

## Alliance Honors Founder Charles H. Percy

German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel once said, “Nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion.” The phrase aptly describes the Honorable Charles H. Percy – former Republican senator from Illinois, entrepreneur, energy conservationist, Alliance to Save Energy founder – whose passion for saving energy gave energy efficiency and conservation advocates a voice in the great American energy debate.



Born September 27, 1919, in Pensacola, Fla., and raised in Chicago, Ill., Percy distinguished himself as a successful entrepreneur – “boy wonder of the corporate world,” in the words of Illinois political writer Robert Howard – who was at one time the youngest person to head a Fortune 500 company.

In 1949, Percy left the private sector realm for a career in politics; he was elected U.S. Senator of Illinois in 1967. A three-term senator, Percy was known as a moderate Republican who often reached across the aisle to work with Senate Democrats.

Alliance Director of Government Relations Brad Penney remembers Percy well from Penney’s days working for Senator Pell, who was the Ranking Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee when Percy was the Committee chair. “Senator Percy was truly a giant in the Senate back in the day,” says Penney. “He was highly respected for his quiet dedication to issues, like energy efficiency, that he considered important for the future of the country. He was universally loved by the staff of the Foreign Relations Committee.”

Throughout his career, Percy remained a stalwart advocate of energy efficiency and conservation who practiced what he preached. The senator’s former chief energy advisor (1976 to 1980) and longtime friend Chris Palmer recalls shopping with Percy in a Giant store when the senator advised the manager to put doors on the cold containers to prevent the cold air from escaping and wasting energy. “The senator...saw energy inefficiency and waste as inimical to the national good,” says Palmer, who is Distinguished Film Producer in Residence and director of American University’s Center for Environmental Filmmaking.

And though it would be years before the concept and consequences of global warming were fully revealed, Senator Percy and a few of his contemporaries were already concerned about their country’s energy dependency. Back then, “he knew intuitively that energy was a foundational issue for the nation, and that if we didn’t get it right, stop wasting and reduce our oil dependence, then we were in serious trouble,” says Palmer.

This prescient outlook was further validated when the 1973 OPEC oil embargo left millions of Americans stranded at the gas lines. As Percy recalls, “I was an artillery gunner in World War II when America was under attack, but I never saw the American people as vulnerable as when that [oil] embargo hit.”

Percy’s passion for energy efficiency and conservation came to light in the bills he sponsored, many of which helped shape modern energy policy. There was S.737, which aimed to amend the Internal

Revenue Code of 1954 and provide income tax incentives for the conservation of energy used to heat or cool residences; and S.1972 which encouraged the use of mass transportation and car-pooling by federal employees.

In February of 1977 Percy sponsored S.591 which aimed to establish an Energy Policy Council and a Department of Energy Supply and Natural Resources, enhance energy conservation programs throughout the executive branch, and study energy regulatory policies, among other activities. Six months later, President Carter signed the Department of Energy Organization Act of 1977 and created the Department of Energy, which assumed the responsibilities of the Federal Energy Administration, the Energy Research and Development Administration, the Federal Power Commission and programs of various other agencies.

Despite his own tremendous efforts to advance energy efficiency, Percy believed that the energy efficiency and conservation movement had yet to gain presence in the national energy conversation, which was evolving into more of a heated debate as the nation's energy crisis deepened.

A 1976 memo from Palmer to Percy defined the task at hand: unlike the nuclear, oil, coal and gas companies which had their lobbyists, Palmer observed, energy conservationists were without a strong voice. "When the senator [who was traveling in the Middle East at the time] read my memo...he immediately telegraphed to say that we should establish a new nonprofit organization to lobby on behalf of conservation." Palmer, one of the first staff members of the Alliance, adds that "It was his vision that created [the Alliance to Save Energy] and he was hands-on and deeply involved from the very start."

Percy strongly believed that bipartisanship was key to the success of the Alliance, so he chose his personal friend Hubert Humphrey, a Democratic Senator from Minnesota and former vice-president under Lyndon B. Johnson, to stand as the Alliance's co-chair. Humphrey eagerly agreed to join the endeavor. Founding the Alliance, he said to Percy, could be "the single most important thing we do in our lifetime."

From the Alliance's inception, Percy tirelessly served the organization and its mission, first as chair of the board of directors from 1977 through 1982, then as co-chair through 1989, and later by participating in Alliance activities and taking a keen interest in Alliance affairs.

This year – September 27th to be precise – marks the senator's ninetieth birthday, and the Alliance's thirty-second. And despite a marked shift in the political landscape since Percy's days in the Senate, his legacy of sound energy policy, bipartisanship and dedication to the advancement of energy efficiency continue to drive the Alliance's mission inside and outside the beltway.

"Senator Charles Percy is one of those great political leaders whose contributions and accomplishments transcended his time in office," says Alliance President Kateri Callahan. "The Alliance to Save Energy – Senator Percy's "brain child" and passion throughout his long life – stands in testament to this fact. Without his keen foresight and dogged championship, the energy efficiency and conservation movement would simply not be where it is today."