

Governor Jay Nixon's Speeches

August 19, 2009

"Eulogy for Governor Warren Eastman Hearnest"

Former Governors and First Ladies – Members of our Congressional delegation – Statewide officers, members of the General Assembly, local elected officials – Friends of Governor Hearnest and Betty, and those who served in office with them – And, my fellow Missourians –

It is my honor to be here today to help commemorate the life and leadership of Missouri's 46th Governor.

Warren Eastman Hearnest led a life of accomplishment even before he became Governor – not the least of which was marrying his hometown sweetheart, Betty – a marriage that would last more than 60 years.

Together, Warren and Betty raised three daughters: Lynn, Leigh and Julie.

On behalf of the people of Missouri – the people your husband and father loved and served so well – Georganne and I extend our deepest condolences to each of you.

From an early age, Warren Hearnest was already making a difference for our state and our nation. A West Point graduate, he served our country as an Army lieutenant. After his discharge from the Army, Gov. Hearnest continued his service to the public, first in the Missouri House of Representatives. There, he rose through the ranks of the General Assembly to become House Majority Leader – a position to which he was elected twice without an opponent.

During his legislative career, Gov. Hearnest was instrumental in establishing the University of Missouri medical school in Columbia; passing legislation that vastly improved the state's mental health system; and improving public education throughout Missouri. He sponsored the bill to establish the state's teacher retirement system – still considered one of the best in the country.

As a fellow graduate of the University of Missouri law school, I find it especially astonishing that Governor Hearnest was able to accomplish so much in the Legislature by balancing his official duties with caring for a young family and taking classes fulltime in law school.

While other law school students may have been sleeping, he was studying late into the night -- only to get up early to go to class before heading back for another full day in Jefferson City. This was an early sign of the dedication and tenacity Gov. Hearnest would bring with him to the Executive Office.

This dedication would be required as Gov. Hearnes faced the challenges of leadership as Missouri's chief executive during a turbulent era. During the stormy times of the 1960s, he guided Missouri with a steady hand. He made a real difference by signing the state's first civil rights bill – a public accommodations act sponsored by a young state representative named Mel Carnahan – and by strengthening our state's employment discrimination laws and our Human Rights Commission. Although many years have passed since Governor Hearnes left office, his legacy of compassion, action and enlightened leadership endures.

The people of Missouri today are the inheritors of this legacy. His life -- both as a public servant and a private citizen -- was a testament to the simple fact that one individual can make a difference in the lives of thousands.

And what a difference Governor Hearnes made ... for Missouri's children, our working families, and all those who fight to overcome the challenges of mental illness.

Governor Hearnes believed that every Missouri child – no matter where they were from, or what their parents did for a living -- deserved a good education, and that without it, our democracy could not thrive. And he did what all great men and women do: He honored that belief with action.

Under Warren Hearnes' leadership, the University of Missouri system was greatly strengthened, and junior colleges in Joplin and St. Joseph joined the ranks of Missouri's excellent four-year public colleges and universities.

With Governor Hearnes leading the way, education funding – at every level – soared to unprecedented heights. Because of his leadership:

- Appropriations for higher education rose 204 percent;
- State aid to public elementary and secondary schools grew 167 percent;
- Funding for vocational education went up 933 percent;
- And funding for Missouri's junior colleges, now called community colleges, increased 812 percent.

From kindergartens, to new universities, to vocational schools and community colleges -- all benefited from his unflagging commitment to making Missouri a national leader in preparing our children for the jobs of tomorrow. Warren Hearnes valued public education.

Gov. Hearnes knew that progress required an educated, trained workforce and having good jobs to put those men and women to work right here in the Show Me State.

In communities both large and small, rural and urban, thousands of Missourians are now working in good-paying jobs Governor Hearnes helped bring to Missouri ... at Scholastic and GE, Noranda and Proctor & Gamble, and other businesses in every corner of the state. He was a champion for business and economic growth, and our communities are stronger for it today.

But among his many accomplishments, Governor Hearnese may be remembered best as a beacon of hope for those who suffer from mental illness. At a time when the stigma of mental illness forced many to suffer in silence and live in shadow, he spoke out on their behalf.

Because of his courage, Missouri became a national leader in the diagnosis and treatment of depression, addiction and other mental illnesses.

And it was Governor Hearnese's outspoken leadership that established our network of regional centers, where families could not only find treatment for their loved ones close to home, but also remain engaged and involved in their care.

It was Governor Hearnese who championed the landmark legislation creating a statewide network of Sheltered Workshops for the developmentally disabled. Today, we remain committed to Governor Hearnese's vision that all Missourians deserve the opportunity to lead productive, purposeful lives -- lives filled with dignity, kindness and loving support. Truly, Warren Hearnese valued the life of every Missourian.

Earlier this year, I met a man who clearly embodied the difference that sheltered workshops have made for Missouri families. In 1966, the year Missouri's first sheltered workshops were established, Glenn Cromley's parents enrolled him in the workshop at Sedalia.

Glenn is now 61 years old, but for the past 40 years, he's had the opportunity to work hard and contribute each day by assembling first aid kits for local distributors.

At my State of the State address in January, I asked Glenn to stand and be recognized in honor of all of those Missourians who get up each day and work to their full potential at our sheltered workshops.

That wouldn't have been possible without Governor Warren Hearnese.

In the state House of Representatives, they called Warren Eastman Hearnese "the Gentleman from Mississippi." Throughout his long life in public service -- in the legislature and as Secretary of State; as an Army Lieutenant and as Governor; as a circuit judge and as director of legal services in southeast Missouri; as a devoted husband and father and as a rock-solid Missouri Tigers football fan -- Governor Hearnese always answered the call to duty. And he showed that, first and foremost, he was a Gentleman for Missouri.

In his work for children, the mentally ill, minority groups, and all Missourians, Governor Hearnese walked the path shown to us in the Gospel ... that, "Whatsoever you do for the least of my people, that you do unto me." That is Governor Hearnese's legacy, and his example to each of us.

Betty, our thoughts and prayers are with you and your family. Our hearts are heavy with grief, even as our spirits are lifted by the remembrance of his life. Georganne and I -- and the people of Missouri -- thank you for the long, faithful service you and Governor Hearnese have both given to the Show-Me State.

May God bless his loyal servant, Warren Eastman Hearnese, and may God bless our Great State of Missouri.