

OBITUARIES

Ex-Sen. Cole remembered for integrity

By Fred Brown
Denver Post Political Editor

Ralph A. Cole, a former state senator known for his courtly demeanor and strong convictions, died Tuesday at Presbyterian/St. Luke's Medical Center.

Cole, 81, had suffered a stroke at his Littleton home on Sunday.

He served 22 years in the Colorado Legislature, beginning with the 1965 session. He spent eight years in the House of Representatives and 14 in the Senate, retiring in 1986.

For years, he was the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee. He also served as leader of the Republican majority in the Senate.

"He was probably the fairest legislative chairman I've ever seen," said one longtime legislative staffer.

But the eloquent, white-haired Cole also was known for his fierce commitment to constitutional law and key causes. He championed the state



Cole

would take on anybody," said former Gov. Dick Lamm, who often found himself at odds with Cole. "Unlike so many of today's political battles, where you know people are just posturing, Ralph Cole fought from the heart."

Cole, a lawyer, twice challenged the constitutionality of the state's "Sunshine Law," which requires open meetings and financial disclosures by legislators. The law, a citizen initia-

community corrections system and was the driving force behind the state's seat belt law.

"He was a man of impeccable integrity who fought like hell for what he believed in and

would take on anybody," said former Gov. Dick Lamm, who often found himself at odds with Cole. "Unlike so many of today's political battles, where you know people are just posturing, Ralph Cole fought from the heart."

Cole, a lawyer, twice challenged the constitutionality of the state's "Sunshine Law," which requires open meetings and financial disclosures by legislators. The law, a citizen initia-

tive passed in 1972, survived the court tests.

He also refused to allow a committee hearing on a 1994 "shield" law to protect reporters from having to reveal their sources. But he still was respected in news media circles.

"Sometimes he thought the press got in his way. He was never shy about saying that," said Cindy Parmenter, spokeswoman for the state health department and a statehouse reporter during the Cole years.

"But even with the tension between him and the news media, he was one of the better legislators of his era. And he deeply cared about Colorado," Parmenter said.

Born in Plattsmouth, Neb., on March 25, 1915, Cole moved to Colorado with his family when he was child and made the state his home for the rest of his life. He graduated from Denver's South High School in 1934 and received two degrees from the

University of Denver — a bachelor's in political science and his law degree in 1940.

He was a captain in the U.S. Army during World War II and remained in the Army Reserve as a member of the Judge Advocate Corps.

His wife of 39 years, Jean, died in 1987. They had no children.

"He was really a senator's senator," said state Treasurer Bill Owens who succeeded Cole. "He was courtly and principled and utterly fearless. He did what he thought was right, regardless of who it angered."

Gov. Roy Romer, who remembered Cole as "a hard competitor and a passionate advocate," ordered the Capitol flags flown at half-staff until after Cole's funeral today.

Services will begin at 11 a.m. tomorrow at Drinkwine Mortuary, 999 W. Littleton Blvd. Cremation will follow. The family asks that memorial gifts be made to any charity.

Obituaries

Local, national and international

Ralph Cole, 24-year lawmaker who made friends of his enemies

By John Sanko

Rocky Mountain News Capitol Bureau



Cole

Ralph Cole, an outspoken former Colorado lawmaker who relished his irascible reputation, died Tuesday at Presbyterian-St. Luke's Hos-

pital. He was 81.

Gov. Roy Romer ordered that state flags be flown at half-staff in honor of the man who served 24 years in the Colorado legislature. Mr. Cole retired after the 1988 session, joking that four more years was "more than the people

should have to put up with."

Memorial services will be at 11 a.m. Friday, July 5, at Drinkwine Mortuary Chapel, 999 W. Littleton Blvd., Littleton. Mr. Cole's wife, Jean, died in 1987.

A Republican who served Littleton in both the House and the Senate, Mr. Cole was most proud of the mandatory seat-belt law he pushed through in 1987. But perhaps he was best-known for his ability to prod, cajole and frequently infuriate everyone from his colleagues to the governor.

David Ethan Greenberg, who had been a member of former Gov. Dick Lamm's administration, once wrote that if you worked for Lamm, "You came in every morning knowing that Ralph Cole was

out there watching, making sure you were staying in line.

"You went home every night wondering whether you had screwed something up, waiting for Cole to call a press conference to denounce your latest fiasco."

And yet those who felt the sting of Mr. Cole's tongue-lashing had a grudging admiration for the man and his rigid adherence to his convictions and beliefs. Even Lamm, a Democrat, admitted a respect for Mr. Cole.

Romer called Mr. Cole "a hard competitor and a compassionate advocate for what he believed in."

"Those of us who worked with him loved him for who he was," Romer said.

"I was sent up there to do what

I thought was right, and it hasn't bothered me particularly that I've suffered a lot of harsh criticism," Mr. Cole once said. He was a third-generation lawyer and Nebraska native who served as an Army captain in World War II.

Mr. Cole sponsored or helped write scores of bills, helping create the community corrections system and fund homes for battered women.

Although he infuriated Lamm to the point where the then-governor described him as petty and vindictive, Mr. Cole insisted: "I didn't hate him. I just saw all of his warts."

Sen. Al Meiklejohn, R-Arveda, described Mr. Cole as "a thoughtful gentleman, a principled conservative and utterly honest, and a

man who served with distinction in the highest sense of (the word)."

"Ralph Cole has a perpetual place in the history of Colorado," Meiklejohn said. "He's just part of our culture and history now."

Denver City Councilman Dennis Gallagher, a Democrat who also served in the legislature, called the death a great loss to the state.

"Ralph Cole loved the Constitution and he loved constitutional history," Gallagher said.

"He was a staunch conservative and we didn't agree on much, but we got to be good friends. I know the angels will welcome him."

He is survived by several cousins.