

Statement of U.S. Rep. Steve Rothman on the Passing of Congressman Peter Rodino

For Immediate Release

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STATEMENT OF U.S. REP. STEVE ROTHMAN ON THE PASSING OF CONGRESSMAN PETER RODINO

Yesterday, I attended the funeral of one of the greatest statesmen and political leaders in the history of the United States, the Honorable Peter Rodino, Jr. A distinguished Member of the United States House of Representatives for fully four decades, Peter Rodino, Jr. was possessed of an innate sense of wisdom and fairness, and the American people were blessed to be the beneficiaries of his remarkable leadership.

These qualities served him and our nation well during a time of constitutional crisis, when a pervasive atmosphere of lawlessness seemed to permeate our government's Executive Branch and the very institution of the Presidency itself. After the eruption into the public consciousness of a series of crimes and scandals that came collectively to be referred to as "Watergate", Peter Rodino, Jr. demonstrated extraordinary leadership and judgment as Chairman of the powerful House Judiciary Committee. In that capacity, he was able to forge a bipartisan consensus that saw the Federal Government weather one of its darkest hours to emerge with our democratic institutions and principles stronger, more resilient and more relevant than ever.

When the impeachment hearings of President Richard Nixon began, Peter Rodino, Jr. said of the House Judiciary Committee, "I really believe that this is an instance when we can demonstrate that the system does work." He not only made good on that promise to the American people, he bequeathed to us an enduring legacy of renewed faith in our republic, its Constitution, and the system of checks and balances envisioned by our Founding Fathers. After he led the House Judiciary Committee to produce bipartisan majorities on two articles of impeachment, additional revelations about the Nixon administration's malfeasance cemented a unanimous recommendation for impeachment to the entire House. Shortly thereafter, the most powerful leader in the world announced his resignation from the Presidency. "I believe our laws and our system will be stronger for it. I hope we will all be better for it," said Chairman Rodino at the time.

Of course, he was right, as he was throughout his career on so many vital issues ranging from civil rights, to fair employment, to voting rights. Thirty-four years after the momentous events of the Nixon impeachment proceedings in 1974, I was privileged to draw directly from Chairman Rodino's wisdom. I found myself in circumstances that must have seemed familiar to him: I was a Democratic Congressman from Northern New Jersey serving on the House Judiciary Committee, confronted with difficult decisions surrounding the controversial impeachment proceedings of a sitting President. I traveled to Peter Rodino's home/office at Seton Hall University School of Law in order to benefit from his sage counsel, his humane compassion, and his voice of experience. He urged me to be fair and follow the constitution-to rely on my understanding of the law and my principles in coming to a decision on the difficult matters before me. It was advice that I followed then, and continue to follow to this day.

It is with sadness in my heart, but also tremendous pride, that I said goodbye to Chairman Peter Rodino Jr. this week. Along with Woodrow Wilson, I believe he was the greatest leader New Jersey produced in the twentieth century. We in the Garden State are privileged and proud to have sent him to Congress for forty years, and as a result, the entire nation was fortunate enough to benefit from his wisdom, courage and leadership during some of the most difficult moments in

its history. We will never forget Congressman Peter Rodino, Jr. and the enduring legacy that he has bequeathed every American.