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Val Vigil celebrated as a dedicated public servant

Former state representative and Thornton City Council member passes away



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Val Vigil.
COURTESY OF CITY OF THORNTON



Posted Thursday, February 18, 2021 3:45 pm

Liam Adams
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Val Vigil spent the better part of the past two decades as an elected official.

That entire time, his commitment to the community motivated him.

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"He didn't have the ego," said Adams County board of commissioner Chairperson Eva Henry, who was Vigil's ward partner on Thornton City Council. It wasn't just that he lacked ego, though, Henry said.

"It was just this strong sense of value when you talked to him. When you talked to him, you just knew where his heart was and what he really cared about," she said.

Vigil, who was from Thornton, passed away Feb. 5 at the age of 73.

It's a sentiment echoed by citizens, business owners or state legislators. They will say the same. It's why Gov. Jared Polis asked flags to be lowered Feb. 18 in honor of him.

"Val was a good friend and an inspiring public servant. Colorado lost a great person and public servant who touched so many lives," the governor said in a statement.

Moral courage

Vigil's career began in 1971 when he graduated from Adams State University in Alamosa, according to a university statement. That same year, he started his own financial consulting business, Vigil & Company, which he continued operating until his passing.

In 1999, Vigil started his first term in the Colorado House of Representatives, serving Commerce City and southern Thornton. Among his most notable work was authoring the ASSET Bill, which provides in-state tuition to undocumented students.

"It was a different time. For me, it's a real signal of moral courage that he introduced that bill every single year," said state Sen. Dominick Moreno. Before Moreno was state senator, he was a state representative and had succeeded Vigil in his seat. At the time Vigil brought the ASSETT Bill forward, Moreno said there was "a lot of anti-immigrant sentiment in the state."

Vigil actually wasn't a state representative when the bill passed in 2013. Moreno was a co-sponsor of it when it became law.

"For Val, I think what he would say that although he was so proud that the policy was adopted, he would probably want people not to forget about the generations of young people who missed out on opportunities because of inaction from the legislature," Moreno said.

Aside from legislative work, Vigil was also known for constituency outreach. At the end of each session, he would draft a report card that he would hand deliver to people at their door.

Moreno said, "I certainly looked up to him as a mentor, as an example of what was possible about how you can conduct yourself in the legislature. And fight for progressive policy, but still be a respected person on the other side of the aisle."

Vigil took a similar approach to Thornton City Council, which he joined in 2009. Henry said she and Vigil would pick days to walk down a street in their ward to speak with residents. He would choose one side of the street and she would choose the other. And, Henry said, "If I came across a family that only spoke Spanish, all I had to do was holler at him across the street and he would come over and engage them."

Other times, Vigil would do the same thing by himself, specifically engaging Latino residents and business owners in south Thornton. He would then raise those concerns at a council meeting to have the council address them, whether it was a business owner wanting to place a sign a certain somewhere or paint a building a certain color.

"It was solutions and things we wouldn't have been made aware of," Henry said.

Vigil's work sent a message, "That the community mattered and that the Latino community mattered," Henry said.

In addition to city council, Vigil also served on the Adams State Board of Trustees from 2011 to 2019.

He is survived by his wife, Annabelle, and two daughters, Nadine and Valerie. There was a memorial service for him in Northglenn on Feb. 18.

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