

# Former Gov. Marvin Mandel dies

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**F**ormer Gov. Marvin Mandel, who won acclaim during two tumultuous terms in the State House as one of Maryland's most effective chief executives only to be forced from power on corruption charges in 1977, died Sunday afternoon, his family said. He was 95.

The cause of death is not yet known.

Gov. Larry Hogan ordered flags to fly at half-staff in honor of the former governor.

"The state of Maryland lost not only a former governor but also a truly great leader and someone countless people thought of as a friend, including myself," Hogan said. "I will be forever grateful for the advice, wisdom, and stories Governor Mandel has shared with me throughout the years.

"No other governor has had the lasting impact on all three branches of Maryland government."

Mr. Mandel died while visiting with his family and the family of his late wife, Jeanne Dorsey Mandel, while celebrating the 50th birthday of Paul Dorsey, Mr. Mandel's stepson.

"Governor Mandel was a great governor but more importantly a great father and grandfather," Mr. Dorsey said. "He spent his final weekend with family in St. Mary's County eating crabs and enjoying the beautiful scenery that St. Mary's has to offer. He lived life to the fullest."

In recent years the lifelong Democrat re-emerged in the public arena as a regent of the University System of Maryland appointed by Republican Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. He also was an adviser to recent governors. But he remained controversial — earning a rebuke for engaging in lobbying while serving on the board.

Mr. Mandel, whose gubernatorial tenure ran from 1969 to 1979, was one of the last surviving links to Baltimore's rich but not always savory history of machine politics. Even his critics conceded his skills as an administrator and a political magician in his dealings with the General Assembly.

Beginning as an accidental governor chosen by the legislature, Mandel, a Baltimore native, quickly established himself as a formidable statewide politician. Twice he was elected governor by thumping margins, and he used those mandates to bring about a sweeping modernization of state government.

But even as he was establishing his dominance of Annapolis, Mandel could not escape the political culture of Baltimore in the 1970s.

The governor became enmeshed in a convoluted legal case that led to his conviction in 1977 of accepting \$350,000 to help longtime allies obtain extra racing days for a Prince George's County racetrack they had secretly purchased.

After six years of trials and appeals, the former governor served 19 months of a three-year sentence, but in 1988 the U.S. 4th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a lower court ruling that threw out the mail fraud and racketeering convictions of Mr. Mandel and his five co-defendants in the case.

The appeals court's decision followed a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in a Kentucky case in 1987 that restricted

the use of the 115-year-old mail fraud statute.

Mr. Mandel's legal travails tainted his image as a dedicated public servant and eroded the enormous political power he had amassed over 27 years of public life. However, his accomplishments as a state legislator and governor could neither be easily dismissed nor readily forgotten by people long familiar with state government.

Ehrlich said Mandel was a mentor during his time in the legislature and an adviser who "helped me pull my government together" when Ehrlich was elected governor.

"He was a friend to a freshman delegate from Baltimore County in his 20s when he had no reason to be," Ehrlich said. "He was kind and supportive in all my races."

Ehrlich called Mandel "a hugely significant figure in the history of Maryland," and credited him with creating the state's cabinet structure.

Ehrlich recalled Christmas dinners in the basement of the Governor's Mansion with former Gov. William Donald Schaefer and Mandel, who told tales about their terms as governor.

"We'd listen to their stories about Maryland politics the way it used to be," Ehrlich said. "It was our favorite night of the year."

With their deaths four years apart, Ehrlich said, "it's the end of an era that will never return."

Former Gov. Parris Glendening said Mandel's legacy is a "mixed picture," but that he "really did make our state better."

"Part of us will remember him in a period of great corruption with Agnew and everything else, and part of us will remember him as someone who contributed to the well being of the state," Glendening said. "The state will be better because of his work long after we've forgotten his personal failures."

A short, soft-spoken man, Mr. Mandel was selected overwhelmingly for the governorship by the legislature in 1969 to succeed Spiro T. Agnew, who had resigned to become Richard M. Nixon's vice president. At the time the state had no lieutenant governor, and as the speaker of the House of Delegates, Mandel had the inside line to succeed Agnew.

Mr. Mandel served in the House for 16 years before his peers selected him to be governor.

During the 1969 and 1970 legislative sessions, the General Assembly adopted 93 of the 95 measures sponsored by the Mandel administration.

The governor's legislative program included eight constitutional amendments —including reform of the state's court system — and legislation reorganizing the executive department's 248 agencies and departments into 11 departments headed by Cabinet-level secretaries.

Maryland thus became one of the few states at that time to adopt the Cabinet system.

Frank DeFilippo, who was his press secretary, said Mr. Mandel's hallmark was reforming all three branches of government and creating a system that lives on in Annapolis today.

"Marvin Mandel was a transformational governor who bridged the old and the new," he said. "What he did very effectively was take what was a backwater state by the back of the neck and drag it kicking and screaming into what was then the 20th century."

He ran for a full four-year term in 1970 and was elected by a 2-to-1 margin. Four years later, his re-election

was another landslide..

Mr. Mandel's leadership, hard work and intimate knowledge of state government earned him a reputation as a capable executive when successive presidential administrations had been pilloried over the prolonged U.S. involvement in Vietnam and the Watergate scandal.

During these years, Governor Mandel's reputation spread well beyond Maryland.

He was elected unanimously in 1972 as chairman of the National Governors Conference. He was only the second Maryland chief executive to hold that post. He also was chosen that year by the national Democratic Party to make one of the principal speeches at the national convention that nominated Sen. George S. McGovern for president.

Two years later, however, the governor's image began to suffer. He divorced his first wife of 32 years and announced "I am in love with another woman." He subsequently married Jeanne Blackistone Dorsey.

Marvin Mandel was born in Baltimore on April 19, 1920, the son of a "cutter" in a local clothing company.

Mr. Mandel attended Pimlico Elementary School, Garrison Junior High School and graduated from City College high school in 1937. He played in several sports, pitched in semi-professional baseball games and did a little boxing.

Mr. Mandel remained a sports enthusiast all his life. He missed few Baltimore Colts home football games.

After graduating from City College, he attended the University of Maryland. His parents mortgaged their home so he could be the first member of the family to attend college. From college, he went to the university's law school, completing his degree in 1942.

The year he earned his law degree was the first full year of America's participation in World War II, and he went straight into the Army. He entered the Army as a private and came out as a technical sergeant. He spent most of his military career as an instructor in basic training camps.

After the war, he began his law practice, forming a partnership with three associates and remaining a member of the firm until he was elected governor.

In 1951, City Councilman Samuel Friedel, later a congressman, asked him to run for the Democratic State Central Committee.

The following year, the State Central Committee was faced with the problem of filling a 5th District vacancy in the Baltimore delegation to the House. Mr. Mandel managed to break a deadlock over a choice for the vacancy by presenting himself as the logical compromise candidate.

In 1963, a savings-and-loan scandal erupted in the state, sending the speaker of the House of Delegates to jail. Mr. Mandel, who by this time held the influential chairmanship of the House Ways and Means Committee, ran successfully for speaker and won re-election to that post five years running.

When Governor Agnew left Annapolis for Washington, Mr. Mandel was again in the right place at the right time, and to no one's surprise was selected to fill the vacancy.

The following two years in office were impressive enough to enable him to defeat his Republican opponent, C. Stanley Blair. In 1974, Mr. Mandel was challenged by Republican Louise Gore, a wealthy businesswoman and socialite. She lost to the incumbent.

The second election was perhaps more remarkable because, by the summer of 1974, the electorate was

unavoidably aware of Mr. Mandel's widely publicized separation from his first wife, Barbara Oberfeld Mandel, a year earlier.

In April 1974, two of the governor's friends had been notified by the U.S. attorney's office in Baltimore that they were under investigation by a federal grand jury. In September 1975, the governor reported that he, too, was a target of the federal probe.

Two months later, a grand jury indicted Mr. Mandel and five associates, alleging that the governor used his power to push legislation in Annapolis that benefited his friends, who in turn gave him hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes and gifts.

Thus began the legal contest that included two trial postponements, a mistrial and, in August 1977, the conviction of all six defendants. Mr. Mandel was found guilty on 17 counts of mail fraud and two counts of racketeering for accepting gifts and bribes from his co-defendants to influence legislation that helped them get extra racing dates from the state for Marlboro Racetrack in Prince George's County.

Between his conviction and his appeal, Mr. Mandel remained free but turned over the duties of office to Lt. Gov. Blair Lee III. On Jan. 11, 1979, with days remaining before the inauguration of Harry R. Hughes as governor, a three-judge panel of the U.S. 4th Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the convictions of all six men and ordered a new trial — an outcome that allowed Mandel to shoulder Lee aside and reclaim the powers of office for 451/2 hours. He was disinvited to the inauguration by Hughes, and he did not attend.

In July 1979 the full Court of Appeals reinstated the convictions.

The following year, Mr. Mandel began serving his term in a federal prison at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida. The prison term was commuted by President Ronald Reagan Dec. 3, 1981, and the former governor was released the next day.

He went to work as a business consultant in Arnold, and spent some time as the host of a radio show. He could not resume the practice of law because he had been disbarred in 1982. In 1987, he petitioned the Maryland Court of Appeals for reinstatement — to no avail.

Mr. Mandel's attorneys appealed his conviction again. Based on the high court decision, U.S. District Judge Frederic N. Smalkin overturned the convictions of Mr. Mandel and his co-defendants. The following year, the Maryland Court of Appeals reinstated his law license.

Mandel would continue to practice law well into his mid-80s. For most of the 1990s he kept a low profile.

For several years, the former governor devoted much of his time to the care of Jeanne Mandel, who was stricken with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease). After years of progressive paralysis, she died in 2001.

Mandel would re-emerge as a political figure only after the election of Ehrlich, whom the former governor supported, in 2002. Ehrlich named Mandel to lead a commission seeking efficiencies in government and, in 2003, named him to the Board of Regents of the University System of Maryland.

In that capacity, Mandel found himself at the center of an ethics controversy. During the 2006 legislative session, the former House speaker took an active role as an advocate for legislation supported by the state's wholesale liquor distributors, who were locked in a turf battle with Maryland wineries.

Mandel's intervention backfired after his role was reported, and the wineries secured a favorable outcome that allowed most of them to continue selling directly to retailers.

The Board of Regents determined in May 2006 that Mandel's actions that year and in the previous two sessions had violated its policy prohibiting members from lobbying the legislature. It cleared him of using his position as a regent for personal gain and said his violations were not intentional.

Mandel remained on the board, saying he had not been fully informed of the policy, but agreed not to repeat the violation.

Lobbyist and friend Bruce Bereano said he and Mandel talked regularly about politics, long after Mandel left public office, and the former governor paid close attention to current events such as the Iran deal and the Baltimore unrest in April.

Bereano called Mandel "a visionary" who created the state-funded Shock Trauma system, which airlifts the most critically injured Marylanders across the state to the University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore.

Funeral arrangements will be announced early this week, the family said.

In addition to Mr. Dorsey, Mr. Mandel had two children, a son Gary and a daughter Ellen, from his first marriage.

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

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