

## Kagen: Obey fought for equality and justice in Congress

Steve Kagen, M.D. 4:29 p.m. CDT September 8, 2014



Last week, I had the privilege of speaking at the opening ceremonies of the Dave Obey Civic Resource Center at the University of Wisconsin Marathon County in Wausau, sharing lessons learned while serving with Chairman Obey in the U.S. House of Representatives during the most challenging times our nation faced in a century.

As Wisconsin's newest federal lawmaker in 2007, I witnessed Dave's ability to find the "middle path" by reaching across the table to his ideological opponents and doing what many in Congress today fear to do — compromise. He improved the lives of people everywhere in America, using compromise as his most effective tool without compromising his ideals.

Obey helped create a more perfect union by making progress the American Way, finding the middle path. Compromise is not a dirty word; it is the way forward. There is, however, a dirty word in politics. It is the dirtiest word in the world: "conservative", and I can explain how it happened by allowing the facts to speak for themselves.

In early 2009, Representative Obey and I were asked to clean up the mess left behind by the biggest conservative-elephant parade in history. Without paying for a penny of it, conservatives-in-name-only sent our children to fight and die in an unnecessary religious civil war in Iraq; promoted torture of military captives; enacted tax cuts to overfed millionaires and billionaires; bailed out their friends on Wall Street; and allowed millions of taxpayer bailout-dollars to pour into the pockets of crooked banksters whose unregulated bets crashed financial institutions and housing markets worldwide.

There was a complete meltdown of confidence in the ability of our federal government to solve any of these once-in-a-century crises; crises created by fake "conservatives" who served themselves, not ordinary people. These fraudulent "conservatives" would later shut down government altogether, thereby establishing the word "conservative" as the dirtiest word in the world.

Shame on fake "conservatives" for moving their corporate headquarters to Canada and beyond; for feeding the rich and starving the poor; and unjustly asking people with little to pay for it all.

Simply put, you cannot trust today's "conservatives" with your money or your life.

My words may seem harsh to some, but they are true and should be discussed vigorously, soon and often in the Dave Obey Center.

Aside from being an expert in compromise, Obey also fought hard for human equality and justice for all.

But doesn't equality in education mean we must fully fund public education? Any nation that fails to educate all its children will cease to exist. There is no room in government today for "conservative" frauds who send our tax dollars to private religious schools, for such self-centered policies will destroy our children's future.

And shouldn't equality in health care mean everyone pays the same price for the same service? Think about it. Show us the lowest price you accepted as payment in full, so we can all pay the lowest price instead of whatever amount you can get. It's the American Way. Equality in health care means equality in pricing.

Equality also means every citizen can vote without paying a poll tax, and that every vote is counted.

Another lesson learned is this: if it makes sense in Wisconsin, it will be hard to do in Washington.

Finally, I learned there are three kinds of politicians: a politician with no spine, a clay spine, and statesmen and -women with spines of steel. Dave Obey has a steel spine.

We need more Dave Obeyes in public office, for today more than ever we need more courage and less fear; more compassion and less cruelty; and more truthfulness and less falsehood.

Thank you, Dave, and especially Joan, for making life better for all of us, and for sharing our Wisconsin values with people around the world.

Former U.S. Congressman Steve Kagen, M.D.

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