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The Republican Party of Texas

- Women's History Month -

Anne Legendre Armstrong (1927 - 2008)



Anne Armstrong

In the arena of politics, one would be hard-pressed to mention “woman” and “trailblazer” in the same sentence without a thought of Anne Armstrong. She was not only a stalwart for the Republican Party, but also women in general. A giant from Texas to many outside of the state, but to South Texas ranchers, she was simply one of them. One headline upon her death proclaimed, “Anne Armstrong dies in Houston, helped build Texas GOP – Texas GOP stalwart...dies.”¹

She was borne Anne Legendre in New Orleans, LA, on December 27, 1927. Showing superior educational aptitude, she graduated valedictorian in 1945 from Foxcroft School in Middleburg, VA then Phi Beta Kappa from Vassar College in 1949. She married Tobin Armstrong in April 1950, and they had five children.² In Kenedy County, Texas, she was a rancher and county commissioner,³ however, her achievements are monumental and can easily be viewed as a script for the big screen.

Former President George H.W. Bush called her public service “exemplary” and stated “she set a high standard for all who recognized that government service is vitally important to our way of life.”⁴ Ironically, while a college student, Armstrong began her political involvement as a Democrat. She was a campaign worker for President Harry S. Truman in 1948, however, by the time she graduated college, she emerged as a Republican, supporting Dwight D. Eisenhower. She noted that her decision to switch party affiliations was prompted by her belief in “freedom and liberty, as against the intrusion of big governments.”⁵

Armstrong’s achievements as a Republican, nevertheless, are nothing short of stellar! Some of her achievements are as follows:

- Elected co-chairman of the Republican National Committee (1971).
- The first woman to hold the cabinet-level post of Counselor to the President, serving under both Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford.⁶
- The first woman from either party to provide a *keynote speech* at a National Convention.
- The first woman to serve as President’s Counselor with full Cabinet status.⁷
- The first American woman ambassador to Great Britain and the Court of St. James’s (1976-1977)
- Founded the first White House Office of Women’s Programs (later becoming the White House Council on Women and Girls).
- Served on the boards of directors of American Express, Boise Cascade, General Motors, and Halliburton.
- The first woman to chair President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board.
- Chaired Georgetown University’s Center for Strategic and International Studies Advisory Board.
- Member of the Texas A&M University Board of Regents.⁸
- Trustee of Sothern Methodist University and the Smithsonian Institution.⁹
- Texas Women’s Hall of Fame (1986).
- Presidential Medal of Freedom (1987).¹⁰

The Texas Women’s Foundation stated it best, noting “Anne Legendre Armstrong claimed a place in history by punching through glass ceilings and earning the distinction of ‘first woman to’ – on more than one occasion.”¹¹ She was, no doubt, a phenomenal woman being named Republican Woman of the Year (1979) and Texan of the Year (1981).¹² Her achievements are numerous and speak volumes

to the many contributions made and the lasting impacts she left on Texas and this nation as a whole. Her work helped in the recruitment of female appointees to high-level government positions and broadening opportunities for women in the federal government. She made a reputation as one willing to face hostile audiences during turbulent times.¹³ Armstrong is undoubtedly a true Texas jewel and historic stalwart for women, Republicans, Texans, and Americans in general. She is truly a woman to be celebrated and recognized for years to come!

As always, there is so much more which can be learned from the rich history of Texas Republican politics. It is therefore paramount, that the lessons of the past be sought, thus ensuring a more prosperous and more sound future for generations to come. Thank you for taking the time to take embark upon this journey through history. Remember, *History Matters!*

Endnotes

¹ Scharrer, Gary. 2008. “Anne Armstrong dies in Houston, helped build Texas GOP.” Austin Bureau.

² Morgan, Barbara. 2019. Anne L. Armstrong. Encyclopedias.com

³ Scharrer, Gary. 2008. “Anne Armstrong dies in Houston, helped build Texas GOP.” Austin Bureau.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Morgan, Barbara. 2019. Anne L. Armstrong. Encyclopedias.com

⁶ Texas Women’s Foundation. 2020. Anne Legendre Armstrong.

⁷ Scharrer, Gary. 2008. “Anne Armstrong dies in Houston, helped build Texas GOP.” Austin Bureau.

⁸ PennState University Libraries. 2021. Hon. Anne Legendre Armstrong. Overview of speech.

⁹ Texas Woman’s University. 2020. Anne Legendre Armstrong. Texas Women’s Hall of Fame.

¹⁰ Scharrer, Gary. 2008. “Anne Armstrong dies in Houston, helped build Texas GOP.” Austin Bureau.

¹¹ Texas Women’s Foundation. 2020. Anne Legendre Armstrong.

¹² Richard Nixon. 2021. Anne L. Armstrong (White House Central Files: Staff Member and Office Files). Presidential Library and Museum.

¹³ Grimes, William. 2008. Anne Armstrong, Presidential Adviser and Pioneering Politician, Dies at 80. The New York Times.