

Rep. Portman has served his district well

U.S. Congressman Rob Portman was recently asked by President Bush to join his Cabinet and serve as U.S. Trade Representative. After Senate confirmation, Portman would be leaving the Cincinnati area seat he has held since his election in 1993.

When I asked Rob Portman in 1993 why he wanted to run for Congress, he said “it’s a national platform from which to do good.” And a lot of good he did.

He checked federal power. His first legislative act was the authorship and passage of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act. While not perfect and some large unfunded mandates continue, the Act halted many bad laws and ensured Congress never passed others without knowing the impact on their state and local partners. He also reformed the Internal Revenue Service, co-chairing a commission and passing a law that added new taxpayer rights and made Uncle Sam more responsive to the public.

He fostered local consensus and helped young people. Portman started the Coalition for a Drug-Free Greater Cincinnati to mobilize parents, educators, clergy, chief executives, counselors and others to develop innovative ways to prevent and treat skyrocketing teenage substance abuse. It was so successful he authored and passed the Drug-Free Communities Act, which today provides significant federal support and has helped start hundreds of similar coalitions around the country in the United States.

He supported important efforts locally. He obtained key matching federal support for the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center; broke through government bureaucracy to safeguard Warren County’s drinking water; and helped accelerate the cleanup of Fernald and provide safe power and new jobs in Pekton.

He fought for land conservation. Portman authored and secured passage of the Tropical Forest Conservation Act, which has conserved 54 million acres of tropical forests on two continents.

And he strengthened the safety net, passing pension reform and tax legislation that provided new tools for saving and investment at a time when we need more of both.

In every case, he reached across the aisle to gain bipartisan support; built local, state and national coalitions; and stayed focused on facts and sound policies. In the process he was honest and ethical. Through his accomplishments and integrity, he has enhanced the image of public service.

At the senior staff table in the White House, the phrase, “where’s Portman on that issue?” became a mantra, as the Administration looked to the Ohio Republican to get the job done on its domestic agenda. Now the President has sought out Portman to complete his Cabinet, and Portman has answered the call.

When I asked Portman last week why he wanted to be U.S. Trade Representative, he replied, “it’s a national platform from which to do good.” His focus had not changed since 1993. No doubt, some great good he will do.

John Bridgeland was Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council and USA Freedom Corps under President George W. Bush during the first term and was Chief of Staff to Congressman Rob Portman from 1993 to 1998.