

Gay community mourns Ford death

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Gay activists have joined tributes to the late Gerald Ford who died aged 93 this week,

Lobby group the Log Cabin Republicans, praised Ford's recognition of gay rights while the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force described the former President as an 'advocate for individual rights.'

Log Cabin President Patrick Sammon sent condolences to Betty Ford and their entire family, he said: "President Ford was a great man called to lead our country during one of its most difficult hours, he will be remembered for helping to heal a wounded nation and for acting as a force for tolerance and common sense American values."

In 2001, President Ford joined the advisory board of the Republican Unity Coalition, a gay-straight alliance which was formed to advocate for gay and lesbian issues within the Republican Party. Ford's decision to join that board marked the first time a past or current US president had joined an organisation advocating for gay equality.

Also in 2001, Ford told *Detroit News* columnist Deb Price, "I have always believed in an inclusive policy in welcoming gays and others into the [Republican] party." He went on to say that same-sex couples should receive the same economic benefits as married couples, such as Social Security and tax deductions. "I don't see why they shouldn't. I think that's a proper goal," Ford said at the time.

"I think they ought to be treated equally. Period."

He also expressed support for a federal law banning workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation, saying "That is a step in the right direction. I have a longstanding record in favour of legislation to do away with discrimination."

In a 1999 appearance on *CNN's Larry King Live*, President Ford said, "The Republican Party ought to be the party of the middle, not the party of the extreme right wing."

Mr Sammon added, "President Ford recognised that all Americans deserve to be treated with dignity and fairness, throughout his presidency, President Ford served with integrity as a leader for all Americans."

Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, described Ford as a 'good, decent and principled leader.'

He said: "We mourn the death of former President Gerald R. Ford, a good, decent and principled leader. Because he espoused true conservative values, he consistently advocated for the rights of individuals and condemned those who sought to impose conformity of thought and behaviour. These beliefs led him to support women's rights and to publicly support federal legislation to prohibit anti-gay discrimination in employment.

"In recent years, he decried the growing coarseness of American politics and called for bipartisan solutions to our nation's problems, something he always sought

while in office.

"We express our condolences to Mrs Ford, his children and other members of his family and to all who knew and loved him."