Congresswoman Betty McCollum (D-MN) received the Bruce F. Vento Public Service Award from the National Park Trust at an event at the Newseum in Washington Thursday evening.

Given annually to a public servant who has “demonstrated a lifetime of outstanding service, skill, resourcefulness or innovation in the preservation of land, water or historic resources for the legacy of America,” the award honors the memory of Congressman Bruce Vento, Congresswoman McCollum’s predecessor in Congress and a former Chair of the Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands.

“This award is particularly special to me because I was Congressman Vento’s constituent when he served in the U.S. House. At the same time, Bruce was my constituent when I served in the Minnesota State House. More than that, he was a friend and my mentor for more than 20 years,” Congresswoman McCollum said. “As Ranking Member of the Interior-Environment Appropriations Subcommittee, I’m proud that my role has given me a chance to work on many of the same issues he did.”

The National Park Trust is a national charity dedicated to preserving parks today and creating park stewards for tomorrow. Previous recipients of the Bruce F. Vento Public Service Award have included such high-profile figures as Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger (R-CA) and Senators Harry Reid (D-NV) and Mark Udall (D-CO).

Photos from the event are available here. The full text of Congresswoman McCollum’s remarks is below:

Good evening. Thank you, Sue and Bill, for those very kind words of introduction. And I am so appreciative that Vice President Mondale’s appeared in the video -- what a great surprise!

And thank you, Lloyd, Wali, and Weldon for the t-shirt and book. I’m very glad that you have had the opportunity to experience our national treasures through the Buddy Bison program.

The Buddy Bison program is just one example of the tremendous work of the National Park Trust. Your vision of preserving parks today and creating park stewards for tomorrow is one I share.
That’s one reason I am honored to receive the Bruce F. Vento Public Service Award.

But it’s not the only reason. This award is particularly special to me because I was Congressman Vento’s constituent when he served in the U.S. House. At the same time, Bruce was my constituent when I served in the Minnesota State House.

And Bruce was much, much more. Bruce Vento was a friend and my mentor for more than 20 years.

Over the years, Bruce and I campaigned together and worked together on local projects.

As Bruce was fighting to protect our National Parks, he still found time to partner with me on local efforts like the restoration of Lake Phalen on the east side of St. Paul.

He even lent me the resources of his terrific staff and strategists, including Larry Romans, Rick Healy, and Peter Gove, all of whom are here tonight.

By the time I was elected to the Minnesota State House in 1993, Bruce had already established a legacy of protecting our public lands and national treasures. Because he always fought the good fight, his work was an inspiration.

Bruce would probably have given me grief for becoming an appropriator instead of an authorizer, but as Ranking Member of the Interior-Environment Appropriations Subcommittee, I’m proud that my role has given me a chance to work on many of the same issues he did.

One of Bruce’s greatest legacies is his tireless work to protect northern Minnesota’s Boundary Waters.

The BWCA wasn’t just an issue for Bruce, it was a passion. He dedicated much of his career to ensuring this million acres of pristine land and water was protected.

Everyone here tonight should understand that the Boundary Waters are again under threat -- this time from copper-sulfide mining that would do irreparable harm to this pristine area.

That is why I have been working with the Obama administration to ensure that this dangerous mining is never allowed in the watershed.

Bruce’s interest in conserving and protecting our treasured spaces stretched to all 50 states and beyond.

I remember receiving one of Bruce’s congressional newsletters when he was waging a particularly fierce battle to preserve the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

In tiny mosquito type spilled over four pages, Bruce had laid out all the reasons we had to protect ANWR.

Let me tell you: reading that letter was a commitment. It started on my kitchen table, went to my coffee table, and ended up on my bedside table.

It may not have included the pithiest talking points, but that newsletter sure represented the commitment and passion of a science teacher.

Bruce understood that to create the next generation of conservationists -- the park stewards of tomorrow -- we have to get young people into our parks today. As a social studies teacher, I second that.

In that spirit, I am proud that President Obama and the National Park Service have launched the Every Kid in a Park and Find Your Parks initiatives.

Our national parks are celebrating their Centennial, and we want every family to experience America’s natural treasures!

The Every Kid in a Park initiative is just one example of the tremendous success that can be found when public, private and non-profit partners, including the National Park Trust, work together to promote conservation and environmental stewardship.
I appreciate all that you do and I especially appreciate you recognizing the legacy of Bruce Vento with this award.

As we remember that legacy, we should also pay tribute to the people who selflessly supported Bruce over the years: Larry Romans, Rick Healy, Peter Gove, and, above all, Sue. I have been so fortunate to benefit from your advice and friendship, even before I was elected to Congress.

Thank you again for honoring me with the Bruce F. Vento Public Service Award and for being here tonight.