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## A Tribute to Robert L. Oakley

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**James S. Heller\***

¶34 Most people who were born in the last thirty years never heard of Philip Hart, a Democrat from Michigan who served in the U.S. Senate until his death in 1976 at the age of 64. If they have heard of Phil Hart at all, it is because the Hart Senate Office Building is named after him, or because they heard the words “The Conscience of the Senate,” which is what senators on both sides of the aisle called their colleague.

¶35 A description of a biography of Hart—*Philip Hart: The Conscience of the Senate*<sup>6</sup>—says much about the Senator. Here are some excerpts: “Author and sponsor of critical legislation, particularly in the areas of civil rights, antitrust enforcement, and consumer and environmental protection . . . . He was intelligent and committed, idealistic and courageous, honest and humble . . . . A role model for many, an inspiration for others, the extent of his influence was demonstrated in the fall of 1976 as he was retiring from the Senate and dying of cancer.”<sup>7</sup> Columnist Mary McGrory wrote that “naming (the new Senate building) for Phil Hart was a nice gesture, and if they could build his qualities . . . into the walls, we would have a Senate that would astound the world with its civility and enlightenment.”<sup>8</sup>

¶36 If we substituted a few facts, the description of Senator Hart would fit Bob Oakley. Phil Hart served in the Senate for just under eighteen years. Bob Oakley served as AALL’s Washington Representative for almost exactly the same amount of time. The Hart Building was named to honor a great Senator. The Reading Room at Georgetown has been renamed the “Robert L. Oakley Reading Room” to honor a superb law librarian and a wonderful colleague. More important, the Hart Building and the Oakley Reading Room honor men who were “intelligent, committed, idealistic, courageous, honest, and humble”—kind and decent men who died too young but left legacies that will last forever.

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6. MICHAEL O’BRIEN, *PHILIP HART: THE CONSCIENCE OF THE SENATE* (1995).

7. BiblioVault, Book Information: Philip Hart: The Conscience of the Senate, <http://www.bibliovault.org/BV.book.epl?BookId=5616> (last visited Jan. 28, 2008).

8. *Id.*