

THE Carter Mondale *Letter*

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In Memoriam: Walter F. Mondale 1928–2021

**'Fritz' Served with Honor,
Humor, and Humility**



by Gail Harrison and Richard Moe

Walter Frederick “Fritz” Mondale was born on Jan. 5, 1928, in Ceylon, Minnesota. His father, Theodore, was a farmer who became a Methodist preacher. His mother, Claribel, was a part-time music teacher. Fritz Mondale often quipped, “My dad preached, my mother played piano, and I sang. We could marry ‘em and bury ‘em faster than anyone else in Minnesota.”

From his early life in small rural towns, Walter Mondale developed a deep respect for farmers and other hardworking men and women and a strong personal ethic of frugality. Folks who knew him well sometimes called him “no frills Fritz.” He preferred his food and clothing plain rather than expensive and ice fishing with friends over a stay at a luxury resort. He was taught not to lie or brag. He valued and went to great lengths to uphold and increase public trust in our democratic institutions. As a Depression-era child from a family with limited means, he cared deeply about people who lacked the wherewithal to provide for their families.

The Minnesota Democrat was appointed to serve as state attorney general in 1960 and was elected in his own right soon thereafter. Mondale zeroed in on a case before the U.S. Supreme Court, *Gideon v. Wainwright*. The plaintiff, Clarence Earl Gideon, was indigent. He had been convicted of minor theft. Gideon appealed, arguing that he had been denied his Sixth Amendment right to a fair trial because he couldn’t pay for a lawyer to defend him. Mondale

Special thanks to the Minnesota Historical Society, the Jimmy Carter Library and Museum, and the University of Minnesota for photos used in this issue.

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joined with Massachusetts Attorney General Edward McCormack Jr. in spearheading submission to the Supreme Court of a brief on behalf of Gideon signed by 23 state attorneys general. In 1963, the high court unanimously held in favor of Gideon.

When Minnesota Sen. Hubert Humphrey became vice president in 1965, Mondale was appointed to his seat in the U.S. Senate and again was soon elected in his own right. As a U.S. senator, he picked his issues carefully. Following up on Gideon, Mondale introduced legislation to provide legal services for the poor. "If the poor and the powerless do not have free access to our legal system, government by law is a failure," Mondale said.

Ultimately, he succeeded in passing legislation creating the independent federal Legal Services Corp. As vice president, he worked to secure funding and to attract talented young lawyers, including Hillary Rodham Clinton, to the Legal Services board of directors.

Mondale did not wear rose-colored glasses. He believed economic injustice and discrimination based on skin color, ethnic origin, gender, and sexual orientation are real, wrong, and deeply destructive.



Hubert Humphrey was Mondale's longtime mentor.



(Left) Mondale served as Minnesota's 23rd attorney general, from 1960 to 1964. (Right) Mondale in his army uniform with his mother, Claribel Mondale.

Not long after he entered the Senate, Mondale focused on discrimination in federally backed housing programs. He and Sen. Edward Brooke (R-Massachusetts) organized hearings that spotlighted the experience of Lt. Cmdr. Carlos Campbell, a young naval aviator who was newly assigned to the Pentagon. The officer and his wife started looking for a place to live in the Washington, D.C., area. They spoke with a number of real estate agents who were initially positive but, as soon as the couple showed up in person, turned them away because they were Black. Mondale and Brooke introduced the Fair Housing Act to reform practices and programs that contributed to segregation of neighborhoods. The measure was initially bottled up in committee, then filibustered on the Senate floor. Mondale and other sponsors were unable to break it free until the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968 shocked the nation's conscience and propelled the measure into law.

Mondale understood the tight link between segregated neighborhoods and inherently unequal schools. The idea that a toddler born in the wrong ZIP code could be condemned to a lifetime of lower economic and other expectations infuriated and galvanized him. He agreed to chair the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee's Subcommittee on Children and Youth and went on to help create and chair the Senate Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity. He shared the view of a leading developmental

psychologist, Erik Erikson, who said: “The most deadly of all possible sins is the mutilation of a child’s spirit.”

Mondale also authored a proposal to begin to transform a small, eight-week summer program known as Project Head Start into a comprehensive strategy to help disadvantaged preschool-age kids succeed when they entered public school. He initially called for up to \$4 billion in federal funds over five years to offer essential health care, nutrition and educational assistance, and social services to pre-K children from low-income families. Following public hearings, Mondale’s Head Start proposal was approved by large margins in the Senate and House of Representatives but vetoed by President Richard M. Nixon.

Interest groups on the far right opposed quality standards for federally funded child care. They sounded false alarms over so-called communal child-rearing and wrongly predicted loss of parental rights. Mondale did not give up.

Having fought drawn-out multiyear battles over the right of every child in America to equal educational opportunity, Mondale realized that action on filibuster reform was

essential to break the chokehold on civil rights legislation imposed by a determined minority in the Senate. As the gavel came down to begin the 94th Congress in 1975, he and Sen. Jim Pearson (R-Kansas) offered a proposal to reduce the number of votes required to invoke cloture from 67 to 60 senators. After a grueling parliamentary fight, it became the first such motion to succeed in the modern history of the Senate.

The Minnesota native fought for institutional reform of the executive branch as well as Congress. He was appalled by revelations in a 1974 New York Times article by Seymour Hersh exposing “a massive, illegal domestic intelligence operation” during the Nixon administration that had placed anti-war activists under intensive surveillance. During earlier administrations, U.S. spy agencies had illegally bugged Dr. Martin Luther King’s hotel rooms and staked out his rallies as part of an effort to discredit him as the nation’s foremost civil rights leader. Mondale helped establish and then served on the Senate Select Intelligence Committee, chairing the

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Vice President Walter Mondale and his wife, Joan, wave to the crowd during the Democratic National Convention at Madison Square Garden in New York on Aug. 13, 1980.

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Subcommittee on Domestic Intelligence. Following months of study and via investigative hearings, he gained a deep knowledge of how domestic and foreign intelligence agencies work and where, when, and how they erred. He used this experience to help write and implement the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978, thereby increasing accountability and adherence to constitutional safeguards.

Over his nearly 12 years in the Senate, Mondale earned the respect of colleagues on both sides of the aisle. He was seen as a hard worker with a sense of humor who kept his word and got things done. This reputation was echoed in the press by respected political reporters and commentators.

While the Minnesota senator was immersed in legislative battles, a little-known governor from Georgia, Jimmy Carter, moved to lock down the 1976 Democratic presidential nomination. Soon speculation turned to Carter's selection of a running mate, with Mondale among the names most frequently mentioned in the media.

After rebuffing entreaties from his staff to "be available" for the vice presidency, Mondale met with Humphrey to get his views on how Mondale should respond if he were asked to join the ticket. He knew Humphrey's experience had been difficult and heartbreaking and expected a negative response. He was surprised by his old friend's advice. Humphrey said forcefully, "Fritz, those four years as vice president were the most exciting and productive of my life. I learned more about our country and our government and about the world than I could in any other way. And I



Mondale addresses a crowd at Andrews Air Force Base as Pope John Paul II looks on. The pope was departing the country after a weeklong American tour in October 1979.



Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill administers the vice presidential oath of office to Mondale.

got more done in one day than in a year in the Senate. If it's offered to you, take it." That was the moment that Walter Mondale began to consider seriously the prospect of being vice president.

Shortly thereafter, Fritz and Joan were invited to travel to Plains, Georgia, which Mondale concluded was small but slightly larger than Ceylon, where he was born. He had mixed feelings. He loved the Senate and had already decided he did not want to give up his seat for a position that was purely ceremonial. He asked Gov. Carter directly how he viewed the vice presidency and what role he would be permitted to play if they ran together and won.

Carter responded that he'd read many histories of past vice presidencies and was struck by how the office had become "a wasted asset." The fact that Harry Truman had not been told about the atomic bomb until after he assumed office had shocked him. He wanted a vice president who played a substantive role in both domestic and foreign affairs and was prepared to assume the presidency immediately should that become necessary.

Mondale was sold but did not know who would get the nod until the last day of the Democratic National Convention in New York, when Carter called him to ask if he would like to join the ticket. He responded yes and went on to campaign virtually nonstop, traveling 65,000 miles to cities and towns primarily in the Midwest, Northeast, and Mid-Atlantic regions.

Soon after they won the election over incumbent

President Gerald R. Ford and Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, Mondale went back to consult with Humphrey and spent a good deal of time with Rockefeller. He also read all the literature on the American vice presidency he could find and met with staffs of former vice presidents dating back to Truman. President-elect Carter invited Mondale to meet with him at Blair House in Washington in early December 1976 and be prepared to offer suggestions as to what his role as vice president would entail. At the meeting, Mondale said he didn't want any line responsibilities but wanted instead to be a general across-the-board advisor and troubleshooter on domestic and foreign policy. To be successful in that role, Mondale said, he would need unfettered access to the president himself and to all of the information that flowed through his office. He felt he could be helpful on congressional relations and the diplomatic front. Carter responded that he liked what he had heard and asked for a memo summarizing it.

The president-elect said a few days later he agreed completely with the memo and over the next several weeks added a few thoughts of his own. He directed his staff and Cabinet to respond to a request from the vice president as if it had come from him, the president. And he told them clearly that if anyone tried to undermine the vice president, that person would be fired. He also gave Mondale a coveted office in the West Wing, just steps from his own. Finally, to ensure staff coordination, he made Mondale's chief of staff, Richard Moe, a member of his own senior staff. The two leaders also agreed to continue a practice from the Ford administration: a regular weekly lunch where the president and vice president



Mondale takes part in an August 1977 breakfast meeting with Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, President Carter, and National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski.

could have a private and confidential hourlong conversation about anything on their minds. Mondale came to believe that these lunches were the most important vehicles he had to convey his thoughts to the president on policy, personnel, or political matters. During the four years, nothing ever leaked from these conversations.

Mondale did have occasional moments when he missed the independence of being in the Senate, but he invariably overcame them when he realized the unprecedented trust that President Carter had given him in terms of access, responsibility, and opportunity. He would often say that he had been given a more generous gift than any other vice president had ever received.

Over four years, all of this enhanced the ability of the executive office to deal with the many serious issues that came up. For the first time, the president had the ability to delegate responsibility to the only other nationally elected official in the government and someone who was an integral part of the decision-making process. The change didn't require a constitutional amendment or an act of Congress, but simply a considered decision of the president. And that decision has been followed, with appropriate variations, by nearly every subsequent administration, including the present one. The modern vice presidency has every prospect of becoming permanently institutionalized by use because it has such obvious benefits for the presidency and for the country.

What difference did all this make for our country?

First, subsequent vice presidents were able to score important specific diplomatic and domestic gains—George



Carter and Mondale talk policy in Plains, Georgia.

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H.W. Bush on China, Al Gore on climate change, Joe Biden on managing interactions with several strategically important countries.

Second, budgets for education, child care, job training, and a host of areas where Mondale possessed unique expertise were augmented in good times and protected when resources were tight.

Third, a host of critical domestic and foreign policy victories were achieved when the congressional or diplomatic outcome had been in doubt. Examples include:

- Creation of a new Cabinet-level Department of Education.
- A landmark decision by the U.S. Supreme Court (*Bakke v. California*) upholding affirmative action.
- Ratification of the Panama Canal treaties.
- Action by the U.S. Navy to rescue Indochinese “boat people” who were drowning at sea.
- Deregulation of new natural gas prices, which set off a boom in natural gas exploration and the addition of trillions of cubic feet to our country’s reserves.
- Expansion of Head Start to exceed \$10 billion in funding and serve more than 1 million children and their families yearly.

In addition, Vice President Mondale flew to Israel and worked hard to persuade Prime Minister Menachem Begin to come to Camp David to meet with Egypt’s President Anwar Sadat. He explained Jimmy Carter to Begin and then returned home and explained Begin to Carter. In private meetings and public events, Mondale did everything he could to build understanding within the American Jewish community of who President Carter was and what he was attempting to achieve. The resulting historic peace agreement between Israel and Egypt has lasted more than 40 years.

Beginning in January 1979, the Carter-Mondale administration faced three crises, any one of which could have ended in a 1980 election loss. In January, the Shah of Iran was overthrown. In November, a group of militant Iranian students invaded the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, taking 60 American hostages. And on Christmas Eve, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. In the period between January 1979 and the November 1980 election, the price of crude oil more than doubled. Inflation and interest rates rose, and the U.S. economy stalled and then contracted as interest rates and



Mondale was tireless—and effective—on the campaign trail.

unemployment climbed.

While the initial polling did not show it, the odds favored Republican candidate Ronald Reagan, whose campaign was the first to use the slogan “Make America Great Again.” Reagan won handily, putting Carter and Mondale out of office.

Although Mondale won the 1984 Democratic presidential nomination, he too lost to Reagan, this time in a landslide. The loss notwithstanding, Mondale conducted his campaign with characteristic integrity and made history as the first nominee of a national party to select a woman, Rep. Geraldine Ferraro (D-New York), to be his running mate. Among the things he was proudest of in later life were the things he did as a senator, vice president, and presidential candidate to create and expand opportunities for women.

President Bill Clinton, elected in 1992, asked Mondale to serve as U.S. ambassador to Japan. Mondale and his wife, Joan,

both served ably, strengthening cultural as well as diplomatic ties. When faced with a firestorm ignited by the rape of a Japanese schoolgirl by three U.S. servicemen stationed on Okinawa, Mondale immediately did the right thing by apologizing—on behalf of the United States—to the Japanese people.

While Fritz Mondale served our country with distinction in Washington and Tokyo, he never lost sight of his Minnesota roots. He spent much of his time back in Minnesota teaching at the Humphrey School at the University of Minnesota and mentoring young people considering engagement in public service. High on his list were actions to protect his beloved St. Croix River and to preserve the integrity of the unique Boundary Waters Canoe Area. In his waning days, Mondale didn't hesitate to say yes when asked if he would pitch in one more time to help protect wilderness in the BWCA from toxic copper sulfide mining.

In February 1981, a month after leaving office, Mondale gave a lecture on the vice presidency at the Humphrey

School. It offered his thoughtful, personal, and remarkably candid reflections on steps he and President Carter had taken to turn what had been a constitutional afterthought into a vital arm to assist the president in ways no one else can do. At the conclusion of that talk, Mondale displayed his characteristic wit. He said:

“You may be wondering, now that I have sketched all the ground that has been broken, the duties that I have performed, and the success that we have achieved, how is it then that we lost the election? I have the answer, but I am out of time.”

It's our country's blessing that such a self-effacing and exceptional public servant devoted his life to us. It is our loss that this spring he ran out of time.

About the Authors: Gail Harrison was a senior policy advisor to Senator and Vice President Walter Mondale. Richard Moe was chief of staff to Mondale as a senator and vice president and was an assistant to President Jimmy Carter.



The Mondales and Carters in the White House on Jan. 21, 1977.

Dignitaries, Staffers, Friends Note Passing of Walter Mondale

Shortly before his passing, Walter Mondale sent this note to many of his former staff.

Dear Team,

Well, my time has come. I am eager to rejoin Joan and Eleanor. Before I go, I wanted to let you know how much you mean to me. Never has a public servant had a better group of people working at their side!

Together we have accomplished so much, and I know you will keep up the good fight. Joe in the White House certainly helps.

I always knew it would be okay if I arrived some place and was greeted by one of you!

My best to all of you!

Fritz

Former President Jimmy Carter

I mourn the passing of my dear friend Walter Mondale, who I consider the best vice president in our country's history. During our administration, Fritz used his political skill and



personal integrity to transform the vice presidency into a dynamic, policy-driving force that had never been seen before and still exists today.

He was an invaluable partner and an able servant of the people of Minnesota, the United States, and the world. Fritz Mondale provided

Carter and Mondale at the White House in December 1979.



In 2015, Mondale and Joe Biden, then U.S. vice president, shake hands at "Celebrating Fritz: An Evening with Walter Mondale," hosted by the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs and held in Washington, D.C.

us all with a model for public service and private behavior. Rosalynn and I join all Americans in giving thanks for his exemplary life, and we extend our deepest condolences to his family.

President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden

It's with great sadness that Jill and I learned of the passing of Vice President Walter Mondale, but great gratitude that we were able to call one of our nation's most dedicated patriots and public servants a dear friend and mentor.

Jill and I had the opportunity to speak to Fritz and his family [shortly before his death], to reflect on the years of friendship we shared, and how much we learned from and leaned on each other.

When I arrived in the United States Senate in 1973, Walter Mondale was one of the first people to greet me. Through his work as a senator, he showed me what was possible. He may have been modest and unassuming in

manner, but he was unwavering in his pursuit of progress [and] instrumental in passing laws like the Fair Housing Act to prevent racial discrimination in housing, Title IX to provide more opportunities for women, and laws to protect our environment. There have been few senators, before or since, who commanded such universal respect.

When President Obama asked me to consider being his Vice President, Fritz was my first call and trusted guide. He not only took my call, he wrote me a memo. It was Walter Mondale who defined the vice presidency as a full partnership and helped provide a model for my service.

And Joan did the same for Jill, helping her carve out a role for herself as our nation's Second Lady.

He not only created a path for himself, he helped others do the same. Walter Mondale was the first presidential nominee of either party to select a woman [Geraldine Ferraro] as his running mate, and I know how pleased he was to be able to see Kamala Harris become vice president.

In accepting the Democratic Party's nomination for president, he described the values he was taught to live by: "to play by the rules; to tell the truth; to obey the law; to care for others; to love our country; to cherish our faith."

As a senator, an ambassador, a vice president, and a candidate for president, he lived and spread those values.

Our hearts go out to the Mondale family. And we take some comfort in the fact that he is with Joan and Eleanor now.

Former President Barack Obama

Walter Mondale championed progressive causes and changed the role of VP—so leaders like Joe Biden could be the last ones in the room when decisions were made. In selecting Geraldine Ferraro, he also paved the way for Kamala Harris to make history. Michelle and I send prayers to his family.

Former President Bill Clinton

Walter Mondale believed in the power of government to make a positive difference in people's lives and proved it at every stage of his remarkable career—with deep policy knowledge, a tireless work ethic, and uncommon decency. Hillary and I loved him and will miss him very much.

Vice President Kamala Harris

Vice President Mondale brought the president and the vice president closer together, redefining the relationship as a true partnership. He worked side by side with President Carter as the two endeavored to end the arms race, promote human



U.S. presidential candidate Walter Mondale and vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro campaign at a political rally at Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in 1984.

rights, and establish peace. Mondale's choice of Ms. Ferraro opened "a new door to the future," to borrow his words. His legacy will live on in all of us.

He was so generous with his wit and wisdom over the years. Each time I open my desk drawer and see his signature there, alongside the signatures of 11 other vice presidents, I will be reminded of and grateful for Vice President Mondale's life of service.

The family of Geraldine Ferraro

We are deeply saddened by the loss of our hero and friend, Walter Mondale. When he chose Geraldine Ferraro to be his running mate in his 1984 presidential campaign, Mr. Mondale opened the doors of opportunity and forever changed what was possible in our country for women and girls. Geraldine Ferraro, our wife and mother, was incredibly proud of the relationship she and Mr. Mondale forged during that historic race, and for her remaining days, she cherished what would become their deep and lifelong friendship. As her family, we were also honored to work for that trailblazing ticket, and equally so to have been able to call this eminently decent, honorable, and lovely man our friend, too.

Sen. Tina Smith, D-Minnesota

I loved Walter Mondale, and I'm not the only one. Mondale was a giant not only because of the positions he held ... but because of the work that he did.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-California

Walter Mondale was well-respected and liked on both sides

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A 2015 panel including Sens. Dianne Feinstein (second from left) and Patrick Leahy (third from left), with moderator David Cole, discussed Vice President Mondale (far right) and his policies.

of the aisle. This was a man of intelligence and integrity, and he practiced both during his long career in public service.

Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Virginia

I will always think of him as the chief sponsor of the Fair Housing Act and first presidential candidate to ask a woman to join him on the ticket. Ahead of his time.

Sen. Cory Booker, D-New Jersey

We drink deeply from wells we did not dig. I mourn the passing of VP Walter Mondale, whose lasting legacy includes a law that helped my family move into a home in an all-white neighborhood with good schools that gave me the foundation to serve—just as he did—as a U.S. senator.

Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah

It's hard to find a picture of Fritz Mondale where he isn't smiling. A cheerful and good soul who will surely be welcomed by a loving God.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina

He served his country with great distinction and was passionate about his causes. A true public servant who will be missed.

Sen. Bill Hagerty, R-Tennessee

While Walter Mondale and I had different political beliefs,

when I was U.S. ambassador to Japan, a position he once held, he was always gracious and kind with his time and advice. I will treasure our calls and correspondence.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-California

Walter Mondale was an icon of honor and decency who helped broker a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt in the Camp David Accords of 1978. His passing is a sad and great loss for our nation.

Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson, D-Texas

It was my honor to serve alongside him in the Carter administration during my tenure in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. It is with sorrow that I mourn his passing.

Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minnesota

We thank you, Mr. Vice President, and promise to continue the fight for justice and civil rights.

Leon Panetta, former defense secretary and White House chief of staff

He not only transformed the vice presidency, politically, but his standard of ethical conduct, I believe, has still set a standard for all that have held that office ever since

I first met Fritz when I was a legislative assistant in the Senate working on civil rights legislation. As senator, he was a leader on pushing for equal justice. When I became director of the U.S. Office for Civil Rights, he was my strongest supporter for enforcement of the law providing equal education to all children.

I always appreciated his assertiveness on the role of the federal government respecting the poor, minority groups, and women. He saw before so many of us that the policies the nation was adopting in the early 1980s would eventually stress the middle and lower classes. If we would have heeded his warning, we might have avoided the current populist discontent and economic disparities that wrack our great nation, as well as the prodigious deficits he so courageously advised against.

Norm Ornstein, resident scholar with the American Enterprise Institute

When we look at people who made a mark through public service in the 20th century, Fritz Mondale is going to be right up there in the hall of fame.

Al Eisele, former reporter and Mondale press secretary

Mondale was one of the leading spokesmen of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party as a senator and brought a dose of socially progressive politics to the 1976 ticket.

At that year's Democratic convention, Mondale portrayed joining forces with Carter as ending the Democrats' geographical and political divisions, saying to applause, "We stand together as a nation, reunited at long last, North and South, Georgia and Minnesota."

Deborah Sale, 1976 lead advance, Mondale vice presidential staff, executive director of the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities

I first met then Senator Mondale when Gene Godley invited me to attend Mondale Advance School just after he'd been selected by Jimmy Carter to run with him for vice president. He spoke to his new staff and said what I view as perhaps the wisest political message for any politician or office holder to give his staff. He said, "I reserve the right to make my own enemies."

Ruth Cogswell—former White House press officer

Vice President Mondale was such a good, kind, humble man, and I am grateful that I was able to work with his people in the general election in 1976. It was the beginning of a road that landed me in the White House press office. Just all really good people.

Chuck Levin, White House advance staff 1977–1979

My memory above all is this: respect and admiration! Mr. Mondale was always a gentleman, compassionate and supportive, and I admired his tireless public service, energy, and the example he set coast to coast for other politicians.

And this personally: I'm a Californian with long shaggy hair, not, let's say, typical on the trail, and Senator and VP Mondale immediately and always appreciated my work and seeing me at the airport. That was cool and memorable in my book.

Les Francis, deputy White House chief of staff for President Carter

It may seem strange, but soon after learning of the death of Fritz Mondale, I found myself thinking about elephants—and

not because a pachyderm is the symbol of his lifelong opposition, the Republican Party. And not because elephants are descendants of huge creatures from the dinosaur era, although younger readers might view folks such as Mondale and me as dinosaurs because of our age and progressive ideals.

No, I have thought about my friend, former boss and mentor Fritz Mondale and elephants together for another reason. As wildlife advocate Amelia Meyer has written:

"The elephant's capacity for sadness and grief is truly unique amongst members of the animal world... Because elephants live in such close-knit herds and live for about as long as humans do (approximately 70 years), they form strong bonds with those around them. When these ones die, the rest of the herd mourns that death."

Those who worked for and with Fritz Mondale in the Senate, the White House, in political campaigns—including his crushing defeat for president in 1984—formed strong bonds with him, and with one another. To a person, we admired him, respected him, were inspired by him. We loved him, and he loved us in return. We were—we are—a herd.

Rolf W. Hansen, former Consul General of Norway

As former consul general of Norway in Minneapolis, it was a

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Democratic presidential nominee Jimmy Carter raises hands with vice presidential nominee Walter Mondale at the Democratic National Convention in July 1976, New York City.

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great pleasure to meet Walter Mondale and discuss current matters with him. His interest in Norway was keen and long-lasting. He was a truly great man in all senses of the word and a great voice of reason and compassion. May he rest in peace.

Joel Goldstein, the Vincent C. Immel Professor of Law Emeritus at St. Louis University and the preeminent scholar on the vice presidency

Walter Mondale was one of the great public servants of his generation. He had a deep commitment to America's highest ideals, including a belief that government could be a positive force in creating a more just and inclusive society which treated people from different demographic groups fairly and drew on the talents of all. He transformed the vice presidency and used his influence to open doors to those excluded and to save many whose lives were threatened. ...

He was a skillful politician who conducted his public service with integrity, humility, decency, and good humor. He fought good fights, and America is the beneficiary of his skill, his commitments, and his character.

Messages from students at the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota, shared by Dean Laura Bloomberg:

When I get discouraged or frustrated in graduate school or in public service, I always remember that Walter Mondale once told me he was proud of me and that I was doing good

work. I was also impressed when he made every student introduce themselves and explain their policy interests and how he individually encouraged each student. I've seen a lot of guest presentations or lecturers in five years of higher education, but very few who were that kind to students and treated them as equals, let alone a former vice president.

He left me just astonished at the force of his kindness and humility. It's strange to think of those attributes as strengths, as weapons even, but he exemplified the notion that there's real power in caring for people and acting from the heart. He left big shoes to fill.

I marveled at the amount of time Fritz spent with undergraduates—mostly freshmen and sophomores; when I asked him about it, he said that they were young people at the beginning of their journey of engaged citizenship and there was nowhere more important for him to be.

We spent some time together before the 2016 election planning revisions to the 1968 Civil Rights Act. I would visit him in his office once a week. It was wonderful to get to know him on a more personal level. At one point, he asked me if I thought passage of the act was the right thing for Black people. He had some misgivings given the plight of Black people in America today. I told him that I would not be here today without the work that he championed. It was the absolute right thing to do. It was a powerful moment for me to spend time with a man of such deep commitment and values.

Shoichiro Toyoda, honorary chairman, Toyota Motor Corp.

I remember our intense conversations about how we could contribute to constructing a better economic relationship between the United States and Japan. I would like to express my gratitude for the valuable advice Ambassador Mondale provided over the years as Toyota expanded into the United States and strived to be a company that can contribute to the community.

Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota

The most consequential vice president in American history, Walter Mondale's efforts were critical in the success of the Camp David Accords, which ended the conflict between Israel and Egypt. For decades, Mondale was a great friend to Minnesota's Jewish community, and we will miss his



Mondale enjoys the support of his family at the 1980 Democratic National Convention: (from left) daughter Eleanor, wife Joan, and sons Ted and William.

graciousness, generosity, and wisdom dearly...

His “Test of Civilization” speech to the United Nations Conference on Indochinese Refugees in July 1979 summoned the world’s conscience on behalf of the desperate people of Southeast Asia. Explicitly he referenced the failure of the Evian Conference to help the Jews of Germany in the most desperate year of 1938. Comparing the two situations, he urged: “The question they underline is not simply humanitarian... It is a test of civilization.”

Vice President Mondale’s longstanding friendship with then Defense Minister of Israel (and later President of Israel) Ezer Weizman was a critical back channel to (Prime Minister Menachem) Begin as the intricate, intimate and fateful negotiations were on the verge of collapse. The Egypt-Israel peace treaty of 1979, which resulted from the Camp David talks, has maintained the peace for more than four decades.



Mondale and Carter meet in front of the Marine One helicopter, January 1979.

Cui Tiankai, ambassador, People’s Republic of China

Vice President Mondale was an accomplished statesman and a longtime friend of the Chinese people. He played an important part in establishing and growing China-U.S. diplomatic relations.



Mondale, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance meet in February 1979.

Ryan B. Shaffer, president, Japan-America Society, Washington, D.C.

Ambassador Mondale came to Tokyo at a critical juncture in U.S.-Japan relations. The Cold War that had served as the glue of the U.S.-Japan alliance had ended, allowing long-festered trade issues to rise to the top of the bilateral agenda and sour relations. At the same time, the U.S.-Japan security relationship was adrift, with no clear rationale or focus after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The 1995 attack in Okinawa by three American servicemen on a Japanese school-girl created a crisis in the alliance. Ambassador Mondale played a critical role in managing these issues and establishing a new post-Cold War foundation for the U.S.-Japan relationship, formalized during a 1996 visit to Japan by President Clinton and the issuance of the U.S.-Japan Security Declaration. This foundation is being built on today by President Biden and Prime Minister Suga.

Ambassador Mondale approached his responsibilities in Japan the same way he approached all of his public duties: with humility, humor, steadfast integrity, and a deep respect for the role of government and the public servants who make it work.

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Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minnesota

We lost my friend and mentor Walter Mondale, known to friends as Fritz. In my home state of Minnesota, we were proud to call Fritz our attorney general, our senator, and our vice president.

On the national stage he shined as a young state attorney general who championed the right to counsel. As a senator he was a leader in the fight for civil rights and housing legislation and—way ahead of his time—warned of the need for intelligence oversight and privacy protections. He reshaped the vice presidency and served as a true partner to President Jimmy Carter, someone who wasn't just a figurehead but instead a close advisor and confidant, deserving of a place in "the room where it happens."

In our state, we were lucky enough to see a different side of Fritz as well. He was the husband and father who lovingly took care of his wife, Joan, and daughter, Eleanor, through heartbreaking illnesses. He was a model for anyone who wonders what life would be like if the job ends or life takes a bad turn.

It was not just the decency he displayed on the local and national political stage that made him stand out. It was the dignity he brought home with him in the wake of defeat. He didn't crawl under a desk or complain about his losses.

Instead, with his characteristic humbleness and good humor, the man who had played a pivotal role in the Camp David peace accords between Menachem Begin of Israel and Anwar Sadat of Egypt would happily talk Mideast peace with a cashier at the grocery store. He'd share stories from his time as ambassador to Japan with students at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs. And most important, he took on the mission of preparing the next generation of leaders for the next big decision by serving as a mentor to so many. And I know that when the jury verdict in the trial of Derek Chauvin was read, Fritz Mondale was with us rooting for justice.

My first job in politics was as a college intern in Vice President Mondale's office in 1980 during his last year in office. I went to Washington with grandiose visions of writing big briefings on big issues. Instead I was assigned to furniture inventory, which meant I had to write down the serial numbers of every lamp, table and chair provided by the government for the use of the vice president and his staff.

As I like to remind students, I learned two things from that job: One, Walter Mondale was scrupulously honest.

Nothing was missing. Second, take your jobs seriously, even when they aren't exactly what you planned. Thanks to him, that was my first job in Washington. And, again thanks to him, senator was my second.

It was Walter Mondale who encouraged me to run for the Senate, which included his insistence that I get my reasons for running down to a 30-second elevator speech. "That's today's politics," he explained.

This resulted in a series of phone calls, with me earnestly reciting my 30 seconds and him responding with his typical Norwegian understatement: "That's just not good enough. Call me back in an hour." This went on for most of a day until I could finally recite those 30 seconds of reasons, eventually taking them to the cornfields of southern Minnesota, the iron ore mines in the north, and ultimately, the halls of the Capitol.

He did that for so many because politics was never just about him. When he picked Geraldine Ferraro to be his running mate during his bid for the presidency in 1984, he assured me, and so many other young women, not to mention countless little boys and girls around the world who watched that day, that anything and everything was possible.

I still remember what Ms. Ferraro was wearing that day—the red dress, the string of pearls, the confidence. And I remember how proud he was to stand by her side. In fact, it was my experience with Vice President Mondale that encouraged me to believe that someday I, too, could actually run for office.

On the wall in the Carter Museum in Atlanta are Vice President Mondale's words uttered shortly after their 1980 defeat, summing up their four years in office: "We told the truth. We obeyed the law. We kept the peace." I wrote those words down once on a piece of paper at the museum and slipped them in my purse. Through the Trump years, those words were my touchstone.

We told the truth. We obeyed the law. We kept the peace. That is the minimum we should expect from our public servants. With Walter Mondale, we got that and so much more.

He was a small-town boy, the son of a minister who rose to the second-highest office in the land, with a strong moral core that defined his every action. He set a high bar for himself, and for his entire life he kept passing it and raising it, passing it and raising it.

As our country's political winds have whipped back and forth in every direction over the past decades, Walter Mondale remained true to his North Star compass of goodness and decency. I can't think of a better role model.

Longtime Aide Gives Insider View of Working with Mondale

By Mike Berman

In late 1974, Mondale flirted with seeking the Democratic nomination for president in 1976. It went so far as my setting out to rent an office in Washington, D.C. I had talked to Madeleine Albright about joining our team, but before she made up her mind, Mondale pulled out. Had he gone forward, it is unlikely that he would have been selected as Jimmy Carter's running mate.

The Mondales were the first vice presidential family to live in the house that is now known as the Vice President's Residence. The house had been the home of the chief of naval operations. It was available to Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, and while they did some remodeling, the Rockefellers never spent a night there.

I was Mondale's campaign treasurer in the 1984 primary and general elections and the national campaign coordinator in the general election.

When Bill Clinton was elected president, he offered Mondale the position of U.S. ambassador to Russia. Mondale accepted, and on the day President-elect Clinton was set to announce Mondale's position in an evening speech at Georgetown University, I got a call at 3 p.m. It was Mondale. He said, "I cannot go to Russia and I would like you to tell the Clinton folks." I was shocked and said to him, "You know if you do this, your chances of being an ambassador are over. You won't get another chance." He said, "I know that."

I knew the Clinton folks pretty well. I had spent the fall in Little Rock working on the campaign. So, I called Bruce Lindsey and told him what Mondale had told me. I think I explained to him why. Clinton obviously did not make the announcement that evening.

And then, unexpectedly, Clinton appointed Mondale as ambassador to Japan and Mondale accepted. To this day, I think this is the most gracious thing Clinton ever did.



Mondale meets with key staff members Jim Johnson, Mike Berman, and Dick Moe.

In 2002, toward the end of his reelection campaign, Minnesota Democratic Sen. Paul Wellstone—who held Mondale's old Senate seat—was killed in a plane crash. Mondale was asked by the Wellstone team to replace Wellstone. Mondale agreed and I set about raising some money for the campaign. Mondale was not elected.

The last time I spoke to Fritz was on April 9, 2021. He called to wish me a happy birthday and spoke/sang the Happy Birthday song.

On April 19, 2021, I received a call from Minneapolis at 7:21 p.m. letting me know that Mondale had died. He had been a part of my life for 57 years.

About the Author: Mike Berman held many positions with Walter Mondale. This article was excerpted from a longer piece available in its entirety at www.mikeswashingtonwatch.com (May 2021 edition).

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The Carter Center welcomes the support of Carter-Mondale alumni. We invite you to join us at CarterCenter.org and make a donation to support our activities.



Memorial services for Walter Mondale have been postponed until spring 2022 due to COVID-19.

Vice President Walter Mondale and President Jimmy Carter meet on the White House lawn in April 1978.

About This Newsletter

The Carter/Mondale Letter is sent to individuals who were associated with the campaign and administration of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and Vice President Walter Mondale. Please send us news, photos, and other items that will interest your fellow alumni and let us know of others who need to be added to the mailing list. Contact Jay Beck, The Carter Center, One Copenhill, 453 John Lewis Freedom Parkway, Atlanta, GA 30307; Phone (404) 420-3809; Fax (404) 420-3816; Email jay.beck@cartercenter.org.

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