

They just don't make 'em like Ralph Regula any more

By: Jean Nero

Special to the Repository

Posted Mar 04, 2009 @ 12:00 PM

We often rant and rave over current Congressmen and their acts of corruption, deceit, or just thoughtlessness. But it would be a mistake to wrap all Congress in the same bundle. The one who proved to be the exceptional model of what a Congressman should be is our own Ralph Regula.

Much praise has been said on his retirement. For me, just as Stan Cmich was the best mayor this city ever had, Regula is the best representative we ever had on the national scene — one who serves as a model for newcomers.

While I did not work with him on legislation, I worked a bit one-on-one with both him and his predecessor, Frank Bow, when I worked in corporate public relations. New immigrants like Papa appreciated Bow's help to get started in their new country. But Ralph Regula surpassed that, and lived out in his service the truths he proclaimed.

In his personal life, Regula and wife, Mary, lived true commitment to marriage and family life. The story of how Mary made best use of her position to bring us the National First Ladies' Library and Museum is one we admire. Meanwhile, Ralph took his personal commitment and life standard into his work, and achieved a powerful post on the Appropriations Committee to become a major player in Washington politics. His altruistic standards never wavered, and we benefited from that with many projects that improved our community.

Whether it was a major project or a simple request, we could count on Regula. When I was struggling with a big project the first time I chaired it for the Ad Club, a call to him brought us the solution and a major senator's help. After I retired, a visit to his staff was always helpful.

Now, as we celebrate the lives of men such as the late Stan Cmich and retired Ralph Regula, our admiration mingles with anger as we ask the big question voters ask. What happens to good men who lose their moral compass when elected to power in Washington? Why do many men who know better, cheat or omit paying their taxes while passing laws to punish workers who can't? What happens when these men tell workers they can't afford Social Security, while at the same time, Congress has a separate retirement plan for themselves that insures a comfy living to eternity? How is it that a

Congressman who's been proved guilty of both fraud and immoral acts is now comfortably collecting his retirement pension?

I recently read that "a skunk, even while it's not agitated, still stinks." Perhaps that's what makes men like Regula such a celebrated hero. For 36 years, in a room full of skunks, he carried high the precious, fragrant flowers of personal honesty, work and faithfulness to principles that aired the place out and kept our faith in the system. For showing our nation and the world what a true "people's representative" can do to improve their lives, Ralph Regula deserves our salute and gratitude — while we pray others will follow in his style.