

Fritz H. Windhorst, Pioneer U.S. Jurist & Senator, Dies at 88

Youngest-ever U.S. Commissioner and legislator built geographical, political & social bridges in the Greater New Orleans Region

NEW ORLEANS, LA, USA, August 28, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Fritz H. Windhorst, the youngest-ever United States Commissioner and a five-term Louisiana State Senator, passed away August 27, 2023, in New Orleans, Louisiana, at 88 years old.

From 1955 to 1961, Windhorst was court clerk and court crier for the Honorable Herbert W. Christenberry of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District. At Christenberry's

encouragement, Windhorst completed Loyola Law School night classes in 1962. At age 27, Windhorst was appointed as the youngest-ever U.S. Commissioner in 1962 and reappointed for a second term in 1966. As Chairman of the National Association of United States Commissioners Legislative Committee, Windhorst led the drafting and passage of the Federal Magistrates Act of 1968 to replace commissioners with a federal magistrate system.

Windhorst's first political campaign was an unsuccessful 1969 bid for a New Orleans City Council at-large seat on the ticket of mayoral candidate Jimmy Fitzmorris, his longtime friend and political ally.

Lisa Fitzmorris Clement fondly remembers 50 years of "Fitz and Fritz." "From their early beginnings in the Irish Channel, my father and Fritz made serving others their trademark, which made them beloved and outstanding leaders of our time."

In 1972, Windhorst was elected to the Louisiana State Senate and served for 20 years. He represented the Westbank area of Greater New Orleans and was the first Louisiana legislator



Fritz H. Windhorst (age 27) is sworn in as the youngest-ever U.S. Commissioner by Judge Herbert W. Christenberry of the United States District for the Eastern District Court of Louisiana (October 9, 1962).

with a district including both Orleans and Jefferson Parishes. After just his first Legislative Session in 1972, the Alliance for Good Government named Windhorst its first Legislator of the Year. Former appellate judge Edwin Lombard admired Windhorst as a “great friend...even when we supported different candidates” and credits him with “passing some of the most important bills in Louisiana’s history.”

In 1985, Windhorst (a Democrat) joined the Republican Party. During a 1986 meeting with President Ronald Reagan, Windhorst got Reagan to help him propose to Barbara Turner, which Reagan later memorialized in a personal letter.

Starting with his 1970 Algiers Bridge Committee, and then throughout his Senate years, Windhorst worked tirelessly as the driving force for a second New Orleans span across the Mississippi River, the GNO Bridge No. 2 finally opened in 1988. In 1989, Windhorst sponsored the Name the Bridge Contest and the legislation to adopt fourth-grader Jennifer Grodsky's winning entry: Crescent City Connection. His other legislative accomplishments include four-laning LA 23 (Behrman Highway), the elevated Westbank Expressway, Intracoastal Waterway Bridge, Louisiana Superdome, Delgado Community College Westbank Campus, levee protection projects, Westbank vocational schools, creation of the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, Algiers Cutoff Bridge, and Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. Former Senator John Alario calls Windhorst a “giant in representing the Westbank of Jefferson and Orleans Parishes” and the Crescent City Connection “the crowning achievement” of Windhorst’s career.

Fiercely loyal to his constituents, Windhorst was a skilled politician in bipartisan efforts, serving as floor leader for three Louisiana Governors (Edwin Edwards, Dave Treen, and Buddy Roemer). Known for his political decorum and self-taught oratory skills, people stopped and listened when he took to the Senate podium. Louisiana Lt. Governor Billy Nungesser always “looked up” to Windhorst, a family friend. He “taught me to do all you can to make a difference. We have lost a true Louisiana champion.”

Windhorst also practiced law and founded numerous law firms, including Windhorst, Heisler, deLaup & Wysocki and Windhorst, Gaudry, Ranson, Higgins & Gremillion. Windhorst successfully defended Harry Connick Sr. against incumbent Jim Garrison’s lawsuit challenging Connick’s primary victory in the 1973 election for Orleans Parish District Attorney. He then served as Connick’s legislative leader for 17 years (until Windhorst’s retirement) during which the Orleans DA’s office never lost a bill in the Louisiana Legislature.

Windhorst, a devout Roman Catholic, became a Catholic knight in the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem in 2011 and was awarded the Order of St. Louis IX Medallion in 2015. The Honorable Jay C. Zainey of the Louisiana Eastern District remembers Windhorst as “a friend and man of faith. By his example, legislation, and personal conduct, Fritz has certainly improved the lives of many people.”

Windhorst is survived by his wife Barbara Turner Windhorst and his children Judith Windhorst

Cahill, Stephanie Hildebrandt, and Stephen J. Windhorst.

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Senator Fritz H. Windhorst

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