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## OBITUARY

*Tilman M. Bishop*

JANUARY 1, 1933 - JUNE 16, 2019



**T**ilman "Tillie" Bishop, a native Coloradan whose reputation as a legislator grew from Grand Junction to touch the peaks of the nation's highest state and whose work for freedom resonated around the world, died Sunday, June 16. He was 86. Tillie was the Centennial State's fourth-longest serving legislator, with four years in the Colorado House and 24 in the Senate. In all he worked with five governors while in the General Assembly and his career in elective office reached 38 years in total with service as a Mesa County commissioner and University of Colorado regent. He also served as a trustee for Colorado Mesa University. And for 67 years, he was the partner and best friend to his wife, Pat. He was born Jan. 1, 1933 in Colorado Springs, to Oliver Fredrick Bishop and Lilly May French. His was first touched by the West Slope in high school, he told a friend, Richard Gilmore, D.D.S, when Tillie was the manager of the Colorado Springs High School football team that battled Grand

Junction High School for the state football championship in 1951. Colorado Springs won, 14-13. He and Pat moved to Grand Junction in 1962, when the couple swung through Grand Junction on the way to the World's Fair in Seattle. He interviewed at what was then Mesa Junior College, bringing with him testing expertise that was sorely needed. His hiring marked the beginning of 31-year career at what is now

Colorado Mesa University. 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 in an interview shortly before his death. "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, he said, "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 Grand Junction attorney Terry 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 Tillie. So, Farina cajoled Tillie, 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 GOP governors John Love and Johnny Vanderhoof, then Democrats Dick Lamm, Roy Romer and Bill Ritter, then Republican Bill Owens. When he retired from the Legislature, he had served six of his 24 years as Senate pro tem. While in the Senate, he joined with another legislator, Democrat Jerry Kopel in 1980 to make Colorado a burr under the ever-so sensitive skin of Soviet leaders bent on persecuting Jews. 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 2019, he introduced 736 bills and shepherded 456 to the governor's desk for signature. One measure was vetoed, but overall he batted .650 in the Legislature. When Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper was barnstorming the state in his run for governor, his entire campaign entourage 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 to co-chair it. 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 U.S.S.R. While in the Senate, Tillie worked with legislators from both parties to put a constitutional amendment on the ballot in 1992 to establish Great Outdoors Colorado, which protects open space using Colorado Lottery funds. As a trustee of Great Outdoors Colorado, he persuaded the Colorado Supreme Court to rule that Great Outdoors Colorado funding was exempt from revenue limits established by the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights, which was approved in the same election, but with fewer votes than the measure that established GOCO. Back in Grand Junction, Tillie was a reliable salesman for the Grand Junction Lions Club, selling more than \$50,000 worth of Lions Club Carnival tickets over the years, and he was a Melvin Jones Fellow, the highest award available to Lions. Since he departed from the public eye, Bishop 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 was difficult because of the onset of Parkinson's, which most immediately affected his legs. He still communicated with friends, dispensed 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. He still fretted that he was unable to move about as he would have wished. "It's like a prison," he said of the disease. He is survived by Pat and a multitude of friends. As son, Barry, is deceased. Tillie served on too many boards, committees and commissions to list, but two that he was particularly fond of, said Pat, were the Selection Committee for the Colorado Sports Hall of Fame and the Aspinall Scholarship Committee. Pat Bishop, President Tim Foster and the MU Trustees will host a celebration of Tillie's life on Tuesday, June 25, from 4 to 6 p.m. on the third floor of Escalante Hall on the CMU campus. Parking is available in the University Center parking garage off 12th Street. From the garage, walk west to Escalante Hall, on the northwest side of the plaza. Memorial contributions may be made to the Tilman and Pat Bishop Endowed Scholarship at the CMU Foundation, 1450 N. 12th St., Grand Junction, Colorado, 81501.


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