

Hargraves tribute — 16 years of service — page 15



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SALUTE TO SERVICE: STATE REP. ROBERT HARGRAVES

Locals recall Hargraves as respected, available

Longtime legislator retired this year

By Pierre Comtois
Correspondent

GROTON — After 16 years as state representative for the towns of Pepperell, Townsend, Groton, Dunstable and Ayer, Robert Hargraves decided to retreat from Beacon Hill politics this year.

Returning to his roots, the former schoolteacher decided to keep his hand in local affairs by running for the Board of Selectmen, a position he once held before his role on the legislative stage.

Failing to win a seat on the Board of Selectmen in last year's election, Hargraves landed on his feet and was appointed as a member of the town's Finance Committee, where he brings his extensive knowledge of Statehouse number-crunching to bear.

That said, the long years Hargraves served in Boston have not been forgotten by his constituents or local leaders who often relied on his help to have their voices heard in the state's capitol.

"I think that as a representative Bob was a very well-respected member of the Legislature, not only by myself but to his colleagues on both sides of the aisle," said Rep. James Arciero, D-Westford.

"His approach was refreshing. He was a straight shooter who always let you know where he stood on an issue. He was a tireless advocate for his constituents and he had a keen understanding of his district and the people he represented.

"Bob was one of the most respected representatives of the minority party on issues such as health-care financing," said James Arciero. "Along with help from his colleagues, I give him a tremendous amount of credit for sponsoring and pursuing the Lyme disease bill that is going to help a tremendous amount of people. That kind of concern is something that has endeared him to his colleagues."

"Bob did a good job representing his district," said Board of Selectmen member Peter Cunningham. "His focus, I think, seemed to be on local issues and constituent services. He wasn't the sort of state representative who would go down and file bills that go nowhere. From time to time issues would come up that he would focus on and advocate, like the time he filed legislation dealing with Lyme disease.

He pushed very hard for those things he wanted but in a bipartisan way. I think he did a good job."

"I think he was passionate about the district and about what he could do for the district," said Rep. Sheila Harrington, R-Groton, who took over Hargraves' seat in the Legislature.

"I admired his tenacity when he wanted to get something done when he wanted to do it. I think he was a great asset and a very dedicated public servant."

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"Bob did a very good job as a state representative," said fellow board member Fran Dillon. "He certainly looked after and took care of the people within his district. If his constituents needed help, Bob was always there."

"He was actually my principal in high school and I've always found Bob to be

try cooperative and in tune with the issues in Townsend," said Townsend chief of police Erving Marshall. "I've never been reluctant to reach out to him on legislative issues. He was always a good source and a great legislator for our area."

"I thought Bob was a great state rep.," said Don Black, longtime chairman of the town's Parks Commission.

"I think he really grew into the position. Watching him go to the Statehouse with virtually no experience and seeing how he wound up among other things as a member of the Ways and Means Committee and having some real clout in Boston...I thought that was a real feather in his cap. And one of the things I always liked about Bob was that he always answered his own phone. If you called him up and he was in, you wouldn't get somebody else. You could always reach him. He was always reachable, always approachable and that speaks very well of him."

"Bob was very conscious of his constituents and worked very hard for them," added Kevin McKenzie, the town's representative on the Nashoba Valley Regional Technical School Committee. "What I liked about Bob was that he was always trying to



COURTESY PHOTO

State Rep. Robert Hargraves poses with the award-winning band from Hawthorne Brook Middle School in Townsend during the band's visit to the Statehouse.



NASHOBA PUBLISHING FILE PHOTO/JOHN LOVE

Lance Cpl. Dave Tozier, Lance Cpl. Jared Henley and Sgt. Gregory Meringer listen to Rep. Robert Hargraves welcome them home during a party in their honor in 2007.



COURTESY PHOTO

Bob Hargraves' summer home is not far from the Bush compound in Kennebunkport. Here, Hargraves has a chat with President George Bush.

bring business into the district. And whenever I sent an e-mail to him, 15 minutes later I'd get a call from Bob. His access to government offices was also a very valuable asset to the district. For instance, on the whole school bussing issue last year when schools were going to lose \$350 million in state aid, Bob was one of the first to sign off on a letter to the governor to restore the money. So Bob was a very good friend to education in particular."

A state legislator since 1994, Hargraves began his career as a school teacher before moving into administration as a principal in the North Middlesex Regional School District. In the 1970s he served for one term on the Board of Selectmen before returning for a stint of four consecutive terms in the 1980s.

"Bob was certainly direct and to the point and had a every dry sense of humor," commented former state Sen. Stephen Panagiotakos. "If you took the time to get to know him, you'd find that he was a fun guy to be around.

He had a good heart. Politics is personal so if you can have a friendship with people that helps and it certainly helped him. Bob was also a strong voice for the Republican Party for many years. His concern and care for those in his district was second to none."

"Bob got out and mingled with people," said Dillon of Hargraves style of representation. "He knew people, met with people, talked with people. He knew people throughout his district. Bob touched all levels of his constituency and listened to them and did the best he could for them."

"I think Bob had a very common touch," said McKenzie. "Every time I saw him in front of his constituents, he knew half the people in the room. I've gone to Eagle Scout presentations with Bob and it seemed as if he knew everyone in the room. As a legislator, he was actually pretty easy to reach out to, especially once he knew who you were."

"Bob was out there every day meeting and talking

with his constituents," Black said. "He was in district all the time and visited all the town halls on a weekly basis. In fact, he probably knew as many of his constituents as any rep on Beacon Hill."

"He did a good job for the town," said former Ayer town clerk Ann Callahan, noting that the legislator kept regular hours at Town Hall one night a week specifically to make himself available to any constituent who wanted to talk to him. "We liked him. He was very friendly and pretty much took care of us."

"One thing that really impressed me about Bob was that he had a real good sense of history and could recall people, remember family situations, or have an anecdote to tell about particular situations," recalled Cunningham.

All who knew Hargraves or worked with him agree that he has left some big shoes to fill.

"Bob will be missed if only because he knew so many people throughout the

Please see **LOCALS/19**

Marshall: He was always available

LOCALS/From Page 17

district," Dillon said. "People will certainly miss being able to meet with him and talk with him."

"I think it'll be Bob's sense of humor that will be missed the most," confessed Arciero. "Colleagues on the Hill thought his ability to find a clever joke or line that surmised how he felt about an issue at a particular time useful in bridging disagreements. It was his way of getting to the point."

"I think what will be missed most about Rep. Hargraves will be his sense of humor," said Harrington, agreeing with Arciero that Hargraves' ability to inject humor into a discussion often helped defuse otherwise contentious issues.

"I think he did quite a bit for all five towns in his district," said McKenzie. "He was involved in restoring the covered bridge in Pepperell, the development of Devens, the preservation of the Nashua River, and he actually worked across party lines to get things done."

"I think what will be missed most about Bob was his availability," said Mar-



NASHUA
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Rep. Robert Hargraves takes his last calls as a legislator.

shall. "He was always available. In fact, I think even his home phone was listed."

"Bob was always staying within his district," said Hall. "He liked to stay close to the people. Personal contact with his constituents was his most valuable asset as a legislator. He was always out there listening."

"I hope nothing of what Bob did as our representative will be missed," said Black. "I hope that Sheila Harrington, who is also from Groton, picks up where Bob left off so that

we don't miss a beat."

"He provided access to state government and tended to have good people who worked for him," said Cunningham. "It's too early to say what will be missed in his absence from state government. Sheila Harrington, his replacement, may turn out to be just as good with constituents as Bob was. Bob was good at forming alliances and working in a bipartisan way when he needed to. He was pragmatic that way."



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Rep. Bob Hargraves attends a William E. May Endowment Fund dinner to honor former Townsend police Chief William May, center.