

Statement for the Congressional Record
A Tribute to Governor Olene Walker
Senator Orrin G. Hatch
December 3, 2015

Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to Governor Olene Walker, a woman beloved in my home state of Utah and regarded across the nation as a model of civility and selfless service. Governor Walker passed away last Saturday from causes incident to age. In her 85 years of life, she led with compassion and humility, earning the respect and admiration of everyone she served.

Governor Walker's life was one of humble service, and her modest background made her rise in politics all the more impressive. Raised in rural Utah, she developed her trademark work ethic on the family farm and spent much of her childhood milking cows, hauling hay, and harvesting sugar beets. Both as a young woman working in her family's fields and as a governor serving the people of Utah, no task was ever below Olene—she was always willing to do whatever was necessary to get the job done and to help those in need.

As a state legislator, a lieutenant governor, and a governor, Olene was steadfast in her commitment to help society's most vulnerable, especially small children. Her work in the area of healthcare reform precipitated the establishment of our state's Children Health Insurance Program, which helps provide medical insurance for Utah's underprivileged youth. After becoming Utah's first female governor, she continued her advocacy for children by championing education reform.

Governor Walker's Read With a Child Early Literacy Initiative was essential to her reform efforts. This program sought to improve childhood literacy by encouraging parents to read with their kids for at least 20 minutes every day. The initiative's focus on the family speaks to a simple truth: meaningful societal change doesn't begin in the bustling chambers of Congress but in the quiet solitude of the home, through the daily interactions between parent and child. As a former homemaker and as a mother of seven, Olene understood that healthy homes lead to a healthy society. This belief influenced many of her pro-family policies as governor.

Perhaps more than anyone I know, Governor Walker exemplified the teaching that the greatest among us is the servant of all. She often eschewed the trappings of public office and even refused to use a driver. After leaving the governorship, Olene volunteered to serve as the Primary President for her local church congregation. This humble position was a significant departure from her role as Utah's chief executive. Instead of negotiating with legislators and managing state agencies, Olene led dozens of little children in song and prayer, teaching them about the words of Christ and his early apostles. Anyone preoccupied with prestige or positions of power would surely consider this new responsibility a demotion. But Olene wasn't one of those people. She never concerned herself with titles, standing, or prominence; she cared only about serving others in whatever capacity she could.

And she served until the very end. Even after retiring from office, Olene remained in the public sphere and continued to advocate for education reform. She was also active in

ecclesiastical service and would eventually serve a two-year mission in New York City for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She was equally engaged in academia and was instrumental in establishing the Olene S. Walker Institute of Politics and Public Service at Weber State University. In addition to hosting public forums, the Institute helps students find jobs and internships in government and encourages women to become involved in politics.

Through her trailblazing example, Governor Walker leaves a legacy of leadership that is sure to inspire generations of young Americans. With her passing, we have lost not only an exemplary stateswoman but also a loving mother and a friend. I am deeply grateful for my association with Olene Walker. I consider myself lucky to have known Olene and even luckier to have served alongside her. Elaine and I send our deepest condolences to the Walker family. May God comfort them, and may He comfort all of us as we mourn the loss of an exceptional woman.