



David C. Kozak

February 17, 1945 - March 9, 2025

FORT COLLINS, Colorado - David C. Kozak passed on March 9, 2025 at the age of 80 following a lengthy illness during which he reflected and connected with old and new loved ones. In his final days, family surrounded him with prayers, songs, jokes, hand-holding, stories, and love.

David was born February 17, 1945, in Lackawanna, New York, the son of the late HC and Grace Gilman Kozak. He adored his Grandparents Frank and Mary Gilman and was excited to be reunited with them.

David graduated from Gannon University ('66) and received his PhD in Political Science and Public Policy from the University of Pittsburgh. David served 20 years in the U.S. Air Force as a professor at the Air Force Academy and the National War College, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel before returning to Gannon University. At Gannon, Dr. Kozak taught undergraduate and graduate Political Science and Leadership. An annual Chautauqua Institution lecturer for 25 years, he also directed Leadership Erie and lectured nationally and internationally. Dr. Kozak also had the privilege of teaching at West Point on a sabbatical. As a Political Analyst, Dr. Kozak made numerous contributions to local and national media outlets. He was known for his novel teaching methods, often bringing in special guest speakers, including seven former U.S. Presidents. He always encouraged his students, connecting them to unique opportunities, including bringing student delegations to several

Presidential Conventions. His research focused on bipartisan collaboration, and his students often said that you couldn't discern his political leanings, because David believed that political science was a "dispassionate search for the truth." He was friends with Democrats and Republicans and modeled civility and civic engagement.

As much as he accomplished professionally, his first priority and joy was always his family. Going out to dinner, hosting parties, exploring nature, amusement parks, state fairs, beaches, or engaging in both meaningful and funny conversations. He treasured his children, and having grandchildren transformed his life with how much time he spent with each of them to teach them and learn from them. He said his "last lecture" was to teach his children and grandchildren how to die, by remaining gracious and grateful.

David is survived by his loving wife of 57 years MaryAnne Mandeville whom he met while they attended Gannon University. They shared a passion for higher education by giving lectures and co-teaching several graduate courses. David always said that "MaryAnne was the best thing that ever happened to him," and everything came from what they built together, including his family, his son Jeffrey; his son Timothy and wife Dawn; his daughter Jacqueline and husband Mark Thiel; his grandchildren Taylor (23) and Payton (20) Kozak; Istria (9) and Gus (6) Kozak Thiel; and his brother Paul.

His family and friends delighted in his many interests, including model railroads, aquariums, professional wrestling, auto thrill shows, Buddy Holly, fireworks, and good food. His enormous sense of humor, larger than life presence, and one of a kind voice and laugh will be deeply missed.

David will be interred in a private burial with full military honors in Fort Collins, Colorado with his family who are near and far, from Kauai to London. Memorial celebrations in Erie are forthcoming. Memories can be shared at

Goes Funeral Care (<https://www.goesfuneralcare.com/>). In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Dr. David and MaryAnne Kozak Gannon READs Program or Pathways Hospice of Northern Colorado. David cared about his many caregivers at Columbine and Pathways, who gave him dignity in this process to the end.

Tribute Wall

BT

“As I read these reflections, I feel a great loss at having never met David. But I have had the honor of knowing his remarkable daughter Jackie and if she is a reflection of him, he was surely a magnificent human being. I send heartfelt condolences to the entire Kozak family but also celebrate a life so clearly well lived. May his impact continue through the students he taught, the children he raised, and the insatiable curiosity and kindness he brought to life. With sympathy, Betsy Taylor

Betsy Taylor - April 07, 2025 at 02:42 PM



“A sympathy card was purchased for the family of David C. Kozak.



March 27, 2025 at 05:08 PM

SW

“Words cannot express my heartfelt condolences to the Kozak family. As a non-traditional student at Gannon, Dr. Kozak made learning an enjoyable experience. Never a dull lecture, charismatic in speech, knowledgeable of every subject matter captivating your attention always wanting more. I enrolled in every class offered in my field of study taught by this great man. The world of academia has lost a brilliant mind.
Rest in Peace Dr. Kozak.
Sheila Ellyn Woeger

Sheila Ellyn Woeger - March 27, 2025 at 10:50 AM

NR

“ My condolences to dear MaryAnn and family. Rest in Peace, my friend. Dr. Kozak called everyone "my friend." David became such a fine friend and ally because of his keen political analysis lectures and incredible connections. He knew everybody in politics. As a Chautauqua Lecture Coordinator, I especially appreciated how he promoted Chautauqua and took our lectures into Erie and Washington, DC. He hustled to give his Gannon Political Science students unprecedented opportunities on the national stage. There was no one like him. He shall be missed.

Nancy Newson Roos - March 24, 2025 at 11:34 AM

CA

“ So honored to have been a colleague of Dr. Kozak, and most importantly for the impact he made on my daughter, son and countless others who were blessed and positively impacted by his teaching and day to day interactions. What a wonderfully amazing man. His influence, kindness and wisdom will be sorely missed.

Carol Ann Amann

Carol A Amann - March 20, 2025 at 05:52 PM

LJ

“ Maryann – I am so very sorry to hear about Dr. Kozak. My thoughts and prayers are with you and your family.

I wish there were enough words to adequately describe how highly I think of Dr. Kozak and what an impact he had on my life. I am so thankful for all the wonderful memories from Gannon, Leadership Erie and beyond. I feel blessed and fortunate for the years of friendship.

He was by far the greatest professor I had during my time at Gannon. He opened my eyes to what learning could be like – he engaged us and challenged us and made everything so interesting and so real. I will never forget the classes, the projects, the involvement, and especially our class trip to Washington D.C. I also had the opportunity to participate in Leadership Erie, which was a tremendous experience, and continued to work with him through my job at the MBA. I will miss his election insights, his advice, his positive words of encouragement and his stories.

I am so glad we remained in contact over the years. He truly made a difference in my life and the lives of others and impacted them in ways big and small. His dedication, knowledge, humor and discussions will be missed more than words can say.

*Sending continued thoughts and prayers,
Lori Joint*

Lori Joint - March 17, 2025 at 04:12 PM

CS

“ Janet and I are saddened to see David passed away. Both of you will always be in our prayers. David was a giant in the community and we are glad to have called him a friend. Our memories with both of you are short, but will never be forgotten.

Charlie & Janet Szewczykowski - March 17, 2025 at 09:11 AM

EB

“ Jackie, my wife and I were saddened to read about the passing of your father. He and your mother were a pleasant breath of fresh air whenever I encountered them during your middle school years. An incident I fondly recall occurred while your dad, Dr. Kozak, was demonstrating his portable model train set (on his request) to my fifth and sixth grade social studies class. We were rudely interrupted by a camera crew and reporter requesting your father to break down a political action taken by the US government in the Middle East which had just occurred. He left the room and explained the situation on camera which was later used on the news at six. He then put his engineers cap back on, returned to the classroom, and let you kids run the train. Our deepest sympathy goes out to you and your family. Your father will be sorely missed by all.
Mr. Ed Beck (You can now call me Ed)
Middle School Social Studies Teacher

Edward Beck - March 16, 2025 at 08:01 PM

MH

“ My sincere sympathies for your loss. Dave was a great man. I worked with him for a number of years on Leadership Erie, and appreciated his good humor, thoughtfulness, and intelligence. He made a great difference to the many people he encountered in life, and his impact will live on for many years to come.

Michael Hannan

Michael Hannan - March 16, 2025 at 12:51 PM

KF

“ Kathy F. purchased a sympathy card for the family of David C. Kozak.



Kathy F. - March 16, 2025 at 08:41 AM

MC

“ *Maryanne and Family,*
What a wonderful legacy David has left on the importance of a life well lived. In his both personal and professional life he was passionate about his interests and served as an exemplary role model. He will live on in the hearts of all of us fortunate to have known him and will be sorely missed.
Dr. Michele Campbell

Michele Campbell - March 15, 2025 at 06:32 PM

JE

“ *Dear Mary Ann,*
I am so sorry for your loss. Please know that you and your family will be in my prayers. He was one great man who married one great lady.
My sympathy and love,
Judy Emling

Judy Emling - March 15, 2025 at 06:38 AM

KI

“ *MaryAnne & family. We are so incredibly sorry for your loss of David. We are all thinking of you and sending our love. Kim & all of us from Rupp Limousine, Erie PA*

Kimberly - March 14, 2025 at 06:20 PM

JW

“ *David, you have done so much our community here in Erie. Your influence on students and the leadership in Erie will be felt for years. Personally You are a hero to me. I will always remember you as my friend. God bless, buddy.*

John C. Williams

John C. Williams - March 14, 2025 at 04:19 PM

RF

“ Dr. David Kozak was a friend a mentor and a dear, dear colleague. We first met in 1990 when he asked me to speak at Leadership Erie. Over the years we have shared consulting projects, speaking engagements and some "interesting" travel experience. David, you were the person who opened the door to me working with the Federal Government. We did some amazing work at the Federal Executive Institute. But I didn't only know you professionally, I got to spend time with you and Marianne. Jacquie even hired me to work with the city of Fort Collins when she was working there. I was so thankful that you and Marianne and Jacquie got to meet my mom and sister several years ago. You, dear friend, are a GIANT among great people in the world. There are so many people who will miss you. And there are so many people who love you -- me included. God speed David. You still have work to do in heaven.

*Dr. Roger Firestien
Associate Professor Emeritus
Center for Applied Imagination
Buffalo State University*

Roger L Firestien - March 14, 2025 at 02:58 PM

CB

“ To Jackie and the larger Kozak family, my condolences to you during this tough time. I know how much your father meant to you. Be proud of the immense impact he made on Erie, Gannon and the overall political landscape. Me and my family will be praying for you all.

Chuck Buseck - March 13, 2025 at 01:48 PM

BT

“ There are some people who we wish could live forever. These people touch so many lives and make a difference in having lived on this earth. Dr. Kozak was an exemplary human being. He was wise, intelligent, curious, kind and always such a gentleman. Gannon University was very lucky to have him in our midst for those 28 years and he will be remembered by all who knew him. For you, his beloved family, how fortunate you all are to know him as husband, father, grandfather. Your lives have been forever blessed as you all well know. Please accept my condolences on your loss and may David's legacy and memory shine brightly for you in your lives ahead.

Sincerely,
Barbara Townsend
Department of Psychology
Gannon University

Barbara Townsend - March 13, 2025 at 12:39 PM

KY

“ I am so deeply sad to learn of David's passing. Over the years, David and I had many deep and thoughtful conversations about politics. His wisdom and insight enriched my life.

Kim Young - March 12, 2025 at 08:49 PM

“ To the Family of Dr. Kozak,

I am deeply saddened by the passing of Dr. David Kozak, a professor who had a profound impact on my life—not only in the way I approached my education, but also in how I view my country and the world around me. He was truly one of a kind.

Dr. Kozak was, without question, the best professor I had at Gannon University. I literally built my class schedule around the courses he taught because his classes were engaging, challenging, and deeply insightful. He had a unique way of making political science and government policy come alive, pushing me to think critically and always give my best effort. He was demanding but fair, holding his students to high standards while ensuring they gained real knowledge and practical understanding of the subjects he taught.

One of the most remarkable aspects of his teaching was his ability to connect students with real-world political leaders and policymakers. I was always amazed by the high-profile individuals he arranged for us to interview—senior advisors to Presidents, policymakers, and experts who had shaped our nation’s history. Not many students can say they had the opportunity to ask such influential figures about their years of service, and that was entirely because of Dr. Kozak’s passion and connections.

His legacy as an educator, mentor, and scholar will live on in the countless students he inspired, myself included. I will forever be grateful for the lessons he imparted, the challenges he set before me, and the way he shaped my understanding of government, policy, and leadership.

Rest in peace, Dr. Kozak. I am honored to have been one of your students. My deepest condolences to his family and loved ones.

Sincerely,

Frank Mezler

Frank Mezler - March 12, 2025 at 03:03 PM

WB

“*Jackie, I'm so sorry for the loss of your dad. I know how very special he was to you and your family and what a wonderful man he was. Sending prayers that time and loving memories will fill your hearts once again soon.*

Wendy Bricher - March 12, 2025 at 09:36 AM



“*Since Tim is my Buffalo Bills brother, it makes you my Buffalo Bills dad. To my Buffalo Bills dad and United States Air Force Colonel: thank you Colonel for the many kind phone chats during and after Bills games. I enjoyed our conversations about the Bills and the Air Force. It has been an honor to know you and I'm forever grateful that you raised a great son like Tim. As you know, he has been riding shotgun with me for about 10 years now as my Buffalo Bills brother and best friend. I promise you we will honor you every NFL Sunday when we watch the Bills play. In fact, for one game each season, we will listen to a Bills game on the radio rather than watch it on TV--just like you did. When we do, be sure to join us in spirit. And if you can, when we need it most, please send a gust of wind that helps the Bills win--we can't deal with any more "wide rights." Colonel, may you rest in peace, and may God welcome you to His kingdom. Check in on Tim and his beautiful family every now and then, and keep rooting for our Bills. I render my salute to you for a life well lived. Rest easy...until you hear us screaming after a Josh Allen touchdown!*

Jeff Urbaniak - March 11, 2025 at 09:50 PM

TW

“ Dr. Kozak launched thousands of careers. Including mine, 1 presidential administration, 2 gubernatorial administrations and now nearly 20 years in local government. Thank you for inspiring your students.

Tim Wachter - March 11, 2025 at 09:22 PM

PB

“ Dr. Kozak was a great source for political analysis both local and national. He helped me frequently with political news coverage. He will be missed whenever I think about what's happening in government.

*Pierre Bellicini
Erie, PA*

Pierre Bellicini - March 11, 2025 at 09:18 PM

DH

“ My condolences to the extended family, I have some fond memories of Dr.Kozak when he and his wife use to attend many functions hosted by the Minority Political Caucus back in the day. Rest in Peace and Power.

Denise Horton and family

Denise S Horton - March 11, 2025 at 08:39 PM



MA

Dear Jackie, I was so very sad to learn of the death of your father. Please know I'm keeping you close to my heart. Mary Pat.

Mary Pat Aardrup - March 12, 2025 at 03:57 PM

TR

“ Much love is being sent to Maryanne, Jackie, Mark, Istria, Gus, and all their wonderful family. Dr. David Kozak was legendary and an upstander for everyone he met. One of the most memorable moments was when we hosted him for a session in the City to share his leadership insights. His wisdom, wit, and warmth were on full display. It was standing room only, and we were all compelled by his stories. Among the many things I learned that day was "leaders lead the learning." I will always feel his presence.

Teresa Roche - March 11, 2025 at 07:59 PM

TR

“ Much love is being sent to MaryAnne, Jackie, Mark, Istria, Gus, and all those in their wondrous family. Dr. David Kozak was legendary and an upstander for everyone. He loved public service. One of the most memorable moments for several of us in the City was when we hosted both David and MaryAnne so that he could share his leadership insights, and he held all of us spellbound. His wit, warmth, and wisdom were on full display beautifully. It was standing room only, and among the many things he shared that stayed with me was, "Leaders lead the learning." His presence will always be felt by me.

Teresa Roche - March 11, 2025 at 07:53 PM

MG

“ He was always generous with invitations and class guest speakers. He and Mary Ann are gifts to the Gannon and Erie Community.

Mary C. Gensheimer - March 11, 2025 at 03:39 PM

SY

“ *The Buckley SFB military Retiree Activities Office (RAO) would like to offer our sincere condolences and our gratitude for Lt Col Kozak's service to our country in the Air Force. If you would like help with any matters related to casualty assistance, Defense Finance & Accounting Service, Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP), Veterans Affairs (VA), etc. you can contact our office on Buckley SFB at 720-847-6693 or raobuckley@gmail.com. The RAO is staffed by volunteers, all military retirees themselves, and our sole purpose is to provide assistance to any military retirees and surviving spouses/family members with anything related to their military service and/or benefits, in particular during difficult times such as this. We are deeply sorry for your loss.*

*Steve Young
Lt Col, USAF, Ret
Director, Buckley SFB RAO*

Steve Young - March 11, 2025 at 02:20 PM