

A GOOD FRIEND, A GREAT MAN, AND A PROUD MISSISSIPPIAN

*Governor Haley Barbour**

I was honored to be asked to submit a tribute to Governor William Winter, a giant in Mississippi politics. Winter, who served as the 58th Governor of Mississippi, devoted his career as both an attorney and a public servant to enhancing the lives of those around him and making Mississippi a better place for all its residents.

Upon graduating from the University of Mississippi, Winter joined the military to fight for our country during WWII. Rather than being sent immediately to active combat, he was charged with training one of the few African American regiments, an experience that shaped his career as a public servant. From there, he served as a high-ranking officer in the 86th Infantry Division, which was deployed to the Philippines.

He went on to serve in the Korean War, before returning home to work on his family's Grenada County farm and provide for his mother following the death of his father. This is something we have in common: losing our fathers far too early.

Winter returned to Ole Miss, where he, like me, attended law school. While getting his degree, Winter ran for, and won, a seat from Grenada County in the Mississippi House of Representatives. As when he was in the military, he was recognized as a leader, and it wasn't long before he was appointed by then-Governor J.P. Coleman to be Mississippi's State Tax Collector.

Winter made a run for Governor in 1967, which he lost. Most would have called it quits after that, but Winter didn't. While

* Founding Partner, BGR Group; 63rd Governor of Mississippi, 2004-12; Chair of the Republican National Committee, 1993-97; White House Political Director to U.S. President Ronald Reagan, 1986-87. J.D., University of Mississippi School of Law. Bryce Harlow Award Recipient; American Association of Political Consultants Hall of Fame Inductee.

serving as Lieutenant Governor in 1975, he tried again to become the Governor of Mississippi. After a hard-fought primary, he came up short, losing his second gubernatorial race.

Finally, in 1979, the people of Mississippi put their trust in William Winter to serve as the state's Chief Executive. Mississippi's Constitution affords the Governor limited powers relative to other states, but Winter was a master at his craft. He used his talent as a communicator and the bully pulpit of the Governor to shape legislation in a way no Governor had before.

It's impossible to talk about William Winter without talking about education. He had a passion for public education and its transformational effects on the lives of so many Mississippians. He championed a major overhaul of Mississippi's public education system, establishing statewide public kindergarten and creating new funding streams for schools.

While I didn't always agree with William on politics, I have always harbored strong respect for what he was able to achieve during his time as the state's top politician.

Both as Governor and after, Winter was a staunch supporter of civil rights. After his tenure in government, he devoted himself fully to breaking down barriers of race, later founding The Institute for Racial Reconciliation at the University of Mississippi, which now bears his name.

Governor Winter devoted his life to service of the United States and Mississippi. He was a fighter, never afraid to pick battles he believed to be worthy of the time and resources they required. He was as politically savvy as they come, but always acted with integrity and respect for those he worked with and against. He was the definition of a statesman.

One of my proudest accomplishments as Governor was the passage, funding, and building of the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum and the Museum of Mississippi History. Governor Winter and former State Supreme Court Justice Reuben Anderson were extremely influential in getting that wonderful project across the finish line in downtown Jackson. I'll always be grateful to both of them. It was one of many great achievements of Winter's career after he served as Governor.

But he was also just a great guy. He and I sat on opposite sides of the political aisle. We had fundamental policy and

political differences. We certainly didn't agree on everything. But he didn't let what divided us overcome that which brought us together. We shared a love for Ole Miss. We both hailed from political families on the edge of the Mississippi Delta. And most importantly, we shared a love for the State of Mississippi.

As an attorney, Winter brought the same winning attitude and passion for helping others that he exuded in every other facet of his life. He fought hard battles, not because he enjoyed fighting, but because he knew that to effect real change, it would take hard work and persistence, two qualities he possessed in abundance.

He was a good friend, a great man, and a proud Mississippian. I'm honored to have known him.

