

Mark Keppler: Ken Maddy's last wish

By Mark
Keppler

As people remember Sen. Ken Maddy on the 15th anniversary of his passing Thursday, the state's political leaders and political columnists continue to describe him as "a class act...unfailingly charming, articulate and pragmatic... exceptional."

In short, a model legislator. But Maddy was more than that. He was also someone who cared deeply about the San Joaquin Valley he represented for 28 years in the state capitol. His last wish was that we find a way to nurture the next generation of bipartisan problem solvers in politics and government. That wish is coming true.

Last week, Lynda and Stewart Resnick and the Resnick Foundation made a generous gift to fund two \$56,000 Wonderful Public Service Fellowships at the Maddy Institute at California State University, Fresno. It will support two San Joaquin Valley students, who are accepted at a nationally ranked graduate program in public policy/public administration or a related area this fall, to pursue a career in public service. Applications are due Feb. 27.

This is not just an incredible opportunity for two Valley students; it is an incredible investment in the Valley. As owners of the Paramount Agricultural Companies, the Resnicks have a vested interest in the Central Valley. What is telling is the fact that the only thing they have asked is that we find two outstanding Valley students who, after graduation, want to come back to the Valley and make it a better place. Their gift could be transformational.

Just think of it. Two outstanding Valley graduates from the nation's top universities coming back to the Valley to lend their talents and knowledge to address Valley issues. In just 10 years, we could have 20 of the nation's brightest and committed minds on the path to becoming the next generation of Valley city managers, planning directors, county administrative officers, economic development chief executive officers and in other key administrative positions, as well as in elected office.

Larry Martin, our board chairman from Modesto, put it succinctly when he said that "given Sen. Maddy's vision for the Maddy Institute, this program may end up being the most impactful project we have ever worked on." Impactful, indeed.

The Valley's well-documented challenges — high unemployment, low educational attainment, air pollution, water quality and quantity problems, to name a few — sometimes appear overwhelming given the very limited amount of money we have to deal with those issues. Consequently, good — no, outstanding — leadership is a must. We simply can't afford anything less than the most effective and efficient leadership.

We truly need the best and the brightest attacking our problems with new and innovative solutions if we are to have any chance of solving the challenges we face. That is why the Maddy Institute has, over the last 14 years, provided over 300 scholarships for college students from throughout the Valley to spend a semester working in a local, state or national legislative office to learn the political process and apply that knowledge as future community leaders.

The Wonderful Public Service Fellowship will build on our legislative intern programs. Our hope is that this fellowship will give these interns the financial means to follow their passion and dedicate their lives to public service for the betterment of the Valley.

The political leadership in Sacramento — on both sides of the aisle and from across the state — has recognized the importance of developing the next generation of Valley leaders. They realize that, as an integral part of the state, as the Valley goes, so goes California.

Just last week, Gov. Jerry Brown and California's legislative leaders Sen. Pro Tem Kevin de Leon, Sen. Republican Leader Bob Huff, Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins and Assembly Republican Leader Kristin Olsen hosted a major fundraiser for the Maddy Institute's Sen. Bob Beverly Scholars who work as legislative interns at the state capitol in Sacramento. Maddy and his good friend, Beverly, years after their passing, are still bringing state leaders together in a bipartisan effort to address California's and the Valley's challenges. That is quite a testament to everyone involved — past and present.

It's not often someone's last wish is granted 15 years after their death. The Wonderful Public Service Fellowship, together with our legislative intern programs, will help fulfill Maddy's wish that programs be established to train a new generation of bipartisan problem solvers for the Valley. I'm sure Maddy is smiling.

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