

The End of an Era

AP/World Wide Photo



IAM member Howard Metzenbaum fought for average Americans throughout his entire political career, including twenty years as the U.S. Senator from Ohio.

United States Senator Howard M. Metzenbaum fought for the little guy throughout his entire public life. He was a fifty-year member of the Fighting Machinists. His tenacity, acute sense of injustice and sheer intelligence made him a formidable foe.

The biggest corporations and their lobbyists hated to hear his name. His end-of-session efforts to block their pet projects – the infamous Christmas-tree bills – saved taxpayers billions of dollars. His filibuster-by-amendment tactic stalled decontrol of natural gas prices even as he sued Columbia Gas Transmission Corporation for gouging customers.

Howard Metzenbaum single-handedly kept the Ford Company's Brook Park Engine

Plant near Cleveland, OH operating for over thirty years by placing company executives under oath, cross-examining them in detail about their outsourcing plans and trapping them in a blatant falsehood. That congressional hearing led to a landmark plant-closing act that still provides advance notice to blue-collar workers that their jobs are at risk.

A National Senator

Serving on the Budget, Energy, Labor and Judiciary Committees, Howard Metzenbaum found ways to stop the worst excesses of the Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush and Clinton administrations.

Known as "Senator No," he accumulated enemies quicker than most men in public life do friends. But he did so only

to protect American workers and consumers.

Alaskan Senator Ted Stevens once called him a "pain in the ass;" threatened to fly to Ohio and campaign against him; and spent nearly two decades trying to rewrite the Cloture Rule after Metzenbaum spiked Steven's Prudhoe Bay amendment.

What was Metzenbaum's response? He sent Ted Stevens a first-class, round-trip airline ticket to Cleveland. Then he called a press conference daring him to come to Ohio.

But there was a gentle side to Howard Metzenbaum. He loved his wife Shirley and his four daughters – Barbara, Suzie, Shelley and Amy – with every fiber of his being.

He loved children, collected photographs of his staff's kids and grandkids, chatted with the toddlers who visited the U.S. Capitol and fought to protect children across the globe from unsafe infant formula ingredients.

Howard Metzenbaum died on March 12, 2008 at the age of 90. His passing marked the end of an era. He was the last "National Senator." And his portrait deserves to hang in the Senate Reception Room along with those of Daniel Webster, John Calhoun, Henry Clay, Bob La Follette, Robert Taft, Arthur Vandenberg, Robert Wagner, John Sherman and Oliver Ellsworth.