

U. professor a witty voice in Utah politics

By Paul Rolly
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J.D. Williams inspired three generations of college students to jump into politics and the U.S. "experiment" of government while constantly poking conservative Utah with outspoken barbs, like calling for the impeachment of two Republican presidents.

Williams, the first director and the heart and soul of the University of Utah's well-respected Hinckley Institute of Politics, died at his home Monday evening after a long battle with cancer. He was 81.

"He kept his wonderful sense of humor until the very end," said his wife of 61 years, Barbara, affectionately dubbed by Williams as "Bea."

"J.D. was always the flirt," she said. "So in one of his final lucid moments, his brother Rex asked if his wife Shirley could come in the room and visit for five minutes."

"No," boomed Williams. "Give me a half hour."

Williams taught political science for 40 years at the U. Among his students was longtime President Bush adviser Karl Rove, whose politics were anathema to him.

While Williams hailed Rove's love and command of politics, he decried his failure to "play the game fairly and with honor."

Rove, was saddened by the news of Williams' death. "He was a wonderful individual," Rove told *The Salt Lake Tribune* on Tuesday. "He was a mentor to thousands, a remarkable individual." Rove may have been a conservative Republican, but that didn't matter much to Williams. "That didn't stop him" from encouraging Rove to excel in his public service to his country.

Rove said Williams was "noble" and taught everyone among his students to always give back to the society.

Former students remember Williams' fervor for his subject that sparked their own enthusiasm for government and politics. He sent hundreds of young men and women into a life of public service through the internships he helped initiate at the institute.

"It was hard to take notes in Dr. Williams' class," said attorney and former Republican state legislator David Irvine. "His lectures were so full of rich, pithy, funny comments, I always was afraid I would miss something wonderful while concentrating on writing something down."

Added ex-Salt Lake City mayor and one-time Williams' student Ted Wilson: "He had a way of being absolutely frank and direct about his own politics, but he conveyed that enthusiasm to his students without trying to influence their own beliefs. He taught students to love the process, but he made sure to respect their own political choices. He got internships and helped launch the careers of young Republicans and Democrats alike."

Williams began teaching at the University of Utah in 1952, right after he received a Ph.D. in political science from Harvard. He had obtained his undergraduate degree from Stanford. He quickly made a name for himself as a lecturer and author of numerous publications on politics and public administration and within a few years was named director of the university's Bureau of Community Development.

When business icon and philanthropist Robert H. Hinckley provided the endowment for the Hinckley Institute of Politics in 1965, Williams was named its founding director.

"His easy manner and kind disposition, paired with his passion for politics and desire to promote student participation, touched a great number of lives," said U. President Michael K. Young.

One life he touched was that of Patrick Shea, attorney and former chairman of the State Democratic Party. But his first encounter with Williams wasn't that enjoyable.

"He expelled me from the assembly of the Model United Nations [a program for high school students] for making too many procedural moves independent of substance," said Shea. "I learned from my early encounter that J.D. was a person

of substance and loved the world of competing ideas. He instilled in anyone who came within his path a bountiful sense of curiosity, a deep commitment to our democratic process and the integrity with which it needed to be operated."

Williams, who unsuccessfully ran as a Democrat for the U.S. Senate in 1968, riled many conservative contributors to the Hinckley Institute in 1973 when he called for the impeachment of President Nixon, who was deeply embroiled in the Watergate scandal. He later offered his resignation as director to the Institute's board because he feared his controversial stance would hurt fundraising efforts for the program.

He remained as a full-time professor in political science and in the fray over controversial political subjects.

In various speeches and writings, he took on the Legislature's attempts to regulate the content of cable TV, led a consumer protest against what he called excessive gas-rate increases, spoke at a campus rally protesting South Africa's racist system of apartheid and called for the impeachment of President Reagan.

"J.D. was the perfect individual to run the institute at its onset," said current Hinckley Institute Director Kirk Jowers. "His activism caused consternation among Republicans and conservatives, but it showed the students that he cared about participating in politics. He was willing to act on his principles rather than merely speak in class. That is the spirit that Mr. Hinckley wanted. If the director was just an academic not willing to fully engage on behalf of principles, candidates and positions, the heart of the institute may have been lost before it ever got started."

Williams also was a sought-after lecturer on the origins of the U.S. Constitution and its government and he was a prolific debater on behalf of a "living, breathing Constitution to conform to changing times" against the "original intent" interpreters of the country's founding document.

He was born Jan. 13, 1926, in Salt Lake City to Rex W. Williams Sr. and Helen Spencer Williams. In 1946, he married his high school sweetheart, Bea, who survives him along with their four children Kirk, of Salt Lake City, Gil (Cindy), of Midway, Taylor (Sheryl) and Kim (John) D'agostino, of Parker, Col.; 11 grandchildren, four great-grandchildren, and brother Rex. He was preceded in death by his parents, brother Robert and one grandchild.

A visitation will convene at Larkin Sunset Lawn Mortuary, 2350 E. 1300 South in Salt Lake City on Friday, Sept. 21, from 5 to 8 p.m. A memorial is set tentatively at the university's Orson Spencer Hall Sept. 22, the time yet to be determined.

The family asks that in lieu of flowers, donations be made to the J.D. Williams Scholarship Fund at the University of Utah Development Office, 540 Arapeen Dr., Suite 250, Salt Lake City, Utah 84108.

* THOMAS BURR contributed to this story.

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