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From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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Above All, We Celebrate Hope

It may not be one of the more noble holiday traditions but I guiltily admit that one of my favorite things to do at this time of year is to settle down on the couch next to the fireplace with a bag of cookies and my dog to watch the endless stream of Christmas movies on TV. My wife and kids usually shun the endeavor and remind me that we've watched them, literally, dozens of times before. Yet this annual ritual gives me comfort, so I continue.

My favorite among these is, "A Christmas Story," which takes place circa 1940 somewhere in the Midwest, and chronicles young Ralphie and his quest to obtain the ultimate Christmas gift, a "Red Ryder carbine-action 200 shot range BB rifle with a compass in the stock." Despite steady objections from his mother, father and even teacher that he'll "shoot his eye out," he relentlessly pursues his dream gift with a series of clever tactics designed to subliminally plant the idea in his parents' minds. When these efforts fail, true to childhood form, he turns in desperation to a department store Santa who dutifully warns him about shooting out his eye, then casually sends him on his way. Oh, the disillusionment!

Along the way we are treated to the trials and tribulations of childhood and the familiar stories that go with them: a mother who washes his mouth out with soap, the humiliation of having to wear pink bunny costumes given by an overbearing aunt, a spoiled younger brother who follows him around like a tail, a band of misfit friends who abandon each other at the very hint of trouble, and a frustrated but lovable dad who mutters obscenities as he fixes the boiler and wars with neighborhood dogs. Of course, who could forget his having to navigate neighborhood bullies Scut Farkus and Grover Dill and his triumphant moment of delirious liberation as he finally defends himself from their tyranny.

So why am I writing about this movie? Because it reminds us of what it was like to be a kid at Christmas, the good and the bad, warts and all. That's why it's a classic. It's not about neatly wrapped, shiny packages tucked under a tree. Instead, it tells the story of everyday people with daily disappointments, frustrations and setbacks. But it also chronicles how one little boy perseveres with good humor and faith that things will work out in the end while also taking comfort in his family and friends. Ralphie is ever hopeful and I think that sums up the spirit of Christmas.

So while I certainly wish you a peaceful, healthy and joyful holiday season, a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, more than that I wish you a little bit of Ralphie: the ability

to hope despite any challenges the new year may bring. Indeed, hope is the best gift of all.

P.S. – Ralphie did eventually get the Red Ryder for Christmas. And he did almost shoot his eye out. So be careful.