

OBITUARIES

Hugh L. Carey dies at age 92

Former Democratic governor steered New York through 1970s financial crisis

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Former New York Gov. Hugh Carey was at his best when faced with a crisis and when he took office in 1975, New York City wobbled at the edge of fiscal calamity.

The governor had inherited the worst economic climate since the Great Depression. New York City, the nation's Wall Street-powered economic engine, was nearing bankruptcy. Famously declaring the "days of wine and roses are over," the well-to-do son of an entrepreneur rose to the challenge, forced major changes in the way New York governed and financed itself, and stared down a Republican president to keep New York City from insolvency.

The liberal Democrat who reversed the tax-and-spend excesses of his Republican predecessor to keep the city and state afloat died yesterday at his summer home on Shelter Island. He was 92.

Carey's acumen for building bipartisan compromise was legendary, recalled former state Sen. Seymour Lachman, who oversees Wagner College's Hugh L. Carey Center for Government Reform at Wagner College.

"There are very, very few Hugh Careys in American politics," Lachman said last night. "He was really a great

man and one of the most outstanding governors New York state has ever had."

"As our nation faces fiscal crisis, we are reminded of the proud example set by Governor Carey that with sober, enlightened leadership, government can help solve even the most difficult problems," former Gov. George Pataki, a Republican, said in a statement.

The Brooklyn-born Carey served two terms as governor from 1975 to 1982 after seven terms as a congressman representing his home borough.

"This government will begin today the painful, difficult, imperative process of learning to live within its means," Carey declared in his inaugural address on Jan. 1, 1975.

Lachman, a Democrat who once represented part of Staten Island in the State Senate, and co-author Robert Polner chronicled Carey in the book, "The Man Who Saved New York: Hugh Carey and the Great Fiscal Crisis of 1975."

"He was a highly articulate, intelligent person who met challenges head-on," Lachman said. "His philosophy was revealed in the people who he selected to run the government..."

Carey's predecessor, Republican Nelson A. Rockefeller, had run up much higher taxes and enormous debt as he built a legacy of state universities and highways while in New York City, Mayor John Lindsay, a Republican turned Democrat, followed a similar spending pattern that led to deep deficits in the 1974-75 recession.

With New York City at the brink of bankruptcy and

threatening to take the state down with it, Carey took drastic action, seizing control of the city's finances, engineering more than \$1 billion in state loans to bail out the city and mustering the backing needed to reorganize its shaky finances and restore confidence in both the city and state.

Shuttling among Albany, New York City and Washington, he then won federal loan guarantees from the reluctant Republican administration of President Gerald Ford that secured the plan.

Ford's hesitancy made front-page news, immortalized in the New York Daily News headline: "Ford To City: Drop Dead." While Ford did not explicitly mouth those words, they were implied in a speech he made initially denying the city federal assistance.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg said in a statement that Carey's leadership "set the stage for the city's incredible rebirth in the years and decades that followed."

Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who announced Carey's death, called him a "true American success story."

Carey campaigned successfully for appointment, rather than election, of judges to the state's highest court, a move that was seen as insulating the Court of Appeals from politics. He helped bring the Democratic National Convention to Madison Square Garden in 1976 and 1980 and sought to again stamp New York as a singular American destination, launching the iconic and still-imitated "I Love New York" campaign.

"The tough decisions he



Former Gov. Hugh Carey received an honorary degree from Wagner College in 2007.

made saved our city from bankruptcy, and over 30 years later, remain an example that Washington can live by as we fight to restore economic security in the U.S," said Rep. Michael Grimm, (R-Staten Island), in a written statement yesterday.

Hugh Leo Carey was born in Brooklyn in 1919. He left St. John's College in 1939 to enlist in a National Guard horseback cavalry unit at Camp Drum in northern New York. He fought in the infantry with the 104th Division in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, and was a decorated lieutenant colonel when he was discharged in 1946.

After military service he went to law school and then joined the family business; his father was a petroleum distributor. In his first run for Congress, in 1960, he wrested a seat from a four-term Republican incumbent.

Carey and his first wife, Helen, had 14 children. Two sons died in a car accident in 1969 and Helen, who had suffered from cancer, died in 1974. Less than three weeks later, he announced his candidacy for governor.

Carey, who also maintained a residence on Manhattan's Upper East Side, was a senior partner at Harris Beach law firm.