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EDWARD J. KING, 1925-2006

Hundreds pay their respects Public viewing again today, funeral Monday



From front, Governor Mitt Romney, Lieutenant Governor Kerry Healey, former acting governor Jane M. Swift, and former governors William F. Weld and Michael S. Dukakis were at the State House to give the family of former governor Edward J. King condolences. Thomas P. O'Neill III is at rear. (Globe Staff Photo / David L. Ryan)

By Brian MacQuarrie, Globe Staff | September 23, 2006

As former governor Edward J. King lay in a closed casket draped with a Massachusetts flag yesterday, a solemn parade of public officials, past and present, offered their condolences to his family in the State House.

They included Governor Mitt Romney, who laid a wreath beside the coffin, plus former governors William F. Weld, and Michael S. Dukakis, who lost the Democratic primary to King in 1978 in one of the state's greatest political upsets, and former acting governor Jane M. Swift .

Lieutenant Governor Kerry Healey, the Republican candidate for governor, also was there, as well as King's lieutenant governor, Thomas P. O'Neill III.

There were Democratic gubernatorial candidate Deval L. Patrick, former Senate president William M. Bulger, former House speaker Thomas M. Finneran, former treasurer Robert Q. Crane, and former Boston mayors Kevin White and Raymond L. Flynn. Former governor Paul Cellucci was out of the country on a business trip but is expected for the funeral on Monday, officials said.

On the periphery, watching players from the state's political past and future make their way through the Hall of Flags, were the aides, drivers, and campaign workers who regarded King as the kid from the neighborhood who made good, the friend who never forgot where he came from, and the governor who never deviated from his principles.

“Eddie King may be the last regular street kid we'll have as governor for a long, long time,” said Bobby Depauw, a Charlestown native who worked as an aide to the governor. “I'm a better man for knowing him.”

There was muted laughter outside the hall and handshakes between old friends . And there were stories.

Michael James Reardon, a former driver for King, recalled how he once impersonated President Reagan to reach King by telephone. And how only recently, when King lay critically ill at Lahey Clinic in Burlington, he joked with the former governor that he had submitted his name for the gubernatorial race.

“I said, ‘Come on, governor, we're late,’ ” recalled Reardon, a court officer. “He said, ‘Michael, what are you talking about?’

“We're getting ready to run for governor again,” Reardon replied. “I'm not running,” King answered.

“Too late,” Reardon shot back. “I've already thrown your name in the hat.”

Reardon was one of hundreds of people who filed past the casket yesterday afternoon. King's family greeted each visitor individually, whether they came from the Back Bay or King's native East Boston. The governor, who lost his rematch with Dukakis in 1982, is the 11th person to lie in state at the State House.

“We had our differences, but this is a guy who cared about the state. He poured himself into it,” Dukakis said after greeting King's family. “There is a lot to be said for that.”

Louis DeGeorge, who worked as King's assistant campaign coordinator during the 1978 race, said he owes the positive direction of his life to King. DeGeorge recalled that he met King after seeing his campaign signs outside an office at the Park Plaza. In DeGeorge walked, without knowing King or his politics, and saw the candidate sitting alone in the room. DeGeorge said he had been a political science major before dropping out of Northeastern, and King and he began discussing the race. Eventually, King said to him: “To keep you out of trouble, I'll give you 10 grand for the year” as a campaign worker.

DeGeorge enrolled at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell with King's encouragement, and now works in corporate business development. “My whole life has been built off my first relationship with him,” DeGeorge said.

And to Don Flanagan, who also worked as a driver and aide for King, the former governor was a mentor who taught him about character and professionalism. Flanagan recalled picking King up at his Winthrop home every day at 6:30 a.m., after the governor had finished his run, and then taking him to a barber shop beside the State House for a daily trim.

“He was a man of great discipline,” Flanagan said.

To King, Flanagan said, the highest compliment was: “He's a good American.”

King's body will lie in state again today for public viewing from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The funeral will be at 10 a.m. Monday at St. Ignatius Loyola Church at Boston College.■

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