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GENERAL'LY SPEAKING

Week of November 19, 2018

**Dispatches From
The Eisenhower Memorial Commission**

Life and Leadership of EMC Chairman Emeritus Rocco Siciliano:

A Reflection by Executive Director Carl Reddel



Chairman Siciliano (left) and Executive Director Reddel (right) pose with the future site of the Eisenhower Memorial at a Commission meeting in Washington, DC, March 2009

I offer for your reflection this brief memoir containing some personal thoughts and reflections on Rocco Siciliano's leadership as Chair of the Eisenhower Memorial Commission. It is not an historical evaluation and by definition will be incomplete, given the exceptional diversity and richness of Rocco's legacy.

Observation and experience with Rocco's nurturing of the Eisenhower legacy began for me when I served as President and CEO of the Eisenhower World Affairs Institute (1999-2001), where General Andrew Goodpaster was a senior fellow and Rocco was Chair of the Institute board.

As a presidential appointee, Rocco became Chair of the newly created congressional, bipartisan Eisenhower Memorial Commission in 2001, and continued in that role until 2015, playing the major leadership role in the memorial site selection and design, and enjoying the significant support of Senators Daniel Inouye (Commission Vice Chair) and Ted Stevens, all three combat-decorated World War II veterans and passionate admirers of General and President Eisenhower.



Commissioners, Senator Daniel Inouye (left), Chairman Rocco Siciliano (center), and Senator Ted Stevens (right) in front of The Getty Center, Los Angeles, CA, 2002

Rocco's leadership style was multi-faceted and rich, but given the brevity of this memoir I would like to suggest what I consider to be the most striking facet of his leadership - - his basic, principled and transcending humanity. Rocco valued people. And they knew it, or soon came to know it.

Rocco's humaneness in dealing with subordinates and colleagues alike transcended social and economic differences. Often he was totally disarming in referencing his own foibles and flaws and in leading listeners to believe that they were with a leader who understood well and with insight the universal human predicament of balancing our strengths and weaknesses to positive effect. His disarming candor generated loyalty, commitment and high performance. On a lighter note, he was great fun to be with in what he invariably made a shared enjoyment of life and living.

The Siciliano family came first for Rocco, beginning with his extraordinary wife, Marion. If you had not yet met the family members, you would soon learn much about them -- all of them, children, grand-children, and great grandchildren -- as Rocco recounted with immense pride their challenges, achievements and successes.



Chairman Siciliano with two of his grandsons at a Commission meeting in Washington, DC, June 2013

With his stories of the family you would soon learn that Rocco was a man of high standards, principles and values, as demanding of himself as he was of others. At his core was an immense respect for the education and hard work that had served him so well in his own life story, so beautifully conveyed in his autobiography.

As the leader of a bipartisan congressional committee including four U.S. Senators and four members of the U.S. House of Representatives, Rocco's style was fascinating to observe. Most striking to me was the spirit of flexibility, pragmatism and cooperation, which to me was Rocco's hallmark. "Enemies" did not exist, only fellow Commissioners possessing different and possibly opposing views, who rarely escaped the disarming congeniality of Rocco's persistent inclusiveness.

Whenever Rocco was in Washington, he would seek every opportunity for personal encounters and communication with his fellow commissioners, especially members of Congress, which was often difficult given the saturation and intensity of congressional scheduling. He would also seek out the key individuals in the memorial's sponsoring governmental agencies and organizations to great positive effect.



Commissioners Senator Roberts (left) and Rocco Siciliano (right) pose with Architect Frank Gehry (center) at a reception announcing the designer for the Eisenhower Memorial, Washington, DC, July 2009

Rocco worked very closely with Commission Vice Chair Senator Daniel Inouye. They shared a profound belief in the relevance and pertinence of Eisenhower's life story to their fellow Americans. On one occasion in Senator Inouye's offices, the usually taciturn and circumspect Senator verbosely regaled a surprised Rocco with the importance for America of the War of 1812 and how oblivious American high school students were of its significance. Recognizing Rocco's masked puzzlement as to why the Senator was carrying on, I discretely signaled that I did not know the Senator's purposes, and then the Senator said, "And Rocco, if we don't do something about Ike, our ignorant students won't know about him either!"

Subsequently, I thought that the incident was a great page out of arcane historical Americana and regretted that I did not have a video recording of this Japanese-American from Hawaii passionately and personally calling for his fellow commissioner and colleague, the Italian-American from Utah, to join together in sharing the life story of Ike, this great German-American from Kansas, with all Americans, especially to educate the young.



Members of the EMC team present Mr. Siciliano with a plaque and gavel, "In recognition and sincere appreciation of his leadership as Chairman of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial Commission 2001 - 20015," at Siciliano's home in Beverly Hills, CA, May 2015

I am aware that some of you have known Rocco well and for some time and will wonder why I have not spoken to some of his other virtues, talents and extraordinary skills. To be sure, I have only touched the surface of his multi-faceted character, especially in the unusual combination of his humanity with his shrewdness in life's affairs as well as in the management and leadership of large, successful organizations.

All of this is a reminder of what a privilege it was to have Rocco as a leader in the cause of sharing Ike's story with all Americans, especially the young, which in the final analysis is one of the best pieces of evidence we have that the great historical experiment of America works.

Carl W. Reddel, Brig. Gen., USAF (Ret.)
Executive Director



Chairman Siciliano and the full Commission at a meeting in Washington, DC, March 2009



Architect Frank Gehry (left) and Chairman Rocco Siciliano (right) lean over a model of the Eisenhower Memorial at a Commission meeting in Washington, DC, July 2011



Diane Disney Miller and Rocco Siciliano at a fundraising event hosted by Disney Miller for the Eisenhower Memorial, San Francisco, CA, October 2012

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