

You have viewed 1 of 3 of your monthly page views for May. [Subscribe now.](#)

Jim Dyer, former Southwest Colorado legislator, dies at 85

‘The people that didn’t love Jim were so partisan they couldn’t see daylight’

By Reuben Schafir Herald Staff Writer

Friday, May 19, 2023 4:15 PM **Updated Friday, May. 19, 2023 9:23 PM**



Privacy - Terms



served six two-year terms in the seat before he was term-limited in 1998.

Former state representative and senator Jim Dyer, pictured here with his wife, Sheri, died April 29 at the age of 85. The two were prioritizing relationships and his constituents over power, Dyer mused about running for the District 6 senate seat in 1998, but said he would only do so if Sen. Ben Alexander, his colleague who held the seat at the time, opted not to seek reelection. When Alexander announced his intentions not to run, Dyer signed up.

"I'm going to shout from the top of Red Mountain Pass," he said the morning of his announcement, before traveling up to the pass to do just that.

In doing so, Dyer, a lifelong Democrat, once again prevailed before a voting bloc dominated by Republicans.

He was appointed to the Colorado Public Utilities Commission in 2001 and served in that role until stepping down in May 2004.

Edward James "Jim" Dyer, Jr., was born Dec. 9, 1937, in St. Joseph, Missouri, to Edward James Dyer, Sr., and Eleanor Grace Brown Dyer.



Former state representative and senator Jim Dyer died April 29 at the age of 85. Dyer served in the Marine Corps during the Vietnam War. (Courtesy of Matt Dyer)



He was raised in Kansas and attended Saint Benedict's College. He graduated in 1959 with a bachelor's in English literature before attending Officer's Candidate School later that year.

In 1963, Dyer began his first tour in Vietnam as a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy, where he was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for bravery and the Vietnam Gallantry Cross Medal with Palm. He served two more tours in Vietnam after transferring to the Marines in 1964, where he rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel.

He married his wife, Sharon Ferguson, in 1966.

By the time he retired from the Marines in 1979, Dyer had been recognized with the Soldiers Medal, three Bronze Stars, the Air Medal, the Gallantry Cross with Palm (Republic of Vietnam) and the Order of Military Merit (Republic of Korea).

"Jim was a very loyal guy when it came to taking care of his troops and not forgetting them," said Durango resident Gen. Ron Fogleman, former chief of staff of the U.S. Air Force. "One of those men that served with him in Vietnam ... later in life ... murdered someone and he ended up in Fort Leavenworth as a prisoner. And Jim would go visit him every year. He would drive to Kansas – he just never forgot his troops."

Dyer's care for others was a distinguishing characteristic, Fogleman said.

Capt. Joel Eisenstein was a lieutenant under Dyer in Vietnam from 1971 to 1972 and said that as a commanding officer, Dyer made his care known to the troops serving beneath him.

"He used to send a helicopter around to all the units and he'd bring in the lieutenants and the staff NCOs (noncommissioned officers) and he'd take them out on the beach and they'd cook steaks for us and every now and then he'd bring a band in," Eisenstein said. "... That's kind of the little things that he did that he didn't have to do,

but he knew that morale was important. And he knew that the troops needed to know that he was there for them."

After retiring from the armed forces, Dyer and his wife moved to Durango, now with three sons, Jim, Andy and Matt, in tow.

Dyer sold heavy equipment and pursued a degree in career counseling from Fort Lewis College.

A notoriously amiable man, Dyer was elected to the Colorado House of Representatives in 1988, where his caring traits earned him a reputation as a humble public servant.



Former state representative and senator Jim Dyer died April 29 at the age of 85. Dyer married Sheri Dyer in 1966 while in the Marine Corps. (Courtesy of Matt Dyer)



The antithesis of an ideologue, Dyer made loyalty to his constituents and colleagues a priority of his time in office, transcending party lines.

In 2002, Dyer did not endorse his replacement in the senate, former Democratic Sen. Jim Isgar, in a race against Republican Kay Alexander, citing the years he and Alexander spent together in the House.

“You just don’t turn on a friend,” he told *The Durango Herald* at the time.

Both former state senator and representative Ellen Roberts and Rep. Barbara McLachlan recalled the leisurely manner in which Dyer shopped at City Market, taking the task as an opportunity to read the pulse of the community.

“I never really saw him with a full cart,” McLachlan said.

“He would stand there and just wanted to check in with people and see what was on their minds and how he could best represent people in the southwest corner,” Roberts said.

Mark Larson, the Republican who succeeded Dyer in representing the 59th House District, said Dyer “cared about all the right things.”

“He was so loved,” Larson said. “The people that didn’t love Jim were so partisan they couldn’t see daylight.”

Traversing the Capitol grounds, Larson recalled how Dyer would always stop at the Vietnam War memorial and recite the names of three men under his command who had died in the conflict.

“He was a Democrat, but nothing at all like what Tucker Carlson would have you believe Democrats are like,” Bill Roberts, a former opinion editor for the *Herald*, said. “And he was a career Marine who just would not fit in a Clint Eastwood movie.”

Both during his time in office and upon his retirement from public life, Dyer wrote a weekly column for the *Herald*, often about happenings in the state Legislature.

Richard G. Ballantine, chairman of the *Herald’s* board of directors, recalled Dyer stopping by the paper’s offices on Saturdays after returning from Denver to write those columns, often while singing to himself or for others.

“It was always a good read,” Ballantine said.

Matt Dyer, Jim’s youngest son, said he takes example from his father’s confidence, care and service.

“He was a lot of things to a lot of people,” Matt said. “For his family, he was respected and loved. And I think he made a positive impact in the places he went, whether that was Durango, Denver or Vietnam. He made a difference.”

Jim is survived by his wife, Shari, three sons, sister, nieces and nephews. Services are planned for next month; the family plans to run an obituary in early June with more details.

rschafir@durangoherald.com

Former state representative and senator Jim Dyer died April 29 at the age of 85. Dyer was known as a loyal and caring man, both during his tenure in the Marine Corps and as a politician. (Courtesy of Matt Dyer)



You might also like



How's your internet? Counties in Southwest Colorado want to know

May 22, 2023



U.S. Highway 550 north of Durango closed Saturday for bike race

May 22, 2023



Laura's Artisan food truck set for grand opening at Powerhouse Science Center

May 22, 2023

Reader Comments

5 comments

Sort by **Oldest**



Add a comment...

