

Dr. Robert Dark: He Always Made Others Look Good

Garrett Cuneo, HCD(hc),FICC(hc)

On Friday, April 16, 2004, the profession lost a great doctor and I lost a friend of nearly 30 years. Some of you probably knew Dr. Bob Dark as the husband of Dr. Jerilynn Kaibel, who is a member of the ACA Board of Governors, on the NCMIC Board of Directors and the past president of the California Chiropractic Association (CCA). It's not surprising that many more didn't know Bob Dark; he was a quiet and unassuming individual who never sought the limelight and always made others look good. However, in my mind, no one had a greater influence on changing the political thinking of this profession, both in California and nationally, than Bob Dark.

Bob was a Vietnam War veteran who was awarded a Purple Heart for a wound suffered on July 21, 1968. He graduated from the Cleveland College of Chiropractic and became licensed in 1976 when I was state board executive secretary, something I never let him forget. He was CCA president in 1982-83 and the CCA-PAC chair from 1987-1993. Later, he served as COCSA president and as chairman of the ACA-PAC. I was CCA executive director and ACA executive vice president during his tenure with both organizations.

In all my years in politics, I have never met an individual in the profession who was smarter politically than Bob Dark. He had the philosophy that this profession couldn't approach legislative and PAC manners in the same way as others do. We had to be more aggressive. We had to take chances with our legislative agendas. And more importantly, we had to take chances with our PAC contributions. Contributing a small amount to every candidate and avoiding involvement in contested races could have made for a smooth tenure for Bob, but it would never have gotten this profession on the radar screen. His aggressiveness and political smarts made him the ideal person to work for - and also made it easy for me to suggest an aggressive fundraising strategy. He was smart enough to walk me through every idea (throw out the bad and keep the good), without hurting my substantial ego. When he agreed with an idea, I knew that he would always be there to back me up if things didn't go well. When it was successful, he would always insist that others got the limelight, particularly staff. I would have gone to war for this guy, and in a political sense, we did - with a lot of success. Here are some examples:

After numerous attempts to gain support from Republicans in 1988, we put aside 30 percent of our PAC budget - \$60,000 - and contributed it to a non-incumbent Democratic candidate for the legislature the last month before the election. Our guy beat the incumbent Republican by 600 votes, resulting in a chain of events that toppled the existing Republican leader. The same year, he helped raise \$1.2 million in a campaign to defeat an auto insurance initiative that threatened to knock this profession out of P.I. In 1970, we again got involved in a targeted race, this time supporting a Republican in the primary who was running against an orthopedic surgeon who was the darling of the California Medical Association. Again, we waited until October to make a contribution of \$60,000, and again, the infusion of late money turned the election around. Our candidate won by 400 votes. By 1992, again under Bob's leadership, we supported conservative Republicans in the primary against moderate Republicans who were supported by the California Medical Association. With over \$500,000 to contribute, we won eight of the 10 seats in the primary

supporting individuals who ended up winning in November. As a side note, the Republican leadership we had opposed in 1988 was now on our side and was now our greatest supporter. We had gotten on the political radar screen and had sent a powerful message that if you hurt this profession, there is a consequence. Our legislative successes in the 90s in California could be traced to the aggressive approach advocated by Bob Dark.

He instilled the same sense of aggressiveness when he took over the ACA-PAC in 1996, a philosophy that permeates today. I believe the results can be seen from the successes we have had since 1997.

Dr. Bob Dark was a great guy. But more significantly, he was a doctor who loved his profession and left a legacy that will long be remembered - a legacy that has brought about legislative successes in California and nationally. The profession loses a champion. Dr. Kaibel loses a partner and her best friend. His family loses a loving father, grandfather and son. And I lose a friend and a political partner.

His family has asked that, in lieu of flowers, contributions be made to the Bob Dark Memorial Fund in care of the National Chiropractic Legal Action Fund, P.O. Box 75359, Baltimore, MD 21275-5359; or to the Dr. Robert L. Dark Memorial Scholarship Fund, care of California Chiropractic Foundation, 1600 Sacramento Inn Way, # 106, Sacramento, CA 95815.

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