

## **Biographical Note George Nigh**

George Patterson Nigh, Oklahoma's twenty-second Governor, was born in McAlester on June 9, 1927, son of Wilbur R. and Irene Crockett Nigh. Nigh attended public schools in McAlester and Eastern Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College at Wilburton. From June 1945 through September 1946, he served in the U.S. Navy. Nigh was granted a Bachelor of Arts degree from East Central State College at Ada in 1950 when also elected to the House of Representatives on the Democratic ticket. At that time, the legislature met every other year. Nigh taught history at McAlester High School from 1952 to 1958, taking a leave of absence when the legislature convened. Nigh served in the House of Representatives for three terms, from the twenty-third through the twenty-sixth legislatures.

Nigh was elected Lieutenant Governor, the youngest in the state's history, in 1958, and worked to increase state tourism. In 1963, Nigh became the seventeenth Governor of Oklahoma, filling an unexpired nine-day term following the resignation of Governor J. Howard Edmondson. During those nine days, Nigh appointed Edmondson to the United States Senate seat upon the death of Robert S. Kerr. Also, Nigh signed a contract with the federal government for funds to build Fountainhead and Arrowhead state lodges. After his term, Nigh worked for the United States Jaycees. He was elected Lieutenant Governor again in 1966, 1970, and 1974.

On November 7, 1978, Nigh was elected Governor, but was sworn in January 3, 1979. Nigh served five days to fill an unexpired term following the resignation of Governor David Boren. Nigh began his regular term as twenty-second Governor of Oklahoma on January 8, 1979. During his first term, Nigh pushed through seventeen tax

cuts, extended educational television statewide, and built roads. In his first term, the funds were allocated for the re-construction Centennial Expressway and the Lake Hefner Parkway in Oklahoma City. Despite the major tax reduction, the level of services in state government increased. Nigh was re-elected in 1982; the first Oklahoma Governor to win reelection to a second consecutive term. He had become one of the most popular political figures and carried all seventy-seven counties. Governor Nigh chaired the National Conference of Lieutenant Governors, co-chaired the Interstate Oil Compact Commission, served on the Executive Committee of the Southern States Energy Board, and chaired the Southern Growth Polices Board. He also served as president of the Council of State Governments. Nigh promoted a “good guy” image with his white hat political trademark, and served until 1987.

Nigh joined the faculty at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond. He began a program to provide trained personnel for positions in state government. Nigh served as president of the university, a position from which he retired in 1997. Nigh is credited with starting a building boom and bringing international attention to the university. Nigh was awarded the Jim Thorpe Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2000, he wrote his autobiography, "Good Guys Wear White Hats: The Life of George Nigh." Nigh holds the state record for serving four different terms as Governor.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

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