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POLITICS

"A legendary leader in East Hartford:" Former state Rep. Tim Moynihan dies

By DANIELA ALTIMARI
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Timothy J. Moynihan, a former state representative and close ally of former Gov. William A. O'Neill, died recently. Moynihan is shown in this file photo from 2001, when he announced his retirement as president of the Metro Hartford Chamber of Commerce. (STEPHEN DUNN / HC)

Timothy J. Moynihan was a Democratic Party power broker, an influential state lawmaker from East Hartford and a confidante of former Gov. William A. O'Neill.

But Moynihan, who was 78 and died over the weekend, might best be remembered as the longtime leader of the region's chamber of commerce. In that role, he helped lay the groundwork for several initiatives in Hartford, including more housing downtown, increased office occupancy and the city's reconnection with the riverfront.

Despite his Democratic affiliation, Moynihan worked well with members of both political parties, according to a Courant editorial published in 2001, when he announced his retirement from the MetroHartford Chamber of Commerce. "He was known as a conciliator and facilitator who never let ideology stand in the way of progress," the editorial stated.

Moynihan, a graduate of East Hartford High School, won his first election — a seat on the East Hartford school board — in 1965, just two years after he graduated from St. Michael's College in Winooski, Vt.

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After serving on the board for nine years, five as its chairman, Moynihan made a successful bid for the state House of Representatives.

He was a skilled politician who truly cared about his constituents, said U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, whose time in the House overlapped with Moynihan's.

"As a coalition builder, cajoler, charmer and friend no one was a better legislative leader in his era," Blumenthal said. "I was proud and inspired to watch him work his magic as a junior member of the state House. He had the gift of gab, but also genuine vision and depth— and most important, he cared to his core about making government better [for] the lives of every day Americans."

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U.S. Rep. John Larson, who served with Moynihan in the legislature and counts him as a mentor, said he was a giant of the General Assembly and "a legend in East Hartford."

"There was no one who was more respected or highly regarded than Tim Moynihan," Larson said in a statement. "His leadership spread generations and had an enormous impact. He exemplified what it meant to be a public servant and put service before self."

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Moynihan was a real estate agent, but even without a law degree he was able to grasp the often complex details of legislation, Larson said.

"Tim epitomized what it meant to be a citizen legislator," Larson said. "While not a lawyer, he knew Connecticut state statutes better than anyone. He especially understood the nexus between law and the practicality of common sense application of a bill."

Moynihan took over as Democratic chairman in 1985, when the party was still reeling from the bruising losses it endured in the Reagan wave of the previous year. His mandate was to heal and modernize the party.

His efforts paid off: in 1986, the last hurrah of the party lever that allowed voters to vote a straight party ticket with a single maneuver, Democrats, led by O'Neill and former U.S. Sen. Chris Dodd, regained control of the legislature.

Daniela Altimari



Daniela Altimari covers state government and politics at The Courant.



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