

Snowe in the Forecast
But Spring on Its Way

By Brian P. Cory

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With another presidential primary behind us and Super Tuesday right around the corner, Senator Olympia J. Snowe from Maine stole the headlines yesterday with her surprise announcement that she will not seek re-election in November 2012.

Snowe's decision has been described as a significant setback to the Republicans' ability to regain control of the Senate. Snowe served thirty-three years in Congress, eight terms in the House and three terms in the Senate. Political analysts are now racing to predict how the impact of Snowe's retirement will play out. Ah, the sport of Washington.

So, how does this relate to education?

Listen to Snowe.

The following excerpts are taken from her released statement:

“Unfortunately, I do not realistically expect the partisanship of recent years in the Senate to change over the short term. So at this stage of my tenure in public service, I have concluded that I am not prepared to commit myself to an additional six years in the Senate...”

“...what motivates me is producing results for those who have entrusted me to be their voice and their champion, and I am filled with that sense of responsibility today as I was on my first day in the Maine House of Representatives. I do find it frustrating, however, that an atmosphere of polarization and ‘my way or the highway’ ideologies has become pervasive in campaigns and in our governing institutions.”

“With my Spartan ancestry I am fighter at heart; and I am well prepared for the electoral battle, so that is not the issue. However, what I have had to consider is how productive an additional term would be.”

“It has been an indescribable honor and immeasurable privilege to serve the people of Maine, first in both houses of Maine's legislature and later in both houses of Congress. To this day, I remain deeply passionate about public service, and I cherish the opportunity I have been given for nearly four decades to help improve the lives of my fellow Mainers.”

“...we must return to an era of civility in government driven by a common purpose to fulfill the promise that is unique to America.”

Snowe had a reputation of reaching across the aisle. Time and time again, she voted against her Republican colleagues and worked with Democrats to get important work done. Snowe became known as an independent voice and a consensus builder.

I was basically unfamiliar with Snowe until the story broke yesterday. I began Googling her name and read a number of articles about her. After the fourth or fifth article, I found myself exclaiming, "Please stay! Now is the time that we need you the most!" (And that is coming from a New Jersey/New York guy.)

In 2005, Snowe joined a group of senators called the "Gang of 14." This bipartisan group defied respective party leaders and successfully negotiated a compromise on filibuster rules in the Senate. According to a recent article in the *Washington Post*, only five of the fourteen senators will remain in office by January.

How about us? Could we be losing our gang too? These questions are quickly becoming serious concerns as the list of outstanding educators grows who are considering retiring prematurely or have already circumvented their original envisioned timeline by jumping ship.

There is another growing list of educators who have never experienced their second, fifth, or fifteenth year because they burned out or chose to bow out or became pushed out or any combination thereof. Veteran and rookie educators alike have decided or are deciding to pursue alternative pathways to escape the negativity, pressures, and politics that have permeated their beloved profession.

Too many irreplaceable and promising educators are muttering Snowe-like sentiments as they exit the profession.

As these educators exit, who will replace them? Is the prospect of pursuing education as a profession attracting great excitement among the best and brightest students beginning their college careers in approximately six months from now? More questions which are quickly becoming serious concerns.

If some of the current narrative swirling about education does not change soon, these concerns will become intensified. Snowe will be in the forecast.

We will be knee-deep in educators who exit the profession because they do not realistically expect the narrative to change over the short term. We will be digging out from piles of educators who, at this stage of their public service, have concluded that they are not prepared to commit to additional years in our schools.

These will be the same educators who are motivated in producing results for those who have entrusted them to be their champion and who are filled with that sense of responsibility, whether they are at the twilight of their fourth year or fortieth year.

The frozen tundras will be littered with educators who wanted to battle but succumbed to the fight with doubts of how productive they could actually be.

These educators will exit while proclaiming that it was an indescribable honor and immeasurable privilege to serve. These educators will exit while remaining deeply passionate about public service and they will cherish the opportunity they were given to help improve the lives of children.

And their exit will send an unretractable message to future potential educators.

Snowe is right.

We must return to an era of civility in education driven by a common purpose to fulfill the promise that is unique to students.

Educators must lead the way.

And educators should be encouraged that spring is on its way. Stick around and blossom.