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**Orator:** Theodore Roosevelt McKeldin foretold "a glorious victory" for Dwight Eisenhower.

# McKeldin a man of his words

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■ **Legacy:** He 'scaled the tallest heights, but he never lost the common touch.'

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SUN STAFF

It was perhaps more than a little ironic that the man who was nearly Dwight D. Eisenhower's vice presidential running mate should die several days after the resignation of the man who had edged him out for the spot on the 1952 Republican ticket.

Theodore Roosevelt McKeldin, former governor of Maryland and former mayor of Baltimore, died at his Goodale Road residence in Homeland on Aug. 11, 1974, two days after the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon.

Hopes were raised that McKeldin, who had gotten on the Eisenhower bandwagon early during his first term as governor in 1951, might be Ike's running mate in the 1952 presidential election.

Denied the nomination, the opportunity to place Eisenhower's name before the GOP convention in Chicago brought McKeldin into national Republican prominence.

Dressed in a blue suit and wearing a blue tie embossed with "Republican elephants rampant," McKeldin told the enthusiastic and cheering delegates that Eisenhower could win "a glorious victory in November by appealing to all segments of the voters."

Known for his oratorical skills, McKeldin, praising Eisenhower's abilities, said, "Here is the man to unite our nation. ... he is a strong man — the Hercules to sweep the stench and stigma from the Augean stable of the Washington administration."

Like Nixon, who was born into a poor and struggling California farm family, McKeldin was also born into relative poverty.

He was raised in South Baltimore, one of 11 children of a stone-cutter-turned-policeman father who drank. After grammar school,

he went directly to a \$20-a-month job as an office boy in a bank. He attended Baltimore City College at night and eventually earned a law degree from the University of Maryland in 1925.

He began his political career in 1927 by volunteering his speaking services to William F. Broening, who was running for mayor. So popular was McKeldin that he earned the sobriquet the "boy orator," and after Broening was elected, was appointed by him to the position of "assistant mayor."

A two-term governor (1951-1959) and twice mayor of Baltimore (1943-1947 and 1963-1967), McKeldin brought his own ebullient personal style to his work. He presided over the rewriting of the Baltimore City Charter and was "identified with many of the state's biggest highway and redevelopment projects including the State Office Building in Baltimore, Charles Center and the Inner Harbor urban renewal projects," said *The Sun*.

"His major legacy, however, was not physical. It was moral," observed *The Sun*.

"He was a liberal Republican who preached and believed in brotherhood. He set an example that helped Maryland avoid much of the ugliness and trauma that accompanied desegregation elsewhere," said the newspaper.

Urging compliance with the Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation of races in public schools, McKeldin said, "We have to rid our souls of prejudice."

At McKeldin's death, then-Mayor William Donald Schaefer described him as "a man who scaled the tallest heights, but he never lost the common touch. Mr. McKeldin loved people and the city and, in a way, he belonged to each of us."

"The essence of his speeches and appeals was not only his abundant effervescence," said a *Sun* editorial at the time. "It was, looking back on the years he served as Governor and Mayor, his personal warmth and conviction.

Whatever the cause, whatever his position, one had the unmistakable feeling that Mr. McKeldin meant what he was saying. Public office in his hands, was indeed a bully pulpit, in the sense that the original T.R. had in mind.

"The McKeldin years seem in retrospect political by chance and non-partisan by design. But once his mission was begun, it acquired an unmistakable record of good will," concluded the editorial.