

Walter Frederick Mondale

(born 1928)

Walter Frederick Mondale, a U.S. senator from Minnesota and the 42nd vice president of the United States, was born in Ceylon, Minnesota. Mondale practiced law in his native state and served as attorney general of Minnesota from 1960 to 1964. A long-time supporter and protégé of fellow Minnesotan Hubert H. Humphrey, Jr., Mondale was appointed as a Democrat to fill the vacancy in the U.S. Senate that was created when Humphrey resigned to become vice president of the United States in 1964. Subsequently elected and then reelected, Mondale served in the Senate until 1976. Outspoken and progressive, Mondale was a strong advocate for social reform. He chaired the Select Committee on Equal Education Opportunity, and in an attempt to facilitate the passage of civil rights legislation, led a successful effort in 1975 to amend the Senate cloture rule so that a smaller majority would be needed to defeat a filibuster.

Mondale was elected vice president with Jimmy Carter in 1976 and served until 1981. His working relationship with Carter was unusually strong, and he played a more active role in executive decision-making than most previous vice presidents. After Carter's defeat in 1980, Mondale resumed practicing law in Minnesota. His unsuccessful bid for president against Ronald Reagan in 1984 was distinguished as the first major party ticket to include a female vice presidential candidate, Geraldine Ferraro. Mondale later was U.S. ambassador to Japan from 1993 to 1996.



In 1986 the Senate commissioned sculptor Jud Nelson—Walter Mondale's choice—to create Mondale's portrait bust for the Vice Presidential Bust Collection. Announcing the commission, Mondale said, "I credit my wife, Joan, for introducing me to Nelson's work, which spans a broad range of exceptional creative endeavor." Active in the art world, Joan Mondale had served as honorary chairperson of the Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities during her husband's vice presidential term.

Vice President Mondale sat three times for Nelson in the sculptor's New York City studio. For reference during the intervals between sittings, Nelson used a series of photographs of Mondale, as well as a life mask of his face. Between the first and second sitting, however, the vice president lost considerable weight—the desired effect of a diet regimen. When the leaner Mondale appeared at the studio, Nelson reacted with shock: "Into my studio stepped a new Walter Mondale, dashing, trim, and three months into his vegetable diet. I was panic stricken. How was I going to hide all those extra pounds before he saw the sculpture?"

Mondale, of course, did view the clay model, noting with dismay the too-heavy face and jowls. Nelson set himself to the task of shaving down the clay to accurately reflect the slimmer vice president. Once the revised model was approved, Nelson himself carved the figure in Carrara marble. He relied upon traditional carver's tools rather than the modern dental drill he uses for his contemporary pieces. The completed bust was placed on view at the Capitol in 1988.

The Oregon-born Nelson studied at Bethel College and the University of Minnesota. He is best known for his detailed sculptures of everyday objects: a bulging plastic garbage bag, sunglasses, folding chairs, and Pop-sicles. Nelson carves his pieces himself and is one of the few modern sculptors who works directly in marble. "Carving is my approach to form," he has noted. "My work is based on direct observation, line for line, fold for fold." Nelson's most celebrated sculpture is a heroic bronze astronaut figure at the Gerald R. Ford Museum in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His work has been exhibited widely and is held in several permanent collections, including those of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City.

Sculptor Jud Nelson revises the clay model of a newly slimmed Walter Mondale, 1987.

(Courtesy Judson R. Nelson)

Walter F. Mondale

Judson R. Nelson (born 1943)

Marble, modeled and carved 1987

30 x 36 x 25½ inches (76.2 x 91.4 x 64.8 cm)

Signed and dated (under subject's truncated left arm): Nelson '87

Commissioned by the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, 1986

Accepted by the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, 1988

Cat. no. 22.00041

