

Robert D. Ray, Centrist G.O.P. Governor of Iowa, Dies at 89

By Daniel E. Slotnik

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Robert D. Ray, a centrist Republican who served five terms as governor of Iowa and welcomed thousands of Southeast Asian refugees to his state in the 1970s — a politically risky decision he considered a moral imperative — died on Sunday at a care facility in Des Moines. He was 89.

His death was confirmed by Scott Raecker, the executive director of the Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University in Des Moines.

Mr. Ray won his first term as governor in 1968. He embraced a fiscally responsible but progressive agenda, which included support for looser abortion laws and the Equal Rights Amendment and opposition to the death penalty.

Professor Dennis Goldford, chairman of the political science department at Drake University, said in a telephone interview on Tuesday that it would be difficult for a politician like Mr. Ray to flourish in today’s more conservative Republican Party in Iowa.

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