

In Memoriam Senator Ann Kennedy “Pat” Regan (1923–2007)

Two Views

i. Senator Mignon Waterman

After a heavy wet snowfall on a beautiful winter day, I always appreciate discovering that someone was out ahead of me to break the cross-country ski trail. It makes my trek so much easier and more enjoyable.

When I entered the Montana Senate in 1990, my path of service was made much easier because Pat Regan had blazed the trail and cut through the obstacles before I arrived. I have heard many stories of the discrimination and roadblocks that Pat had to endure. I am not sure I would have had the courage to face down the detractors like Pat did. But then, Pat was never known as someone who would shy away from a fight, if the cause warranted it.

Although I never served with Pat, she and Dorothy Eck were very instrumental in my deciding to run for the Montana Senate in 1990. Pat and her family and friends had always told the story of how she was talked into running for the legislature by friends as they encouraged her with a pitcher of martinis, if I recall the story correctly. So I should have been suspicious as she and Tom had Ron and me over to Joe and Margaret Gans’ house “to visit.” It was there over a glass of wine

that I first remember the subject of my running for the legislature was broached. That evening was followed by many calls of encouragement from Dorothy Eck and others, an effort that I am sure Dorothy and Pat orchestrated.

After my successful campaign, which was assisted by much advice and support from Pat, she continued to be there to advise and support me. She encouraged me to apply to serve on the Finance and Claims Committee because she believed we needed more women where the action was. Also, because of my work in Human Services, she encouraged me to apply my expertise in that area. Thus began a twelve-year period of advocacy for those who could not advocate for themselves. Again, this was a role that Pat had filled for years and I was honored to continue her work.

Later, when Pat Williams retired from the United States House of Representatives, Pat was one of the first people to encourage me to run for his seat. She felt a woman should seek that seat, and I was humbled that she thought I was qualified. Although I did not win that race, it was a wonderful experience that was made even richer because of the opportunity to share the Regans’ hospitality at the Pat and Tom Bed and Breakfast. The chance to laugh and share their insights was a highlight of that campaign.

I don’t remember Pat ever dressing me down for doing something she didn’t approve of, and I

think I would remember such an event! However, I do remember the calls and notes of support and encouragement as I struggled with tough budget cuts and policy initiatives.

The path that Pat blazed for the women of Montana left very deep tracks that have and will continue to make the election and service of women in the Montana Legislature much easier. It was an honor to know her.

2. Teresa Cohea

Fearless is the word that I associate with Pat Regan.

—She wasn't afraid to raise her voice for important causes.

—She wasn't afraid to ruffle feathers and challenge authority.

—She wasn't afraid to take bold—and sometimes unorthodox—action.

And best of all she was a fearless leader. For a whole generation of women in Helena and throughout the state, Pat showed us the power of speaking out:

—Of using our authentic voices to work for causes, to seek better jobs, to break the glass ceiling.

—Of challenging conventional wisdom to find the *real* truth, the *real* answer.

Pat made a profound impact on us.

The stories of Pat's fearlessness are legendary. But let me tell you—being the *object* of her fearlessness wasn't always comfortable. Twenty-five years ago when I had a young child, I was the legislative staffer for a committee Pat was chairing. It was a contentious hearing, the room was packed, and the meeting went on and on. Suddenly, in ringing tones Pat announced a recess in the meeting because "Mrs. Cohea needs to go nurse her baby." It was a toss-up who was more embarrassed—me or the older male legislators in the room!

If it was sometimes uncomfortable to be the object of her fearlessness, it was always fun to be in the audience. It was instructive to watch Pat the legislator become the Pat the teacher and reduce an obstreperous legislative opponent to an abject eighth-grader hanging his head and saying "I'm sorry, Mrs. Regan."

But Pat never used her quick wit and outspokenness to belittle other people. She had the wonderful gift of caring passionately about ideas and causes but *not* forgetting that it is individual people that are at the root of any cause. She was unstintingly generous in helping anyone she felt had been wronged. I'll always remember the appreciation a long-time Montana Power lobbyist expressed for Pat. As you can imagine, Pat and the lobbyist were polar opposites on almost every issue but as chair of the Business and Industry Committee Pat felt that the Public Service Commission was not listening to a valid issue Montana

Power Company was raising. Through sheer force of personality, she held Commission members and Montana Power representatives in a meeting room until agreement was reached.

For me the ultimate example of Pat's fearlessness was shown last Friday night. I was lucky enough to spend a wonderful, magical evening with her, husband Tom, and daughter Margaret just before her death. Since Pat has always been a fighter, I thought she would be fighting leaving this earth. But one more time Pat was fearless—she was ready for the next chapter in her remarkable life. As we talked legislative stories and current politics, Pat would pause and say with a look of great peace, "All is well." One more time, Pat taught me an important lesson—death is not to be feared. One more time, Pat was right—because of Pat, because of what she did for women and for all the people of Montana, All that Pat touched is Well. Thank you, Pat, for everything.