

PAST CHAIR PROFILE: HAYDEN W. HEAD, SR.

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*The Oil, Gas and Energy Resources Law Council of the State Bar of Texas periodically prints articles profiling Past Chairs of the Council. Due to the hard work and dedication these Past Chairs provided both to the Council and to the practice of oil, gas and energy law in Texas, the Council felt that recognition of these Past Chairs was due. **The following Past Chair profile is of Hayden W. Head, Sr. (1915-1987), who was Chair of the Council during its 1954-1955 term.***

There are a precious few men and women alive today from what has become known as the “greatest generation,” those Americans who served their country during World War II and returned home to dedicate their lives to civic endeavors and improving their communities. One such leader was Hayden Wilson Head, Sr., a Corpus Christi-based attorney whose contributions to the lives of South Texans are still felt today.

Head was born in Sherman, Texas in 1915. His father was an attorney and his grandfather was a justice on a state appellate court. After graduating from Austin College in 1934, and the University of Texas School of Law in 1937, Head was licensed to practice law in Texas. However, like many of his generation, the United States’ entry into World War II was a call for Head to serve his country, and his legal career was put on hold.

From 1941 to 1945, Head served as an Army Air Corps fighter pilot in the European theater, attaining the rank of captain. A mere three weeks before Germany’s surrender, his aircraft was shot down over the Baltic Sea coast. Upon his capture by the enemy, he was confined to a Nazi prison camp. Head was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross with nine oak clusters as a result of his service.

Upon his return stateside and to the practice of law, Head was the founder of the Head, Kendrick & Head law firm in Corpus Christi, which eventually merged with another local firm to become Kleberg & Head, one of the largest and most respected law firms in South Texas. Head’s legal practice focused on representation of the burgeoning petrochemical industry in and around Corpus Christi, and his clients included DuPont, Celanese and other companies that were major employers and pillars of the Texas economy. His client list also included many of the leading independent oilmen of the day, such as Guy Warren and Maston Nixon, as well as major land owners such as Rand

Morgan. Head would often lobby Congress in Washington D.C., on issues important to Texas business, including deregulation of natural gas for Southern Minerals Corporation, a longtime client. Head’s firm represented the mineral lessors in *Samano v. Sun Oil Co.*, 621 S.W.2d 580 (Tex. 1981), in which the Supreme Court of Texas determined whether a sixty-day limitation period for drilling or reworking operations was applicable to the secondary term of a mineral lease. Head’s clients prevailed, with the Court finding that the mineral leases expired because the lessees failed to produce, drill, or re-work their existing operations within 60 days from the date production stopped.

Along with his successful law practice, Head threw himself into improving his South Texas community. While he never held elected office, Head served in numerous leadership roles, including service for the Nueces River Authority, Spohn Hospital, the American Red Cross, Corpus Christi’s Airport Advisory Commission, the Area Development Committee, and the Coastal Bend Council of Governments. It was through these organizations that Head was able to champion such projects as the establishment of Naval Station Ingleside, the deepening of the ship channel (fostering the growth of the Port of Corpus Christi), and the building of Choke Canyon Reservoir. Head was also a director of the First City Bank in Corpus Christi, chairing its trust committee.

Head had a keen interest in local government and was of the firm opinion that the “commission municipal” format of government should be replaced by the “council-manager” system that is common today. He formed a slate of candidates to run against a slate of commissioners allegedly tied to George Parr’s political machine, and Head’s slate prevailed based on a council-manager platform. Out of this triumph came the Better Government League, a coalition of business leaders led by Head that backed candidates for local office from the 1940’s through the 1970’s.

Politically, Head leaned towards conservative viewpoints, which eventually caused him to move from the conservative wing of the Democratic Party to the Republican Party. Head was a longtime supporter of U.S. Senator John Tower, who was quoted as saying “I’ve never heard a disparaging word about Hayden Head from anybody, and that’s pretty rare in this business.” Head was

known as a political kingmaker in Corpus Christi, so much so that whenever a local political candidate stated that he had not yet decided whether to run for office, it was often construed as “Hayden Head hasn’t returned my telephone call.” His fundraising prowess made his law office a necessary stop for any aspiring political candidate for local, state or federal office, with Head reportedly able to raise as much as \$50,000 (in 1970’s dollars!) in a single luncheon by tapping his formidable network.

A dedicated alumnus of the University of Texas School of Law, Head led the effort to establish 32 endowed teaching chairs of at least \$1 million each at his alma mater. As Chairman of the University of Texas Development Board from 1983 to 1985, Head raised funds to endow chairs in science and engineering, and for the purchase of the Pforzheimer Library of English Literature. Head was named a Distinguished Alumnus of the University of Texas, and was awarded a Presidential Citation by the school, both in 1987. After Head’s death, a large group of his friends and colleagues established the Hayden W. Head Memorial Endowments, which created two endowed chairs valued at \$1.25 million each, one being the Hayden W. Head Regents Chair for Faculty Excellence in the School of Law, and the other the Hayden W. Head Regents Chair in the Plan II Honors Program.

When not practicing law, Head and his wife, Annie Blake Morgan Head, would spend time at their ranch in Zavala County near Crystal City. It was in July of 1987, while flying his twin-engine Cessna 421, he crashed into a hangar on his ranch and the plane caught fire. A ranch foreman ran to pull Head and his wife from the burning wreckage, but, true to form, Head insisted that his wife be removed first and she survived. Head perished in the crash at 72 years of age.

Not surprisingly, the example of government service and leadership set by Head carried over to the next generation of his family. His son, Hayden W. Head, Jr., served in the United States Navy, practiced law in the family firm, and was appointed in 1981 by President Ronald Reagan to the United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas. Judge Head served as Chief Judge for the Southern District of Texas from 2003 until taking senior status in

2009. Judge Head stated that his father “was, first and foremost, an extremely fine and capable lawyer, one of the finest lawyers this state has ever produced. I mean that on a client basis, doing work for the clients he represented.”

The fruits of Head’s leadership and determination can still be seen in the Corpus Christi area today. A tireless advocate for greater access to air travel for South Texans, the main terminal at Corpus Christi International Airport is named in his honor. The Port of Corpus Christi is the largest port in the United States based on revenue tonnage, boasts a 45-foot deep channel, and accounted for 58% of the nation’s crude oil exports in 2021. Choke Canyon Reservoir provides a critical source of drinking water for Corpus Christi.

What has been missing since Head’s passing is the kind of leadership that he provided. One politically active Corpus Christi attorney stated that “we’ve not seen his kind since his departure. There were very few people who could pick up the phone and call the leading citizens, across the board, and call a meeting to discuss something important to our community. He was one of those few. He didn’t pull any punches; people knew where he stood. Since his death, there has been a total absence of the kind of leadership and responsibility that he was known for.”

Indeed, the world today could use a few more leaders like Hayden W. Head, Sr.

