The last frontiersman: Malcolm Wallop, R.I.P.

Contributed by Kerri Houston Tolockzo
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To the public, Senator Malcolm Wallop was a tall, imposing man, quick to point out inherent errors in liberal thinking but quicker to share his love of country and his conservative ideas.

He served in the Senate from 1977 to 1995 before retiring to start a conservative think tank, which he aptly named “Frontiers of Freedom.”

For those of us who loved him, he was a dear, sweet man, a story-teller with a mischievous sense of humor who treated his staff like family.

My experience with Senator Wallop began when I was hired as senior vice president for policy at Frontiers of Freedom in 2002. I had seen Senator Wallop at various events in the past, and I was a little nervous about greeting him at my first staff meeting, as I’d seen him be quite, let’s say, “intense.”

The senator walked in the room, still looking larger than life, and I stood up to shake his hand. Instead he gave me a big bear hug and said, “Well, hello, young lady!” That’s how my love affair with Malcolm Wallop began.

But I was not alone. Everyone on our staff adored him. To the girls, he was a big, lovable protector. To the boys, he was like another dad. He was a kind and encouraging mentor and teacher. We teased him mercilessly that the logo for Frontiers — a D.C. think tank — was a herd of horses galloping across the prairie. He loved every minute of it.

Malcolm was, in every sense, a frontiersman; it colored his personal and political views throughout his life. His roots in Wyoming went back several generations, and his proudest possessions were yellowed photos of his pioneering grandfather and father riding horses and driving wagons as they made Big Horn their home. I’ve never met anyone who loved the land like Malcolm did.

The senator viewed liberty not so much as a noun, but as a verb. When he looked out at his land or saw people working hard to provide for their families, he saw liberty. His independent spirit made him a fierce opponent of communism, a fiery advocate for property rights and a strident proponent of national security. In fact, it was Malcolm Wallop who first whispered “missile defense” into President Reagan’s ear.

There will be much said about the senator’s political life in the next few days, but despite all his policy successes and his close relationship with Ronald Reagan and Dick Cheney, those things only count here on earth.

For many years, Malcolm would get a big, fat roll of bills just before Christmas and walk around some of the poorest parts of Washington, giving money to random people and families that he saw were in need. Few knew this story and no person on the receiving end had any idea that their angel was a United States senator. This act of anonymous giving led Jason White, Frontiers of Freedom’s former senior vice president, to write his best-selling book “Christmas Jars.” That book started a tradition of anonymous giving in homes all across the nation.

Senator Wallop was an influential conservative voice, tirelessly advocating for policies that would keep this nation and its

people safe and free. He made a mark on every branch of government and really did see America as a frontier for freedom.

But mostly, he was a precious man who told the most outrageous (and true!) life stories in a booming voice and made you laugh to the point of tears. He had not the least reservation in showing his love for his country, his family — and even his beloved dog, “Pappy.”

In 2005, after he had semi-retired from Frontiers, our staff decided to honor him with our Ronald Reagan Award at the annual gala. Vice President Dick Cheney agreed to present the award to his old friend, and was sworn to secrecy. We lied to Malcolm, saying that the vice president would be getting the award, and Cheney went right along with it.

The senator was humbled and delighted to discover he had been duped. Vice President Cheney gave a warm and funny talk about Malcolm’s exploits and his love for Wyoming. We staff members each gave a toast to our beloved senator, who was fighting tears. It was the perfect tribute to a great man.

And he loved his Lord. If heaven is really where God lets you live out eternity in your Happy Place, then Malcolm is riding a horse across the meadow, with Pappy chasing behind and his beloved wife Isabel waving from the porch.

Senator Malcolm Wallop, gentleman frontiersman and patriot, you will always be missed.

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