

BOOK REVIEW

Philip Rock, with Ed Wojcicki, *Nobody Calls Just to Say Hello:*

**Reflections on Twenty-Two Years in the Illinois Senate;
Southern Illinois University Press: Carbondale and
Edwardsville, ISBN 13-978-0-8093-3071-3, 2012, 247 pages.**

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As the Illinois General Assembly struggles to bridge the divide between political parties, now is an appropriate time to look back at the legacy and leadership of the late Philip J. Rock, the long-time Democrat who spent 22 years in the Illinois Senate—serving most of that time as its president. This political biography by Rock and former journalist Ed Wojcicki, now executive director of the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police, expounds on Rock’s talent for bringing warring parties together, no matter how vexing the political landscape might appear.

The book’s title, *Nobody Calls Just to Say Hello*, evokes the thousands of phone calls and visits that Rock fielded during his time in Springfield representing Oak Park and Chicago’s West Side. Drawing upon dozens of interviews conducted by Wojcicki, the authors paint a fascinating portrait of the give-and-take of senatorial politics, the thrill of legislative success, and the heartbreak of failed campaigns and political defeat.

The *Chicago Tribune* once described Rock as “the man for all sessions”—a description that this book shows is richly deserved. Born to a barber in 1937, Rock grew up in Chicago’s working-class Austin neighborhood. A strong student, he graduated from Loyola University’s law school in 1964 and honed his political and legal skills during his four years as assistant attorney general for the State of Illinois. Rock then gained support for a run for state office from Mayor Richard J. Daley, who at the time served as chairman of the Cook County Democratic Party Central Committee. Rock’s straight talk, work ethic,

and empathy resonated with people, paving the way for his election to the Senate in 1970.

Rock proved adept at holding a fragile, divided, and sometimes unruly Democratic caucus together. In 1979, he became Senate president, a position he held for 14 years over seven consecutive terms, longer than any other public servant to this day. Through a combination of compassion, leadership, and persuasion—and a gift for oratory—Rock served as the primary sponsor of 450 bills before his retirement from the Senate in 1993.

Unlike many political biographies, which have a “tell-all” quality, this book is a rarity for offering so many insights into the policies Rock advocated while remaining respectful of his rivals, although he does occasionally muse about some of his less-than-competent colleagues. Twenty-four chapters take readers through legislation efforts ranging from horseracing and manufacturing jobs to taxes and transportation (including an especially well-rounded discussion of the creation of the Regional Transportation Authority). Rock took special pride in enacting policies to assist abused and neglected children and to support victims of domestic violence.

A particularly well-written chapter recounts Rock’s campaign in the 1984 Democratic Primary for U.S. Senate, an effort that progressed well in Chicago and the rest of Cook County but gained little traction elsewhere. Rock quickly realized that he had little stomach for the endless campaigning and ceremonial appearances devoid of the serious policy discussion that was needed. He recalls being improperly labeled a conservative by the more liberal Paul Simon, the frontrunner, due to Rock’s pro-life stance and endorsement of government support for parochial schools. This cost him much-needed support from the then-powerful National Organization for Women and diverted attention from his legislative support for abused and neglected children and assistance to victims of domestic abuse and from his work expanding women’s representation on the Democratic State Central Committee. In the end, Rock drew just 19% of the vote, putting him in last place among the four contenders. Simon won easily with 35%. Reflecting on this experience, Rock calls the entire campaign “ill-conceived.”

Rock’s deal-making during the 1985 legislative session, especially supporting educational reform, was perhaps his finest hour. State leaders generated ideas at a frenetic pace, prompting Rock to hold a summit of legislators and school officials to sort out hundreds of proposals for educational reform. The legislative

package that emerged contained 47 provisions, included a basic skills test for teachers, and mandated teacher evaluation requirements, bilingual education requirements, report cards on the performance of school districts, and the creation of the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy. The bill passed by an overwhelming 56-2 margin. Governor James Thompson called the Education Reform Act of 1985, which he proudly signed, “a vote for the future of every child and grandchild in this state.”

This book is not written for those interested in a breezy account of a life in public office. Rock nonetheless shares many lighthearted memories of his time under nine governors, from Otto Kerner to Pat Quinn, and his interactions with Daley, Simon, and others. Readers will learn how Rock worked to bridge divides, sometimes in the club car when riding a train back and forth between Chicago and Springfield. Although redistricting affected his chances for reelection in 1992, his decision not to seek reelection that year was primarily due to the likelihood that the Republicans would gain control of the Illinois Senate (which happened), ending his role as Senate President. Another factor was Rock’s consideration of running for an opening on the Illinois Supreme Court for Cook County. He decided at the last minute not to do so.

Rock remained active in local politics, and in 1999, Governor George Ryan appointed him chair of the Illinois Board of Higher Education in acknowledgement of his passion for and knowledge of higher education.

Rock was born in Chicago on May 4, 1937. He died in Chicago on January 29, 2016.

As a legislative leader, Rock espoused some of the following principles (pp. 7–8):

- Be fair and evenhanded.
- Care about what you’re doing and the people you serve.
- Remember that effective change can take years. If you don’t accomplish something this year, usually you can try again later.
- Choose to have a responsible and reasonable dialogue, especially with people with whom you disagree.
- Take action to make government work for the people for whom government is supposed to work. Government is not self-executing.

- Give everyone a chance to be heard.
- Don't be vindictive. No retaliation allowed.

When Rock left Springfield, several elected officials noted that a single word—fairness—encapsulated his leadership style. Rock's legacy shows that this timeless virtue deserves to be kept front and center in all aspects of public life.

Dean F. Eitel, now retired, formerly served as assistant director of DePaul's School of Public Service and as an adjunct lecturer at the University of Illinois at Chicago's Department of Public Administration.

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WEBINARS AND WORKSHOPS

Readers of the *Illinois Municipal Policy Journal* are invited to the following programs featuring the research in this volume. These discussion-oriented events are sponsored, or co-sponsored, by DePaul University's Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development. They are moderated by a faculty member from that university. To take part in these events, all of which are free of charge, or to be added to the listserv, please email chaddick@depaul.edu or call (312) 362-5731.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22, 2020, NOON–1:00 P.M.

Webinar: Rethinking Municipal Service Delivery When Facing Declining Population and State Budget Unpredictability

Presenters: Andy Blanke, Nicholas Kachiroubas, and Norman Walzer

Co-hosted by the Chaddick Institute and School of Public Service, DePaul University

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2020, NOON–1:00 P.M.

Webinar: Effective Municipal Strategies to Eliminate Lead Service Lines

Presenters: Caroline Pakenham, Nora Beamish-Lannon, and Stephen Beavis

Co-hosted by the Chaddick Institute and School of Public Service, DePaul University

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2020, NOON–1:00 P.M.

Webinar: How Changing Public Opinion and State Preemptive Policies Affect Municipal Policy Options

Presenters: John S. Jackson, Nestor Davidson, and Laurie Reynolds

Co-hosted by Chaddick Institute and DePaul's Master of Public Policy Program

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 2020, NOON–1:00 P.M.

Webinar: Helping Households at Risk: Innovations in Affordable Housing and Strategies for Lessening Urban Flood Risk for Low-Income Neighborhoods

Presenters: Marcella Bondie Keenan, C. Scott Smith, and Kyle Smith

Co-hosted by the Chaddick Institute and School of Public Service, DePaul University

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2020, NOON–1:30 P.M.

Lunch Symposium: Complex Connections: Improving Air, Bus, and Rail Service to Downstate Illinois

Presenters: Joseph P. Schwieterman, Matthew Jacques, and Kevin Snyder
14 East Jackson Boulevard, Suite 1600, Chicago

Co-hosted by Chaddick Institute and the Transportation Research Board, Chicago Chapter. A networking session for graduate students from Illinois universities will immediately follow the symposium.

Please check online at chaddick.depaul.edu for possible changes in the time and location of these events.