

NEWS CHICAGO METRO/STATE

Karen Lewis, fighter for public education, charismatic ex-leader of Chicago Teachers Union, dies

Lewis had considered running against then-Mayor Rahm Emanuel in 2014 but decided against it after being diagnosed with a brain tumor.

By Stefano Esposito | Feb 8, 2021, 9:04am CST



Karen Lewis addresses a union rally in September 2012. | AP

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Karen Lewis, the charismatic former head of the Chicago Teachers Union, has died, her spokeswoman confirmed.

“The nation has lost a true champion. Karen Lewis was one of the most powerful and prolific voices in public education, advocating for students, their families and the communities in which they live,” said Stephanie Gadlin, a spokeswoman for Lewis.

“For her tenure as president of the Chicago Teachers Union, she was the architect of today’s fight for education justice. As her spokeswoman, I cannot tell you how inspired I was by her leadership as well as her vulnerability as she navigated the treacherous terrain of Chicago politics. ...

“Our city has lost a great voice. I send my heartfelt condolences to her loved ones, friends and to the 25,000 members of the CTU. May her memory reign for all days to come and she find rest in the bosom of God.”

Lewis had considered running against then-Mayor Rahm Emanuel — of whom she was a frequent critic — in 2014 but decided against it after being diagnosed with a brain tumor.

Lewis announced her retirement from the union back in 2018 to “focus on my health, get well.”

The feisty union president who commanded the country’s third-largest teachers union was diagnosed in 2014 with **an aggressive form of brain cancer** that halted any plans to unseat Emanuel.

Born in Chicago, Lewis attended CPS’ Kozminski Elementary School and Kenwood High School, leaving before graduation to take early admission at Mount Holyoke College. She later transferred to Dartmouth College, where was the only African-American woman in her graduating class.

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— ChicagoTeachersUnion (@CTULocal1) February 8, 2021

This is a developing story. Check back for updates.