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Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Delivers Remarks at Funeral Service for Congressman Donald Payne, Jr.

05/2/2024

May 2, 2024**Remarks as Prepared for Delivery**

Good morning.

It is a solemn honor to join, today, in celebrating the life of my friend – and a true hero to the people of New Jersey – Congressman Donald Payne, Jr.

To Don's wife Bea, to their three beautiful children Donald III, Jack, and Yvonne, to Don's uncle, and former Assemblyman, Bill Payne, and to every member of the Payne family, on behalf of your entire New Jersey family: please accept our sincerest condolences.

And thank you for sharing your beloved "Chop" with us for all these years.

To the distinguished Members of the Clergy, including Cardinal Tobin and his team, to the many elected officials, from all levels of Government, to all of Don's colleagues in Congress, here with us today, including Senator Booker, Leader Jeffries, Representatives Clyburn, Pallone, Waters, Thompson, Cleaver, and many other of his colleagues, the Honorable Marcia Fudge, to those representing counties in his District, Senate President Scutari and County Executive Guy, and to everyone here in Newark and Essex County, including County Executive DiVincenzo, Chairman Jones, Mayor Baraka, and so many of you who worked hand-in-hand with Don to better the lives of our families: thank you for joining us to bid farewell to one of the Brick City's and New Jersey's proudest sons – and greatest champions.

For more than half-a-century, the Payne family has given more to our great Garden State than can be adequately captured in words.

From here in Essex County, down to the State House in Trenton, and down to our nation's Capital, in Washington, D.C, the Payne name has been etched deeply – and proudly – into the very foundation of our nation.

It is a family name that signifies a legacy of public service, selflessness, and integrity.

And during his 65 short years on this planet, Don devoted every fiber of his being to carrying the Payne family legacy to new heights.

But no matter how high he climbed in his career, Don was always grounded in an unwavering and unrelenting commitment to serving the community that raised him.

From his earliest days in public service – when he founded the Newark South Ward Junior Democrats organization as a teenager – to his leadership, more recently – as Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials – Don approached every day with a dogged determination to make life better for his neighbors in Newark, in his District, and all across New Jersey.



And a major reason why he was so effective, as a legislator, is because he understood deeply — and, in fact, shared — many of the same struggles and experiences as his constituents throughout North Jersey.

I mean, look no further than the fact that Don lived on the same exact street in Newark his entire life.

That is just one fact that speaks to a bigger truth — that no matter how far Don's career took him, home was never far from his heart.

And considering everything he accomplished during his ten-plus years in Congress, it is clear that home was always front of mind for Don, as well.

When he saw families in our state being torn apart by gun violence — he resolved to be a force for change and helped enact the strongest gun safety reforms in a generation.

When he saw children in his city being poisoned by lead pipes — he dedicated himself to securing billions of dollars in federal funds to bring clean water to vulnerable communities across America.

And when he, like millions of Americans, struggled with a chronic illness — in his case, diabetes — he drew from that experience to build a more accessible and more affordable health care system for every family.

But no matter the issue, no matter the policy, Don's work was always rooted in his love for New Jersey. To supporting our state's children, our families, and our small businesses.

And he lived up to that commitment, to our state, in ways both big and small. Even all the way down to his bowties — each one of which were handmade by the same, single merchant in Newark, Michael Lamont.

So really, it should come as no surprise that whenever an ambitious young person asked Don for advice on how to get started in politics, he would tell each one the same thing.

He would advise them, "to thine own self be true."

Well, if there is any sentiment that could sum up the life of Donald Payne, Jr. — that is it. Because he lived every single day being true to himself, to his community, and to that proud Payne family legacy.

And it was that same spirit of truth and integrity in public service that I saw for myself, recently — when Don and I sat down for the very last time.

The two of us met in my office in Newark — and as always, Don came prepared with his big heart, tenacious spirit, and — of course — his signature bowtie.

And as always, he came to the table with just one topic at the top of his mind: helping our state's families. He wanted to discuss how we could continue working together to make life easier for our working neighbors... by expanding access to broadband connectivity and creating good-paying jobs for our brothers and sisters in labor.

It was a conversation that reminded me, once again, how lucky we were to have Don fighting for us in Washington, doing his part to build upon his father's towering legacy.

So, though I — and, of course, all of us — are devastated to lose Don, I am extremely grateful for his years of friendship, and for his decades of fearless service to our state, and to our nation.

With him gone, it is now our responsibility to carry the proud Payne family legacy forward. By being true to ourselves, to our values, and to this state we love so dearly.

Thank you, and God Bless you all.

Governor Phil Murphy

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