

Brief Biography of Clifford P. Case II Loyal Son, Scholar, Statesman

Early Years

A native son of New Jersey, Clifford Phillip Case II had a distinguished career in the United States Congress, including five terms in the House of Representatives (1945-1953) and four terms in the Senate (1955-1979). He was born in Franklin Township (Somerset County) on April 16, 1904, the son of Reverend Clifford P. Case, a Rutgers College graduate, and Jeannette McAlpin Benedict Case. When Case was three years old the family moved to Poughkeepsie, New York, where his father was the pastor of the First Dutch Reformed Church.

Following his father's unexpected death in 1920 young Clifford supported his mother and siblings and then matriculated at Rutgers College in 1921. While there he was active in the Glee Club, played the tuba in the band, served as manager for the student musical clubs and was an attack man on the lacrosse team. Academically he focused on the liberal arts and was named to the college's Phi Beta Kappa chapter. It was at Rutgers that Case met his future wife, Ruth Smith, a student at the New Jersey College for Women (later Douglass College), Class of 1927. Following his graduation from Rutgers in 1925 Case attended Columbia Law School, receiving his degree in 1928. In that year he married Ruth Smith. Their loving and enduring relationship lasted fifty-four years until the Senator's death in 1982.

Early Political Career

In 1944 Clifford Case was elected to his first of five terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. In the House Case served on the Civil Service, Claims, Education and Judiciary Committees. He was well known for his support of General Dwight D. Eisenhower's presidential candidacy in 1952, and was appointed to the President-elect's staff. In early 1953 Case announced that he would run for governor of New Jersey, but withdrew from the race in late March after failing to raise sufficient funds for the campaign. He resigned his House seat in May 1953 to accept the presidency of the Fund for the Republic, (an independent corporation supported by the Ford Foundation) which worked to protect freedom of expression in the United States.

In March 1954 Case announced his candidacy for the U.S. Senate. A grueling campaign ensued during which Case openly criticized Senator Joseph McCarthy's communist witch-hunt, while conservative New Jersey Republicans attacked Case as "Stalin's choice for the Senate." The *Star-Ledger* accused his sister Adelaide of having communist affiliations during her undergraduate years, which Case forthrightly denied. With the strong support of both President Eisenhower and Vice-President Richard M. Nixon, who campaigned for him in New Jersey, Case triumphed over Democrat Charles Howell in one of the state's closest senatorial contests of the twentieth century winning by less than 4,000 votes.

U.S. Senator

Although retaining their residence in Rahway, N.J., Senator Case, his wife and their teenage son Clifford III moved to a townhouse in Georgetown, Washington, D.C. in early 1956. Until 1979, Case would represent New Jersey in the U.S. Senate where he earned a national reputation for honesty, integrity, bipartisanship, and thoughtful decision-making that set a standard for his peers. In the late 1950s Case set himself apart from other senators by advocating the disclosure of financial assets by members of Congress and senior officials of the executive branch, and by regularly introducing legislation for such disclosure. According to Case one of his most important accomplishments was his endorsements of U.S. Attorneys for New Jersey who fought corruption and organized crime. Later in his career, Case was active in asserting the role of the Senate in limiting excessive, and often secret, expansions of executive branch powers. In 1972 President Richard M. Nixon signed the Case Act, requiring the U.S. president to submit to the Congress the texts of executive agreements within sixty days of their signing.

The Senator was tireless in his efforts to pass civil rights legislation. He collaborated with a group of centrist Republicans and members of the Democratic majority to secure passage of the 1957 Civil Rights Act,

the landmark 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the Voting Rights Act. Case's voting record demonstrated his commitment to helping those in need whether they were ethnic or religious minorities, women, the elderly, the infirm, workers or students.

Human rights and international affairs were central themes of Case's work, particularly in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where he rose to the position of ranking minority member. A supporter of U.S. efforts to contain the spread of communism, Case shifted his views on U.S. policy in Vietnam following a fact-finding trip there in May 1967. During the late 1960s and early 1970s he co-authored amendments seeking to end U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Later Case and New Jersey Representative Millicent Fenwick co-sponsored legislation creating a U.S. commission to monitor compliance with the human rights provisions of the Helsinki Accords which President Gerald R. Ford signed into law in 1976.

A very strong supporter of Israel Case represented the U.S. Congress at the opening of the Israeli Knesset in 1966. He later became an outspoken critic of the Carter Administration's efforts to sell U.S. warplanes to Egypt and Saudi Arabia in 1978. During his final term in the Senate Case's behind-the-scenes efforts on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee brokered a key compromise that facilitated Senate ratification of the Panama Canal Treaty.

Case was also a strong advocate for conservation and environmental protection. He proposed the creation of a Cabinet level office to advocate for the environment, helped secure funds for parks, preserves and recreational areas in New Jersey, and opposed ocean dumping off the Jersey Shore.

Final Years

Case was very popular among New Jersey voters, but by the late 1970s the state's Republicans began to shift their allegiances to more conservative candidates. With a very low turnout in the 1978 primary election, Jeffrey Bell, a Ronald Reagan supporter who had moved to New Jersey expressly to challenge the incumbent for his Senate seat, defeated Case. Throughout his tenure in the Senate, Case had always faced his most difficult challenges during Republican primaries, but had prevailed until this point. Following his unexpected and surprising loss, Clifford Case began the transition to a more private life with his family. With modesty and humility, he declared, "I think I can honestly say that it's miraculous that I was in politics for forty years and managed to stay that long."

Case's influence in New Jersey politics was substantial. As a moderate who advocated fiscal responsibility while supporting a strong federal role in social welfare programs, his name was frequently mentioned as a possible gubernatorial candidate. Case saw himself as better suited for his work in the Senate, not viewing his skills as appropriate for the executive branch. Case was often at odds with conservative New Jersey Republican power brokers. For example he opposed the 1964 nomination of Senator Barry Goldwater for president; tried to block Richard Nixon's 1968 presidential nomination, and successfully worked to secure President Gerald Ford as the Republican presidential nominee in 1976.

After leaving the Senate in January 1979, Case served at Rutgers University as a visiting lecturer on political affairs, and published articles on the Congress and on ethics in government. He joined an international law firm in Washington, D.C., served on the Helsinki Watch Committee, and chaired the Board of Directors of Freedom House. He also enjoyed spending more time with his extended family.

In 1981 Case was diagnosed with lung cancer. He had surgery in August of that year but succumbed to the disease on March 5, 1982. Following the funeral service at Rutgers' Kirkpatrick Chapel, Clifford Case was buried in New Cemetery in Somerville. His wife Ruth lived until 2003, supporting the Senator's legacy through contributions to Rutgers University.

William R. Fernekes, Ed.D

Fernanda H. Perrone

Senator Clifford Case Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries.