

Communicator of the Year

Rep. Don Sundquist

In less than a single term as a Republican Congressman from the 7th District of Tennessee, Rep. Don Sundquist developed a trusting relationship with his constituency to the extent he ran unopposed for reelection.

As a communicator, Congressman Don Sundquist has established credibility with both courage and candor as a speaker and with an open mind and responsiveness as a listener. **The Tennessee Speech Communication Association is proud to recognize Congressman Don Sundquist as its 1985 Communicator of the Year.**

Sundquist developed this relationship by establishing open lines of communication between himself and his constituencies through frequent town meetings, "community days," and personal visitations. He was also accessible to the people of his district through regular newsletters, surveys, radio programs, and newspaper columns. He initiated "open door" policies in his Memphis, Clarksville, and Washington offices, and he insisted upon prompt and meaningful responses to all received letters and inquiries.

With communication lines thus open, Sundquist demonstrated himself to be a good listener as well as a candid and courageous speaker. Sundquist's listening has influenced his voting on matters of social security, agriculture, and trade. Such responsiveness was illustrated clearly on the issue of quartering Marines in Lebanon. As reported in the **Congressional Quarterly** (1-7-84), Sundquist was one of 270 Democratic and Republican House members who voted for a resolution allowing Marines to remain in Lebanon up to April, 1985. Yet, after listening to constituents during the "community days" he held in his district, Sundquist was ready to support legislation to bring the troops home much sooner, even if that meant standing against what appeared to him as the counter-productive policy of a Republican President.

Sundquist's candor and courage as a communicator has been highlighted by the **Savannah Courier** and demonstrated in his criticism of TVA. The **Courier** reported that Sundquist's candor was "refreshing in an era when politicians say what they think the audience wants to hear rather than what the audience needs to hear." At a time when all government agencies and departments were asked to tighten their belts for the purpose of reducing the federal deficit, the Tennessee Valley Authority proposed a budget increase. Sundquist was the only Tennessee legislator to stand against TVA for what appeared to him as fiscal irresponsibility. For simply requesting that TVA make recommendations for where their budget might be cut, Sundquist was criticized, confused with David Stockman of the Reagan Administration, and branded as someone who wanted to destroy TVA. After many speeches and letters, however, Sundquist succeeded in clarifying his position and making that position prevail. He, therefore, demonstrated the ability to communicate effectively in a way that overcame media distortion, partisan politics, and bureaucratic intransigence.

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