

Ralph Denton

September 8, 1925—

Appointed 4/8/63 by Governor Grant Sawyer

Ralph Denton was born in Caliente, Nevada to parents who stressed the importance of equality and tolerance. Denton has dedicated his life in southern Nevada to promoting civil rights and other causes.

Denton's mother, Hazel Baker, was an educator, and served as a Nevada State Assemblywoman. His father, Floyd, was the undersheriff of Lincoln County. Ralph Denton grew up in a small town, Caliente. He worked shining shoes at the local barbershop where he was exposed to lawyers from Las Vegas. Seeing the lawyers in suits prompted Denton to pursue law. He graduated from Lincoln County High School and attended the University of Utah before enlisting in the US Army in 1943. Denton went to law school under the patronage of Nevada Senator Pat McCarran and graduated from American University in 1951.



After earning his law degree, Denton returned to Nevada where he worked as the deputy district attorney in Elko under Grant Sawyer. In 1955, Denton moved to Boulder City and opened his own law firm. When his friend Grant Sawyer ran for governor, Denton worked as his campaign manager. He maintained his law office in Las Vegas, often taking referrals from the ACLU and other civil rights cases.

In April 1963, Governor Grant Sawyer appointed Denton to the Clark County Commission to succeed Arthur Olsen. Denton was often at odds with casino owners and developers as he championed the working class. Denton was known for his dedication to fairness and commitment to honesty and integrity.

Denton sought a seat in the US House of Representative in 1964, running against Walter S. Baring. He lost the election, but ran against Baring again in 1966. Denton lost the second race. Although he won Las Vegas, the rural parts of the state continued to support Baring. In 1974, Denton ran for governor with the promise to restore public confidence. He dropped out of the race when Governor Mike O'Callaghan announced he would seek another term.

In 1976, Denton worked as the Boulder City Attorney. He continues to practice law in Las Vegas also. The University of Nevada Oral History program published an oral history of Denton's life entitled, A Liberal Conscience. That same year, his daughter, Sally Denton, coauthored a book on Las Vegas history called The Money and the Power.

The commitment to equality and tolerance that Ralph Denton's parents instilled in him defined his career. He helped transform southern Nevada from a segregated community to one of opportunity for all its residents.