

1st Black woman to serve in Colorado Senate dies

GLORIA TANNER

By Kieran Nicholson

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Gloria Travis Tanner, the first Black woman to serve in the Colorado Senate and a member of the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame, died on Monday at her Denver home. She was 86.

In 2001, Tanner established the Senator Gloria Tanner Leadership and Training Institute for Future Black Women Leaders of Colorado. She was the lead founder of Colorado Black Women for Political Action in 1977; a co-founder with former Sen. Regus Groff of the Colorado Black Roundtable; and the co-creator of NOBEL-Women (National Organization of Black Elected Legislators) headquartered in Washington, D.C.

On Tuesday, Gov. Jared Polis and Lt. Gov. Dianne Primavera released the following statement: "We join fellow Coloradans in mourning the loss of the great Gloria Tanner, Colorado's first African American woman to serve as a State Senator, and the second to be elected to a leadership position in the Colorado House of Representatives.

"Beyond her storied career spanning 17 years at the Capitol — fighting to pass landmark legislation to improve the lives of women and families — former Senator Tanner's undying love for her community is manifest in her mission to shape emerging leaders."

In 1985, Tanner was elected to the Colorado State House and she became the second Black representative to hold a leadership position — minority caucus leader, according to a 2019 CU Denver News story. In 1994, when Sen. Groff retired, Tanner was appointed as his replacement, becoming the first Black woman senator in Colorado history.

As a leader in Colorado's Capitol, Tanner, for more than a decade, spearheaded civil rights efforts, Rep. Joe Neguse said on Twitter in February in a Black History Month salute. She served as the House minority caucus leader from 1987 to 1990.

Rep. Leslie Herod, D-Denver, the chair of the Black Democratic Legislative Caucus of Colorado, described Tanner as a mentor and an inspiration.

"Senator Tanner was a trailblazer whose determination and commitment to Colorado improved the lives of all people in our state, and I join Coloradans in mourning her passing. Gloria's tireless devotion to serving our community uplifted the lives of so many Coloradans and families. Gloria was a mentor to us all," Herod said in a statement.

Plans for a service for Tanner are pending.

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