

*SPEECH OF
HONORABLE SHERROD BROWN
OF OHIO
IN THE UNITED STATES SENATE
JULY 25, 2007*

Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to the life and legacy of Harold Pote. Hal, the founder and President of the Spina Bifida Foundation (SBF), passed away suddenly on June 26, 2007.

My staff and I are deeply saddened by this loss, which is felt not only by his friends and family, but by many of us on Capitol Hill.

My staff and I first met Hal nearly six years ago, when he began a campaign to increase Congressional awareness of Spina Bifida, the nation's most common, permanently disabling birth defect.

Hal's nephew - Gregory - was born with Spina Bifida almost 22 years ago. Spina Bifida occurs in the first month of pregnancy when the spinal column does not close completely.

In the United States, Spina Bifida occurs in 7 out of every 10,000 births and there are 70,000 men, women, adolescents, and children living with this condition. Hal supported his nephew through more than twenty surgeries and was there to share in many wonderful memories, including the special moments in 2004 when Gregory carried the Olympic torch. Hal was dedicated to improving treatment and services for Gregory and others living with Spina Bifida. And by promoting public awareness about the important role folic acid plays in preventing Spina Bifida, Hal played an instrumental role in helping reduce the incidence of this condition.

Hal joined with a group of colleagues to form the Spina Bifida Foundation in 1999. In its eight years of existence, the SBF, under Hal's steadfast leadership, has had a significant impact.

Not so long ago people born with Spina Bifida did not live past their teenage years. Thanks to research and outreach enabled in no small measure by Hal's exceptionally effective foundation, many children with Spina Bifida are now living to be adults and are enjoying a higher quality of life than previous generations.

Hal's achievements go beyond his philanthropy and advocacy on behalf of people with Spina Bifida. He was born in Penns Grove, NJ, in 1946 and received his bachelor's degree in economics from Princeton in 1968, and his M.B.A. from Harvard Business School in 1972.

In 1984, at the age of 37, he was named chairman and CEO of Fidelity Bank. Hal left Fidelity in 1989 and that same year cofounded the PFR, a private real estate group, which was later acquired by Prologis.

In 1993, Hal cofounded the Beacon Group, a Manhattan-based investment partnership later acquired by Chase Manhattan. He lead Chase's Regional Banking Group and after that bank merged with JP Morgan he became chairman of Retail Financial Services for JP Morgan Chase. After retiring from JP Morgan Chase, Hal returned to Philadelphia in 2006 to serve as CEO of the American Financial Realty Trust.

Hal Pote's sudden death is a tragedy. Yet his life was a triumph. I offer my heartfelt condolences to his family – his wife, Linda Johnson, his mother Lucille Bock Pote, his two brothers Frank and Corey Pote, and his nephews.

I ask my colleagues to join me in saluting and remembering this extraordinary man.