

COMMENTARY

Pataki evokes Truman's last days

The political critics are having a field day with George Pataki's final days in office, but history will mock their columns and commentary with the same reproach today's historians use on those who attacked President Harry Truman when he left the White House and departed for home in Independence, Mo.

This is a broad and diverse state and the challenge of creating and sustaining public policy momentum is enormous. Every issue is fraught with political minefields and no good deed is ever recognized by the commentators who are probably paid by the bile.

This was the arena that Pataki has operated in for over a decade, and not once during my years of watching him navigate Albany, the media or the political arena did I ever hear him complain about the half-truth, the anonymous source or the outrageous lie. Perhaps the biggest problem is not Pataki's legacy, but his unwillingness to take credit for the deeds he accomplished in office.

Try this on for size: He saved nearly



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1 million acres of undeveloped land throughout the State of New York. Will it take 100 years before historians have the hindsight to understand just how profound Pataki's actions were in preserving pristine land? Perhaps, but the citizens of this state won't have to wait that long to enjoy those properties set aside through progressive Pataki programs.

From his first days in office, he confronted and stopped tax-and-spend policies that put businesses at risk, crippled job growth and made New York vulnerable to economic raiding by virtually every other state in the union. As the Information Age grew and matured, he ensured that New York would maintain a critical mass of educational centers of excellence so that we could compete in this arena.

His efforts on behalf of health care were also unrecognized by the pundits – but not by New York's growing senior population, as graying Baby Boomers seek to stay in those neighborhoods where they raised their families and built their communities. How easy it is for critics to apply a political formula to

his delicate balancing act of preserving the quality of medical care for seniors versus the need to protect the state budget.

In being the first New York governor in over 150 years to find that his state was on the front line of a murderous war, he rose to the task with quiet but firm resolve. He did so with a sense of humanity and a commitment to honor those who died while restoring lower Manhattan to economic vitality. The task will take years, but it was Pataki who set the tone and put into place the building blocks that will ensure New York's continued recovery.

Today, he will get no credit. Given how America works, his grandchildren may see columnists and historians discussing these quiet but effective works; in the meantime, the Honorable George Pataki will have to take comfort in the fact that those who know just hard it is to be an elected official also know just how effective he was in quietly putting into place policies and programs that will benefit the citizens of the State of New York for years to come.

That's what Harry Truman did.

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