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Campbell praised as visionary party leader
Work on behalf of industry and GOP left lasting impact, politicians say

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They called him everything from South Carolina's Ronald Reagan to an economic visionary as tributes poured in Wednesday after the death of former Gov. Carroll Campbell.

Most touched on his role in building the Republican Party into the state's dominant political force, others on his landmark accomplishments in bringing international investment to South Carolina.

Many declared him a governor whose legacy was progress, but the common theme was of an always-focused man who made a difference.

"I think it would be nearly impossible to find someone who has contributed more to South Carolina than Carroll Campbell," said Gov. Mark Sanford.

Advertisement "Gov. Campbell was not only a personal friend to me and Jenny, but in many ways his leadership in reforming and restructuring state government continues to serve as an inspiration and model for our administration's efforts today."

Jim Micali, chairman and president of Michelin North America, described Campbell as "a visionary who worked tirelessly to secure and improve the future of South Carolina."

Campbell was elected to the U.S. House in 1978, shortly after Michelin located its research and development center in the Upstate, and was to become a staunch ally for Michelin and other international firms, Micali said.

"Campbell blazed the trail for South Carolina's transition into high-tech manufacturing, continuing to attract global companies," he said.

Bobby Hitt, manager of public relations for BMW, said that without Campbell, BMW wouldn't be in South Carolina.

"I would say Carroll Campbell is the patron saint of BMW," he said.

Hitt recalled how Campbell made a cold call, every salesman's toughest pitch, while in Munich, creating the beginnings of a relationship that led Helmut Panke to look at South Carolina. Panke, who was director of planning at the time, is now chairman of the company.

"Most people know the legend of Panke and Campbell sitting beside the pool at the Governor's Mansion and hashing out what was needed for BMW to come to the state," Hitt said.

"They wrote it out on a napkin and initialed it," he said.

Although business was important to the two men, "the relationship really was a personal relationship," Hitt said.

"This is a guy who was just absolutely dogged about creating manufacturing jobs in South Carolina," Hitt said.

When it comes to economic development, he said, "everything is compared to the Campbell administration."

David Wilkins, U.S. ambassador to Canada, said Campbell was his hero and his leadership role model.

"He taught me a lot about politics and about governing," Wilkins, the former speaker of the House from Greenville, said in a statement from Montreal where he was attending an environmental conference.

"But more importantly, he taught all of us about leadership," Wilkins said. "He brought South Carolina to our finest years and bravely led us through some of our darkest days. Nothing - not even a brute named Hugo - was more powerful than Carroll Campbell.

"Like his friend Ronald Reagan, Carroll Campbell faced the sunset of his life with faith, knowing he was being lifted up on a thousand whispered prayers," Wilkins said.

In addition to his roles as a family man, political figure and businessman, Wilkins said Campbell would be remembered "as a man who faced his final years with courage and humility. He and Iris and their sons faced his Alzheimer's head-on, raising awareness of the disease and making every moment count."

U.S. Sen. Jim DeMint of Greenville, recalling Campbell's efforts in helping him win a seat in the House in 1998, said he mourned the loss of an admired public servant and a good friend.

DeMint praised Campbell for working to improve the lives of all South Carolinians, particularly his efforts to bring BMW and its high-paying jobs to the region.

"He was a visionary that understood South Carolina must compete in a global economy, and his tireless efforts helped bring our state's economy into the 21st century," DeMint said.

U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham of Seneca, who is 50 and first won elective office at age 37, said Republicans of his generation owe Campbell a debt of gratitude for building the modern state GOP.

"His very successful eight years as governor helped lay the groundwork for the Republican takeover of the state Legislature which occurred after he left office," he said.

Campbell also was admired by some who were on the opposite political side.

Joe Erwin of Greenville, state Democratic Party chairman, said Campbell "used his significant political skills to advance South Carolina's economy. BMW's presence here is a great example of his tenacious commitment to

economic development.” Erwin added, “His leadership helped make South Carolina a better place.”

U.S. Rep John Spratt, a York Democrat, praised Campbell for devoting much of his life to public service, leaving “as an epitaph a list of accomplishments that will live long after him.”

“I served with him in Congress and worked with him as governor, and the better I knew him, the more I admired his ability,” Spratt said.

State Treasurer Grady Patterson, also a Democrat, praised Campbell as a politician who could put partisan differences aside for the common good. “The governor was a master at summing up a situation,” Patterson said.

Erwin’s Republican counterpart, Katon Dawson, called Campbell “a leader of remarkable character and integrity.”

U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis of Greenville said that a generation of politicians, himself included, look to Campbell as a guide. He often thinks, “What would Gov. Campbell have done in this situation?” he said.

“And there are some of us who would never have made it without his help,” Inglis said, again including himself.

A “deeply saddened” U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn was state Human Affairs commissioner when Campbell was governor, and became South Carolina’s first black congressman in a century when he was elected in 1992.

“We enjoyed a very close, professional relationship, and never let partisan politics come between us,” said Clyburn, a Democrat who received the Order of the Palmetto from Campbell.

“Gov. Campbell was forthright and forceful. He was a masterful politician and an extraordinary party builder. The Republican Party is benefiting today from his skill, and his loss marks the end of an era,” Clyburn said.

Second-term U.S. Rep. Gresham Barrett of Westminster mourned the loss of “a great public servant but also a remarkable man.”

Lt. Gov. Andre Bauer said Campbell inspired South Carolina in the same way President Ronald Reagan inspired the nation, including shining the spotlight on Alzheimer’s. “His leadership motivated positive changes in our state, drew many of us into public service, and continues to this day to affect change in the fight against the very disease that took so much of his life,” Bauer said.

State Attorney General Henry McMaster said that when you add it all up, Campbell was “a true giant in the life of our state.”

Campbell’s “legacy of leadership and accomplishment is one to which many will aspire but few will surpass,” he said. “He will be truly missed.”

Speaker Bobby Harrell, R-Charleston, said Campbell was always there when South Carolina needed strong leadership, from Hurricane Hugo to restructuring state government to closing the deal with BMW.

The chairman of the Republican National Committee, Ken Mehlman, praised Campbell’s life of “unparalleled integrity and character.”

“In South Carolina, his service marked a significant turning point in both the state and the Republican Party. Both were struggling to keep up with a changing society when Carroll Campbell emerged bringing the promise of a new economy and a new perspective, a Republican perspective, to South Carolina politics,” Mehlman said.
