

Lois DeBerry, Legislator in Tennessee for 4 Decades, Dies at 68

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NASHVILLE — Lois DeBerry, a Tennessee legislator who was one of the nation's longest-serving female lawmakers and who entered the national spotlight in 2000 with a presidential nominating speech for her friend Al Gore, died on Sunday in Memphis. She was 68.

The cause was pancreatic cancer, said her nephew, Gary DeBerry.

First elected in 1972, Ms. DeBerry was the second black woman to serve in the Tennessee General Assembly and the first woman to be named speaker pro tempore in the state's House of Representatives, where she was its longest-serving member.

Nationwide, only two other female lawmakers elected in 1972 are still serving, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.



Lois DeBerry Credit...Mark Humphrey/Associated Press

A Democrat, Ms. DeBerry was a close friend of Mr. Gore, the former vice president, and gave a rousing nominating speech for him at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles in 2000.

“The Gore campaign at that time needed a sparkplug,” recalled State Representative John DeBerry, a distant relative who served with her for more than 20 years in the legislature. “And Lois was chosen for that.”

In the Tennessee House, Ms. DeBerry promoted legislation to benefit poor people, children, the elderly and college students.

Survivors include her husband, Charles Traugher, and a son, Michael Boyer.