



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

JACK M. MARTINS January 5, 2015

The Heart of the Matter

I know it's probably not true, but it seems the promise and excitement of the New Year always brings with it a bit of heartache. This time we lost a beloved New Yorker. On New Year's Day, shortly after Governor Andrew Cuomo gave his second inauguration speech, his father, former Governor Mario Cuomo, succumbed to heart failure. He was 82 years old. His untimely death is unquestionably a tremendous upset to his family, but it's also a blow to everyday New Yorkers – the “family of New York” as Mario once so impeccably put it.

Now, the first question that may come into the more cynical mind is why I, a Republican state senator, hold a liberal Democrat like Mario Cuomo in such high regard. I guess it's simply a matter of shared histories. You see, Mario was born to Italian immigrant parents, in South Jamaica, Queens, to a father who dug ditches and then went on to start his own successful grocery store. I was born in the same neighborhood, to immigrant parents from Portugal. My dad dug so many holes and poured so many foundations that he's lost count, and he too went on to develop his own, successful business. I'm certain that those humble immigrant beginnings in an America that delivered so much for our families shaped Mario as much as it shaped me. At least I like to think so. His graduation from St. John's Law, my Alma Mater as well, solidified this conviction for me.

I believe it was this working-class framework that underpinned Governor Cuomo's passion for, and approach to, public service. As he once put it, his heart was always with workers "whose fingers are too thick to work a computer keyboard," and I know that sentiment well. To be sure, how we believed to best help everyday New Yorkers may have been different, but I long admired his renowned commitment to the cause. What's more, I can say I that I have tried, albeit not nearly as well, to emulate his unwavering dedication to public discourse and debate. Mario Cuomo was a talker. He was a tough but gifted mediator and even more brilliant orator who believed that conversation was key to understanding "the other guy," and making progress.

Nor did he shy away from confrontation, and legend has it that he would walk right into crowds of protesters just to hear their side. During his first gubernatorial campaign, while he was routinely being attacked for not embracing the death penalty as an answer to the high crime gripping New York, pundits predicted his loss. So Mario traveled throughout New York, boldly explaining his position and he went on to win that race. And no one disputes that through it all, from negotiations as a young lawyer protecting homeowners in Corona, Queens to negotiating billion dollar budgets, Governor Cuomo was always gracious. He was a statesman to the umpteenth degree and it is this kind spirit of civility and discourse that inspires my efforts in Albany.

Whether you agreed with his politics or not, one thing is indisputable: there are very few people in New York history whose service was marked by such idealism. He was a man of integrity, and compassion was undeniably his calling card. For that New Yorkers remember him as more than just a governor, but a good man. And no higher compliment can be paid.

On behalf of myself, my family, and all the residents of our district here on Long Island, I extend our prayerful condolences to his wife of 60 years, Matilda, and to his children, Governor Andrew Cuomo, Maria, Margaret, Madeline and Christopher.

In one of his most riveting speeches, Mario Cuomo said, “At the heart of the matter we are bound one to another.” He was right and as New York’s three-term governor, from 1983 to 1994, we, all New Yorkers, are most certainly bound to him.