



NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION®

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History of the Elliot Richardson Prize

Elliot L. Richardson (1920–1999) was a prominent American lawyer, politician, and exceptional public servant known for his integrity and principled leadership. An Academy Fellow, Richardson served in the cabinets of Presidents Richard M. Nixon and Gerald R. Ford between 1970 and 1977, and is the only individual to serve in four cabinet positions in the U.S. government, including:

- **Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare** (1970–1973) under President Richard M. Nixon
- **U.S. Attorney General** (1973) under President Richard M. Nixon
- **Secretary of Defense** (1973) under President Richard M. Nixon
- **Secretary of Commerce** (1976–1977) under President Gerald R. Ford



Richardson became most famous as attorney general, when he chose to resign rather than carry out President Nixon's illegal order to dismiss Archibald Cox, the special prosecutor investigating the Watergate scandal. The events of October 20, 1973, later dubbed the 'Saturday Night Massacre', have come to exemplify how, in moments of national crisis, a public servant of principle can place loyalty to the country and the Constitution above allegiance to any individual, party, or personal ambition.

The integrity, courage, and sense of duty Richardson exhibited in that moment were hallmarks of his entire career in both the public and private sectors.

Born in Boston, MA in 1920, Richardson graduated from Harvard College, and Harvard Law School (where he was president of the Law Review). He enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1942 as a private and participated in the D-Day invasion of Normandy. He was awarded multiple honors for his military service, including two Purple Hearts and a Bronze Star, before beginning his career in public service. Richardson was appointed **Assistant Secretary for Legislation in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare** (1957–1959) and **United States Attorney for the District of Massachusetts** (1959–1961) by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. He also served as served as the **Ambassador at Large and Special Representative of the President (1977-80) for the Law of the Sea Conference** under President Jimmy Carter.

In his many roles, Richardson listened thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, valued and supported career employees, nurtured and recognized talent, mastered a wide range of subjects, and earned the lasting respect and admiration of countless colleagues.



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Donald T. Bliss's 2024 review of the book *Elliot Richardson: A Man of Principle*, by Donald A. Carr states that, "In this era of hyperbolized politics, partisan warfare, institutional skepticism, and cultural division, it's instructive to be reminded that we can choose leaders who rise above the fray, work across party lines to build consensus, apply principled analysis and intellectual rigor to solve problems, and skillfully thread through the unanticipated minefields that threaten a democracy."

How the Elliot L. Richardson Prize came to be

Shortly after Richardson's death in 1999, his friends and admirers, with the financial support of Hitachi, Ltd and the Hitachi Foundation, established The Elliot L. Richardson Prize Fund to honor his memory.

The Prize is awarded for excellence and integrity in government service and public management. The Fund's goal is to "inspire future public service by highlighting the accomplishments of other exceptional public servants.

Originally established under the auspices of the Council for Excellence in Government, the Board of the Fund approached the National Academy of Public Administration to become the new home for this prestigious award. In 2010, NAPA acquired the Elliot L. Richardson Prize Fund: a \$1.2 million endowment that supports a biennial award to one or more individuals for excellence in public service.

The amount of the prize is determined by the fund Board of Directors and has typically been \$50,000. Consistent with the public-spiritedness of Elliot L. Richardson, recipients of the award are required to designate one or more charities to receive half the prize amount they are awarded.

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