



Nobody Calls Just to Say Hello: Reflections on Twenty-Two Years in the Illinois Senate

Philip J. Rock, Ed Wojcicki

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A loyal partisan and highly principled public official whose career overlapped with those of many legends of Illinois politics—including Mayor Richard J. Daley, Governor James Thompson, and Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan—Democrat Philip J. Rock served twenty-two years in the Illinois Senate. Fourteen of those years were spent as senate president, the longest tenure anyone has served in that position. This nuanced political biography, which draws on dozens of interviews conducted by Ed Wojcicki to present the longtime senate president's story in his own words, is also a rare insider's perspective on Illinois politics in the last three decades of the twentieth century.

A native of Chicago's West Side, Rock became one of the most influential politicians in Illinois during the 1970s and 1980s. As a senator in the 1970s and senate president from 1979 to 1993, he sponsored historic legislation to assist abused and neglected children and victims of domestic violence, ushered the state through difficult income tax increases and economic development decisions, shepherded an unruly and fragmented Democratic senate caucus, and always was fair to his Republican counterparts. Covering in great detail a critical period in Illinois political history for the first time, Rock explains how making life better for others drove his decisions in office, while also espousing the seven principles he advocates for effective leadership and providing context for how he applied those principles to the legislative battles of the era.

Unlike many Illinois politicians, Rock, a former seminarian, was known for having a greater interest in issues than in partisan politics. Considered a true statesman, he also was known as a skilled orator who could silence a busy floor of legislators with his commentary on important issues and as a devoted public servant who handled tens of thousands of bills and sponsored nearly five hundred of them himself.

Nobody Calls Just to Say Hello, which takes its title from the volume of calls and visits to elected officials from constituents in need of help, perfectly captures Rock's profound reverence for the institutions of government, his respect for other government offices, and his reputation as a problem solver who, despite his ardent Democratic beliefs, disavowed political self-preservation to cross party lines and make government work for the people. Taking readers through his legislative successes, bipartisan efforts, and political defeats—including a heartbreaking loss in the U.S. Senate primary to Paul Simon in 1984—Rock passionately articulates his belief that government's primary role is to help people, offering an antidote to the current political climate with the simple legislative advice, "Just try to be fair, give everyone a chance, and everything else comes after that."

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