



For Immediate Release

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John Vasconcellos Remembered Memorial Announced

John Vasconcellos died Saturday, May 24 at home surrounded by his close family and friends. He was 82. Known throughout California, and indeed the country, for his political skills and vision, he was at once a very private man, a devoted friend and mentor, and an exceptionally talented craftsman of public policy innovations in education, public safety, state budgets, health and human services.

John served 38 years in the California legislature, was Chairman of the Assembly Ways and Means Committee for twelve years, oversaw two revisions of California's Master Plan for higher education, authored ground-breaking legislation in AIDS research, medical marijuana, family health, atmosphere-damaging chemicals, and legislative ethics. While he was best known, and often lampooned, for his work to bring Self-Esteem into public policy, his body of legislative work was considerably more complex and broad-ranging, and was always characterized by an attention to those most in need.

John was born on May 11, 1932 in Santa Clara, and remained devoted to the south bay region his entire life. He graduated from Bellarmine Preparatory High School and attended Santa Clara University, graduating magna cum laude and valedictorian of his class. After two years in the United States Army, John came back to Santa Clara for law school, again graduating at the top of his class. After a brief period practicing law he served as Governor Pat Brown's traveling secretary, encouraged by classmates and faculty at Santa Clara to seek a life of public service. These same friends persuaded him to run for the state Assembly (indeed, they entered his name in the race before telling him). He was first elected to the Assembly in 1966.

His work in the State Assembly was characterized by a close attention to the linkage between budgets and policy, a passionate commitment to help those marginalized by the society or economy, and a relentless search for the root causes of social ills. He was known

throughout his legislative career for not suffering fools easily, for his impatience, and for his astonishing capacity to command legislative detail. Assuming leadership of the Ways and Means Committee before there were computers, he became known in Sacramento for his command over every conceivable detail in California's state budget.

His body of public work suffered caricature when he insisted on creating the Commission on Self-Esteem and Personal Responsibility, and was parodied by Gary Trudeau in *Doonesbury*. John loved the parody, knowing that Trudeau had accomplished what few legislatures could: broad public awareness of the concept of Self-Esteem even while laughing. He reached out to Trudeau, thanking him for the notice, and Trudeau in turn sent John the original drawings of the parody, which John then put proudly on his office wall.

For those who knew and loved Vasconcellos, his public life was always characterized by a particular dualism: on the one hand, his deeply personal search for self-awareness and authenticity; on the other hand his commitment to the wonky work of old-fashioned politics, where deals are made and policy is brokered. His bravery in combining these two elements of his life was evident to everyone who worked with him: open about his own inner torments and confusions, and at the same time searching for ways the government could ease the torments of the society. People turned to him for legislative help because he was trusted, always listening, able to empathize. When asked how someone who talked about Carl Rogers, Virginia Satir, and psychology as much as roads and schools could be re-elected so often, John commented that his constituents were simply the best educated voters. The truth is also that he delivered for them, over and over.

While the public record of his work will define much of his legacy, John was known equally well for the extraordinary network of friends and contacts he built over 40 years of public life. He became a friend to many, especially those seeking a way into political life. Blue pen and yellow notepad constantly in hand, he took notes at every conversation, connected people and ideas and initiatives, set up dinners and 49er games and casual meetings to introduce people to one another, to keep in touch, to get new ideas and debate them. He started study groups, statewide reform initiatives, created commissions and research projects, and through it all kept growing his community of friends.

John was also, and surprisingly to many, an intensely private man who had a rich inner life of reflection and feeling, animated by books and films and music. He loved Dave Brubeck, Isabel Allende, and the art of obscure painters he would discover on vacation. He loved Hawaii--his father had migrated from Maui—and John returned to Maui often.

Once retired, it was hard to get John to dress in anything other than Hawaiian shirts and garish shorts.

John is survived by: his sister Margaret Brindle and brother Jim Vasconcellos, niece Beth Brindle and a network of nieces, nephews and cousins. John never married, but formed an exceptionally close bond with an adoptive family, the Saunders, Mitch, Cindy, Megan, and Briana. He also had a devoted community of friends whom he kept in his heart and life in a remarkably consistent and deep way. The news of John's death has reverberated through

his community with a sudden shock, as it is hard to imagine a world in which he is not emailing us, on the phone, coming to graduations and birthdays and picnics and parties with books to leave behind and stories to tell.

A man of uncommon public capacity, who served his state in a thousand ways with great distinction, John will always be remembered for both his public work and his wide and rich friendships.

Memorial services will be June 21st at 9:00am at the Mission Church at Santa Clara University. John requested that in lieu of flowers or other gestures in honor of him, that donations be made to the De Anza College Institute for Community and Civic Engagement, care of the Foothill De Anza Community College Foundation.

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