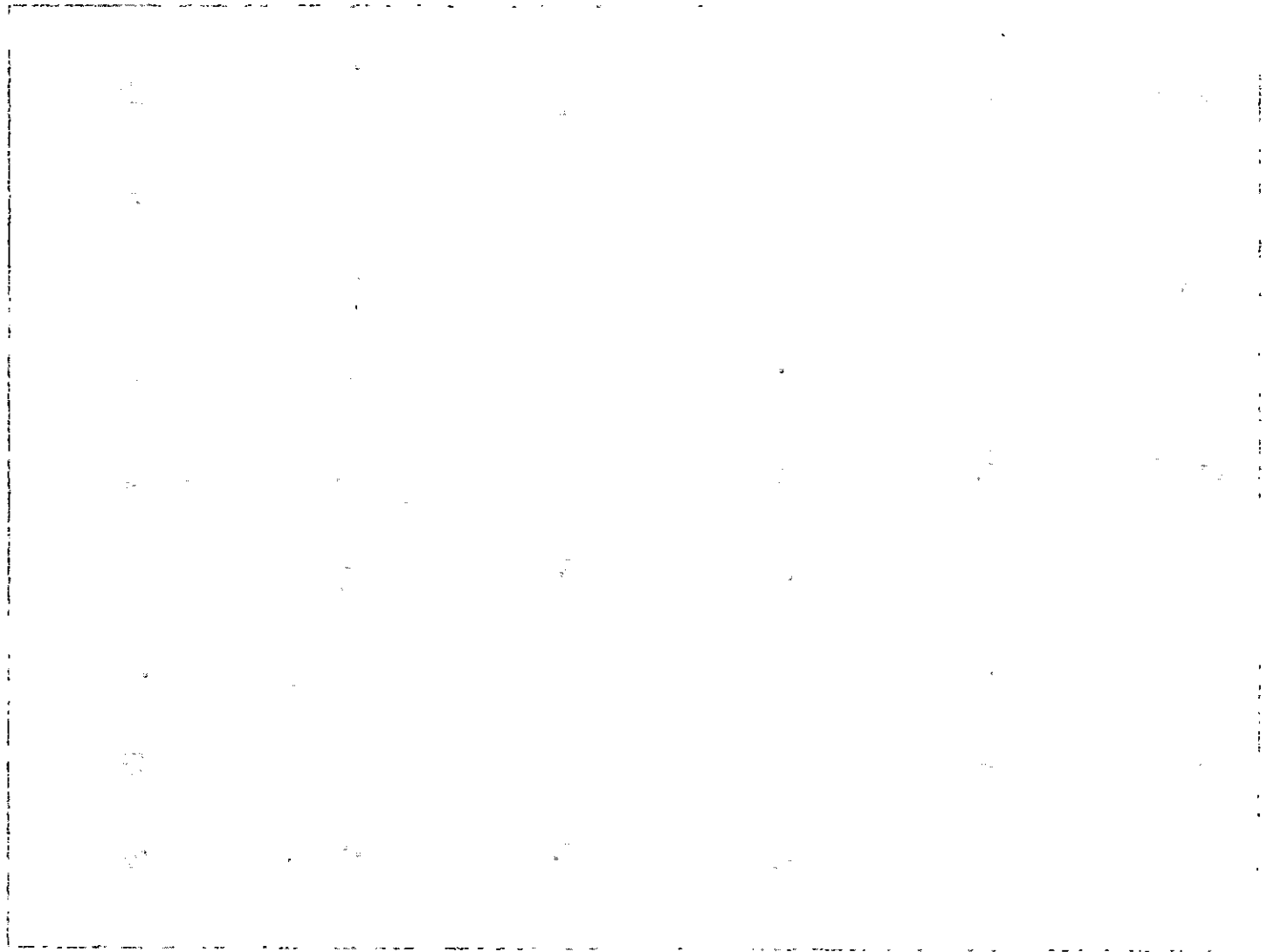


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Revered statesman Tilman Bishop dies

By GARY HARMON



Since its founding in 1921 the Grand Junction Lions Club has had several thousand members and only 7 of those members have received the Melvin Jones Fellowship Award. This is an accolade that the Grand Junction Lions Club takes very seriously as it is the most prestigious award the Grand Junction Lions can ever bestow on one of our own. The Grand Junction Lions Club is proud to award this rare honor to Tilman "Tillie" Bishop Tue. afternoon at Two Rivers Convention Center.

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Tilman "Tillie" Bishop, whose influence covered Colorado from his unlikely base of Grand Junction for 28 years in the state Legislature and 38 years in elected office overall, died Sunday in Grand Junction.

Bishop was 86. His death was announced by a family friend, Grand Junction attorney Terry Farina.

Bishop's portfolio of accomplishments resonated from Utah to Kansas, Wyoming to New Mexico — and on at least one occasion, well beyond the boundaries of the Centennial State.

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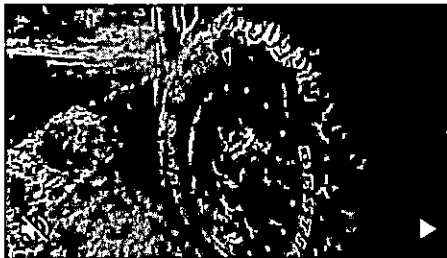
He was Colorado's fourth-longest-serving legislator, served as a state representative and state senator. He also was a Mesa County commissioner, University of Colorado regent and Colorado Mesa University trustee.

Bishop also was a long-serving administrator at what is now Colorado Mesa University, where he arrived in 1962 after having swung through Grand Junction on his way with his wife, Pat, to the World's Fair in Seattle, Washington.

He was defeated in his first bid for public office, but never again after that, and he had served for six years as president pro tem of the Colorado Senate when his 24-year tenure there ended.

Over his career in the Legislature, Bishop's reach stretched to the mountaintops of the nation's highest state, and beyond. He joined with another legislator to make Colorado a burr under the ever-so sensitive skin of Soviet leaders bent on persecuting Jews.

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While a community college campus and a wildlife area, both in Mesa County, are named for Bishop, one of his most significant accomplishments is one that bears no name, but which undergirds the Colorado winter economy.

Legislation he carried established the relationship between skiers participating in what is admittedly a dangerous sport and the operators who ferry them to mountaintops so they can slide down the slopes on two fragile slats, or more recently, fly down on a single board.

In all, he said in an interview in May, he introduced 736 bills and shepherded 456 to the governor's desk for signature.

There was one measure, he noted, that was vetoed, but overall he batted .650 in the Legislature.

In addition to helping build Colorado's ski industry, he was a reliable salesman for the Grand Junction Lions Club, selling more than \$50,000 worth of Lions Club Parade tickets over the years.

Through it all, he counted on Pat, his wife of now more than 60 years, he said.

Bishop's political career began inauspiciously enough, with a loss in the Republican primary.

He was chosen from among a group of politically frustrated friends, no one else of whom could spare the time to run, Bishop recalled.

"I ended up being the candidate," he said, smiling slightly when asked whether that meant he had drawn the short straw.

His friends, however, backed him and "We put together a helluva campaign."

Pat drove a Bishop-backing billboard around town in a pickup and they both knocked on doors from morning to night.

Bishop learned along the way to always use sidewalks when approaching a house after a potential voter scolded him for crossing a lawn on the way to the doorstep.

Another, he recalled, badly underestimated him when he accidentally left the gate open and the family dog — "It was a lab-poodle mix" — escaped. Bishop chased down the canine and returned it to the family home.

When he asked for a vote, the resident said he was going about it wrong.

"Why don't you run for dog catcher?" the voter said. "You did a pretty good job."

In the general-election campaign, Bishop was trying to unseat a Democrat and he frequently crossed paths with Farina, a Democrat.

"You're running a good campaign, but (Democrat Ed) McCormick's going to win," Bishop remembered Farina telling him. Pat nodded in the background.

"Every time he said that, Pat and I each knocked on 50 more doors," Bishop said.

Which, it turned out, was exactly what Farina hoped.

"I wanted him to win," Farina said. Though he was bound to support his fellow Democrat, he preferred Bishop, Farina said.

And, "Tillie was a friend," Farina said,

In those days, Farina noted, Republicans tended to be more progressive than many of his fellow Democrats and such was the case with Bishop.

So Farina cajoled Bishop, assuring them they were close, but probably would fall short on Election Day.

Win, though, Bishop did, marking the start of more than a quarter century in the Legislature.

Once there, Bishop found quickly that "Mesa County was an afterthought" in the Legislature. And so was he, Bishop said, recalling that he was seated near a couple Front Range legislators, fellow Republicans, who jabbed him for his long hair and sideburns.

"I think he might be a pretty good legislator if he cut that hair and looked like a human being," Bishop remembered one saying.

In all, Bishop returned again and again to the Legislature, where he worked with five governors, Republicans John Love and Johnny Vanderhoof, then Democrats Dick Lamm, Roy Romer and Bill Ritter, then Republican Bill Owens.

When Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper was barnstorming the state in his run for governor with his entire campaign entourage, he stopped to visit Bishop at Bishop's home.

"That's the regard he had for Tillie," Pat said.

Bishop teamed up with another legislator, Jerry Kopel, in 1980 to pressure the Soviet Union to release three prisoners of conscience who were among a group of 10 men and one woman who tried to flee Leningrad after commandeering an airplane. One was released, five were pardoned, and two died. The remaining three were imprisoned.

Kopel established the "Committee to Free the Leningrad Three" and chose Bishop as co-chairman.

Bishop "was quite enthusiastic about the project and obtained 29 of the other 34 senators to join the committee. In the House, even with Sen. Bishop's help, we were only able to persuade 41 of the other 64 House members to sign on," Kopel wrote.

One of the three was released to go to Israel, a second released only to be rearrested later and the third freed, but prohibited from leaving the country.

Since departing from the public eye, Bishop has battled cancer in his leg and another cancer on his nose, which was removed and grafted over with skin from his forehead.

Getting out of his home has been difficult because of the onset of Parkinson's, which most immediately affected his legs, but he could still communicate with friends and dispense wisdom and rove the world electronically via telephone and email.

He greeted visitors while seated in a recliner, with a telephone at his right hand and one of two iPads ready on his left.

Being unable to move about with ease was trying, Bishop said. "It's like a prison."

No information about services was immediately available.