

# Tom Loftus: Walter Mondale: A stalwart of good

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Walter Mondale passed away peacefully and gracefully at age 93 in his home state of Minnesota.

His second home state was Wisconsin. Here is where his colleague and friend Gaylord Nelson was a senator and where Walter's self-deprecating sense of humor was welcome. He had the stories, and he had the timing.

It was also where his mentor Hubert Humphrey had been known as Wisconsin's third senator.

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During the Wisconsin Democratic presidential primary in 1984, I was the speaker of the Assembly and on the Mondale team, and trying to hold the Democratic Party together. Things were a mess.

National party Chairman Bob Strauss and the Democratic National Committee had voted not to recognize delegates chosen in Wisconsin's open primary. So, we had to organize a statewide caucus system from scratch. Not popular with the voters, the press or in keeping with the LaFollette reform of an open primary.

Walter won the caucuses and the delegates. Gary Hart won the open primary, the "beauty contest", as the press referred to it.

In the general election vs. President Ronald Reagan, Walter won only Minnesota but came close in Wisconsin. What I most remember from the race now his campaign

promise to seek a freeze on nuclear weapons.

I ran for governor of Wisconsin in 1990. Walter campaigned for me. The morning after my defeat his was the first telephone call I received. He said: "I thought you would like to hear from a fellow loser".

When during one of the gubernatorial campaign debates with Gov. Tommy Thompson I was asked if I would serve my full term if elected. I said, "Yes, unless named Ambassador to Norway."

There was no term, full or otherwise, but President Bill Clinton did name me ambassador to Norway. Walter said he was after the job but out of kindness he said he would take the post of ambassador to Japan.

Mondale could explain things in the way that would have heads nodding in understanding. Not a lot of words.

He explained the relations between Norwegians and Norwegian Americans when during the time he was vice president, he visited Mundal, the small town his ancestors emigrated from. There he famously said: "I don't know many of you, but your faces are familiar."

I visited him often in recent years. A former prime minister of Norway asked that a branch of the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights be established. The two of us did that, and of course it might as well be in Minneapolis near where Walter lived.

We walked around a lot during those visits. And he reminded me often that I was only successful because I had followed his advice: "Tell the truth, show up on time and shine your shoes."

Rest In Peace Walter Mondale. Takk for alt.

*- Loftus is the former Democratic speaker of the Wisconsin Assembly who served as U.S. ambassador to Norway.*