



Remembering a Champion

The tragic death of former Rep. Helen Chenoweth-Hage (shown) in an automobile accident on October 2, left me, like so many others, stunned. Her sudden passing was all the more shocking since it followed by only four months the death of her husband, Wayne Hage, a well-known fellow champion of property rights and constitutional government. Over the years, both Wayne and Helen had written articles for *The New American*. Each of them had also been the subject of separate feature interviews in the magazine, and each had been the focus of multiple stories in these pages.



I first met Helen Chenoweth many years before she would gain national recognition in the political world. She was a young wife and mother in my hometown of Orofino, a small timber town in northern Idaho. I was her paperboy and, on a couple of occasions, her babysitter, when my sisters weren't available to watch her children, Megan and Michael. Later, in high school, I worked part-time for her husband, Nick Chenoweth, in his construction business. I was always impressed with Helen's intelligence, gracious charm, warm friendliness, and captivating smile.

Although I had always considered her a friend and neighbor, in the way that folks in small, rural communities do, our real friendship didn't blossom until after my graduation from college in 1975. That same year, Helen became America's first woman to be appointed a state executive director for the Republican Party. She and Nick also became deeply involved at that time in the reelection race of their longtime friend, Idaho Congressman Steve Symms, for whom Helen served as chief of staff. For a couple months in 1976, I became the volunteer chauffeur for Congressman Symms and the Chenoweths, as we crisscrossed Idaho's beautiful 1st Congressional District on the political stump circuit. It was an exciting time.

I soon went on to join the staff of The John Birch Society and began to write for its magazines. Helen continued on in politics and then launched another career as co-founder of a consulting firm that fought for the rights of property owners and against the heavy hand of federal regulation and taxation that was crushing family farms, ranches, and businesses. She also went on the speaker circuit for the John Birch Society.

In 1994, Helen was elected to represent Idaho's 1st District in Congress. Liberal journalists, feminists, and environmentalists seemed to be driven to near-frenzy level at the mere mention of her name. According to them, she was the agent of evil corporate interests who would ravage the national parks and forests for filthy lucre, leaving nothing but open-pit mines, clear-cut forests, and slaughtered spotted owls. Idaho voters didn't buy it. They knew that Helen was a true environmentalist who balanced appreciation for Idaho's natural beauty with concern for the needs of its people. Most especially they knew that she was a fearless and passionate champion of their God-given rights, as guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution. Helen handily won reelection twice and could easily have remained



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on October 30, 2006

in office, but she had pledged to stay in Washington, D.C., no more than three terms. True to her word, she resigned her seat in 2000, but she didn't resign from the freedom fight.

In 1999, she married legendary Nevada rancher and author Wayne Hage, a longtime friend, whose lovely wife Jean had died several years before. Together with Wayne, Helen carried on the Hage family's heroic decades-long legal battle against the harassing policies of the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. Their court victory in *Hage v. U.S.* is a seminal triumph for private property owners and all those who treasure liberty.

Helen and Wayne were exemplary patriots and models of Christian charity, courage, perseverance, and decency. Their lives have enriched and inspired many. They will both be sorely missed and long remembered.

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