

OBITUARIES

Abner Mikva, liberal titan of law and politics, dies at 90

BY EMILY LANGER
THE WASHINGTON POST

Abner J. Mikva, a liberal titan of law and politics who served as a U.S. congressman from Illinois, a federal judge in Washington and White House counsel to President Bill Clinton, and who was an early mentor to future president Barack Obama, died July 4 at a hospice center in Chicago. He was 90.

The cause was complications from bladder cancer, said a son-in-law, Steven Cohen.

Once described by the New York Times as “the Zelig of the American legal scene,” Mikva held high office in all three branches of government.

He wielded influence beyond his official capacities, offering judicial clerkships to future U.S. Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan, who accepted, and to Obama, then a recent Harvard Law School graduate, who declined and opted instead to return to Chicago, where he eventually launched his political career.

“This guy really has brass,” Mikva recalled thinking.

Described as a father figure to Obama, Mikva connected the young politician with other power brokers who would help pave his way in public life.

In 2014, Obama awarded Mikva the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the country’s highest civilian honor, recognizing him as “one of the greatest jurists of his time,” who “helped shape the national debate on some of the most challenging issues of the day.”

Mikva traced his passion for politics to an encounter with the Chicago Democratic machine in 1948, a moment that became political lore. Energized by the liberal campaigns of future senator Paul H. Douglas and future governor Adlai E. Stevenson II, Mikva, then a law student, showed up at the eighth Ward Regular Democratic Organization headquarters.

“I came in and said I wanted to help,” he recalled in an oral history with political historian Milton Rakove. “Dead silence. ‘Who sent you?’ the committeeman said. I said, ‘Nobody.’ He said, ‘We don’t want nobody nobody sent.’ Then he said, ‘We ain’t got no jobs.’ I said, ‘I don’t want a job.’ He said, ‘We don’t want nobody that don’t want a job. Where are you from, anyway?’ I said, ‘University of Chicago.’ He said, ‘We don’t want nobody from the University of Chicago.’ “

Mikva, who clerked for U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sherman Minton, soon threw himself into Chicago politics and positioned himself as a liberal, independent-minded reformer against one of the most entrenched party organizations in modern American history.

In 1956, he won election to the Illinois House of Representatives and proved a shrewd and collaborative politician at the statehouse, working effectively on social reform bills dealing with crime, civil rights, health care and other issues.

Twelve years later, he captured a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives after dislodging an 86-year-



President Barack Obama presents the Presidential Medal of Freedom to five-term Illinois Rep. Abner Mikva during a White House ceremony in Washington, DC, in 2014.

old incumbent Democrat, Barratt O’Hara, from his district on the South Side of Chicago.

Mikva became a standard-bearer for liberal causes, supporting gun control and abortion rights and opposing the Vietnam War and capital punishment, and was a near-constant thorn in the side of Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley. Daley, who dominated the city’s Democratic machine for years, could not countenance the upstart legislator and referred to him, perhaps not unintentionally, as “Mifka.”

In a move attributed to Daley’s organization, Mikva’s district was redefined during congressional reapportionment. He ran for a seat on the city’s North Shore in 1972, lost, and sat out of Congress for a term, then tried again in 1974 and won. He remained on Capitol Hill until President Jimmy Carter, a Democrat, nominated him in 1979 for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia.

That court, with jurisdiction over federal agencies, is often described as the most important judicial body in the United States after the Supreme Court. Mikva overcame the opposition of the National Rifle Association in his Senate confirmation proceedings and became known on the bench for the liberal principles that endeared him to the like-minded but at times angered conservatives.

In 1993, Mikva, then the court’s chief judge, helped decide a high-profile case in which the court ordered the commission of a midshipman who had been expelled from the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis because he was gay.

“The Constitution does not allow Government to subordinate a class of persons simply because others do not like them,” he wrote in the court’s opinion.

The decision, which challenged the Clinton administration’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy on gays in the military, was reversed on appeal the following year. In 2011, “don’t ask, don’t tell” was repealed, allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly in uniform.

Although he was generally regarded as an activist judge, Mikva had the respect of colleagues with differing worldviews, including fellow appeals court judge Robert H. Bork, the conserva-

tive jurist whose failed Supreme Court nomination in 1987 set off an ideological wildfire.

Mikva cautioned for judicial restraint in certain circumstances. He said that he supported the result of Roe v. Wade, the landmark 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, but said he wished “the court had stayed its hand and allowed the political process to continue.”

“We would have legislated the effect of Roe v. Wade in most states,” he said in a 1999 oral history for the University of California at Berkeley, “and we wouldn’t have had to pay the political price we’ve had to pay for it being a court decision. The people who are angry at that court are angry beyond measure. As far as they are concerned, the whole system is rotten because they’ve lost their opportunity to slug it out.”

Mikva was frequently mentioned as a contender for a Supreme Court nomination, although he quipped that he was “too old, too white, too male and too liberal” to make the cut.

He left the appeals court in 1994 when Clinton, midway through his first term, offered him the post of White House counsel. Mikva was the third person to hold the position under Clinton, after Bernard Nussbaum and Lloyd N. Cutler.

Mikva represented Clinton during controversies including a congressional inquiry into the FBI’s 1993 raid on cult leader David Koresh’s Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Texas. But few issues consumed more of Mikva’s time than the Whitewater probe stemming from a failed Arkansas land deal involving Clinton and his wife, Hillary Clinton.

Kenneth W. Starr, the independent counsel appointed to investigate the matter, had previously served with Mikva on the appeals court. During their dealings with the president, Mikva once told the Times, Starr was discreet and respectful. He questioned the Clintons upstairs in the White House residence on a Saturday, rather than in a more public setting, and he used a back entrance to access the residence. There were no leaks to the media.

“I realize it was not done for this president,” Mikva recalled telling Starr at one point. “I appreciate your

concern for the presidency.”

Mikva left the White House in 1995 and became a professor at the University of Chicago law school. He said that he was disappointed by the conduct of the investigation as it became increasingly rancorous and as it grew to encompass Bill Clinton’s personal life, including his affair with White House intern Monica S. Lewinsky.

“I was shocked when Mrs. Clinton was called before the grand jury and he made her go to the courthouse” in 1996, Mikva told the Times. “He could have taken her testimony under oath at the White House. He knew there was no back stairway at that courthouse, that she’d have to walk right in front of the barrage of cameras. Ken knew that courthouse better than anyone.”

Abner Joseph Mikva — the surname is the Hebrew word for a ritual bath — was born on Jan. 21, 1926, in Milwaukee. His parents, immigrants from the shtetls of Eastern Europe, spoke mainly Yiddish and encouraged him in his education. His father became a life insurance agent and lost his job in the Depression, and the family relied on relief for a period.

After Army Air Forces service during World War II, Mikva graduated in 1951 from the University of Chicago law school, where he was editor of the law review. During his political rise, he worked as a labor lawyer, including with the firm of Arthur Goldberg, who later became a labor secretary, Supreme Court justice and U.S. representative to the United Nations.

In 1948, Mikva married the former Zorita “Zoe” Wise. In 1997, they helped found the Mikva Challenge, a Chicago-based nonprofit organization that aims to engage young people in civic life. Besides his wife, survivors include three daughters, Mary Mikva, Laurie Mikva and Rachel Mikva Rosenberg, all of Chicago; and seven grandchildren.

Although Mikva did not ascend to the Supreme Court in real life, he did join the bench in Hollywood. In “Dave” (1993), the romantic comedy starring Kevin Kline as a stand-in commander in chief, Mikva played the chief justice who administers the presidential oath of office.

Founder of Enterprise car rental dies at 94

BY HARRISON SMITH
THE WASHINGTON POST

Jack C. Taylor, who grew a seven-car leasing business into Enterprise Holdings, a rental giant that boasts the world’s largest car and truck fleet, died July 2 at his home in Ladue, Missouri, just outside of St. Louis. He was 94.

Enterprise announced his death but did not specify the cause.

Taylor had flown F6F Hellcat fighter planes in the Pacific during World War II, landing on aircraft carriers such as the USS Enterprise, before returning to St. Louis to sell Cadillacs during the postwar boom.

He was promoted to manager, but Taylor had few ambitions in business until, at 35, he began to notice that cars leased by a Greyhound bus subsidiary in Chicago were making their way into town.

Leasing — which offers businesses and consumers smaller down-payments and the opportunity to change vehicles every few years — was still novel in the 1950s, and Taylor saw an opportunity to corner the market in St. Louis.

His boss, dealership owner Arthur Lindburg, agreed with him, and in 1957 Taylor took a 50 percent pay cut and invested \$25,000 of his own money to found Executive Leasing in the lower level of Lindburg Cadillac. He began with seven cars and a one-quarter share in the business.

By the time of his death, Taylor and his family controlled a fleet of more than 1.7 million cars — the largest in the world, Enterprise claims — and an estimated 88 percent of the private company.

Driven by its car and truck rentals, Enterprise employs 91,000 people in more than 9,000 locations around the world. The company said it earned \$19.4 billion in revenue in 2015, more than double that of its two chief competitors, Hertz and Avis, and in the last four years it has expanded across China, Europe and Latin America. The company’s retail division makes it perhaps the largest buyer and seller of cars and trucks in the world.

The company found success with some hesitation, offering rentals in the early 1960s only after customers began asking for cars to use while they waited for repairs. Taylor began with a small fleet, or perhaps a flotilla, of 17 Chevrolets, charging \$5 a day and 5 cents a mile.

Recognizing that the company was too small to compete with Hertz and Avis at airports, Taylor chose to focus his rental business on local drivers instead of business travelers. He and an ambitious young manager, Don Holtzman, developed relationships with auto insurance adjusters so that when drivers’ cars was stolen, adjusters steered them toward Executive Leasing.

When courts ruled in the early 1970s that insurance companies were liable for motorists’ economic losses due to being without a car, Forbes magazine explained in 1990, “the insurers decided to provide reasonably priced rental cars, and Enterprise’s rental business took off.”

The company was renamed Enterprise in 1969, in honor of the aircraft carrier Taylor served on in wartime, and later took the name Enterprise Rent-A-Car in response to the growth of its rental business.

The company reshaped the rental market with its focus on opening locations in urban neighborhoods rather than at airports and with its signature offer, “We’ll pick you up.” The practice began in the early 1970s, when an Orlando, Florida, manager began offering customers free rides

to the rental office.

Early on, Taylor emphasized customer service and equitable compensation. He set up a “customer give-away account” to allow managers to cut prices to satisfy grumpy clients and instituted a promotion system that encouraged accountability from the company’s young hires. Enterprise is one of the largest employers of new college graduates in the country, hiring about 8,000 each year.

“Take care of your customers and your employees first,” Taylor liked to say, in what became a kind of corporate credo at Enterprise, “and the profits will follow.”

The company expanded abroad in 1993, opening a location in Windsor, Canada, and finally moved into the airport market two years later with a location at Denver International Airport. By 2001, it was opening an average of one new office every business day.

Its expansion into airports was furthered by the acquisition of Alamo Rent A Car and National Car Rental, which were owned by private-equity-controlled Vanguard Car Rental Group, in 2007. The purchase expanded Enterprise’s car fleet by 42 percent.

The company renamed itself Enterprise Holdings two years later.

Jack Crawford Taylor was born in St. Louis on April 14, 1922, and he grew up in the neighboring town of Clayton, where Enterprise is based. A lackluster student, he attended Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, and then Washington University in St. Louis before enlisting in the Navy following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. “The war,” he later joked, “saved me from further educational activities.”

He operated Enterprise as a family business. A late brother, Paul, was a vice president, and in 1991 Taylor stepped down to allow his son, Andrew Taylor, to take over as chief executive. (Andrew Taylor began his Enterprise career washing cars during high-school vacations.) A daughter, Jo Ann Taylor Kindle, is president of the Enterprise Holdings Foundation, the company’s philanthropic affiliate, and a granddaughter, Christine Taylor, was named chief operating officer in February.

Taylor retired as executive chairman in 2013, replaced by his son. Pamela Nicholson was named chief executive that same year, becoming the first person from outside the Taylor family to hold the position.

Marriages to Mary Ann MacCarthy and Susan Orri-son ended in divorce. In addition to his son and daughter, both from his marriage to MacCarthy, Taylor is survived by five granddaughters and three great-granddaughters.

Enterprise made Taylor one of the wealthiest individuals in the United States, with Forbes magazine estimating his net worth at \$5.3 billion in its 2016 list of the world’s billionaires. A philanthropist in later life, Taylor donated more than \$860 million by his company’s count, including to organizations such as Washington University, where he was an emeritus trustee, and the St. Louis Symphony.

In interviews, Taylor said he never expected Enterprise to take off and — despite his taking a pay cut and investing thousands — was unconcerned during the company’s early years. “After landing a Hellcat on the pitching deck of a carrier, or watching enemy tracer bullets stream past your canopy,” he once said, “somehow the risk of starting up my own company didn’t seem all that big a deal.”

Military historian Robert F. Dorr dies at 76

BY BART BARNES
THE WASHINGTON POST

Robert F. Dorr, an author and former Foreign Service officer who wrote hundreds of books, newspaper and magazine articles on military aircraft, battles and history, died June 12 at a hospital in Falls Church, Virginia. He was 76.

The cause was a brain tumor, said a son, Robert P. Dorr.

From 1964 to 1989, Dorr was in the Foreign Service, mainly as a political officer, and his assignments included South Korea, Madagascar, Japan, Sweden, London and Liberia.

In retirement, he wrote books on topics ranging from World War II history to more recent military missions to novels and adventure stories. His 1991 volume about the Persian Gulf War, “Desert Shield: The Build-up, the Complete Story,” reportedly sold 100,000 copies.

Dorr was a columnist for Air Force Times and other military publications and often was a “sympathetic voice for enlisted airmen,” said Kathleen Curthoys, a presentation editor at Military Times.

Robert Francis Dorr was born in Washington on Sept. 11, 1939. He grew up near

Bolling Air Force Base and since childhood was fascinated by airplanes. With money he earned from a paper route, he bought an Underwood typewriter and began writing stories when he was 12.

As a student at Suitland High School in Prince George’s County, Maryland, Dorr began his writing career with an unsolicited article in Air Force Magazine arguing that bombers in the Strategic Air Command needed fighter aircraft escorts, the Air Force Times said in an obituary.

After high school graduation in 1957, Dorr served

four years in the Air Force, stationed mostly in Korea. Having learned the language, he eavesdropped on North Korean communications. He later settled in San Francisco, attended the University of California at Berkeley and began writing adventure stories for pulp fiction magazines.

In 1968 he married a Korean national, Young Soon Cho, and they later settled in Oakton, Virginia. Besides his wife, survivors include two sons, Robert P. Dorr of Arlington, Virginia, and Lawrence G. Dorr III of Trinity, Florida; a brother; and three grandchildren.