congress James Billington once described Jackson as an “instinctively democratic man.”10 And Jackson’s seatmate Senator Slade Gorton eulogized Jackson on the floor of the Senate by saying, “Henry Jackson was in all things a man of the people. Although he spent a lifetime in Washington, DC, he did so without ever leaving the countryside of Washington State. He knew, and was known, in every town and county.”

The memory of Scoop Jackson as a man of the people can be overshadowed by the substance of his accomplishments, especially in foreign policy and environmental protection. When he spoke publicly, it was almost always about policy. And when the press covered him, it was about his work in policy. But as Jackson’s press secretary Rick Cocker once told the Spokane Spokesman-Review, “I think he got as much charge out of helping a woman in Ephrata get her social security benefits as he did putting together some piece of national legislation.”

Similarly, Jackson took his relationships with little-known citizens just as seriously as he took his connections with famous world figures like Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping. Perhaps it was his genuine connection with people of all kinds that made him so effective in relating to people in power. “He established friendly personal relations with many world leaders,” wrote James Billington, “but his total lack of pomposity kept him away from the self-congratulatory meetings among the mighty that provide more photo opportunities than substantive accomplishments.”14 Once given the opportunity to spend time with world leaders, Jackson never lost touch with his own neighbors in Washington State. As Jackson biographer Robert Kaufman noted, “He insisted on being the same person, whether he talked on television, to constituents, to legislators, to presidents, to Soviet dictators or dissidents.”

“Relate to world leaders he did,” said former Congressman Don Bonker, a Democrat of Southwest Washington in a tribute to Jackson on the House floor, “but Scoop really enjoyed talking to senior citizens, kids, the local civic leaders, and others in the community. I marveled at his vivid description of La Center and Naselle, only two of the hundreds of small towns Scoop knew like his own neighborhood. He would cite names and places in remote areas of the State that would surprise even his close supporters. It seemed at times everyone in the State either knew Scoop, was a classmate, got a letter from him, or had heard the Senator speak. He touched all of our lives.”

Jackson’s was not a style fully suited to the age of television, though he was a frequent guest on Sunday morning talk shows. “A formidable legislator but a man of

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8 Pyle
9 Government Printing, 334
10 Government Printing, 327
11 Government Printing, 6
12 Government Printing, 338
13 Fosdick, xi
14 Fosdick, xiii
15 Kaufman, 321
16 Government Printing, 383
17 Fosdick, 19
18 Kaufman, 6
19 Kaufman, 309
little charisma, he lacked the inclination or the skill to develop a style of campaigning appropriate to the age of mass media,” wrote Kaufman. Jackson “was not relaxed on the campaign stump, except in Washington State, and terrible reading a speech,” said his aide Richard Perle.

If he fell short when it came to political stagecraft, Jackson rose to become one of the most accomplished and beloved leaders of his generation. He was personally genuine, tireless in his drive to build coalitions, and determined at his core to prove the human potential of democracy.
The Education of Henry M. Jackson

Jackson was raised by his Norwegian mother to “judge people as individuals rather than imputing negative group characteristics to them,” wrote Robert Kaufman. Jackson’s sister Gertrude, an Everett school teacher who was 14 years his senior, told him about the struggles of her students from poor families and helped him to gain a sense of compassion for people in need. When Jackson was a student at the University of Washington during the Depression, he witnessed the signs of deep poverty in Seattle. He spoke with desperate mothers who he found looking through his fraternity’s garbage in search of leftovers for their families.

Jackson’s knack for retail politics, as well as hard work, may have begun with his Everett Daily Herald newspaper route when he was just ten years old. He once won a national award for delivering nearly 75,000 newspapers without any customer complaints. “I had a little system I used,” he recalled years later, “We would give the customer a receipt when they paid for the paper. I had on the receipt: don’t call me at the Everett office. Call me at home if you have a complaint. So I managed to develop and build a good organization.”

Another key moment in young Jackson’s life was when he was twelve years old and had his tonsils removed. His roommate at the hospital in Everett was another 12-year old named John Salter. The two boys found they shared some common interests. “As time passed,” former Seattle Times political writer Richard Larsen wrote, “the friendship between Jackson and Salter grew. In the wily, aggressive Salter, Jackson found a friend who would eventually develop into an effective political campaign organizer. In the sober, stiffly straight Jackson, Salter found a man who would be an effective Mister Clean candidate.”

Jackson’s first attempt at public office was his 1938 campaign for Snohomish County Prosecutor. Osa Nurmi, who volunteered on that campaign, said that the campaign “was all footwork ... house to house, with pep rallies, parades.” Jackson campaigned by shaking hands with pedestrians in downtown Everett, greeting workers at the Weyerhaueser mill, and visiting Scandinavian coffee klatches in small rural towns. “Henry Jackson excelled, then and always, as a practitioner of this labor-intensive, retail politics,” wrote Kaufman. “He possessed a remarkable memory, giving him total recall of names, places, and events, even years later. Also, he had boundless energy for campaigning. Although as a public speaker he was always indifferent at best, on a face-to-face basis people found him an appealing combination of thoughtfulness, confidence, empathy, and integrity. His ability to project that image was a tremendous asset in that era when those attributes mattered more and media magnetism mattered less.”

After two years as county prosecutor, Jackson ran for Congress. With Salter as his campaign manager, Jackson once again practiced his brand of retail politics and got elected at age 28. He kept this up in each succeeding election, and when the election was over, he would go around the district expressing his thanks to voters.

So it was that Jackson developed and practiced his instincts for democracy.

Jackson’s inner conviction that people matter may have been confirmed most decisively a few years into his Congressional service when he saw the consequences of Nazism. More than one observer thought that Jackson’s passion for human rights arose from his experience visiting the concentration camps of Europe at the end of World War II. Elie Wiesel, the famed Holocaust survivor and Nobel Prize recipient, captured this in a remarkable first-hand account: “It was a moment that stood on the other side of time, on the other side of existence. On the heels of the American liberators, a congressional delegation arrived in Buchenwald on April 12, 1945. Our eyes met in a unique encounter, one that left an
indelible imprint on the consciousness of both. In that moment of grace, I could not have possibly foreseen that this fateful meeting between the representative of the free world, Henry M. Jackson, and the emaciated young boy would be just the first of many. What Jackson saw then colored his philosophical and political life.”30

Man of the People
When Jackson turned to the Senate in the 1950s, his love for campaigning was undiminished. He was tireless as a political salesman, building relationships with people everywhere he could find them. “Running for reelection is like selling soap,” he once said. “People have to believe in you; you have to convince them that you deserve their trust. They vote for you out of respect, not because of the way you vote in the Senate.”31 As a politician, Jackson’s success was due in large part to the relationship he maintained with his able administrative assistant and campaign manager John Salter. “It was Salter as much as Jackson who developed and sustained the impressive array of organizational and personal ties in Washington State that made Jackson such a formidable political figure there by the late 1950s,” wrote Kaufman.32

Jackson was also formidable because of his decades-long partnership with his fellow U.S. Senator from Washington State Warren Magnuson. In style, the two senators were quite different—Jackson’s temperament, wrote Kaufman, was “more congenial to Southern Democratic titans such as Richard Russell than to the Senate leadership under Lyndon Johnson, where Magnuson thrived.” The staffs of the two senators sometimes clashed, but “the senators managed to enforce a discipline that chilled public confrontation and ensured cooperation on the major domestic issues affecting Washington State. Both believed in senatorial courtesy, decorum, a division of labor, and respecting each other’s province.”33 As Jackson said of Magnuson, who retired after losing an election to Slade Gorton in 1980, “Our relationship was special....We considered ourselves partners in the state of Washington....Ours was a natural relationship, never forced or contrived, and not something we had to work to maintain. This does not mean that we agreed on every problem or every approach to a problem. But we managed to disagree without being disagreeable. We talked and we listened. When a problem came up, Maggie and I did not write each other letters outlining our differences. Our offices were next door to one another, almost an extension of one another. He supported me and I supported him.”34

As young congressmen, Jackson and John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts rented apartments in the same building and often walked to work together.35

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Later, Jackson would befriend another senator from Massachusetts, John’s brother Ted Kennedy. “The same spirit that made him true to himself made him so consistently true to his friends,” said Ted Kennedy, who attested to Jackson’s personal loyalty to him and to his family. “On more days than I can count,” said Kennedy, “I felt his happy clasp on my shoulder; I saw his crinkled smile; I enjoyed his counsel and his company.”36

In the fast-paced life of Washington, DC, Jackson kept up. Congressman Tom Foley of eastern Washington, who had worked on Jackson’s Interior Committee staff once said, “Scoop was the fastest reception attender ever. He was in and out in 20 minutes. I discovered one of the things he did….He took a drink and walked around as if he would spend the night there. He never said good-by, but left by the side door without notice. Then he was on to the next one. He could go through three receptions in an hour. Later on, the Jackson style became more common. But he was a record holder in those days.”37

On his returns home to Everett, Jackson made the rounds in his hometown—“he caught up on the local gossip, listened to people’s problems, and dispensed advice,” wrote Kaufman.38 As Harry Metzger described the scene, “Scoop would come home at Christmas, have an obligatory scotch and water, and then ask...
what was happening around town and how everyone was doing.” If Jackson knew of someone who was having health troubles, he made a point of calling on them and giving his best wishes.39

Then, when constituents visited Washington, DC, Jackson would host them in the Senate dining room and even give them personal tours of the capitol on occasion.40 “Senators—Kennedy, Mansfield, Tower, others—would stop at Jackson’s table for small talk and to be introduced to the visitor from Jackson’s home state,” Richard Larsen wrote in the Seattle Times.41 Once in 1958 when two women from Everett were at the capitol and were about to sit down for lunch with their senator, Jackson aide Dorothy Fosdick pulled Jackson aside and asked him to have lunch with a group of “important people.” The Everett women said they could meet another time, but Jackson was intent on dining with them then and there. He sat and talked with his guests for two hours, getting up only briefly to say hello to the people at the “important” table.42 “By the sheer force and number of all these one-on-one and small group encounters, he conveyed his genuine empathy for people and their problems,” wrote Kaufman.43

With Jackson, busy as he was, there was never a rush to get away from people who sought his attention. “He never appeared to be in a hurry,” wrote the Bothell Northshore Citizen after his death. “Scoop was readily available to the press, and we presume to any of his constituents. He always returned telephone calls. And he always responded to written notes.”44

He “had a knack for making people feel at ease with him,” wrote the Vancouver Columbian.45 “It was not his intellect, brilliance or glibness that made Henry Jackson a man to remember or admire,” wrote Hal Zimmerman in the Camas-Washougal Record. “It was his common, direct, friendly style. He was a likable person.”46

Jackson had “an ability to listen and establish a productive relationship with people,” said the University of Washington’s Kenneth Pyle. “He loved people—ordinary people and he respected and absorbed their feelings and needs. He was a good conversationalist, able to initiate conversation with strangers. He was totally without pretense. I remember airplane travel with him. When the seat belt sign came off, he enjoyed moving up and down the aisle chatting with people.”47 As Senator Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island once said, Jackson had the qualities of “humility and interest in other people.”48

And Jackson was truly interested in what people had to share with him, according to Dorothy Fosdick. “One of Jackson’s secrets was that, in fact, he listened,” wrote Fosdick. “Anyone, at least almost anyone, with experience, facts, or informed ideas on a matter that concerned him had an audience and often a friend in Jackson. The Senator was also a great questioner; he could be relentless on subjects he considered important. Some who served with him thought he was too accessible. But when Jackson wanted help or advice, there was a vast reservoir on which to draw.”49

Jackson’s care for people was an outstanding feature that President Ronald Reagan recognized in tribute to Jackson. When Reagan presented the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Jackson’s family in 1984, he said, “When he wasn’t on the floor of the Senate or talking to the leaders of the world, he was usually in his office on the phone—consoling a constituent in a moment of grief, tracking down a lost social security check, congratulating an honor student, or helping a small businessman who was caught up in red tape.”50

**Jackson the Collaborator**

Having watched Jackson for a decade, Senator Johnston of Louisiana summarized Jackson’s approach to leadership. “He simply talked to everyone involved in a particular issue, learned their problems, and found
a way to put together a coalition of people interested in resolving the issue."\(^{51}\)

Jackson’s disposition to talk with people made him highly effective in the legislative arena. “In enlisting support for his various initiatives, Jackson was assiduous in working with Democrats and Republicans, one Member after another, using every nook and cranny of the U.S. Capitol,” wrote Fosdick. “When colleagues think back about their times with Jackson, they are apt to come up with some tale about how he won their vote for a pending measure while they were swaying along on the Senate’s antiquated subway cars, or how he gained their support for an amendment or a communication to the President while they were swimming in the small pool of the Senate gymnasium.”\(^{52}\) And as the columnist George Will wrote, “A legislature is a face-to-face society, where character and moral force tell. What Jackson did in committees and on the floor was awesome. But it was only a small fraction of the work he did during four decades of 18-hour days, working with one Member after another, one Member at a time, building coalitions of commonsense.”\(^{53}\)

Jackson’s relationships with his colleagues were built on trust. “In time, with disciplined, constant work, his expanding friendships, his refusal ever to berate a colleague, Jackson became a Senator with solid liaisons with Republicans and Democrats, northerners and southerners, liberals and conservatives,” wrote Richard Larsen. “He held spontaneous meetings with fellow Senators he met at the swimming pool where he worked out daily, in the cloakroom, in the Senate gym or in an office building corridor. More than one Senator remembers how the Jackson arm would be draped over one’s shoulder while the talk turned to the reasonable, rational solution to a legislative problem. An arm over the shoulder, rather than a twist of the arm.”\(^{54}\)

Jackson’s effectiveness was built largely on his willingness to work across party lines and across other differences. “His ties of affection reached across the political spectrum,” said Senator Ted Kennedy.\(^{55}\) Daniel Dreyfus, a Jackson advisor on the Interior Committee staff, noted Jackson’s “rare ability to deal with people of diverse philosophical points of view.”\(^{56}\) So it was that Jackson, a staunch supporter of civil rights, built enduring relationships with Southern Democrats whose views on civil rights were far from Jackson’s but whose votes were critical on many other important issues.\(^{57}\)

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Jackson also worked to build a strong bipartisan Washington State Congressional delegation. Congressman Sid Morrison, a Republican from Central Washington, spoke of Jackson’s “special touch,” recalling how Jackson and his wife Helen hosted the Washington State delegation in their home in 1983.\(^{58}\) “He went out of his way to make us feel welcome,” said Morrison.\(^{59}\)

**Jackson as a Mentor, Teacher, and Student**

Jackson was intentional about reaching out to new colleagues. After Jackson’s death, Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska said that Jackson “went out of his way to seek out newcomers to the Senate and to give them advice.”\(^{60}\) Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont remembered how Jackson’s was the first congratulatory call he received from outside of his own state on election night 1974. When Leahy’s parents came to visit the Senate on more than one occasion, Jackson greeted them and took time to talk with them. “He would take my parents aside and tell them how well I was doing here, and somehow try to convince them that the future of the Nation rested on my abilities.”\(^{61}\)

Congressman Al Swift of Washington State recalled how Jackson spent some 20 minutes talking with him and his wife after they had arrived in the nation’s capital. Jackson, having just spoken at a major dinner in his honor, called aside the Swifts and walked with them out a service door. “Here was one of the busiest men in..."
Washington, D.C., both because of his responsibilities but also by his nature who took us out in what amounted to an alley and leaned up against the fender of the car and talked to us for about 20 minutes about how we were settling into Washington, D.C., something about his experiences in Congress, a very fatherly and very unhurried discussion from a man who so often seemed to always be in a hurry,” recalled Swift. 62

Senator Pete Wilson of California appreciated the senatorial welcome he received from Jackson. “Characteristically, as I was to learn, he took the initiative in our relationship, befriending me in my first days in the Senate,” said Wilson. “Nothing could have been more flattering.” 63 Similarly, Senator Alan Simpson of Wyoming recalled how Jackson greeted him upon his arrival in the Senate, offering his help. “But that was the way Scoop Jackson was,” said Simpson, “a man who would always take the time out to offer encouragement or a positive word to a new Member of this body—of whatever political stripe.” 64

Jackson was also approachable to first-time candidates for public office who sought his attention. This was the case for desperate young U.S. Senate candidate Joe Biden of Delaware, who for some reason ended up outside of a private house where presidential candidate Jackson was having dinner in the midst of the 1972 Democratic Convention in Miami. Challenged by a supporter to knock on the door of the house, Biden refused. Then the eager supporter went ahead and knocked, leaving tongue-tied Biden to explain to Jackson’s driver and security man Don Donohue that he wished to meet Jackson. Jackson welcomed the nervous surprise guest into the dining room, served him dessert, and talked to him about his campaign in Delaware. 65

In his interactions with junior Senators, Jackson went beyond senatorial courtesies and filled the role of a mentor. Senator Paul Tsongas of Massachusetts expressed his gratitude for Jackson’s “outreach to those of us who were new and inexperienced and somewhat timid as we came into this body.” In particular, Jackson put new members of the Energy Committee at ease and helped to educate them in the issues before the committee. 66

As Jackson mentored his colleagues, he earned their friendship. “On a number of occasions he gave me personal advice on how to be a better Senator and how to serve my constituents better,” said Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah. “He went out of his way for me. In the process, I gained inestimable respect and friendship for him.” 67

Jackson thought of succession as he led in powerful roles. With succession apparently in mind, he was a mentor to Senator Johnston of Louisiana, “designating me, in a certain sense, as his apprentice chairman for the last years of his chairmanship of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources,” said Johnston. “No apprentice ever had a better example to follow. He gave me room to make my own decisions and my own mistakes. He never withdrew his trust.” 68

Jackson also placed tremendous trust in Senate staff members and rewarded them with his friendship. He recruited and cultivated a team in his Senate office that became renowned for its professionalism and effectiveness. Many young people came to the capitol to work for Jackson, but “they ended up working with him, because his style of leadership was inextricably bound up with a compulsion to teach by example,” said Senator Johnston of Louisiana. 69 “Henry Jackson treated his staff as partners in the enterprise,” wrote Dorothy Fosdick. 70 “Scoop was not our boss,” said Mike Harvey, his longtime chief counsel on the Senate Energy Committee, “he was our leader, our teacher, and above all our friend.” 71 Jackson asked a lot of his staff, but he earned tremendous respect from them. 72

To Richard Perle, Jackson’s advisor on foreign and defense policy for 11 years and whose father had died early in his life, Jackson was “a surrogate father,” said Jackson staffer Howard Feldman. 73

Staff from other Senate offices were impacted by Jackson as well. When future Senator John Heinz of Pennsylvania was working for Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania in the 1960s, as Heinz later recalled, Jackson “did not hesitate to welcome me into his office and be as gracious and helpful as he always was to all of us as colleagues.”

Jackson also spent time with college students. “I enjoyed bringing young people to his office or having him to campus to talk with students,” said Pyle. “He relished these meetings.” Jackson even spent time drawing on ideas from young people. James Billington recalls his first impressions of Jackson in the 1950s "when he was already a much-respected congressman

74 Government Printing, 185
75 Pyle
but not averse to sitting on the floor for a late-night bull session with graduate students and young government workers, whose views he probed as if they were expert consultants.”

Jackson spent time getting to know and seeking advice from people in academia. “He was comfortable with academics and intellectuals and had a wide range of contacts in the scholarly world that he called on for advice,” said Pyle. “Henry Jackson was humble enough intellectually to realize he had a lot to learn, and humble enough personally to associate habitually with people who knew more than he did—people he could and did learn from,” said former Senator Malcolm Wallop of Wyoming. “Some of the Western World’s first scholars found Henry Jackson congenial company.”

Especially in the field of foreign policy, Jackson surrounded himself with some of the preeminent thinkers of his day. He assembled an advisory network of scholars who he could call on for ideas and feedback. “Throughout his official life, the Senator drew on a remarkable group of experienced, historically oriented advisers whom he informally consulted in person, by letter--often by phone--to get their judgments on issues with fateful international strategic implications,” said Dorothy Fosdick, Jackson’s longtime top foreign policy advisor.

If Jackson was attentive to the best ideas and eager to associate with the best thinkers, he also spent time teaching those around him. He was, as his son Peter reflected, “an experienced and skillful teacher.”

Others—Senator Howard Metzenbaum of Ohio, Senator Dale Bumpers of Arkansas, Congressman Tom Foley of eastern Washington—used the word teacher to describe their colleague as well. He was, said Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York in his eulogy of Jackson at the National Cathedral, “a teacher before almost anything else.”

Jackson taught through explanation, through discussion, and by example. He explained complex ideas in his speeches or in his encounters with individuals, whether he was explaining “the intricacies of petroleum marketing or decisionmaking in the Kremlin or environmental protection, or any one of a variety of other important subjects he understood so well,” said Senator Chris Dodd of Connecticut. “It was a rare individual who would not benefit immensely from one of Scoop’s impromptu tutorials.”

Even the Senate pages saw in Jackson a teacher. Dodd looked back on his time as a page in 1961, recalling fondly Jackson’s example and humanity. “We talked about Senator Jackson in those days because he was a true human being,” said Dodd. “He treated us with respect, with kindness, with courtesy. He did not treat us as some servile group that should do his bidding. He was always interested in our welfare, wanting to know how we were doing in school, how we enjoyed the work, whether we had questions about the institution or the legislation pending on the floor.”

The Power to Bless

Perhaps Jackson’s life work was to prove that love and politics can go together, that love for particular people and places can be an animating force to change the whole world. As Senator J. Bennett Johnston said of Jackson, “He was loved and had a chance to exercise his own large capacity to love.” Or as Senator Moynihan quoted W.B. Yeats in his eulogy at Everett’s First Presbyterian Church, he was “blessed and had the power to bless.”

It could be said that in an age of ideologies, Jackson stood for the signal idea that people matter most. He demonstrated this both in his style of politics and in the substance of his politics. Human dignity and human freedom were at the core of his work. And for Jackson, those ideals were not merely abstractions.

“People never became abstract to Scoop because he held on to his touchstone with reality: This state, this

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community,” said Congressman Al Swift. “He did not think in terms of faceless masses—he thought in terms of people whose faces he could see in his mind, in terms of businesses he knew, homes he visited, friends whom he’d talked to just a few days ago in Everett, or minutes ago on the phone. The people Senator Jackson represented in a lifetime commitment were real people with faces and names and children and successes and sorrows. You could tell it in the way he talked to people. Scoop usually didn’t give speeches, he talked with you. He’d draw your attention saying, ‘think of it,’ and invite your judgment, saying, ‘don’t you agree?’”

To Jackson, people “were not just nameless, faceless voters, members of interest groups, or staffers,” said Senator Carl Levin of Michigan. “It showed in the way he treated them personally and in the way they returned that consideration with the support, loyalty, and devotion that such treatment deserved.”

It was more than winning elections that drove Jackson to value people. Jackson so internalized his belief in the dignity and individuality of human beings that he made it the cornerstone of his policy leadership during the Cold War. “While Jackson championed the cause of human rights as a national obligation, he was also remarkably aware of the living, breathing human beings struggling for freedom,” wrote Dorothy Fosdick. According to Fosdick, these real exemplars of the struggle for freedom included “Anatoly Sharansky, incarcerated in the Gulag by the KGB; Andrei Sakharov and Yelena Bonner, isolated and harassed for saying what they thought; Pastor Georgi Vins, imprisoned because he wished to preach and practice his faith in God; Ida Nudel, ‘angel of mercy’ to countless prisoners of conscience, banished to Siberia; ballet dancers Valery and Galina Panov, denied the chance to perform; Simas Kudirka, seaman from Lithuania, thwarted in his first brave jump to freedom; poet Huber Matos, confined in Cuban jails.”

This personalization of human liberty, and of the human activity of politics, determined the way Jackson carried himself as much as it influenced the way he voted in the U.S. Senate. He stood for equality in public policy, and he treated people as equals. “To secretary and senior vice president alike, Jackson gave a straight look in the eye and a firm handshake,” wrote John Marshall in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

Other journalists noticed this too. “He greeted people with a sincere, straightforward manner no matter what their station in life was,” wrote Del Price in the Port Angeles Chronicle. Or as Richard Larsen put it in the Seattle Times, “Jackson seemed as comfortable meeting with executives in the corporate board room as he was shaking hands around a labor hall.”

With Jackson, it was a habit to pay attention to people. His acknowledgements for people happened over and again, and as Marshall wrote, they were “the kinds of things that people would remember, especially at election time. They were what separated Jackson from the politicians who were just going through the motions, doing what was expected.”

Jackson may have been a different kind of politician, but that wasn’t enough to make him president. Twice Jackson ran for president, and twice he failed. Why couldn’t the American public see what the people of Washington State apparently saw in Jackson? Perhaps it is because no candidate, no matter how personable, can win on the strength of personal relationships alone. Charisma is needed. Media stardom is needed.

Congressman Tom Foley tried in vain to persuade Jackson to spend more time on camera in 1972. Demonstrating his preference for personal connections over airtime during the 1972 presidential primary campaign in Wisconsin, Jackson once canceled a slot on the NBC Today Show so he could
make it to an event at a bowling alley. Jackson campaign media consultant Gerald Hoeck said that Jackson’s best speech of that campaign was one he delivered without notes to a brewery full of blue collar workers in Milwaukee. Jackson then took on arm wrestling challenges from some of the men, which “impressed the hell out of them,” said Hoeck. The Seattle Times editorial board offered its assessment of why Jackson failed to win the presidency: “It was impossible nationally to cultivate the personal touch—the ‘my neighbor’ feeling that solidified his hold on Washington voters.”

It was a feeling that was portrayed in a 1983 article by Hoeck in the Seattle Weekly. Hoeck recalled a 1982 visit to Aberdeen during Jackson’s final reelection campaign. Jackson and his team stopped at a sidewalk café in the downtown for lunch. “Then it began,” wrote Hoeck. “The parade of people. They came streaming from all over town. Our visit had been unannounced, but they had all suddenly heard that Scoop was in town. Scoop is sitting at a table downtown on Main Street—right now…the telephone grapevine had been working. “They came by the dozens—housewives, labor leaders, Democratic committeemen and women, bankers, businessmen, reporters, plain ordinary citizens. They wanted to talk to one of their favorite people. A few had problems they wanted to talk about—like a harbor project Scoop was working on—but mostly, they wanted to shake his hand, say hello, talk about their families. And Jackson knew their names, remembered the old get-togethers, and asked about friends.” This was a scene of democratic friendship at its finest.

Can the Jackson style of leadership be emulated in a new century at the level of the U.S. Senate, if not the presidency? Writing in the Washington Post after Jackson’s death, Joseph Kraft expressed doubts about the currency of Jackson-style leadership even in the 1980s. Jackson was the “last of a breed,” wrote Kraft. “New Senators are made on television, and in an age where ideological fashion is turned against government. They do not build loyalties quietly from within. They go for the evening news, usually by profiling themselves, from right or left, against

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94 Kaufman, 234-235
95 Kaufman, 235
96 Kaufman, 236
97 Government Printing, 256,
the powers that be. More and more, the Senate is a collection of egos.”98
And yet, one may wonder if in the course of events there may be another shift in how we measure our politicians and what we expect in our leaders. Might there be a place again for political personalities like Scoop Jackson? Might we step away just a bit from the divisiveness and focus more on getting to know one another so that we can work together?

In Henry M. Jackson, people of all political perspectives and from every part of the country can find an example worth emulating. Jackson showed the potential of people-centered politics and proved the moral advantages of government based on human relationships. Jackson set this higher standard not too long ago as a U.S. Senator. Americans who yearn for the best of democracy in our own day would do well to embrace Jackson’s legacy.

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QUOTE ATTRIBUTIONS:
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