After Kathleen Blanco’s death, Savoie speaks on impact, legacy

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Louisiana’s first female governor Kathleen Blanco lived her life selflessly. Originally from Acadiana, Gov. Blanco was a proud Ragin’ Cajun alumna and a member of the Kappa Delta sorority. The University of Louisiana at Lafayette would become home for Blanco during her years and eventually become the place where part of her legacy will live.

“Gov. Blanco’s husband Raymond Blanco worked as the assistant coach here at UL Lafayette from 1963-1969 and continued his time after as the dean of men, and he would later become the vice president of student affairs. Many on-campus still refer to Raymond Blanco affectionately by the name of 'Coach.'”

“They were always on campus,” Savoie said. “And suddenly all their kids grew up on campus.”

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“Those were very difficult, hard lifts. She also provided teacher pay raises and fully funded higher education,” Savoie said.

Gov. Blanco, who spoke on the center last year at the UL Lafayette Legacy Gala, said she was unafraid of what may be found in the boxes of papers, and she noted that, while other governors may seek to shred a few sensitive documents, she wanted transparency.

Trailblazing acts like these were not unheard of in Blanco’s life. She served as the first woman elected to state representative from Lafayette and the first woman to serve on the Louisiana Public Service Commission, which she would later become the first chairwoman of. During her first term as a state representative, she was one of only two women in either house of the legislature.

“Just being the first woman to do so many different things, that’s significant,” Savoie said. “The other big lesson (Blanco taught) is that you can use political influence to improve people’s lives.”

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Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco delivers her remarks at The Legacy Gala honoring her career and the launch of the Kathleen Babineaux Blanco Public Policy Center.

“She started the Go Grant,” Savoie said, “and did it without a lot of fanfare. It’s a huge deal, and it’s important. She did it because it was just the right thing to do.”

Her impression, Savoie said, would last a lifetime.

“When I was a student here, I was president of my fraternity,” Savoie said. “We had just been reinstated. After about a week, some knucklehead did something, and we got thrown off campus again, and I had worked for a year to get us back on. I met with the person who was the fraternity adviser, and he said the only person who can reinstate the fraternity is Dean Blanco. I said, ‘Well can I go talk to him, please?’

Even though it was late, Savoie drove over to their home to help his fraternity.

“It was past midnight when I knocked on the door, and a sweet lady opened it,” Savoie said. “She was holding a baby. I told her what I was there for and she invited me in, let me sit down in the living room and got me a glass of water. Then went and woke him up and told him he had to talk to me.”

Savoie said that meeting spoke to Blanco’s absolute humanity as a person who only sought to help in a time of need.

“She knew that I was in trouble, and I needed help. She was going to help me get that help.”

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