
BAYTOWN'S PROUD REFLECTION OF INTEGRITY: NOT YOUR AVERAGE JOE

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Joseph Hugh Allen was born and raised in Baytown, Texas. He was an outgoing young man and he developed a strong devotion to his family and community. Allen graduated from Robert E. Lee High School in 1958 and joined the military. He proudly served in the United States Army Security Agency from 1958-1961 while stationed in the Far East and Japan. In 1961, he was commended as "Serviceman of the Year," received the Army "Good Conduct" medal, and was honorably discharged. These awards are not given lightly by the military. Upon his departure from the military, as he prepared to return home to Baytown, he was encouraged by commanding officers, who recognized his leadership abilities, to seek a position in public service.¹ He returned to Baytown and enrolled in Lee College. True to his outgoing and active personality, he jumped into the beam of the spotlight, serving as Editor of the *Lee Lantern*, the campus publication, and President of the Lee College Student Association. Allen went on to further his studies in the areas of Economics and Political Science at the University of Houston.² Joe Allen had evolved into a well-rounded man with strong desire to protect his community through leadership. With such drive and determination it was just a few short years after completing college that he became Baytown's first representative in the State Legislature. Allen was elected to the Texas House of Representatives in 1966 where he began the first of many terms with the 60th legislature.³

Joe Allen had become Baytown's brightest star and the city beamed with pride



JOSEPH HUGH ALLEN
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and adoration at its offspring ambassador to Austin. The populous of Baytown was overjoyed further when, during only his second term in the legislature, he would become one of the youngest members of the Texas House of Representatives to receive a vice-chair appointment on a standing committee. Just a sophomore at his post, with commendation from House leadership, Joe was appointed Vice-Chair of the Committee on Data Processing and Printing. That same year, he would serve on the Conservation and Reclamation Committee, Counties Committee, Public Land and Buildings Committee, and the Liquor Regulation Committee.⁴ Allen would go on to achieve more than could be contained in one essay. He maintained many leadership positions within Baytown and the surrounding

communities and would eventually serve in varying capacities in both the public and private arenas (often simultaneously). Allen was extremely interested in the preservation of his community's natural resources and environment. He was also concerned about the face of politics and the integrity of the position which he had been entrusted.⁵ Allen served his community with vigor and forethought and such is demonstrated by his involvement in three key events: the passing of his Red Drum Conservation Act of 1977, authored by Allen, which established fishing limits on coastal redfish; his active involvement in stopping subsidence in the Brownwood subdivision in Baytown through his participation in authoring a bill establishing a coastal subsidence district; and, most notably, his membership in the "Dirty Thirty," a bi-partisan group of state legislators that fought to eliminate corruption and scandal in Austin. These accomplishments are but a small glimpse of the complete picture of Joe Allen's contributions, but each boldly exhibits his fierce commitment to his community, his constituency, and his integrity as Baytown's public leader and Representative in the great state of Texas.

In the late 1960s technology in fishing equipment (most significantly monofilament netting) and growing knowledge of the habits of redfish heated an ongoing 100-year debate between commercial fishermen and recreational fishermen.⁶ Since commercial fishermen had realized how much easier it was to trap redfish in the shallows than other types of fish in the deep water, the redfish was being "over-fished." Recreational fishermen had been complaining for years and various laws and regulations had been put in place from licensing requirements to size limitations and even to when and where certain areas could be fished. However, commercial fishermen were still managing to cause the redfish population to decline at an alarming rate. Commercial fisherman displayed significant disregard for the regulations that had been put in place over time as they challenged their validity and the authority of the regulating bodies. A group of recreational fishermen,

concerned about the rogue fishing habits of commercial fishermen and their disregard for the ever declining fish population, formed the Gulf Coast Conservation Association.⁷ Joe Allen and fellow committee members took notice. Joe authored what would become known as the Texas Red Drum Conservation Act of 1977 (Senate Bill 624) declaring emergency with respect to this species and requiring urgent action. The bill was presented in the House and Senate in Mid-February, 1977 and was passed into law by the Senate on March 22, 1977. This law established fishing license requirements, transportation licensing requirements, and established per day limits for both commercial and sport fishermen.⁸ This bill would not be the only legislation on this controversial topic, but was the foundation cornerstone for subsequent regulations to be built upon for protecting the beautiful environment and habitat of the coastal waters of Baytown and surrounding communities.

Allen was full of community pride for Baytown and East Harris County. This was his home and he treasured the bounty of beauty that came with coastal living. This was also where he grew up — his roots were deep there. In the mid-1970s, when Joe learned that part of his beloved town was sinking, he was jolted into action. A small geological explanation gives understanding of the magnitude of the problem. This region of the United States has never had a need for water. The coastal area has a plentiful natural aquifer system below the ground's surface. Early settlers would only need to drill shallow wells to have free flowing water. As years passed on and the population experienced large and sometimes very rapid growth, the demand for water increased. Eventually, as underground water sources became over-tapped, people had to dig wells deeper to get water. The reduction in moisture in the sub-surface aquifers caused areas of the aquifers to compact and sink into deeper layers of the earth. The over-pumping of the underground water supply was causing irreparable damage above the surface of the ground. The elevation above sea level was falling. If allowed to continue at the then present levels, areas closest to the coast



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: HOUSE SPEAKER GUS MUTSCHER, GOVERNOR PRESTON SMITH, FORMER PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON, AND LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR BEN BARNES, AT "GUS MUTSCHER DAY" IN BRENHAM, AUGUST 17, 1970.
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and closest to sea level would just sink into and become part of the sea.⁹ Again, Joe Allen saw the danger and urgency surrounding this issue. He and his colleagues went to work. They presented a plan to the Texas Legislature and the Harris-Galveston Coastal Subsidence District (HGCSO) was formed to study the effects of the removal of ground water on the subsidence of the land surface area. Nearly immediately following the formation of the HGCSO came the institution of the 1976 Regulatory Plan. As the HGCSO was still new and developing its resources, the plan was a proposal to curb underground water consumption in targeted communities considered to have the highest threat of subsidence. Residents as well as commercial consumers were encouraged to seek alternate water sources.¹⁰ Allen's leadership and dedication to the City of Baytown and the surrounding coastal areas bolted him and his team into action further illustrating his commitment to his community and its beauty which he so richly appreciated.

Allen's work in Austin was not always without controversy and not always as easy as one may believe. Having just started his public career in 1966, by 1969 Allen was already

acutely aware of the underhanded actions of many politicians. Political decisions were bought and sold daily and that was not what he envisioned for his great state. Joe was an honest man with integrity and virtue. He was well respected by his peers for these traits and was known to work hard and work late if it was necessary to get the job done. In January of 1969, Allen reported to *The Baytown Sun* what his plans were for the coming legislative sessions. He gave a list of items he intended to present to the House of Representatives on behalf of the community and promised to report back at the end of the session with the results. One of the items that Joe listed was his plan for introducing ethics and lobby licensing reforms. Allen told *The Baytown Sun* that he planned on introducing two separate bills addressing these issues. His goal was to "reinforce the code of ethics for members of the legislature and state employees and to tighten the lobby licensing law."¹¹ Allen believed that the existing codes were weak and vague. His intent was to modernize and fortify the existing measures and to ensure that all members of the legislature as well as state employees had clear instruction as



SPEAKER RAYFORD PRICE SUCCEEDED GUS MUTSCHER AFTER HE WAS INDICTED. PRICE LATER LOST A VERY CLOSE PRIMARY WITH A MEMBER OF THE "DIRTY 30."

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to the acceptable practices surrounding receipt of campaign contributions, asking for and receiving gifts from lobbyists, and more.¹² At the time he could not have known how he would be put to the test within a very short time with respect to these very beliefs and issues.

Just as Allen was waging war on corruption, some of the very people in his immediate circles would become involved in one of the largest scandals ever investigated by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to that point. The Sharpstown Scandal was a lucrative financial fraud scheme developed by Mr. Frank Sharp, a developer and businessman in southeast Houston. Mr. Sharp was shifting assets between companies, fraudulently driving up stock prices of his holdings, and creating situations where lawmakers in Austin could jump in, make a little money, then leave. In January 1971, this all came to light as the Securities and Exchange Commission had been conducting an investigation into the dealings surrounding Frank Sharp and his various corporations, including his banks and large insurance company. The Speaker of the House was just one of many implicated in the scandal but refused to vacate his position while the SEC investigation continued. A bi-partisan group of thirty representatives (eventually a total of 35) formed within the Texas House of Representatives and came to be called the "Dirty Thirty."¹³ Joe Allen was one of them. The name would imply that these were people of less than redeeming character. However, that is not the case. They were called the "Dirty Thirty"

as a result of their non-conforming tactics against the Speaker and his substandard leadership of the delegation. The "Dirty Thirty" were strong in their call to the Speaker to step down – they failed. Then they suggested a committee of the whole be established to conduct its own investigation – they failed. When the Speaker could no longer afford the negative attention of the menacing group of "do-gooders," he appointed a five person committee to investigate the scandal and clear his name. The panel, however, consisted of a group of his closest allies within the delegation. The "Dirty Thirty" had been accusing the Speaker of running the House like a dictatorship. This move by the Speaker strengthened their argument both inside the House and to the public.¹⁴

Joe Allen and his fellow crew of the "Dirty Thirty" kept the scandal alive so that the public would not forget come election time. By the next election, "Texas politics ... had undergone a thorough housecleaning: the incumbent governor was labeled an unindicted co-conspirator in a bribery case and lost his bid for reelection; the incumbent Speaker of the House of Representative and two associates were convicted felons; a popular three-term Attorney General lost his job; an aggressive Lieutenant Governor's career was shattered; and half of the Legislature was either intimidated out or voted out of office."¹⁵ The integrity of many was thoroughly tested and the lack of integrity of many was thoroughly exposed. Joe was said to have wanted to make a difference in the world.¹⁶ One of his most notable marks was his participation in this movement that sparked true reform in Austin. As a result of the Sharpstown Scandal and the "Dirty Thirty," real reforms in ethics, lobbying, and campaigning were enacted to ensure fair and equal government for all. Additionally, disclosure was a big part of the reformation process. It became policy to disclose who was paying for campaigns and a more open-government, public record system was put into place.¹⁷ These reforms would not have been possible without Joe Allen and his fellow membership of the creative and brave

politicians known as the "Dirty Thirty." By Joe Allen's participation in this group, he committed to help restore integrity, honesty, and honor to the position he loved and the politics he embraced.

Joe Allen was not "your average Joe." He enjoyed the world of politics¹⁸ and enjoyed public service.¹⁹ He was committed to his family, his community, and his service. Allen was a great Democratic lawmaker and truly met his objective to make a difference. It is no wonder Joe Allen was inducted into the Lee College Hall of Fame and eventually became a member of the Board of Regents of Lee College. He truly was Baytown's bright and shining star and the city maintains a strong level of pride in the fact that they can call Joe Allen their own. Sadly, Joe

Allen lost his battle with Alzheimer's disease on May 24, 2008 in his hometown of Baytown, Texas.²⁰ Following his death many who knew him wrote kind words in obituaries across the state. Joe Allen was known for his grand sense of humor and practical jokes. He loved life and he loved laughter.²¹ Many thought he always dressed impeccably. According to his obituary in the *Austin American-Statesman*, he also held a "keen intellect and [was] a sharp observer who knew how to pass legislation."²² Representative Joseph Hugh Allen of Baytown, Texas... he was anything but average.



END NOTES

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