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INVITED EDITORIAL COMMENTARY

In remembrance of Robert D. Tollison

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The passing of Robert D. ("Bob") Tollison obviously was a great loss to the economics profession, to public choice and to his many friends and admirers. For those who knew Bob as a colleague, a close friend, and an inspiration, his death was a shock and will leave a lingering hurt. I knew Bob had some health issues, but who doesn't after having passed their three score and ten. But he went too suddenly for someone who was still a prodigious scholar, who had so much more to contribute and look forward to, and who projected such a sense of invincibility. It was his powers as an economist, the creativity and consistency exhibited in his scholarship, and his joy in his family and friendships, that are vivid in my memories of Bob.

Bob was a brilliant scholar, but there was a methodological consistency in his work that is rare even among the best of them. Whether he, like Gordon Tullock, was a natural economist who grew up seeing self-interest as the overriding human motivation, or came to this view from his economics training, I can't answer. But I never saw any indication of Bob wavering in the slightest from the power of self-interest in explaining human behavior. Indeed, Bob would seize on opportunities to defend the assumption of self-interest even when most would have considered it safe to pass on such occasions, or to be more "reasonable." I remember one of the Wednesday night seminars at the Public Choice Center in Blacksburg when Jim Buchanan challenged a guest speaker (I don't remember who) for assuming self-interest when it was not, according to Buchanan, appropriate to do so. The issue may have been expressive voting, but again I don't remember. What I do remember is Bob challenging Jim with words to the effect that, *I learned from you that people are just as motivated by self-interest when making political decisions as when making market decisions, and I'm sticking with that view whether you do or not*. Being new to the Public Choice Center at the time, but having heard of Jim's temper, I was impressed with Bob's courage, and went on full alert. But Jim responded graciously, the seminar continued and my heart rate returned to normal.

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Ideas were obviously important to Bob, which is not surprising given that he could be described as an idea factory. Bob was not optimistic, however, that the ideas of public choice would improve the political process. Remaining consistent to his methodological view, he saw interests rather than ideas as the driving force behind political outcomes. This helps explain why Bob and Buchanan, despite the tremendous respect they had for each other as scholars, and their mutual affection as friends, were not always enthusiastic about how the other approached the study of public choice. Buchanan saw constitutions supplemented by the animating ideals of freedom and responsibility (what he referred to in one article as the "soul of classical liberalism") as critical to constraining government and maintaining a classical liberal economic order. Bob was skeptical of the emphasis on what was first described by Richard McKenzie as "Constitution Economics", preferring to explain economic and political behavioral, including the drafting of constitutions, as the pursuit of self-interest. Bob once published a paper on state constitutions showing that many were loaded with special-interest items, such as limits on the price of milk.

All those who knew Bob also knew that although self-interest informed his scholarly work, it did not describe his relationships with his colleagues, coauthors, and students, except in a tautological sense. He could not be described as a push over when it came to departmental and campus politics, but he was fair and often generous with those whom he had disagreements. He took his teaching seriously, working diligently to help the many graduate students who asked him to direct their Ph.D. research to get their dissertations started and completed, and then get good academic jobs. For many students, Bob's help and guidance continued beyond their graduations as he worked with them to refine and develop ideas that grew out of ongoing collaborations. And some of Bob's roughly 250 refereed articles, 12 books, more than 100 chapters in edited books, not to mention several textbooks, books reviews and editorials, were authored with colleagues and associates who were not his students.

Student or not, it was an honor to work with Bob as a coauthor, in addition to being an opportunity to improve one's skills as an economist. No one who knew Bob's intellect, his work habits, and his expectations regarding coauthors thought that he was carrying them, at least not for long, or that they were carrying him. We knew Bob was a fount of interesting ideas and that he wanted to get them into publishable form quickly to clear the pipeline for more, which meant that he expected ability and diligence from his coauthors. Bob liked to say, *rejected in the morning mail, resubmitted in the afternoon mail*. There seldom was any afternoon mail, but Bob's coauthors understood that they were likely to get a call soon after the morning mail was delivered.

It was my good fortune to be a colleague of Bob's at Virginia Tech from 1978 until 1981, when he left to become the Director of the Bureau of Economics at the Federal Trade Commission, and then at George Mason from 1983 until 1985, when I left for the University of Georgia. As a colleague, a friend, and a coauthor, I had many conversations with Bob, mostly about economics with some light banter and jokes sprinkled in. But the two most memorable conversations I had with Bob were short and serious, and had nothing to do with economic theory.

The first conversation occurred when I first met Bob in New Orleans at the 1977 Southern Economic Association meetings on the way to Virginia Tech to give a seminar, in the hope of spending the next academic year there while on sabbatical from the University of Colorado. During our talk, the fact that I was getting divorced came up and Bob mentioned that he had gone through a divorce a few years earlier, but had met and married a wonderful woman, and was sure things would work out for me as they had for him. I remember the conversation for the sincerity of Bob's comments and for making me a little less nervous about my seminar at Virginia Tech. It is not likely, however, that after almost 40 years I would be recalling it as memorable conversation if it were not for the second conversation.

For several years, beginning in 2007, my wife and I visited Bob and Anna at the beach house they rented outside Charleston, South Carolina, during the Christmas holidays. One late afternoon the four of us were walking along the beach, Bob and I walking together about 50 yards behind Anna and my wife. At one point, Bob and I starting talking about how much our wives meant to us, and how much we loved them. Because it was so natural for Bob to see and explain things in terms of self-interest, I almost expected him to explain his love for Anna in those terms. He certainly could have, but he didn't. He simply said that he loved her, that he had loved her from almost the first time he saw her, and loved her more than ever. It was a short, but poignant conversation between two happily married men. But it was particularly touching for me because of that first conversation Bob and I had. Bob was right about things working out for me because during that sabbatical year at Virginia Tech he and Anna introduced me to the woman who has now been my wife for over 37 years.

Bob's death has left the world an emptier place for many of us. We know the pain of his passing will linger. But we also know, and appreciate more than words can convey, that our lives have been enriched by Bob's contributions to economics, and by his generosity and friendship.