Jack Kemp, a former GOP Conference Chairman, nine-term Congressman, Housing Secretary and Republican Vice Presidential nominee, passed away over the weekend. Congressman Pence issued a statement on Sunday,
noting that

Jack Kemp was a great man whose character, optimism and compassion will shape his party and his nation for generations.

"As a legislator and a thought leader, Jack Kemp shaped a rising generation of leaders in both parties with his ideas about entrepreneurial capitalism, enterprise zones and equality. Those ideas were the driving force behind the economic policies of President Ronald Reagan and the welfare reform of the Republican Congress.

"His optimistic belief in the American dream-in the power of free markets and entrepreneurial capitalism-was a lodestar to millions of Americans. His devotion to ensuring equality of opportunity for every American regardless of race, creed or color helped ground the Republican Party in the true ideals of Lincoln. His integrity and personal Christian faith showed his colleagues how to build a career in public service without compromising the people and the values that matter most.

Newspapers and media outlets around the country paid tribute to Kemp with editorials and articles, including

The Washington Post's Michael Gerson: " Head and Heart "

This belief in the power of ideas removed all rancor from Jack's political approach. Everyone fell into one of two categories: convert or potential convert. He seemed to believe that if he had just an hour -- better yet, three hours -- with anyone, he could change their mind by the force of his ideas. So he gave nearly everyone the benefit of the doubt. He assumed goodwill on the part of his opponents. And he became the rarest kind of public figure -- a conviction politician who was also a peacemaker...

Jack's ideals and priorities never really changed over the years, as a congressman, as a Cabinet secretary, as a vice presidential nominee. This is a contrast to many Republicans, and former Republicans, who will leave no mark beyond the vague, unpleasant memory of their opportunism. Even in Jack's absence, we know precisely what he would say: You can't divide wealth you don't create. Don't punish the rich, enable everyone to become rich. Value the dreams and contributions of immigrants. Be a happy warrior, not an angry one. And let me tell you about the gold standard.

Wall Street Journal lead editorial: " Capitalist for the Common Man "

Importantly, however, and unlike many of today's Republicans, Kemp's populism was inclusive. Across his career, he ventured into neighborhoods where Republicans too rarely tread. His policy innovations included enterprise zones, public-housing vouchers and a free-trade pact for all of North America. Also like Reagan, he believed that immigrants made America stronger and more vibrant. His religious faith was strong but never censorious. Kemp's loquacious optimism was contagious, even if he did sometimes get carried away...

Republicans will need to be ready with Kempian proposals to address middle-class economic anxieties and revive broadly shared prosperity. The GOP also needs a rhetoric and a demeanor that invite all Americans to its cause. The Kemp-Reagan message was rooted in ideas but it also appealed broadly across ages and incomes because of its buoyant temperament. Jack Kemp's admirable life shows that it is possible to be a populist intellectual and a capitalist for the common man.

When news broke of Kemp's diagnosis of cancer, Congressman Pence wrote an open letter to him that was published in the
Washington Times
which he concluded by saying

My admiration and respect for you are boundless. The debt this nation owes you can only be repaid by imitation of your example. You will remain in my prayers, and I will always be proud to call you a friend and to say that I am, first and foremost, a "Jack Kemp Republican."

Congressman Pence and Jack Kemp with local community leaders in Indianapolis in 2007.

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