



## Remembering Eugene Rossides: The Golden Greek

John Gizzi

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Six weeks after the death of Eugene Rossides on May 27 at age 93, he is still being mourned and warmly remembered by the tightly knit Greek American community.

The onetime Columbia University football immortal and the first Greek American to be confirmed by the Senate to a position in the executive branch of government was, as the Greek foreign ministry said, "one of the most emblematic figures of the Greek diaspora [the community of Greeks living outside Greece]."

"I am never under any illusion that I am replacing him because there is no replacing a legend," said Nick Larigakis, president of the American Hellenic Institute founded by Rossides. "I always considered Gene Rossides like a second father because I was always able to share with him things that I was never able to share with my father. He will be remembered as a man of virtue and integrity, a genuine man."

Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and a former Reagan White House staffer, recalled to Newsmax how Rossides "excelled at everything he did. And, at different times in his life, he was just one step from greatness."

An example of what Bandow was referring to was Rossides being drafted by the New York Giants in 1949 but declining to instead go to law school.

In the early 1970s, then-Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Rossides was at the top of most lists of possible successors to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

The offer never came, and Rossides pursued other things.

Brooklyn-born Rossides had to make his own way almost from the start. His immigrant father died when he was one month old. Young Rossides was a star football player at Erasmus High School and was recruited by Columbia in 1944.

Under legendary Coach Lou Little, Rossides played halfback in his freshman year. After being named to the 1945 College Football All-America Team, he became Columbia's quarterback.

"Growing up after World War II, my brothers and I knew the names of all the college football greats and Gene Rossides was certainly one of them," nationally syndicated columnist Pat Buchanan recalled to Newsmax. "And in 1947, he did what no one else could do — he ended a 32-game winning streak by West Point."

With Rossides leading the team back from a two-touchdown deficit and scoring five touchdowns himself, Columbia beat West Point by a breathless score of 21-20. In so doing, they overcame West Point legends and All-Americans Glenn Davis, "Doc" Blanchard, Arnold Tucker, and Dan Foldburg.

The "Golden Greek" was drafted by the Giants, but, perhaps aware of the short span of pro-football players, opted instead for Columbia Law School on a scholarship. Following a stint in the U.S. Army, he served as assistant attorney general of New York and assistant to the under secretary of the treasury.

After several years in private practice, in 1969, Rossides was named by President Richard Nixon as assistant secretary of the treasury for enforcement. In this capacity, he oversaw a wide range of law enforcement agencies: the U.S. Customs Service, the Secret Service, the U.S. Mint, the Bureau of Printing and Engraving, the Tariff and Trade Office of Law Enforcement, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, and the IRS Enforcement Center.

Rossides' skill in managing the disparate agencies and his good relationship with Congress resulted in his inclusion on lists as prospective FBI director when and if Hoover stepped down.

Following Hoover's death in May of 1972, The Washington Post reported that "informed speculation began to focus" on Rossides "as a leading candidate to take over the sensitive job."

"[Treasury Secretary] John Connally had pushed me for the FBI directorship, but I wasn't interested," Rossides told Newsmax in 2019. "I preferred the law enforcement agencies at Treasury. And besides, after one meeting with him, I didn't like Hoover."

He recalled his one meeting with the FBI chief and how Hoover later called his boss, then-Treasury Secretary David Kennedy, to complain "about something I said about Customs — and it was completely untrue."

Of today's FBI, Rossides told us "it's overblown. Its problem is that it has too many people and law enforcement is properly run by state and local law enforcement. At the federal level, law enforcement should be as limited as possible."

After leaving government Rossides threw himself into private practice and into the Greek American community. He published a Greek American newspaper known as The National Herald and founded the American Hellenic Institute in 1974.

Furious at the Turkish invasion of Cyprus that year, which resulted in the island nation being divided between Greece and Turkey, Rossides led the successful lobbying campaign for a U.S. arms embargo with Turkey that was in effect from 1975-1978.

Gene Rossides never led the Giants to the Super Bowl and never ran the FBI. But his drive, his conquest of adversity, and his patriotism will clearly be etched in the memories and hearts of many.