

adapted and improved from a prior standard of ethics. And that standard was adapted and improved from a prior standard. If that were true, it would imply an infinite number of regressions into time or "improvements." There has to be a time before which there were no other improvements.

Then he makes an appeal to common sense. Whose common sense, his or mine? Not everyone shares the same common sense. He says morality should be about things like compassion and ending suffering. But why? Why are they good? What's his standard of behavior? What if it's different than mine? Why are certain behaviors wrong and others right?

When morality is based on what one wants to do, rather than on an absolute standard established by the one who knows all and has created all, that seems rather foolish at best.

*Kris Webb
Springfield*

PORTER'S LEGACY

Charles Porter, who served two terms as Oregon's 4th District representative (1957-61),

died recently at age 86. Far ahead of his time on every major issue of those days and beyond, he opposed U.S. funding of Latin American dictators, promoted diplomatic recognition of China, opposed the Vietnam War, proposed normalized relations with Cuba, opposed the fraudulent 2000 presidential election, etc.

A fearless truth-teller, he threatened the most corrupt elements of the status quo and repeatedly upset politicians of both parties who get along by going along. Locally, Charlie was largely responsible for removing the Cross illegally placed atop Skinner Butte decades ago. A true Christian, he knew that the cross arrogantly constructed under cover of darkness on public property was profoundly unconstitutional, un-American, and un-Christian.

The fact that Congress, with few exceptions, was crammed then as today with corporate toadies, warmongering chickenhawks, and pious hypocrites yet had not a place for Charlie's courage, wisdom, and insight speaks volumes about the intellectual timidity, the lack of vision, and the moral bankruptcy of our dysfunctional political system — sold as it is to, and

controlled by the shrewdest, the vilest, and the highest bidders.

I never encountered Charlie over the decades when he didn't come up with a humorous quip, a witty political insight, or a worthy cause that needed supporting. For me he was an inspirational role model, a true original, an authentic American hero.

I honor him. I miss him. Oregon needs more Charlie Porters.

*Jerome Garger
Yachats*

NEW YEAR TIDINGS

As we begin a new year, many have renewed hopes for a peaceful world and prosperity.

To our troops all over the world, defending freedom and fighting terrorism, I salute you and pray that your new year will be spent at home with your loved ones.

To the Sunnis, Kurds and Shiites in Iraq I offer you my blessings for a new Iraq that serves the best interests of all Iraqis, regardless of their ethnicity, political slant or religious beliefs. The

U.S. and Great Britain took down the dictatorship that oppressed a majority of Iraqis. It's up to those that have been elected to office to see to it that "revenge and retribution" will be best meted out in the courts and not by vigilante justice.

To our elected officials in local and state governments and especially those that represent us in Washington, I wish you a year of awareness and honesty. The kind that will allow you to see that a knee-jerk reaction is what the terrorists use to "justify" their actions.

To my fellow Oregonians, may the new year bring us all better health and economic stability. Change happens when we take action. We are adaptable people and can adapt to changes in the world economy by not allowing it to have such an impact on our local economy.

My wish for American automakers is to see the handwriting on the wall and use that genius to get us out of the oil/gas dependency.

To all a Happy New Year, filled with love and compassion.

*Fred Marsico
Corvallis*

viewpoint BY LAURA OLSON

'A Beautiful Race Horse'

Remembering Charlie Porter

On a fall evening in 1956 in Roseburg I was working late on a news story for *The Roseburg News-Review* when someone knocked on the locked front door. It was Charlie Porter. I knew he was running for Congress and when he asked if he could use a typewriter, I could think of no reason to refuse. After Charlie had finished, I took some time to interview him. After all, he was news. He thanked me and walked out into the dark.

Weeks later, following the election which he'd narrowly won, Charlie called me at home about 10 pm to ask if I'd like to work on his Washington, D.C., staff. Surprised and a bit stunned, I said I'd think about it and call him back. I wondered "why me?" Later I learned that he had followed the advice of Sen. Dick Neuberger to take a southwest Oregon staff with him and add one or two longtime Capitol Hill case-workers to help with the mail and to educate us. My Oregon colleagues were to be Jack Billings as administrative assistant, Barbara Burke as secretary, and Rolf Harlow Schillios as press assistant. I would do research.

I'd use my spare time to help on his monthly television report to the district. Working on Capitol Hill in the late '50s was fun and pretty simple. We had no computers. Phone calls were reserved for emergencies. Staff members wrote and typed letters to constituents after Charlie approved our drafts. We could send telegrams, but the Postal Service handled about 95 percent of our work.

Charlie wrote many drafts which Barbara finalized. As a member of Congress, he received two paid trips home each year. He wrote most of his own speeches, sometimes with help from experts at the Library of Congress's Legislative Reference Service.

Before leaving Eugene, Charlie began his career in congress by suggesting that Democratic Speaker of the House John McCormick should not have accepted a high honor from Dominican Republic Dictator Trujillo. This didn't set well with the speaker and Charlie was placed on the Post Office and Civil Service committee to "train" him. Rather he worked hard to improve postal service at home and abroad and he was successful.

The Eugene parents of a young pilot, Gerry Murphy, who had disappeared in the Dominican Republic where he's worked for the dictator, asked Charlie to help them find out what happened. That request got him more deeply involved in Latin American affairs early in his congressional career. Small "d" democrats in Latin America soon came to know about Charlie because he had begun to speak of the need to encourage democracy in that part of the world. We grew accustomed to greeting well-known South Americans coming to see him in his office.

At the same time, Charlie always first took care of business related to the Fourth Congressional District. He came in early each morning and "nibbled the mail" to see what needed to be done. He asked us to make sure that responses went out in 24 hours. And we did our best to do this. When he was in the district, he'd make



Charles O. Porter in a photo taken March 27, 2005

notes of requests and bring them back to us to work on when he didn't have the answer.

Charlie's wonderful wife, Priscilla, was probably his greatest admirer and severest critic. She let him know when she felt he was off track, and sometimes she was successful. I can also remember Jack Billings telling me in 1957 that "you know, he's like a beautiful race horse. We just have to keep him on track" — and we did try.

Charlie's biggest problems, I believe, were created because of his brilliance and his compassion. He looked out and saw what needed to be done, and he was never too busy not to try to help make things better. At that time in his life, he just needed more patience.

His ability to find "spare time" after taking care of Fourth District business did lead to his defeat in 1960. He fought to end nuclear testing, strongly supported by Norman Cousins and others. He sought to have the U. S. recognize then-mainland China and start trade in non-strategic goods, strongly supported by groups like the San Francisco Commonwealth Club. And he strongly supported the environmental work of Rachel Carson and others.

Perhaps more damaging though was his work to democratize Latin America. When he went to Venezuela to meet with President Betancourt we staffers were proud. We learned that he addressed a crowd of more than 100,000 who had gathered in a huge soccer field in Caracas. The audience waved banners and shouted "Viva Porter." Pretty heady stuff for a junior congressman. National magazines such as *Life* and *Time* began reporting on his efforts and calling him the secretary of state for Latin America. National radio programs such as *Meet the Press* interviewed him. Yep. Pretty heady stuff.

So his defeat in 1960 was his loss, but it was also Oregon's. He might have become a U.S. Senator. Who knows? After his defeat he came home, and for more than 40 years worked to solve problems both inside and outside Oregon.

When I returned home to Oregon in 1982, I quickly learned that once one was a member of Charlie's staff, one never left. I found myself helping him and others establish a World Affairs Council. Later, at his urging, I joined the Wayne Morse Historic Park Corporation board. Charlie had helped found the corporation. The board, working with the Lane County commissioners, established the Wayne Morse Free Speech Plaza and a new federal courthouse would be named for Morse. Active in achieving all of these was my old boss. Working with him was never dull, because, most likely, it helped someone or something somewhere.

I never knew Charlie to hold a grudge, and I don't remember his losing his temper. Life to him was a wonderful game, and he played it well. Gadfly? Maybe. But he'll be missed.

Laura Olson is a long-time liberal activist who lives up the McKenzie River.