

Honorable Mayor A.J. Holloway, Jr.

1939 ~ 2018

BILOXI

A.J. Holloway, who oversaw an unprecedented number of quality-of-life improvements during his unprecedented 22 years as Biloxi's mayor, died early Tuesday morning, June 5, 2018. He was 79.

He was elected to the City Council in 1989 and elected mayor in 1993, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2009, and 2013, before resigning in 2015.

Holloway became mayor a year after casino gaming was legalized. The industry re-energized the local economy, creating 15,000 jobs, generating \$6 billion in development, boosting the number of annual visitors to the community from a million a year to between 8 and 10 million a year, and accounting for billions in new revenue.

And Holloway, long known as a fiscal conservative, tripled the size of the Biloxi Police and Fire departments (he called them the "best-trained, best-equipped and best-paid police and fire departments you'll find"), built a \$10 million Lopez-Quave Public Safety Center and new fire stations in east Biloxi, north Biloxi and Eagle Point; abolished fees for youth sports leagues and oversaw the construction of the Donal M. Snyder Sr. Community Center, the renovation and expansion of the Biloxi Community Center, and the construction of an 80-acre sports complex in north Biloxi that would later bear his name.

"He was a force," Mayor Andrew "FoFo" Gilich said. "He was always in it, and that smile was infectious."

During Holloway's tenure, four new public schools were built, including a state-of-the-art high school, an \$80 million investment in public education; tens of millions were invested in new municipal facilities such as police and fire stations, libraries, community centers, parks, playgrounds and ballfields; new roads were built and decades-old ones were rebuilt, a \$35 million affordable housing initiative was undertaken in east Biloxi; and residents throughout the city saw their property tax rate drop by 50 percent.

The mayor also tapped into state and federal revenue for major projects. He and the late Delmar Robinson, whom Holloway had appointed years earlier as chairman of the Biloxi Housing Authority, worked with Sen. Trent Lott, then Senate Majority Leader, to establish the \$35 million Hope VI affordable housing initiative in east Biloxi. The townhome developments replaced barracks-style housing that has been constructed generations earlier.

The mayor successfully lobbied then-Gov. Kirk Fordice to have the state transform the derelict Howard Memorial Hospital on Back Bay into the Department of Marine Resources and other state agencies. He also successfully lobbied the state for assistance on major road projects, such as the widening of Caillavet Street, which was part of a massive streets improvement



project that saw the widening of Cedar Lake Road and Popp's Ferry Road, and the construction of Back Bay Boulevard.

As Biloxi entered the 21st Century, the city was enjoying the most prosperous time in its 300-year history - that is, until Aug. 29, 2005, when Hurricane Katrina, the worst natural disaster to ever strike the United States, decimated Biloxi and surrounding communities.

"It was our tsunami," Holloway said in a quote that was republished around the world.

Katrina claimed 6,000 of 25,000 homes and businesses in Biloxi, and more than 15,000 were left without jobs in the gaming industry alone.

Holloway's staunchly conservative nature and small-business upbringing were steadfast before and after the storm. The mayor's memory of the city's economic challenges before casino gaming arrived prompted him two months before the storm to invest \$92,000 in a business-interruption insurance policy that captured \$10 million in gaming revenue that would have been lost to the storm.

He marshaled city departments, used state and federal aid and went about the business of clearing the city of debris in the days after the storm and set about a long-term recovery program.

Six months after the storm, Holloway announced the "Reviving the Renaissance" initiative, prompting nearly 200 residents to step forward to help craft a blueprint to guide the city's rebuilding efforts in a way that recaptures the successes of the past.

Holloway, along the way, has stayed on message. In fact, a State of the City address he delivered to Biloxians in 2007 included a line from a State of the City message he had delivered in 2004, more than a year before Katrina.

Said Holloway in 2004 and again in 2007: "Future generations are going to look back on this chapter in our history as a time when we made the right decisions, when we cherished and protected our culture, and we did things to improve and enhance our quality of life. They're going to see this as an historic time."

Added the mayor: "We were on the right track before this storm, and we're going to stay on the right track. The people of Biloxi have a unique opportunity. We are in the midst of something most people can only dream of. We were making history before this storm, and we stand poised to make history again. Imagine that. Some people are lucky to

be a part of history once in their lifetime. We have the chance to be part of history TWICE in our lifetime."

The challenges of a post-Katrina Biloxi may define Holloway's public service career, which began with the Biloxi Public Schools, where he served as business manager for six years. He also served at the Mississippi Tax Commission for 12 years and attained the post of senior revenue agent. He was later elected to the Biloxi City Council serving one term before being elected mayor of Biloxi in 1993.

Holloway was a high school football hero, a fierce competitor on the field, and was later said to have thrown a punch that led to the longtime cancellation of the Biloxi-Gulfport football rivalry.

"He was a legend," Gilich said. "One of my first memories was playing football with his brother Donnie. I remember like it was yesterday. I thought 'I'm playing football with A.J. Holloway's brother. Then there was that ballgame with Gulfport. The whole town was like 'All the Way Holloway.'"

"He was a legend in so many ways."

Holloway parlayed his high school year into a scholarship at the University of Mississippi, where he earned a bachelor's degree in education. At the same time, he excelled in athletics, having played in two Sugar Bowls and a Cotton Bowl while at Ole Miss and on the 1960 Rebels national championship football team (future U.S. Senators Trent Lott and Thad Cochran of Mississippi were cheerleaders for the team). Holloway brought that winning spirit to City Hall as councilman and later as mayor, promising fiscally conservative leadership and responsible government.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Andrew Joseph, Sr. and Iris Letort Holloway.

Holloway's survivors include his wife of 56 years, Macklyn Holloway; his children, Heather Holloway and her husband John Radicia and Jeff Holloway; his grandchildren, Destin Holloway, Jordan Holloway, Hannah Radicia and Abigail Radicia; his sister, Dale Steckler; his brothers, Donnie Holloway and Kenny Holloway; and numerous nieces and nephews.

The family wishes to extend a special thanks to Kare In Home Hospice and Kare In Home Health Services, especially Patricia Reddix, Lisa Ducksworth and Dr. Ben Chaney for the special care provided for Holloway.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be held at Nativity BVM Cathedral on Friday, June 8, 2018 at 12:00 pm. Friends may visit from 9:30 am until mass time. Entombment will follow at Southern Memorial Park.

The Howard Avenue Chapel of Bradford-O'Keefe Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

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