

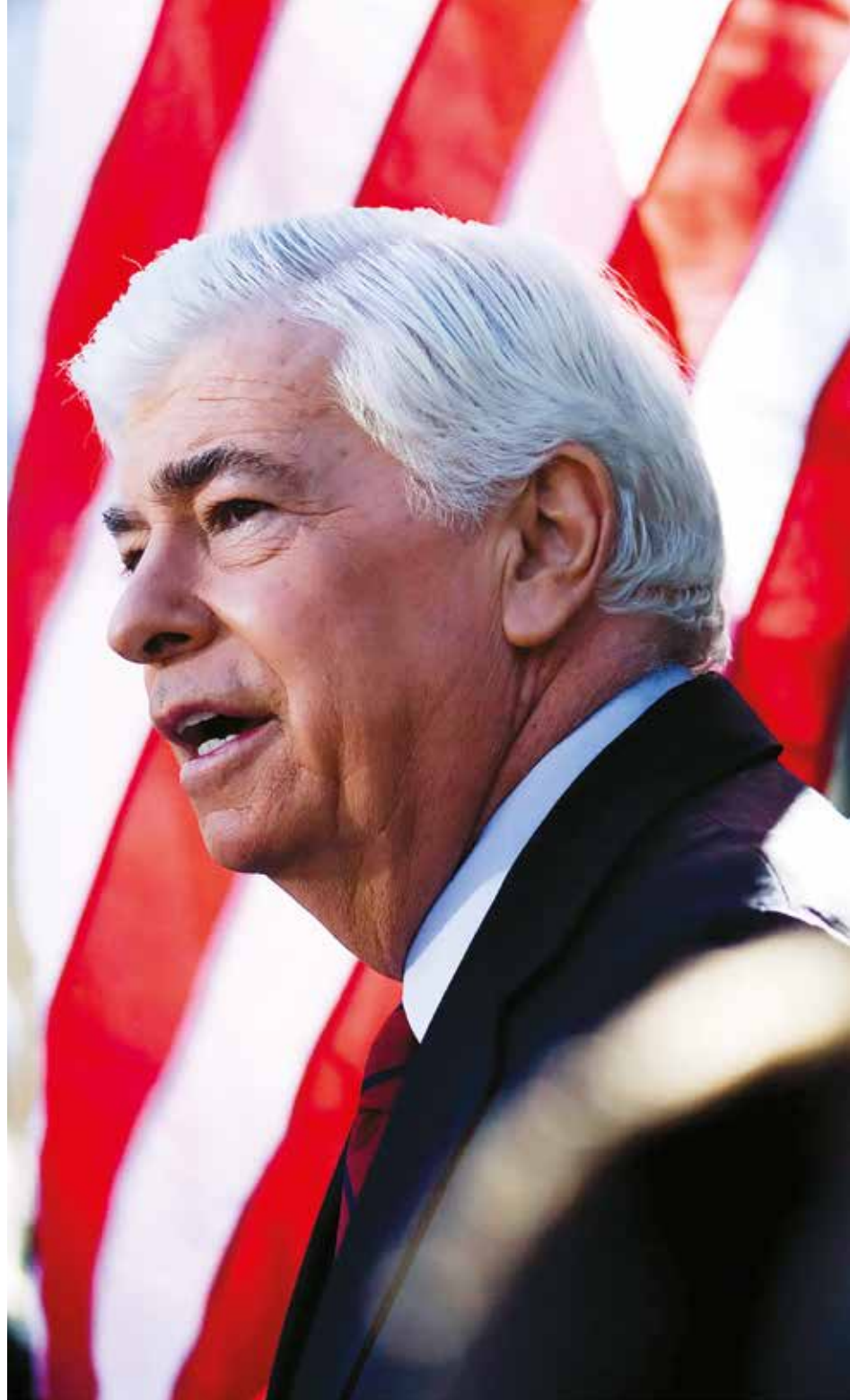
**S**TANDING OFFSTAGE, CHRISTOPHER DODD decided to scrap the 35-page speech he had prepared as keynote speaker at the 2014 Rome International Film Festival. Never mind that Mr. Dodd and his staff had worked on the speech for weeks, revising and rewriting it until 3 that morning. Never mind that Mr. Dodd, CEO of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), had no backup plan. Watching the panel discussion that preceded his address, Mr. Dodd decided that the speech in hand wouldn't connect with this audience. Tearing off the top sheet of his speech, he wrote down seven bullet points on its blank side and walked out on stage. Thirty off-the-cuff minutes later, Mr. Dodd walked off stage to resounding applause and winked at his aide "How was that?" he asked.

His instincts, ease and charisma as a speaker go a long way toward explaining why Mr. Dodd is a legend in the US Senate. At the start of his Senate career, the little-known Democrat from Connecticut cut an instant national profile by delivering a scathing televised critique of President Reagan's support of right-wing regimes in Central America. Nearly three decades later, when Senator Dodd retired from the Senate, he delivered a valedictory speech that Republican Senator Mitch McConnell – a frequent political opponent – called "one of the most important speeches in the history of the Senate." In between, he employed his mastery of language to spearhead approval of a wealth of legislation, including the Child Care Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act and the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act.

After Mr. Dodd's retirement from the Senate in 2010, his oratory skills made him the perfect voice of the MPAA, where he served for seven years. Now senior counsel at Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer – and a devoted father who had his first child at age 57 – Senator Dodd sat down with his former aide, Brunswick Account Director Casey Becker, to address a subject relevant to all leaders: how to connect with an audience.

**Between campaign stops, the Senate, visits back home with constituents, the MPAA, I estimate you've given more than 10,000 speeches.**

[Laughs] I'd be hard pressed to come up with a number. After more than 40 years in public life, I am certainly no longer surprised to be called upon to share my thoughts. Whenever I showed up at, say, the New London Democratic Committee meeting, I would have been expected to say a few



Former US Senator  
**CHRISTOPHER DODD** tells  
Brunswick's  
**CASEY BECKER**  
about the role  
of words in a life  
of stories

words, though I wouldn't have prepared a speech. I couldn't tell you how many speeches that I gave as a candidate and as a Senator. After leaving the Senate I frequently spoke to groups about the financial reform bill, and of course I gave speeches on behalf of the MPAA.

Some required more thought than others, for instance, responding to President Reagan on Central America. I worked hard on my speech nominating Bill Clinton in '96 at the Democratic Convention, when I was Chairman of the Democratic National



# DEDOD

## SENATOR

Committee. I put a lot of thought into a nominating speech for Gary Hart in 1988 – only to watch him almost nominate himself four hours before I delivered my remarks. [Laughs] I reread that speech not long ago, and it holds up pretty well.

**On a speech that matters, say, your valedictory speech, how long does it take to write?**

I wrote it over a period of time. I felt as though I was putting a period not only on my 36 years in the Congress, but on my father’s 16 years as well. That’s

more than a half century of family Congressional service in a country with a relatively short history. So the closing speech was very important to me.

The process began with a conversation with staff who would be working on a draft. I shared the themes I wanted to include. The very best speechwriters can help you judge the sound of words. Not the sound in your head, intellectually, but literally the sound of the words. I would often ask speechwriters to read their drafts to themselves out loud. Sometimes I would record the speech to

**Senator Christopher Dodd announcing his retirement from the steps of his East Haddam, Connecticut home on January 6, 2010.**

**"If I were coaching [executives] today, I'd say what Ernest Hemingway said when someone asked him how to start a novel. Hemingway said, 'The first thing I write is the truest thing I know'"**

hear what the words of the speech sounded like. What the words felt like. There's a lot of truth to that old line, "I can't remember what you said, but I remember how you made me feel." Occasionally, you might speak a phrase that people will recall. But in the end what they remember is how you made them feel.

#### **Did you ever study other speakers?**

I read the speeches of Churchill, who was very disciplined, and Lincoln. Many of the great speakers share a love of language and a love of history.

#### **What do you do if you sense that the audience isn't engaged?**

If you're watching the first row of your audience begin to doze in the middle of a speech, stop, pause, and say, "Let me tell you a story." At least temporarily you'll get the audience's attention, but then you'd better have a good story to tell.

If you want to inform an audience about something, you need to entertain them enough to hold their attention. President Kennedy and President Franklin Roosevelt were talented speakers in their ability to do just that.

#### **Of the presidents you served under - Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush senior, Clinton, George W. Bush and Obama - who was the best speaker?**

President Reagan was maybe the best. He could emote in wonderful ways without becoming excessive. You could tell when he was angry without him sounding angry. And you could tell he appreciated humor. President Obama had a wonderful delivery, and a deep appreciation for language and words.

Bill Clinton was effective. He could ramble on, but you didn't mind, because he was so interesting. Not long ago, President Clinton spoke at the center I started in my father's memory at the University of Connecticut. (The center's purpose is rooted in the work that Dodd's father, Thomas, performed as Executive Trial Counsel at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials.) We give out an award every couple of years to human-rights groups or organizations that are making a positive contribution to human rights.

When President Clinton spoke, there were around 500 people in the audience, and you could hear a pin drop. Even though he went off on several tangents that left you wondering where his remarks were going, because he was so interesting, he had the ability to keep people focused on what he was saying.

#### **How long should a speech take to deliver?**

I always thought that the attention span of the average audience is about 20 to 30 minutes.

#### **What's the trick to a good opening?**

There are situations where a clock is controlling, and they're trying to move things along. Under those circumstances, you need to get right to the subject of the speech. Similarly, if the subject matter of the speech is very technical, I'll stick to prepared remarks.

But in a more relaxed environment, I might very well scrap the prepared text and write down a few notes of the high points, and speak extemporaneously. What is very important, if not under strict time constraints, is to begin with words that relax the audience. Humor and good stories can be very helpful.

#### **Is there an example?**

Over the years you accumulate quite a few of them. You do not want to tell the same story over and over again, or you might have some in the audience shaking their heads, saying, "You're not telling that story again!" That doesn't help the speaker.

A humorous story I've told on a number of occasions is about the time William Howard Taft was giving a speech at the Waldorf Astoria, many years ago. He had been out of public life, and the event was a black-tie dinner honoring him. The senator from New York, Chauncey Depew, who thought himself a rather clever speaker, introduced President Taft.

Now, Taft, aside from having been both President of the United States and Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court – still the only person in our history to have held both of these offices – was also physically a giant. He was six feet tall and weighed more than 300 pounds. Senator Chauncey Depew introduced President Taft by saying, "It's my pleasure now to introduce you to a man who's both pregnant with integrity and pregnant with courage."

Well, of course, the crowd roared with laughter, and gave Taft a standing ovation. Taft slowly got up, went to the podium, looked out over the audience and said, "If it is a girl, I shall call her integrity. If it is a boy, I shall call him courage. But if, as I suspect, it's nothing more than gas, I shall call it Chauncey Depew."

Telling a story relaxes the audience and acknowledges that you hope to inform them without boring them.





**US Senators Chris Dodd, a Democrat, and Mitch McConnell, a Republican, take part in the First Nail Ceremony, December 6, 2000 in front of the Capitol. The event symbolizes the parties coming together, as they drive in the first nails to build a platform for the inauguration ceremony for a newly elected President. George W. Bush would take office the following January.**

**Was there a speech that was important yet more or less impromptu?**

It was an important moment, but not quite “impromptu.” The two leaders of the Senate, Majority Leader Tom Daschle and Minority Leader Trent Lott, called a meeting in the Old Senate Chamber on the eve of the impeachment trial of Bill Clinton. It was just senators – no family, no staff – to discuss how we were going to handle the trial of President Clinton. Tom Daschle called me the night before the meeting and asked if I would be one of the speakers on the Democratic side of the aisle. There was not a lot of time to prepare.

What do you say to your 99 Senate colleagues at a moment like this? I decided to use the Old Senate Chamber, that setting in which we were meeting, for the theme of my brief remarks. I suggested there were two paths the Senate could take in our conduct of this trial. In the very room where we were gathered, in 1856, in a debate on the abolition of slavery, the Democratic Congressman Preston Brooks burst into the Chamber, took his walking cane and beat Charles Sumner, the Republican Senator from Massachusetts. That incident is infamous. It’s taught in high schools. That was one path we could take, turning the Senate impeachment trial into a political brawl. Or we could follow the example of Senators Clay,

Calhoun and Webster in the compromise of 1850, drafted right there in the Old Senate Chamber between these political opponents. These three crafted a compromise that delayed the outbreak of the Civil War, and some historians believe may have ultimately saved the Union. That was the second path we could take. The path of measured debate, compromise and decorum.

My point that day was, regardless of the outcome of the trial, how would the conduct of the US Senate be perceived and remembered by historians and others? As reminiscent of the caning of Senator Sumner, or reminiscent of that great compromise of 1850? After I and others spoke, Senator Phil Gramm stood and sounded a similar note, then Senator Ted Kennedy spoke, stressing the importance of us working together on this trial. I recall we all left the Old Senate Chamber with a clear mindset of how the Senate should proceed.

**What do you think of the speeches you hear today from corporate executives?**

I know some executives go through public speaking training, since speeches are not a major part of their experiences in moving up the corporate ladder. When they reach the senior ranks, they are expected to address audiences of shareholders, employees and customers. If I were coaching them, I would say

CHRIS DODD

A lawyer turned politician, Chris Dodd is best known for having served 30 years in the US Senate, where he was the author of important legislation including the financial regulations popularly known as Dodd-Frank. From 2011 to 2017, he served as CEO of the Motion Picture Association of America. He now serves as senior counsel for Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer.

what Ernest Hemingway said when asked how he began writing a novel. Hemingway said, “The first thing I write, is the truest thing I know.”

I always thought that was not a bad idea when giving a speech. Start off with something you really believe. It will help you as the speaker, and it is good for the audience as well. It’s very important that the audience believe that you believe what you’re saying.

A good corporate executive will have strong beliefs. They wouldn’t be where they are if they didn’t. I would be less concerned about eloquence than conveying authenticity and sincerity. In short, I would want the audience to know me. One executive who is very good at communicating is Bob Iger, Disney’s CEO. He’s very comfortable on stage in front of an audience, very direct, very authentic.

Has the art of the speech changed?

Donald Trump has changed many things about our country. He delivers what are a series of “bumper-sticker” slogans, not great speeches. But as we’ve

learned, they are effective. A good part of the country tell us they have been waiting for political leadership to say what they really believe, someone who expresses his raw emotions.

Consider my friend, Vice President Joe Biden. What some considered Joe’s political liabilities have become strong assets. Joe speaks with great candor, honesty and believability. When Joe talks, people believe he is saying what he really believes. I profoundly disagree with President Trump on many, many issues, but when he speaks to his audience, people believe he’s expressing what he believes.

But the eloquence or logic of a speech, while still valued in many quarters, appears to be giving way to something new. We’re seeing a change in what constitutes an effective speech – a result that seems to indicate less of an appreciation for the well-crafted remarks of a time gone by.

CASEY BECKER is an Account Director with Brunswick, based in New York. He was Special Assistant to the CEO at the Motion Picture Association of America under Mr. Dodd.

FAREWELL REMARKS ON SENATE FLOOR IN 2010 (excerpts)

☆ Politics today seemingly rewards only passion and independence, not deliberation and compromise as well. It has become commonplace to hear candidates for the Senate campaign on how they are going to Washington to shake things up – all by themselves. May I politely suggest that you are seeking election to the wrong office. The United States Senate does not work that way, nor can it, or should it.

☆ Mayors, governors and presidents can sometimes succeed by the sheer force of their will. But there has never been a Senator so persuasive, so charismatic, so clever or so brilliant that they could make a significant difference, while refusing to work



with other members of this body. Simply put ... Senators cannot ultimately be effective alone.

☆ We one hundred Senators are but temporary stewards of a unique American institution, founded upon universal principles. The Senate was designed to be different, not simply for the sake of variety, but because the framers

believed the Senate could and should be the venue in which statesmen would lift America up to meet its unique challenges.

☆ In the end, the difference between a partisan brawl and a passionate, but ultimately productive, debate rests on the personal relationships between Senators. A legislative body that operates on unanimous

consent, as does the Senate, cannot function unless the members trust each other. There is no hope of building that trust unless there is the will to treat each other with respect and civility, and to invest the time it requires to create that trust and strengthen those personal bonds.

☆ No matter how obnoxious you find a colleague’s rhetoric or how odious you find their beliefs, you will need them. And despite what some may insist, you do no injustice to your ideological principles when you seek out common ground. You do no injustice to your political beliefs when you take the time to get to know those who don’t share them.