



U.S. Ambassador to Canada and former Gov. James Blanchard and wife Janet pay final respects to George Romney.



Sander Levin



Ronna Romney



John Engler and wife Michelle

Romney leaves bold legacy, say politicians

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

As Governor-elect John M. Engler was about to be inaugurated into office, an 82-year-old man shook his hand firmly and offered words of wisdom: "Whatever you do, always be bold."

The man offering that advice was George W. Romney, who knew something about being bold. Engler recalled Monday as the former auto executive, three-term governor and presidential cabinet member was eulogized at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Bloomfield Hills.

Romney, 82, died last week while exercising on his treadmill. Romney believed in boldness, according to many of the 1,200 friends and admirers who gathered to pay last respects to the

man they described as "the great American of the 20th Century" and the last "great lion." Some talked about the former governor as part of the 90-minute service. Others recalled their experiences in small groups or privately to the dozens of news agencies on hand to cover the funeral.

Southfield Mayor Donald F. Fracassi, for example, said Romney showed great leadership and boldness in the development of I-696.

The freeway — which now handles thousands of vehicles daily — was mired in political bickering and property acquisition disputes when Romney was governor and he was a city councilman, recalled Fracassi.

"But he took over," the mayor said. "He'd get everybody in a

room and wouldn't let us out until we agreed on something. I-696 would not have been built without Romney."

Former Gov. William G. Milliken, who was Romney's lieutenant governor for four years, recalled one stroke of his boldness that put Michigan government on solid financial ground but angered many of Michigan's conservatives: Enacting the state income tax.

"People eventually forgave him," said Milliken, who considered Romney his mentor. "They forgave him because they came to realize the income tax was needed."

Former Berkley Mayor George W. Kuhn, now the Oakland County Drain Commissioner, remembered Romney spearheading another tax measure — this one very popular with suburbanites.

"That was when Detroit enacted its municipal income tax," said Kuhn. "Both (Detroit) residents and nonresidents were to pay 1 percent of their income to the city."

Romney, as governor, led the way in reducing the nonresident portion to one-half of 1 percent, said Kuhn. "He saved the people



George Kuhn



Dick Headlee

of Oakland County thousands of dollars."

U.S. Rep. Sander Levin, a state senator in the 1960s when Romney was making his mark, used one word to describe him: "Formidable." Romney was formidable in politics and formidable in his personal convictions, he said.

Richard Headlee, author of the constitutional amendment to limit property taxes, remembered work-

ing with Romney to bring Christmas gifts to American service personnel in Vietnam. That was just one of the ways he demonstrated concern for his fellow human beings, said Headlee, who is retired from his Farmington Hills insurance company and now lives in Utah.

"All my memories of Romney are very pleasant," he said. "He was a great man."



Doug Fraser



U.S. Sen. Spencer Abraham (center), state Sen. Dick Posthumus (left), R-Alto, and an unidentified man, remember the Romney legacy.

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Romney's public and personal life. "That's remarkable."

But speaker after speaker during the 90-minute service — planned by Romney himself — talked about, or alluded to, the love within the family and the influence it had on their lives.

When her mother was ill, recalled Jane Romney, an actress from Los Angeles, her father gave soup to nourish her body and prayers for her soul.

He nurtured his children and grandchildren with practical advice, spiritual guidance and personal encouragement, she said.

Her father even supported her

when she strayed politically, Jane Romney recalled.

"He didn't mind that I was a Democrat," she said.

"He even leaked to the press that I was supporting Jerry Brown," she said, speaking of the former California governor during the 1992 presidential primary. "He just wanted me to be a good citizen."

Scott Romney, a Birmingham lawyer, recalled seeing his parents frequently holding hands ... a way of saying, "I love you."

George Romney had met the former Lenore Lafount — the daughter of staunch Democratic

■ Staff photos by Stephen Cantroll



Financier Max Fisher of Farmington Hills was a political ally of George Romney in the Republican Party.

parents — when she was 15 years old, recalled ex-daughter-in-law Ronna Romney, now a talk show host and candidate for U.S. senator in Michigan.

Although not officially part of the funeral, Ronna Romney privately told reporters of the love between Lenore and George and within the family.

She was 15 years old, said Ronna, "and he fell madly in love." It took him almost seven years, but George finally talked her into marrying him, Ronna said.

"Lenore was considering a movie contract (in the silent movies) at the time, but she gave that up."

Another son — Mitt, for whom George Romney campaigned in 1994 in the campaign against Massachusetts Sen. Edward Kennedy — remembered how the love between his parents spread throughout the family and characterized their dealings with other people.

He often cooked dinner and made homemade ice cream for family on Sundays, recalled John Engler. "Never mind that it was usually the same dinner," quipped the governor. "He really cared for his family."

Mourners were invited to memorialize Romney's death with a gift to the church, the Points of Light Foundation (in which Romney was active), or to their local volunteer organization.

But Mitt Romney suggested something else. "If someone wants to do something to remember my dad, they should do something special for somebody else," he told reporters.

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William Milliken and wife Helen