

Claiborne deBorda Pell

Senator Claiborne deBorda Pell was born in New York City on November 22, 1918. He served as United States Senator from Rhode Island from 1961-1997. He was elected in 1960 and re-elected in 1966, 1972, 1978, 1984 and 1990 and was the longest serving Senator in Rhode Island history.

He served as Chairman of the Committee for Foreign Relations; Chairman of the Subcommittee on Education, Arts and Humanities; Member of the Committee on Labor and Human Resources; Chairman of the Committee on Rules and Administrations; Member of the Democratic Policy Committee; and served on the Executive Committee of the Environmental and Energy Study conference.

He was an honorary Vice President of the American Bible Society, an honorary trustee of St. George's School and trustee emeritus of Brown University. He served as a member of the Board of Visitors of both the United States Naval Academy and the United States Coast Guard. He was director of the Society of Friends of Touro Synagogue of Newport and attended Trinity Episcopal Church in Newport. Senator Pell was also a trustee of Save the Bay. He wrote two books, *Power and Policy: America's Role in World Affairs* (1972) and *Megalopolis Unbound* (1966) and co-authored of a third, *Challenge of the Seven Seas* (1966).

Claiborne Pell was born in New York City into a family with a long history of public service. His father, Herbert Claiborne Pell, was a Congressman, a Democratic State Chairman, and later, U.S. Minister to Portugal and Hungary. His ancestors include five Members of Congress, one of whom, George M. Dallas, also served as Vice President of the United States under President James Polk.

A graduate of St. George's School in Middletown, R.I., he earned his A.B. degree (summa cum laude) in history from Princeton University in 1940 and his M.A. degree from Columbia University. He received honorary doctorates from 51 colleges and universities.

He received 20 decorations, including the Presidential Citizens Medal, the second highest non-military award of the United States, and was awarded medals by both the Kingdom and the Republic of Italy, four by Portugal, two by the Netherlands, and by France, Sweden, Greece, Liechtenstein, Austria, Luxembourg, Lebanon, Pakistan, the Knights of Malta and by Cardinal Koenig of Austria.

He enlisted in the Coast Guard four months before the attack on Pearl Harbor and started his Coast Guard career as a ship's cook. He received a commission while aboard ship and served in the North Atlantic and in Sicily, where he helped rebuild the fishing industry. After the war's end, he continued in the Coast Guard Reserve, from which he retired in 1978 with the rank of Captain. Claiborne Pell was arrested three times by Fascist governments and three times by Communist governments.

After the war, he participated in the San Francisco Conference that created the United Nations. He then served seven years as a State Department official and Foreign Service Officer. He is the only member of the Senate to have been a Foreign Service Officer. During his diplomatic career, he held posts in Czechoslovakia following the Communist takeover.

After resigning from the Foreign Service, Pell spent eight years in business and political activities. During that time he also was Vice President of the International Rescue Committee for which he directed Hungarian refugee activities in Austria following the Hungarian Revolution.

In 1960, he sought the Democratic nomination for the Senate seat of retiring Senator Theodore Francis Green and became the first unendorsed candidate in Rhode Island history ever to win a state-wide primary. He was elected in the general election by the largest plurality in Rhode Island history up to that time.

Pell was the principal sponsor of a 1965 law establishing the [National Endowment for the Arts](#) and the [National Endowment for the Humanities](#) and was the Senate author of the [National Sea Grant](#) College and Program Act of 1966, a program funded at about \$40 million annually - including about \$1.5 million that goes to the University of Rhode Island.

On the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Pell was an early and outspoken opponent of United States military involvement in Vietnam and has been a vigorous supporter of arms control agreements, including a mutual, verifiable nuclear freeze. He took the lead in proposals to ensure peaceful uses of the oceans and international cooperation in protection of the environment.

His leadership, both in the Committee and on the Senate Floor, helped secure overwhelming ratification of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty to reduce nuclear weapons. He also fathered a treaty prohibiting the use of environmental modification techniques as weapons of war.

Claiborne Pell also took a leading role in eliminating financial barriers to higher education. His legislation created the Basic Educational Opportunity Grants which Congress named [Pell Grants](#) in 1980.

A member of the Presidential Commission on Drunk Driving, he was the original Senate advocate behind the federal legislation to help crack down on drunk driving. A set of tough drunk driving measures, initially proposed by Claiborne Pell, was signed into law in 1982.

He was also the originator behind the High Speed Ground Transportation Act to improve rail passenger service and his efforts were instrumental in the implementation of the downtown Providence railroad relocation project and the construction of the new Providence AMTRAK Station.

His legislation resulted in the establishment of a career service for Foreign Service Information Officers. Another of his bills authorized the creation of a National Police Memorial, dedicated to local, state, and federal law enforcement officials who lost their lives in the performance of duty.

He was the primary sponsor of specialized bills dealing with such areas as environmental education, libraries, historic preservation, education for the handicapped, and amendments to cushion the economic impact of severe defense cutbacks on Rhode Island.

He was appointed by President Eisenhower as a delegate to the initial meeting of the International Maritime Consultative Organization in 1959 and was a delegate to the 25th United Nations General Assembly in 1970. He served often as a Senate advisor to the U.S. delegation to the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea. He also was the first Senate advisor appointed to the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) and has served as a member of the Commission on Improving the Effectiveness of the United Nations.

He was a Senate representative at the first environmental conference in Stockholm in 1972. He was the only Senator who participated in the Stockholm meeting who also was a Senate representative at the follow-up United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

Claiborne Pell was appointed by President Clinton as a Representative of the United States of America to the 51st Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1996.

In 1997, he was granted the status of Distinguished Visiting Professor at Salve Regina University, Newport, Rhode Island.

Claiborne Pell suffered from Parkinson's disease, and passed away on January 1, 2009. He is survived by his wife, the former Nuala O'Donnell, three children - a son, Christopher, and two daughters, Dallas Pell Yates and Julia Pell – and five grandchildren. Their son Herbert III passed away in 1999.