

## **TOM EAGLETON—AN APPRECIATION**

ED QUICK\*

I first met Tom Eagleton in 1964 at a meeting of the 28th Ward Democratic Club on Delmar Avenue in St. Louis. It was a brief greeting: he was running for Lieutenant Governor and I was a graduate student in political science at Washington University with a developing passion for politics. Subsequently, I followed his career and in 1968 volunteered in his primary campaign for the Senate, working with his principal political advisor, Ed Filippine. Filippine was instrumental in my being offered a job in Tom's office in Washington following his election in November 1968. I worked for him during his eighteen years in the Senate. My role as employee and friend evolved into one of full friendship following Tom and Barbara's return to St. Louis. We would be in frequent touch by mail, telephone, or fax and would get together during his visits to Washington. I knew Tom for thirty-eight years. Some of his closest friends and associates knew him longer and from different perspectives, but my experience enabled me to appreciate some of the qualities he possessed at his core which made him an exemplary public leader and which inspired loyalty, admiration, and devoted service to him by those who were his employees and friends.

The "Three I League" was a powerhouse minor baseball league for most of the 20th century consisting of teams from Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa. It served as the rhetorical device Tom often used when called upon to praise or eulogize a political friend: the old baseball league was transformed into the qualities of the three *I*s—intelligence, industry, and integrity. These qualities would be an honorable epitaph for any politician, and certainly they applied to Tom.

However, I will, in this Appreciation, cite other qualities that were at the core of Tom Eagleton. These are his love of writing and the English language; his self-confidence and humility; his devotion to the law and reverence for the Constitution; his love of history and teaching; his forthrightness and belief that commitments made were to be honored; and his love of politics. The name Eugene Hecker would be recognized by few today—outside alumni of St.

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\* Ed Quick was on Senator Eagleton's Senate staff for eighteen years and was his Administrative Assistant (chief of staff) from 1977 through 1986. He was Legislative Director for Senator David Pryor of Arkansas (1987–1991) and a member of the United States Postal Rate Commission (1991–1997). He and his wife, Colleen, live in Lawrence, Kansas.

Louis Country Day School. He taught English there in the 1940s and had a profound influence on Tom. Hecker must have been a remarkable teacher. He made language live; he inculcated the belief that the knowledge of the minutest details of grammar was the prerequisite for clear thought and expression.

I think Hecker molded Tom's considerable native intelligence into an excellent writer. He always wrote by hand, usually on a yellow legal pad, and the clarity of his prose reflected Hecker's training. Tom needed help spelling regularly, and I personally thought he was partial to hyperbolic adjectives, but his expression was consistently clear and cogent. He was a famous letter writer, many of which cut to the chase with a stiletto and were often obscene and/or hilariously funny. When Tom wrote something provocative or obscene that he later might regret, the admonition that "Mr. Hecker would not approve" usually inspired reconsideration and change. I think Mr. Hecker sparked Tom's love of writing and appreciation for good writing; his inspiration lived with him from those first days in school when he was learning about verb tense agreements and the hazards of double negatives.

Self-confidence and humility may seem contradictory qualities at first glance, but Tom had them in the right measure, and I think they were linked. I don't mean self-confidence as conceit or bravado. Tom was not everyone's cup of tea, not only his politics but also his persona. Especially in his early political career, his exuberance, enthusiasm, and drive were seen by some as brashness. Time moderated that perception for many.

The self-confidence Tom had enabled him to hire smart staff members and to listen to them and often accept their thoughts and judgments, even though they may have been contrary to his initial feelings about a matter. This self-assurance was accompanied by a humility that was reflected in his often-stated belief that he had a good staff that helped him achieve his legislative and political goals and for which he got the credit. He was proud of his staff, beginning in the Circuit Attorney's Office, which he entered as a legal greenhorn with no notion of how to run a prosecutor's office, into the Missouri Attorney General's Office, and continuing to the Senate.

Tom did not let his ego get in the way of having a good staff. Some Senators do. They can't take criticism, won't hire people smarter, or as smart, as they are, want obsequious deference and are comfortable only with lackeys. Not Tom. He wanted people who were smart, knew the legislative and political game, could get along with other senators' staffers—and outfox them when his interests were at stake—and who were thorough and never misled him or made him look ill-informed or foolish.

Not all, but the overwhelming number of Tom's staff fit this mold, but one was the staffer *sine qua non*—Marcia McCord Verville. She joined the Senate staff in 1971 as a legislative correspondent—a step above a file clerk—and by the time Tom retired, she was among the few elite legislative staff members in the entire Senate. Marcia was very smart, had a great—often ribald—sense of

humor, knew the legislative histories of all the bills in her areas, and also knew the interests of Senators, executive agencies, constituents, and interest groups. Her judgment was unimpeachable and her analytical abilities unsurpassed. She didn't suffer fools gladly, especially other Senators and their staffs—a trait she shared with Tom—and she delighted in deflating pompous staffers with inflated reputations. She was particularly disdainful of staffers who worked for Senators, such as Ted Kennedy, who believed they were the best and the brightest because of a mythological reputation for general excellence of the Senator's staff.

Tom reveled in Marcia's excellence as a legislative master and was profoundly grieved when she died of cancer in November 1993. His willingness to work with such a talented person, and with many others like her, testified to his combination of self-confidence and humility.

Mark D. Eagleton, Tom's father, and Professor Paul Freund of the Harvard Law School were, I believe, the greatest influences in developing Tom's appreciation for the law and particularly the Constitution and Bill of Rights. Tom was nurtured on the law by his father, perhaps the outstanding trial lawyer of his era in St. Louis. Professor Freund, who by coincidence was also a St. Louis native, made him aware of the constitutional principles underlying our government and the safeguards that citizens have against abuses of the power of the state.

Tom was ever mindful of the intricacies and nuances of the separation of powers and was particularly alert to efforts in Congress to circumvent or abridge the separation. He frequently fought attempts by Senators, such as Jesse Helms of North Carolina, to circumscribe and thus emasculate, the powers of the Supreme Court.

His experiences as circuit attorney, and especially as attorney general of Missouri, gave him further education in, and appreciation of, the law. Although he never sought it, he once told me the one cabinet office he would have relished was Attorney General of the United States. He would have made a great one.

Tom read. He had an insatiable curiosity and was always reading one, or more, books on history, political biographies, and/or current affairs. One long-time worker in, and observer of, the Senate once told a friend of Tom's that he was always astonished when he visited Tom in his office because he was a Senator who read books!

Franklin D. Roosevelt was the President he most admired; he read every book available on him, his era, and his political friends and foes. Tom was also an authority on the life and political career of the British Prime Minister Lloyd George.

Tom not only was a student of history, he was a teacher and major leader in achieving the rejuvenation of the Truman Library in Independence, Missouri. His father knew President Truman and played poker with him in

Washington; Tom first met Truman when the former President was traveling through St. Louis and Tom was St. Louis circuit attorney running for Missouri attorney general. After leaving the Senate, Tom served on the Board of the Truman Library, led the campaign to modernize it, and make it the outstanding example of living history it is today.

Tom's teaching at Washington University and Saint Louis University School of Law were great sources of delight and gratification. The future politicians, scholars, and lawyers he stimulated and inspired are legion and are among his finest legacies. His curiosity and efforts to understand, and help others understand, history and political life greatly inspired those who were his employees, friends, and students.

Often one hears in politics that a man's word is his bond. That truism is frequently willfully ignored by elected officials who are solicited for support by more than one group or individual whose positions are contradictory, or when deciding to support a position that would alienate many other supporters or result in future retribution by the group, or person, not supported. Many Senators and other elected officials refuse to take positions on important matters, or, more notoriously, tell competing interests that they support each one. As the saying goes, "some of my friends are on one side and some of my friends are on the other side and I'm with my friends."

All politicians listen to advocates without taking a position and the advocates take away the impression they are being supported, and Tom was no different from any Senator in that. Ambiguity, or being non-committal, may lead to wishful thinking on the part of a beseecher. On major issues or decisions, however, when Tom decided a position he stuck with it and didn't hide it, regardless of the political consequences which were sometimes surprising.

In the fall of 1976, a contest for Senate Majority Leader ensued with the retirement of the legendary Senator Mike Mansfield of Montana. The favorite to succeed Mansfield was Senator Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, who as Assistant Majority Leader, or Whip, had built support through thorough attention to the needs and wishes of all Democrats. No request was too trivial for Byrd, who had locked up many votes because of favors done. Tom was among those who thought a better leader than Byrd could be found, and the group decided on Hubert Humphrey, the former Vice President who had returned to the Senate in 1971. Tom encouraged Humphrey and committed to him before Hubert entered the contest.

Senator Byrd met with all Democrats to solicit their support, and he asked to talk to Tom. Tom went to the meeting and told Byrd he respected him but that he was for Humphrey. Because Humphrey was a long shot and Byrd was the likely new Leader, Tom knew after that meeting that his requests for committee assignments, bill scheduling, and the myriad prerogatives the Majority Leader has, would likely fall on courteous, but deaf, ears. To top off

the political jeopardy, the next day, Humphrey announced that he would not run for Majority Leader. Tom had gone out on a shaky limb and Hubert had cut it off. The aborted Humphrey campaign for Majority Leader is but one example of Tom's fidelity to commitments made. His word was, indeed, his bond.

This political comedy with potentially disastrous results did not end with Byrd's election as Leader, however. Byrd did not put Tom in the deep freeze. I think Byrd already appreciated his intelligence, debating ability, and talent as an investigator; Tom's forthrightness in leveling with Byrd, not furtively supporting Humphrey, caused Byrd to respect him even more. Eagleton and Byrd were different philosophically on many issues, in the way they worked in the Senate, and in political style, but they became friends and mutually respected one another. Byrd gave Tom a plum assignment to the Intelligence Committee and asked Tom, and Tom's dear friend Senator Gaylord Nelson, to be his liaison to Democratic liberals.

The measure of Byrd's respect for Tom was shown in 1986 when Tom was leaving the Senate and Byrd was organizing the Iran-Contra hearings, which were to begin in 1987. Byrd offered Tom the position of general counsel for the Iran-Contra Committee, arguably the most important job in the undertaking. Tom already had plans in motion to move to St. Louis with Barbara and begin a new phase in their lives, so he declined the honor.

Tom loved politics. He caught the bug early from his father. Dinner conversations at the Eagleton household were, as Tom often said, devoted to "the law, baseball, and politics." When he decided to run for St. Louis circuit attorney, he had just finished law school and had no legal, and little political, experience. His father counseled that he should establish himself as a lawyer first and maybe run for office later. Tom, however, had the political bug and was willing to take the risk—a quality that most successful politicians have.

He sought the counsel and support of established Democratic ward leaders in St. Louis. In 1956, they were the men who could deliver the votes, particularly in the Democratic primary. Many of them were Irish, but not all—Murphy, McAteer, Dwyer, Roche, but also Chambers and Weathers and Berra. They were heirs of the great St. Louis Democratic leader, Robert Hannegan, who in the 1940s became Democratic National Chairman and orchestrated the selection of Senator Harry Truman as President Roosevelt's running mate in 1944. Tom was very fond of the ward leaders, respected them, and admired their political sagacity. They helped launch his statewide career in 1960 by giving their support in the Democratic primary to Warren Hearnes of the Bootheel in Southeast Missouri for Secretary of State in return for support for Eagleton for attorney general by Bootheel political leaders. It was old politics as it had worked for years and Tom loved it.

In 1960, Tom was the target of anti-Catholicism during his race, and he witnessed its force in Missouri in the Kennedy-Nixon election for President. I

think the experience reinforced Tom's basic commitment to those who were victims of prejudice; who were without power in society; and those who lacked the advantages of money, legal clout, and social status. I think that stories from his father's law practice as a trial attorney who represented injured workers against powerful corporations initially molded this point of view.

Tom's political career started in the old ward politics of St. Louis, saw the withering of those organizations and the effectiveness of their leaders, and adapted to the new television-dominated and political consultant-directed campaigns. He was a transitional politician between eras.

He didn't much like the new political era, particularly the requirement that ever increasing—obscene, as he said—amounts of money had to be raised to feed the TV monster. But he knew that the corrosion of politics by the necessity of having to raise ever greater amounts of money was inexorable and that it made it harder for men and women of conscience to make reasoned, independent judgments on matters of tremendous public import because they had given a bit of themselves away to interests with narrow objectives in order to raise the money to be elected or re-elected.

This terrible truth caused him great anguish because he knew what it did to elected officials and he knew there wasn't an easy, or maybe not any, solution to it. But it didn't diminish his zest for politics. He had faith that there are people who, like him, would run for office with the clear knowledge of the snares of elective politics, who would fight to retain their integrity and independence of judgment.

The foregoing are some of the qualities at the core of Tom Eagleton. Many others, both privately and publicly known, could be elaborated on. He loved his family—Barbara, Terry, and Christy, and Aunt Hazel. He loved St. Louis and despaired of its plight in recent years. He loved baseball and the Cardinals; although his leadership brought the Rams to St. Louis, baseball was always his first love in sports. He loved art with great zeal. He loved Beffa's, its wonderful proprietors, and friends who gathered there. He loved to travel and was especially fond of London and England. He loved the Church of Pope John XXIII. He loved his close friends, especially Bob Koster and Bill Buckley. He said the former could always brighten his day by making him laugh and the latter could always dampen his day by telling him he was spending too much money.

Tom's generosity and kindness to friends whom he knew for years, or whom he'd just met yesterday, were legion. The number of people he helped with a kind word, a sympathetic ear, an act to assuage a loss or wound or sickness, and an act to right an injustice are known only to those who were touched by him. They number in the thousands.

Tom loved dogs. He insisted all kids should have a dog and bought one for my children when he retired from the Senate, a beautiful sheltie named Chelsea. Stephen, Vanessa, and Andrew were then seven, four, and four. I

had never much liked dogs, but Tom was insistent. Tom's bond with the kids grew when he visited and they saw his genuine love of the dog. He came to be like an uncle for them or the grandfather they hadn't known. Tom touched their lives in incalculable ways, just as he did others who were privileged to know this remarkable man as a friend. He is sorely missed.

