

In 2013, another Speaker of the House had this to say:

Newt Gingrich: Washington Could Use More Tom Foleys

There was something especially poignant about Speaker Tom Foley passing away shortly after the bitter hostility of the government shutdown. He would not have approved of the House Republican confrontational strategy. However, I suspect he also would not have approved of Senator Harry Reid's endless obstructionism nor of President Obama's endless repetition that he would not negotiate.

Speaker Foley believed in negotiating. He had negotiated as chairman of the House Agriculture Committee. As he rose, he was consistently the least partisan member of the House Democratic leadership. Part of his conciliatory approach was personality, part geography, part learned from his mentors, part legislative experience.

Foley was a great storyteller and could keep his fellow legislators relaxed and laughing through an extended series of anecdotes. Many of his stories involved laughing at himself. It was a wonderful lesson in the power of humility to disarm your opponents (and in some ways very much like President Lincoln).

His home district also made him less liberal and less partisan than most of his fellow House Democrats. Eastern Washington State has a lot of conservative Republicans and a lot of small government — skeptical of Washington, D.C. — farmers and small-town small businesses. The

population center of Spokane, Wash., was more liberal and had more union members (and was the key to his 15 successful elections from 1964 through '92). Had Foley come from Seattle, he might well have been more militantly liberal. But he didn't and wasn't.

Part of Foley's legislative style came from his mentoring by two giants of Washington State politics. Senators Warren G. Magnuson and Henry M. Jackson were both powerful when Foley was a rising young member. They both had a conciliatory style of reaching across the aisle and working with Republicans. They also both approached issues from a fact-based rather than ideologically driven analysis. Foley brought a lot of their style with him to the House.

Finally, Foley's years on the House Agriculture Committee, culminating in his chairmanship, required a very bipartisan approach. The House Committee on Agriculture is one of the least ideological, most bipartisan committees in the House. It is dedicated to helping rural America on a bipartisan basis. Indeed, the divisions within the committee are more geographic and crop-centered than ideological or partisan. For example, rice and cotton have very different interests than wheat, corn or dairy.

Foley's formative legislative years were spent focused on rural American issues that were inherently pragmatic, practical and bipartisan.

While he was friendly and relatively less partisan, Speaker Foley was an excellent debater. In one heated late-night debate he caught me in an obvious inconsistency. He jumped in and hammered me so brilliantly that all I could do was stand up and give him a bow. He smiled and bowed back. The hundred or so members on the floor applauded our mutual respect and good sportsmanship.

None of this is to suggest that Foley was incapable of firm, resolute partisanship when it was necessary. He played a key role in forcing President George H.W. Bush to break his word on raising taxes. I was involved for months in the Andrews Air Force Base budget negotiations in 1990. Democratic majority leader Richard Gephardt played the leading role in the negotiations, but when the key meetings with President Bush forced the tax issue, Speaker Foley was in the meetings and was unyielding in his commitment to higher taxes.

Speaker Foley also played a key role in passing gun-control legislation in 1994. This was a victory of partisan loyalty over regional loyalty. Gun control is a very high value for most liberal Democrats. The right to bear arms is a very high value in eastern Washington State. In choosing his national party over his state, Speaker Foley put his seat at risk. That fall, he would become the first Speaker to lose re-election since 1862.

Since Foley had won in a wave election in 1964, it probably did not shock him to lose in a wave election 30 years later. Indeed only a national tide could have led to his defeat. He was very popular back home and had faithfully gone home and sustained the grassroots ties that ensured re-election. He always said that being elected Speaker was the second greatest honor of his life after having been chosen Congressman by his hometown fellow citizens. And he meant it.

After losing, Speaker Foley was extraordinarily generous in helping me understand the operations of the Speaker's office. There had not been a Republican Speaker in 40 years. In fact, the only House member who had served in a Republican majority was Bill Emerson of Missouri. He had been a page in 1954. Clearly we needed help to have a smooth transition of power. Speaker Foley was cooperative, attentive and informative in the two months we had between the elections and the

swearing-in of the new House. He could have made things difficult, but his sense of the larger institution and his basic decency led him to be very helpful.

After the speakership, Foley continued to serve his country as ambassador to Japan. He had a passionate interest in consumer electronics and deep affection for the Japanese. He loved the assignment and he served America very ably.

During President George W. Bush's Administration, we worked together on the Defense Policy Board. He always brought common sense, a deep concern for national security and a great ability to work on issues without partisanship.

I have nothing but fond memories of serving with Tom Foley. We worked together when we could, competed when we had to and cooperated for the national interest as often as possible. He was interesting, intelligent and had great integrity.

America lost a genuine patriot this week.