

ROGER BETANCOURT

(1943 – 2024)

(Roger Betancourt unexpectedly passed away April 9 of this year. The historian James Flexner referred to George Washington as America's "Indispensable Man". For ASCE Roger was our indispensable man. Without him there would have been no ASCE, many of us would not have become involved in researching Cuba, and I certainly would not be its current president. Below follows a tribute to Roger by Luis Luis, his dear friend and long-time ASCE member. – Luis Locay)

Roger Betancourt

It was with deep sadness that I learned of the passing on April 9 of Roger, a dear friend of nearly seven decades. We shared friendship, family gatherings, social outings, travels and professional activities. He was foremost a warm family man with a loving family and marriage of 57 years to Alicia. Roger had a keen interest in the wellbeing of others and boosting endeavors he favored.

We first met in Havana at our beloved Colegio de La Salle in 1956 when we started *bachillerato*, the five-year high school program. I remember quiet and studious Roger seating to my right in our home room in our fourth-year, the last year we completed as the school was closed and the Christian Brothers exiled by the communist regime. After June 1960 we did not meet again until 1969 as Roger, already married to Alicia and having completed his PhD, joined the economics faculty at the University of Maryland and I began teaching economics at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis. We forged personal and family bonds and shared professional activities, especially faculty seminars.

Roger worked assiduously at Maryland, earning the respect of his peers and students. He published many articles and seminal books on capital utilization, the economics of retail and distribution and economic development. Much of his work was in applied microeconomics and econometrics and later in his career he became interested in the new institutional economics applied to economic development issues. He was very proud of his work as a dissertation advisor and mentor for graduate students. He advised dozens of students, propelling their careers and earning lifelong gratitude and friendship. He had world-wide connections from his students and from research and teaching in far-ranging places such as Sri Lanka and Argentina. He taught as a visiting professor at universities in France, Spain and Turkey among others. We met during Roger's visits at INSEAD in Fontainebleau. I warmly recall family beach vacations with Roger and family in Maryland where he regularly beat me at tennis, and their visit to our house in England.

ASCE was Roger's special endeavor of the last three decades. He was a driving force in the creation and organization of ASCE. He worked with Cuban-American economists and other professionals mainly in the Washington DC area to design and launch an organization aiming at the study of the Cuban economy in a broad sense and the process of transition to a democratic market economy. ASCE was incorporated in the State of Maryland in August 1990. The

agreement establishing ASCE was signed at Roger's house, and he became its first President. With help from friends Roger had come up with the articles of incorporation. He brought up the idea of setting up a professional organization rather than just a think tank or purely research outfit. He was concerned that the new association would be inclusive regarding research and analysis as well as membership with a diverse professional background. To his credit Roger was one of the few academic economists involved in the foundation of ASCE. Washington is after all a city of economists who mostly work for governmental and international offices and agencies.

In December 1990 ASCE, as proposed by Roger, was affiliated with the Allied Social Science Associations operating under the aegis of the American Economic Association. This allowed ASCE to have a session during the annual meetings of the AEA. Roger attended these meetings usually as presenter or commentator. Behind the scenes he helped recruit participants and searched for interesting papers to be presented. He was actively involved in persuading the AEA to maintain ASCE's session at the annual meetings.

During the more than the three decades' life of ASCE Roger was crucial in stimulating leadership of the association and was in its nominating committee which initiated the election process for the executive board and president. Roger's charm and seriousness of purpose was invaluable in attracting many of the outstanding presidents and board members of the Association. Roger while a close follower of events in the Cuban economy preferred to direct his research to conceptual issues. For example, he wrote papers on the distribution and transition processes that were broadly applicable to transition economies. Roger participated in every one of the annual meetings of ASCE in 1991-2022 as commentator, presenter or chairing panels.

Roger kept his keen interest on ASCE as he actively worked this year with the nominating committee. He remained active as well in many other projects. His sharp mind, for example, focused on comparative statistical analysis of the COVID pandemic gauging results of public health policies across developed and developing countries. In the last year Roger was working on a new book on economic development which applied his unique knowledge and research on production, distribution and institutional development.

Roger will be missed greatly by his friends and colleagues in ASCE. I offer deep condolences to Alicia, Roger Alberto, Juan Luis and grandchildren for the loss of a loving husband, father and grandfather.

Luis R. Luis

April 12, 2024