

REMEMBRANCE

My friend and free trade

That issue remained leading cause of Robert Mosbacher

By JAMES A. BAKER III

WHEN Bob Mosbacher died Jan. 24, I lost a close friend, and our country lost one of those rare individuals who combine passion and pragmatism in equal doses. During a career in business and public service that spanned six decades, he accumulated a well-earned reputation for clear thinking and straight talk.

When Mosbacher discussed the energy business, he was like E.F. Hutton — people listened. When he raised money for Republican candidates, he did it with the integrity of a fundraiser whose word was as good as gold.

But most important, when he advocated free trade, his message was as consistent as it was concise — America's economic well-being depended on it.

His views were highlighted during a speech he made in 1991 at the Forum Club of Houston. "Free trade," then-Secretary of Commerce Mosbacher said, "is the future. Innovative technologies and production techniques — many of them American — are shrinking the world marketplace. The challenges of the next century simply will not abate. As one of our great novelists, Thomas Wolfe, said, 'You can't go home again.'"

Now, nearly two decades later, in the epilogue of his memoir that will be released later this spring, Mosbacher remains equally adamant about the critical role of free trade.

"As important as anything," he wrote, "I hope America will not turn inward, and away from the world, as we continue to confront those threats to our shared future. The U.S. economy can, and will, remain the world's leading economy throughout the 21st century provided we not heed the protectionists and isolationists, and withdraw or pull back from the global market."

Mosbacher knew what he was talking about.

As commerce secretary under President George H.W. Bush, Mosbacher was

one of the principal advocates of the North American Free Trade Agreement. He worked tirelessly to advance the treaty, which was designed to carry out the vision that President Bush, and President Reagan before him, had for our hemisphere. Later, although he had left public office, Mosbacher helped to make sure that NAFTA was ratified during the Clinton administration in 1993.

The results speak for themselves. According to the Office of the United States Trade Representative, trade among the NAFTA nations from 1993 to 2007 more than tripled, from \$297 billion to \$930 billion. Business investment in the United States rose by 117 percent during a comparable period,



LONGTIME FRIENDS: Then-Texas Heart Institute Leadership Award Dinner co-chair Robert Mosbacher, left, shared a moment with James A. Baker III in 2001. Baker was an honoree at the dinner.

compared with a 45 percent increase between 1979 and 1993. And Canada and Mexico became two of our best trading partners. The giant sucking sound that naysayers predicted turned out to be the sound of cross-border opportunities entering America.

When Mosbacher and I

were members of President Bush's Cabinet, free trade was one issue upon which both sides of our polity in America could agree. Sadly, the passage of NAFTA represented the high-water mark for free trade agreements.

In today's supercharged political environment, where red-state, blue-state rivalries make bipartisan achievements in Washington a rarity, a growing cacophony of voices is questioning our role as the world's foremost advocate of free markets. Regrettably, these groups have found a more sympathetic audience for their counterproductive views in the corridors of U.S. power.

Despite the successes of NAFTA and other free trade agreements, protectionism is growing, reflecting in large part the public's anxiety about high unemployment and economic uncertainty. According to a recent poll, only 43 percent of Americans believe that free trade agreements benefit the U.S. economy. Only a decade ago, polling showed that 56 percent of Americans believed that free trade would promote economic growth for our country. As a result of the changes in the political landscape, proposed free trade agreements between

the United States and Colombia, Panama and South Korea languish in Congress without ratification.

Today, the world is watching to see what America will do. Will we remain committed to the free markets we have advocated for decades? Or will we display an isolationist/protectionist attitude that will end up limiting the opportunities of American workers and businesspeople alike?

I know what Bob Mosbacher would have advocated had he lived.

He would argue, as he does in that forthcoming memoir of his, that "I hope our nation will set a different course veering away from a counterproductive direction that restricts trade or investments here. (T)he only way we can fix (our) problems, and ensure our continued prosperity, is to stay engaged in the global economy.

"Besides, the world still looks to America, with all our challenges, to lead by example. They expect it."

And, of course, Bob Mosbacher would be right.

Baker was secretary of state under President George H.W. Bush and secretary of the Treasury under President Ronald Reagan.



PAUL LACHINE

POLITICS

A realistic, pragmatic approach to health care reform

■ With his focus back on children, president would be reaching out to both parties

By VIVIAN HO

POLICYMAKERS in Washington are continuing to struggle with the future of health care reform in the aftermath of Republican Scott Brown's election to the Senate. With the loss of their 60-vote majority in the Senate, Democrats can no longer be assured of passing legislation without the threat of a Republican filibuster. The leaders of the House and Senate drafted legislation that was subject to special interest groups from all sides, rather than creating cohesive policy that would have improved access to health care and controlled rising costs. There is talk now in Washington of "scaled-back" health care reform, but policymakers have failed to coalesce around what model that scaled-back reform should take.

President Barack Obama should make a clear and detailed statement on his new proposal for health care reform as quickly as possible. The public continually expressed its dissatisfaction over the Democrats' version of reform the past several months. Yet the need remains. Health care now consumes more than 16 percent of gross domestic product, but more than 45 million Americans are struggling without health insurance.

It would be wise for the president to return to the policy he supported as a candidate in the Democratic primaries — providing health coverage to all children in the U.S. Implementing universal access to health care for all children is politically acceptable to both Democrats and Republicans, and it is generally appealing to the public. Past research has also demonstrated that insuring children is much less expensive than covering adults (because children are healthier on average than adults) and is in fact cost-saving to society in the long run.

Beyond insuring children, scaled-back reform should focus on measures that control rising health care costs. A growing body of medical research indicates that our health care providers are wasting tremendous resources on treatments that provide little or no value to patients. If we can control these unnecessary costs, health insurance premiums will stop rising, and more consumers will be able to afford it.

It is crucial that the president act quickly and decisively. As the year progresses, members of Congress facing re-election will increasingly be distracted by partisan politics rather than the need to draft legislation that improves the quality of our health care system in the long run. The time to act on health care reform is now.

Ho is the chair in health economics at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy and associate professor of medicine at Baylor College of Medicine.



NAOKAZU OINUMA : ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

CABINET MEMBER: Robert Mosbacher, commerce secretary under President George H.W. Bush, spoke at Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry in Tokyo in 1991.

REFORM: Dialogue sought

CONTINUED FROM PAGE B10 scientific random sample of Americans but rather on an opt-in online panel survey."

We are not calling for an amnesty or open-borders policy such as our opponents might claim.

Our intention is to begin meaningful conversation in our congregations about the important moral dimensions of this issue and to urge Congress to act now.

This article was authored by DiNardo, Doyle, Rinehart, Clemons and the Rev. John Bowie, pastor of True Light Missionary Baptist Church and co-chair of The Metropolitan Organization.



JAMES NIELSEN : CHRONICLE

SPEAK OUT: Among those leading the immigration discussion were United Methodist Bishop Janice Riggle Huie, from left, Episcopal Bishop C. Andrew Doyle and Catholic Cardinal Daniel DiNardo.

POWER: Who will want it if it will cost more?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE B10 able to stay with property if it's sold. Those who wisely made the improvements will be free of ongoing debt if they decide to move.

In the end, who will want expensive nuclear power when more affordable options are available? NRG has been searching for more than a year for a buyer for 20 percent of the proposed STP expansion. None has surfaced. San Antonio wants less of its share and may want to get out altogether.

Houston ratepayers will be hit with large electric rate

hikes if NRG continues down the nuclear path. Former Nuclear Regulatory Commission member Peter Bradford predicted a 60 percent increase in utility bills for San Antonio with more nuclear power. Expensive and risky nuclear power should be dropped in favor of clean, affordable and quickly deployed wind and solar energy.

Hershey is a fiction writer, an environmental activist and a partner in a farming and ranching business. She was born in Houston and has lived here most of her life.

STUDENTS: Speed will be important

CONTINUED FROM PAGE B10

Texas Education Agency, the commissioner of education, the State Board of Education and other appropriate officials to ensure that the discretionary aspects of the reforms embodied in HB 3 are implemented in accordance with our recommendations and legislative intent.

■ Assisting the appropriate officials in their work to upgrade the state's education data systems in order to provide the necessary infrastructure to accommodate the enhanced accountability system.

■ Working with the TEA to ensure appropriate standards for use of the new Texas Projection Model, which tracks student growth toward proficiency on the post-secondary readiness "ramp."

■ Assisting the TEA in developing more rigorous and relevant career and technology courses that will improve the options for students who choose to pursue a high school pathway to industry or commercial certification.

And fourth, while implementation of new legislation is important, we are also working hard on other policy developments with a view toward the next legislative session as well as policy enhancements through the various rule-making authorities in the interim:

■ We will work closely with the Texas Charter Schools Association to develop policy to strengthen charter schools as competitive alternatives by closing ineffective charters, providing equitable funding



DEAN ROHRER

for successful charters and increasing or eliminating the cap on charters.

■ We will continue to advocate for measures that enhance educator quality, partly through implementation of new legislation and partly through working with the TEA, the State Board for Educator Certification and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to develop rules that will lower barriers to entry; more properly evaluate and compensate teacher effectiveness; assess and improve teacher preparation and professional development programs; identify, remediate or remove ineffective educators; and improve the quality of campus leadership.

■ We will be actively engaged as a policy resource on such interim legislative study issues as expansion of prekindergarten and public school finance.

If all this seems ambitious, it is. But we must

pursue these policy deliberations and enhancements with all deliberate speed, and we cannot delay them any longer, because to do so would be a disservice to our kids and our future.

And while all this is proceeding at the state policy level, there is an important point to note about federal initiatives. The thrust of the majority of public-education policy pronouncements of the secretary of education are consistent with TIER's objectives, and the administration should be applauded for adding its voice and encouragement in support of states that are working to improve their standards.

This is a never-ending battle, and we must win. It's the civil rights campaign of the 21st century.

Windham is chairman of the Texas Institute for Education Reform (www.texaseducationreform.org).