

## J.D. Williams: U. professor lit up Utah politics

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Professor J.D. Williams had an incandescent enthusiasm for the American experiment. He loved politics, and he was able to light that fire within generations of young Utahns. It is a measure of his legacy that the longtime University of Utah professor was lionized at his death by Karl Rove, President Bush's chief political strategist, and Pat Shea, President Clinton's director of the Bureau of Land Management.

Both studied with J.D. Both mourned his passing. Politically, that may be the only thing they hold in common.

Williams never was shy about voicing his political opinions. He called for the resignation of President Nixon and the impeachment of President Reagan. When G. Gordon Liddy, one of the Watergate burglars, came to speak at the U., Williams rose from the audience and called him one of the three most despicable men in history.

Everyone in Utah who followed politics had an opinion of J.D., if only from reading *The Salt Lake Tribune*. Reporters called him often, knowing they could count on a pithy quote.

Liberals loved him as the gadfly who delighted in stinging the Republicans. (Before there was Rocky, there was J.D.) Conservatives sometimes loathed him, but they could dismiss him as a voice in the wilderness.

However, the students who flocked to his political science classes at the U. came to know him a bit differently.

Yes, he was outspoken, but he wasn't overbearing. He didn't hide his light under a bushel, but he didn't burn the students who disagreed with him. It helped that he was witty and, above all, passionate.

His initials notwithstanding, he was not a lawyer. But he was a scholar of the Constitution, an acolyte of the school which holds that it is a living document, not a dead repository of original intent.

As founding director of the Hinckley Institute of Politics, he guided countless forums, debates and seminars with local, state and national political figures. He landed internships and opportunities for study abroad for kids from across the political spectrum. Among those interns was Rove.

Williams ran for office himself, unsuccessfully seeking seats in the U.S. Senate and the Utah Legislature.

Whether in the role of gadfly or godfather, lecturer or listener, J.D. Williams lent a creative spark to Utah politics. We will miss his light and inspiration.

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