

Joseph D. Tydings, progressive U.S. senator from Maryland, dies at age 90



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By **Christina Tkacik, Frederick N. Rasmussen and Jacques Kelly**
The Baltimore Sun

OCTOBER 8, 2018, 11:15 PM

Former U.S. Sen. Joseph D. Tydings recalled in his autobiography that as U.S. attorney for Maryland in the 1960s, he brought so many political corruption cases against fellow Democrats that he once received a call from U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy.

"My God, Joe," he recalled Mr. Kennedy saying, "can't you ever find a Republican to indict?"

Sen. Tydings, a "Kennedy man" who followed the footsteps of his adoptive father, Millard Tydings, into the U.S. Senate, died Monday of cancer in Washington. He was 90.

Politicians on both sides of the aisle recalled him as a fair, principled prosecutor and politician whose career was marked by a willingness to take on anyone, regardless of affiliation.

"His progressive battles cost him his Senate seat in 1970, but his display of political courage was an inspiration to me and many others," said Sen. Chris Van Hollen. "In these difficult times, he serves as a

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“Joe re-wrote the book on the use of the U.S. attorney’s office as a corruption hunter,” said former Maryland Attorney General Stephen H. Sachs. “His use of a grand jury — and the tips it received — changed Maryland’s political picture. Personally, he was a loving man who was affectionate to his colleagues.”

Gov. Larry Hogan called Sen. Tydings “one of Maryland’s great civic leaders,” and praised his “landmark prosecutions against public corruption.”

“Sen. Tydings and his family have made a lasting mark on Maryland,” said the governor, who ordered flags to fly at half-staff on the day of the senator’s interment.

“He was a fine progressive public servant,” said former Gov. Harry R. Hughes. “I was glad to call him a friend. He was a very friendly man who enjoyed being around people.”

“Joe was a true independent,” said U.S. Sen. Ben Cardin. “In every office he held he respected the rights of the people rather than the political environment he worked within.”

“He helped to change politics in Maryland ... and distinguished himself as a public servant from the very beginning,” said former Sen. Paul S. Sarbanes. “He was very much committed to public service and he helped open that to a whole new generation as a very strong advocate of progressive positions.”

He was born in Asheville, N.C., on May 4, 1928, to Eleanor Davies and Tom Cheesborough. He and his sister, Eleanor, were later adopted by U.S. Sen. Millard Tydings after his mother divorced their biological father. He was the maternal grandson of Joseph M. Davies, an attorney who was posted in 1936 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as an ambassador to Moscow.

He grew up on a farm in Havre de Grace; the house on the banks of the Chesapeake Bay now belongs to Ashley Addiction Treatment.

The future senator was raised amid privilege — his grandfather married Marjorie Merriweather Post, heiress to the Post cereal fortune, and he made childhood visits to her opulent homes in New York City and elsewhere. But he remained frugal throughout his life and didn’t consider himself an elite.

“He was a man of the people, despite how he grew up,” said his daughter, Mary Tydings of Easton.

He attended public school in Aberdeen before entering McDonogh School in Baltimore County. Upon graduation, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and attained the rank of corporal. He served with the 6th Cavalry Group of the Third Army, one of the Army’s last horse platoons, during the postwar occupation of Germany.

A lifelong horse lover, he later introduced the Horse Protection Act in the Senate, meant to combat the abusive practice of “soring” horses to affect their gait. He was given an award by the U.S. Humane Society for his work.

After completing his military service, he entered the University of Maryland, College Park. He played football in 1950. In 1953 he graduated from the

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He served as president of the Maryland Young Democrats in the 1950s, and during his tenure he once confronted an Ocean City hotel owner who refused to allow blacks to stay there.

In 1954 he was elected to represent Harford County in the Maryland House of Delegates. There, he fought for greater oversight of savings and loan companies after the industry's major scandal.

"I was appalled no one was doing anything about it," he wrote in his autobiography, "My Life in Progressive Politics: Against the Grain," co-written with former Baltimore Sun reporter John W. Frece and published this year. The reason, he argued, was that many politicians in the state were profiting from these schemes.

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy named him U.S. attorney for Maryland. As the state's federal prosecutor, he brought corruption-related cases against numerous politicians, including Rep. Thomas Johnson and House of Delegates Speaker A. Gordon Boone, who both served time in prison.

At the urging of President Kennedy, Sen. Tydings launched a bid for the U.S. Senate in 1963. The president was assassinated the same day that Sen. Tydings held a downtown Baltimore luncheon with colleagues to prepare for his run.

"We were having a lunch at the Marty Welsh restaurant when we got the word," recalled J. Hardin Marion, his former campaign manager and later his Senate chief of staff.

He defeated Louis Goldstein — later state comptroller — in the 1964 Democratic primary and went on to beat Republican J. Glenn Beall Sr. in the general election. Elected at age 36, he had run with a pledge to clean up "old guard" politicians.

"It was a challenging relationship between Joe and President Lyndon B. Johnson," Mr. Marion said. "He supported a lot of LBJ's and the Democratic Party's programs and initially supported Vietnam. But he split and became an anti-Vietnam senator."

During his six years in the Senate, 1965-1971, he championed gun control and civil rights and opposed the war in Vietnam. Mr. Marion said that although he was a "very junior senator, Joe played a significant role making sure that legislation like the Voting Rights Act got passed."

According to his family, Sen. Tydings became an enemy of President Richard Nixon after helping defeat two of the president's Supreme Court nominees, Clement F. Haynsworth Jr. and G. Harrold Carswell. His advocacy for gun control drew the wrath of the National Rifle Association. He lost a 1970 re-election bid.

"The NRA did him in, and his loss from active politics was really a loss for the State of Maryland," said former State Sen Julian L. Lapidus. "Joe was... a liberal who was maybe a little ahead of his time."

Former Vice President Joe Biden wrote the forward to Sen. Tydings' autobiography, and noted that while he and the senator came from different backgrounds, "our politics ended up in the same place. When I think back to my early years in the Senate, I was building on groundwork that Joe had helped lay --- from
ng civil rights protections for all Americans."

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After leaving elected office, Sen. Tydings remained active in political circles and lobbied for laws protecting the Chesapeake Bay. A favorite hobby was log canoeing on the bay, which he enjoyed until his later years.

He served as a member and chairman of the Board of Regents of the University of Maryland from 1974 to 1984, and was a regent of the University of Maryland system from 2000 to 2005. He was an architect of spinning off the former University of Maryland Hospital into the nonprofit University of Maryland Medical System.

At an age when his peers were considering retirement, Sen. Tydings worked as an attorney with the firm, Blank Rome LLP. Jim Kelly, chairman of the firm's Washington office, said Sen. Tydings worked toward causes he deemed important.

"It sounds a little trite, but he really was committed to basic notions of justice and fairness," Mr. Kelly said. "He was not afraid to wear that on his sleeve, and he was not afraid to stand up and be counted."

Former Maryland Attorney General Douglas F. Gansler fondly recalled their breakfast meetings, where Sen. Tydings would order grits, crispy bacon, eggs and tomato juice.

"He was a man of deep principal and courage. He went after corruption at the highest levels — in his own party," Mr. Gansler said. "Civil rights, women's issues and minority issues — he was talking about them in the 1960s and we're still talking about them today. He was an establishment figure who took on the establishment when he thought it was appropriate to do so.

"He lived a very long and spirited life, and he made a great deal of difference in other peoples' lives," he said.

Sen. Tydings married Virginia Reynolds Campbell of Lewes, Del., in 1955. They had four children and divorced in 1974. The following year, he married Terry Lynn Huntingdon of Mount Shasta, Calif., with whom he had a fifth child. That marriage and two subsequent marriages ended in divorce.

Sen. Tydings kept a home in Harford County near Ladew Topiary Gardens. He called his residence "Bachelor's Quarters" and hosted an annual party at the My Lady's Manor races.

His daughter recalled that one of Sen. Tydings' political slogans was "Joe Tydings doesn't duck the tough ones."

It remained an apt phrase until the end of his life. Sick with cancer, he nevertheless attended his oldest grandchild's wedding on Maryland's Eastern Shore in September.

A memorial service and reception will be held at 10:30 a.m. Nov. 10 at the University of Maryland Memorial Chapel in College Park.

In addition to his daughter, he is survived by other children Millard Tydings of Skillman, N.J., Emlen Tydings Gaudino of Palm Beach in Australia, Eleanor Tydings Gollob of McLean, Va., and Alexandra
ussell of Monkton; and nine grandchildren.

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