

**Russell A. Rourke**

December 8, 1985–April 7, 1986



**R**USSELL A. ROURKE was born on December 30, 1931, in New York City. He graduated with honors from the University of Maryland in 1953 with a bachelor of arts degree and earned a law degree from Georgetown University in 1959. He was associated with the law firm of Keogh, Carey and Costello in Washington, D.C., before beginning his government career in 1960. His first government position was as administrative assistant to Congressman John R. Pillion (R.-New York); and in 1965 he became administrative assistant to Congressman Henry P. Smith III (R.-New York).

In 1974 Rourke was the Republican-Conservative nominee for Congress from the 36th District of New York. After that unsuccessful candidacy, he became deputy to presidential counselor John O. Marsh, Jr. Appointment as special assistant to President Gerald R. Ford followed in 1976. His principal responsibilities included acting as legislative liaison between the White House and Congress and regular participation in policy and program meetings with the president, members of the Cabinet, and the White House senior staff. Rourke also undertook special projects assigned by President Ford, and among his final assignments was the White House transition team in 1977.

Rourke served as the administrative assistant to Congressman Harold S. Sawyer (R.-Michigan) before being sworn in as assistant secretary of defense for legislative affairs in May 1981. In the latter capacity, Rourke was the principal adviser to Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger, regarding congressional consideration of the department's legislative program; maintaining direct liaison with the Congress, the executive office of the president, and other government agencies on defense legislative matters; and overseeing the military department congressional activities on defense matters. He was awarded the Department of Defense Distinguished Public Service Medal by Secretary Weinberger for his superb performance as assistant secretary of defense for legislative affairs.

In July 1985 Rourke retired as a colonel from the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve after thirty-two years of service. Before joining the Reserve, he had enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1953 and completed active duty as a first lieutenant after serving a tour of duty in Korea. From 1972 to 1974 he served as the commanding officer of Marine Air Control Squadron 24, Quantico, Virginia. His decorations included the Legion of Merit.

During his short tenure as secretary of the Air Force, Rourke observed that the Air Force had done a superb job over the years in recruiting, training, and retaining high-quality people, and that it would continue to work to improve their quality of life. He noted that the Air Force had steadily expanded opportunities for women and that 17 percent of enlisted recruits were women. He pointed out that the Soviet threat remained constant and that Soviet efforts at developing advanced systems continued and covered the complete range of technological weaponry required to modernize all their forces. He foresaw that pressures for reduced deficits and balanced budgets would affect U.S. defense programs, and he predicted that the Air Force could be caught “in the squeeze of lower budget levels and increasing costs to operate and maintain the systems we have been buying over the past five years. That could mean the threat of less funding for modernization programs at the very time we need most to continue them.” Rourke further predicted that deficit spending would characterize the Air Force budgets for the foreseeable future.

Rourke left office in April 1986, citing personal reasons. He is married to Judith Anne Muller of New York City. They have three children.