

Eulogy by Steven Merksamer Given at the Memorial Service for Governor George Deukmejian on June 9, 2018

THANK YOU DONNA –

I WAS HONORED WHEN GLORIA AND THE FAMILY ASKED ME TO SAY A FEW WORDS ABOUT GEORGE’S REMARKABLE SERVICE TO OUR STATE – 28 YEARS AS A LEGISLATOR, ATTORNEY GENERAL AND GOVERNOR.

I FIRST MET GEORGE NEARLY 40 YEARS AGO, OCTOBER, 1978.

HE WAS A CANDIDATE FOR ATTORNEY GENERAL, AND WAS LOOKING TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE BREADTH AND SCOPE OF THE OFFICE--HE WAS HOPING TO WIN.

I WAS A YOUNG DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL IN THE CIVIL DIVISION OF THE OFFICE.

GIVEN GEORGE’S LEADERSHIP IN THE SENATE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE ISSUES, HE FELT HE HAD A GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT THE CRIMINAL DIVISION OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL’S OFFICE DOES – BUT HE WANTED SOME ADVICE ON THE CIVIL DIVISION.

SO A COLLEAGUE, MIKE FRANCHETTI, ARRANGED FOR US TO HAVE LUNCH IN SACRAMENTO.

THAT WAS MY FIRST MEETING WITH GEORGE – AND I KNEW THEN ... THIS WAS NOT YOUR TYPICAL CANDIDATE.

FIRST OF ALL, HE DIDN’T ASK US FOR A CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTION!

SECONDLY, HE DIDN’T TELL US HOW GREAT HE WAS – OR HOW SMART, IN FACT, HE DIDN’T TALK ABOUT HIMSELF AT ALL!

AND, HE DIDN’T DENIGRATE HIS OPPONENT.

ALL HE WANTED TO DISCUSS WAS HOW THE ATTORNEY GENERAL’S OFFICE COULD BE IMPROVED—MADE BETTER, MORE EFFICIENT AND MORE RESPONSIVE TO THE PUBLIC INTEREST—SHOULD HE GET ELECTED?

I LEFT THAT LUNCH THINKING – WOW! – THIS IS AN UNUSUAL POLITICIAN.

HE DOESN’T ASK FOR MONEY—HE DOESN’T BRAG—HE DOESN’T BAD MOUTH HIS OPPONENT--HE JUST LISTENED FOR 2 HOURS TO A COUPLE OF BORING LAWYERS FILL HIM IN ON THE AG’S OFFICE.

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AND THEN HE PICKS UP THE LUNCH TAB TOO!

A MONTH LATER—GEORGE WAS ELECTED ATTORNEY GENERAL—AND SOON BOTH MIKE AND I WERE ELEVATED TO SENIOR POSITIONS ON GEORGE'S STAFF.

AS ATTORNEY GENERAL, GEORGE CONTINUED HIS WORK BEGUN AS A LEGISLATOR, AS THE STATE'S LEADING ADVOCATE FOR PUBLIC SAFETY, VICTIMS' RIGHTS, AND FOR THE RE-IMPOSITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY IN CALIFORNIA.

BUT AS MUCH AS GEORGE LOVED THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE, HE WAS FRUSTRATED WITH THE QUALITY OF JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS THAT HAD BEEN MADE, PARTICULARLY WITH THE THEN CURRENT LEADERSHIP OF THE CALIFORNIA SUPREME COURT.

AND FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS, BUT MOSTLY BECAUSE ATTORNEY GENERALS DON'T APPOINT JUDGES, AND GOVERNORS DO—GEORGE DECIDED TO RUN FOR GOVERNOR—VERY CLEARLY THE UNDERDOG—FIRST AGAINST LT GOVERNOR MIKE CURB—THE FAVORITE OF THE REPUBLICAN ESTABLISHMENT IN THE PRIMARY, AND THEN AGAINST MAYOR TOM BRADLEY—CLEARLY THE OVERWHELMING FAVORITE IN THE GENERAL ELECTION.

AND WHAT IS PROBABLY THE BIGGEST COME-FROM-BEHIND UPSET IN CALIFORNIA HISTORY, GEORGE DEFEATED MAYOR BRADLEY AT 5:30AM—THE DAY AFTER THE ELECTION—BY 93,000 VOTES.

AND WHAT A GOVERNORSHIP IT WAS..

FIRST THE MULTI-BILLION DOLLAR DEFICIT GEORGE INHERITED—ELIMINATED...WITHOUT RAISING TAXES.

TO SAY GEORGE WAS A FISCAL CONSERVATIVE AND TAXPAYER ADVOCATE WAS AN UNDERSTATEMENT.

IN FACT, DURING HIS 8 YEARS AS GOVERNOR, GEORGE USED HIS VETO MORE THAN 4,000 TIMES, SAVING THE TAXPAYERS NEARLY \$7 BILLION DOLLARS, AND CREATING A REGULATORY CLIMATE THAT ALLOWED THE PRIVATE SECTOR TO GENERATE OVER 3 MILLION NEW JOBS—ONE OF THE LARGEST PERIODS OF ECONOMIC PROSPERITY IN CALIFORNIA'S HISTORY.

YET WHILE HOLDING THE LINE ON TAXES, AND BY PRUDENT MANAGEMENT, THE GOVERNOR WAS ABLE TO DRAMATICALLY INCREASE FUNDING FOR K-14 EDUCATION, TRANSPORTATION, HEALTH CARE PROGRAMS, TOXIC CLEANUP AND TOURISM PROGRAMS—INCLUDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FIRST CALIFORNIA OVERSEAS TRADE OFFICES.

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OVER \$90 BILLION DOLLARS WAS AUTHORIZED FOR INFRASTRUCTURE—INCLUDING SCHOOLS, ROADS, FREEWAYS, PRISONS, MASS TRANSIT, AND PARKS.

AND IT WAS GEORGE DEUKMEJIAN WHO MADE THE REVITALIZATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA IN PARTICULAR—AND OUR SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION GENERALLY--HIS TOP FUNDING PRIORITY—SO THAT CALIFORNIA ONCE AGAIN WOULD HAVE THE FINEST PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN THE WORLD—OPEN TO ALL QUALIFIED STUDENTS—AND AFFORDABLE TOO!

AND FINALLY, GOVERNOR DEUKMEJIAN WAS ABLE TO RESTORE CONFIDENCE TO THE BADLY TATTERED JUDICIAL BRANCH OF OUR STATE BY THE APPOINTMENT OF OVER 1,000 EXCEPTIONALLY WELL QUALIFIED MEN AND WOMEN OF ALL BACKGROUNDS TO THE COURTS.

SO YES, GEORGE APPOINTED GREAT JUDGES AND WAS A GOOD FISCAL STEWARD—BUT HE WAS COMPASSIONATE TOO.

A LESS KNOWN FACT IS THAT THE DEUKMEJIAN ADMINISTRATION DEVOTED MORE RESOURCES TO AIDS FUNDING THAN THE NEXT 10 STATES WITH THE LARGEST AIDS CASELOADS COMBINED, AND THIS WAS IN THE EARLY 80'S, WHEN AIDS WAS CONTROVERSIAL AND NOT WELL UNDERSTOOD.

SO YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND, ...

GEORGE WAS A GOVERNOR WHO WANTED TO DO THE RIGHT THING—EVEN IF MANY OF HIS SUPPORTERS HAD A DIFFERENT OPINION.

AND THAT TAKES US TO GUN CONTROL.

IN 1982, CANDIDATE DEUKMEJIAN OPPOSED AN IMPRACTICAL GUN CONTROL BALLOT MEASURE, THAT WAS CONSIDERED TOO EXTREME BY MOST OBSERVERS.

BUT IN 1989, WHEN A YOUNG RACIST DRIFTER – IN COMBAT GEAR AND ARMED WITH AN ASSAULT RIFLE, SHOT UP A SCHOOL YARD IN STOCKTON, KILLING 5 ASIAN IMMIGRANT CHILDREN, WOUNDING 30 OTHER KIDS AND TEACHERS, GOVERNOR DEUKMEJIAN ACTED.

HE IMMEDIATELY EMBRACED AND ULTIMATELY SIGNED – WHAT WAS THEN THE TOUGHEST ASSAULT WEAPON BAN IN THE COUNTRY – TAKING ON THE GUN LOBBY – AND FRANKLY – A LOT OF HIS REPUBLICAN BASE.

I THINK GEORGE SKELTON DESCRIBED THIS BEST--YEARS AGO WHEN HE WROTE:

“GEORGE DEUKMEJIAN WAS NOT A FLASHY GOVERNOR, WASN'T A SPELLBINDER, BUT HE WAS A BOLD LEADER ON A PERILOUS FRONT: GUN CONTROL”.

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“IN A STATE THAT PRIZES ENTERTAINERS AND CELEBRITIES, DEUKMEJIAN TWICE GOT ELECTED ANYWAY. HE WAS THE QUIET-SPOKEN, STRONG WILLED TYPE. “IRON DUKE,” THEY CALLED HIM.

AND SKELTON ENDED HIS COLUMN THIS WAY.

“WE CAN USE A NEW IRON DUKE OR TWO IN SACRAMENTO AND WASHINGTON”.

AND THEN THERE IS THE END OF APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA.

WHILE ORIGINALLY SUPPORTING THE UC PRESIDENT AND REGENTS POSITION FOR UC NOT TO DIVEST IN COMPANIES DOING BUSINESS IN SOUTH AFRICA, GOVERNOR DEUKMEJIAN HAD A CHANGE OF HEART.

AS WE ALL KNOW, GEORGE GREW UP WITH STORIES OF THE TURKISH GENOCIDE OF ARMENIANS—AND WAS INCREASINGLY REPULSED AT THE VIOLENCE AGAINST BLACKS PERPETRATED BY THE WHITE SOUTH AFRICAN REGIME.

WHAT DO YOU DO? DO YOU LISTEN TO THE REGENTS AND THE PRESIDENT OF UC, AND THE LEADERS OF THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY, AND THE LAWYERS – ALL OF WHOM YOU RESPECT VERY MUCH -- AND OPPOSE DIVESTMENT – OR DO YOU ACT IN ACCORDANCE WITH YOUR HEART?

WELL...I THINK YOU KNOW THE REST OF THE STORY.

THE GOVERNOR DECIDED UC MUST DIVEST. ON JULY 11, 1986, GOVERNOR DEUKMEJIAN WROTE TO THE REGENTS:

“WE MUST NOT TURN OUR BACKS ON BLACK SOUTH AFRICANS AT THIS MOMENT OF GREAT CRISIS. AS THE WORLD’S SEVENTH LARGEST ECONOMY, CALIFORNIA CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE – WE MUST STAND UP FOR FREEDOM AND STAND UP AGAINST VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS WHEREVER THEY OCCUR.”

THE REGENTS MET SEVERAL DAYS LATER, AND WITH THE GOVERNOR’S LEADERSHIP, VOTED TO DIVEST BILLIONS IN PENSION FUND HOLDINGS IN COMPANIES DOING BUSINESS IN SOUTH AFRICA.

AND THEN LEGISLATION WAS INTRODUCED TO REQUIRE ALL STATE PENSION FUNDS TO SELL HOLDINGS IN COMPANIES OPERATING IN SOUTH AFRICA.

VIRTUALLY ALL THE GOVERNOR’S ALLIES OPPOSED THIS LEGISLATION...BUT THE GOVERNOR SIGNED THE BILL ANYWAY.

AND AS HE SIGNED THIS HISTORIC LEGISLATION, THIS IS WHAT HE SAID:

“WE ALL OUGHT TO ASK OURSELVES THE QUESTION AS I HAVE DONE. HOW WOULD WE FEEL IF OUR RIGHTS AND IF OUR INDIVIDUAL FREEDOMS WERE DENIED AND THE REST OF THE WORLD TURNED ITS BACK ON US?”

SO THAT’S IT. WHAT ELSE CAN I SAY?

THE GOVERNOR WAS LIKE A FATHER TO ME—A FRIEND—A MENTOR—A ROLE MODEL—A BOSS—AND LOOKING AROUND THIS ROOM, I KNOW THAT IS TRUE FOR A LOT OF OTHER PEOPLE HERE TODAY.

I WAS PRIVILEGED TO WORK WITH THE GOVERNOR IN THE BEST OF TIMES, BUT ALSO THROUGH SOME OF THE TOUGHEST TIMES—SOME OF WHICH HAVE ALREADY BEEN DISCUSSED.

AND WHAT DID I SEE? WHAT DID ALL OF US WHO WORKED FOR THE DEUKMEJIAN ADMINISTRATION SEE?

WE WATCHED A MAN CONDUCT HIMSELF, ALWAYS, WITH GREAT INTEGRITY AND CHARACTER—DECADES IN PUBLIC SERVICE AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS, AND NOT A HINT OF SCANDAL.

WE WATCHED A MAN WHO NEVER FORGOT HIS ROOTS, AND THE SACRIFICE AND HARDSHIP OF THE FAMILY WHO PAVED THE WAY FOR HIM.

WE WATCHED A MAN BECOME AN INSPIRATION TO THE ARMENIAN PEOPLE WORLDWIDE, AND NEVER, EVER, LOSE HIS NATURAL HUMILITY.

WE WATCHED A MAN GOVERN THE STATE FOR EIGHT YEARS—NOT BY FOCUS GROUPS, OR POLLING OR SPIN—BUT BY ADHERENCE TO PRINCIPLE.

WE WATCHED A MAN WHO CARED DEEPLY ABOUT THE NEED FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS OF BOTH PARTIES, TO WORK TOGETHER, IN A BY-PARTISAN FASHION, UNDERSTANDING THAT MEN AND WOMEN WITH STRONG VIEWS OFTEN DIFFER, BUT THAT GOOD GOVERNANCE REQUIRES RESOLVING THOSE DIFFERENCES IN A CIVIL AND RESPECTFUL MANNER, IN GOOD FAITH, WITH THE GOAL OF SERVING THE PUBLIC INTEREST RESPONSIBLY, AND EFFECTIVELY.

AND WHEN THE GOVERNOR ENDED HIS PUBLIC CAREER IN 1991, HE LEFT OFFICE WITH THE HIGHEST APPROVAL RATING FOR ANY GOVERNOR IN CALIFORNIA’S MODERN HISTORY.

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SO INDEED, WE WERE ALL BLESSED TO WATCH GOVERNOR DEUKMEJIAN LIVE A REMARKABLE LIFE, REMARKABLE NOT BECAUSE OF HIS ACHIEVEMENTS ALONE, THOUGH THEY WERE MANY.

GEORGE DEUKMEJIAN'S LIFE WAS REMARKABLE BECAUSE HE WAS ABLE TO ACHIEVE SO MUCH—WITH SO MUCH—HONOR!

THERE IS A PRAYER THAT I LIKE BY JOSIAH ALBERT HOLLAND—A 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY WRITER, REFORMER, THINKER, WHICH I ONLY SLIGHTLY MODIFIED TO MAKE MORE GENDER NEUTRAL—AND WHICH IS PERHAPS MORE RELEVANT TODAY THAN IT WAS EVEN 135 YEARS AGO.

IT GOES LIKE THIS:

GOD...GIVE US MEN AND WOMEN! A TIME LIKE THIS DEMANDS STRONG MINDS, GREAT HEARTS, TRUE FAITH, AND READY HANDS;

MEN AND WOMEN WHOM THE LUST OF OFFICE DOES NOT KILL;

MEN AND WOMEN WHOM THE SPOILS OF OFFICE CANNOT BUY;

MEN AND WOMEN WHO POSSESS OPINIONS AND A WILL;

MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE HONOR;

MEN AND WOMEN WHO WILL NOT LIE.

GEORGE DEUKMEJIAN EXEMPLIFIED THAT VERSE. AND THE DEUKMEJIAN YEARS EXEMPLIFIED THAT TIME.

THE DEUKMEJIAN YEARS WERE A SPECIAL TIME—AND A SPECIAL MOMENT FOR ALL OF US WHO WERE PRIVILEGED TO WORK WITH HIM.

AND ON BEHALF OF ALL THE GOVERNOR'S TEAM—ALL THE HUNDREDS OF US HERE TODAY—AND MANY MORE THAT COULD NOT BE HERE—WE THANK THE GOVERNOR, AND YOU GLORIA—AND THE ENTIRE DEUKMEJIAN FAMILY—FOR THE HONOR OF KNOWING GEORGE, AND FOR THE QUIET GRACE OF HIS HUMANITY, HUMILITY, COURAGE AND LEADERSHIP.

THANK YOU.