



Obituary



Mark Wells White, Jr.

1940 - 2017

The Board and staff of the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum are sad to announce the passing of Board Member Emeritus and former Governor Mark Wells White, Jr.

He passed away from a heart attack at his home in Houston at age 77.

Governor White served as the 43rd Governor of Texas from January 18, 1983 to January 20, 1987 and found time to support the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum on the Board and as an emeritus member for many years. As Governor he was staunchly supportive of the Texas Rangers and their importance to Texas law enforcement and history.

Our deepest condolences to his wife Linda Gale and family.

Biographical Sketch adapted from Wikipedia

White was born in Henderson, in Rusk County, Texas to parents Mark Wells White, Sr., and Sarah Elizabeth White. White attended Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and was a member of the Tryon Coterie Club, now Phi Delta Theta (Texas Lambda Chapter) at Baylor.

While in Houston he attended Woodrow Wilson Elementary School,[1] Lanier Junior High School,[2] and Lamar High School.[3] He graduated from Baylor Law School in 1965. After spending time practicing law in a private practice in Houston (Harris County), White served as the state's assistant attorney general. In 1973, White was appointed as Texas secretary of state under Governor Dolph Briscoe and also served in the 36th Infantry Division of the Texas National Guard.

White served as secretary of state until 1977, when he resigned to run for state attorney general, where he served until 1983. In the 1978 general election, White defeated the Republican choice, James A. Baker, III, a Houston lawyer, businessman, and power broker affiliated with the Bushes of Houston. White polled 1,249,846 votes and (55.13 percent) to Baker's 999,431 votes and (44.08 percent). As the state's chief enforcement officer, he co-chaired the Federal-State Enforcement Coordinating Committee and was a member of the Governor's Organized Crime Prevention Council. On the national level, he was elected Chairman of the Southern Conference of Attorneys General in May 1981.

White declined to seek a second term as state attorney general, but chose to seek the governorship in 1982 against fellow Democrat Bob Armstrong. As the state's forty-third chief executive from January 18, 1983 to January 20, 1987, White worked to "preserve and enhance... resources so that Texas would not fall back, but go forward as a state of the future." His main concerns were the economy and education. By focusing on Texas' resources, White was able to work on many problems facing the state in the early 1980s. The Texas economy during the early and mid-1980s was volatile. The price of oil declined and pushed Texas into a recession. This led Governor White to "lay the groundwork for a more diversified economy--one less reliant upon the...swings of a single industry."

Among White's appointments was Elma Salinas Ender as the first Hispanic woman to serve as judge of a district court in Texas. From 1983 until her retirement in 2012, Ender was judge of the 341st Judicial District, based in Laredo.

White sought to improve education, transportation, water resources, law enforcement, and taxes to lure new industry to Texas. Education was an essential factor for White. When he took office, Texas was ranked as one of the lowest performing states for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) also in teachers' salaries. After taking office, White immediately appointed a committee on Public Education, called a special session of the legislature in 1984, and worked with lawmakers to pass the Educational Opportunity Act (EOA). Through White's work, Texas saw the desired results. SAT scores increased by twelve points, Texas first graders improved in statewide tests and teacher salaries increased by \$5,000.

By focusing on education, White was able to make Texas a "state of the future" with regard to its most important resource, its children. Through his diligent work as Governor of Texas, many of the problems of the present and future were alleviated. However, four years later, White was defeated by Clements, who opted for a second, nonconsecutive term.

Among White's advisors as governor were the Dallas industrialist H. Ross Perot and former State Senator Max Sherman, who left a brief stint in the administration to become dean of the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs in Austin.

White served as governor during Texas' sesquicentennial in 1986 and oversaw a number of the celebrations concerning that anniversary. He also made a cameo appearance in the popular CBS drama series Dallas.

White practiced law and was chairman of the board of the Houston Independent School District Foundation, a non-profit organization which supports the public schools. In 2011, White publicly opposed Texas A&M's potential departure from the Big 12 conference to join the Southeastern Conference (SEC). Mark White Elementary School, a Houston Independent School District elementary school, opened in August 2016.

