

Ann Richards

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This article is about the American politician/teacher, for the Australian-American actress, see [Ann Richards \(actress\)](#). For the American jazz singer, see [Ann Richards \(singer\)](#).

Ann Richards

45th [Governor of Texas](#)

In office

[January 15, 1991](#) – [January 17, 1995](#)

Lieutenant(s)	Bob Bullock
Preceded by	Bill Clements
Succeeded by	George W. Bush

Born	September 1, 1933 Lakeview, Texas
Died	September 13, 2006 (aged 73) Austin, Texas
Political party	Democratic
Spouse	David Richards (div.)
Profession	Teacher

Dorothy Ann Willis Richards ([September 1, 1933](#) – [September 13, 2006](#)) was an [American politician](#) and [teacher](#) from [Texas](#). She first came to national attention as the Texas state [treasurer](#), when she delivered the keynote address at the [1988 Democratic National Convention](#). Richards served as Governor of Texas from 1991 to 1995 and was defeated for re-election in 1994. Born during the start of the [Depression](#) in rural Texas, she died in [Austin](#) from [esophageal cancer](#) at the age of 73. ^[1]

Two public memorial services ^[2] for Ann Richards were held on September 16 and 18, 2006, in Austin, Texas; and on [September 18, 2006](#), she was laid to rest in the [Texas State Cemetery](#) during a private burial service.

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[\[edit\]](#) Early life

Dorothy Ann Willis was born in [Lakeview](#) (now part of Lacy-Lakeview), [McLennan County](#), the only child of Robert Cecil Willis and Mildred Iona Warren. She grew up in [Waco](#), participated in [Girls State](#), and graduated from Waco High School in 1950. She attended [Baylor University](#) on a [debate](#) scholarship and earned a bachelor's degree. After marrying high school sweetheart David "Dave" Richards, she moved to [Austin](#), where she earned a teaching certificate from the [University of Texas](#). David and Ann Richards had four children: [Cecile](#), Daniel, Clark, and Ellen.

Richards taught [social studies](#) and [history](#) at Fulmore Junior High School in Austin from 1955 to 1956. She campaigned for Texas [liberals](#) and [progressives](#) such as [Henry B. Gonzalez](#), [Ralph Yarborough](#), and [Sarah T. Hughes](#).

[\[edit\]](#) Political career


By the 1970s, Richards was an accomplished political worker, having worked to elect liberal Democrats [Sarah Weddington](#) and Wilhelmina Delco to the [Texas Legislature](#), and having presented training sessions throughout the state on campaign techniques for women candidates and managers. She supported ratification of the [Equal Rights Amendment](#) to the U.S. Constitution, presenting the amendment to the delegates of the [National Women's Conference](#), held in Houston (1977). (The amendment was never ratified by enough states to become part of the Constitution.)

In 1976, Richards ran against and defeated a three-term incumbent on the four-member [Travis County, Texas](#) Commissioners' Court; she took 81.4 percent of the vote against Libertarian opponent Laurel Freeman to win re-election in 1980. During this time, her

marriage ended, in part because of the strain of politics on the relationship. Richards' drinking became more pronounced, and she sought and completed treatment for [alcoholism](#) in 1980. David Richards is a prominent civil rights attorney in California.

After the incumbent state treasurer, Warren G. Harding (no relation to the former U.S. president of the same name), became mired in legal troubles in 1982, Richards won the Democratic nomination for that post. Winning election against a Republican opponent in November that year, Richards became the first woman elected to statewide office in more than 50 years. In 1986, she was re-elected treasurer without opposition. Richards was a popular and proactive treasurer who worked to maximize the return of Texas state investments. Richards said that when she took office, the Treasury Department was run something like a 1930s country bank, with deposits that didn't earn interest. At the 1984 Democratic National Convention, Richards delivered one of the nominating speeches for nominee [Walter Mondale](#), and she campaigned actively for the Mondale/Ferraro ticket in Texas, even though President [Ronald Reagan](#) enjoyed great popularity in her state.



 Ann Richards' official portrait as Governor of Texas (excerpt), painted by James E. Tennison^{[3][4]}

[[edit](#)] 1988 Democratic National Convention

Richards's keynote address to the 1988 [Democratic National Convention](#) put her in the national spotlight when she uttered her famous line about the wealthy, then-[Vice President George H. W. Bush](#): "Poor George, he can't help it...He was born with a silver foot in his mouth."^[5] The speech set the tone for her political future; she was a real Texan who established herself as a candidate who appealed to suburban voters as well as to the traditional Democratic base that included [African Americans](#) and [Hispanics](#). In 1989, with co-author Peter Knobler, she wrote her autobiography, "Straight from the Heart: My Life in Politics and Other Places".

[\[edit\]](#) Governorship

In 1990, Texas' [Republican](#) governor, [Bill Clements](#), decided not to run for re-election. Richards painted herself as a sensible progressive, and won the Democratic gubernatorial nomination against Attorney General (and former congressman) [James Alton "Jim" Mattox](#) of Dallas and former Governor [Mark White](#). Mattox ran a particularly abrasive campaign against Richards, accusing her of having had drug problems beyond alcoholism. The Republicans nominated multi-millionaire rancher [Clayton Wheat Williams, Jr.](#) After a brutal campaign and a series of legendary gaffes by Williams in the final weeks before the election, Richards narrowly won on [November 6, 1990](#) by a margin of 49-47 percent; she was inaugurated governor the following January. ^[3]


She was a "minority governor" because her popular vote was below 50 percent. Although officially she was the second woman to hold Texas's top office, Richards is considered the first woman elected governor in her own right, since twice-elected [Miriam "Ma" Ferguson](#) is often discounted as having been a proxy for impeached governor [James E. "Pa" Ferguson](#), her husband.

The [Texas economy](#) had been in a slump since the mid-1980s, compounded by a downturn in the U.S. economy. Richards responded with a program of economic revitalization, yielding growth in 1991 of 2 percent when the [U.S. economy](#) as a whole shrank. Richards also attempted to streamline Texas's government and regulatory institutions for business and the public; her efforts in the former helped to revitalize Texas's corporate infrastructure for its explosive economic growth later in the decade, and her audits on the state bureaucracy saved \$6 billion.

As governor, Richards reformed the Texas [prison](#) system, establishing a [substance abuse](#) program for inmates, reducing the number of violent offenders released, and increasing prison space to deal with a growing prison population (from less than 60,000 in 1992 to more than 80,000 in 1994). She backed proposals to reduce the sale of [semi-automatic firearms](#) and "cop-killer" bullets in the state.

During her first term, she signed into law the amendment of the Texas Financial Responsibility Law where renewal of a motor vehicle's registration (also covers initial registration of a motor vehicle), safety inspection sticker, driver's license, and/or obtaining new license plates require that a motorist must have a valid auto insurance policy. The law, which passed on September 1, 1991, broadens the 1982 law where a police officer will request a driver's license and proof of insurance during a traffic stop.



 Governor Ann Richards visiting [NASA/JSC](#) in 1992

The [Texas Lottery](#) was also instituted during her governorship - advocated as a means of supplementing school finances; Ann Richards purchased the first [lottery](#) ticket on [May 29, 1992](#), in Oak Hill, Texas. ^[6]

School finance remained one of the key issues of Richards' governorship and of those succeeding hers; the famous [Robin Hood plan](#) was launched in the 1992-1993 [biennium](#) which attempted to make school funding more equitable across school districts. Richards also sought to decentralize control over education policy to districts and individual campuses; she instituted "site-based management" to this end.

She was famous for her personal charisma, for her ease with the public, and even for her see-through wispy white hairdo. It was said that many people who knew her personally saw little if any difference between her public and private personas. Her sense of humor was often part of her day-to-day political life. Regarding a concealed weapons bill, she was asked if she didn't think the women of Texas might feel safer if they could carry guns in their purses. She replied, "Well I'm not a sexist, but there is not a woman in this state who could find a gun in her handbag, much less a lipstick."

She was unexpectedly defeated in 1994 by [George W. Bush](#), winning 46 percent of the vote to Bush's 53 percent, even after having outspent the Bush campaign by \$2.6 million. ^[3] The Richards campaign had hoped for a misstep from the relatively inexperienced Republican candidate, but none appeared, and Richards created one of her own in calling Bush "some jerk," recalling missteps that cost Clayton Williams the election in 1990. Richards would later commend Bush's oratory and attributed her loss in 1994 to Bush's ability to "stay on message." ^[4] Some argue that Bush and his advisor, Karl Rove, resorted to using a smear campaign against Richards. ^[5] Other people attribute her loss to the fact that she vetoed the Concealed Carry Bill that would have allowed licensed citizens to carry guns for self-defense inside public establishments without the owner's permission (see [Gun politics in the United States](#)). This veto may have cost Richards the 1994 election ^[6]. Bush would thereafter sign a concealed-gun law, which was pushed by

a future Republican lawmaker, state Representative [Suzanna Hupp](#) of the [Killeen](#)-based district.

[[edit](#)] Post governorship

Beginning in 2001, Richards was a senior advisor to the communications firm Public Strategies, Inc. in Austin and New York. From 1995 to 2001, Richards was also a senior advisor with [Verner, Lipfert, Bernhard, McPherson and Hand](#), a [Washington, D.C.](#)-based international law firm. Richards sat on the boards of the [Aspen Institute](#), [J.C. Penney](#), and [T.I.G. Holdings](#).

One of her daughters, [Cecile Richards](#), also a liberal activist, became president of [Planned Parenthood](#) in 2006. Ann Richards demonstrated interest in social causes such as [equality](#), [abortion](#), [gay rights](#) and [women's rights](#).

She was a tireless campaigner for Democratic candidates throughout the United States. In the [2004 presidential election](#), Richards endorsed [Howard Dean](#) for the Democratic nomination, and campaigned on his behalf. Richards later stumped for Democratic nominee [John Kerry](#), highlighting the issues of [health care](#) and women's rights. Some political pundits mentioned her as a potential running mate to Kerry; however, she did not make his list of top finalists, and he selected [North Carolina](#) Senator [John Edwards](#). Richards for her part said she was "not interested" in any degree of a political comeback.

[[edit](#)] Teaching

Ann Richards had taught social studies and history at Fulmore Junior High School in Austin (1955-1956). She continued teaching in later years.

Richards served at [Brandeis University](#) as the Fred and Rita Richman Distinguished Visiting Professor of Politics from 1997 to 1998. In 1998 she was elected as a trustee of Brandeis University in [Waltham, Massachusetts](#), she was reelected in 2004, and continued to hold the position until her death.

She was diagnosed with [osteoporosis](#) in 1996, having lost 3/4 inch in height and broken her hand and ankle. She changed her diet and lifestyle, and then her bone density stabilized. She spoke frequently about this experience, teaching or advocating a healthier lifestyle for women at risk of the disease. In 2004, she authored *I'm Not Slowing Down*, with Dr. Richard U. Levine ([M.D.](#)), which describes her own battle with osteoporosis and offers guidance to others with the disease.

In a review of *I'm Not Slowing Down* by Steve Labinski,^[7] the book was described as inspiring women to fight the disease with various tactics, such as:

- identifying factors that might increase vulnerability to osteoporosis including lack of [estrogen](#), [menopause](#), and usage of drugs related to [caffeine](#), [tobacco](#) and [alcohol](#).^[7]
- emphasizing the impact of [bone-density tests](#) and explaining the process using Ann Richards's own bone test as an example;
- supplying an extensive list of [calcium](#)-enriched foods which are beneficial, plus noting some foods to avoid;
- listing everyday tips to improve muscle condition and prevent bone injuries.^[7]

Reviewer Labinski also noted that in the mission to help women overcome osteoporosis, Ann Richards had created a useful, and often humorous, book that would inspire many.^[7]

In the fall of 2005, Ann Richards taught a class called "Women and Leadership" at the [University of Texas at Austin](#): twenty-one female students were selected for that class.

[\[edit\]](#) Awards

During her career, Ann Richards received many awards and honors including: Baylor Distinguished Alumna, the [Texas NAACP Presidential Award for Outstanding Contributions to Civil Rights](#), the [National Wildlife Federation Conservation Achievement Award](#), the Orden del Aguila Azteca (Order of the Aztec Eagle) presented by the government of Mexico, the Maurice N. Eisendrath Bearer of Light Award from the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the Texas Women's Hall of Fame honoree for Public Service.

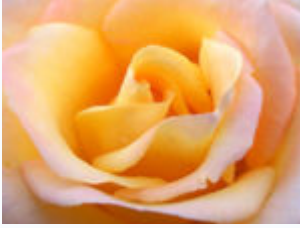
The Ann Richards Middle School in [La Joya, Texas](#) is named for Governor Richards.

On November 16, 2006, The City of Austin changed the official name of the [Congress Avenue Bridge](#) to the "Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge."

[\[edit\]](#) Memorial services



↻ The Capitol Rotunda in [Austin, Texas](#)^[11]



In the Texas Capitol Rotunda, many yellow roses were left in memory of Ann Richards.^[12]

Three services^[13] for Ann Richards were held:

- A short service occurred on Saturday, [September 16, 2006](#), in Austin, Texas, when former [President Bill Clinton](#) gave a [eulogy](#) after the casket of Ann Richards was carried into the Texas Capitol Rotunda, to lie in state for two days: with visits from 9:30-8 p.m. on Saturday and 9-8 p.m. on Sunday (September 17).
- A full memorial service^[14] occurred on Monday, September 18, 2006, from noon-1:30 p.m., in the Frank Erwin Special Events Center on the [University of Texas-Austin](#) campus, with [Ron Kirk](#), [Liz Smith](#), [Henry Cisneros](#), [New York Senator Hillary Clinton](#), and her granddaughter Lily Adams speaking. The event included a video tribute to Ann Richards, and the music included [blues](#), [jazz](#), processional, gospel choir, and operatic [arias](#).

Recorded blues and jazz songs were played for hours, including [Lyle Lovett](#) and [Willie Nelson](#)'s "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain,"^[14] as the 3,800 attendees arrived. A brass quintet played somber ensemble pieces as family and friends entered the arena, including a slow, instrumental "[Somewhere Over the Rainbow](#)," followed by gospel solo music from the [Wesley United Methodist Church](#) Intergenerational Choir. Operatic soprano [Jessye Norman](#) sang a rare version of [Ave Maria](#) and, later, other inspirational music.

Columnist Liz Smith related many stories about Ann Richards and said, "Ann Richards was the most alive person I have ever known: let's keep her that way, in our hearts."

The video tribute^[14] to Ann Richards included old photographs and recent video clips, introduced by the song "[Don't Fence Me In](#)" sung by [Willie Nelson](#). The scenes showed Ann Richards as a young [Travis County](#) commissioner and later as state treasurer and governor. One of the photographs showed Ann Richards holding the t-shirt labelled "A Woman's Place is in the Dome" (Texas Capitol Dome).

- A private burial service occurred early on Monday, [September 18, 2006](#), at the [Texas State Cemetery](#), attended by about 500 people, including family and close friends; singer [Nanci Griffith](#) performed "Across the Great Divide", and actress [Lily Tomlin](#) attended.^[14] The body of Ann Richards was laid to rest near the graves of several other Texas governors.

At noon on Monday, [September 18, 2006](#), all across Texas, church bells were rung in memory of Ann Richards.