



Tyrone Thompson 1967-2019

It's been an emotionally traumatic legislative session this year, starting with the abrupt resignation of Senate Majority Leader Kelvin Atkinson after an FBI investigation found he had diverted hundreds of thousands of campaign dollars for his personal use, followed by the equally sudden resignation of Assemblymember Mike Sprinkle after multiple reports of sexual harassment. These were shocking events that shook the legislative building and its insular culture, but the unexpected and stunning death of Assemblyman Tyrone Thompson on Saturday morning was nearly impossible to absorb.

Thompson, a Democrat from North Las Vegas, was universally loved for his passionate public service, especially his commitment to education and helping struggling and vulnerable populations. He was in the midst of his fourth legislative session, chairing the Assembly Education Committee, intensely involved in bills to improve education, the criminal

justice system and homeless services. On Saturday, many people learned of his death via social media as I did, a brutal communication mechanism that left me hoping desperately that such a tragedy could not be true. He was only 51.

Throughout the weekend, tributes poured in from every quarter, from Republicans and Democrats alike, from education advocates and those concerned with homelessness, from lobbyists, his church family and the Clark County community at-large. Everyone had a story to tell and a selfie to share of a man who unabashedly lived his values, known to everyone for his humility and dedication, his kindness and generosity, and his colossal, electric smile.

I met Thompson many years ago when we both worked closely with Shannon West to mobilize more resources for homeless youth throughout the state. West was another community legend lost far too soon, dying at age 45 from breast cancer. Thompson's vision and dedication to

vulnerable homeless kids was unwavering despite his overwhelming grief when West died. He continued on with his life's work, honoring his mentor's legacy by helping to build the Shannon West Homeless Youth Center and pursuing public service wherever it led him. When he was appointed to fill the Assembly seat vacated by Steven Brooks, who resigned due to significant mental health issues in 2013, it seemed like the logical next step in his mission to make our state a better place to live for those struggling Nevadans many elected leaders choose to forget.

Reading comments after Thompson's death, I learned a lot more about him, but none of it surprised me, for he lived so authentically, never asking others to do more than he did himself. He was a court appointed special advocate for almost two decades, serving as the voice of children involved in difficult foster care situations, who were lost in the maze of the family court system until Thompson became their champion. He volunteered for his church

and was ubiquitous on social media, appearing at every community event with a huge, infectious grin, his arms wrapped around his friends and constituents. You can tell by looking at the endless selfies how much he loved his community and how much he was, in turn, truly loved.

Many people have suggested a school be named after Thompson to publicly cherish his memory and inspire future generations of kids to strive for service instead of glory. It's an honor I wholeheartedly endorse. Thompson leaves a legacy anyone would be proud of, serving as a role model to so many and empowering youth especially to reach for the stars. His was a life well lived, a shining example of service that won't soon be forgotten.

One wonders how devastated and grieving legislators will carry on this last month of the 2019 session as the legislature winds down, final weeks that are often filled with tension and conflict. Somehow, they will. They must. Tyrone Thompson would expect no less. □



WWW.BESTOFNORTHERNNEVADA.COM