



Lurleen Burns Wallace

1967-1968

Lurleen Burns Wallace was born on September 19, 1926, in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, to Henry and Estelle Burroughs Burns. She worked in a Tuscaloosa dime store where she met George C. Wallace. Sixteen-year-old Lurleen married George on May 22, 1943, and devoted herself to being a housewife and mother over the next twenty years. When her husband was elected governor in 1963, she assumed the duties of first lady. Mrs. Wallace opened the first floor of the governor's mansion to tourists seven days a week and refused to serve alcoholic beverages at executive mansion functions.

In 1966, after failing to get the legislature to amend the constitution to allow governors to serve consecutive terms, George announced the candidacy of his wife Lurleen for governor. The couple admitted frankly that if Lurleen was elected, George would continue to make the administrative policies and decisions. Mrs. Wallace won the May Democratic primary with 54 percent of the vote which assured her election in November.

Lurleen was inaugurated on January 16, 1967, and refused to have the customary inaugural ball out of respect to Alabamians serving in Vietnam. Although she continued to carry out George's policies regarding segregation, Mrs. Wallace did not remain in her husband's shadow completely. She initiated a few programs of her own. Most notable was her successful campaign to increase funding for the state's mental hospitals.

The day after her inauguration, Governor Wallace issued an executive order to the state treasurer requiring that state funds be deposited only in banks that would pay 2 percent annual interest. This order resulted in a court case that was resolved when Lurleen agreed to obtain the change legislatively. A bill requiring banks to pay interest on state deposits was signed into law in June 1967. During her administration, a \$160 million road bond bill was also passed, as was a program to develop Alabama's parks and historic sites.

In March 1967, a federal court ordered that Alabama's public schools must begin desegregation that fall. Lurleen responded with a televised speech to the state legislature on March 31. In that speech she asked the legislature for the power to seize all state schools and place them under police power. Although clearly a policy from George, the speech was delivered by Mrs. Wallace with "force and faultless execution." (Stewart, p. 206). Lurleen, Governor Lester Maddox of Georgia and Governor Paul Johnson of Mississippi called a meeting of twelve southern governors to draft a plan to fight the court order. In addition to the meeting's organizers only one other southern governor attended, Governor John McKeithen of Louisiana. McKeithen and Maddox, however, stated they would not disobey the court order. The hand of her husband was again displayed in May when Lurleen recommended that state funds be withheld from Tuskegee Institute. Mrs. Wallace also opposed an Office of Economic Opportunity antipoverty grant to establish a farm cooperative for blacks in Lowndes County.

In June 1967 Mrs. Wallace was hospitalized in Houston, Texas, where doctors discovered the cancer for

which she had been treated in 1966 had returned. Over the next few months she courageously endured numerous operations and radiation treatment. Her last public appearance was at the Blue-Gray football game in January 1968 with her husband. Mrs. Wallace died in her sleep on May 7, 1968. In addition to George, she was survived by their four children: Bobbi Jo Parsons, Peggy Sue, George, Jr., and Janie Lee. Lieutenant Governor Albert P. Brewer assumed the governorship at her death.

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October 24, 1966

The Joint Legislative Committee
Alabama's Pensions and Senior Citizens Organization
837 South Hull Street
Montgomery, Alabama

Dear Legislative Committee:

I have always looked upon the aged citizens of Alabama with love and compassion. It has long been my fervent prayer that they should be able to live a decent and secure life throughout the years following retirement. When elected your Governor, I pledge the following:

I shall set a goal of \$100 per month for our aged citizens. It is my conviction that the State of Alabama has a responsibility to provide sufficient income for its elderly people so that they can live in dignity and comfort. Possibly \$100 per month is not sufficient to accomplish this, but it is certainly a goal which must be accomplished during my administration.

It is obvious that those aging citizens who are ill will require more support than those who are active. I will strongly support the expanding home health care and home nursing care services.

I believe that we should use our food surplus to feed America first. I am opposed to sending food to Communist countries and will work tirelessly to assure better distribution in Alabama.

The State's responsibility for its aged citizens requires sympathetic administration. It will require changes in policies and increases in the staff of the State Commission for that purpose.

We must rehabilitate as many mental patients as possible by placing them in foster homes or nursing homes so that these people can live in dignity and also draw pensions.

I will work for the best possible health program for our aged citizens and for their protection in the field of re-employment and job security, and also I will attempt to promote recreational activities and facilities that will become the finest in the country.

Finally, when I am elected Governor of Alabama I shall strive to prevent any undernourished child or adult from going to bed with an empty stomach. With God's Help, I shall ask the State Legislature to institute a state-wide plan to protect hungry infants, school age children and needy adults.

With kind personal regards, I am

Sincerely yours,

Mrs. George C. Wallace
Candidate for Governor