

NEWS

'Friendship transcends partisanship'

Stevens, Inouye have bond of brothers

Bond forms over time and outside the lower 48 states

By Klaus Marre

At a time when partisanship dominates a closely divided Congress, the friendship between Sens. Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) and Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii) transcends party lines.

The senators, both highly decorated World War II veterans who have served in the Senate since the 1960s, call themselves "brothers."

They serve on many of the same committees, including the powerful appropriations panel, which Stevens chairs.

And according to data compiled by the Center for Responsive Politics, Stevens was the only member of Congress whose leadership political action committee (PAC) contributed to a member of the opposite party last year, when he gave \$5,000 from his Northern Lights PAC to Inouye's re-election campaign.

Inouye acknowledged that donations crossing party lines are "very unusual," adding, "but Senator Stevens and I have been friends [from] about the time he got here." Inouye first was elected in 1962; Stevens joined the Senate in 1968.

The money comes mostly from people who "believe in our national defense," Stevens said, adding, "If they support me, they support him."

Both lawmakers are aware that Inouye, more than likely, will not need the money to win re-election. In 1998, he won with 79 percent of the vote, the same percentage Stevens received when he won re-election in 2002. "It's more a sign of friendship," Inouye said.

In 2008, when Stevens is up for re-election, Inouye plans to

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Hawaii," Inouye, 79, quipped yesterday when he introduced Stevens, 80, at the Quello Telecommunications Policy and Law Symposium here in Washington.

Former Federal Communications Commission Commissioner James Quello called Inouye's introduction of Stevens "the ultimate in bipartisan synergy."

In his introduction, Inouye said that "friendship transcends partisanship," adding that Stevens is "a Republican, but I love him."

"This nation is fortunate to have a man who is truly dedicated to his job," he added.

Their length of service is one factor that could help explain the closeness of the lawmakers. Another is the time period during which they entered the Senate.

"When I first got here ... canaraderie was commonplace," Inouye said, adding that after contentious debates, "there

was friendship."

The senators "come from a time when there was more collegiality" in Congress, an Inouye aide said. "Geography also plays a role," the aide added, noting that neither of the lawmakers represents states from the "lower 48."

Alaska and Hawaii "share problems of isolation, communication and travel," Inouye said.

Stevens and Inouye share a number of similarities — and at one time even shared a bed. On a return flight from China, Stevens said, he told Inouye to sleep on the bed while he would rest on a chair.

But, Stevens added, after a couple of hours he "wasn't doing so well in the chair and got in bed with him," fully clothed.

When Stevens told this story to a group of Hawaiians, Inouye said: "That's true, but the marriage was never consummated."

Stevens chairs not only the

Appropriations Committee but also its Defense Subcommittee. Inouye is the second most senior Democrat on the full committee and is the ranking member of the Defense Subcommittee. Their friendship has "absolutely" helped them work together, Inouye said.

The lawmakers also serve on the Commerce and Rules committees, but said it is their assignment on the Defense Subcommittee where they work most closely together.

"We're co-chairmen of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee. It doesn't matter who is chairman because the other person is equally involved in the decision making," Stevens said.

Either Inouye or Stevens has chaired the subcommittee since 1981, and Stevens believes that bipartisanship is especially important on issues of national defense. The nation and its defense have benefited from the continuity and coop-

eration he and Inouye have provided, he said.

"When we agree, which is always, there are few people that can defeat us," he said.

Inouye and Stevens have traveled to wherever American troops were in the line of duty, or, as Inouye puts it, the two have gone to "some strange places."

Both of them are attorneys, and Stevens "worked successfully for Alaska's and Hawaii's admissions to the Union" as Department of the Interior solicitor, according to his Senate biography.

Stevens's office is in Room 522 of the Hart Building, Inouye's is two floors above, in Room 722.

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"I will say this publicly: He is my best friend," Inouye said, adding, "All in all, I am so pleased that our paths crossed."

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PATRICK G. RYAN

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