Howard "Ed" Reinecke

1924 - 2016 Obituary Condolences Flowers

The 1960's was a pivotal time in American politics and Ed Reinecke was in the middle of it all. While Senator Barry Goldwater lost the Presidential race to Lyndon Johnson, the election that year set in motion big changes in the Republican Party that still are its core more than a half century later. In 1964 two men were elected to the United States Congress. Ronald Reagan's old Hollywood buddy George Murphy was elected to the United States Senate and Howard Edwin "Ed Reinecke, a San Fernando Valley business man, to the House of Representatives. Both men's lives were closely involved with the man who would become President of the United States, Ronald Reagan. Reagan was encouraged to run for Governor after his fellow actor was elected to the Senate. It would be Ed Reinecke who would eventually serve with Reagan in Sacramento.

Ed was elected to represent California's 27th district which was a huge sprawling district. It extended from the western boundary of Los Angeles County including a large part of the San Fernando Valley extending north to include the Santa Clarita Valley, Antelope Valley and parts of the Mojave Desert in Kern County. Ed found himself ensconced with the key industries of the region including the aerospace industry. It was in Ed's district that the rocket engines were tested for America's space and defense efforts or advanced military aircraft and work on the space program. He was called the "Slide rule Congressman" by his colleagues because of his focus on mathematics and engineering.

The Congressman was a traditional conservative and a serious student of Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln. He was a strong advocate of small government, individual liberty, and the protection of the natural environment. He was an environmentalist before it became fashionable. He served on the Interior Affairs committee and championed the protection of western rivers, and he fought in a bipartisan effort to block the damming of the Colorado River.
Ed was born in Medford, Oregon but grew up in Southern California graduating from Beverly Hills High School in 1942. During World War II he enlisted in the Navy, and served as a radio officer aboard a Gleaves Class destroyer, the USS Cowie. While escorting convoys to supply D-Day and the invasion of Sicily, he was among the first radiomen to use the Lorans navigation system. After the war, he attended the California Institute of Technology, graduating with a degree in mechanical engineering in 1950.

Ed developed a deep interest in engineering through his service in the military and in his education at prestigious Caltech. That experience helped him in Congress but it would play an important role in a new challenge in 1969, serving as Lieutenant Governor of California. The Congressman was doing well in his career in the House and then in 1968 Richard Nixon was elected President. Nixon sought the services of his former Chief of Staff in the Senate, Robert Finch, Lieutenant Governor of California as Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Suddenly Governor Reagan needed to appoint a new second in command of California.

He reviewed many resumes for the position including some on his personal staff but he wanted the candidate to have served in elected office. After interviewing the candidates, the Governor selected Ed because of his experience in Congress and his background as a businessman and engineer. His appointment opened his Congressional seat. One of the half dozen Republican candidates running for the seat ironically was Barry Goldwater, Jr. Ed won his seat in Congress in the 1964 election with the elder Goldwater as the GOP Presidential candidate. While usually never endorsing in primaries, Reagan secretly supported the younger Goldwater who ultimately won the seat in 1967.

Upon arriving in Sacramento, Ed found that Governor Reagan had two telephones in installed with one line connecting he and his new Lieutenant Governor directly involving no staff. Reagan wanted a close relationship with Ed which continued over the decades. Reagan relied on Ed's expertise and judgment. Years prior to the first big energy crisis in 1973, Ed suggested that the Governor's Administration take on the energy issue in a discussion with Reagan's Cabinet. Every Cabinet member disagreed with the Ed. Reagan thought for a moment after listening to his Lieutenant Governor's suggestions and the objections of his Cabinet, he looked at the them all and said "I am going with the Engineer!"

As Lt. Governor, Ed served on a numerous committees, boards, and commissions proposing innovative solutions to critical problems. When he saw the need for expansion of the University of California system, he worked to make the education opportunities from system more efficient and accessible. An engineer by training, he proposed making lectures by "excellent professors" available electronically to campuses across the state. His model anticipated, by 30 years, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCS) and other on-line university course offerings that are widely used today.

He was ahead of his time on need to protect California's water resources. He recognized California's growing population and limited water resources and worked to establish efficient water distribution systems in both California and Mexico.

He was always there to collaborate with his colleagues including with President Gerald Ford, plus US Senators Barry Goldwater, Robert Dole, Daniel Inouye, and Henry "Scoop" Jackson, plus colleagues in the House such as George H. W. Bush. He served as a mentor to Sonny Bono during his initial campaign for Congress.

He ran for Governor of California in 1974 but was defeated in the primary election by Houston Flournoy. Ed had been indicted for perjury during 1974 as part of the Watergate investigation. Ed always denied the charges lodged by Democrats until the end of his life. He was an honorable man. The decision was appealed and the case dismissed. Interestingly several Democrats like Congressman John Burton backed Ed and thought the charges were wrong.

He was elected unanimously as Chairman of California Republican Party in 1983 and provided leadership to the state GOP. President Reagan, who held Ed in high regard, offered him a top position with the Department of the
Interior but he declined the offer.

Ed eventually moved to Placerville, where he owned California's first Charolais cattle ranch, a real estate company, and a small restaurant, Zachary Jacques. He subsequently retired to Palm Springs, where he and his wife, Jean, lived for approximately 20 years.

His last public appearance again ironically was in a special presentation at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in 2015. I had the pleasure to interview this great man that night. His comments were witty, interesting and profound as the large audience in the library listened to him. He provided some unique remembrances of Ronald Reagan and his relationship.

Ed Reinecke dedicated his life to service in the private and public sectors always trying to create innovative answers to critical problems. He was dedicated to the values of limited government and a strong national defense. He risked his life in combat in World War II and raised four children with his wife Jean and is survived by 11 grandchildren and 6 great-grandchildren.

He was a wonderful man who contributed to his family, his nation, and his friends. In my last discussion with Ed he most importantly pronounced his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. At this Christmas time it truly can be said that Ed Reinecke lived a remarkable "Wonderful Life!" I will never forget him.

Visititation will be 10:30 A.M. Thursday, Dec. 29, 2016 at Wiefels Mortuary Chapel, 690 S. Vella Rd. Palm Springs. Graveside Service to follow at 1:30 P.M., Desert Memorial Park, 31705 DaVall Drive, Cathedral City. Published in The Desert Sun on Dec. 29, 2016