

# ROLL CALL

## **Office Space: Office With a Message**

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By Alison McSherry

Roll Call Staff

Two years ago, Rep. Randy Forbes (R-Va.) was sitting at his desk bemoaning the slow pace of Congress. As he got more and more frustrated, he also grew sick of looking at his own picture.

Everywhere he turned in his space in the Rayburn House Office Building, he saw photos of himself posing with firefighters, with government officials and even with the president.

“We sit around looking at these pictures, and we start thinking this is kind of all about us,” Forbes says. “So I brought my staff in, and they thought I was having a senior moment. I told them I want to take all the pictures down.”

Today, instead of staring at his own mug, Forbes has hung a large copy of the Declaration of Independence on one wall surrounded by framed pictures of the 56 signers. The display takes up an entire wall.

“It’s not about me. It’s not about us being here,” he says. “It’s about the legacy that they have left, birthing a nation of freedom.”

Forbes, the ranking member on the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness, created the wall in the hope that it would have an effect on the military officials who come to his office.

“I want to make sure every time one of our generals come in or one of our admirals come in and we have a meeting, or every time we have a staff meeting, or every time our constituents come up for a meeting, that we get to look these guys in the eyes and realize that we stand on their shoulders,” he says.

While Forbes admires the Founding Fathers, he looks beyond them to a higher power for advice when it comes to governing. Any visitor who spends even a few seconds in Forbes’ office soon learns that he is a devout Christian.

The founder of the Congressional Prayer Caucus displays a large framed prayer across from the Declaration of Independence wall. Former Senate Chaplain Peter Marshall delivered this prayer in 1948: “If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and it shall be given to him.” Forbes looks to this prayer as a reminder of his belief that God is supreme over Congress.

“It’s basically for us never to become so conceited that we think we know more about government than God,” he says.

Near the prayer is a print of a painting called “Daniel in the Lion’s Den,” which depicts the biblical figure in a cave filled with lions. Daniel is looking up to the heavens. Forbes says this also serves as an inspiration to him.

“The main thing to always remember is where Daniel was looking for strength,” Forbes says. “He wasn’t looking at the lion — he was looking at God.”

The wall with the Declaration and the wall with the prayer face each other on purpose. Forbes says the Declaration is the nation’s past, while prayer and God are its future. He points out the beginning of the Declaration of Independence, which, of course, says the rights of man are “endowed by their Creator.”

“If the state gave us those rights, then they can take them away,” Forbes says.

Forbes believes this document brought about “two concepts heard around the world.” The first is that people are given rights that the government can’t take away, and the second is that these rights were a gift from God. As long as Americans recognize and respect these ideals, Forbes thinks the country will do just fine.

“The Declaration has always been the founding document of the country, more important even than the Constitution,” he says. “If that document is illegitimate or if it’s wrong, then nothing else that we do has legs under it.”