

Robert D. Garton

Eulogy

August 30, 2026

Welcome and thank you for being with us today to honor and celebrate the life of a truly extraordinary man, Robert D. Garton.

Senator Garton, or Senator, as I always indicated in our discussions over the years, passed from our presence on May 8, 2026, just shy of his 93rd birthday on August 18th. Our purpose today is not to grieve the loss of this truly remarkable man, but instead celebrate a life well lived in service to his family, his community, his state, and our country. Our tribute today represents the full measure of a life well lived. Speaking on behalf of the four grandchildren are Lian Neeman, Brad and Jill's daughter, and Bo (Show-berg) Sjoberg - Brenda and John's son. You will also hear from his son Brad, daughter Brenda, and the love of his life of 71 years of marriage, Barb, through comments from Brenda. Barb is with us via live streaming and it is only apropos that we hold our celebration at Mill Race Center, a facility that Barb was instrumental in helping fund.

No doubt Senator Garton's influences and footprint in our community and state will long transcend his passing. We need not look far to see the influence and impact of the Columbus Learning Center. Without Senator Garton's presence at the budget conference table and insisting that this facility be funded and built, Senator Garton would not approve the State budget bill moving forward for the State of Indiana that year. He was more than an important part of the effort to stave off corporate raiders in the mid 1980's, who sought to purchase a controlling share of Cummins Engine Company (now Cummins Inc.) in order to dismantle the company and forever change Columbus. He sponsored and passed thoughtful legislation that discouraged such practice and now you know the rest of the story.

Senator Garton was visibly uncomfortable the day our community named the Robert D. Garton Plaza in downtown Columbus in his honor. I remember the ruse Barb and I and others orchestrated to have the Senator there in the first place. We then had to create cover for many of the folks from the State House who were stationed on the other side of the courthouse, ready to walk over to the plaza at the right moment. This was the essence of the man, quiet and humble, very different from what you would expect from the Leader of the Indiana Senate for 26 years.

Though humble about his own world, in our conversations over the years, he was ever so proud of his grandchildren. He would want everyone to know about granddaughter Lian and her amazing Vice President of Global Benefits and Technology position at Amazon; Grandson Daniel obtaining his PhD and his breakthrough medical research at the University of Helsinki and now Karolinska Institute in Stockholm; Stefan with both his MBA and Law Degree and his legal work at his West Hartford, Connecticut Law Firm; and Bo beginning his own successful criminal law practice as an attorney in Springfield, Massachusetts. Bo called his grandpa at least once a week and every fall they both enjoyed their special, lengthy "after football game" conversations.

President Eisenhower's favorite Latin saying was:

“Gently in manner, strongly in deed.”

This was Senator Garton. I also experienced on a firsthand basis his deep sense of integrity for our political system. He clearly was one of the most informed and I would suggest experts on the Indiana State Constitution of 1851. He had a keen understanding and respect for the concept of the balance of power between the branches of our state government. I would often marvel at how perceptive he was about current legal opinions, both state and federal, concerning constitutional topics. He certainly is a voice we miss today.

I also experienced his deep sense of decorum and commitment to positive campaigns. I witnessed a moment in his last campaign that brought the point home. Our polling indicated that we needed to define his opponent. I met with the Senator to discuss a new plan on advertising. He said to me in no uncertain terms:

Pete, I have never engaged in negative campaigning, and I will not start now.

You rarely experience in the rush and heat of a political campaign such true commitment to personal integrity and honor.

In ancient Athens, the cradle of Western Democracy, every young man took an oath upon becoming a citizen. The Athenian Oath stated in part:

Thus in all these ways we will transmit this City, not only not less,
but greater and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us.

Robert D. Garton must have taken that oath as well.

Senator Garton truly left this community, this state, and this country in a better state than he first found it when he and Barb established their home in Columbus.

End Remarks

At Gettysburg, President Lincoln remarked:

The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here...

Likewise, this day will pass into our collective memories and much of which we said will fade, but we will never forget Senator Robert D. Garton and his life well lived in service to our community, state, and nation.

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So as we leave- we invoke the Irish Blessing:

May the road rise up to meet you.
May the wind always be at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
May the rains fall soft upon your fields.
And until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.

God bless Barb and the Garton family and safe travels to all who have joined us today.