

Civic leaders honor Dooley

Modesto woman gets public service award.

By Pablo Lopez
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Fresno's top civic leaders on Thursday honored seven-term Congressman Cal Dooley for having integrity, leadership and the smarts to get the job done.

Dooley said he would rather be remembered as a farmer who went to Washington, D.C., to help find solutions to the central San Joaquin Valley's problems by throwing aside political dogma and listening to all sides.

Dooley accepted the Rose Ann Vuich Ethical Leadership Award at the Robert A. Schoettler Conference Center next to the Radisson Hotel in downtown Fresno. Nearly 400 people attended the event.

Carol Whiteside also received the Fresno Business Council's Excellence in Public Service Award. She is founder and president of the Great Valley Center in Modesto, an organization that promotes the region's economic, social and environmental well-being.

Dooley represents the 20th District, which stretches from Arvin in Kern County north into downtown Fresno. He is not seeking an eighth term.

The congressman was full of good cheer and appreciation. He shook hands and hugged many of the luncheon's guests. He thanked his parents, Dick and Do Dooley, and his wife of 25 years, Linda, for supporting him.

His speech was filled with jokes and anecdotes about life in Washington.

Running for office was an easy decision, Dooley said. The alternative would have been plowing a dusty field on a noisy tractor in triple-digit temperature.

He said it wasn't easy getting votes in his first election. He recalled asking one of his uncles, a Republican, for his vote. The uncle told him: "Cal, I only voted for a Democrat once. I was on a jury and I voted to hang him."

Dooley also poked gentle fun at himself.

Smart? He said, "I had trouble convincing my constituents that I had a clue."

The award he received is named after state Sen. Rose Ann Vuich, who represented much of Tulare and Fresno counties during a 16-year legislative career that ended with her retirement in 1992. She died in 2001 at age 74.

Dooley was Vuich's top aide before he sought a seat in the House of Representatives.

The Kenneth L. Maddy Institute at California State University, Fresno, The Fresno Business Council and The Bee sponsor the Vuich award. It is given to an elected official who illustrates integrity, vision and an ability to build consensus.

Fresno Superior Court Judge Robert Oliver said the judges were impressed by Dooley's intelligence, sincerity and calm manner in bringing Democrats, Republicans and those of other political affiliations together.

California Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, via videotape from Washington praised Dooley for being a tireless worker who helped ensure that Valley farmers received their fair share of water.

With the end of his political career nearing, Dooley said, he is concerned about the deterioration of civility among politicians at a time when the United States must stand united against international pressures.

He said many politicians have retreated to partisan doctrine, thinking everything is black and white when, in reality, it is shades of gray.

Dooley received a standing ovation for his remarks.

Whiteside also received a standing ovation for bringing to the forefront the Valley's problems -- high unemployment, a high teen-pregnancy rate, pollution and low student test scores.

She said the people who can make a difference often ignore the Valley's problems because they don't believe the problems affect them directly. But, she added, the problems affect everyone.

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