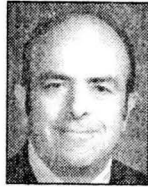


Edward F. Burke dies; ex-chairman of PUC, lawyer, energy activist

PSB 10-2-93

By THOMAS J. MORGAN
Journal-Bulletin Staff Writer

PROVIDENCE — Edward Farley Burke, a longtime Democratic activist and former chairman of the state Public Utilities Commission, died at home yesterday, one day before what would have been his 65th birthday.



He was the husband of Phyllis (Moran) Burke, and lived on Lyndhurst Avenue.

Mr. Burke had been ailing for some time after a kidney transplant a year ago, according to former Gov. J. Joseph Garrahy, a business associate in Mr. Burke's Canadian Connection Ltd. of Providence, an energy and trade consulting concern.

"I'd known Ed maybe 30, 35 years," said Garrahy, who appointed him as chairman of the PUC in 1977, "back to when he was an assistant to (former Mayor Walter) Reynolds. He had a long and distinguished career."

He was born in Providence, the son of the late Dr. Edward F. and Agnes (Farley) Burke. He was a 1946 graduate of Classical High School and a 1950 graduate of Harvard. He obtained a law degree from Harvard Law School in 1953.

He was a lifelong fan and supporter of the Atlanta Braves from the days when the team played in Boston. In a 1988 interview he recalled attending games at Braves Field in Boston in 1935 at the age of 7. "Everybody else on the block was rooting for the Red Sox," he said. "I showed in later life the same tendency — Hubert Humphrey, etc. Lost causes are second cousins, I guess. The Braves were lovable, they were crazy."

When attendance at Braves games began fading, Mr. Burke, then a student at Harvard Law School, became president of a Save the Braves Committee. When he heard the news in 1953 that the Braves were moving to Milwaukee, he said, "I don't think I wept at that point, but I sure as hell did later."

Mr. Burke was a former chief legal counsel to the state Department of Corrections, assistant city solicitor of Providence from 1959 to 1961, administrative assistant to Mayor Reynolds from 1961 to 1965, special counsel to the attorney general 1965-67, chief legal counsel to the Department of Social Welfare in 1969-70, and chief legal counsel to the Department of Mental Health, Retardation and Hospitals in 1970-72.

He was a retired colonel in the Air Force Reserve, where he served as a legal officer.

Mr. Burke became involved early in Democratic politics. In 1948, he

became vice president of the Harvard Students for Truman Club, and served on the executive committee of the Harvard Liberal Union. He was active in Adlai Stevenson's presidential campaigns in 1952 and 1956, and managed Hubert Humphrey's campaigns in Rhode Island in 1968 and 1972. He made an unsuccessful primary run for mayor in 1964.

Mr. Burke was co-chairman in 1976 of the Rhode Island Chapter of Lawyers for Carter. But he divorced himself from election campaigns from the time he became PUC chairman in 1977, until he left the post in 1988.

In 1992, he became a member of the National Executive Committee of Americans for Harkin, and when Tom Harkin withdrew from the presidential campaign, he supported Bill Clinton.

Charged by Garrahy with developing new energy sources to wean Rhode Island away from its dependence on OPEC oil after the 1974 Arab oil embargo, Mr. Burke negotiated contracts to obtain Canadian gas, hydroelectric power and electricity from other sources.

He was a founding member in 1979 of the Northeast International Committee on Energy, and in 1981 of the Governors Power Planning Committee of New England. He was the proxy for Garrahy and Gov. Edward D. DiPrete when they were unable to attend sessions of the Governors Power Planning Committee or of the Eastern Canadian Premiers/New England Governors Committee.

As a result of his work, New England now obtains 10 percent of its energy needs from hydroelectric, nuclear and coal-generating sources.

Mr. Burke was a member and a past president of the National Association of Regulatory Utilities Commissioners.

When he left office, he formed Canadian Connection, of which Garrahy is a former president. For the past two years he was vice chairman of the nonprofit Northeast Corridor Initiative, which supports electrification and other improvements in the Northeast Rail Corridor from Washington to Portland, Maine.

Besides his wife he leaves two sons, Edward Francis Burke of Wayland, Mass., and David William Burke of Providence; two daughters, Elizabeth Burke Bryant of East Greenwich and Melissa A. Burke, a law school student in San Francisco, and six grandchildren.

The funeral will be held Tuesday at 9 a.m. from the J.F. Skeffington Chapel, 925 Chalkstone Ave., with a concelebrated Mass of Christian Burial at St. Pius Church, Eaton Street, at 10:30. Burial will be in St. Ann Cemetery, Cranston.

BURKE,
Edward F.

Ed Burke

No one who met Edward Farley Burke is likely to forget him. His pungent and wry stories, peopled with a cast that seemed to comprise the entire population of Rhode Island and a host of others beyond its borders, left an indelible impression. When he died last week on the day before his 65th birthday, Rhode Islanders lost a public man of the highest quality, as well as a friend. He was that esteemed creature, the honest politician (with a leprechaun's face).

Born into a political family (his grandfather, James Farley, was Providence's Democratic city chairman), Ed Burke grew up in the tradition of progressive Democratic party politics, a tradition he was delighted to describe as "machine." It was, as Mr. Burke recalled in a recent reminiscence, an age of giants on the Rhode Island political scene: Theodore Francis Green, J. Howard McGrath and John O. Pastore. By the age of 12 he was a seasoned political activist, having worked in the Providence mayoral campaign of Dennis J. Roberts. He was soon conversant with city planning, urban renewal and public safety — and was imbued with the ideal that the highest, indeed the only legitimate aim of politics is public service.

His own ambitions for elective office peaked with an unsuccessful run at the Providence mayoralty in 1964. Counsel to a

variety of agencies, including the state attorney general and others, he was named chairman of the state Public Utilities Commission in 1977 by Governor Garrahy. In 1988, after he left the PUC, he set up a consulting firm with Mr. Garrahy to develop trade links with Canada, especially hydroelectric power from Quebec, which he believed was essential to economic growth in the energy-starved Northeast. He also helped lead the Northeast Rail Corridor Initiative, a nonprofit group advocating improvements in the Boston-to-Washington rail corridor.

But Ed Burke is probably best remembered as a loyal champion of noble and, if not lost, then certainly imperiled causes, illustrated best not by his fervent support for his *alma mater*, Harvard, but by his enthusiasm for the Atlanta Braves, which were lost to Boston while he was at law school. He worked to keep the team in Boston then, but even when they decamped to Milwaukee and then Atlanta, his support didn't waver.

Ed Burke's career was caring for the common weal, and in that dedication, Pollyanna-ish though the causes may have sometimes seemed, with his energy and charm, and late in life, with his courage in the face of illness, he was highly effective.

He grew up in an age of giants, and though his manner belied it, he was a giant himself.

PJ. B 10-8-93

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The example of Ed Burke

As long as I can remember (and I am a native of Providence), the politician on the Editorial Page of the Journal has always been a plump man in an outrageous checked suit and black derby, puffing on a fat cigar, who faintly resembles Lou Costello. Usually, the image is someone of lesser intellect, accompanied by captions suggesting equal parts of insensitivity and greed.

You have constantly reinforced this image over the years. To someone weaned on the pages of your newspaper, the politician is a crook who makes deals in smoke-filled rooms, where he sits with his cronies. Is it any wonder that your readers, young and old, recoil from the word "politician" and instinctively become cynical and distrustful when this word is used?

How refreshing, then, to read a deservedly favorable Oct. 8 editorial about the late Edward Burke ("Ed Burke," Oct. 8), one of Rhode Island's very best public figures, who spoke proudly of his political background as a "machine" politician. Ed represented in every respect the best aspects of life in public service and private life. He was a beloved husband, parent and grandparent. His family came first. He was totally honest. He possessed a phenome-

nal memory. (One had only to ask him about Tommy Holmes's batting average for the Braves in 1944.)

More important, Ed had a keen intelligence and ability to relate a specific matter to larger issues of public policy. He had a unique charm and talent that commanded the respect, loyalty and affection of all he came in contact with.

Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary defines "crony" as "an intimate companion; a familiar friend." Ed had the good fortune of being a crony of many important and unimportant persons, in and out of politics. And I, with others, am proud to have been a lifelong crony of Ed's. After all, President Wilson's crony was Colonel House. President Roosevelt's crony was Harry Hopkins. Sometimes only a crony, in *Webster's* definition, is able to say "no" when others say "yes."

I hope you will take this opportunity to focus on the positive aspects of cronyism. Instead of portraying someone involved in public service as the politician who smokes the fat cigar, why not hold out the model of Ed Burke? It can be an inspiration for future generations.

MELVIN L. ZURIER

Providence

BURKE
Ed

The Burkean model

The airwaves and newspaper columns are flooded with facile cynicism about our elected and appointed officials. In the face of this deluge, it is easy to forget the many honest and dedicated public servants who devote their careers to the public interest and to the quality of life for all of us.

The late Ed Burke was a shining example, a role model for all who aspire to public service. He served his city, his state, and — as a colonel in the Air Force Reserve — his country with distinction and integrity. His colleagues on the national scene recognized his outstanding quality when they reached into little Rhode Island and elected Ed Burke to head the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners.

Ed also served his Democratic Party as the embodiment of the "Happy Warrior" — a partisan, but a player by the rules. The late Hubert Humphrey, one of the most decent and humane politicians of our era, was Ed's friend and model.

Young men and women contemplating political activity or public service should take heart at the outpouring of affection and respect for Ed from all of us who mourn his passing.

ROBERT A. RIESMAN

Providence