

# A Template for Civility, Honor, and Decency

**The mutual admiration and respect between Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter are a model for all Americans, within or outside politics.**

BY LARRY J. MARTIN

In 1976, I was 12 years old. I was already interested in worldly events and how politics and government impacted people's lives. Some kids followed sports box scores; I was the geeky kid who followed election results.

It was the bicentennial year (America's 200th birthday), and the year-long celebration seemed to permeate everything in the popular culture. It was also a presidential election year with significant primary races in both major political parties. I was in heaven.

One of my greatest memories is of convincing my dad to let me skip school to see a former one-term governor of Georgia speak in the basement of the Italian American Club in Kenosha. The place was packed, and after then-Governor Jimmy Carter spoke, I pushed to the front, shook his hand, and got his autograph.

I was hooked. Carter's presidential campaign was the first one I ever worked on. That fall, every day, after school, and on weekends, I would head down to the local campaign headquarters and stuff envelopes, put up yard signs, and go door to door delivering campaign brochures.

That year, two great candidates, Carter, and President Gerald Ford, both honorable and decent individuals and public servants, battled it out in what was one of the hardest fought, but respectful and dignified, campaigns. Even as a kid, I knew that whoever won, the country would be in good hands.

After Ford served as president, I, along with my high school and college friend (now State Bar of Wisconsin attorney member) Raymond Taffora, had a chance to meet him in Madison, shake his hand, and get his autograph.

Years later, when President Ford died, the man who beat him gave the eulogy at his funeral. The two former rivals had become the best

of friends, working together, in their post-presidencies, on over 25 different projects making a difference around the world. President Ford had asked President Carter if he would give the eulogy. Carter agreed but only if Ford would give Carter's, if Carter died first.

This past January, President Ford repaid the honor, by providing the eulogy at President Carter's funeral. Six months before President Ford died, he wrote his eulogy to President Carter. Ford's son Steve Ford movingly read it, on his father's behalf.

There are so many lessons to be learned from these two great leaders, who represented two different political parties but also knew how to work together across partisan lines for the common good. For them, politics was not a blood sport but a noble calling in which a person could disagree without being disagreeable.

President Carter will be remembered by many for his remarkable accomplishments after leaving the presidency. But for me, he and President Ford left us a template for civility, honor, and decency. We could use more of that in our public officials and discourse today. **WL**



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