

This Governor is About to Break a 211-Year-Old Record

For the past 211 years, a record in American politics has stood untouched—and also largely unrecognized. One American governor is about to change both.

At some moment on Monday, Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad, a Republican, will become the longest-serving governor in U.S. history. In doing so, he will have surpassed former Vice President George Clinton, who served as Governor of New York for 20 years, 11 months, and 1 day.

Branstad assumed office for his first term as governor of Iowa on Jan. 14, 1983, but did not seek re-election in 1998. He was re-elected in 2010 and 2014, resuming his time in office on Jan. 14, 2011.

U.S. Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa)—who himself is fast-approaching his own milestone as Iowa's longest-serving member of Congress—took to the Senate Floor on Thursday to commemorate the upcoming milestone.

“That’s a large feather in the cap of a farm kid from the town of Leland, population 289, in Winnebago County in northern Iowa,” he said. “In many ways, a small town farm background prepared Terry Branstad for his success as a state House member, lieutenant governor and then governor on two separate occasions.”

Branstad’s biggest accomplishment—which has boosted his status among Iowans, regardless of political affiliation—was his response to the farm crisis in the 1980s. As the agriculture sector was hammered with losses and farm after farm was foreclosed, Branstad tirelessly worked with other Iowa leaders to diversify the state’s economy.

Branstad's mother was Jewish and his father a Lutheran of Norwegian descent, and Branstad was raised as a Lutheran but converted to Catholicism later in life. He and his wife currently reside at Terrace Hill, the governor's mansion, but also own a rural home near Boone, about 35 miles northwest of Des Moines.