

ROBERT D. RAY

Few names in Iowa's 172-year history are as instantly recognizable as Robert D. Ray. He was born in Des Moines September 26, 1928 and passed away in Des Moines on July 8, 2018. In the intervening years, Robert D. Ray's leadership touched the lives of generations of Iowans on dozens of fronts and reached global impact on several occasions.

Ray grew up in the Drake neighborhood and met the love of his life and future wife, Billie Lee Hornberger, at what is now First Christian Church while they were students at Roosevelt High School. The Roosevelt High School sweethearts started dating in 1945 and were married on December 22, 1951. His life revolved around love of family, first as a son and brother, followed by his passion to be a devoted husband, dedicated father to the Ray's three daughters and adoring grandfather to their eight grandchildren.

After World War II, Ray served the U. S. Army in Japan. He graduated from Drake University with a business degree in 1952 and law degree 1954. He was a law and reading clerk in the Iowa State Senate, where he began to understand government and relish politics. Later, he built a successful practice as a trial lawyer with two brothers named Lawyer; the firm was Lawyer, Lawyer and Ray.

In 1963, Ray was elected Iowa Republican State Chairman and became a member of the Republican National Committee. After heavy losses in the 1964 Goldwater debacle, Ray resolved to rebuild and the GOP elected three new Congressmen and 88 state legislators in 1966.

Ray's leadership prompted Republicans of all stripes to ask him to run for Governor in 1968. After winning a hard fought three-way primary, and surviving an airplane crash, Ray was elected Iowa's 38th Governor. He was re-elected in 1970 and 1972, and to Iowa's first four-year gubernatorial terms, in 1974 and 1978. Because Iowans appreciated his steady, open, bipartisan leadership, Ray became the state's first four-term, then five-term Governor.

During his tenure, Iowa re-tooled and greatly expanded funding for K-12 education. Ray led creation of a merged Department of Transportation and elimination of the sales tax on food and drugs. He established the Iowa Energy Policy Council and then Department of Environmental Quality, both ahead of their time nationally. In the late 70s, Ray led the way for bottle and can deposit legislation, dramatically cleaning up Iowa's roadsides.

During the Ray years, Iowa's judicial system was reformed and community-based corrections implemented. Students at two dozen private colleges benefitted from the novel Iowa Tuition Grant program. Ray worked with business and labor on breakthrough legislation while improving Iowa's business climate and promoting ag-business trade on three continents.

Governor Ray established the Iowa Commission on the Status of Women and Iowa Council on Children, assisted Native Americans living in Iowa, and issued Executive Orders

advancing civil rights. He established the Governor's Economy Committee, a Task Force on Government Ethics, the Science Advisory Council, and the Iowa High Technology Commission.

During his 14 years in office, Ray was chairman of the National Governors' Association, Republican Governors' Association, Midwest Governors' Association, the Education Commission of the States, and president of the Council of State Governments. In 1974, Time magazine named Ray as one of America's Rising Young Leaders. He was on the short list of prospects for the 1976 Republican nomination for Vice President. He earlier received, but turned down, two offers to join President Ford's Cabinet.

In the late 1970's Governor Ray became a worldwide leader in the humanitarian re-settlement of refugees from Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam by helping them relocate, find jobs, and start new lives in Iowa. *"I didn't think we could just sit here idly and say, let those people die. We wouldn't want the rest of the world to say that about us if we were in the same situation,"* said Gov. Ray. *"Do unto others as you'd have them do unto you."* A problem developed when Tai Dam refugees were not allowed to settle as one group in one location. Governor Ray visited the White House and State Department to implore President Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger to make an exception. Finally, the Tai Dam were invited to re-settle in Iowa, together.

In 1979, Ray was a member of the U.S. delegation to the Special United Nations Conference of Refugees in Geneva, Switzerland. He later served as a U.S. Representative to the United Nations in 1983 at the request of Vice President Bush.

After leaving office, the Rays moved to Cedar Rapids where he became President and Chief Executive Officer of Life Investors, Inc., later known as AEGON. The Rays moved back to Des Moines when he became President and CEO of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Iowa, nka Wellmark. Ray owned radio station KILR in Estherville and was co-owner of WMT in Cedar Rapids.

Governor Ray was a member of the Iowa Business Council and served on the boards of directors of The Maytag Corporation, AEGON USA, Norwest Bank (nka Wells Fargo) and Alliant Energy.

During the late 90s, Ray filled out the term of late Des Moines Mayor Arthur Davis. City employees appreciated his attention to their work, just as state employees had in prior decades. Ray also was Chairman of the Drake University Board of Trustees. When a vacancy occurred, Ray was named President of Drake.

As a private citizen, Ray became involved in health care debates during the Clinton Administration. He was Co-chair of the National Leadership Coalition on Health Care, a member of the U.S. Surgeon General's Task Force on Mental Health, and the Carter Center's Mental Health Advisory Board. He chaired the Advisory Committee on Rural Health for Congress and was a member of the President's Commission on Consumer Protection and Quality in the Health Care Industry.

At the request of his successor, Governor Terry Branstad, Governor Ray chaired the Iowa Sesquicentennial Commission, a colorful multi-year 150th anniversary celebration of Iowa becoming a state in 1846. That work led to a Ray inspired vision of enhanced civility through character and leadership resulting in Iowa's CHARACTER COUNTS! initiative which is now located at The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake.

Ray held the Order of Coif distinction from Drake and its Distinguished Service Award. He was the recipient of honorary degrees from 18 colleges and universities. In 2010, he received an honorary law degree from the University of Iowa.

Ray was a trustee for the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum and member of The Greater Des Moines Committee. He was a founding board member of the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and founding co-chairman of Keep Iowa Beautiful. Ray served on the Des Moines Public Arts Commission, the White House Commission on Presidential Scholars, and the Iowa Games board. Ray was a strong supporter of Easter Seals of Iowa and Camp Sunnyside including decades as a faithful participant in the annual Pony Express Ride.

For all of his governmental, political, business, educational, civic, and charitable work, Robert D. Ray in 2005 became the only governor or former governor to receive Iowa's highest honor, the Iowa Award, presented by then Governor Vilsack and the Iowa Centennial Memorial Commission.

Governor Ray received numerous other awards, including the Variety Club of Iowa's Humanitarian Award, Meredith Wilson Heritage Award, and Central Iowa Philanthropy Award. Ray was the first recipient of the Des Moines Register's Iowa Star Award after having been named by the paper in 2000 as 'The Most Influential Iowan of the 20th Century.' Ray was a Des Moines Business Record 'Sages Over 70' recipient. He was inducted into the Iowa Insurance Hall of Fame, the Business Hall of Achievement, and Iowa Business Hall of Fame.

Ray's first elected office was President of the 7th grade class at Callanan Middle School; a campaign managed by his life-long friend, Marvin Pomerantz. While at Drake, Ray was elected student President and was a member and President of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity that he long credited with cultivating his manners, character and civility.

Ray was a talented school-boy athlete with a passion for sports his entire life. Ray's Drake Bulldogs were his favorite team though he cheered for all the schools in the state to be successful. Ray was an enthusiastic Iowa Hawkeye football and basketball fan as a result of being a color commentator for Iowa Hawkeye football games in the 1950s and 1960s with his radio business partner, Frosty Mitchell. Ray developed a passion for the Drake Relays while running as an elementary student and only missed four Relays since that time. He later became an ardent tennis and ping-pong enthusiast. Ray also loved cars and was a frequent spectator at the Indy 500.

Ray was an accomplished photographer who loved taking pictures of people and sending them copies afterwards. Photographing his children and grandchildren gave him the greatest joy. And while Ray dined with Presidents and dignitaries from across the globe, some of his favorite meals were with his family at McDonalds. The Rays were world travelers with their favorite trips being with family in Colorado, on African safaris, London, the Eden Project in the U.K., Disney World, and a Disney Cruise.

Ray had a significant sweet tooth for ice cream and his special chocolate chip cookies. He also had an ice cream developed in his name by Andersen Erickson Dairy that was sold locally to benefit charitable causes.

Robert D. Ray is survived by his wife Billie; their three children: Randi (Bill) Watson, Lu Ann (Bill) Newland, and Victoria (Mark) Carlson; and eight grandchildren: John and Michael Watson; Robert, Jeffrey and Billie Newland; and Emma, Leah, and Sadie Carlson.

Ray was preceded in death by his parents, Clark and Mildred Ray, and his sister, Novelene Gibbons.

The funeral service is pending and will be announced shortly.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be sent to The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University, 2702 Forest Avenue, Des Moines, IA 50311.

You may also leave your remembrance of Governor Ray on The Ray Center website at <http://raycenter.wp.drake.edu/guestbook/>