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Stevens was 'larger than life'

By MANU RAJU | 08/10/10 04:08 PM EDT | Updated 08/10/10 05:20 PM EDT

From Capitol Hill to Anchorage, politicians are remembering Ted Stevens as one of the most powerful figures in Senate history, a hero from the "Greatest Generation" and an Alaska icon.

The news shook Capitol Hill the same day the House briefly suspended its August recess to approve a \$26 billion aid bill to the states. Reaction began pouring in from around the nation moments after a family spokesman confirmed Stevens was killed in the crash, which occurred about 320 miles southwest of Anchorage.

"How can you sum up six decades of service?" said Alaska Gov. Sean Parnell at a Tuesday press conference. "Though small in stature, Ted Stevens was larger than life."

Parnell added: "As citizens of Alaska, we have a long road of grief to walk."

Fellow World War II veteran Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii), who served with Stevens for four decades and who called the Republican his "brother," said their friendship was a "very special one."

"When it came to policy, we disagreed more often than we agreed, but we were never disagreeable with one another," said Inouye, who served alongside Stevens on the Appropriations and Commerce, Science and Transportation Committees. "We were always positive and forthright. Senator Stevens and I worked together to ensure that the small non-contiguous states of Hawaii and Alaska were not forgotten by the lower 48 and to ensure that the nation awoke to the importance of the Pacific for our economy and international relations."

"I will never forget him."

Former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin paid tribute to Stevens in a Facebook message:

"In our land of towering mountains and larger than life characters, none were larger than the man who in 2000 was voted "Alaskan of the Century." This decorated World War II pilot was a warrior and a true champion of Alaska," Palin wrote. "In 40 years of service in the U.S. Senate, he fought tenaciously for Alaska's future. Alaskans know how much we owe to Senator Stevens."

In a statement, the White House expressed its condolences.

"A decorated World War II veteran, Senator Ted Stevens devoted his career to serving the people of Alaska and fighting for our men and women in uniform," said President Barack Obama. "Michelle and I extend our condolences to the entire Stevens family and to the families of those who perished alongside Senator Stevens in this terrible accident."

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) said that he knew "how beloved he was by the people of Alaska." And former President George W. Bush said Stevens will be "dearly missed."

Utah Sen. Orrin Hatch, who served with Stevens from 1977 until Democrat Mark Begich defeated the Alaskan in 2008, called Stevens a "legend, a patriot and a gentle warrior who never stopped fighting for his beloved state of Alaska or for what he believed in."

Begich, a former mayor of Anchorage, called Stevens a “great statesman and true pioneer of our state.”

“Over his four decades of public service in the U.S. Senate, Sen. Stevens was a forceful advocate for Alaska who helped transform our state in the challenging years after Statehood,” Begich said. “Sen. Stevens’ many contributions to Alaska are enormous and his legacy of fierce devotion to Alaska will be long-lasting.”

Indeed, Stevens –who served in the Senate from 1968-2008 – was so widely known for the billions of dollars he sent home in federal aid that Alaskans simply referred to him as “Uncle Ted.”