

John Sturdivant represented the same people I represent: federal and D.C. government employees. John's work often wasn't much different from mine. If so, I knew I'd hear from him.

When I first met John, however, we were not on the same side—at least not structurally. I was cast as the manager of a troubled agency, John as the local union president. President Carter had named me to chair the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission when the Commission had gone through perhaps the most troubled period—a huge backlog, firings by the President at the top of the agency, the whole ball of wax. Though entirely a management problem, it could not be fixed without top to bottom change and a wholesale make over. As a civil rights lawyer and a veteran of the movement, I did not look forward to tension with the employees, and there inevitably was some. The union never missed a beat, but John had a lot to do with the mixture of wit and determination that made it all work. In the end, the agency got rid of most of its backlog, not by fighting the union, but by empowering the workers with new, upgraded duties.

John Sturdivant rose through the ranks of his own union the way unions insist that employees should move up in the workplaces that unions represent. But, John rose the way that yeast makes bread rise—because, by conviction and ability, he could not be contained. John Sturdivant was made for the modern era of American unionism. He knew how to do it by fighting, he knew how to do it by negotiating, and he knew how to do it in ways nobody had thought of. He was a strategic thinker who knew how to pick his fights while keeping the others alive to be fought another day. Without that kind of smarts, he would never have achieved the landmark changes that occurred when I chaired the old Subcommittee and that John wore on his sleeves like stripes; the political empowerment of government workers through Hatch Act reform, locality pay, and the first government-wide buyouts.

In the end, John Sturdivant, who was a leader in reinventing modern unionism, was not about to let government reinvent itself without the union as a partner. And the man who had risen to leadership with the rise of public sector unionism was not about to preside over its decline. John Sturdivant had a quality union leaders seek in these tough times for workers and that public officials with a movement background like mine most admire. John knew how to work the inside with the vision of an outsider. Now if the rest of us could only learn to beguile our opponents with a broad, disarming grin.

TRIBUTE TO JOHN STURDIVANT

HON. WILLIAM (BILL) CLAY

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 13, 1997

Mr. CLAY. Mr. Speaker, our Nation has lost an outstanding labor leader. The late John Sturdivant was a loyal public servant who faithfully served our Nation's public servants. As president of the American Federation of Government Employees, John Sturdivant deeply believed in the importance of Government service and deeply valued our system of Government.

From 1991 through 1994, as the chairman of the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee, I was privileged to work with John Sturdivant on a variety of issues. I respected

John as an aggressive advocate of the rights of Federal workers. He was very actively involved in the successful effort to enact the landmark Family and Medical Leave Act. And, John fought tirelessly to protect the salaries and benefits of his members as those on the other side sought to balance the Federal budget on the backs of Government workers. He worked closely with the members of the Post Office and Civil Service Committee staff and took a strong personal interest in all legislation affecting the retirement and health benefits of Federal workers. He and his fellow union members worked closely with the Post Office and Civil Service Committees to develop legislation to mitigate the effect of defense downsizing and base closings on Federal workers. John Sturdivant also helped to establish a Federal employee buyout program that became the model for civilian government agencies experiencing downsizing.

John Sturdivant was at the forefront of the effort to ensure that Government, itself, lives up to the promise of equal opportunity for its own workforce. No one worked harder to bring about reform of the Hatch Act. Until it was amended, the Hatch Act precluded Federal employees from engaging in any effort to campaign in a partisan election campaign. John Sturdivant clearly understood the dangers of Hatch Act restrictions on Federal workers and was outraged that anyone should be required to sacrifice this most vital right of free speech in order to work for the Federal Government.

When John Sturdivant became president of the American Federation of Government Employees, he worked diligently and successfully to lobby the Congress to amend the antiquated Hatch Act. Then he encouraged his members to exercise their new rights and take an active interest in the politics of this Nation and the affairs of Government. John Sturdivant helped bring out the voice of Government workers. He understood that in a democracy, the ballot was the ultimate power and that the surest means of self-protection for AFGE members was active, informed political participation. John Sturdivant made certain that those he represented understood their rights and responsibilities. That by itself is a significant legacy.

I will miss John Sturdivant as I cherish his memory.

TRIBUTE TO JOHN STURDIVANT

HON. RICHARD A. GEPHARDT

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 13, 1997

Mr. GEPHARDT. Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to the late, great American labor leader, John N. Sturdivant. John passed away on October 28 after a long and courageous battle with cancer. He will be forever remembered and missed, especially by those of us who worked alongside him on issues of critical importance to America's working men and women.

John was the National President of the American Federation of Government Employees [AFGE] since 1988. An AFGE activist for more than 30 years, he worked his way up the ranks, serving as president of Local 1754 in Winchester, VA, from 1968 until 1976, when he joined the union's national office. Upon his

election as national President in 1988, he had the proud distinction of being the first African-American to hold that office and to serve as president of a major AFL-CIO union.

John was born in Philadelphia on June 30, 1938 and raised in Bridgeport, CT. In 1956 he enlisted in the Air Force, where he served our country until 1960. In 1961 he went to work as an electronics technician with the Army Interagency Communications Agency in Winchester, VA, where he became active in AFGE.

When he was elected National President of AFGE, John inherited an AFGE that was in dire financial straits. Although the union was near bankruptcy, John was determined to save it and continue its long history of service to Federal employees. He made the difficult financial decisions needed to stabilize the union, and succeeded in saving the organization from disarray. Today, AFGE has about 178,000 active members in 1,100 locals and represents over 700,000 workers in 68 Federal agencies, more than one third of the Federal workforce. Under John's leadership AFGE became a watchdog against inefficiency in government and a champion of workers' and human rights both at home and abroad.

John was well known and highly respected on Capitol Hill, where he worked tirelessly on behalf of better pay, improved working conditions, and higher quality health and retirement benefits for federal employees. He helped win the locality pay system that will bring Federal salaries in line with those in the private sector. And he led a long battle for the Health Act Reforms that now permit Federal employees to participate in our democratic process.

In the aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing, John worked closely with President Clinton and Federal, State and local officials to provide aid and comfort to survivors and to the families of those who died. Once the grieving had subsided, he was instrumental in bringing increased security measures at Federal installations so this tragedy would never be repeated.

As a member of the President's National Partnership Council, he was a full partner in the effort to create better employee-management relationships and to reinvent the Federal Government. He understood that the best way to improve service to the public is by giving those who do the work a voice in how the work is done.

During the partial shutdowns of the Government in 1995 and 1996, John's voice was a powerful one in support of reopening the government and providing workers with back pay when they returned.

John, who lived in Vienna, VA, had been an at-large member of the Democratic National Committee. He was a vice president of the AFL-CIO and a trustee of the George Meany Center for Labor Studies. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Labor Studies from Antioch University in 1980 and later studied law at George Washington University.

John Sturdivant devoted his life to championing the causes of working people in America. His courage, honesty, dedication and vision made him the model of a great union leader. I was proud to know and work with him. All of his many friends and colleagues join me in remembering his passing, and praising his many contributions to improving our Government and Nation.