

Arizona's Statesman: Congressman John J. Rhodes

Congressional Distinguished Service Award

On July 8, 2003, John Rhodes was awarded the first Congressional Distinguished Service Award. Other honorees included Rhodes's Republican colleague Bob Michel and Democrats Lou Stokes and Don Edwards.

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A few days after the ceremony, David Broder published an insightful commentary in the Washington Post that discussed the four honorees, contrasting their character and comportment with that of current members and leaders of Congress. It is included here because of its perceptiveness and keen observation of the changes in Congressional politics over the last several decades.

[CLICK HERE TO READ BRODER ARTICLE](#)

In the summer of 2003, John Rhodes set down some of his thoughts about leadership in an essay, which is presented here.

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Congressional Distinguished Service Award

At a ceremony held in the Capitol's Statuary Hall, Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert introduced the honorees with the following remarks:

The Distinguished Service Award is dedicated to former Members of Congress whose service to the country exemplified the best traditions of the United States House of Representatives.

We are honoring four men today, two Republicans and two Democrats who had widely different political views, but shared a love for their country and for this Congress.

All four are members of the greatest generation, those Americans who lived through the Great Depression, who fought in the Second World War, and who played a critical role in making America the brightest beacon of freedom in the darkest days of the Cold War. . . .

The Distinguished Service Award pays tribute to those who made this House a better place with their service.

John Rhodes, Lou Stokes, Bob Michel, Don Edwards. All of these men shared certain virtues, even as they pursued different political agendas.

Integrity. Humility. Honesty. Steadfastness. None of these men pursued political ambition at the expense of common decency. None sacrificed their souls on the altar of political expediency.

They always respected each other's differences and opinions. They inspired many with their political insight and their remarkable ability to bridge differences when seeking compromise.

John, Louis, Bob and Don will always be remembered not just as the first recipients of this award, but also as great leaders who truly made a difference in the lives of so many Americans.

We do stand on the shoulders of giants. That's how we can make this a better place . . . we can all learn

from lessons passed and those heroes that have gone before us.

John Rhodes was introduced by Congressman Jerry Lewis (R-CA), who recalled his association with the Congressman and over their years of shared service in the House. Below are excerpts from his remarks.

John J. Rhodes, a man of the House, served in the House as the first Republican elected from Arizona. For thirty years, a Member of the House of Representatives. John J. Rhodes, first and foremost a Republican but beyond that a public servant committed to representing his people and his state well and committed to bringing about change in our national government.

Over the years, John served on several committees in the House: the Education and Labor Committee, the Interior Committee, the Appropriations Committee, in which he served on my Subcommittee on National Security, and on the Rules Committee. During all of that service, he made many a contribution to the work of the House in terms of impacting public policy.

During those early years, he had a direct involvement in developing Republican policy or perhaps an alternative to the then leadership direction that might be a bit more conservative. He was chairman of the Republican Policy Committee, and he did a fantastic job helping the leadership to hold our band together to impact the direction of our government.

In 1973, his life changed rapidly for the then-Republican leader, Gerald Ford, was tapped to become our vice president. And by acclamation, John Rhodes was selected to be our leader. His advice and counsel, his stability, his solid commitment to the House made all the difference for the minority of those days.

He was a gentleman who everyone recognized as a person who cared about the House, the institution and public policy first. He reached out to the leadership on the other side of the aisle, seeking compromise, where possible, to impact the best possible of directions.

John J. Rhodes developed an interest in water because of its importance to Arizona. And while serving on the Interior Committee, he literally developed more base knowledge regarding the challenges in this difficult arena than anybody in the entire body.

John J. Rhodes, a public policy specialist, who early on expressed concern about the direction of our country in terms of national security. It was his voice that was heard time and again talking about the challenge and the problem of decreasing defense budgets. It was his voice that suggested we should have an intertwining between foreign policy and national defense that projected itself not for five years, but for ten, twenty, perhaps fifty years, to make certain that America played that leadership role that was necessary to make certain that we were the force for peace and freedom in the world, a voice that's heard today in many circles, that first echoed in these halls by our leader, John Rhodes.

A fabulous Arizonan who would be with us today if it were not for the fact that he is fighting another battle, a battle with cancer . . . John J. Rhodes, a man to be remembered, a man of the House who indeed served out his destiny, making a difference in strengthening the House and Laying the foundation for the future of this great institution.

Due to Rhodes's health, his son, Jay Rhodes III, himself a former three-term Congressman from Arizona, accepted the award on his father's behalf.

Were my Dad able to be here today . . . he would tell you that service in this body is an honor that has

been conferred upon and enjoyed by very few in the history of this country, and it's an honor that cannot be replicated and it's an honor that can sometimes barely be described.

But he would tell you that service here made him when he left a better person than he was when he arrived, and I think that each and every one of us who's had the honor to serve here would concur . . .

If I could use two words to describe my Dad, they would be service and they would be loyalty. Service is self-described in terms of the amount of time that he spent, both in the military and then here in this body, and what he has done since he's left this body.

Loyalty, of course, to his family, tremendous loyalty to his family. Tremendous loyalty to his wife, to my Mother. But loyalty to this institution, because he felt and he feels very strongly that this is democracy's cradle, this is where the work of keeping people free and hopeful starts and sometimes is concluded, hopefully always positively.

And were he here he would tell you that he appreciates this from the bottom of his heart, as I do for him.

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Broder: Award is a tribute to bipartisanship

7/13/03

By David Broder

THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON -- The House of Representatives, too often these days a cockpit of bitter partisanship, took an hour last week to remind itself and the country that it has been -- and could again be -- a much better place.

At a ceremony in the Capitol's Statuary Hall, current members honored four of its alumni with the first Congressional Distinguished Service Award. Two Republicans, John Rhodes of Arizona and Robert Michel of Illinois, both former minority leaders, and two Democrats, Lou Stokes of Ohio and Don Edwards of California, received the plaudits of their peers. Rhodes, who is battling cancer, was represented by his son, former Rep. Jay Rhodes.

Together, the four honorees served 130 years, each with a House career of 30 years or more. Term-limits advocates would make such service impossible, and the country would be the poorer for it.

Stokes was the first black elected to Congress from Ohio. He grew up in Cleveland public housing with his brother Carl, who became the first black mayor of a major American city. Stokes served as chairman of the House Intelligence Committee and the House ethics panel -- one measure of the trust in which he was held by his colleagues of both parties.

Edwards, a polished Stanford graduate, was -- as his successor, Zoe Lofgren, noted -- a one-time FBI agent who was willing to "go after misconduct in the FBI." Perhaps the House's most consistent advocate of civil rights and civil liberties, he is also the most modest of men, pointing out that on the "most glorious moment" of his career, the day the House passed the great Civil Rights Act of 1964, "the Republicans did better than the Democrats" in producing the needed votes, thanks in part to members like John Rhodes.

Republican House Speaker Dennis Hastert, who along with former Democratic Minority Leader Dick Gephardt originated the awards, wanted to do more than honor some fondly remembered elders. The implicit message of the ceremony is that Congress is at its best when its members focus on their shared responsibility to the nation, not their partisan power games. It came through most clearly in the words of Michel and his successor, Rep. Ray LaHood.

LaHood, who served on Michel's staff for many years, recalled in introducing his old boss that "Bob taught us by his example that the House floor should be a forum for reasoned debate among colleagues equal in dignity. . . . He came to the House every day to do the work of the people, and not to engage in ideological melodramas or political vendettas." LaHood, whose own House career shows he learned the lesson well, let the implied rebuke to the bomb-throwers in both parties hang in the air.

Michel, often near tears at the praise, recalled that he spent all "of my 38 years as a member of the minority party. Oh, those were frustrating years," he said to understanding laughter. "But . . . I never really felt I was out of the game or that I had no part to play. Under the rules of the House, the traditions of the House . . . there is a role to play for the minority. . . . We struck a deal, we made a bargain," and worked at "bringing dissonant factions together . . . to craft good legislation for the country -- that was the joy of it!" That is a joy few members of the current House -- where Republicans and Democrats caucus separately to plot each other's ruin -- have known.

But in times of crisis, the large-minded spirit that all four of the honorees embodied is exactly what the nation needs. Rhodes is perhaps the best example. As the Republican leader of the House during impeachment proceedings against Richard Nixon, he faced enormous pressure from the White House and Nixon loyalists to make the Judiciary Committee hearings look as partisan as the comparable hearings on Bill Clinton were to become 24 years later.

This he refused to do. Rhodes defended Nixon as long as he could, but insisted that the committee be given the evidence on the White House tapes. And when the "smoking gun" tape was revealed, Rhodes announced at a televised news conference he would vote for impeachment. A day later, he was one of the three senior GOP lawmakers who went to the White House and told Nixon it was time to resign.

Today's congressional leaders -- and members -- need such role models. Fortunately, they are still around.

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Leadership

The desire to be a leader is quite often born within us. If it is not so born, we may acquire it by association with other people who have become leaders. There are various situations which lend themselves to the role of leadership. First is what you might call luck. I call it being at the right place at the right time with the ability and desire to fit the situations which are ahead of you and yours into the path of leadership. Second, the willingness to work hard with others to accomplish desired objectives is necessary. Third, to gather people around you who can be relied upon to continue and enlarge the success pattern—in other words, to create a pattern among your friends and fellow men that leads to some leadership role and, preferably, of course, since you are a person who wants to be a leader, to be that leader.

In twenty-eight years of my thirty-year Congressional service, I was in the minority party. We got whatever facilities the majority gave us and few opportunities to successfully influence legislative accomplishments. Even so, we prepared plans that we would follow if and when we got a majority in a Congress. The media paid little attention to our plans because they were mainly liberal Democrats who did not believe as we did, and they were sure we would never be in the majority.

When I was chairman of the Republican Policy Committee, we took positions on legislation which was coming up before the Congress. Past Republican leaders did not speak to the media because they were not asked. Gerald Ford and I took our Policy Committee positions up to the press gallery, which surprised everybody—they did not expect such behavior from the minority Republicans. Nevertheless, we sat down and answered their questions on the matters which had been handled by the Policy Committee. We established a rapport with the press beyond anything we had ever hoped for. Despite this, we were not taken seriously, even though we did put together a comprehensive program we would follow if and when we became the majority.

If you wish to become a leader, the background you take to support that effort is important. In my situation, the fact that I graduated from Harvard Law School was important in attracting the people that I needed to help me in becoming and being a leader. It also helped me in earlier days in getting a beneficial assignment when I went on active duty in the Army at Williams Field. Finally, being known as “trustworthy” gives entry to others and helps you to accomplish your aims as a leader.

It is important to look toward the future and try to identify needs for our world and its people which will exist “on the far side of the hill.” Clean and plentiful sources of energy are available, but it will take a global effort to get the means to subjugate and employ them. We must lay out plans to do this in a reasonable time period. Leadership must insist on employing and organizing these needed resources.

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