

GH-R
1-9-2017

late Sen. Joann Orr, I should like to add something.

She was a doughty defender throughout her time in the General Assembly of the principle of separation of church and state, one of the bedrock principles of American life. Who can forget the day she appeared in the Senate wearing her Betsy Ross dress? She truly nailed her colors to the mast that day (as on many others), and did so in an unflinching spirit of good will and openness. When will we see her like again? — Yours sincerely, D.A. Smith, Grinnell

Letters

Sen. Joann Orr:
'When will we see her like again?'

To the editor:
To your excellent obituary of the

Joann Y. Orr, 93, of Grinnell, died on Tuesday, January 3, 2017, with friends by her side at Mayflower Community Health Care Center.

A celebration of her life will be held at 3:00 p.m. on Sunday, January 22 at the Carman Center at Mayflower in Grinnell. Friends are welcome to gather prior to the service beginning at 2:00 p.m. Interment will be at Hazelwood Cemetery, Grinnell, at a later date as Joann deeded her body to the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be designated to the League of Women Voters of Grinnell or Mayflower Human Needs Fund mailed in care of Schild Law Office, PO Box 268, Grinnell, Iowa 50112.

Joann Mathilda Yessler Orr was born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on February 10, 1923. She was the only child of Joseph and Gail (Gauby) Yessler.

Joann graduated from McKinley High School in 1941. She was president of her senior class, was active in musicals, and was a member of the Honor Society. Joann frequently sang at area churches, was active at St. Paul's Methodist Church, and was a Campfire Girl.

Joann attended Oberlin Conservatory of Music on a partial scholarship and graduated in 1946. In 1947, she visited two close Oberlin friends from Long Island, New York, and got a job at United Features Syndicate in New York City, working for her future brother-in-law who was sales manager. During this time, Joann sang with the Chorale led by Robert Shaw.

Joann married Carl Orr on November 26, 1947, on Long Island. They lived in Chicago, Cedar Rapids, and settled in Grinnell. Joann taught music in the Cedar Rapids and Chicago schools.

Carl and Joann bought Lang's Dairy in Grinnell in 1952 and operated it together for fourteen years until selling it to Anderson-Erickson Dairy.

During her years in Grinnell, Joann did yearly recitals and sang solos for many local churches. She greatly enjoyed singing with the United Church of Christ-Congregational choir and the College/Community chorus of Grinnell well into her 80s.

Joann was a passionate advocate for low-income people, women, and taxpayers. She was active in the League of Women Voters of Grinnell for many years, and served one term as president. She also spent time on the Iowa State Board of the League of Women Voters.

Joann was instrumental in both the formation of the Grinnell Human Rights Commission and in the placement of the Iowa Peace Institute in Grinnell. Other organizations she was committed to include the Poweshiek County Mental Health Center, the United Nations Association, Common Cause, the Iowa Civil Liberties Union, the Iowa Women's Political Caucus, the Lee County (Florida) League of Women Voters, the Farm Bureau, Poweshiek County Democratic Women's Club, and the Iowa Commission on Aging.

In 1969, the local State Senator resigned and in a special election to fill a vacancy, Joann was elected State Senator. She served 1969-1970 and was elected again in 1972 to serve through 1980. She headed the Education Committee for four years. Joann sponsored bills on mandatory immunization, solar energy, and school breakfast and supported the Iowa Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in 1977. Her most prominent bill took the tax off food and prescription drugs. Perhaps her most esteemed act was to pay her own way for all entertainment offered to senators by lobbyists and others. In 2016, Joann was inducted into the Poweshiek County Democratic Party Inaugural Hall of Fame. An archived collection of Joann's activities in the State Senate can be obtained at The University of Iowa Libraries website: <http://collguides.lib.uiowa.edu/?IWA0807>

After 1980, the Orrs spent winters in Cape Coral, Florida. They joined the Unitarian-Universalist Church of Fort Meyers, where Joann was active in the choir and social service efforts. She sang with the Fort Meyer Symphonic Master Singers for many years. Joann enjoyed gardening, reading, and taking walks with her dog, Peanut.

In 1998 their Grinnell home was opened to a newcomer to town who was working at Grinnell College, Valorie Moritz, as a tenant. Soon Valorie married Gary Larsson and they had Hans (15) and Thea (13). Valorie's mother and father moved to Grinnell, and her sister and brother-in-law and their three sons moved to Newton. They became like family to Joann.

Carl passed away in 2000.

In 2004 Joann was diagnosed with early Alzheimer's and diabetes. She continued her interest and engagement in politics and social improvement, including attending national conventions. In 2010, Joann moved to the Mayflower, where she enjoyed visiting friends, singing, and attending musical activities.

Joann is survived by two nieces and a nephew on Carl's side. She was preceded in death by her parents and her husband, Carl, in 2000.



OBITUARIES

GRINNELL RESIDENT

Joann Y. Orr, 93



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Mayflower Community Health Care Center.

A celebration of her life will be held at 3 p.m. on Sunday, January 22, 2017, in the Carman Center of the Mayflower Community, 600 Park Street in Grinnell. Friends are welcome to gather prior to the service beginning at 2 p.m. Interment will be at Hazelwood Cemetery in Grinnell at a later date as Joann deeded her body to the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be designated to the League of Women Voters of Grinnell or Mayflower Human Needs Fund, mailed in care of the Schild Law Office, P.O. Box 268, Grinnell, Iowa 50112. Memories and condolences may be shared on the Smith Funeral Home website at www.smithfh.com.

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Joann Yessler Orr

Feb. 10, 1923 - Jan 3, 2017

Joann Yessler Orr, 93, of Grinnell died Tuesday, Jan. 3 at Mayflower Community Health Care Center in Grinnell.

A celebration of her life will be held at 3:00 p.m. on Sunday, Jan. 22 in the Carmen Center of the Mayflower Community, 600 Park Street in Grinnell. Friends are welcome to gather prior to the service beginning at 2:00 p.m. Interment will be at Hazelwood Cemetery in Grinnell at a later date as Joann deeded her body to the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine.

Joann served as the Iowa State Senator for the 36th District representing Poweshiek County 1969-1970 and 1972-1980.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be designated to the League of Women Voters of Grinnell or Mayflower Community Human Needs Fund and mailed to P.O. Box 278, Grinnell, Iowa 50112.

Smith Funeral Home of Grinnell is in charge of funeral arrangements.

Record 1-19-2017

Joann Y. Orr

Joann Y. Orr, 93, of Grinnell, died Tuesday, Jan. 3, 2017, at Mayflower Community Health Care Center. Services are pending at this time.

GH-R 1-24-2017