



## **Former Member Recalls ‘Barrel-Chested’ Therapist**

January 13, 2010

By Tricia Miller

Roll Call Staff

[http://www.rollcall.com/issues/55\\_75/ath/42190-1.html](http://www.rollcall.com/issues/55_75/ath/42190-1.html)

A journey down memory lane prompted an unusual letter to the editor last month. Jim Weaver, who served as a Congressman from Oregon from 1975 to 1987, mailed Roll Call a tribute to a man who served as “House masseur” during his tenure.

“I haven’t the foggiest idea” what prompted the letter, the liberal Democrat recalled in a phone interview last week. “I was just reminiscing over my Congressional career and I remembered Ace Kovaks with great fondness.”

The House Historian’s office confirmed that a specialist in massage therapy named Ace Kovaks did work in what was then called the House Member’s Gymnasium inside the Rayburn House Office Building. In his letter, Weaver painted a colorful picture of a character who loosened Members’ muscles in the House gym. The Hungarian immigrant told of his “escapades” and often came in with a hangover, Weaver remembered. Yet the massage therapist’s defining characteristic wasn’t his wild stories but his forceful massages.

“A barrel-chested man with biceps the width of a lodge pole pine, he gave you a rub that left you a lump of rubble,” Weaver wrote.

Kovaks was a salaried employee under the jurisdiction of the House Administration Committee, Weaver said, so Members paid for the service only in tips. Weaver wrote that he had surprisingly few regular clients, but among them were then-Vice President George H.W. Bush and Reps. Claude Pepper (D-Fla.) and Silvio Conte (R-Mass.).

Weaver, 82, lives in Eugene with his second wife, Katie. After hanging onto a conservative district for six terms, Weaver abandoned a bid for the Senate in 1986 when he was accused of campaign finance violations. Rep. Peter DeFazio (D), a former Weaver aide, replaced him.

These days Weaver is only occasionally involved in politics. He said he doesn’t see much reason to visit D.C. but recently gave a speech to the county commission.

He doesn’t get massages very often either. “Ace was the best,” Weaver said. “I love a real tough massage, but usually they’re too gentle.”

*“Ace Kovaks, House Masseur*

*Ace Kovaks was the House masseur in the years I served in Congress (1975-1987). A barrel-chested man with biceps the width of a lodge pole pine, he gave you a rub that left you a lump of rubble. He was a Hungarian who had jumped on a horse when the Russian tanks moved into Budapest in the 1956 uprising and rode it straight through to Austria. How he got to the United States and where he is now I do not know. His regulars who lay on the cot in the House gym to be pummeled for an hour included Claude Pepper and Silvio Conte. He payed no attention to politics, and he seemed to fear only one person, his direct boss, the chairman of the House Administration Committee. Surprisingly, not many members partook of his services. Even so, he was usually booked up in the late afternoon and for a few special customers — Vice President George Bush was one — he went to their homes on weekends. Mornings were out; he was too hung over to work then.*

*While he massaged he talked, or shouted really, of his escapades, and they were legion, filled with ruckesses in bars and fights over or with women. Several times to my knowledge some senior member of the House had to go to the police station to rescue him. He was married, and proud of his ten year old son who was his miniature. The boy could have easily played fullback for the Chicago Bears.*

*One day in the Library of Congress I made an astounding discovery. I was looking through a book that included busts of the Roman emperors and on one page was the visage of Vespasian. It was Ace to a tee. I mean the likeness was so exact it was eerie. Ace had told me he had grown up outside Pest, on the very site of Vespasian’s headquarters when he commanded the Fourteenth Legion. Now we know that a later warrior, Genghis Khan, left so many descendants that they say one tenth of all people in Asia bear his genes. It seems that Vespasian was as promiscuous as Genghis. Ace, I told him after my discovery, you must be a direct descendant of a Roman emperor. He seemed unimpressed.*

*I cherished those rubs. They kept me going in the throb of congressional politics. Visiting Washington in the mid 1990s, I was told the House no longer employed a masseur. What a pity. No wonder partisanship — Ace was strictly non-partisan — has intensified since then.”*

*— Former Rep. Jim Weaver (D-Ore.)*