

Remembering Ted Wilson, my greatest hero and truest love, through a lens of gratitude and grief

We said our last goodbye to Ted Wilson on May 17. The sendoff for Salt Lake City's 30th mayor (elected to three terms from 1976-1986) was perfect. We woke that day to a brilliant blue sky. Some 400 people celebrated Ted at Rice-Eccles Stadium Tower with a stunning view of Salt Lake City — the city he cherished every day of his 84.9 years on Earth.

Ted died peacefully at home on April 11. He had lived valiantly for four years with Parkinson's disease and an incurable heart condition. Our family man, adventurer, leader, teacher and guru was worn out.

Shortly after his death, my favorite editors at The Salt Lake Tribune asked me to write something about my husband of 20 years. It helped that he was also my favorite politician and public servant. It made some sense, I guess. Ted fell in love with me as a devoted reader of a regular op-ed column I wrote for The Tribune from 2002 to 2007. In 2004, my editor asked me to write about our union.

So we have come full circle. Here I am, writing again about my greatest hero and truest love, through a lens of gratitude and grief.

There is a risk in writing this. I risk getting sappy, like a 12-year-old girl scribbling in a diary about her first crush. I risk being pilloried on the comment board and mocked on social media sites. I mean, who can afford to share real feelings in public and show vulnerability these days?

But then this thought hit me. Ted Wilson was all about taking risks. Whether behind a desk, at a podium or with his climbing partners on a treacherous mountain pitch, he knew most worthwhile efforts begin with risk.

Ted wasn't foolish or impulsive. He calculated his risks, always running a mental cost/benefit analysis of where they might take him. He possessed a rare instinct for recognizing opportunities for himself and others.

Always, the possibility of failure loomed. Ted challenged incumbent Republican Sen. Orrin Hatch in 1982 and lost. He ran against incumbent Gov. Norm Bangert in 1988 and lost. He always got back up.

Ted's daughter, Jessica Wilson Begum, captured this best of his memorial service. "His most influential lesson was the right to fail," she said. "The right to fail is the impetus of Ted Wilson's philosophy of life."

Salt Lake City elected Ted mayor in 1975. At 36, he was one of the youngest mayors in the U.S.

He was dashing and charming and visionary. Ted piloted the first major remake



Ted Wilson campaigning with a honk and wave during his 1982 campaign for U.S. Senate against Orrin Hatch.

of the Salt Lake City Airport. The capital city had grand ambitions — including hosting a Winter Olympics one day (which it did, of course, in 2002). But its airport had chugged along with a small-town look and mentality. Five decades later, with a long line of mayors and excellent directors, our airport is a pretty big deal.

He led the first rehab of the city's wastewater treatment plant. He worked with the Salt Lake City Council to protect the foothills from dangerous and ugly overdevelopment. In the late '70s, prescient that Salt Lake City would one day explode as a recreational mecca, he curbed heavy traffic through City Creek Canyon to allow for more

runners, walkers and cyclists. He worked with Utah's congressional delegation to designate the Mount Olympus and Lone Peak wilderness areas. Thousands of climbers enjoy the first recorded routes Ted and his friends put up across the Wasatch.

Ted took the kind of risks that in today's bloody political arena seem quaint. He treated his political opponents with respect. He pitched himself and his skills to the electorate rather than gut-punching his adversaries with insults and personal attacks. His accommodation of far-ranging views was a trademark. Scores of people across the political spectrum have shared this with me in recent weeks. People liked him.

Ted lived an incredibly full life. Whether at work, play or in relationships, he jumped in with every effort.

I miss him. The community misses him. As I look out on Ted's favorite view of Mount Olympus from our kitchen window, I am imagining a conversation we could have easily shared.

He might ask: "What is it you want? Does it help or hurt others? If it's in the 'plus' column, try it. If you fail, get up and try again. Why not? There could be an amazing summit out there waiting for you."

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HOLLY MULLEN

My siblings and I are likely victims of Nevada nuclear weapons testing. It's time for Congress to step up.

In 1957, I was probably the only child at William Penn Elementary in Salt Lake County that asked his parents what Strontium 90 was. My father was one of the few physicians that did not trust the Atomic Energy Commission's reassurances that "fall out" from nuclear weapons testing in Nevada represented "no hazard" for Utah residents.

When testing occurred, he forbade his eight children from drinking milk for months afterwards to reduce our exposure to radioactive Strontium 90 that would settle on cow pastures and become concentrated in milk. If it rained after a test, he made us wear rubber boots to play outside on the lawn. He had us take potassium iodide pills so our thyroid glands would not absorb the radioactive iodine I-131 released by the tests. Nonetheless, five of his eight children have had cancer, including me, some with multiple types. Many of us have also had non-cancerous thyroid tumors and other diseases likely associated with nuclear weapons radiation exposure.

None of Utah's congressional delegation supports expanding federal benefits in the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA), claiming the "data doesn't support it." Their claim is either disingenuous or borne of ignorance, so let me offer them some data they should be able to understand.

Cesium 137 is a radioactive by-product of nuclear explosions that can travel anywhere in the body, concentrating inside cells by mimicking potassium. It releases beta particles (electrons) and gamma radiation that can cause skin burns. But when inhaled or ingested, Cesium 137 is much more dangerous. Through that route it can precipitate diseases of the pancreas, like pancreatitis, diabetes and pancreatic cancer, and cancers of muscle tissue.

In 2008, an analysis of soil throughout Washington County, Utah, found that of 102 samples



A pillar of smoke with the familiar mushroom top climbs above Yucca Flat, Nev. during nuclear test on April 22, 1952.

taken, only one did not have Cesium 137. Several samples had amounts "substantially higher than earlier estimates would have predicted." The authors said, "This leads us to conclude that doses to the public from the testing could also have been higher than earlier thought."

Researchers at the University of Utah recently found a plethora of toxic heavy metals in the furnace filters of homes in Salt Lake, Weber and Davis Counties. Among the metals were uranium, cesium and yttrium — some of whose isotopes are radioactive and would likely have come from Nevada nuclear testing. Uranium emits alpha particles that are particularly potent in causing carcinogenic damage to DNA when inhaled or ingested. If these radioactive elements

are in Wasatch Front furnace filters, they are in Utahns' lungs, still spreading death and disease.

Another study found that significant radiation contaminated a far greater area than just southern Utah and impacted heavily populated northern Utah and parts of Nevada, Wyoming, Colorado, Arizona, Idaho and numerous tribal lands.

Every organ system depends on the integrity of genetic function, and because of that, radiation damage to DNA can leave a long list of diseases far beyond cancer. It likely includes lupus erythematosus; non-malignant tumors of the thyroid gland, uterus, stomach and ovaries; hyperparathyroidism; poor birth outcomes; liver and cardiovascular diseases; and cataracts. Animal studies strongly suggest that the DNA damage

from ionizing radiation, just like other types of environmental toxins, can adversely affect the health of future generations even if they are not exposed.

Damage to the thyroid has a profound influence on brain development, especially during infancy. Several epidemiologic studies have found low level radiation harms brain development by impairing thyroid function. In 1957, the largest release of radioactive fallout ever measured drifted east from Nevada. Infant and fetal mortality spiked that year. In 1975, 18 years later, a dramatic, and otherwise unexplained, drop in SAT scores occurred among high school students in states downwind of Nevada. Utah had by far the highest drop in the country: 26 points, and the drop declined in other states



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inversely proportional to their distance from Nevada. That year Utah had the highest radioactive iodine levels in milk. A similar pattern occurred in 1979.

The original RECA act has paid out only \$2.6 billion among 40,000 radiation victims: a pittance and a fraction of the actual number of victims. Meanwhile, the federal government plans to spend \$756 billion on more nuclear weapons development between now and 2032.

Fist pumping: Sen. Josh Hawley, (R-Missouri), is as much of a MAGA conservative as Utah's congressional delegation. It is no small outrage that he is the one leading the effort to expand RECA benefits, while none of Utah's senators and representatives are even willing to vote for it, including Sen. Romney.

The only country that has ever detonated nuclear bombs over American citizens is our own. Call Utah's members of Congress. Tell them their refusal to acknowledge and compensate more victims makes them complicit in prolonging and exacerbating this unprecedented moral failure.

Dr. Brian Moench is based in Salt Lake City and is president of Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment. An avid environmental advocate, he appears in the Oscar-eligible feature documentary film "Downwind" (2023). Stream "Downwind" on several platforms, including Peacock, Amazon Prime and Apple TV. More information at www.backlotdocs.com.