



NEWS RELEASE

Iowa Office of Ombudsman

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Iowa Office of Ombudsman
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Ombudsman's Office Mourns Death of Gov. Robert Ray

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DES MOINES – Staff of the Iowa Office of Ombudsman are saddened by news of the death of former Governor Robert Ray, who established the ombudsman's office in 1970 as a way to make government more accountable and responsive to the citizens it serves.

Ray created the position as an arm of the Governor's office after two attempts by Republican legislators in 1967 and 1969 to create the office by law failed. Ray made the idea a centerpiece of his 1969 inaugural address, arguing that the "perilous impersonality" of government made such an office necessary. He also reasoned that an independent, non-partisan state ombudsman could validate good government against frivolous complaints and explain the basis of governmental policies and actions.

Ray's idea for an ombudsman, borrowed from Hawaii during a visit there, gained traction and officially became an independent arm of the Iowa Legislature in 1972. Today, Iowa is one of only five states with a statewide ombudsman. The office fields almost 5,000 complaints and information requests annually. The office's statutory framework remains a model for other offices around the world.

"Governor Ray's vision gave Iowans a stronger voice," said current Ombudsman Kristie Hirschman. "He understood the value of an office that took time to listen to the public's grievances, and to settle disagreements regardless of political affiliations. We strive every day to live up to his high ideals and ethics."

Governor Ray said in 2007 that he was pleased with his creation. "I think it did develop as I hoped it would. It's served a valuable service."

Governor Ray was named an honorary member of United States Ombudsman Association for his efforts in bringing Iowa's office to fruition.

The Ombudsman's staff offers its sincere condolences to Governor Ray's wife, Billie, his three daughters, and his eight grandchildren.

(EDITORS: See attached excerpt of Gov. Ray's 1969 inaugural address.)

Honorable Robert D. Ray, Governor of Iowa First Inaugural Message, January 16, 1969

As a step in combatting the perilous impersonality of government and in giving citizens a renewed sense of direct participation in their government, the office of ombudsman should be established, subject to appointment by the Governor and confirmation by the Senate. The concept has a 160-year history of success, beginning in Sweden and recently under consideration in more than half of our fifty states. An ombudsman would serve as a channel for redressing individual grievances which are beyond the reach of present court procedures and leave many people voiceless. Additionally, the ombudsman would analyze grievances and seek better administration of public agencies. He would improve the performance of legislative functions through identification and recurring problems which may require corrective legislation. Finally, experience has shown that an ombudsman improves the morale of public servants and increases public confidence in them, by ventilating unfounded criticism and rejecting unfounded complaints.