

A tribute to a great leader

By Rep. Vic Kohring

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When I saw the news flash Saturday that Ronald Reagan had passed away, a visceral, tangible, feeling of sorrow and grief swept over me. I admired Ronald Reagan all my life. First as a boy seeing his movies, then as a young adult watching him as a political aspirant and finally in recent years observing as Reagan became one of the greatest presidents in our history.

He was one of our greatest presidents because he did all the things a great president should do. He represented his constituency which in the end turned out to be virtually *all* Americans, even his political opponents, with grace, honesty, patriotism and a clear understanding that government is a dangerous instrument and should be kept *limited*.

When FAA Controllers went on strike in 1981 threatening the entire nations' air safety, Reagan had the courage and tenacity to calmly ask them to return to work within 48 hours or be discharged. When they refused he kept his word and fired them all. His way of handling such crises had a finality that frequently silenced critics.

When he was shot by John Hinckley in 1981 he took it all in such cool-headed stride that we were not at all surprised when he forgave Hinckley as a "misdirected young man." He never called for gun control after the incident recognizing that it was the work of a crazed man, not of the gun used to commit the crime.

After becoming president, Reagan's opponents labeled him the "Teflon President" implying his personal likeability enabled him to slide out of any criticism aimed his way. His critics were very mistaken. At the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin on June 12, 1987, he stood before the Berlin Wall and spoke resolutely... "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" These

six simple words were the words of free men throughout the world. They heralded the pages of history and represented the hearts of every man who ever sought freedom from oppression. His words that day inspired our nation and thrilled me deeply. I was forever convinced that Ronald Reagan deserved the title "Mr. President."

In 1986, the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded, taking the lives of all aboard. Reagan could have remained in the White House and have his spokesman announce he was grieved. But this was not Reagan's way. He was genuinely moved by the tragedy. He traveled to Cape Canaveral and personally met the astronauts' families. His words were from the deepest part of his soul and were chosen to ease the suffering of those families. He spoke with such sincerity and grace, words so thoughtful that they reflected upon him as well as the space program he defended.

Again his critics were aghast at his brilliance in this moment of national grief. Reagan reflected the thoughts of the American people with such radiance and honor that it was difficult to understand how meaningful his words were at that moment. He simultaneously comforted those families and the American public and encouraged the space program to continue forward.

When you look at Ronald Reagan as President of the United States, when you look at how deeply he loved our nation, how he took steps to implement his political philosophy and never doubted that less government, lower taxes and free markets would bring prosperity to his countrymen, you have to admire his courage. The media lashed out at him like a group of untamed, feral animals. Reagan brushed them off as the economy turned around. Yet when the nation began to prosper again, he did not say, "I told you so." He was too much a man of class.

When President Ronald Reagan died Saturday, the world lost one of history's finest. He was a man of outstanding

honor and a personal hero to me. I think he was the same to many more than would admit it too. He earned every bit of the respect he received and more. Rest in peace honorable Sir, and may God bless you and the United States of America.

Vic Kohring, a Republican, represents Wasilla and the Mat-Su in the Alaska State Legislature