

There will likely never be another conservative firebrand like Charlie Duke at Colorado's Capitol.

Duke, 73, died sometime last week in Shawnee, Oklahoma, according to his cousin, James Duke.

There will be some, James Duke said, who won't mourn Charlie.

But I will.

Duke served in the General Assembly from 1989 to 1998. He was first elected to the House in 1988 and served six years in the lower chamber before being elected to state Senate in 1994.

In 1996, he ran for the U.S. Senate, garnering more votes at the El Paso Republican Assembly than Gale Norton — who later became Secretary of the Interior — and the eventual winner, Wayne Allard.

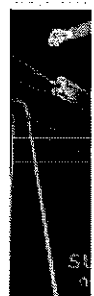
Duke went back to the General Assembly after that. He resigned his Senate seat in January 1998, stating that "God had advised (him) to get out of public office."

Duke was born in Nashville, Tennessee on April 27, 1942. He was a successful electrical engineer when he decided to take the plunge into politics.

When Charlie was in his heyday, between 1994 and 1998, he was something to see.

He railed against fellow Republicans, both at the Statehouse and back home in El Paso County. An unabashed conservative, he was considered a leader in states' rights issues and a hero in the anti-government Patriot movement. In 1995, at the request of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, he went to Montana to negotiate with the Montana Freeman, an effort he abandoned after five days because, as he saw it, the Freeman had no intention of a peaceful surrender.

I wasn't yet a reporter when Duke was at the Capitol, but in those early days of the Internet I read everything I could about him. For better or worse, he was the person who make me realize that politics didn't have to be dull. Three months after he resigned in 1998, I became a political reporter covering the state Capitol.



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In 2000, Duke told The Denver Post's Chuck Green that he had "strong spiritual signals" to run for his old House seat again.

That didn't work so well. He lost in the primary to then-Rep. Lynn Hefley, with whom he had tangled. At one point, Duke accused Hefley and her husband, then-U.S. Rep. Joel Hefley, a Colorado Springs Republican, of manipulating the stock market in an effort to undermine him.

He moved to Oklahoma some 10 years ago, and faded into obscurity.

As James Duke tells it, his cousin is believed to have died at home sometime last week, although body was not found until Monday. James said Charlie Duke will be cremated and there will be no funeral services.