

Rep. Ramona L. Barnes (1938 - 2003)



Representative Ramona Lee Etta Barnes was born July 7, 1938, in Pikeville, Tenn. She graduated from Bledsoe County High School and Waipahu Community College.

She came to Alaska in 1972 as a military wife and mother of three children.

Her family wrote: "Her first involvement with Alaska politics was with the Elmendorf school system and new laws affecting the education of her children. She had a deep interest in education." During the mid-seventies, she became active in Anchorage community affairs and Alaska Republican politics. Prior to her political career, she worked for the Central Intelligence Agency in the Philippines as an undercover agent, raised three children, and managed a beauty school and salon in Anchorage.

She was first elected to the Alaska Legislature in 1978 and was selected as the outstanding freshman legislator of the year. Rep. Barnes served as minority whip and then in 1983 as majority leader. She was also chairwoman of the House Judiciary Committee and championed funding for many other improvements in Alaska law enforcement throughout her career.

"In 1993, Rep. Barnes was selected by her colleagues as the first female speaker of the House of Representatives ... In 1995, she served on the House Resources Committee, where she championed responsible resource development.

"During her twenty years of service to the people of Alaska, Rep. Barnes received numerous awards for outstanding service. A conservative Republican, she believed that as a society, we are responsible for taking care of those who cannot take care of themselves. Rep. Barnes made sure everyone she encountered was treated with fairness and dignity. When she gave you her word, you could 'take it to the bank.' Her word was her bond.

"Rep. Barnes served with distinction for twenty years, longer than any other female legislator, retiring in 2000. Alaska has lost one of its best, and the void will not soon be filled."

Rep. Barnes died November 26, 2003, in Anchorage, Alaska, after a long battle with several illnesses.