

To know what Eric Massa thinks, just ask

If you're curious about where Congressman Eric Massa stands on an issue, there's an easy way to find out, and no it does not involve the Internet.

All you have to do is ask him. He'll tell you exactly what he thinks about any given topic, and in greater detail than perhaps you are ready to digest.

Eric has been in my office several times in the past four years, and on each visit he was capable of a solid hour of talking, minus brief moments of silence necessary for a reporter to get caught up on written notes.

The man, it was obvious early on, could mentally wear you out.

The approach — and I've thought about this for quite a while — can best be described as mixing a college professor with a Marine drill sergeant with a TV product pitchman.

Here's an example: On his most recent visit, Massa was asked about wind farms, and true to form he was quite clear where he stood, and also let it be known that because of his Navy service as an engineer on a nuclear vessel, he understood perfectly how turbine blades are formed and what happens to sound when a wind farm is in operation. It was all interesting, especially the bit about how a turbine could nicely screw up the transmission from a radio station tower, but a lot to digest when also considering that in the same statement he declared all wind companies should be investigated for anti-trust violations.

I do agree with Massa about this, by the way. It is more than curious to me that if we have so much valuable wind in the area, why aren't companies falling all over each other (and bidding against one another) to erect turbines? No,



ANDY
THOMPSON

it looks like somebody got out a map and drew clear lines to direct who can build where.

Massa's approach is vastly different than that of his predecessors, and in fact of that from any other congresspeople I've known through the years. All those men and women spoke well but also to the point. You heard what they had to say on an issue, but not necessarily how they came to that opinion.

It's tempting to write that Massa is giving too much information, and too often, but it has been fun to watch him in action, and listen to stories like the episode when he sprinted to the House floor one day after witnessing an upsetting legislative maneuver on C-Span.

Massa is seemingly unafraid of any situation, of any challenge. It may have always been his nature, but it may also be the result of having fought cancer and looking at the abyss and then deciding from that point onward it would be all or nothing in life. No more jogging, it's a sprint, baby.

During his most recent visit, Massa talked for an hour straight, as is customary, and then on departing let off the gas a little. We looked

at a book on my desk, 'The Encyclopedia of New York State' — a 1,770 page behemoth — and he wanted to know where he could buy a copy. It's likely he has one by now, and has already made it to page 732.

Massa also issued a challenge, one he said no member of the media has taken him up on yet, to follow him for a day in Washington. But this would be no office visit. You'd spend all day, from early morning to late at night, with the congressman as he makes his rounds. His point, not so subtly delivered, is that he can run harder than anyone. Keep up with me if you dare.

This kind of bravado is commendable, but it can lead to trouble, as we all learned this week in a YouTube video reported on first by the Washington Times.

"I will vote adamantly against the interests of my district if I actually think what I am doing is going to be helpful," he said, thus creating an uproar in the right-wing crowd.

Massa, being Massa, refused to back down, invoking Amo Houghton and even Ronald Reagan in his defense.

"We must have the courage to do what is morally right," Massa quoted the Gipper as saying.

Reagan, though, knew he wasn't always the smartest guy in the room, and he knew when silence was the surest way to victory. He certainly didn't read any 1,000-plus page health care reform bill.

Massa didn't need to say what he said Sunday in Pittsburgh. It may take months before he truly feels the sting of those words used against him.