

# [***Joe Brennan, Democratic former governor of Maine and US congressman, dies at 89***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BRC-3BT1-JC5B-G0H8-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

PORTLAND, Maine — Democrat Joseph E. Brennan, whose hardscrabble childhood shaped his working-class views in a political career that included two terms as Maine's governor and two terms in the U.S. House, died Friday evening at his home in Portland. He was 89.

Brennan died with his wife at his side a few blocks from the third-floor tenement housing on Munjoy Hill where his Irish immigrant parents raised a family of eight children, Frank O'Hara, a longtime friend, said Saturday.

Brennan's experience in that neighborhood, a working-class melting pot, stayed with him when he entered ***politics*** with a campaign for the Maine Legislature at age 29, O'Hara said.

An Army veteran, Brennan attended Boston College under the GI Bill and graduated from the University of Maine Law School. He served as a county district attorney and state attorney general, in addition to state lawmaker, governor and congressman.

Former Democratic Gov. Joe Baldacci called Brennan “a friend, a mentor and a dedicated servant.”

“He was a man of the highest integrity, who led Maine through difficult times. He believed that he had an obligation to make things better, and he lived that ideal through his commitment to public education and improving the state’s economy,” Baldacci said.

As attorney general, Brennan participated in negotiations with Wabanaki tribes and the federal government on what became the Maine Indian Land Claims Settlement Act of 1980, which was signed by President Jimmy Carter when Brennan was governor.

Also as governor, Brennan launched education reforms, pressed for tough highway safety measures and helped establish the Finance Authority of Maine.

Current Gov. Janet Mills, a fellow Democrat who was appointed by Brennan in 1980 as the first woman to serve as district attorney, said her selection despite objections from a number of men at the time put her on a path to become Maine’s first female governor.

“Gov. Brennan demonstrated for me and others that ***politics*** is about building relationships, that public service is not about enriching yourself but about enriching the lives of others, and that the most important relationship is the one we have with the people we serve,” she said.

Another key appointment by Brennan was tapping George Mitchell, a federal judge, in 1980 to fill the seat vacated by Democratic U.S. Sen. Edmund Muskie, who resigned to become secretary of state. Mitchell went on to become majority leader in the Senate.

“His family and the people of Maine have lost a great man, and I have lost a dear friend,” said Mitchell, who called Brennan “a superb leader and lawyer who understood the importance of a firm and fair system of justice in our democracy.”

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