

Heard on the Hill

## 30-Year Political Detour Inspired Film by Former Congressman

Bob Mrazek's first production, 'The Congressman', will be screened on Thursday

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Former Rep. Bob Mrazek returns to Washington on Thursday to screen his first film, "The Congressman" -- a picture that explores "what it means to be an American," according to the New York Democrat.

[The film follows the journey](#) of Maine Rep. Charlie Winship, played by Treat Williams. Winship ignites a media firestorm when he is caught on video not standing for the Pledge

of Allegiance on the House floor. Things get worse. He gets into a fight with a colleague, gets read the riot act by his ex-wife and eventually flees to a remote island off the coast of Maine to think things through.

It's an island Mrazek knows well. He's lived part of the year on Monhegan Island for the better part of 30 years, describing it as a beautiful, rough place that contrasts mightily with the rampant partisanship of the nation's capital.

"There are probably only 70 people that live there year round; we're 14 miles out in the Atlantic. And there are a lot of challenges out there, to their lifestyle. And yet, even though a lot of them don't like one another, they know they have to work together in order to accomplish certain common goals. And they do. And so I use that as a framework for my story," Mrazek said.

The former congressman studied film at the London Film School after getting out of the Navy in 1968. "I wanted to be a filmmaker when I was a kid," and he soaked in the atmosphere and interaction with the likes of David Lean and Orson Welles.

But after seeing the political turbulence of that year in the United States, Mrazek came home and started his political career. "A 30-year detour," is how he describes his time before returning to his first love. He's since published novels and nonfiction books, and, of course, this screenplay, which he co-directed with Jared Martin.

The screening takes place at the Motion Picture Association of America, a setting just a bit ironic. One of Mrazek's signature legislative achievements was the Film Preservation Act, a 1987 bill that put the kibosh on the widespread colorizing of black and white films and aimed to find ways to make sure film took its place among other protected art forms.

Standing in his way back in the 1980s was the legendary MPAA chief Jack Valenti, who was concerned about infringing on the studios' commercial efforts, such as colorizing the likes of "Casablanca" and other black and white classics.

Mrazek, a member of the Appropriations Committee, worked with Rep. Sid Yates, D-Ill., and Hollywood stars like Jimmy Stewart and director Steven Spielberg, to make sure the measure hitched a ride on an appropriations bill.

Their gambit worked. "It was about determining for the first time that film was an art form, and worthy of protection like Stephen Decatur's home or John Philip Sousa's music," Mrazek said.

Now one of Mrazek's colleagues from Congress, former Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., is head of the MPAA. No one talks about colorizing anymore, except when you want to make film buffs cringe. Rep. Steve Israel, D-N.Y., who represents parts of Mrazek's old district on Long Island and is a writer himself, will lead a discussion after the movie.

The film opens in Washington on April 29 at the Avalon Theatre at 5612 Connecticut Ave. NW.