

# IN TRIBUTE TO MY FRIEND DON YOUNG



**DON YOUNG,  
LONGTIME ALASKA  
CONGRESSMAN AND  
BOONE AND  
CROCKETT CLUB  
MEMBER, PASSED  
AWAY THIS PAST  
MARCH. HE WAS A  
TRUE FORCE IN THE  
HALLS OF CONGRESS.**

**My friend Don Young was irascible, at times less than eloquent, opinionated though generally correct, and demonstrated his love for his fellow Alaskans by dedicating almost his entire adult life to public service to create opportunities that would improve the daily lives of his state's citizens.**

Known as the Dean of the House and Congressman for all Alaska, he passed away suddenly this past March while traveling home. His wife Ann was by his side.

I first met Don when I was a child. The year was 1968. He was serving in the State House with my father, past Boone and Crockett regular member Ken Brady. Those were heady and exciting times for our young state. The legislature broke new ground as they planned and developed the framework and infrastructure necessary to build our government and communities.

I was lucky enough to hunt and fish with Don many times, particularly whitetail

Congressman Don Young, Senator Ted Stevens, and Governor Jay Hammond discussing the 200-mile U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in October of 1975. (Photo Credit: Anchorage Daily News)

hunting in South Texas. No one was more fun in camp or around the campfire than Don. He had more tall tales than anyone, including a couple that might even have been true.

His public service began in Fort Yukon, Alaska, a remote village located above the Arctic Circle in Alaska's interior. He was elected mayor there in 1964. Two years later, he was elected to the state legislature in Juneau where he served in the state House from 1966 to 1970, and later in the state Senate from 1970 to 1973.

First sworn in as a freshman to the 93rd Congress after winning a special election in March 1973, Don was serving his 25th term, and he was the longest serving member of the current Congress when he passed away. He became Dean of the House in 2017. For the vast

majority of Alaska's citizens, he was the only Congressman they ever knew.

Just hours after being first sworn in to the United States House of Representatives, he found himself leading the historic battle for approval of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. Often citing this as the single most important achievement in his career, Congressman Young stated, "Next to statehood itself, the most historical legislation passed that affected every Alaskan then, now, and in the future, was the passage of the pipeline legislation." That same year, his colleagues honored him as the Freshman Congressman of the Year.

Congressman Young served as Chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee from 1995 to 2001 and then as the Chairman of



the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee from 2001 to 2007. In the 110th Congress, Representative Young returned to the helm of the Resources Committee to lead his fellow Republicans as the Ranking Member. In the 112th Congress, he was chosen to serve as the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Indian, Insular and Alaska Native Affairs (IIANA)—a position he held until January 2017. After fulfilling a successful six-year term as Chairman of the IIANA Subcommittee, Congressman Young was named Chairman Emeritus of the full House Committee on Natural Resources—a role that allowed him to bring his years of experience and knowledge to all five of the



LEFT: Tim Brady awarding Don with the Associated General Contractors of Alaska "Hard Hat" award for significant contributions to the Alaska construction industry in 2017. MIDDLE: (Left to right) Don Young and Regular Member John Hendrix along with Ed Gohr chasing king salmon in Alaska. RIGHT: (Left to right) Tim Brady and Don with former Alaska Governor and Secretary of the Interior Wally Hickel in South Texas in 1999.

panel's subcommittees. Most recently, Congressman Young served as the most senior Republican on both the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and House Natural Resources Committee.

A Boone and Crockett Club professional member since 1990, Don believed in the mission and vision of the Club and was instrumental in helping us shape conservation policy over the last five decades. He understood that hunters were the champions of wildlife and habitat conservation and fought diligently to increase funding for state wildlife agencies via the Pittman-Robertson Act. He worked hard for increased access to public lands so Americans could enjoy the wonderful wild places we have in this country. In 1997, he passed (by a 419-1 vote) the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, which set guidelines and priority uses within our nation's 550-plus wildlife refuges. Over the last five years, the Boone and Crockett Club and our conservation community partners realized some of the greatest policy achievements we have seen over the last 50 years, and Congressman Young helped lead our efforts. Some of the legislation passed includes: The John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act in 2019, The Great American

Outdoors Act in 2020, and America's Conservation Enhancement Act also in 2020. These bills support enhanced opportunities for hunters, fisherman, and recreational shooters, as well as address the deferred maintenance backlog on federal public lands and waters, and reauthorizing vital programs including the North American Wetlands Conservation Act and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Born in 1933 in Meridian, California, Don earned his associate degree at Yuba Junior College in 1952, and his bachelor's degree in teaching at Chico State College in 1958. Between earning his degrees, he served in the U.S. Army's 41st Tank Battalion from 1955 to 1957.

It was in Fort Yukon that Representative Young met and married a young bookkeeper named Lu. Lu was always at the Congressman's side and supported him throughout his public service career. Lu and Don were married for 46 years. They were blessed with two daughters and 14 grandchildren. Lu passed away in 2009. Although Congressman Young never imagined he would find love again, in 2015 he married Anne Garland Walton, a Fairbanks-area flight nurse and proud mother of two children and six grandchildren.

When he first moved to Alaska, Don made a living

in construction and tried his hand at commercial fishing, trapping, and gold mining. In Fort Yukon he taught a 25-student, fifth grade elementary class in the Bureau of Indian Affairs school. During late spring and summers, he captained his own tug and barge to deliver essential products and supplies to villages along the Yukon River. He was the only licensed mariner in Congress.

Congressman Young proudly served as the "Congressman for All Alaska" and loved his role as the only Alaskan Representative in Congress. In his almost 50 years of service, his vision always remained the same—to provide citizens with the opportunity for a better life not just for today, but also for tomorrow and the future.

Congressman Young received the rare honor of lying in state in Statuary Hall at the United States Capitol. Memorial services were held in Great Falls, Virginia, and in Anchorage, Alaska.

The history of Alaska is replete with larger-than-life characters—men and women who accomplished the seemingly impossible who routinely took on challenges that most would shrink from. Don was one of those wonderful personalities that believed anything was possible and quite often proved that to himself and others. I will miss him. ■



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