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EDITORIAL

Henry Hyde, RIP

BY RICH LOWRY

We haven't lacked recently for congressmen who have disgraced Congress. Now, we've lost one who ennobled it.

Henry Hyde has died at age 83. He represented a suburban Chicago district in the House for 32 years before retiring last year in failing health. When political commentators lament the passing of a Golden Age in Congress, they usually are inventing an imagined past. But Henry Hyde really did embody a set of political qualities that have become rare in an age of hyperpartisanship and YouTube debates.

He had principles, but was never a fanatic. He was partisan, but never a bomb-thrower. He defended traditional values, but never was preachy. He was respected by both sides because he knew that respect must be given to be received. He was eloquent in a way few American politicians are, and deeply literate. But he enjoyed his cigars and -- once a stand-up comic -- leavened all he did with a keen sense of humor.

One of his most extraordinary qualities

was that he was persuasive and persuadable. In the mid-1980s, he doubted the need to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act. After traveling to the South for field hearings, he changed his mind and worked to convince Reagan administration officials to support the reauthorization.

Hyde came to his famous pro-life views in a characteristic way -- he considered the evidence. When he was serving in the Illinois legislature in the 1970s, a colleague asked him to co-sponsor a bill liberalizing abortion law. He hadn't thought about the issue, and read a book called "The Vanishing Right to Live" by Charlie Rice that convinced him of abortion's evil. He opposed the Illinois bill and, when elected to Congress, shepherded to passage legislation forbidding the federal funding of abortion. The Hyde Amendment has stood for decades as the most consequential piece of pro-life legislation ever to pass Congress.

The pro-life cause became one of the pillars of Hyde's public life. He once told incoming congressmen, in the political axiom he lived by, that they "need to be at least as clear on the reasons why they would risk losing as they are on the reasons why they wanted to come here in the first

place." His staffers recall left-wing lioness Maxine Waters later repeating exactly the same advice to freshmen congressmen -- and attributing it to Hyde.

He will be remembered for leading the impeachment of President Bill Clinton, a cause he undertook more out of duty than of zeal (during the controversy, it was revealed that he had had an affair 30 years previously). He thought he had no choice but to champion impeachment given President Clinton's offenses against the rule of law: "It protects the innocent, it punishes the guilty, it defends the powerless, it guards freedom, it summons the noblest instincts of the human spirit."

Right, center or left, we need more representatives who love Congress the way Hyde did.

In a speech in the midst of the impeachment fight, he had proclaimed, "We vote for our honor, which is the only thing we get to take with us to the grave." Henry Hyde departs with his honor intact, honed during decades of public service and acknowledged by all. RIP ■

— Rich Lowry is editor of the *National Review*.

GUEST OPINION

Don't let driving distractions mar the holidays

BY JAY ANDERSON

Founder of Stay Alert, Stay Focused, Stay Alive... Just Drive

Yeah, that's the text message we've been waiting for, let me text him right back. Oh no I've lost control, were going to crash..... "911 what's your emergency?" I'd like to report a terrible crash on (name any South-west Florida highway).

Sound familiar? June 2007 five young women in upstate New York, all recent high school graduates crash head-on with an eighteen-wheeler resulting in their untimely deaths. Evidence indicates that a cell phone belonging to the driver had sent and received text messages 38 seconds before the first 911 call reported the crash. We will never know the truth, but do understand: a young inexperienced driver lost control and was responsible for this preventable tragedy.

One can safely assume it's only a matter of time before events such as this become all too common. Text messaging has undoubtedly become one of the most dangerous forms of driver distraction. Sadly, young drivers are the most likely motor vehicle operators to be involved in fatal collisions while using electronic devices. Crashes remain the leading cause of death and long-term disabilities for ages 3 to 34.

The Holiday Season is here and our winter residents and visitors are returning. The increased traffic volume becomes more noticeable daily. What better time to remind drivers how important it is to adopt the driving philosophy of Stay Alert, Stay Focused, Stay Alive Just Drive !

Nationwide Insurance surveyed 1200 Americans ages 18 to 60 in November 2006. Over 80 percent were multitaskers; 59 percent said they're not distracted drivers. The results prove otherwise; 82 percent adjust the radio or CD player, 73 percent talk on cell phones, 68 percent eat, 19 percent text message, 14 percent comfort children, 12 percent apply makeup. Others admit to shaving, reading, and even changing their clothes.

Vehicles today have become an extension of our living rooms. Automobile manufacturers continue to compound the problem adding components that are distractions. DVD players, GPS systems, CD players, satellite radio, laptop computers are just a few examples. Include the other causes of driver inattention you can easily understand why 8 out of 10 crashes or near collisions are a direct result of driver distraction.

A car going 68 mph can travel the length of a football field in three seconds, the same length of time as the typical distraction. The

average reaction time is 1.5 seconds, so even in as little as one second, you can prevent 40 to 60 percent of rear end crashes. That's why we stress the importance of remembering: awareness is the key to understanding how one second can change a life forever.

Walt Seifert, Executive Director of the Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates said it best when he wrote, " We aren't driven to distraction when we drive. We choose distraction. It's an irresponsible choice that endangers our fellow travelers and us."

Florida is on track to join the five states that ban the use of handheld cell phones while driving -- joining California, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Washington and Washington D.C. At least 16 states restrict cell phone use by young drivers. State Sen. Frederica Wilson, (D, Miami Gardens), has prepared a bill to be introduced in March. State Rep. Ronald Brise, (D, Miami Gardens) is preparing the House bill. So far there appears to be very little opposition in either the House or Senate. ■

The Stay Alive Just Drive ! traffic safety campaign directly addresses driver education, one of three vital traffic safety components (education, engineering, and enforcement) Ultimately the person behind the wheel is in control and responsible for the safe and lawful operation of the vehicle.

MOMENTS IN TIME

- On Dec. 13, 1922, eight years after they began offering their removable top on KisselKar and Kissel automobiles, William Kissel and Friedrich Werner received a U.S. patent for their invention. Their "Convertible Automobile Body" had a removable hard top -- one of the earliest convertibles.

- On Dec. 14, 1799, George Washington, the American revolutionary leader and first president of the United States (unanimously elected in 1789), dies of acute laryngitis at his estate in Mount Vernon, Va.

- On Dec. 15, 2001, Italy's Leaning Tower of Pisa reopens after a team of experts spent 11 years and \$27 million to fortify the

tower without eliminating its famous lean. Engineers were able to reduce the lean by between 16 and 17 inches.

- On Dec. 16, 1811, in the Mississippi River Valley near New Madrid, Mo., an earthquake of an estimated 8.6 magnitude on the Richter scale slams the region. The quake raised and lowered parts of the Mississippi Valley by as much as 15 feet and changed the course of the Mississippi River.

- On Dec. 17, 1963, the U.S. Congress passes the Clean Air Act, a sweeping set of laws designed to protect the environment from air pollution. It was the first legislation to place pollution controls on the

automobile industry.

- On Dec. 18, 1620, passengers on the British ship Mayflower come ashore at Plymouth, Mass., to begin their new settlement, Plymouth Colony. That winter of 1620-21 was brutal, and by spring, 50 of the original 102 Mayflower passengers were dead.

- On Dec. 19, 1998, the House of Representatives approves two articles of impeachment against President Bill Clinton, charging him with lying under oath to a federal grand jury and obstructing justice. After the trial the following February, during which he was acquitted on both counts, Clinton said he was "profoundly sorry." ■

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