

Mark O. Hatfield

By Unknown

1922-2011 Mark Odom Hatfield's long career in Oregon politics began in 1951 when he was elected into the Oregon state legislature as the representative for Marion County. In 1955; he was elected state senator; and in 1957, he became the youngest Secretary of State in Oregon's history. In 1958, Hatfield ran against the incumbent Democratic governor Robert D. Holmes and won the governorship. He was only 36.

Hatfield was born in Marion County, Oregon, in 1922. He attended Willamette University and finished his degree before he was called to the Pacific Theater in World War II. His visit to Hiroshima, Japan, a month after the atom bomb had devastated the city, formed his moral—and later political—stance against nuclear weapons.

After the war, he attended Stanford University for graduate work and returned to Salem in 1949 to teach political science. He was dean of students at Willamette during his first two terms in the Oregon legislature. He married Antoinette Kuzmanich in 1958 and the couple had four children. Hatfield was a Republican, but he crossed party lines often. As governor, he established a state-backed birth control system, worked to protect and maintain the sovereignty of Oregon's Native American communities, and helped pass a measure to repeal the state death penalty. He was reelected in 1962—the first two-term Oregon governor in the twentieth century.

In 1966, Hatfield ran for a Senate seat. He had never lost an election, but this race was particularly close because of his stance on President Johnson's war policy. In July 1966, Johnson created a "Truth Squad" to garner support for his foreign policy from the nation's political leaders. At the annual governor's conference that year, each state governor voted "yea" or "nay" in either support of or opposition to the president's Vietnam War policies. Despite prodding by the Truth Squad, Hatfield voted "nay"—the lone dissenting voice in the room.

Following his vote, Hatfield returned to Oregon to campaign for a Senate seat. His opponent, and even members of his own Republican Party, labeled him a traitor for opposing the president. Perhaps more difficult to overcome was his endorsement by the Democratic Senator Wayne Morse. Still, Hatfield won the seat by a narrow margin and continued to serve in the Senate for the next thirty years, the longest term of any Oregon senator. His belief in non-violence, influenced by his strong religious evangelicalism and his experience in World War II, led him to co-sponsor with Democrat Ted Kennedy a nuclear freeze resolution. He argued for reduced armament spending and arms regulation and continued to push for an end to U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. As a result of his political independence, it is difficult to put a strict political label on "Saint Mark," as his colleagues often called him.

In 1991, Hatfield's good reputation was threatened by an ethics investigation into loans he accepted from people with financial interests in legislation before the Senate. He was also accused of using his influence as the senior Republican on the Appropriations Committee to ensure his daughter's admission to the Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU). He received a committee rebuke from the Senate as a result and was allowed to complete his final term in office (despite rumblings of a recall), finally retiring from public office in 1997.

Oregonians' regard for Hatfield is evidenced not only in his success on the ballot, but in the many institutions and civic programs that carry his name. He taught at the Hatfield School of Government at Portland State University. The Mark O. Hatfield Library at Willamette University and Oregon State University's Hatfield Marine Science Center in Newport are dedicated to him, as well as the Hatfield Research Center at OHSU, the Mark O. Hatfield Wilderness, the Mark O. Hatfield United States Courthouse in Portland, and the Mark Hatfield trailhead. He also authored many books, and continued to be active in the state's civic life until his death in 2011.

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