

FROM: Press Office of Senator John F. Kennedy
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BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON GOVERNOR ABRAHAM A. RIBICOFF

Governor Abraham A. Ribicoff of Connecticut will bring to his new post as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare a rich and varied experience which has spanned some 22 years.

The 50-year old Governor entered public life at the age of 28 when he was first elected to the Connecticut State House of Representatives. His ability was immediately noticed in his freshman year when the press corps covering the state capitol in Hartford named him "the most able legislator of the session". He was reelected to the state legislature in 1940 and served as Judge of the Hartford Police Court from 1941 to 1943 and again from 1945 to 1947.

In 1948 -- the same year that President Harry S. Truman scored his upset victory over Thomas E. Dewey -- Governor Ribicoff unseated a Republican incumbent and was elected to the Congress of the United States from Connecticut's first district. As a freshman congressman he was assigned to the Foreign Affairs Committee and was reelected to the Congress in 1950. In 1952 Governor Ribicoff's seat in Congress was recaptured by the Republicans in the Eisenhower sweep. In 1954, however, he made a great political comeback and was elected Governor of the State of Connecticut by 3,000 votes over the Republican incumbent John D. Lodge.

His record as Governor of Connecticut has been impressive and the people of Connecticut returned him to that post in 1958 by a smashing majority of 246,000 votes, the largest plurality ever received by a candidate for Governor in Connecticut.

During his first term in office as Governor he received his first severe test of leadership when Connecticut had disastrous floods which caused great damage and loss of life. He won commendation from throughout the country for the manner in which he organized flood relief and rehabilitation.

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During his first term he launched a program for highway safety. As a result of this program the number of highway deaths in Connecticut has been reduced every year since it began in 1956. The program has gained worldwide recognition.

In the 1958 election he carried all the Democratic candidates into office. Democrats won all of the seats in Congress -- 6 House seats and one Senate seat -- and for the first time in 32 years the State House of Representatives went Democratic.

Governor Ribicoff has been a long time political associate and friend of President-Elect Kennedy. It was Ribicoff who spear-headed the drive at the 1956 convention to obtain the Vice-Presidential nomination for Senator Kennedy and it was Ribicoff who was the first major office holder in the United States after the 1956 convention to openly come out in support of Senator Kennedy for President.

Governor Ribicoff has had a long standing interest in the type of problems he will face as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. During his two administrations as Governor of Connecticut he initiated programs in mental health, mental retardation and welfare, housing for the aged, vocational and technical schools -- programs which have been studied and emulated throughout the country. Among other accomplishments of Governor Ribicoff during his terms of office were flood control, urban redevelopment and anti-erosion beach control. State departments were combined and reorganized, 46 agencies were eliminated or consolidated and 150 special funds were abolished. All municipal courts were abolished and replaced by circuit courts, county government was eliminated and one of the biggest highway programs in the state's history was approved. Legislation was approved providing for greater industrial safety, particularly in the use of safe equipment and the prevention of factory fires. Governor Ribicoff's efforts to bring new industry into Connecticut earned him the title of "number one salesman of Connecticut".

Governor Ribicoff holds 8 honorary degrees from Wesleyan University, 1956; Yeshiva University, 1955; Trinity College, 1955; Hebrew Union College, 1956; Hillier College, 1956 (now the University of Hartford); Amherst, 1959; Fairfield University, 1959; and American International College, 1959.

Governor Ribicoff married the former Ruth Siegel on June 23, 1931, and has two children; Peter, 23 years old and an English teacher in Alameda, California and Jane, 19 years old and a freshman at Pine Manor Junior College in Wellesley, Massachusetts.

Governor Ribicoff was born in New Britain, Connecticut on April 9, 1910. He attended the New Britain public schools and New York University. He was graduated from the University of Chicago cum laude in law in 1933 and admitted to the Connecticut Bar in that year.

Governor Ribicoff has been a leading figure in the Governors' Conference. He was appointed Chairman of Highway Safety Committee in 1956 and served on that committee until 1958 when it was dissolved. He served as Chairman of the Governors' Conference Committee on Roads and Highway Safety and was a member of the Executive Committee of the Governors' Conference. He also served as a member of the Technical Revision Committee on Motor Vehicle Administration of the President's Committee for Traffic Safety in 1959. In 1959 Governor Ribicoff was appointed by President Eisenhower to serve on the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations.