

James Roche Phippard obituary



James Roche "Jim" Phippard, a former USAID official and lawyer, passed away August 16, 2026 at Sunrise on Connecticut Ave in Washington, D.C. after a long illness. Jim was born on May 26, 1933, in Springfield, MA and spent his early years in Willimantic, CT. He was still in grade school when the family moved to Greenfield, MA. A graduate at 17 of Greenfield High School, he won a diocesan scholarship to Catholic University where Jim studied economics, graduating in 1954. After graduation, he joined the Navy as a junior supply corps officer. He served in the Mediterranean supplying the 6th fleet and served as

a Naval Reserve Officer until 1977.

After active duty, he attended Georgetown Law School graduating in 1961. His early legal career included stints at the National Capitol Planning Commission (to work on the Metro) and a clerkship with Justice Prettyman at the U.S. District Court in Washington. Appointed as Congressman John Blatnik's (D-MN) legal advisor, Jim took on the jobs of tracking legislation and budget issues, where he met the USAID General Counsel and joined the Agency for International Development in 1965, serving initially as Assistant General Counsel for Legislation and then as Assistant General Counsel for Africa working on many African assistance projects.

Joining the U.S. Foreign Service in 1973, Jim became the legal counsel for USAID's West African Development Services Office then based in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, covering work in the region from Mauritania to Zaire. In 1976, USAID appointed him legal advisor at its new Cairo Mission created in the wake of the U.S. decision to restore relations with Egypt in support of the Egypt-Israeli Sinai Accords. In this position he facilitated major investments in Egyptian infrastructure and economic development.

Moving to USAID management, Jim attended the Harvard Kennedy School during 1979-80 where he focused on economic development and strategic planning, becoming Director of the Office of North Africa and European Affairs in 1980. Responsible for programming in Morocco, Tunisia, Spain and Portugal, he also coordinated the U.S. response to the Southern Italian earthquake in 1980.

Appointed Mission Director to Tunisia in late 1982, Jim sought to reduce Tunisia's aid dependence and diversify the economy. His vision to move control of many projects to the community level led to the development of water user groups in Central Tunisia promoting irrigation and fruit production in the area. This work merited three Senior Foreign Service Performance awards. In 1987 upon his departure, the President of Tunisia awarded him the Commander of the Order of the Republic – the only USAID Mission Director since independence to be so honored.

Returning to Washington, Jim joined the Senate Ag Committee Staff at the request of Senator Patrick Leahy to help reshape U.S. food assistance. In this position he made key contributions to the 1990 Farm Bill and the U.S. Foreign Operations Appropriations Act, revamping PL 480 legislation, promoting privatization of state run marketing agencies, and recognizing the potential impact of climate change on agriculture.

Retiring as a Minister-Counselor in 1991, Jim applied his expertise initially as Vice President for Central Europe and Global Programs at Agricultural Development International (ACDI) and later serving the expanded nonprofit, ACDI-VOCA as Chief Financial Officer through 2004.

In retirement, Jim maintained his active interest in North Africa serving as a member and then President of the American Tunisian Association until 2004 and organizing a trip to the region in 2001. In 2008 the Tunisian American Association awarded him its Ibn Khaldun Award for his efforts in promoting Tunisian-American relations. In 2010, Catholic University recognized his work in economic development with a Distinguished Alumni Award. Until 2022, Jim split his time at a Florida condo, summer stays in Linekin Bay and Mount Desert, Maine and home in DC. An ardent traveler in later years, Jim toured Sicily in 2016 and explored the Mayan ruins at Chichen Itza in 2018.

Jim's first marriage to Janet St. Marie Gary ended in divorce in 1973. His elder son, Jim, Jr. died in 2014. He is survived by three adult children, Edwin of Arlington, VA, Kathleen of Millsboro, DE, and Melanie of Walnut Creek, CA and his wife of 53 years, Melinda L. Kimble, a retired Senior Foreign Service Officer.

Relatives and Friends are invited to call on Sunday August 30 from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM at Joseph Gawler's Sons, 5130 Wisconsin Ave NW. A Mass of Christian Burial will follow on Monday August 31 at 10:30 AM at Holy Trinity Catholic Church, 3513 N St NW. Interment will be private. To plant trees in memory, please visit the [Sympathy Store](#).

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