

Thompson and Webb Comment on Former Client and Prominent Politician, Rostenkowski

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Retrospective commentary by firm chairman [Dan Webb](#) and senior firm chairman [Gov. James Thompson](#) was aired August 11 on several Chicago news networks in the wake of reports that former Winston & Strawn client and prominent national politician, Dan Rostenkowski, had died of natural causes at his home in Lake Benedict, Wis.

During his 18 terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, Rostenkowski was either at or near the pinnacle of his chosen profession in terms of power and influence. He was perhaps the most productive of all the politicians who represented Chicago as well as Illinois in Washington during the second half of the 20th century.

As chairman of the powerful U.S. House Ways and Means Committee during the 1980s and early 1990s, Thompson told Fox News, Rostenkowski was arguably one of the three or four most powerful politicians in the United States, who was noted for his skill in consensus building to achieve positive legislation on a bi-partisan basis and in ultimately doing what was “right...for everyone...whether they be Democrat or Republican.” Indeed, as then-President Ronald Reagan led a movement to reduce federal spending and to cut taxes, Thompson recalled, Democrat Rostenkowski helped negotiate a compromise that “led to one of the greatest economic booms” in the country’s history. Rostenkowski is also widely credited with leading a 1983 effort to rescue Social Security from insolvency.

“Dan was truly a great congressional leader,” Webb explained to a WBBM News Radio audience. “He knew how to go beyond partisanship and get the people’s work done” for the good of the entire country.

“I never had a conversation with Dan Rostenkowski where partisanship interfered with getting things done for the people of Illinois,” Thompson added. Among other things, Thompson noted, Rostenkowski used his political wiles and seniority to help bring billions of dollars for public projects to Chicago including, Navy Pier’s massive rehabilitation, the reopening of Midway Airport, numerous expansion projects at O’Hare International Airport, new trains for Chicago’s metropolitan transportation agencies, the building of U.S. Cellular Field, the upgrading of the Kennedy Expressway, the building of the Near West-side’s Presidential Towers complex, and the launch of the city’s deep tunnel project.

In 1994, Rostenkowski was indicted on a number of federal official corruption charges for which he pleaded guilty in 1996 and served 15 months in prison. In 2000, he was pardoned by his old friend, President Bill Clinton.

“I do believe that Danny would have won at trial,” lead defense counsel Webb recalled when asked by WBBM about Rostenkowski’s legal troubles. But, in the end, Webb added, Rostenkowski agreed to plea bargain his case to spare his family the ordeal of a public trial.

To the ABC News reporter, Webb said that he’s “always been very proud of what he did with himself after that [difficult decision] was put behind him.” After Rostenkowski served his prison term, Webb noted, “Presidents and world leaders still wanted his advice.” Rostenkowski went on to become a sought-after business consultant and occasional news commentator. The sudden end to his political career “turned out to be a small blip on his life’s radar screen,” Webb concluded.

According to Fox News, Rostenkowski’s ultimate legacy is that of a “genuine giant” who in a real sense “remade the face of Chicago.”

“Nearly anywhere one goes in Chicago today,” Thompson agreed, one can witness Rostenkowski’s influence on its revival or growth through a host of federally-funded public works projects. That love of Chicago and Rostenkowski’s dedication to its success “will be what people here will remember most about him.”

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