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**For Immediate Release**

Contact: [Paul Levikow](#)  
(619) 531-3536

# **Presidential Advisor, Social and Political Activist Midge Costanza Dies**

On March 23, 2010, Margaret “Midge” Costanza died in San Diego, California after a battle with cancer. Midge was a tireless advocate and impassioned champion for equality, justice and human rights. She was the first woman to hold the office of Assistant to the President of the United States, when President Jimmy Carter appointed her to the position of Assistant to the President for Public Liaison in 1977.

Midge Costanza was born November 28, 1932, in LeRoy, New York, to Philip Joseph Costanza and Concetta (Granata) Costanza. When she was five years old, Midge’s family moved to Rochester, New York where she attended Public School #33 and graduated from East High School in 1950. She received an honorary LLD from Framingham State College. For 26 years, Midge worked for John J. Petrossi, a Rochester construction and real estate developer. At the same time, she was active in the Democratic Party, ultimately serving as a member of the Democratic National Committee. Midge entered politics in 1959 as an Executive Committee Member of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Ward of Rochester. In 1964, she managed the senatorial campaign in Monroe County for Sen. Robert Kennedy.

In 1973, Midge was elected to the Rochester City Council, receiving the highest number of votes of any council member. She was the first woman elected to the Rochester City Council and was appointed Vice Mayor.

Midge first met Jimmy Carter in 1974 when he traveled to Rochester to help in her campaign for U.S. Congress. Although she narrowly lost that race, she made a great friend in Carter. When Carter announced his candidacy for president, Midge began her work as co-chairperson of his New York State campaign.

Midge’s straight-forwardness and quick wit made her a popular speaker, and Carter admired that skill. He asked her to second his nomination at the 1976 Democratic National Convention. Carter later appointed Midge to the post of Assistant to the President for Public Liaison. For the first 20 months of the Carter Administration, she received national media attention as Carter's outspoken and committed "Window on America."

“The White House should be the President’s window to the nation,” Midge said. “(It should be) a place where the people can voice what they want, what they feel and what they need.”

Midge served as a link between the President and a wide range of groups who previously had limited access to the White House, including women, youth, seniors, minorities, gays and lesbians, and the disabled. She was particularly active in fighting for women's equality, advocating for many issues, including the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, for the protection of women's reproductive rights, and for the appointment of more women to high office.

After leaving the White House, Midge moved to California, where she remained active in political causes and spoke at events across the country. In Los Angeles, she worked on the television shows *America* and *America Talks Back* and she managed Shirley MacLaine's "Higher Self" seminars.

Midge moved to San Diego in 1990, where she became an active and vital member of the community, working on the campaigns of Congresswoman Lynn Schenk, Sen. Barbara Boxer, and Kathleen Brown. She served on the Board of Directors of San Diego National Bank and co-taught classes at San Diego State University. From 2000 to 2003, she was Special Assistant to California Governor Gray Davis, serving as a liaison to the Governor for women's groups and as a speaker for him throughout California.

In 2005, she joined the office of San Diego County District Attorney Bonnie M. Dumanis as a Public Affairs Officer. She was assigned to the Communications and Community Relations Division with an emphasis on the prevention of elder abuse. She organized the office's Consumer Protection Days, Citizens Academies and Women's Advisory Council.

Among her many honors, the City of San Diego named October 7, 2008 as "Midge Costanza Day." She also received a 2008 "Women Who Mean Business" Award by the San Diego Business Journal, and was named "Outstanding Citizen of the Year 2009."

In 2003, Midge formed the Midge Costanza Institute for the Study of Politics and Public Policy, affiliated with the Women's Studies Department at San Diego State University. Through the Institute, Midge would speak frequently to young people about the importance of participation in government and politics. Midge trained candidates to run for political office regardless of party affiliation. The Institute will continue the work of organizing and digitizing her collection of historical archival documents to be used for her lifelong work of motivating young people in the political process.

Midge is survived by her brother, Anthony Costanza and wife Susan; niece Lauren Kent and husband Scott; niece Erin Costanza; nephew Donald Steiman and wife Diane; grand nieces Erica Steiman and Jessica Steiman; nephew Damien Costanza and wife Deana; niece Julie Bausch and husband Patrick; grand niece Leah Bausch and grand nephew Alexander Bausch; and a large local and national community of friends and collaborators.

A memorial service in San Diego will be held in April on a date that is yet to be determined. A private family service will be conducted in Rochester, New York.

In lieu of flowers, the family has requested that donations be made to the Midge Costanza Institute for Politics and Public Policy. Checks can be made out to the "Midge Costanza Institute," P.O. Box 15523, San Diego, CA 92175.

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