



IN MEMORIAM - ARTHUR KROEGER

He was one of the last great Canadian mandarins, a public servant extraordinaire whose "high ethical compass" and professionalism was a symbol of the plain-speaking, independent and non-partisan public servant.

Now his death, colleagues and commentators say, marks the end of the era of the truly remarkable public servants, who helped define the country and left their mark as "co-architects" of Canada.

Arthur Kroeger, perhaps the "wisest of the old mandarins," died Friday after a battle with cancer. He was 75.

Companion of the Order of Canada, Mr. Kroeger was deputy minister of numerous federal departments in a distinguished career spanning 34 years. From 1993 to 2002, he was also the chancellor of Carleton University.

As the accolades and tributes poured in yesterday, colleagues and commentators remembered a great Canadian who served his country with honour and distinction. He was ahead of his time in many ways, and one of his defining legacies, colleagues say, was his role in advancing the rights of women in the public service. He was fearless and not afraid to go against the grain even in retirement, if he felt the cause was right.

While most of the country fell in line with Justice John Gomery's recommendations for a sweeping overhaul of government in the wake of the sponsorship scandal, Mr. Kroeger was one of the few voices to oppose the judge. He said Judge Gomery's proposal to hand more power to senior bureaucrats as a counterweight to ministers would open the door to "government by the unelected." Those recommendations have still not been implemented.

"I think it is fair to say that he was the last of a great and extraordinary generation of public servants who, you could say, were co-architects of the new Canada," said Gilles Paquet, senior research fellow at the University of Ottawa's school of public and international affairs.

"He was probably the wisest of the old mandarins. He represented the ultimate wise mandarin who was capable of working with any government."

Jim Roche, who was a senior official in the office of the Minister of Transport when Mr. Kroeger was deputy minister, said his death leaves a massive void in the world of Canadian public service.

"He was a great leader and public servant. He had a great belief in the good the government can do for the country and he inspired a whole generation of public servants," Mr. Roche said.

"Before it was even fashionable, he opened the door to women in the public service. He sought them out, he nurtured them and he promoted them. It is one of his defining legacies."

Arthur Kroeger was born in 1932 in Naco, Alta., the son of Russian Mennonite immigrant farmers who came to Canada in 1926 to escape communist persecution. But the Kroegers faced discrimination in Canada and life was tough for a family trying to make a living out of farming in a region that had inferior land and minimal rain. But life grew harder still during the Great Depression and the lessons of the time left a deep impression on Mr. Kroeger. He wrote a book about the family's travails and Katherine Graham, dean of the Faculty of Public Affairs, said his "challenging youth" growing up in the Prairie dustbowl defined his strong ethical character.

"Despite his great accomplishments, he was never one to put on airs and I attribute that to his Alberta farm background. He was very proud of his Prairie roots," Ms. Graham said.

A Rhodes Scholar, he studied at Oxford University, returning to Canada to marry the late Gabrielle Jane Sellers, with whom he had two children, Nina Alexandra and Kate Megan Jane. He joined the Department of External Affairs in 1958, the beginning of what would become a stellar career during which he served as deputy minister for 17 of his 34-year service. He served in several diplomatic posts, including Washington, Geneva and New Delhi, worked in government departments ranging from the Treasury Board to Indian Affairs, Regional Industrial Expansion and Employment and Immigration. He sat on numerous committees and boards, including president of the Canadian Association of Rhodes Scholars, chairman of the National Statistics Council and the Canadian Centre for Management Development.

In 1989, he was made an Officer of the Order of Canada and became Companion in 2000. He received the Public Service Outstanding Achievement Award in 1989 and received honorary Doctorates of Law from several Canadian Universities. In recognition of his distinguished public service career, Carleton University named one of its colleges after him - the Arthur Kroeger College of Public Affairs.

"The only time I saw Arthur Kroeger blush was when he was asked if he'd lend his name to the college," recalled Ms. Graham, dean of the faculty.

"There was nothing about Arthur Kroeger that was about Arthur Kroeger. Almost everything he did, he did for the benefit of others," added Chris Dornan, director of the College.

"He was an extraordinarily kind individual. His concern was not for himself, his concern was for others and what he could do to help them, particularly young people."

Ms. Graham, who had known Mr. Kroeger for 15 years, said while his death is a tremendous loss, his legacy will live on. "We've lost a great public servant of the old school who had a strong ethical compass, someone who had a powerful mind and was not afraid to speak his mind," she said, adding that we've also "lost an exemplar of the public service of tomorrow."

Gordon Ritchie is a retired public servant whose job track roughly paralleled that of Mr. Kroeger for about a decade. One of Mr. Ritchie's responsibilities at the economic development department was to advise the secretary of the cabinet on the performance of deputy ministers. He said Mr. Kroeger was the best of the bunch, "the quintessential senior public servant" who had minimal public profile, but was "very forceful and effective" in giving his ministers straight

advice.

A telling example of the delicate balance Mr. Kroeger struck between serving his political masters while sticking to his convictions occurred in the lead up to the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, Mr. Ritchie said.

As deputy minister of the Energy Department, Mr. Kroeger testified before parliamentary committees on the trade deal. The deal was much favoured by western Canadian energy producers and reviled by those in favour of a national energy program, Mr. Ritchie said.

"Arthur's testimony was absolutely masterful. He managed to not say a word that would undermine the position of the government, but leaving no doubt to anybody who could read between the lines that he really didn't like the agreement.

"That is really the epitome of a fine public servant. He's always respectful of the political authorities and does not undermine them, but that doesn't mean he's given up his soul or that he has no opinions of his own."

Funeral arrangements are expected to be announced in the coming days.

[Ottawa Citizen Story](#)

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We sadly announce the unexpectedly sudden end of the life of a very distinguished federal public servant and a UNTD Cadet (first summer 1953, I believe, maybe even the Coronation Cruise that year) who made an effort to attend as many UNTD Reunions as possible in Halifax, Victoria and Ottawa.

Arthur Kroeger died Friday 9 May. He had been ill with cancer. Until a short time ago, we were all hoping he would be able to regain enough strength to begin chemotherapy at the National Institutes of Health in the United States, where he had been accepted into a clinical trial. However, his condition deteriorated rapidly over the past 10 days, and on Thursday we moved him to the palliative-care unit at the Centre Elisabeth-Bruyere in Ottawa.

Arthur was a Rhodes Scholar (1958), a Companion of the Order of Canada, a federal Deputy Minister of five major government departments, including Transport (" the Dean of Deputy Ministers" in Ottawa) and a former Chancellor of Carleton University. Carleton University's Arthur Kroeger College of Public Affairs is named in his honour.

He is survived by his partner, Huguette Labelle, also a Companion of the Order of Canada, also a former federal deputy Minister of Transport, also a university Chancellor -- in her case, Chancellor of the University of Ottawa, his two daughters, Kate and Alix, and his stepdaughter, Chantal Labelle.

To me and to many Arthur was simply a fine and gracious friend, sadly to be missed as one of the platoon markers of life. Bob Duncombe

The funeral will take place on Thursday, May 15 in Christ Church Cathedral in Ottawa. Please watch the papers for an announcement of the arrangements. Arthur had expressed a wish in his will that a scholarship should be set up in his name at Carleton University. In lieu of flowers, we are asking people if they would be willing to make a donation. Cheques should be made payable to Carleton University, in envelopes marked for the attention of Denise Mayer, 510 Robertson Hall, 1125 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6. People can also give online at www.carleton.ca, under "Giving to Carleton", and earmark their donation for the scholarship fund.