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Remembering Bill Frenzel
November 17, 2014

Dear Friends,

It is with great sadness that I inform you that former Congressman and CRFB co-Chair Bill Frenzel died this morning.

Bill was a modest giant in Washington as a legislator, policy expert, mentor and friend. He has been the chair or co-chair of CRFB since 1995 and has offered steady leadership and wisdom to our organization. Bill's expertise and thoughtfulness on issues ranging from the budget to trade to tax policy could only be matched by his resolve to make positive change.

Bill served as a Member of Congress from Minnesota for 20 years beginning in 1971, serving on the Ways & Means Committee and the Budget Committee, where he was the ranking Republican in 1989 and 1990. In that position, he was often a lonely voice for fiscal discipline. He was instrumental in negotiating the 1990 budget agreement that helped set the country on a course toward a balanced budget.

Bill's knowledge and thoughtfulness helped him gain stature within his own party, while his graciousness and integrity earned him the trust of those on the other side of the aisle.

As CRFB co-Chair and former Congressman Tim Penny said recently, "Bill was one of those legislators who commanded the attention of his colleagues – on both sides of the aisle – whenever he spoke on the floor. He was consistently well informed – and always offered reasoned and persuasive arguments. And, he was naturally funny in the way he phrased his points. On the floor and off, he was uniformly gracious even to those with whom he disagreed."

And as CRFB co-Chair and former Congressman Charlie Stenholm said, "He was one I came to trust completely on the other side of the aisle. Bill was genuine. He made an effort to establish relationships and it was easy to reciprocate."

Shortly after leaving Congress, Bill joined the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget and became our organization's co-chair in 1995. Bill's leadership has been instrumental to the growth of CRFB over the past two decades, and his unrelenting focus on improving the country for the next generation has been an inspiration to all of us working on long-term debt issues. In addition to his



involvement with CRFB, Bill remained involved in public service in many other ways, serving on various boards and commissions tackling the tough issues of the day.

Bill had many talents beyond his unending knowledge of all things budget. While discussing budget details, he would create intricate, detailed “doodles” that were valued as keepsakes of budget talks.

Having had the honor of working with Bill for the past decade, I see him as nothing short of a national treasure. He had a great working knowledge of Congress, which allowed him to see opportunities others might not, and he always seemed to understand the best approach even in the most unpredictable of political times. He had an intellectual compassion that allowed him to understand people’s differing perspectives even when he vehemently disagreed. He had a professional integrity that left everyone trusting him regardless of their party or perspective. And he had judgment you would always, always rely on despite the fact that he was the least pushy person at the table about his own opinions.

And there was such warmth to him. He checked in on our staff regularly, making sure that our talented team had a good working environment – yes folks, those half-day Fridays in the summer all came from Bill. And as a boss, he gave the occasional nudge if things were not on track but always in the kindest of ways. He had a curmudgeonly exterior that could never mask the kindness and warmth he had for those around him. His humor and timing were pitch perfect. And once you had Bill not just as a colleague but as a friend, you knew you had a friend for life. Bill Frenzel was a class act and to know him was to develop a deep appreciation for the integrity, judgment and kindness he showed.

But it was seeing him with his family that I saw the source of Bill’s joy. His family is so welcoming, loving and fun; they are that family you always want to spend time with. The deep undying love he and his wonderful wife Ruthy shared was obvious to anyone who saw them, and was why for every Washington invitation, Bill’s answer was nearly always, I’d rather be home with my bride than anywhere else.

The level of support that Bill offered as a boss, as a mentor, and as a friend is nearly impossible to come by. There is no one better.

Those who worked with and for Bill would all describe him in similar ways. He leaves a trail of people who love him and have benefited from working with and knowing him.

Bill will be missed by all of us in the CRFB family. Our prayers go out to his wife, his daughters, his son-in-law, his grandchildren, and to all the lives Bill has touched over the years.

Sincerely,
Maya MacGuineas