

Former Member of Congress Herb Harris

By CHARLIE NANCE



When former U.S. Representative Herbert E. Harris II (D-8th), was elected in the post-Watergate tide of 1975, he was different kind of congressman from Virginia.

Like his colleague Joe Fisher from Arlington, Herb Harris defeated an incumbent Republican in a wave election. He had also risen to political prominence, not the General Assembly, but through his leadership in area civic associations and the PTA, working with fellow citizens to



build the schools and infrastructure needed to accommodate the area's explosive growth.

Herb entered local government as Mt. Vernon district supervisor in Fairfax County in 1968, part of a civic reform campaign that was fueled, in part, by the indictment of several members of the prior county Board of Supervisors on corruption charges.

Northern Virginia politics was new and different in Herb's early campaigns, and was a source of great mystery to downstate reporters, voters and candidates. Herb's Mt. Vernon neighbor, Charley McDowell, described it to readers of the Times-Dispatch as a land of "come-heres", where politics was run not by traditional office holders and political bosses but by ladies (and men) in tennis shoes.

What was most impressive about Bill's leadership skills was how he so effortlessly bridged the partisan divide. A conservative in disposition and values, Bill worked equally well with Democrats and Republicans, even at times when partisan spirits were rampant. It could be said that Bill was one of those rare people who knew how to "cross the aisle." But the truth was that Bill didn't see the aisle. He only saw the kids and the future that they could have.

As impressive as Bill Boshers' accomplishments as a teacher and a leader were, there was yet another quality that set him aside and made him one of the extraordinary individuals that we had ever met. Bill had the unique ability to touch the lives of everyone with whom he came into contact in a memorable way. We remember the support and hugs he gave us at a difficult time; how he diffused an intense conflict with his self-deprecating humor; and how he provided the encouragement that someone needed to achieve a goal that they were unsure they could reach.

He was truly a magnificent man. We were all graced to have been lifted up by him.

Our prayers and thoughts are with his wife JoAnne, his family, and his seven wonderful granddaughters.

Robert D. Holsworth, Ph. D. Chairman,
GRASP Board of Directors Managing Principal, DecideSmart. 

Herb and his supporters were impatient and in a hurry. (They still are.) In Herb's political world, you didn't wait to get "the nod" or be anointed or invited to enter politics. You seized the opportunity and drew people to you who shared a vision for the kind of community you could become. As Herb's grandson reminded us in a moving eulogy recently, Herb believed you shared your story with others and worked for them and with them until they made it their story, too.

In Congress from 1975-1981, Herb Harris increased funding for Metro, expanded the Manassas National Battlefield Park, worked for the immigration of Soviet Jews, stopped efforts to impose a DC "commuter" tax on Virginians, fought for Federal workers and created the Quantico National Veterans Cemetery (where he was buried on January 5).

But more importantly, he made his community and his friends believe that, working together, they could make things better. In his personal office in the Longworth Building, Herb always kept a small Miro print of Don Quixote, reminding him—and us—that decency and honor can change the world.

His Jesuit education and strong Catholic faith informed everything Herb Harris did in politics, and in life. After service as a Navy officer in World War II, Herb came to Washington to study law at Georgetown. There his post-war classmates included John Dingell (who retired Congress in January as its longest serving member), Father Bob Drinan (who served with Herb on the House Judiciary Committee), and his friend and fellow Mt. Vernon resident, former State Senator Joseph V. Gartlan.

After law school, Herb and his wife Nancy made their home in an apartment in Prince George's County, Maryland. One Sunday, they saw an ad for new homes in the Washington Port, and ventured across the Wilson Bridge to check out a new neighborhood in southern Fairfax County.

I've often thought that if the Harrises had bought their first house on the other side of the river, Herb would have been U.S. senator from Maryland. But Virginia would be poorer for the experience.

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