

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' OFFICE
NEWS RELEASE



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Kent County Commissioners, Staff Mourn Passing of Former U.S. Rep. Vern Ehlers

GRAND RAPIDS – Members of the Kent County Board of Commissioners and Administrator's Office join the community in mourning the passing of former Third District Congressman Vernon J. Ehlers. He served as a Kent County Commissioner from 1975-1982 and as Kent County Board Chair from 1979-1981. After four terms as County Commissioner, he served in the Michigan Legislature (two years in the House and eight years in the Senate), and as a U.S. Member of Congress for the Third Congressional District representing Kent, Barry, and Ionia Counties from December 1993 until his retirement in January 2011.

The influence and impact of Rep. Ehlers is still felt by many on the Board of Commissioners. "I was honored to know Rep. Ehlers during my career, and to have received his endorsement when I first ran for County Commission," said Jim Saalfeld, Chair of the Kent County Board of Commissioners. "I always believed that Vern represented the County, and ultimately our Third Congressional District, with those attributes that have historically defined West Michigan: integrity, thoughtfulness and duty. Vern will be greatly missed, and his legacy will certainly live on."

"Rep. Ehlers served in a capacity that brought people together in a bipartisan, apolitical manner," said Wayman Britt, Interim County Administrator. "He never forgot where he started and served the people of the Third Congressional District with distinction. Distinguished leadership like his is rare and valuable; my sympathies and prayers go out to all who knew and loved him."

Some Board members recall Rep. Ehlers commitment to his constituents, to fiscal responsibility and to the environment. "Vern was a leader for the County, for the people of Michigan, and treated every dollar in Congress as if it was his own," said Commissioner Ted Vonk. "He was a point-person for our Waste-To-Energy Plant and helped bring that to Kent County and Grand Rapids; his legacy will live on through his impact on our environment."

"Vern was more than a leader to me; he was a family friend. My sister was one of his legislative assistants for many years in Washington, D.C. and my mother organized many of his campaign events over the years," said Commissioner Emily Brieve. "He was a man of virtue, grace and empathy; he will be deeply missed by many. My sincerest condolences and prayers go out to his family at this difficult time."

Vern was married to Johanna (Jo) Meulink, was the father of four adult children, the grandfather of five and great-grandfather of three. Information regarding visitation hours and the memorial service is being handled through Zaagman Memorial Chapel: <http://www.zaagman.com/>.

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