

OBITUARIES

Conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly dies at 92

BY BILL TROTT
REUTERS

Phyllis Schlafly, who became a “founding mother” of the modern U.S. conservative movement by battling feminists in the 1970s and working tirelessly to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment, died on Monday at the age of 92, her Eagle Forum group said.

Schlafly, who lived in the St. Louis suburb of Ladue, Missouri, died at her home in the presence of her family, Eagle Forum said in a statement. The cause of death was not given.

She was still a conservative force and popular speaker in her 90s, endorsing Donald Trump for the Republican presidential nomination in 2016 and praising his policy on immigration. She was a delegate to the Republicans’ convention in Cleveland.

Trump said in a statement that he spoke with Schlafly a few weeks ago by telephone “and she sounded as resilient as ever ... She was a patriot, a champion for women, and a symbol of strength.”

Schlafly once called feminists “a bunch of bitter women seeking a constitutional cure for their personal problems,” Time said, while insisting that “women find their greatest fulfillment at home with their family.”

Her political ardor did not fade with age and in 2014, as President Barack Obama pushed for pay equity for women, Schlafly sparked controversy with a column for the Christian Post saying a man’s paycheck comes first.

“The pay gap between men and women is not all bad because it helps to promote and sustain marriages,” she said. “... The best way to improve economic prospects for women is to improve job prospects for the men in their lives, even if that means increasing the so-called pay gap.”

Schlafly promoted traditional family values and once told a reporter that she always listed her occupation as “mother” when filling out applications. But she was hardly a typical stay-at-home housewife/mother.

Shortly after marrying lawyer Fred Schlafly in 1949, she became active in Republican Party politics in Alton, Illinois, and ran unsuccessfully for Congress twice. She would go on to found the Eagle Forum grass-roots conservative group, write a newspaper column and newsletter and author some 20 books.

Her crowning achievement was crusading to prevent the Equal Rights Amendment from being added to the U.S. Constitution and it made Phyllis Schlafly a leader in the modern American conservative movement.

“Phyllis Schlafly courageously and single-handedly took on the issue of the Equal Rights Amendment when no one else in the country was opposing it,” said James C. Dobson, chairman and founder of Focus on the Family. “In so doing, she essentially launched the pro-family, pro-life movement.”

Biographer Donald T. Critchlow said defeating the Equal Rights Amendment helped usher in a conserva-



Phyllis Schlafly, pictured in her hotel room during her visit to New York to attend the 2004 Republican National Convention, died of natural causes on Monday.

tive era in American politics and boosted Ronald Reagan to the presidency.

In her decade-long fight against the Equal Rights Amendment, Schlafly traveled across the country to speak at rallies and persuade state legislators not to approve the Equal Rights Amendment.

Along the way she often debated feminist writer Betty Freidan, who called Schlafly “a traitor to her sex” and once told her: “I’d like to burn you at the stake.”

The intention of the Equal Rights Amendment was to ensure women were treated the same as men under state and federal laws. Schlafly’s attack on the proposed amendment was based on

the premise that the rights of women already were well protected by the U.S. Constitution. She said the Equal Rights Amendment actually would erode women’s standing, leading to homosexual marriages, women in combat, government-funded abortions and loss of alimony.

In 1972 she started the Eagle Forum, now located in Clayton, Missouri, along with Stop ERA, bringing in legions of supporters who had been regarded as nonpolitical housewives. In a 1978 appearance at the Illinois capitol she was accompanied by backers bearing loaves of homemade bread.

Described by Time magazine as “feminine but forceful” and with her hair al-

ways carefully styled, Schlafly said she attended 41 state hearings to testify against the Equal Rights Amendment. When the Equal Rights Amendment’s ratification deadline expired in 1982, having been approved by only 35 of the 38 states needed, Schlafly threw a party in Washington.

Phyllis Stewart was born Aug. 15, 1924, in St. Louis and grew up in a home she described as Republican but not activist. She put herself through Washington University by firing weapons as an ammunition factory tester and later earned a master’s degree in political science from Radcliffe. In 1978 she graduated from Washington University’s law school.

The left attacked Schlafly for promoting domestic life to her supporters while spending so much time pursuing her ambitious political agenda. She responded by saying she never told women they should not work.

“I simply didn’t believe we needed a constitutional amendment to protect women’s rights,” Schlafly told the New York Times.

Schlafly first became a political presence with her 1964 self-published book “A Choice, Not an Echo,” which championed the conservative politics of Arizona Sen. Barry Goldwater.

Schlafly also built a reputation as a strident anti-Communist and opponent of arms control treaties. After the Equal Rights Amendment’s defeat, she continued to preach conservative causes such as limited government, anti-abortion laws, traditional education, strong defense and keeping out illegal immigrants.

She frequently criticized immigration reform and the Obama administration. She wrote more than 25 books, including “How the Republican Party Became Pro-Life” in 2016 and “No Higher Power: Obama’s War on Religious Freedom” in 2012.

Schlafly also was a critic of gay rights, which proved to be a sensitive topic in 1992 when the oldest of her six children, John, who worked for the Eagle Forum, acknowledged he was homosexual.

Schlafly’s husband, Fred, died in 1993. She is survived by six children, 16 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren, Eagle Forum said.

Psychologist Joy Browne dies at 71

Radio host counseled callers and cheered millions of listeners

BY EMILY LANGER
THE WASHINGTON POST

Joy Browne, a psychologist who acted as therapist, confessor and cheerleader to thousands of callers and millions of listeners during nearly four decades as the host of a syndicated phone-in radio talk show, died Aug. 27 at a hospital in New York City. She was 71.

Her daughter, Patience Browne, confirmed the death and said she did not yet know the cause.

Dr. Browne — also known to the troubled and flummoxed as a television show host and self-help author — was running a private practice in Boston in 1978 when a local radio station offered her the chance to host a call-in advice program. The genre, perfected by Joyce Brothers and Toni Grant, was for years a mainstay of talk radio.

At first, Browne declined, concerned that any real or apparent flirtation with entertainment, as opposed to serious therapy, might jeopardize her professional reputation. It was a fellow therapist, she recalled, who changed her mind.

“Look,” she recalled her friend telling her, “if you can touch 100 people’s lives in a year as a therapist, you can touch 1,000 people’s lives in a day on the air.”

The reasoning, Browne conceded, was “seductive.”

First from Boston station WITS and later from her long-time radio home on WOR in New York City, Browne became one of the best-known media psychologists, syndicated on hundreds of stations.

Michael Harrison, publisher of Talkers magazine, a trade publication devoted to talk radio, said in an interview that, at the time of Browne’s death, her program was the longest-running relationships show by a licensed clinical psychologist on AM-FM radio.

“She brought a seriousness about psychology to the radio waves that is quite commendable,” Harrison said. “That came first, before show business or commercialism or anything else. She was very concerned that the information and advice she gave was sound, that it wasn’t sensationalized or in any way hyped up or compromised for the sake of getting ratings or entertaining people. Yet she was extremely entertaining.”

Browne had no appetite for the lurid. She was interested, she told the New York Daily

News, in “normal people talking about having normal problems.”

“I think the most valuable thing I do is help people understand they’re not alone,” she told Canadian broadcaster CTV, “that whatever their problem is, somebody else has got it, that there’s no shame in having a problem, because if people can talk about it they put the shame behind.”

An unknown, but enormous, number of callers phoned Browne to air their shortcomings and vent their frustrations. They unburdened themselves about meddlesome in-laws and willful children, spouses who wanted too much sex or too little of it, trouble with commitment and trouble with overeating.

It was often noted that in her television programs, which appeared over the years on CBS and Discovery Health, chairs remained firmly planted on the floor, in contrast with the melodrama of other shows dealing with family dysfunction. Also, unlike some other on-air therapists or advice-givers, who lured audiences by berating their callers, Browne sought to encourage the people who turned to her for guidance, addressing them as “kiddo” and “patootie.”

“She wasn’t overly moralistic or judgmental,” Harrison said. “She was very, very uplifting and fair and wanted people to come away from her show, both as callers and listeners, feeling better and more optimistic about themselves, as opposed to feeling uncomfortable or unhappy.”

More than delivering advice, she often tried, in the therapist’s traditional role, to help callers find their own way.

“If you won the lottery tomorrow, would you go or would you stay?” she asked a woman whose husband had hired a prostitute. “If you’d go, get a lawyer and you can get a good chunk of his money. If you’d stay, you have to figure out whether the prostitute is the problem or a symptom of a bigger problem.”

There were, however, certain rules that she supported. After a breakup or divorce, people should wait at least a year, to regain their bearings, before dating again. Also, whenever children are involved, romantic partners who are serious about each other should marry because stability in childhood and adolescence is of paramount importance.

“When you hear that you just changed somebody’s mind,” she said, “nothing in the world makes you feel better.”

Joy Oppenheim was born in New Orleans on Oct. 24, 1944, the daughter of a teacher and an accountant. She grew up in Pennsylvania and Colorado and displayed a particular skill even from a young age.

“Even when I was 10 years old, people would tell me their problems,” she told Talkers.

She received a bachelor’s degree from Rice University in Houston in 1966 and a doctorate in psychology from Northeastern University in Boston in 1972. In addition to her private practice, she was working in social services when WITS began approaching local psychologists about an on-air show, eventually settling on Browne.

At the time of her death, her show was broadcast by the Genesis Communications Network.

Browne wrote a shelf full of self-help books, among them “Nobody’s Perfect: Advice for Blame-Free Living” (1988), “Why They Don’t Call When They Say They Will — And Other Mixed Signals” (1989), “The Nine Fantasies That Will Ruin Your Life (And the Eight Realities That Will Save You)” (1998), “It’s a Jungle Out There, Jane: Understanding the Male Animal” (1999) and “Getting Unstuck: Eight Simple Steps to Solving Any Problem” (2002).

Her marriage to Carter Browne ended in divorce. Besides her daughter, of Paris, survivors include her mother, Ruth Oppenheim of Denver; three sisters; and two brothers.

Browne said her longevity as a therapist allowed her to observe up close a changing society.

“When I started, I got a lot of questions about empty-nest syndrome. Now I get a lot of questions about crowded-nest syndrome,” she told the New Orleans Times-Picayune in 1999. “Twenty years ago, it was the husband who was the one doing the cheating. Now half my calls are about the wife cheating. And nowadays half my calls are from men.”

At times, therapy call-in shows have been criticized for blurring the line between entertainment and therapy. But she saw a purpose in work such as hers, particularly in a culture, she told the New York Times, where the religious confessional booth no longer plays the role it once did, and where physicians have seemingly ever-diminishing time to spend with patients.

“Telling someone like me your secrets,” she said, “seems a valuable pressure valve for society.”

Jon Polito, character actor, dies at 65

BY MATT SCHUDEL
THE WASHINGTON POST

Jon Polito, a character actor best known for his roles as menacing, gravelly voiced gangsters, cops and shady business executives in movies created by the Coen brothers and in the first two seasons of the television crime drama “Homicide: Life on the Street,” died Sept. 1 at a hospital in Duarte, California. He was 65.

His death was announced by his manager, Maryellen Mulcahy. The cause was multiple myeloma.

Stocky, bald and often sweaty, Polito seldom if ever had a leading role. Yet in a career that included more than 100 films and 50 television shows, he often had many memorable dramatic — and comedic — parts.

He acted on Broadway alongside Dustin Hoffman and John Malkovich in Arthur Miller’s “Death of a Salesman”; improvised a comedy scene with Marlon Brando in “The Freshman” (1990); and appeared in the 1998 cult classic film, “The Big Lebowski,” created by Joel and Ethan Coen, as a hapless detective in a comically profane encounter with Jeff Bridges’ character, the Dude.

“I’m a brother shamus,” Polito says.

“A brother shamus?” says the Dude. “Like an Irish monk?”

“I’m a private snoop like you, man,” Polito replies.

During the first two seasons of NBC’s “Homicide: Life on the Street,” in 1993 and 1994, Polito played Steve Crosetti, a hardened but haunted Baltimore police officer. He was prominently featured in the show’s first two seasons, but when the producers planned to de-emphasize his role in the third season, Polito voiced his frustration to the media.

It didn’t take long before Crosetti’s body was pulled out of the water, a victim of suicide.

“I was totally wrong,” Polito later admitted, “because, in fact, the changes they made meant that NBC put it on a better night, and it became a success.”

But Polito became a success in his own right, even if his face was more familiar than his name. Early in his stage career in New York, he won awards for his work in off-Broadway productions, and he appeared opposite Faye Dunaway in a short-lived Broadway drama, “The Curse of an Aching Heart,” in 1982.

In a Tony Award-winning 1984 revival of “Death of a Salesman,” he played the callous boss who fired Willy Loman, the central

character played by Hoffman.

Polito portrayed a mob boss in the 1980s TV police drama “Crime Story” before being cast in his first Coen brothers production, “Miller’s Crossing,” in 1990. In the film, set in the 1930s, he plays a mobster, Johnny Caspar, at odds with another gangster played by Albert Finney.

In a riveting scene, Caspar confronts Finney’s character, Leo, and says a bookie named Bernie Bernbaum should be killed: “I’m talkin’ about friendship. I’m talkin’ about character. I’m talkin’ about ... Hell, Leo, I ain’t embarrassed to use the word — I’m talkin’ ethics. Whereas Bernie Bernbaum is a horse of a different color. Ethics-wise. As in, he ain’t got any.”

Polito appeared in four other Coen brothers films, “Barton Fink” (1991), “The Hudsucker Proxy” (1994), “The Big Lebowski” (1998) and “The Man Who Wasn’t There” (2001), a noirish movie starring Billy Bob Thornton.

Throughout his career, Polito often took on comic roles, including that of Silvio, a hotheaded landlord in a 1998 episode of “Seinfeld.” He also played an executive of a low-budget airline in “View From the Top” (2003), a frothy romantic comedy starring Gwyneth Paltrow.

Interviewing Paltrow for a job as a flight attendant, Polito had one of the movie’s best lines: “You’re gonna love the uniform. Our motto is big hair, short skirts and service with a smile.”

John Polito — he later dropped the “h” from his first name — was born Dec. 29, 1950, in Philadelphia. His father was a factory worker.

Inspired by classic Hollywood character actors such as Sidney Greenstreet and Charles Laughton, Polito began appearing in high school plays before receiving a drama scholarship to Villanova University, outside Philadelphia. He graduated with honors.

He landed his first major acting job on Broadway in 1977 as an understudy in the David Mamet drama “American Buffalo.”

Polito had been treated for multiple myeloma, a form of blood cancer, for several years but continued to act until shortly before his death. He had recurring roles in several TV series, including “Modern Family,” “Sunbaths” and “Raising the Bar.” He played Danny DeVito’s brother in the sitcom “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia” and appeared in the 2006 World War II film “Flags of Our Fathers,” directed by Clint Eastwood.