



# Whatever's Fair: The Political Autobiography of Ohio House Speaker Vern Riffe

*Vernal Riffe Jr.*

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## **Whatever's Fair: The Political Autobiography of Ohio House Speaker Vern Riffe** Vernal Riffe Jr.

The autobiography of a legendary Ohio politician and legislator—"The politics that Vern describes—when candidates depended on shaking hands, speaking at every conceivable dinner, passing out literature at the county fair (or fairs, if you were running statewide), and when office-holders worked across the political aisle to get things done for their constituents—belong to a bygone era. This book is an extraordinary window on more than thirty years of Ohio political history and a celebration of a man who loved his work and did it better than perhaps any other member of the Ohio House in our state's history."—Richard Celeste, governor of Ohio, 1983–91. For many Ohioans, Vern Riffe is a household name. His thirty-six years of service earned him his legendary status, and he still is described as the most talented legislator in Ohio's political history. Riffe came to Columbus in 1958 from the Appalachian region of southeastern Ohio. He became Speaker in 1975, a position he held for a state record of twenty years. He flourished in this role, during which time no law passed in Ohio without his blessing. Known for being a pragmatic problem solver and for putting Ohio's interests ahead of regionalism and politics, Riffe counted among his major accomplishments his making the General Assembly a coequal of the executive branch, believing Ohioans expected the General Assembly to be an equal partner with the governor in controlling the state. He also played an important role in the rise of black Democratic legislators in the Statehouse, due to a strong partnership with Rep. C. J. McLin, a Democrat from Dayton. He fought hard to develop his native, impoverished southeast Ohio, which led to the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville, the uranium enrichment facility in Piketon, and Shawnee State University. Riffe's popularity led people to speculate about a possible bid for governor, but he was a realist: he knew he was most effective working behind the scenes, and he was unsure of how voters in ethnic northeast Ohio would respond to his unfamiliar name and southern Ohio manner. This honest and revealing autobiography will be welcome by anyone interested in Ohio and its rich political history.

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