

Gov. Mandel's family, fellow politicians bid him 'Sine die'

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To those who followed him into the Maryland governor's mansion, Marvin Mandel was a wise and generous advisor, regardless of their party affiliation. To the past and present officeholders who gathered for his funeral in Baltimore County on Thursday, he was a master vote-counter and coalition-builder.

And to his family? Mandel was a garment-cutter's son and first in his family to go to college, and a father and grandfather so devoted to his Maryland Terps that he once bit through the stem of his pipe during a particularly stressful game.

"Farewell, and sine die," former Rep. Kweisi Mfume said in one of multiple fond eulogies to Mandel, who died Sunday at 95.

That Latin phrase for "without a day" — which signals the end of the General Assembly session each year — was an appropriately inside-politics line, befitting both Mandel and the audience at the Sol Levinson & Bros. Funeral Home in Pikesville.

The funeral was heavy on Maryland's political class, with elected officials past and present, including Gov. Larry Hogan, former governors Bob Ehrlich and Harry Hughes, Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, U.S. Sen. Ben Cardin, Reps. Steny Hoyer and Chris Van Hollen, state Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller and House Speaker Michael Busch.

"In a sense, Governor Mandel was the architect of modern Maryland," Hogan said in his eulogy, "and no other executive in our history before or since has ever had the lasting impacts on all three branches of government that he did."

Hogan listed Mandel's many accomplishments, among them, helping the University of Maryland create the Shock Trauma system and streamlining state government and an "antiquated" court system.

"As governor, Marvin Mandel maintained incredible calmness in dealing with the Maryland state legislature, which is something I can assure you is not always easy," Hogan said to knowing laughter from the crowd.

Also speaking was Ehrlich, who noted that the Democrat Mandel supported and counseled Republicans such as himself.

"In his not too subtle way, everybody knew where his heart was in gubernatorial races in 2002, 2006, 2010," Ehrlich said, suggesting it was with the Republican candidates.

Ehrlich said he likes to remember a time during the Maryland Association of Counties convention in Ocean City when he and Mandel chatted on a pier, "the elder giving advice to the younger — believe me, the younger needed it."

The service was both celebratory and mournful, the sadness coming for both the passing of the man and the personal, cross-party friendships that seemingly were more common in his political era.

"Back then, politics was a face-to-face business," Frank DeFilippo, who had been Mandel's press secretary, said before the funeral. "There was no Facebook, Twitter ... There was no name-calling."

Cardin, who followed in his fellow Baltimore Democrat's footsteps in the General Assembly — from the Ways and Means Committee to Speaker of the House — said today's officeholders could learn from Mandel.

"You've got to spend time developing relationships," Cardin said before the funeral. "You have to get a coalition together."

Cardin was among the honorary pallbearers who lined the center aisle of the funeral home chapel after the service for Mandel's casket to be ferried to the hearse and then on to burial at Lakemont Memorial Gardens in Davidsonville. Other pallbearers included Orioles owner Peter Angelos, former Congressman and NBA player Tom McMillen, former University of Maryland Chancellor Brit Kirwan, Comptroller Peter Franchot and Court of Appeals Judge Stuart Berger.

Mandel's funeral was a homecoming of sorts, returning him to the part of town where he was legend, according to Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt, who led the service.

"Growing up in Pikeville as I did, I recall the pride we in the Jewish community took as one of our own climbed the ladder in Maryland state government," Weinblatt said.

Several speakers lauded Mandel's loyal friends Maurice "Mo" Wyatt, his patronage chief, and Bruce Bereano, the lobbyist, who helped keep the former governor in the mix long after he left office. Mandel was not without problems — he served time in prison for mail fraud and racketeering although his conviction was ultimately overturned — but this was a day to remember the good times.

"It's just a reflection of his life," Bereano said of the warmth with which the eulogizers remembered his friend. "Everyone spoke from the heart."

Mandel's family from both his marriages — he very publicly left his first wife in the governor's mansion when he fell in love with the woman who would become his second — offered a personal counterpoint to what otherwise would have been a political obituary.

"There was life before Annapolis," his oldest son, Gary Mandel, said.

He remembered going to Colts games every Sunday, playing ball, fishing and hunting with his father, even as he also remembered his mother saying, "Jewish people don't hunt." If his father got a rabbit, Gary Mandel said, "he'd have it the next morning."

But politics were never far away — Gary Mandel recalled that once, when they were hunting on the Eastern Shore, his father got a call that Golda Meir was in Washington and wanted to meet with him.

"We were just coming in from the duck blind, he said, 'We're going to Washington. They'll bring some clothes down from Annapolis, and we'll change on the way.'"

Even in his final years, Mandel remained a diehard fan of local sports, said stepson Paul Dorsey.

"Sitting on the couch, watching his beloved Orioles, watching the Ravens, watching his Terrapins, oh, his beloved Terrapins," Dorsey said. "Oh my God, once we were at the game, he was sitting there, pipe in mouth, he bit through the stem. ... They were trying to find the pipe because it's fallen down into the seats."

Dorsey said Mandel would go to his granddaughter's lacrosse and softball games.

One of his granddaughters, Morrissa Maltz, said tearfully that he would stay up late talking to her about life, and now, more than ever, she could use his company.

"I just want to go back to his house afterward," she said, "and hang out with him and watch TV."

Dorsey said Mandel had a "heart bigger than anything in the world.

"He had two loves in his life," Dorsey said, "his family and the state of Maryland."

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