

Former governor Mandel honored at Maryland State House

By **Chase Cook**

ccook@capgaznews.com

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Wearing a collared white shirt and yellow glasses, Reginald Tongue Sr. stood out from the crowd of politicians in their suits and dresses.

But standing a few feet away from his old boss, former Gov. Marvin Mandel, Annapolis resident Tongue's admiration for the man was no lesser.

"His heart was bigger than the title," said Tongue, who worked as a driver and bodyguard for Mandel in the 1980s.

Mandel, who died Sunday at 95, lay in repose for 10 hours Wednesday in the Maryland State House. Friends, family and politicians came to remember the man who influenced them.

Tongue fondly remembers driving Mandel to Chick & Ruth's Delly for dinner, picking up his lunch and doing other chores for the governor. But Tongue said he was always treated like an equal. "Reggie, come sit with us," the governor would often say.

"He cared about everyone and he treated everyone with respect," Tongue said. "You remembered that about him."

The former governor's coffin was brought into the State House, and a Maryland state flag was laid atop it. A red velvet rope surrounded the coffin.

The morning ceremony was led by Gov. Larry Hogan, who is undergoing chemotherapy for cancer. A Republican, Hogan spoke highly of the Democratic governor, calling him a leader and a "great governor."

As he spoke, the governor seemed to fight back tears.

"This is an opportunity to honor a great man, a great governor and a great grandfather," Hogan said. "We are here to say goodbye, but also it's a day of celebration for a full and wonderful life."

Many of the people at the event were friends, family and those with political ties or politicians themselves. Mandel served as governor from 1969 to 1979 and had been speaker of the House of Delegates.

His 1977 conviction on mail fraud and racketeering charges still colors perceptions of Mandel's career, even after it was overturned on a technicality in 1987 because of a Supreme Court ruling in another case.

Prosecutors said he and five co-defendants were involved in a complex scheme in which Mandel was given money and favors for vetoing one bill and signing another to help his friends make money on a horse racing track deal. Mandel spent 19 months in federal prison until President Ronald Reagan commuted the sentence to time served in 1981.

Mandel steadfastly denied any wrongdoing and said he was vindicated when his conviction was overturned.

During Mandel's time as governor, he presided over constitutional amendments that changed the structure of Maryland's courts and implemented a public defender system. His term also brought changes to how new

schools were paid for, putting more burden on the state and helping out struggling local governments that needed buildings but couldn't afford them.

He reorganized the executive office, cutting 248 departments to 11 and putting Cabinet-level secretaries into leadership positions.

Many called these changes the beginning of "modern government" in Maryland.

Mandel's impact on government — whether you agreed or disagreed with him — can't be denied, said Del. Sid Saab, R-Crownsville.

"When it comes to death, there is no Republican, there is no Democrat," Saab said.

Annapolis Mayor Mike Pantelides paid his respects Wednesday, saying his legacy speaks for itself.

"He was a legend in Annapolis," said Pantelides, a Republican. "Even at 95 he had a quick wit and good advice."

Ted Levitt, owner of Chick & Ruth's Delly, said he was honored to be a pallbearer for Thursday's funeral. Mandel will be interred at Lakemont Memorial Gardens in Davidsonville, 900 W. Central Ave. Services are expected to begin at 1:30 p.m., and the public is invited.

Mandel was a friend of Levitt's family for decades. Ted Levitt met him when he was 8 and maintained a friendly relationship with the former governor, even after Levitt's parents passed away.

The "Marvin Mandel," a corned beef and chopped liver sandwich on rye bread, won't be coming off the deli's menu.

"His name will never come off our menu," Levitt said. "As long as I'm living, it is going to stay there."

Traffic advisory

Marvin Mandel's funeral procession today will likely create traffic problems.

Anne Arundel County Police advise that motorists should be prepared for delays in Davidsonville on Davidsonville Road (Md. 424) south of U.S. 50 and West Central Avenue (Md. 214) from about 12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m., according to a police news release.

The procession will travel from Pikesville along Interstate 695, I-97, U.S. 50 west, Davidsonville Road and Central Avenue.

County police vehicles will help with traffic control. Motorists should expect minor delays along the route as well as the intersecting roadways and should remain alert to officers' directions, especially at intersections.

Source: Anne Arundel County Police Department

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