

Modern Maryland's 'founding father' to lie in State House

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The author of Maryland's modern government.

That's what many called former Gov. Marvin Mandel as news of his death made waves.

Mandel, 95, died Sunday, and Wednesday his body will lie in repose at the State House during a nine-hour period open to members of the public. Gov. Larry Hogan and other dignitaries will receive Mandel's family at the start of the day.

While much has been made of the corruption charges that forced Mandel from power in 1977, the honor according his passing reflects what many said was the Democratic governor's impact on Maryland during his tenure from 1969 to 1979.

Friends, political figures and other supporters lauded him as a key figure in shaping state government into what it is today.

"Governor Mandel was a brilliant administrator who was rightly proud of his extraordinary legacy of modernizing and reorganizing Maryland state government," U.S. Sen. Barbara Mikulski said in a prepared statement. "He will also be remembered for his many other innovative initiatives, including reducing the burden of school construction costs on counties, and helping to build subway systems in both Baltimore and the metro areas around D.C."

A 1977 conviction on mail fraud and racketeering charges remains a dominant event 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.

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

Those who knew Mandel said his accomplishments as a political force rose above the corruption charges. He crafted Maryland into the state it is today with his legislative agenda, said Bruce Bereano, a longtime Maryland lobbyist and friend of Mandel.

Bereano's office released funeral arrangement information Monday.

"I've always thought of him as him being the founding father and author of modern government in Maryland," Bereano said. "He modernized the legislative, executive and the judicial branches of government."

"That is an incredible legacy."

Maryland Public Policy Institute President Christopher Summers said Mandel's status as the "author" of modernized Maryland government came through many big changes made under his leadership.

Mandel served on the institute's Board of Directors and the institute published his memoir: "I'll Never Forget It: Memoirs of a Political Accident from East Baltimore."

Some of the big changes during his administration include:

- He created the cabinet structure of the executive branch, paring it down from 248 agencies to 11 departments led by a secretary. He also established the Maryland Department of Transportation.

Reorganized the court system and implemented the public defender system.

The state assumed some of the construction of schools as costs were beginning to burden local governments.

"He is such a historical figure," Summers said. "Every time you sat down with him, it was like taking a Maryland history course."

Political figures big and small released statements on the passing of Mandel Monday. Like most of them, they lauded Mandel as integral agent of change in the state.

"I was saddened to hear about the passing of my friend, colleague, and Maryland's former Governor Marvin Mandel," Senate President Thomas V. "Mike" Miller said. "He was a true statesman who worked tirelessly to make Maryland a better place to live, work, and raise a family."

John Willis, politics professor at the University of Baltimore, said some caution should be taken when considering Mandel's personal impact on the state.

He was personable and well-liked, especially by politicians, but some of the sweeping changes were constitutional amendments — like the reorganization of Maryland's court system — and not policy decisions from the top down, Willis said.

When someone passes away, it is important to emphasize their accomplishments, but there also should be some objectivity, he said.

"He contributed a lot, but it was not a singular effort," Willis said.

As a former Maryland secretary of transportation, O. James Lighthizer praised Mandel for reforming and funding what he called one of the best transit systems in the country.

Lighthizer, who served as secretary from 1991 to 1995 after serving as Anne Arundel County executive, said he benefited from Mandel's streamlining of the department by putting one person in charge instead of having decentralized, competing entities. That was one example of Mandel's reform of state government — in an arena that everyone uses.

Lighthizer described Mandel as being an honest leader that was dependable — something that could be hard to find at the State house.

"When you're in the political arena you meet a lot of people who don't necessarily tell the truth," Lighthizer said. "Gov. Mandel was a straight shooter."

Staff Writer Rema Rahman contributed to this story.

If you go:

Former Governor Marvin Mandel's funeral will take place Thursday with funeral arrangements open to the public, according to a news release from Maryland lobbyist Bruce Bereano's office.

Funeral services will take place at 11 a.m. Thursday at Sol Levinson's and Brothers Funeral Home, 8900 Reisterstown Road in Pikesville. Internment will be at 1:30 p.m. at Lakemont Memorial Gardens, 900 W Central Avenue in Davidsonville, according to the release from Bereano's office.

The funeral will take place a day after he lies in repose Wednesday at the Maryland State House.

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