

TRIBUTE TO CONGRESSMAN ROBERT T. MATSUI

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Many of us who work in international trade can be accused with some justification of a sense of exceptionalism—a sense that the field of international trade is special somehow.

This is perhaps because this profession calls upon so many skills: an *intellectual grasp* of policy and politics, economics and business and law, and often additional disciplines from medicine to finance to the arts; understanding and applying the often complex dynamics of *negotiating*, each negotiation different from the next; and, the importance of international trade regulation to a number of key facets of our domestic and international environments, including improving standards of living in the United States and around the world, creating new opportunities for people in every country and in every part of society, integrating the poorest countries to a much greater extent into the trading system and helping to set them on a course of sustained development.

One key constant for me over the last eighteen years since I first walked through the doors of the old Tariff Commission building at 7th and E Streets in Washington—now a swanky hotel—to start a job at the U.S. International Trade Commission [ITC], has been the people who work in this field. I think virtually daily of the outstanding and extraordinary people with whom I have had and continue to have the good fortune to work.

For each of the four symposiums that the other co-chairs and I have organized, we have chosen to honor someone whose integrity, knowledge, judgment, courage, and other personal qualities (usually including their sense of humor) stand as guiding lights for all of us—and to dedicate to that person the symposium and the law review volume containing its proceedings. Previous honorees have included Walter Hollis, Jules Katz, and Bill Hart.

In my case, I am lucky enough to know or to have known each up close and personal, serving with Bill Hart at the ITC, and under Jules Katz at USTR [the office of the U.S. Trade Representative]. In the case of Walter Hollis, he was still volunteering at USTR following his retirement from the State Department when I started there. Although I did not know him well, I have learned about his extraordinary contributions to the field of trade thanks to Warren Maruyama.

Tonight's honoree, Congressman Robert T. Matsui, is no exception. I'm sure that every person in this room had the privilege to work with him or for him, and has strong and fond memories of those experiences.

In my case, I was privileged to work for Congressman Matsui when he served as a senior member of the Trade Subcommittee and then as its Chairman

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during NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] and the Uruguay Round bills in late 1993-1994, and then to be re-hired by Congressman Rangel and Congressman Matsui when I returned to the Committee seven years ago this month.

Now, many of you recognize that I am a fool—but may still be thinking, I did not think he was fool enough to attempt to offer a few words of tribute to Congressman Matsui, alongside the many more eloquent ones that friends and colleagues of Mr. Matsui have offered in the last nine months, including those at the memorial services in Washington and Sacramento in January, and later ones such as Congressman Kolbe's moving tribute at the WITA [Washington International Trade Association] dinner this summer.

In that regard, I offer the brief comments that follow, not so much to recall Bob Matsui's extraordinary accomplishments in the trade field, among others—those are amply known and will be appropriately recorded in the history of this time—but to recall an individual who combined the finest qualities of a human being alongside the most exceptional qualities of a politician and policy-maker.

Bob was a mentor who *inspired* all those with whom he came into contact (and, I would say, continues to), challenged them (and continues to), and whose presence and example, I believe, also remain a great reassurance to us.

He was an *inspiration*, because of his rock-solid belief that through hard work and honest policy and political effort, people could accomplish worthwhile goals in life. Bob, of course, used words to inspire, but oftentimes, at least for his staff, his mere presence was inspiration enough. When he strode into the office that Mary Jane Wignot and I shared seeking an update on one or another aspect of the draft Uruguay Round implementing bill, the mere kinetic energy emanating from his dynamic presence was inspiration enough to raise our adrenaline in advance of briefing him on the subject at hand.

He was a *challenge*, because his intellect was the most restless and rigorous I have ever known. To work for him was to know that whatever answer I had for him was either incomplete (although I did not exactly know how), or would provide fodder for additional questions, whose answers in turn would also be incomplete or fodder for yet more questions. His aim for perfection arose, I believe, because he sought to accomplish the most difficult goals in his life, and the only way to do that was for the quality of his work product to be better than everyone else's. He demanded that of his staff, just as he did of himself, and just as he did of all those who sought to lobby him or those who appeared before him in a hearing. The admonition—spoken or unspoken—was that you can do better. Today, Bob's challenge is as timely and important as ever.

Finally, Bob's presence and example were and are tremendous. It is the reassurance of having on my side, or being on the side, of a winner. Once again, not winning for the sake of winning, but winning because he understood the issue better than anyone else, went the extra mile that others would or could not to work out an agreement or, when that was not possible, win a fight, winning a public

policy argument just by the overpowering combination of his strong will and his articulateness and his exceptional intellect. It is a comfort to work with someone who has certainties—certainties not borne of ignorance and arrogance, but of learning life's lessons and being prepared.

Finally, more important even than those exceptional qualities was that Bob was a very rare human being. For me, these qualities are captured in two short anecdotes.

There were many episodes of this kind for me, but I will share only two with you so as not to carry on too long. The first was in the late spring, 2002. It was just after my wife and I had gotten engaged. Now, as backdrop, you should understand that I had known my wife since the early Pleistocene era—and Bob knew this. I was waiting with other staff and some members in a conference room for a members' meeting to start late one afternoon. Bob strode in in his crisp, determined way, made his way around the end of the table, greeting the other members and staff with a smile or a friendly nod, or a pat on the back, or the way he would grab someone on the upper arm.

When he said hello to me, I mentioned that Des and I had just gotten engaged that week. Immediately, that big smile of his came onto his face, clearly delighted to hear our news. When I mentioned that Desiree and I would be sending an invitation shortly for him and Mrs. Matsui to attend and that we would be honored if they could attend, he responded that *he* would be honored to attend.

It was just two or three months later, and it was late one night, past midnight if I remember correctly, and Bob, along with Congressman Rangel and Congressman Levin had summoned us to meet them in the Rayburn Room to discuss a pressing legislative matter. As I walked beside Bob toward some chairs and a couch situated by the fireplace on the far side of the room, he asked lightly how things were going for Des and me. I was all wrapped up in thought about how to present an issue to the three of them and what to recommend, and was sleep-deprived (albeit probably not any more than he was). So, on autopilot, I mumbled something about how things were “O.K.” There was a complete absence of any emotion or enthusiasm in my voice.

He stopped dead in his tracks, turned to me, his eyes lit up and he looked at me and said, “O.K.?! Just O.K.?!” He said in a loud voice, “What do you mean, ‘O.K.’?” We both broke out laughing.

Bob knew and understood the human side of people. He was that very rare combination of a person who demonstrated the finest in a politician, knew humanity and also knew policy—an extraordinary combination in a person.

This is an extraordinary man we honor tonight and with this Symposium. The other co-chairs and I are grateful to all of you who have agreed to participate—the speakers and moderators who have spent so much time and effort, some traveling a long distance to do so, to offer their insights with us, and also to those of you who are attending who, I hope, will engage actively with your own questions and comments, and will leave the program enriched.

Bob's leadership in the trade field will be missed.

As I often say, the work we have before us today—as was the case ten years ago and will be the case ten or twenty years from now—requires that all the minds in this room be actively engaged.

And, as each of us engages, I hope that we will feel a firm hand grab us just above the elbow, offering challenge and reassurance and saying, “Come on, we can do better.”

We miss you, Bob, and always will. We are grateful for the many ways that you enriched this profession and our lives.

