

## Keith King, a titan of school choice in Colorado education, dies at 75

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Keith King  
christian murdock, gazette file

Keith King, a businessman, education leader and former legislator who served in the state House and Senate, as well as on the Colorado Springs council, has died after a long illness.

He was 75.

Funeral arrangements have not yet been announced.

Gov. Jared Polis, who, like King, has been an advocate for charter schools, on Saturday ordered flags to be lowered to half-staff until the day of King's memorial.

"I was devastated to learn about the passing of Keith King," Polis said in a statement Saturday. "He dedicated his life to public service, whether it was his time in Colorado's General Assembly, serving on Colorado Springs City Council, or helping more students access quality education through the creation of Colorado Early College."

"Over the years, we have worked closely on issues like education and workforce development, and I know that he will be missed by so many. My thoughts are with his family during this difficult time," the governor said.

In a statement, state Senate Republicans called King a "longtime business & community leader, champion of choice in education & man of resolute faith who made our community, our state, and the world better by his efforts.

"Keith was a titan in the State House," state House Republicans also said. "He was a leading force on so many issues, most notably his passion for education. His many contributions to the state of Colorado will not soon be forgotten."

King served eight years in the House, from 1999 to 2007, and one term in the Senate from 2009 to 2013. He also served as House Majority Leader during the 2003-04 sessions.

King was born on March 12, 1948 in Tekoa, Washington. He earned a bachelor's degree from Colorado State University, Pueblo in industrial education in 1970 and a master's degree in vocational education from Oregon State University in 1976.

He was married to Sandi for 50 years. They have two sons, Brandon, an electrical engineer at RTLogic! in Colorado Springs, and Jeremy, a professor of medicine at the University of Nebraska Medical School in Omaha.

King is survived by his wife, sons and their wives, and five grandchildren.

Following college, King taught high school and coached basketball in California and Oregon until 1977, when he came back to Colorado.

King started his business life in Colorado Springs as the owner of Waterbed Palace, beginning in 1977. The business grew to 18 stores in six states. Waterbed Palace was named national waterbed retailer of the year in 1991. King sold the company in 2002.

But it was education, both K-12 and higher education, that was his life mission.

In Colorado, King served on the Cheyenne Mountain School Board from 1991 to 1995 and was president of the Cheyenne Mountain Charter Academy from 1995 to 1998.

Charter schools were first authorized in Colorado in 1993, but it was King's work to strengthen that system for which he may be best remembered.

He sponsored two bills to improve charter school structures and operations — both signed into law in his very first session in 1999.

King also sponsored the annual school finance act three times, including in 2003, when Gov. Bill Owens took the unusual step to approve part of the measure and veto part of it.

In 2004, King sponsored the landmark College Opportunity Fund bill, which dramatically changed the funding system for public colleges and universities. It removed public college tuition from TABOR calculations and put those cash funds, the state's largest source of cash funds, into enterprise status.

In between serving in the House and Senate, King started Colorado Springs Early Colleges and Colorado Early Colleges in Fort Collins, Parker and Aurora, all authorized by the Charter School Institute.

King's final elected office was with the Colorado Springs City Council from 2013 to 2017, including as council president.