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In Memory of Congressman Henry J. Hyde

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United States Congress

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In Memory of Congressman Henry J. Hyde

*Congressman Peter J. Roskam**

On December 4, 2007, I had the great privilege to stand in the hall of the United States House of Representatives to reflect on the life and legacy of the late Congressman Henry J. Hyde.

That evening I was joined by colleagues from both sides of the political aisle, senior and junior members from all walks of life come to pay tribute to one of the giants of our institution, one of the true legends of the United States Congress.

It occurred to me then that this gathering reflected Congressman Hyde's distinguished career. That night, a bipartisan coalition of lawmakers sharing a common purpose and, cooperating in good faith, came together to pay tribute to a man who spent his life defending the weak, speaking for the silenced, and serving the people of this great nation with the full weight of his talents and convictions.

When I was running for Congress in 2006, I knew there would be no replacing Henry Hyde. As my Congressman, Henry Hyde had made a difference not just in the lives of his constituents, but also in the lives of Illinoisans and people all over the world as he articulated his beliefs with passion and clarity.

While serving as Chairman of the International Relations and Judiciary Committees, Congressman Hyde presided over some of the most significant legislation of the day. At every turn, his remarkable intelligence, cordiality, and deft humor served to prompt honest and forthright debate. Congressman Hyde was legendary for his ability to disagree without being disagreeable.

More than just wit and charm, though, Congressman Hyde exuded a deep sense of respect for the rule of law that pervaded his every action as a member of the United States Congress. In the politically charged atmosphere of President Bill Clinton's impeachment proceedings,

* Congressman Peter J. Roskam was elected to serve the 6th District of Illinois in the United States House of Representatives after the retirement of Congressman Hyde. His remarks are based on a speech he delivered on the floor of the House of Representatives on December 4, 2007.

Chairman Hyde acted with dispassionate impartiality with an eye towards justice, not partisan showmanship. Congressman Hyde's collegiality will be sorely missed.

Congressman Henry Hyde's countless legislative accomplishments, from the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Family and Medical Leave Act, and landmark HIV/AIDS legislation, to his leading role in creating the Millennium Challenge Corporation and reforming the U.S.'s patent, copyright and trademark system, are overshadowed only by his larger-than-life personality. During his tenure as a member of the United States House of Representatives, Congressman Hyde distinguished himself as one of the most principled, influential public servants of this age.

As a young Hill staffer, and later as a Congressional candidate, Henry Hyde was an inspiration to me. While I join his family and friends in mourning the passing of a great man, I know that this has not been the last chapter in Henry Hyde's book. Congressman Hyde leaves behind a proud legacy of integrity, of purpose, and of action. His spirit will live on in the People's House of Representatives to which he devoted so much of his life.