

Former University President Lloyd Elliott, 1918-2013

The People's President

During his 23 years of leadership at GW, Lloyd Elliott always put students—and their studies—first.

Former George Washington University President Lloyd Elliott, who died Jan. 1 at 94, is remembered as an unassuming leader who consistently put students' best interests above all else.

From humble roots as a public school teacher from a family of educators in West Virginia, Dr. Elliott became a 23-year leader of the university who helped transform it into a respected residential academic institution.

Dr. Elliott served as president from 1965 until 1988. During that time, he increased the university's endowment from \$8 million to \$200 million, oversaw the building of three libraries on the Foggy Bottom Campus, and emphasized the study of world affairs, leading to the renaming of GW's School of International Affairs to the Evelyn E. and Lloyd H. Elliott School in 1988.

Dr. Elliott's daughter, Patricia Kauffman, remembers her father saying that, as a child, he went to school 24 hours a day, seven days a week, because his own father, a public school teacher, was always educating him. Dr. Elliott's early experience as a public school teacher and administrator imbued him with a sense of principle when it came to educational priorities.

In the mid-1980s, for example, when the White House requested use of the Charles E. Smith Center for a high-profile meeting between President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, Dr. Elliott refused, citing a disruption to students' lives and studies during finals week.

"He always had a twinkle in his eye, but people who knew him knew when he was deadly serious," Ms. Kauffman says.

During his tenure as president, his behind-the-scenes leadership style allowed faculty members and administrators to flourish, Ms. Kauffman says.

"I can say it was truly never about him. It was about getting the right person for the right position and giving them every opportunity and encouragement to succeed," she says.

Richard Southby, executive dean and distinguished professor of global health emeritus, was both a colleague and a close friend of Dr. Elliott.

"He was gracious and supportive," Dr. Southby says. "Once he made a decision, though, he was firm. He was a very solid administrator without being flamboyant—he

didn't need to have his name in the press. He stood up for things he thought were important."

One of those things was his decision, in 1965, to disband the university's football team, which cost the university a great deal of money, even though the team wasn't particularly successful. Syracuse University had recently made the same decision, although the president of that institution reinstated the football team after alumni and students helped raise the money to cover the program.

"I remember that he faced a lot of resistance from students and alumni," Ms. Kauffman says. "What he said was, if you can raise the money, like Syracuse did, that's fine, but before the money goes to football, we need libraries, classrooms, and more professors."

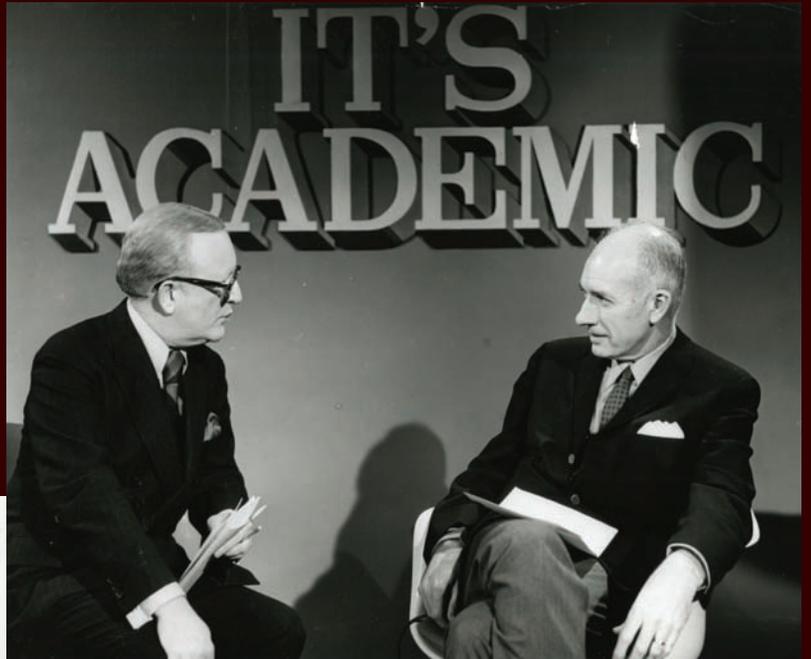
Dr. Elliott's focus on educational excellence included overseeing the construction of three libraries on the Foggy

Bottom Campus: the Estelle and Melvin Gelman Library, the Jacob Burns Law Library, and the Himmelfarb Health Sciences Library.

"He was extraordinarily proud of the libraries," Ms. Kauffman says. "I remember when Gelman got its millionth book. He was very excited."

Dr. Elliott's focus on learning, as well as his calm demeanor, was also crucial when he was tasked with keeping the university operating during anti-Vietnam War demonstrations on campus, which attracted many protesters due to GW's location.

After his retirement from GW, Dr. Elliott became the first president of the National Geographic Society Education Foundation, the National Geographic Society's educational arm, and stayed involved with GW.



Clockwise from bottom left: Dr. Elliott chats with students, staff, and faculty at one of his weekly coffees in 1966.

Dr. Elliott and his wife, Betty, receive a certificate at the Alumni Service Awards in 1987 from former Alumni Relations Director Ron Howard. They were married for more than 70 years.

*Dr. Elliott on set of an episode of *It's Academic**

Right: Dr. Elliott overlooks the construction site for the Marvin Center in 1968.

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In fact, Dr. Elliott—the honorary chair of the Elliott School’s board of advisers—attended the body’s most recent board meeting in November.

“Dr. and Mrs. Elliott were deeply engaged in the life of the school that bears their name,” wrote Michael E. Brown, dean of the Elliott School of International Affairs, in a letter to students, staff, and faculty of the school after Dr. Elliott’s death. “Having a former university president as a senior adviser was extremely valuable for the school.”

Dr. Elliott and his wife, Betty, who died in 2009, were married more than 70 years and were both honored at the Alumni Service Awards in 1987.

“At a personal level, I can say that getting to know Lloyd and Betty has been one of the greatest privileges of my tenure

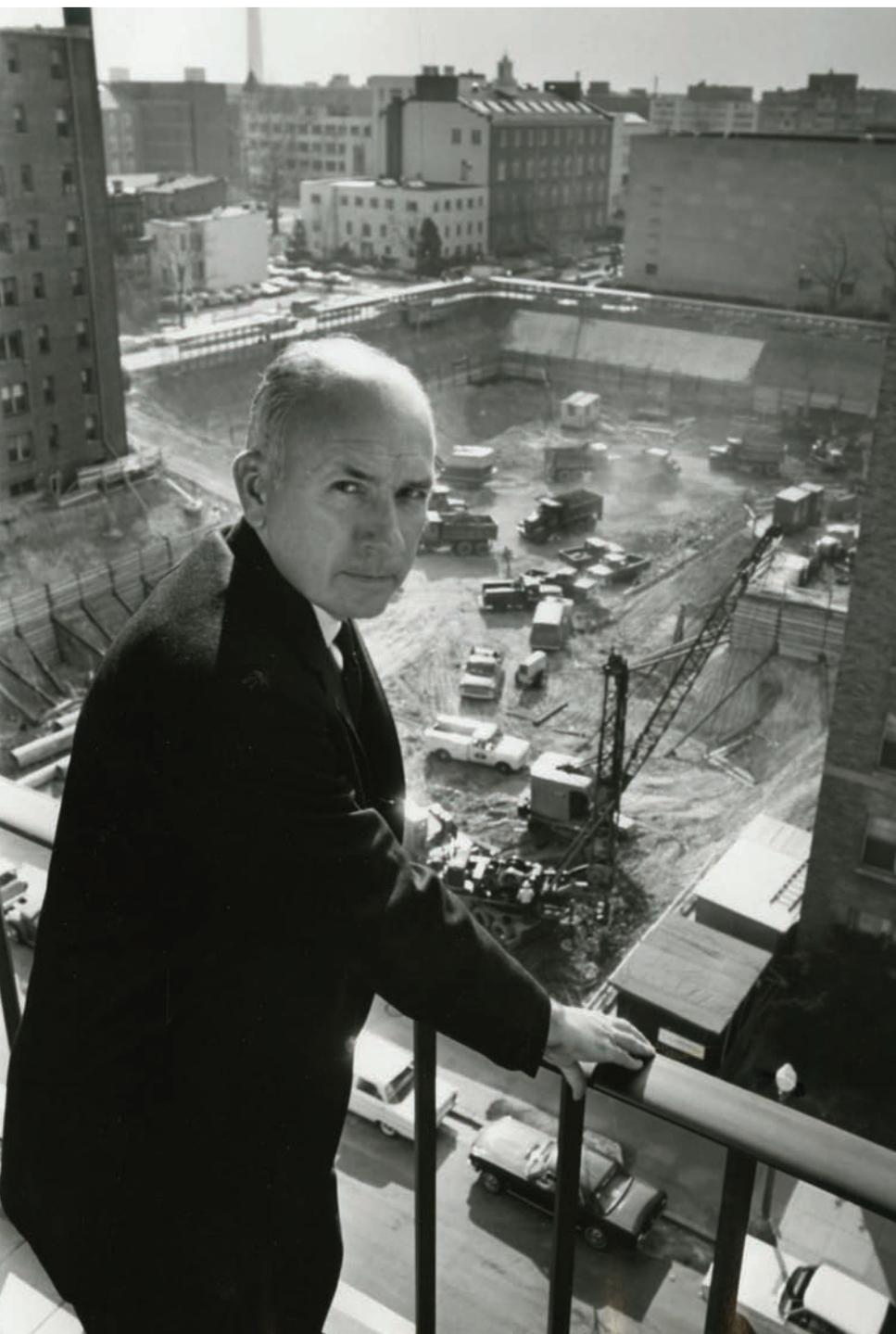
as dean of the Elliott School of International Affairs,” Dean Brown wrote.

Ms. Kauffman says she hopes the university community will remember her father’s character.

“He cared about students above anything else. He cared about their opportunities, about making opportunities for them. He was absolutely what you saw—he never pulled punches. And people knew it intuitively.” **GW**

—An earlier version of this story appeared in *GW Today*.

Do you have a memory of former University President Lloyd Elliott that you’d like to share? Email magazine@gwu.edu.



Remembering a Leader

Ambassador Edward “Skip” Gnehm, BA ’66, MA ’68, Kuwait Professor of Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Affairs, first met former University President Lloyd Elliott in a room of the Washington Hotel in 1965. At that time, GW had been operating without a president and Mr. Gnehm was representing a restless student body as its president.

“In his quiet, calming voice, he told me he’d been offered the position of president of the university, but that he’d said he wouldn’t accept it until he’d had a chance to talk to student leaders,” Mr. Gnehm told a crowd gathered at a university memorial service for Dr. Elliott on Feb. 26.

Over the course of several hours, Dr. Elliott explained to Mr. Gnehm his vision for the university and how he planned to lead it.

“His vision became the university community’s vision and with patience and great perseverance, he brought people together,” said Mr. Gnehm, who went on to earn two degrees from GW and become a professor in the school named for Dr. Elliott and his wife, the Elliott School of International Affairs.

Mr. Gnehm’s story was just one of several tributes that colleagues, friends, and admirers paid to the university’s 14th president. To learn more about the service, as well as see a video about Dr. Elliott’s legacy, visit gwtoday.gwu.edu/lloyd-elliott-remembered.

J. R. BLACK, COURTESY UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES