

Lawrence J. DeNardis, Congressman And University President, Dies At Age 80



Lawrence J. DeNardis, of Hamden, was state senator and a U.S. representative, as well as an acting assistant secretary at the Department of Health and Human Services under President Ronald Reagan. He died Friday at age 80. (Contributed photo)



By **Edmund H. Mahony**

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Lawrence J. DeNardis, former congressman and president of the University of New Haven, died Friday after a short hospitalization in New Haven. He was 80.

DeNardis, of Hamden, made careers in both academia and politics.

“Larry’s legacy is embedded in the University of New Haven,” said University of New Haven President Steven H. Kaplan. “It can be seen in the remarkable work of our students, faculty, staff as well as our alumni. He embodied the spirit and history of this great institution, and we are grateful for his many contributions. We also applaud his service to the state of Connecticut, as well as his congressional service.”

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DeNardis had a career as an educator, teaching and chairing an academic department at Albertus Magnus College from 1964 to 1979. He led the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges in 1979-1980 and was appointed the fifth president of the University of New Haven, serving from 1991 to 2004.

In politics, DeNardis, a Republican, was the youngest delegate at the Connecticut State Constitutional Convention in 1965. He was elected repeatedly to the state Senate, serving from 1970 to 1979 and sponsored legislation that, for the first time, established a funding formula that attempted to distribute state school funding in a way that equalized educational opportunities among towns.

He was a delegate at state Republican conventions between 1966 and 1982. He chaired the state convention in 1982 and was a delegate to the national convention in 1976.

In 1980, riding a Republican wave led by President Ronald Reagan, DeNardis was elected to Congress from the state's 3rd District, defeating state Senator and future U.S. Sen. Joseph I Lieberman and serving from 1981 to 1983.

"Larry was a fantastic guy, a true gentleman, loved and respected by all who knew him," former Republican state chairman Richard Foley said Saturday. "Our hearts go out to his wife and family."

In Washington, DeNardis was viewed as a Republican moderate. He lost narrowly in the 1982 mid-term congressional election to Democrat Bruce Morrison. Morrison won a rematch in 1984, with Reagan again at the top of the ticket.

DeNardis took a job in the Reagan administration after the 1984 loss, as acting assistant secretary at the Department of Health and Human Services from 1985 to 1987. President George H.W. Bush later appointed him to the Board of Regents of the National Library of Medicine.

DeNardis was appointed the fifth president of the University of New Haven in 1991. He is credited with trying to change the school from a commuter college to become a residential university.

He died Friday at Yale New Haven Hospital and had been diagnosed with a brain tumor.

He was born in New Haven and received his bachelor of arts degree from the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester in 1960, and a master's degree in 1964 and a Ph.D. in Government in 1989, both from New York University. He was a lieutenant in the U.S. Naval Reserve from 1960 to 1963.

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