

David Oman

One more time, for the last time, Bob Ray has done what he did so often in life--bring people together, in this church, at the Capitol last evening, on social media, and in conversations.

Lessons from his life have been learned and re-learned this week, none better than the simple reminder that a keen mind, warm heart, and a bias for action --by one person-- can cause great change, and uncork goodwill among so many.

Gov. Ray's life ended without regrets and remorse. Embracing his example, we're better able to live our lives with renewal and resolve.

Yesterday, a motorcade brought the Ray family past many touchpoints in Bob's and Billie's lives --Terrace Hill, Drake University, and Theodore Roosevelt High School.

President Roosevelt, in 1910, a year after leaving the White House, spoke in Paris about leadership, and making a difference. He said, 'above all stands character, a man's force and courage, his good faith and sense of honor...self-restraint, common sense,

the power of individual responsibility, and acting in conjunction with others.'

TR didn't know it, but he previewed the life of Robert D. Ray, or as we called him, RDR.

Another President Roosevelt, Franklin, died at the end of World War II. FDR and RDR had something in common – a very real human touch. During FDR's funeral, an aging African American man wept inconsolably on a Pennsylvania Ave. sidewalk.

A reporter approached timidly and asked, 'Did you know the President?' The man said, 'No...but he knew me.'

Good leaders, good people, know, in a broad sense--and in the moment—what other people feel and need.

Bob Ray had that quality. He knew Iowans, or as he liked to say 'our Iowans.'

People who had a two-minute phone call or 20 minute meeting, or just a handshake at the Fair, felt they mattered and were the most important person to Gov. Ray at the time...and they were.

Sometimes, Bob Ray wasn't aware of his impact.

Two years ago, at Wesley Acres, Gov. Ray wasn't in room 146, nor physical therapy or the lunch room. A nurse and I couldn't find him. It turned out he was in P.T.; he told us we'd been lost.

Then the nurse said to me 'Gov. Ray changed my life...' I asked her to tell me more.

It seems her late teen life was not good in 1969; she doubted herself. Then she listened to Gov. Ray's first Inaugural Address on the radio. She added, 'He talked about the future. He said the future was going to be better and brighter. I felt he was talking about me and my life. He gave me hope. My life turned out alright, and now, I get to help him.'

Gov. Ray spoke with thousands of Iowans through four of his campaigns in seven years, ending the two-year term era. Iowans quickly got to know his openness and decency...civility and sincerity...humanity and humor.

And who didn't love his smile?

That genuine persona stood in stark contrast to the erosion of trust in a Washington awash in Watergate. In '74, Bob Ray stood against the tide. He won 59% of the vote when nine other GOP

governors were swept away. He acquired more momentum, if not a mandate.

Governor Ray knew how to campaign. He knew how to govern. And, he knew the difference.

The late Lt. Gov. Arthur Neu said, 'Ray would take his time making decisions, but when his mind was made up, he was as tough as nails.'

The other evening, I wrote down Ray policy initiatives and stopped at 30. Some were ahead of their time, some were copied by other states. They covered tax policy, streamlined government, education, conservation, human services, human rights, public safety, agriculture and transportation.

I can't list them all today. As they say about baseball stats...'you can look 'em up.'

The Gov would at times borrow or co-opt good ideas from Democrats. They didn't know whether to laugh or cry, but he always gave them credit.

Gov. Ray looked beyond the next year or cycle. He paired with Gov. Culver's father, Sen. Culver, to set up the Iowa 2000 project. In his first term, Gov. Vilsack cloned it with Iowa 2010 .

In 1978, Gov. Ray came up with a new theme 'progress with stability' as part of a larger effort throughout his administration to better connect Iowa's cities and towns with rural Iowa.

In small towns he would nudge with nuance 'stability with progress.' Bob Ray communicated deftly. He was transparent with and respected the press. He helped define modern Iowa and did define the modern Iowa governorship.

With Billie Ray and three active daughters, the five defined the modern Iowa First Family.

We thank you for supporting him, and for your sacrifice.

A governor's work is never easy. Gov. Ray's four successors, all with us today, have said privately and publicly, over time and this week, how much they respected him and his leadership.

Bill Clinton was the 32 year-old Gov.-elect of Arkansas when he met Bob Ray, then 50, at the NGA 'new governors school' in November '78.

The two hit it off. It was Ray 'charisma' and Clinton 'charisma on steroids.'

Clinton credited Ray with mentoring him on how to be a good governor. When he would come to Des Moines as President in the 90s, he would often ask about Bob Ray and word would get back to us. Wednesday, President Clinton tweeted a heartfelt remembrance of his mentor and friend.

Ray met one Pope... but worked with seven Presidents. There is apparently no public record of what Richard Nixon thought of him. The tape recorders must have been turned off.

President Ford said, 'I relied heavily on Bob's good advice.'

President Reagan: 'The success you experienced was the product of good ideas, hard work, a whole lot of follow through --just what you'd expect to find in Iowa.'

President George H. W. Bush said this well, 'He never turned his back on the Party, but somehow transcended Party and made public service better.'

Like Bush 41 and Jimmy Carter with their post-Presidencies, Bob Ray also defined the role of 'former' governor.

His ongoing service as CEO, mayor, and Drake president was exemplary. Ray backed countless charities and good works. Once I told him ‘you’ve supported about everything except ‘Iowans for Term Limits.’

To close, in the years ahead, governors and perhaps Presidents like Ronald Reagan was, will be in Room 9 of the Capitol. Gov. Branstad fittingly designated it the ‘Robert D. Ray Conference Room.’

Governors have made many important decisions in that room, including Ray’s to re-locate and welcome legal political refugees to Iowa.

Future governors will see a large, wonderful oil painting of Gov. Ray. That portrait is behind me. It returns to the Governor’s Office today.

Next year, or 2028, or 2046 (Iowa’s Bicentennial year) or any year, governors will sit in the Ray Conference Room-- coping with complicated, controversial, even morality laden decisions.

Our Iowans and future Iowans can hope those governors pause, in deliberative, decisive moments, look up at the portrait, and think...

What would Robert D. Ray do?

How would he lead?

-0-