

EULOGY FOR TOM BEVILL

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To honor the life and accomplishments of Tom Bevill, we must talk about the person he was. He was a devoted husband and father, a patriot and a statesman.

Mr. Bevill inherited me when I was elected to Congress in 1990. Actually, I had first met him in 1980 when he was getting off of Air Force One with President Carter in Huntsville. What a distinguished man he was coming down those steps, and I am talking about Tom Bevill. I had just been elected District Attorney of Madison County and I was meeting the man I had heard so much about, Tom Bevill. A powerful member of Congress and the Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water.

In 1991, I was a dangerous creature, a freshman Member of the U.S. House of Representatives. Mr. Bevill and his entire office became like family to me. He went out of his way to teach me everything he could and he let other members know that I was his partner, though I knew I was a very junior one.

One of the first legislative battles we fought together was over funding for NASA's Space Station. I had thousands of jobs at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville connected to the Space Station. A Michigan Member was offering an amendment to an appropriations bill to kill the whole program, ending my jobs. So a number of us, including Mr. Bevill, organized to defeat the amendment. Mr. Bevill, like a good teacher, sent me to talk to this Michigan Member. Now Chairman Bevill didn't do all this work "for" me, he always did it "with" me. In this case, he sent me to talk to the man alone. I did not know this man, but off I went, and I talked to him—or tried to—and it did not go well at all.

This man from Michigan put his hand on my shoulder, grinned and said, "You might as well kiss those jobs goodbye." He was crude and rude. So I reported this back to Chairman Bevill and he said, "You don't say? Well, truth be known, the man is practically a communist. But, we'll beat him." And we did. Chairman Bevill was brilliant on the floor during the debate. We saved those jobs and probably mine too. And the Space Station is out there in space. But, I sure learned a lot from Tom Bevill.

1. This eulogy was delivered at Representative Bevill's funeral on March 31, 2005.

I can see him now. Always neatly dressed, hard at work for his Alabama and his Country.

Chairman Bevill was from a different, and I have to say, better era. A time in the U.S. House when Members were civil and even courteous to one another. They might disagree and often did, but they walked away as friends. And they did it with dignity.

Tom Bevill was always at the Thursday morning prayer breakfast. He sat in the same place every week with his friends. He took me with him the first time I went, and I was and am a better person for it. He showed me where members of Congress could eat lunch in the Capitol. As often as I could I would eat there, watching and listening to Tom Bevill and his friends. Members were always trying to talk to Tom Bevill, to ask him for something, and he was always kind and courteous.

The Alabama delegation, seven of us, would tend to gather at every vote in the same area of the House floor. Mr. Bevill would watch our votes and every now and then he would make a comment. A careful comment: "Bud, are 'we' being a politician today or a statesmen?" or "I find that 'our' people in Alabama don't see this issue the way some do." Offering wonderful, helpful, wise advice. That was the kind of man he was.

And so, every now and then, some—not many—will say to me in my district in North Alabama, "You are going to be another Tom Bevill." Or at least that's the way I hear it in my mind. They probably actually say, "You keep this up and you 'might' be another Tom Bevill." Then I know, that after 15 years, I have heard the best compliment one could pay: To be compared to Tom Bevill.

He gave us so much and I will miss him dearly.

Susan, Don, and Patty, thank you for letting us share him with you and your families.

There won't be another one like Tom Bevill.