

Proposal:

To name the first floor of the East Wing of the Capitol Building after Francis Bardanouve, a long-time member of the Montana House of Representatives.

The area to be designated includes the current offices of the Legislative Services and Legislative Fiscal Divisions.

While I leave the details to the Capitol Complex Advisory Council and its staff to complete, the intended designation would include lettering over or on the doorway in some manner designating the wing as the Francis Bardanouve Wing and a plaque commemorating his service. As the proposing entity, I assume the responsibility for securing the funds needed to cover the costs.

Background:

Francis Bardanouve was a Blaine County farmer-rancher from near Harlem whose service in the Montana Legislature spanned five decades.

He was first elected to the Montana House of Representatives in 1958. He was re-elected seventeen times. That's right. 17 times.

Until his retirement in January 1995, he served a total of eighteen sessions, ten as the tight-fisted chairman of the powerful House Appropriations Committee.

He was instrumental in establishing and transforming many of the institutions that many of us simply take for granted.

He secured passage of legislation creating the Board of Investments, but only after he traveled at his own expense to several states to study their systems.

He spent time in each of the state mental and hospital institutions to experience them first-hand and worked hard for better conditions. Over time, he became the champion for the de-institutionalization of many patients who had been warehoused at the state hospitals at Warm Springs and Boulder.

He pressed for funding of a full-time professional staff for the Legislative Council, replacing a system in which lobbyists and corporate lawyers often drafted legislation that was introduced.

He led the charge for the creation Legislative Fiscal Analyst office that gave the legislature the power to independently analyze and set budget policy and priorities for the state. He was fond of telling stories about how funding for programs had previously been set by relying on individual legislators keeping running totals on slips of paper they kept in their vest pockets. Analyses of any type did not exist and justifications were largely a product of friendships.

Of all of his many accomplishments, he often said he had but one regret in life: "I never got to ride my horse over the beautiful landscape that encompassed the prison ranch at Deer Lodge."

When he died on March, 2002, he was still on the advisory board for the Montana State Prison ranch. While in the Legislature he played a major role in turning the ranch from a business that consistently lost money into a viable business enterprise.

Francis Bardanouve never cared much for recognition.

He raised modesty to an art form.

He was humble.

In fact, if he were here today and listening to this proposal, he's likely kick up a fuss.

He was compassionate. An ardent advocate for education, he always fretted about the well-being of his cattle, worrying about whether they had enough water and grass.

He was fearless and had a steel trap mind. He was blessed with an earthy commonness that is so uncommon among most elected officials.

He constantly reminded his colleagues never to forget where they came from and not to let their positions go to the heads. He said, "It never fails. All sessions I have served in Helena, I go back to Harlem, and someone passes me on the street and says, "Francis, where have you been all winter. Did you go down south?""

Francis overcame a severe speech impediment. It started in the winter of 1946, when after years of having been teased and taunted, he disappeared without explanation. Without telling anyone, he had gone to Pennsylvania to have surgery on his cleft pallet.

But the most remarkable part of his transformation into an inspirational and persuasive speaker on the floor of the House of Representatives was when he met and later married, Venus, his speech therapist. She was the love of his life. At age 50, he had become stepfather to her three children, who were in their late teens and older at the time.

My recommendation is a small commemoration for all that Francis Bardanouve, a beloved Son of Montana, contributed during his time in office and the examples he set for current and future public servants.

Justification:

State law allows for buildings and other locations to be named after an individual who has been deceased for at least ten years. The tenth anniversary of Francis Bardanouve's passing will not be until March 2012. It is not uncommon for a delayed effective date to accompany actions of this type of action.

Francis Bardanouve was a truly remarkable Montanan. At a time when our country desperately needs to be reminded about the essential qualities of humility and integrity in public service, what better way to so than to honor an individual who led by example and was committed always to doing what was right for Montana.