

James B. Hunt, Jr. - A Democratic Hero

My wife and I first met Jim Hunt at a State Democratic Convention in the mid 1960s. We have had many associations with him in the intervening 40 plus years. For us there are many Democratic heroes, but first of all there is Jim Hunt.

We were with him when he was sworn in as State YDC President for 1968. We were on his committee for Lt. Gov. in 1972. We were county "keys" when he ran for Governor in 1977. As a military aide-de-camp, I had the pleasure of being one of two to lead Governor and Mrs. Hunt from the Mansion to his first term swearing-in in 1977. In the photograph, I was among those Gov. Hunt visited in the field at Fort Bragg on June 13, 1979.



What follows are examples from personal knowledge that indicate the traits and personal characteristics that make Jim Hunt a genuine Democratic Hero of the first order:

Hunt returned the Governor's office to Democratic hands in 1976 where it has remained 23 of the following 31 years. He engineered the constitutional amendment passage in 1977 allowing Governor's to run for reelection. While concentrating on educational issues, Gov. Hunt had a wide ranging agenda for improving the lives of all North Carolinians during his first two terms. I had the privilege of observing him up close as his vice-chair of State Goals & Policy Board, which he chaired. He was a human dynamo when it came to work. Once at a Southern Growth Policy Board meeting in Atlanta he had his delegation meet for early breakfast before the Board's daylong agenda began. When it was over, he had us meet again until nearly midnight. Same schedule for the following days. Diligence and hard work are traits of leaders, the stuff of heroes. Jim Hunt is also a man of strong convictions. He is a teetotaler. As a military aide, I attended a formal sit down dinner at the Mansion hosting the Japanese Consul General. When it came time for toasts, we stood very formally and did so with water to the U.S. President and Japanese Premier. Strong principles, strictly adhered to, are also attributes of a hero.

During Gov. Hunt's second two terms, I served as his Highway Safety Representative. He had taught me to use a seat belt when he was Lt. Governor. While campaigning, he got in my car one day. He would not let me drive off until we were both belted. I had never used mine before. He has often told the story of how, as a young man before seat belts were mandated, his life was saved when he was hit head on by a drunk driver. His father had had belts retrofitted. When your boss is a true believer in your program, the rest is easy. Click It or Ticket began in North Carolina on our watch and became a national program because of Jim Hunt. Gov. Hunt inspired dozens of other progressive programs and their North Carolina leaders during his 16 years in office. He still does. He is a true Democratic Hero.

Submitted by Joe M. Parker