

Remembering William H. Hudnut, III

An Interview with Senator Richard G. Lugar

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ABSTRACT: After the death of William H. Hudnut, III, on December 18, 2016, *Indiana Magazine of History* editor Eric Sandweiss interviewed Senator Richard Lugar about his memories of Hudnut. Bill Hudnut moved to Indianapolis in 1964 to become pastor of Second Presbyterian Church. In 1972, he began his political career with one term in the U.S. Congress and then became mayor of Indianapolis, serving from 1976 to 1992. Lugar reflected on his early political contacts with Hudnut, while Lugar was still Indianapolis's mayor, and then commented extensively on Hudnut's career as mayor, in particular his plans for developing the city's downtown area and transforming Indianapolis into the "amateur sports capital of the world."

KEYWORDS: William Hudnut III, Richard Lugar, Indianapolis, mayors, Republican Party, UNIGOV, Richard Nixon, Pan American Games, Indianapolis Colts

Former Indianapolis Mayor William H. Hudnut, III, died December 18, 2016, following one of Indiana's most notable careers in public service in recent decades.

Arriving in Indianapolis in 1964, Hudnut served as minister of Second Presbyterian Church until 1972, when he ran successfully as a Republican for a seat in Indiana's 11th Congressional District. Defeated in his reelection bid two years later, Hudnut next set his sights on the mayor's office. He

succeeded fellow Republican Richard Lugar in that job in 1976, then went on to serve four terms before stepping down in 1992. In recent decades, he resided in Chevy Chase, Maryland; he served as that city's mayor from 2004 to 2006, and he worked at the influential Urban Land Institute in Washington, D.C.

As Hudnut himself acknowledged in an IMH interview ("The Civil City: An Interview with William H. Hudnut, III," Volume 102, September 2006), his mark on the city was long lasting: in addition to attending to the daily business of running the city, he successfully crafted its image as a sports center and oversaw the rebuilding of its downtown. Yet as Hudnut knew, much of the groundwork for those changes had been laid by his predecessor, Dick Lugar, before the latter's long career in the U.S. Senate.

In January 2017, IMH editor Eric Sandweiss spoke with Lugar by phone about his memories of Bill Hudnut. Their conversation, transcribed below, has been lightly edited for clarity and length.



William Hudnut and Richard Lugar at press conference, c. January 1972.

The political careers of the two men intersected when Lugar was mayor of Indianapolis and Hudnut was running for a seat in Indiana's 11th Congressional District. Hudnut won and served a single term from 1973 to 1975, before succeeding Lugar as the city's mayor in 1976.

Courtesy, University of Indianapolis Digital Mayoral Archives

Eric Sandweiss: *Can you tell me when you first met William Hudnut? What do you remember of him from before you entered City Hall?*

Richard Lugar: I believe that the first time I met him was during some civic occasion. This is after he had accepted the ministership of Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis. I was pleased to meet him, but I do not recall the time or the event, or that we had any particular conversation. I just became aware that he was the minister of a very prominent church in Indianapolis. My family and I were members of St. Luke's United Methodist, which was down Meridian Street another mile-and-a-half or so, and we passed Second Presbyterian each Sunday and noted increasing numbers of cars in the parking lot. Surely, that period of eight years, or thereabouts, of Bill's ministry was very important for the growth and vitality of that church.

ES: *When you were on the school board or involved in other civic activities in the early 1960s, did you ever cross paths with him in relation to civic issues, political issues, social causes?*

RL: No, I do not recall visiting with Bill Hudnut during the time that I served on the school board. That was roughly 1964 to '67.

ES: *Let's talk about your mayoralty as it related to his presence in the city. Did you see him, or his parishioners, as people you needed to reach out to—or to appease, or to learn from, or anything once you stepped into the mayor's office?*

RL: No, I did not. I was certainly well aware of the size and scope of Second Presbyterian Church and that Bill was the minister, but I cannot recall any specific ways in which Second Presbyterian or Bill were active in the initial years of my mayoral service.

ES: *So how did you get to know him?*

RL: I think the first occasion that Bill came into my activities was when he was serving as chairman of a Ministers for Lugar committee in my reelection campaign in '71. I did not really meet with the ministers, but nevertheless I was pleased to know that they had taken that role and were advocating on behalf of my becoming mayor of Indianapolis. I think it's also been mentioned—maybe by Bill himself—that that race triggered his own interest in politics.

ES: *Something about your example seems to have politicized him, or made him aware that maybe he could get more done coming out from behind the pulpit.*

RL: I think that he had aspirations, obviously, to serve his congregation. But I think you probably stated correctly that he came to the conclusion that some of the basic issues in which he was involved could find solutions in public life, if you took the responsibility to carry the ball there.

ES: *Were you not aware of that ambition until he actually decided to run for Congress in 1972?*

RL: No, I was not aware, and I was pleased to learn that he was going to become a candidate, but we did not have any conversation or consultation before that time.

ES: *Was he your kind of candidate? Did you support him in the party primary?*

RL: Yes I did. I believed that this was a real breakthrough for the Republican Party in Marion County. In fairness, Andy Jacobs Jr. was, I think, a very able congressman and an excellent citizen and leader in our community. Nevertheless, I was very pleased not only as a Republican, but I had appreciated Bill's support of my work, so I was eager to reciprocate.

ES: *Once he went to Washington, then the two of you had more of a direct relationship, I imagine.*

RL: That really was not necessarily the case. I cannot remember that I was involved in lobbying Bill on any particular situation, nor did he ask for advice and counsel. I was certainly pleased with the work he was doing—followed it in the *Indianapolis Star* and others who've covered it, but I don't recall contact during the two years that he served in that term.

ES: *When he was then defeated by Jacobs two years later, did you sense some unfulfilled ambition that needed to be satisfied, or did you imagine that he would go back to preaching?*

RL: I really did not know whether he would be disappointed with such a short tenure in public life, nor did we have any conversation that would have given me insight into how he felt it.

ES: *So when do you remember first learning that he was going to seek the office of mayor?*

RL: I think that I probably learned about it through gossip or conversation among Republicans who came in around City Hall. I was aware of it when it was publicized in the *Star* or television stations of Indianapolis, but I did not have any advance warning or pleasure of hearing about it.

ES: It really wasn't the old-style case of the party grooming the next in line, or you selecting a successor? It really came through conventional party channels rather than from your office?

RL: Yes, that's correct. The problem that I faced then was that there was a two-term limit for the mayor of Indianapolis. So I knew that I was not going to be able to continue. There was never a question of organizing for another reelection campaign at that point. In fact, in 1974, when the Senate election for the reelection of Birch Bayh had come up, the party leaders came to me and told me that it was turning out to be a potentially disastrous year for the Republican Party in Indiana, quite apart from Indianapolis. The problems of President Nixon were leading to poll results that indicated total wipeout. So they mentioned that they had in fact done a poll in which they tried out several Republican candidates. They mentioned specifically, in addition to myself, Bill Ruckelshaus and I forget who else, but in any event we were far behind. I was eight points behind according to their poll. I think they knew that I was very much interested in running against Vance Hartke in his reelection campaign in '76. They also said, rather bluntly, "We know that you are eager to run against Hartke in '76, but don't anticipate strong party support if you don't help out the party when we really need you—and that is right now." So, to make the long story short, I decided to run for the Senate in 1974. This was during the seventh of my eight years as mayor. And it was a very tough race. When President Nixon resigned, Gerald Ford became the president. And I recall that suddenly the polls changed, and I was even with Bayh and the trend seemed to be accelerating and I thought, "My goodness, a miracle is going to happen," but not so. As it turned out, Ford pardoned Nixon about a month or two later and once again we went back down. I finally lost by, I think, only four points. And it turned out, at least in terms of my situation, we gained statewide recognition, a lot of momentum, and won easily two years later against Vance Hartke. But I was probably so preoccupied with the problems of administering the city and running two Senate campaigns that I didn't really note exactly what Bill Hudnut was planning to do until people told me that he wanted to be a candidate. So I said, "Well, that sounds like a good idea."

ES: Do you recall literally turning the keys over to him? Do you recall the succession between you and him, and whether you told him anything in particular about the job?

RL: I'm certain that we did have a conversation or two and I related to him, "These are where things stood in various ways." But I was also confident that he had a very good grasp about what was going on. I think that the mayoral race that he ran indicated that, so I was confident, having heard what he had to say, that he was on the right track and I simply wanted to offer him very strong encouragement.

ES: *What kind race did he run?*

RL: It was simply a very active race in which every day he was involved in meetings or rallies, or visits to various neighborhoods. It was sort of a fundamental campaign at the grassroots.

ES: *Once he came into office you must have been, I don't know, either nervous or proud. You had done so much in your terms. Did you see Indianapolis changing during his long mayoralty, or did you see him continuing the momentum that you had initiated with Unigov?*

RL: Well, I very clearly was pleased that he continued the momentum, but nevertheless he established some wonderful additional achievements during that time. It might be useful to summarize here some of the activities in which I'd been involved. I expressed these things to Bill, but I think he understood anyway, because he had served in the Congress and had been through two congressional campaigns. First, while I did not visit personally with Mayor Cavanagh of Detroit or Mayor Stokes of Cleveland, I certainly was reading what they had to say about the fact that affairs were crumbling in those large midwestern cities, largely, of course, in many cases, because of severe unemployment, racial strife—which was very, very tough—and the departure of large numbers of people from the cities, as they went beyond the tax base and were out of sight. In essence, a sort of a hollowing-out effect was occurring, and this was, of course, one of the fundamental reasons why from the beginning I felt that Unigov was going to be critical for the future of Indianapolis. That we would have, really, all the money on one table: one mayor, one council, we would have enough single-member districts that they would bring very good representation by black citizens as well as white citizens, and that momentum would bring attention from around the country. No other northern city was ever able to achieve Unigov, although many tried, because politically it was very difficult. The people who were leaving the city didn't want to be a part of this, and sometimes black citizens who thought they were going to take control did not really want to see anyone returning for that

matter. It was a very difficult stretch. I remember I looked at Nashville, Tennessee, and Jacksonville, Florida, as models of unified government that had worked for those communities in various ways, and during the time that I was mayor, I was asked often to give lectures at civic meetings. I remember in Des Moines, Iowa, or in Anchorage, Alaska, or really all over the place it's "How do you do it?" We believed voters would be interested and other good government groups, but politically it was just beyond the pale. All this is to say that when Bill came in, he knew the story at least of Unigov, of the political situation that had brought that about and of the importance of working with the legislature. When I was advocating Unigov, I travelled, that first year that I was mayor, all over the state, often taking advantage of Lincoln Day dinners or other affairs, to visit with members of the legislature, who were going to be really instrumental. Because every city is a creature of the state, and you cannot change the structure of the fundamentals without a legislative battle—and that means people voting from all over the state, not just Indianapolis. So, I was, of course, concerned about momentum, and I probably would have run for another term as mayor if it had not been mandated that I could not. I felt that the attention that we were receiving for Unigov was very important to continue.

If I can take a moment to add one more factor to this: at the time I was mayor, President Nixon came into office. In the year of 1969, as I recall, he did not head out of Washington at all for any public situation. There were a lot of Vietnam protests going on. But in 1970, apparently his advisors said, you really ought to make a trip, and so they decided Indianapolis is where they would go. This was, in part, because Mayor Lindsay of New York, who had been a Republican, had turned Democrat, and so Indianapolis was the largest city with a Republican mayor. And so they came out. It was quite a trip. I remember very well all of the precautions we made coming down Washington Street for the caravan. There were about twenty-thousand people as I recall and finally, they got to the City-County Building, which had a platform for the President and Mrs. Nixon. So he gave a short speech, and I could tell as he went up on the elevator to the 25th floor that he was—not shaken, but terribly relieved, because there were sharpshooters on the buildings all around. So, on the trip upstairs, he said, "Lugar, I want you to go with [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan to Brussels to the NATO Conference on Cities, and represent the United States." I said I'd be very pleased to do that. (In fact, Moynihan later became the senator of New York, at the same time I became a senator.) So I had the temerity while I was there [in Brussels] to

invite all the mayors or civic leaders of the world to come to Indianapolis the following year for an international conference on cities. About fifty different countries and locations came. So this established a different path also for Indianapolis as an international city. We had many groups—whether they were Croatians, Serbians, or whoever—that found that there were colleagues in the city that they had not met with before. The presence of these mayors stimulated breakfasts, lunches, and what have you that brought out all of the different nationalities and ethnicities in Indianapolis.

I mention this, because this type of activity led President Nixon to name me vice-chairman, as I recall, of an intergovernmental committee. [New York Governor] Nelson Rockefeller was the chairman of the group, and this led to many trips to Washington and a good bit of contact with the Nixon administration on behalf of what we were doing. For example, when we came to the year of federal revenue sharing, I found out about that at the intergovernmental commission meeting. I found out how much Indianapolis was going to get and committed that money to buy the area where the Market Square Arena was built. Then we built the arena, which kept the Pacers in town and elevated them to the National Basketball Association. So these were important events that I shared with Bill so that he knew the whole background, if he didn't already, and could build upon that.

ES: Did Hudnut change the city in ways that surprised you, or that you hadn't expected, in those years after you left the Circle City?

RL: I think he did a great number of things that I could not have anticipated and I was among those who applauded all the way. I think thirty major building projects occurred during his mayoralty in the downtown area. That's made a very conspicuous change. There were expansions at Monument Circle, Union Station, and the Indiana University School of Medicine complex, the Convention Center. It was during that period of time that Eli Lilly and American United Life committed to stay in Indianapolis, and that was very reassuring.

The second thing, after all the buildings, was that Indianapolis became the amateur sports capital of the world. (At least it was called that by Hoosiers, but I think by many others, too.) A lot of this was due to very strong advocacy by Bill Hudnut, including the Pan-American Games. I came out from Washington to see that, and it was truly remarkable. The 1982 National Sports Festival occurred there, and likewise there were events in the Velodrome and the Natatorium of national significance. He was also of course president of the National League of Cities. I had served in that capacity, and I was very pleased that Bill was recognized by the mayors of the country. He served on



Mayor Hudnut unloads boxes from Mayflower Moving trucks as the Colts arrive in Indianapolis, March 30, 1984.

Hudnut sought to turn Indianapolis into the amateur sports capital of the world, but among his most memorable accomplishments were overseeing construction of the Hoosier Dome and then negotiating with Colts owner Robert Irsay to bring the NFL team to Indianapolis in 1984.

Courtesy, University of Indianapolis Digital Mayoral Archives

the Board of Governors, I was told, for almost the entirety of his tenure as mayor; this led to his having a good comprehension of what was going on in all the cities of America and what he had to do to keep Indianapolis ahead. And then, of course, there was the tremendous event of the Baltimore Colts coming to Indianapolis in 1984. Many have written—correctly—that it was very courageous of him to finance and to build the Hoosier Dome before the Colts signed up. Then to negotiate with the Irsays to get the Colts to come. That's what is still remembered vividly by anyone who is interested in football—or interested in Indianapolis as a whole.

ES: Did you see a man who approached the duties of mayor any differently than you had? I guess we all have our own style, but did he see the job in fundamentally different ways than you, or did it feel like a continuity of commitment?

RL: I think, in terms of the business aspects—the advocacy for Indianapolis, the work with the National League of Cities, or the intergovernmental relations people in Washington—that we had similar styles, and that continuity was reassuring, really. Even more so, after the legislature passed a bill sometimes called “Hudnut Forever”—instead of a two-term limit, he could go on as long as he could get elected, and that was tremendously reassuring to many who were involved. Whether it was the sports situation, or the building business, or the convention business, they all, I think, valued this continuity of leadership. I admire Bill for doing some things that, I think, were unique at the time. There have been a number of pictures of him dressed up in various costumes in parades, cavorting about the city with a lot of fervor. People, I think, appreciated that. He had a good sense of humor. He didn’t take himself that seriously. He was able to enter into whatever might be the ethnic background or the cultural situations of the time.



Mayor Hudnut in St. Patrick’s Day costume, c. 1980

Known for his sense of humor, Bill Hudnut enjoyed dressing up for special occasions. The mayor in a leprechaun costume was a crowd-pleasing staple of the Indianapolis St. Patrick’s Day parade.

Courtesy, University of Indianapolis Digital Mayoral Archives

ES: *So he had a personal touch.*

RL: Very much so. Very vigorous in the parades and getting out to see the people.

ES: *What about after his final term as mayor? Did you see him after he moved to Washington? The two of you overlapped many years in D.C., did you not?*

RL: We did. To be truthful, I did not see Bill very often in D.C. I was aware, just reading about him, that he was out here, but our activities didn't cross. He was out in Chevy Chase and served on the council and ultimately was mayor, which was fun to hear, but only occasionally did I see him during that period of time.

ES: *What was your sense of his life there? Was he enjoying himself, getting things done, or do you think he missed being back in Indianapolis?*

RL: I had the impression that he was enjoying a lot of successful pursuits. I obtained some of those impressions from people who attended his funeral service out here in Washington. It was a very good turnout. The church was full. I was asked by [Hudnut's widow] Bev to be one of the speakers and we had dinner the night before; I sat between Bev and Chris, the son of Bev and Bill. I had, earlier on, enjoyed having Chris as an intern in our Senate office and he was a very talented guy, so we had an opportunity to catch up on subsequent events. It was really just occasional things of that variety that brought us together until the time that Bill ran into very tough health problems. So I went to visit him, and we had many more conversations, much more frequently, during that period of time. He continued to be very interested in Indianapolis and Chevy Chase, but likewise in the world in general. So usually, we talked over the telephone. I think I had maybe only three or four occasions to see him personally during this period of time.

On one of these occasions, which I think was important, we went through the RFRA [Religious Freedom Restoration Act] experience in Indiana; as you recall, a good number of civic leaders, including friends of mine like Jim Morris and Mark Miles at the Speedway, were protesting the effects of that act. The legislature met for at least some change in all of that, if not complete repeal. I got a call late one morning from Bill. He said, "You know, what we ought to do is bring five mayors together on a letter about this RFRA Act, and about the need for reform, and all that we know about the growth of Indianapolis." He said, "I made an initial draft, and I'd like to email it to you right away. Then, if you would edit it, we could talk about it and send it on to Steve Goldsmith, Bart Peterson, and Mayor

[Greg] Ballard.” All this occurred within a few hours of time. All five of us came together, and it was published in the *Indianapolis Star*, as I recall, in the next edition. It may or may not have had any impact, but the fact was that we had been together, all five mayors, at the fiftieth anniversary of the Greater Indianapolis Progress Committee and that was a beautiful evening. I was asked to speak first, and I commented how courageous it was for Bill and Bev to be there, given Bill’s health condition, but really how typical of his outreach, his idealism, his ministry, his faith. In any event, each of us went through many of the things which had occurred during our terms of office. And the amazing thing about all of this was that each one built upon what the previous one had done. In other words, recognized those achievements and celebrated those, but then added additional aspects—as opposed to a partisan situation in which somebody tries to repeal everything that’s happened in his predecessor’s time or says, “that was a terrible mistake.” Because of this whole five-mayor idea, the momentum of Unigov and then of Bill’s work, with all the buildings and the sports and so forth, continued right on. I think this is the basis for the optimism people have in Indianapolis about the future.

ES: It’s easier to see that coming true in Indianapolis, because it has had an unusually dual-party mayoralty, compared to other big cities. So you could say that Chicago or San Francisco builds on its legacy, but it’s because there is a single party and a single machine running it. In Indianapolis, you can see the ball bouncing from one side to the other even as the city continues in a straight line, more or less, in terms of policies and procedures.

RL: That’s right. It was the appreciation and the admiration that the mayors had for each other that is really, I think, impressive—it doesn’t happen in many cities. That you would have each one of these mayors extolling the virtues of their predecessors—or successors, as the case may be. In fairness to Mayor [Joe] Hogsett, while he is not one of the five, he is now our mayor, and I think he has been appreciative of what occurred before and is building upon that.

ES: As you know, Mayor Hudnut had prewritten his epitaph; he said so in several interviews, including one that he gave to the IMH years ago. He wanted it to say that “he built well and cared about people.” You have documented that amply in your conversation. Is there any line that you would add to the stone if it were up to you?

RL: I do have a line to add: “A man of faith who brought joy into all the lives he touched.”