



ROOSEVELT

A MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY

REVIEW FALL 2009



Mike Quigley

Roosevelt Alumnus
is Illinois' Newest
Congressman



The Freshman

BY LAURA JANOTA

U.S. Representative Mike Quigley is Making the Grade in Washington

Illinois Congressman Mike Quigley felt a bit like Mr. Smith when he first arrived in Washington, D.C., last April.

“There’s this temptation to say ‘This is fun and spectacular,’” said Quigley (BA, ’81), who, like Mr. Smith in Frank Capra’s *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, couldn’t help but be fascinated by his surroundings and the new job before him.

“It’s exciting to recognize that you’re the one who decides things like who gets health care and who gets education,” said Quigley. The Roosevelt political science and environmental policy alumnus won a 12-candidate Democratic primary and a special election earlier this year for the 5th Congressional District seat held by Rahm Emmanuel, who resigned to become White House chief of staff to President Barack Obama.

“Then you realize that this is serious business and that there’s this extraordinary learning curve you face without much orientation or training. It’s extraordinary pressure,” said Quigley, who, nonetheless, has hit the ground running, learning as he goes.

Unlike the naïve Mr. Smith, Quigley is a seasoned politician who spent more than a decade as an elected Cook County commissioner, and before that, as a top aide in the office of former Chicago Alderman Bernie Hansen, where he learned how to get things done.

Much like Mr. Smith, though, Quigley is earnest, even idealistic, about what can be accomplished for constituents in his district and for the nation as a whole.

“It only takes one voice to stand above the crowd and touch people’s lives,” said Quigley, who gave his first address on the House floor about the need to strengthen federal hate crimes legislation to include enhanced penalties for crimes that are committed because of one’s sexual orientation.

Since then, Quigley has been to the White House Rose Garden to witness President Barack Obama’s signing of the Civil Rights Oral History Project bill that the congressman co-sponsored. He has spoken in favor of replacing the U.S. military’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy toward gays and lesbians with a non-discrimination policy. He’s also taken early public stands in favor of women’s choice and human rights in Cuba.

“As a congressman, I plan to stand up whenever I can for the ideals that our country is all about,” he said.

Politician, trial lawyer, environmentalist, grassroots organizer and a good-government policy expert with a bachelor’s degree from Roosevelt, a master’s degree in public policy from the University of Chicago and a law degree from Loyola University, Quigley believes fairness, equality and justice best define America. Furthermore, he credits his Roosevelt University education with being the first to emphasize and instill him with those values, giving Quigley the foundation that has spawned a career dedicated to fairness and equality for all.



“I wouldn’t be where I am today without the University,” he said.

At Roosevelt, Quigley took an interest in the environment and environmental policy, and did an internship with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in Chicago. One of his professors at the time was former adjunct faculty member Mary Gade, one of the Midwest’s most respected environmentalists and a former head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in Chicago.

Another one of Quigley’s favorite Roosevelt professors was the late political science professor Frank Untermyer. “I was in a tough situation trying to get through school and it was extraordinary that someone could be so benevolent and willing to help,” said Quigley.

Struggling financially, Quigley remembers being hungry and taking some leftover food once from a table outside Untermyer’s office, where a University event had just ended. As he ate, a phone call to complain was made to Untermyer.

“I could hear him (Untermyer) telling the person, ‘He (Quigley) was hungry. Do you know what it’s like to be hungry?’” recalled Quigley, who also took a loan from Untermyer to get through college. After graduation, Quigley paid Untermyer back in monthly installments.

In all, Quigley spent 11 years of learning at higher education institutions. While law school taught him much about the constitutional concepts of equality, fairness and justice, Roosevelt’s Untermyer lived those values, effectively making the point for Quigley that it is those principles that really matter in the end. In recent years, Quigley also has stressed those principles in the classroom, giving back to his alma mater as an adjunct instructor of political science and environmental management at Roosevelt University.

“Of all the educational institutions I attended, Roosevelt was, by far, the kindest and gentlest to me. It was the place that really humanized me,” he said.

Roosevelt University Political Science Professor Paul Green, who has watched Quigley’s political career take off in recent years, believes his success is tied in part to his image as a reformer fighting for social causes.

“Mike Quigley understands that politics and social justice are compatible,” said Green.



Congressman Mike Quigley (far left) joins President Barack Obama and other officials for the signing of a bill that Quigley co-sponsored creating the Civil Rights Oral History Project.

“He’s learned that you can be a good politician by showing that you can get things done for the people in the tradition of Franklin Delano Roosevelt,” he said.

While Quigley believes strongly in the ideals of the University’s namesakes, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, he won’t necessarily be hearkening back to the New Deal for his agenda. Instead, Quigley wants to be a voice for progressive change.

“My reach in the end, as President Obama said, will be to reinvent government, make it smaller, consolidate things and make it more efficient,” said Quigley. “Government matters but it has to adapt to the time that it serves.”

As a county commissioner, Quigley wrote a widely acclaimed 70-page report, “Reinventing County Government,” which calls for major reforms aimed at making Cook County government more efficient. One of the recommendations that Quigley made in the report was to get rid of township government – a proposal he believes would eliminate duplication of services by townships and counties, thereby saving taxpayers money.

It is a concept that David Hamilton, professor emeritus of public administration at Roosevelt, writes about extensively and embraces as a good-government, taxpayer-friendly idea. “I used Mike Quigley’s report as a source in my research, and I also had him present in one of my classes,” recalled Hamilton. “He was vigorous and dynamic, and you could see that he was passionate

about government service and improving the delivery of services.”

As an instructor at Roosevelt, Quigley has shared many of his experiences on what it is like to work in government.

“One of the great things about his class was his stories,” said Lynora Dobry (MPA, ’07), who took Quigley’s government management course where she heard a lot about Cook County government and Quigley’s reform efforts. “He opened our eyes to the fact that it takes one person to be the voice of reason and to change things for the better,” she said.

Quigley also has reached out to Roosevelt students, giving them advice on future careers, and in the case of Dobry, hiring her after her graduation first as his Cook County legislative affairs director, and most recently as the community outreach director in his congressional office in Chicago.

Currently focused on learning and getting things done at the federal level, Quigley regrets that he no longer has the time to teach and share his practical experience with students in the classroom. However, he is bringing that expertise – and idealism – to Washington, D.C., where he believes he can make a difference and change things for the better.

“Don’t let anyone tell you you can’t make a difference,” said Quigley, who is known for giving that advice to his students. “Don’t let anyone say you can’t change the world,” he added. “You can, and you have a moral responsibility to try.” **R**