



Senator Robert P. Griffin

August 6, 1923 - April 16, 2015

ROBERT P. GRIFFIN

Died April 16, 2015

Senator Robert P. Griffin, Michigan's Distinguished Public Servant, passed away peacefully on April 16, at the age of 91, with his wife, Marjorie, of 67 years as always near his side. He served in the U. S. House of Representatives and U. S. Senate for 22 years, and on the Michigan Supreme Court for eight years. He was born in Detroit to a blue-collar family. His father was a foreman at a Pontiac assembly plant. He was the first one in his family to go to college (Central Michigan University) and to attend graduate school (University of Michigan Law School). In between, he served in World War II in Europe, earning two Battle Stars. Thereafter, in 1947, he married the former Marjorie Anderson from Ludington, Michigan, former valedictorian of both her high school and college classes, and moved to Traverse City, Michigan, where he was a defense litigator for five years with the biggest firm in town (four lawyers).

In 1955, Griffin ran for Congress, won, and drove his family (at the time, three boys aged five, three, and one) in an old station wagon tugging a U-Haul to the Washington, D.C. area to join the second term of the Eisenhower administration. He joined and led a group of progressive Republicans in the House called the "Young Turks" who engineered a leadership coup, replacing the conservative Republican Leader Charles Halleck with his good friend from Michigan, Jerry Ford. However, Griffin is perhaps best known during his 10 years in the House for the bi-partisan Landrum-Griffin Act of 1959, to this day still one of the major pieces of labor legislation. Phil Landrum (D-Ga) was the co-author and then-Senator John F. Kennedy (D-Mass) was a co-sponsor.

After serving five terms in the House, Griffin announced in 1966 that he was running for the U. S. Senate. Incumbent Democratic Senator Patrick McNamara died in office six months before the election. Good friend, Gov. George Romney, appointed Griffin to fill out Senator McNamara's term. Though trailing in the polls by 35% in what was then a heavily Democratic/pro-union state, he nonetheless came from behind and won election to the

Senate in 1966 and again in 1972. He was one of the few Senators who was not independently wealthy and had to live off his salary while maintaining residences in both Michigan and the Washington D.C. area.

In the Senate, Griffin served as Minority Whip for eight years under Senator Hugh Scott. He served on the Judiciary, Finance and Foreign Relations committees. Among other things, he was on the Republican Party's short list for the Vice President slot that ultimately went to Spiro Agnew. His decision as Minority Whip to vote for President Nixon's impeachment, according to Woodward and Bernstein's *The Final Days*, was the last straw that prompted President Nixon to resign. When his good friend Jerry Ford became President, President Ford told him he would get the next U. S. Supreme Court appointment. But when the opportunity arose, President Ford, after discussing the matter with Senator Griffin, decided to give the nomination to John Paul Stevens, as Senator Griffin had led the confirmation fight against President Johnson's nomination of Justice Abe Fortas to be Chief Justice in 1966 on ethical grounds, and they both agreed that "cronyism" was just as much of an issue in Senator Griffin's potential nomination to the High Court. In 1976, Senator Griffin served as President Ford's successful floor manager at the Republican Convention where Senator Griffin engineered the behind-the-scenes effort to get President Ford nominated in a most contentious battle with Ronald Reagan.

In 1978, Senator Griffin lost his Senate seat to Senator Carl Levin. Afterward, he was elected to the Michigan Supreme Court where he served as an Associate Justice for eight years, replacing his former adversary and later good friend Chief Justice G. Mennen ("Soapy") Williams, the former three-term Democratic Governor of Michigan, whom Griffin had defeated for the Senate in 1966 in a hotly contested race. Reflecting a bygone era of how politics used to be, Senator Griffin died with as many Democratic friends as Republican friends.

During his 22 years in Washington, Senator Griffin had the great privilege of meeting many world leaders and celebrities, including Leonid Brezhnev, Margaret Thatcher, Pope Paul, Anwar Sadat, Golda Meir, Chou En-Lai, Bob Hope, Red Skelton, Al Kaline, Gordie Howe, Arnold Palmer, John, Robert and Ted Kennedy, and countless others. He gave Don Rumsfeld one of his first jobs on Capitol Hill as a staffer. As Minority Whip, he was invited to the White House every week for strategy meetings with Presidents Nixon and Ford. He served with six U. S. Presidents. His last visit to the White House was for President Ford's 90th birthday party in 2003, at which Senator and Mrs. Griffin, President George W. and Laura Bush, and President and Mrs. Ford celebrated and the six of them were photographed together for the last time. Also in 2003, the State Bar of Michigan honored Congressman, Senator, and Justice Griffin with their Distinguished Public Servant Award.

In 2006, the Traverse City court house in his home town was renamed the Robert P. Griffin Hall of Justice.

Senator Griffin leaves his wife of nearly 68 years, Marjorie; four children, including Paul, Richard, James, and Jill; 13 grandchildren; and 7 great-grandchildren.

The family would greatly appreciate, in lieu of flowers, any donations to the Robert and Marjorie Griffin Endowed Chair in American Government, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan 48859. See <https://www.cmich.edu/colleges/chsbs/PoliticalScience/Griffin/About/Pages/Senator-Robert-and-Marjorie-Griffin.aspx>.

Public visitation with the Griffin family will take place on Monday, April 20, 2015, from 5 pm to 7 pm at the Robert P. Griffin Hall of Justice on Washington Street, Traverse City. Public services will be held on Tuesday, April 21, 2015, at 12 noon at the First Congregational Church, 6105 Center Road, Traverse City, the Rev. Gary Hogue presiding. Senator Griffin's family is being cared for by the Reynolds-Jonkhoff Funeral Home.

Events

APR **Visitation** 05:00PM - 07:00PM

20

Robert P. Griffin Hall of Justice
280 Washington St., Traverse City, MI, US, 49684

APR **Funeral Service** 12:00PM

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First Congregational Church
6105 Center Road, Traverse City, MI, US, 49684

Comments



“ I had the privilege of knowing Bob Griffin who graduated from Fordson High School. In the 1997 I became the President of the Fordson Alumni Association. Bob wrote a letter to me which I still have and cherish, inviting me to Traverse City, MI to meet a group of Fordson Graduates. They had formed their own Alumni group there. I wasn't able to come, but would call him occasionally. While Bob would call me even after I was not President of the Alumni Association. Also occasionally, and him and I would send cards around the holidays. I lost contact with him early in last decade. He was a very nice guy and a big Fordson fan during Football Season. It was a pleasure to have been an acquaintance Friend, and me being a Historian; being able to speak to someone who was there in history at that time. Thank you Bob for the wonderful Memories and kindness.

Joel Hurley - October 25, 2018 at 06:59 PM



“ i am very sorry for your loss. my father, william wadsworth also just passed away, his funeral will happen this june i remember mant times when the griffins came to our house on the peninsula, next door to the governor . they were all there and my brother and i walked around in awe listoning to all the conversations. our father would say "you boys shouwilliamld listen very closely, because these are some great people" william wadsworth, may 18 2015

william wadsworth - May 16, 2015 at 07:04 PM



“ I was just a lowly campaign volunteer back in 1972 and had to have an operation on the fast track. He called my mother and father to check on me while I was in the hospital. Who dies that other than a good human being concerned about others. A sad loss, but a life well lived. Peace to all of you at this difficult time.

Rex J Ford - April 29, 2015 at 07:01 AM



“ We hold your family close to our hearts during this celebration of your fathers life! It was truly an honor to have met him. His legacy is so inspiring.
Connie & Rick Deneweth

connie deneweth - April 23, 2015 at 07:47 AM



“ With the passing of Bob, we lost a true leader. A man who put citizenship ahead of partisanship. If we had more Bob Griffins in Washington how much better the nation would be. My condolences to Marge and the family.

Gil Ziegler

Gil Ziegler - April 22, 2015 at 10:24 AM



“ Dear Griffins,

I was always in awe of the fact that I lived on the same street (Peninsula Court) as someone as famous/special as Senator Griffin. It was a badge of honor. I was really impressed to receive a phone call from him in 1966.....Our honors history teacher created an assignment that involved writing to the Senator's office and asking some obscure question that his staff would have to research. Senator Griffin called me and asked what was going on--apparently receiving a hundred or more letters asking for research answers was out of the ordinary. I explained that it was a school assignment. He promised that each letter would be answered, and cautioned me that there would be an extended time frame--his staff had more important matters to address and would respond to the letters as time permitted. I communicated that to the teacher. (Of course, in retrospect, it was a poorly framed assignment that the Senator handled with utmost professionalism.) My folks were always big fans and often stated that if every elected official had the Senator's integrity and strong character, American government would operate quite differently.

My condolences to all of you---from Jill, for whom I babysat to Marge, who was seemingly unflappable. He was a very special person; I feel privileged to have known him and all of you.

Sincerely

Ann E Ballance

Ann Ballance - April 21, 2015 at 01:25 PM



“ My deepest sympathy to Aunt Marge and the kids. Thank you for all the wonderful childhood memories of Traverse City!

- Carol Anderson

Carol Anderson - April 21, 2015 at 12:50 PM



“ Senator Griffin went to law school with my father, Stuart Goldfarb. On a visit to Washington DC as a young girl, I remember going to Senator Griffin's office just as he was about to take the underground shuttle to the Senate. I was asking questions (probably a lot of questions) and he invited me to join him on the ride and I actually sat with him and continued the barrage of questions. He was wonderfully patient and I will never forget that fantastic experience, one not forgotten through the years that have gone by since then!

My deepest sympathy to the family. A wonderful man who will not be forgotten.

Martha Goldfarb Stubbs

Martha Goldfarb Stubbs - April 20, 2015 at 11:56 AM



“ "Leave lots of white space," was the standard instruction to any staffer assigned to draft a letter for his signature or remarks for him to deliver on the Senate floor. He was the consummate editor and perfectionist. It could be frustrating when you got to the 5th or 6th draft, but it was a great learning experience. I find myself editing my own stuff to this very day. Our thoughts and condolences to Marge and family. Bob and Margaret Lewis

Bob Lewis - April 20, 2015 at 09:40 AM



“ I'm sorry to hear that Senator Griffin has passed away. I will always remember how he helped me back in 1966 when I was attending Northwestern Michigan College. I was receiving financial help from the GI Bill. After a couple of terms my benefits were stopped for some unknown reason. I tried to get them started again without success, and was close to having to drop out of college. As a last resort, I called Senator Griffin's office in Washington, and asked for their help. That was in the morning, and was told that they would check on it and to expect a call back in the afternoon. About 3:00 I received a call and was told that my GI Bill was reinstated and the amount of money I would be receiving. They also told me the date I would receive the check. The check arrived on the date they said it would and the amount was exactly what they said it would be. I received these benefits monthly until I graduated from MSU with High Honors. Without Senator Griffin's help I would never have gotten my degree. Jerry Nyberg

Gerald Nyberg - April 19, 2015 at 12:52 PM



“ Senator Griffin was a great statesman, a man who put principles above politics. He will be sorely missed.

Max Grider - April 19, 2015 at 02:28 PM



“ Senator Griffin cut through military red tape to get me home on military emergency leave at Christmas in 1969. Things were stalled when suddenly my CO received a call from a general in the Pentagon, I was driven to the airport personally by my CO and was home within 24 hours. It was then I discovered the Senator had been contacted by a family member and he responded swiftly. My CO treated me very nicely thereafter never knowing who I was or how I rated such attention. Thank you Senator. RIP

dennis Early - April 22, 2015 at 09:46 AM