

Thank You, Senator Dole!

As many Kansans are aware, Senator Robert Dole has set out on an ambitious goal of visiting all 105 counties in Kansas this year. On May 12, his tour included a stop at Seneca. I made it a point to go see him and to thank him for all he had done to help on issues that affect cities and rural water districts.

Upon arriving, he opened with several witty quips, stating, "Let's get one thing straight here first; I want you to know I'm not here to ask you for anything. I'm not asking for your vote and for once I'm not asking for money. I just want to say thank you."

This article isn't about me; it's about how someone so very important treated my representation of KRWA over the years. My first venture to ask for legislative support in Washington was in 1983. I was asked to attend a meeting of the National Rural Water Association. It was held at the Holiday Inn in Bethesda, Md. So far, so good. On the third day of the meeting, it was suggested we should try to visit offices of senators and representatives. The fact that the request seemed like a simple task indicates how completely inexperienced and unprepared I was.



Senator Dole visited Seneca, KS on May 12 as one stop on his ongoing tour of Kansas. KRWA thanked him for his long-time support for public water and wastewater utilities. His reply was, "Thank you for all you've done."

The Metro was and is a good way to travel in D.C. and so I stayed on it until I heard "Capitol South". I thought, "Well, that ought to get me close." From there I made the trek to the Hart Office Building and paraded into the office of Senator Robert Dole. I did not have an appointment but two staff members took time to listen to all the concerns KRWA had about the Safe Drinking Water Act regulations. I left, sweating harder than when I arrived.

There were numerous letters and calls to the Senator's office during the year. In the spring of 1984 before another visit to Washington, there was time to go through the protocol of contacting the schedulist and obtaining an appointment. Senator Dole's staff members at the time, Greg Schnacke and David Spears, arranged for Dennis and me to get on the tram and ride over to the Capitol to meet with the Senator. And in the subsequent 22 years until

his departure from the Senate in 1996, Senator Dole took time to visit with KRWA, other than one time when he was meeting with a foreign dignitary.

Not only did he take time to see us, he dug in on the issues that we brought to his office's attention. For example, in 1986 when the Reagan Administration decided to sell the loan portfolio held by the Farmers Home Administration, I contacted the Senator and asked him to support allowing systems to purchase their own loans at discount. That wasn't the way it was done in the first year of the sale. There were additional sales planned in FY 1989. Because of the support of Senator Dole and with the help of other legislators, the FY 1989 Agriculture Appropriations Act included a provision that required that any loans to be sold be first offered to borrowers for prepayment. That was a huge deal! I don't know who did what specifically

in Washington, but I know that Senator Dole along with then Congressman Jim Slattery from Kansas were leaders who strongly supported this change versus selling blocks of loans on Wall Street as had been done in the prior sale.

On another visit to the majority leader's office in the Capitol, Senator Dole said to us, "Stick around here; I want to introduce you to a couple of my other friends." He went through the doors onto the Senate floor and returned with Senator Specter and Senator Cohen.

Senator Dole was consistent in providing legislative support to ensure that there was reasonable funding for water and wastewater systems. When we met in Washington, he would ask how water systems were doing. And he would thank Kansas Rural Water for the help that was being provided to those systems with training and technical assistance programs. And we thanked him for his support of those programs.

On the recent tour stop at Seneca, when asked what accomplishment from his time in the Senate he is most proud of, his response was, "Saving Social Security in 1983". I didn't expect him to say, "Getting the Farmers Home Administration to allow borrowers to buy their own loans at discount," but I bet if we had talked about it, he'd have remembered that effort.

There was another time in 1992 when the Safe Drinking Water Act amendments were being proposed, KRWA enlisted systems and consultants to contact Senator Dole and ask for his support of a two-year moratorium on further regulations. I remember it; it was SB 2900. KRWA asked systems to send letters to Senator Dole in support of the bill. The Senator requested that the names of 200 or so cities and rural water districts that had contacted him be entered into the Congressional Record during the hearing. And there was another time when there was a critical vote on drinking water regulations and the Senator held up the vote until he

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had word back from KRWA as to what the Association's opinion was.

Since leaving the Senate in 1996, the senator established the Dole Institute of Politics in Lawrence. He played a major role in the development of the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C., where he continues to meet Honor Flight veterans as often as possible. He also helped to found the Bipartisan Policy Institute, and remains active on disability, food security and veteran's issues.

Many Kansans have their own stories about Bob Dole. He was and remains a statesman who could separate the politics from the person.

Another thing he said on his tour stop in Seneca was this: "There's nothing wrong with compromise, and there's nothing wrong with bipartisanship. That's how you get things done."

Senator Dole, thank you again for taking time to meet with KRWA more than twenty times over the years. It's impossible to fully realize the difference you made on so many issues that impacted water and wastewater systems. And thank you for the support that you provided to the Kansas Rural Water Association, and the National Rural Water Association to help communities gain necessary projects to improve the quality of life and the economy of Kansas and the nation. You showed us all that many things are possible through public service. You encouraged others to never be afraid to try to help other people.

Elmer Ronnebaum is KRWA General Manager; he has been employed by KRWA since 1983. He served seven years on the KRWA board of directors prior to that. He also helped develop a large



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