

## Investor's Business Daily Revolutionary Hero

Tuesday April 25

Leadership: This year marks the 10th anniversary of welfare reform, one of the conservative movement's top domestic achievements. The indispensable man was Robert B. Carleson, who died last week in Washington.

Actual reform of the New Deal centerpiece took years of academic research, most of it verifying the conservative insight that welfare increased dependency while it decreased moral autonomy. Carleson, a thoughtful public servant, didn't need the academics to teach him human nature.

Over the past decade welfare rolls nationwide plummeted, even in liberal New York City. The U.S. economy experienced its most vibrant years as millions of citizens ended their dependency on the state. No coincidence.

The political historians, going back a third of a century, will find Carleson at the center of welfare reform. As Ronald Reagan entered his second term as California's governor with an unspectacular record, he turned his attention to the state's hemorrhaging welfare spending.

Golden State taxpayers were spending \$2.1 billion on welfare, the nation's biggest commitment. Reagan turned to Carleson to do something. Carleson's task force proposed cutting a multiplicity of automatic payouts.

Reagan's problem: a Democrat-controlled legislature with a welfarist constituency. Carleson quietly found attractive ways for the Democratic leadership to cooperate. The Welfare Reform Act of 1971 passed, starting a reversal that saw 300,000 fewer welfare clients by decade's end.

When state finance director Casper Weinberger joined the Nixon administration as secretary of health, education and welfare, he picked Carleson to serve as the nation's welfare commissioner. Carleson pitched the California model to the other 49 states. He even derailed a Democrat-inspired Nixon plan to enlarge the welfare state.

Later, in the Reagan White House, he found more ways to curb welfare spending. But his grandest accomplishment awaited the GOP congressional victory in 1994. Carleson promoted his idea of fully scrapping the New Deal program, replacing it with block grants to the states, where legislators would slash entitlements.

Now the delicious part: Bill Clinton vetoed the plan twice. Republican Bob Dole wanted to leave

it that way in order to beat Clinton over the head in the 1996 presidential race. But Carleson pushed congressional leaders to try a third time, calculating that Clinton this time would sign to deprive Dole of the issue.

Carleson, putting principle above partisanship, proved even cleverer than the ever-crafty Clinton. Naturally Reagan was drawn to a man who could teach party pragmatists how to get things done.

Today Reagan's attorney general Edwin Meese will eulogize Carleson in the rotunda of the Ronald Reagan International Trade Center in Washington. Gathered Reagan alumni will remember this above all: Without California welfare reform 35 years ago, Reagan almost certainly would not have been a presidential contender.