

JOHN J. GILLIGAN - A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

At services and events in Cincinnati and Columbus on September 4th and 5th. Ohioans honored the life and mourned the loss of John J. Gilligan. What is important now is to make sure that people remember what Governor Gilligan stood for throughout his long career.

At a time when "big money" so dominates politics, and when politicians rank a bit lower than used car salesmen in the public mind, it is critical to have models of something better. John Gilligan is such a model. In seeking elected offices, his goal was to make government work for all the people, and he especially sought to enact legislation that promoted economic, social, and political justice.

After distinguished service in World War Two and a stint as an English professor at Xavier University, he began his long career in public life when he was elected to Cincinnati City Council in 1953. During his time on Council in the 1950s and early 1960s, he championed Civil Rights when it was not yet a safe issue for average politicians. In 1964. He was elected to Congress where he served for one term supporting many of "the Great Society" programs launched under the Johnson Administration. He voted for such landmark legislation as the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

After losing his seat to Robert Taft, Jr. In 1966, Gilligan returned to City Council in 1967 before making a run for the U.S. Senate in 1968. Although he lost this race to William Saxbe, he became known statewide for his progressive views and charismatic style. He turned these assets into a political victory when he successfully ran for Governor in 1970.

Although he only served one term as Governor of Ohio, Gilligan took a leadership role that rejuvenated state government. In order to have a resource for funding public education, he convinced the Legislature to enact a personal income tax in 1971. When an initiative was launched in order to repeal the tax, Gilligan campaigned vigorously to convince voters that this revenue source was needed. At a time when elected officials live by the mantra, "no new taxes", Gilligan's actions shine out for their foresight and courage.

Defeated by a slim margin in his reelection bid in 1974, Gilligan served as President Carter's Director of the Agency for International Development, before returning to his alma mater, Notre Dame University. At Notre Dame, he was the Director of the Institute for International Peace Studies until he came back to Cincinnati in the early 1990s.

Not content to retire and rest on his laurels, he took on the task of focusing on important public issues as Director of the Civic Forum at the University of Cincinnati College of Law. Diverse citizens were invited to spend six weeks each fall exploring critical issues

such as homelessness and housing, welfare reform, public education, and the emergence of urban regions. During this period, participants heard various local and outside speakers and they discussed what they were learning.

When Governor Gilligan invited Applied Information Resources to assist him with these forums, I became quite involved in this phase of his long and productive career. What immediately struck me about this exceptional man was his intellectual capacity and his commitment to make government at all levels and the civic sector effectively serve those in need of assistance. He was always reading and absorbing books and articles, and he was forever translating this information to friends and colleagues. His hope for the Civic Forum was that participants would come away from their immersion in an issue with a commitment to act.

During this same period, Gilligan chaired a new regional citizens' organization, Citizens For Civic Renewal, and AIR became the behind the scenes organizer for this effort to promote regional approaches to problem solving. Under his leadership, CCR hosted numerous public meetings on everything from regional transportation to campaign finance reform.

Several Civic Forums on public education prompted the former Governor, then in his late 70s, to decide to run for the Cincinnati School Board. He became aware of the effectiveness of the community school model in other states, and he wanted to promote this innovation in our city's public schools. This innovation involves including health clinics and other community activities in neighborhood schools. Once elected to the School Board in 1999, he was able to translate this concept into a reality in many of our city schools.

Well aware that politics needed major reforming in order to have a healthy democracy, Governor Gilligan accepted a position on the Common Cause/Ohio Board after he stepped down from the School Board after two terms. Although ill health prevented him from being very active in Common Cause projects, he was always supportive of efforts to make money less of a dominant force in elections.

Besides his compassion for others, his intelligence, and his passion to serve, the quality that I and others will miss is the Governor's sense of humor. He possessed a keen wit and he was a captivating story teller. He would keep his companions laughing with stories such as the time he had to persuade a pol from northern Ohio that he could not accept a suitcase full of money for one of his campaigns.

In paying tribute to his public career, I am sure that he might squirm with all the allusions to Christ-like actions like feeding the hungry or clothing the naked. I think, however, he would relish his son John's comment at his Memorial Service that his father devoted his life to "comforting the afflicted and flicking the comfortable."