

RIP George Herbert Walker Bush

By Joseph W. Brady

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Why is it that we often do not fully appreciate people until they have passed away? The recent passing of President George H.W. Bush is the most recent case in point. This is an individual to whom there had not been a great deal of praise directed in the years since he left office. Evidently it took his final departure for many Americans to reflect upon and ultimately appreciate the strong character and many contributions of this outstanding individual. In the nearly two weeks that have passed since his death even President Bush's harshest former critics have been among those heaping belated praise on our former leader.

Whether or not George H.W. Bush was a great president can be debated by historians. What is indisputable is the fact that he was a man of courage, character and humility with an unparalleled commitment to public service. President Bush's service to the country began at an early age as he became the second youngest commissioned aviator in the U.S. Navy in World War II. His courage was demonstrated by being shot down in combat and continuing to serve following his remarkable rescue. His humility was perhaps most aptly demonstrated by his response to those who urged him to fly to Germany to reap the public relations windfall of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, an event for which he deserved considerable credit. Bush chose to remain in Washington, stating simply that it was "their moment, not mine," or words to that effect.

Even his infamous "no new taxes" pledge, the reversal of which undoubtedly cost him re-election, can be viewed within the prism of a man doing what he felt was best for the country at the time regardless of the individual political consequences. Subsequent to his electoral defeat he became close friends with Bill Clinton, who had handed him his greatest political disappointment, working closely with Clinton in an effort to raise funds for Haitian relief programs as well as other initiatives. Once again in this instance, Bush demonstrated a preference for results over political alliances.

Finally, in planning for his own funeral, in contrast to the late Senator John McCain, who even on his deathbed was unable to restrain his contempt for Donald Trump, President George H.W. Bush made it clear that in spite of the supposed “bad blood” between the incumbent President and the Bush family President Trump was to be included among the event participants. For one final time this profoundly loyal American put unity ahead of division.

During most of the funeral proceedings my wife and I were on the road to Prescott, Arizona and were unable to join the more than 17 million people who watched the event on television. We did, however, hurry to make it to a stop in Needles for lunch in order to witness President Bush’s last ride on “4141,” a rare Union Pacific locomotive that had been commissioned in his honor in 2005, to his final resting place.

On behalf of all my fellow Americans I wish Godspeed to one of the last members of The Greatest Generation and thank you, Mr. President, for your lifetime of service to our great country.

Joseph W. Brady is president of the Bradco Companies and vice president of the Victor Valley College Board of Trustees.