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Former Colorado state Sen. Jim Isgar dies at 64

He was a passionate supporter of education, agricultural interests



Photo by:
Isgar

By [Ann Butler](#) Herald staff writer

Standing on his deep roots in La Plata County, former state Sen. Jim Isgar may have made his largest mark on the state's agricultural community. Two months shy of his 65th birthday, he died in Denver on Friday after a 4½-year battle against a rare form of leukemia.

Isgar had a background in water before he was appointed to the Senate in 2001 to finish the term of former Sen. Jim Dyer, who resigned to take a position with the Colorado Public Utilities Commission. As a farmer and rancher in the Breen area, Isgar served on numerous water boards, including La Plata and Animas-La Plata conservancy districts, HH Ditch Co., including 25 years as president, and the Southwestern Water Conservation District.

Isgar would subsequently be re-elected twice to the Senate, heading the Senate Agricultural Committee, before President Obama appointed him director of Rural Development for Colorado under the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 2009.

"Jim was a true Coloradan and a strong supporter of agriculture and water issues in the state," said Bruce Whitehead, executive director of the Southwestern Water Conservation District. "Senator Isgar was well-known for his influence over state water law and policy, and many bills had to be 'Isgarized' prior to passing out of his committee."

Ann Brown, Isgar's former campaign manager, still has a box marked "Isgar campaigns" in her garage.

"Jim fought in the state Legislature for the common-sense use of available water," she said. "Not only was Jim a champion for water use, he was a champion for education. He lobbied hard for Fort Lewis College."

In 1988, Gov. Roy Romer appointed Isgar to the Colorado Board of Agriculture, then the governing board for his alma mater, FLC, Colorado State University and University of Southern Colorado.

The emphasis on education was a legacy from his parents, Arthur and Anne Isgar, Brown said. They encouraged rousing games of Scrabble, games Isgar often won.

He paid attention to every detail, Brown said.

"He was meticulous in his work whether in figuring out an irrigation system or working on a budget," Brown said

Isgar's accomplishments should not outweigh who he was as a man, Whitehead said.

"Most of all, Jim will be remembered as a great friend, with a quick sense of humor," he said. "This is a sad day for Colorado, but Jim's legacy (and his black hat) will live on."

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Information with this article was updated to show the correct day of the memorial service.
