

Senate Committee on Rules

Testimony of Annette Talbott in Favor of HCR 32A

April 22, 2019

Madame Chairwoman and members,

Thank you very much for taking the time to honor a dedicated public servant, former House Speaker and Senator Grattan Kerans. I am submitting a short statement from the family thanking you all, with special thanks to Senator Prozanski and Representative Holvey for introducing this resolution. They were not able to join you today.

Grattan was a dedicated public servant for over two decades including his service in the Oregon House and Senate and his work in Government Relations for the Oregon University System. His dedication to public service was driven in part from his Mother, an attorney and activist, and his grandfather, Eugene Grattan Kerans, who served in the Franklin Roosevelt administration in several political positions including speechwriter.

Grattan was first elected to the House in 1974 as a Democrat from Lane County. He was quickly recognized for his leadership skills becoming the Majority Whip in his second term. In his third and fourth terms in the House, he served as the Majority Leader. In his fifth term, he was elected as Speaker of the House.

I had the pleasure of working for Senator Kerans as Committee Counsel to the Senate Labor Committee and the Ethics, Elections and Campaign Finance Committee. He hired me fresh out of law school. I have had several jobs in politics and the law since but I can say without a doubt that he was my favorite boss. While he expected you to meet his high standards and be dedicated to the legislative process, he was generous and kind and a man of high integrity. He inspired and mentored many staff and members over the years in both their professional and personal lives. He used his time in public service to fight for economic and social justice legislation. He leaves a legacy of laws protecting workers, consumers, seniors, the disabled, and students as well as others protecting the environment.

He also said his job was to “fight the good fight,” even if you didn’t always win. He would often follow that up with at least on the first try. This was an important life lesson for me to learn that standing up for what you believed in was the right thing to do even if you might fail. There were those who did not agree with him but they always knew what he stood for and why.

As Chairman, he often challenged those with differing opinions on legislation to find compromise. He was famous for telling lobbyists disagreeing over amendments – “to go out in the hall” and see if you can work it out and come back in and tell me when you have. This was particularly challenging because he often sent me out in the hall with them to help develop the compromise language. I continue to use the negotiation skills I honed out in the hall to address legal and public policy issues.

In running the committees, he expected the lobby to know what they were talking about and he would skillfully and thoroughly question them to see if they did. Many asked me where he went to law school, I would laugh and note he was not a lawyer but add that he would have been a better one than many attorneys I practiced law with over the years.

Another lesson in legislating I learned from him was to never be afraid to stand alone. He would never hesitate to be the solo “No” vote on a bill if he thought it was just taking the law in the wrong direction. He was also very forward thinking. We passed legislation to prohibit genetic testing for employment

purposes decades before it was common because he thought it was a horrible trend to try to deny someone a job for their genes when the tests only show a possibility of getting a disease.

He wasn't afraid of tackling hard issues or leading on issues that had public support but were controversial "inside the building." He fought hard for ballot access for third parties, even though he was clearly aligned with one of the two major parties. He worked hard to pass campaign finance legislation in the Senate in 1993. He referred to it as doing the people's business. He felt strongly that democracy was at risk by the corrupting force of money.

While in the Senate, he championed dozens of bills to protect workers and their families. This included first in the nation legislation that became a model for the rest of the country including the Oregon Family Medical Leave law which grew from parental leave to pregnancy disability and sick kid leave. He expanded whistleblowing protections for both public and private sector workers. He worked hard to protect injured workers and their re-employment rights and to pass civil rights and farmworker protections. I later had the pleasure of serving as Deputy Labor Commissioner and helped enforce those very laws. As a member of the Ways & Means Committee, Grattan also worked tirelessly to increase funding for health and safety programs, senior services and higher education.

His work to protect Oregon's environment was something I watched from afar but was always impressed by it. He worked to restrict field burning with a colleague from across the aisle after the terrible accident on I-5; it was a public health and environmental issue that he felt desperately needed to be addressed for his constituents and the state. He fought hard to preserve watersheds, safeguard drinking water, tried to ban ozone-depleting chemicals and put aside funds to clean up Superfund sites.

He pressed for strong laws to protect the integrity and transparency in elections and governance. He often recited famous quotes and had Bartlett's Familiar Quotations on his shelf. He was fond of the quote that "sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants" from U.S. Supreme Court Justice Brandeis. He raised critical issues in the legislative arena and proudly pursued the people's initiative process if those failed in the building including work on measures for the Citizen's Utility Board, Oregon Minimum Wage increases and indexing, and Campaign Finance reform.

Grattan had a great sense of humor and a wonderful smile and laugh. He was an outstanding orator who gave powerful floor speeches, often without any notes. The chamber would become quite quiet to listen to him passionately articulate why he was urging you to vote "aye" or seeking your nay vote on bills he thought should die. I suspect he changed votes on the floor with several speeches.

And most notable in today's sometimes polarized political environment, he was a statesman who respected the legislative process, his colleagues, the press, staff members and those he was elected to serve.

Thank you again for taking the time to honor Grattan's public service.

Annette Talbott, Happy Valley, Oregon

HCR 32A Testimony from Family of Former Speaker and Senator Grattan Kerans

On behalf of the family of Grattan Kerans, we would like to express our deepest gratitude to this committee and to the Oregon Legislative Assembly for this special recognition of his public service. We all knew how happy he was to be serving the people of Oregon, through his representation from Eugene. And how pleased he was for the victories he was able to achieve in their behalf. He never tired of employing his quick wit and eloquence in the advocacy of or dissension from the provisions of a bill.

You who are elected members of the Oregon Legislature today honor him simply by continuing in the long-standing tradition of honest, principled service to this State. Thank you so very much for that! Grattan would be so glad to see you here.

Janet Kerans

Tim Kerans

Seattle, Washington



Staffroom photo by Ron Cooper

House Majority Leader Grattan Kerans drew scores of double-takes and inquiries about his health Thursday after he took to a wheelchair to dramatize the barriers that paraplegics face every day. Pictured here with Kerans are Republican state Rep. Mary Burrows, a Lowell Eugene resident, and Ted Achilles, of West Linn.

Lawmakers learn barriers first hand

By SUE HILL
Oregon Statehouse Reporter

House Majority Leader Grattan Kerans substituted wheels for his legs Thursday and discovered, he said, that life in the Capitol became as logistical as political.

The Eugene Democrat was one of several lawmakers who spent all or part of the day in wheelchairs in homage to Architectural Barriers Week.

"It's been depressing, or, I should say limiting," said Kerans, the only lawmaker

er who managed to stay in his wheelchair all day. "I've had difficulty getting around. Doors are a problem. Carpets are a problem. Bathrooms are a problem. I had to stop and think before going anywhere."

Kerans said at least 200 people stopped to ask him if he had been in an accident.

He is sponsor of several bills that would ease barriers to those confined in wheelchairs.

Rep. Wayne Fawbush, D-Hood River,

took to his chair after lunch.

"I honestly don't think I could have done it all day," he explained in mid-afternoon. "Have you every been in one of these things and tried to do anything. I discovered that I couldn't cut an apple en route to a committee because I needed my hands to push the chair along."

Rep. Wally Priestley, D-Portland, wheeled around in his chair at least part of the morning. Emerging from a Democratic caucus late morning, Priestley was pushing the empty chair along.



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Shelton Journal, Wednesday, November 10, 1982

Rep. Grattan Kerans was destined for leadership



House speaker designate Grattan Kerans talks about his background during an interview in his Capitol office.

Families carry on culture

By SUE HILL
Oregon Statehouse Reporter

When he first stepped into the Oregon Legislature in 1975, a freshman legislator from Eugene with an agenda of liberal economic policies for the benefit of the political power in Salem.

Grattan Kerans was not the only one to do so. He had eight years of hands-on experience in the business world before he stepped into the legislature.

Emerging as Kerans' ally, he agreed that he would normally be considered a political newcomer.

He was born 47 years ago in Washoult, Ore., the youngest of seven children who came to Astoria as immigrants from a tight Canadian town in the South and later to fight racism in the United States.

His grandfather was a contractor and entrepreneur in the Roosevelt Administration, but in that renowned great-grandfather, he found a fierce and Democratic Party activist. The family line of political radicals off on the young Kerans, who was not attending school for Adlai Stevenson in 1956.

"I came from a family of voters," Kerans said.

But when a serious illness took him out of high school for two years, he couldn't decide what it was for years of it whether he drifted through track drives, had contact with Kerans' maternal uncle, a local politician, the might have run for the Washington Legislature had he not been everything, they wanted and minor right across to Oregon.

"I never forget when we drove across the Lane County line that March day in 1965," he said. "The air smelled like a fresh coat of paint. It was one of those spring lambs on an

avoid games. We couldn't believe it. We knew we had found our home."

Kerans studied in politics at the University of Oregon and about the common paper news. But he was not satisfied to be an old law politician.

He worked as a legislative staff member for several years before moving to the House in 1974, finally defeating an incumbent.

After contacting many members of his party to his neighborhood neighbor, Kerans took stock of his political future and decided to need his help, becoming a house speaker.

In 1977, he served as majority whip — the position responsible for lining up votes. He was elected majority leader in 1978 and 1980.

Kerans remains, he has worked as a political consultant, most recently on Sen. Ted Kulongoski's unsuccessful run for governor.

Kerans' political interests describe him as a moderate and moderate. His political interests describe him as a moderate and moderate, with a few years of labor and farm political contacts.

He is a natural speaker, appearing often at the state meeting — and some of the most party — four special sessions in 1982.

Last winter, on the final day of a special session to handle state budget deficits, Kerans collapsed. He was taken to Salem Hospital suffering from what was later diagnosed as a heart attack.

He has since lost 30 pounds, and has changed to suit walking before Jan. 15, the day he accepts the speaker's gavel from Nancy Meyer.

Kerans was arrested for drunken driving at Salem during the 1981 session, although he and other friends would be a no-brainer decision.

A man who plays chess in the week, like the District Attorney Kerans he does on, he is now under the gun to prove that a habit can become a addiction, given the chance.