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Ariz. officials fondly recall ex-president

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Arizona officials reacted Tuesday night to the death of former President Gerald Ford with sadness for the loss and admiration for the man.

U.S. Rep. Jeff Flake said that despite the years separating their tenure in Washington, he met the former president several times.

"Ford will best be remembered as a good and decent man at a time when this country desperately needed a good and decent man," said the Arizona Republican, who went to Congress in 1995, nearly 20 years after Ford had left the White House.

Flake recalled meeting the former president in the cloakroom of the House of Representatives. A longtime member of the House as a representative from Michigan, Ford would return to visit the ladies who staffed the cloakroom, Flake said.

"He was a man of the House," he said, noting his 24 years of service. "He was a minority leader there, and he was remembered fondly."

Gov. Janet Napolitano is "deeply saddened" by the news, a spokeswoman said. "His presence and effect on American history will be felt for a long time," Jeanine L'Ecuyer said.

Ford had several ties to Arizona, including:

- More than 30 years ago, Mexican President Luis Echeverria met with President Ford in a border summit hosted by Ford's friend and supporter, Arizona Gov. Jack Williams. They met at Rio Rico in southern Arizona.

- Barry Goldwater dismayed party conservatives in 1976 when he sided with Ford over Ronald Reagan.

- Ford, former Vice President Walter Mondale and former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger addressed social and political issues in a forum in 1987 in Sun City West.

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