

# Marker panel shortchanging Dan Flood

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS ago, Daniel J. Flood resigned from Congress pleading guilty to a federal prosecutor's charge that he had taken bribes in exchange for his influence on Capitol Hill. Judge Oliver Gasch, calling a prison sentence "inappropriate" for a 76-year-old man in precarious health, gave him a year's probation.

Flood later insisted he was innocent and that he pleaded guilty only to spare himself the rigors of a trial. But the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission still seems to be intent on punishing him.

For the second year in a row, the PHMC recently rejected a proposal that would have recognized Flood's contributions to the state and the nation on a blue-and-gold roadside marker. That marker would have been placed near his district office on Wilkes-Barre's Public Square.

"Flood is clearly a part of controversial history," wrote Kenneth Wolensky, the historian who chairs PHMC's marker committee. "The suggested text (for the marker) ignores the criminal accusations at the end of his life." The committee went on to recommend the writing of a "definitive biography of Flood" that would look at his career "on balance." Such "documentation" would "better serve" a historical marker nomination.

That would be well and good if the concerns about Flood's resignation from office hadn't already been addressed in the latest proposal, or if the recommendation of a "definitive biography" had been made the first time the proposal was rejected. Instead, one gets the impression that PHMC is looking for any excuse to avoid honoring a public servant who did more for the Common-

## COMMENTARY

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wealth of Pennsylvania, and this country, than most other members of Congress.

From 1967 to 1980, Flood served as chairman of the Labor, Health, Education and Welfare Subcommittee and vice chairman of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee. As a result, he



exercised near veto power over much of the \$300 billion federal budget.

While his exceptional success in the art of pork-barrel politics allowed him to channel millions of health, education and welfare dollars into Northeastern Pennsylvania, Flood's vision of the national interest made the Johnson administration's "War on Poverty" financially possible.

But Flood, who worked his legislative magic through patronage, horse-trading, influence-peddling, had become a dinosaur by 1980. His fierce opposition to surrendering U.S. control of the Panama Canal put him on a collision course with the Carter administration. His pugnacious wheeling and dealing and the grandiloquent oratory that accompanied it on the House floor was resented by congressional

colleagues, who yearned for the same high visibility but without having to make the same substantive legislative contributions.

It was Flood's great misfortune to be caught in the chasm between the old Machiavellian politics that once dominated Capitol Hill and the era of public cynicism that immediately followed Watergate. Congress had been forced to discover "morality." Not surprisingly, Flood's case was among the very first to come before the House Ethics Committee shortly after it was established. He was to be made an example.

I wonder how many of those people who benefited from the Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969, the Black Lung Benefits Act of 1972, or the federal relief dollars that followed in the wake of Tropical Storm Agnes would agree with the PHMC's refusal to honor Flood with a historical marker.

It would be interesting to know how many employees of the PHMC benefited from the Flood-sponsored Area Redevelopment Act of 1961, which became the basis for the Economic Development Administration under President Lyndon Johnson four years later.

PHMC's refusal to recognize Dan Flood raises the question of who we, as a society, should honor for their contributions. Flood had his faults, just like any other public servant. But he certainly did more good for Pennsylvania and the nation than many other figures who have been awarded a state historical marker by the PHMC.

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