

“Our Leader, Henry Hyde”

BY Dave Andrusko

I first met Henry Hyde I believe it was in the late 1970s. The details are foggy, but I remember I was attending a fund-raiser for a pro-lifer running for office from my native Minnesota.

Rep. Hyde was the featured speaker and had to leave to catch a plane shortly after delivering his remarks. Along with two others, I went outside to chat for a few minutes while he waited for the cab to take him to the airport.

Hyde was larger than life in two ways. Even then he was the unquestioned leader of the pro-life Movement in Congress. He also was very tall.

I remember this part like it was yesterday. I am 5'6". Hyde is at least a foot taller. As we talked, he unobtrusively stepped off the curb and into the street. We were no longer like Jeff and Mutt.

It's the kind of courtly behavior that no one would notice. It is what you'd expect from Henry Hyde.

He is, in that unappreciated phrase, a gentleman and a scholar.

As you read in the story on page one, last month National Right to Life celebrated its 13th annual Proudly Pro-Life Awards Dinner by honoring Hyde, who is retiring in 2007. The only thing more impressive than the lavish praise showered on the 82-year-old Hyde was his utter humility.

In a subsequent exchange of emails, Mark Gallagher, who works for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, told me to be sure to remind our readers that the Hyde Amendment had saved 650,000 lives. The Hyde Amendment prevents Medicaid and any other program under these departments from funding abortions except in limited cases.

But this can't be that big a deal, right? Prior to passage, Medicaid paid for about 300,000 abortions a year. The figure now is under 200.

The Hyde Amendment first passed thirty years ago after a titanic congressional battle. Pro-life forces were led by a freshman congressman from Illinois's Sixth Congressional District, a man whose name would become synonymous with pro-life determination and eloquence.

That the Hyde Amendment would hold up once it came to attention of a Supreme Court riddled with pro-abortionists was by no means a given. U.S. District Court Judge John Dooling quickly struck the Hyde Amendment in a 622-page decision. While the Dooling decision was working its way up the judicial ladder, over half the members of the United States House of Representatives filed a friend of the court brief challenging Dooling's conclusions.

D-Day came in 1980. On a 5-4 vote the Supreme Court upheld the Hyde Amendment. Writing for the majority in *Harris v. McRae*, Justice Potter Stewart concluded that "abortion is inherently different from other medical procedures because no other procedure involves the purposeful termination of a human life."

A tremendous shot in the arm for the Movement, the Hyde Amendment represented the first significant pro-life victory in the seven years since *Roe* was handed down. Pro-life morale needed a boost.

It is important to understand that the Court insisted its *Roe* decision did not equal "abortion on demand." Yet

until *Harris v. McRae*, every subsequent attempt to hedge in the unrestricted abortion “liberty” was swatted away like a gnat by an imperious High Court.

There are four excellent speeches that we have reproduced in full or in large part from the tribute. (See pages 1, 4, and 5.) They tell you not only about Henry Hyde the amazing legislator, but about Henry Hyde the amazing man.

It is not the slightest exaggeration to say that pro-life congressmen and congresswomen hold him in awe. He is staggeringly eloquent. But aren't there are others in the House and Senate who can make the case for life convincingly?

Of course. But Hyde's particular gift, a reflection of the man that he is, is his uncanny ability to use his knowledge and his eloquence to amiably prod his pro-abortion colleagues to examine the principles they say they espouse.

In other words, Hyde shows them that if they walk the walk it demands that they stand with Hyde on the side of life. It is a kind of gentle political ju-jitsu and is hugely effective.

Debating Henry Hyde on any issue is no picnic. Debating him on abortion is to clash swords with the master.

Let me conclude by borrowing from the remarks of pro-life Rep. Steve Chabot (R-Ohio).

“In addition to our great love for Chairman Hyde, we all share another common bond. We believe in the right to life for all God's children. And Henry Hyde has been the leader who has never wavered in his fight on behalf of unborn babies. We have had many wonderful Members of Congress who have engaged in the battle but nobody has been more committed, more effective, more eloquent than Henry Hyde. He has been our leader. And when he leaves the Congress, he will be greatly missed.

“But he will leave behind a committed band of followers who have learned under his tutelage and will keep the pro-life flame burning. We owe it to those unborn babies. And we owe it to our leader, Henry Hyde.”