



James Ferlo

May 19, 1951 - May 15, 2022

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Jim Ferlo, Jimmy to his good friends, was a passionate and compassionate lifelong civil rights and social justice activist, who didn't just talk the talk - he walked the walk. He spent his entire adult life advocating for poor people, minorities, women, workers and the LGBTQ community.

Born into a large Italian American family in Rome, New York, Jim moved to the Pittsburgh area after high school, following his sister Lyn's move to the area. Upon moving to Pittsburgh, Jim immediately got involved in both the anti-war movement (Vietnam) and the civil rights movement. Despite his young age, Jim became an indispensable staff member of the Peace and Freedom Center of Pittsburgh, proving himself to be both a great community organizer and a tremendous writer.

Jim had no formal education beyond high school but was incredibly well read and had a near encyclopedic knowledge of US History and local Pittsburgh history. He went on to work for and/or get deeply involved with a number of different Pittsburgh community organizations like the Urban League of Pittsburgh, Community Action Pittsburgh, the South Oakland Citizens' Council, Pittsburgh Neighborhood Alliance, the Pennsylvania Alliance for Jobs and Energy and the Community Health Advocacy Network. Jim was the primary organizer for countless anti-war, civil rights and economic justice

demonstrations in Pittsburgh and was a fiery orator who had a gift for inspiring crowds. In fact, Jim was so prolific in the Pittsburgh progressive movement in his youth that the FBI followed him and devoted hundreds of pages of notes to his comings and goings. Jim was actually quite proud of that fact. Jim also worked very closely with members of the labor movement. He organized community support for the workers involved in first health care strike ever in the Pittsburgh area at Western Psychiatric Hospital and also spearheaded a campaign to help keep the Nabisco factory in East Liberty from being shuttered.

In the 1980s Jim decided to see what positive change he could foment as an elected official and decided to run for a seat on the Pittsburgh City Council. Jim ran unsuccessfully in 1983 and 1985 before winning an at large seat on Pittsburgh City Council in 1987. Despite numerous opponents, manufactured smear campaigns, and an attempt to gerrymander him out of his Council District, Jim handily won reelection every time he ran. Jim was elected by his colleagues on City Council to serve as President from 1994 through 1998. He remained a member of Pittsburgh City Council serving the 7th District until his move to the Pennsylvania State Senate in January 2003. Jim was known as a problem solver to his constituents while serving on Council. He always seemed to find a way to cut through the City's bureaucratic red tape to solve problems for citizens and local businesses. Jim also organized many community development corporations to turn around what were once struggling neighborhoods like Lawrenceville, Highland Park, Bloomfield, Polish Hill.

While in City Council, although Jim was known as a tough, often bull headed negotiator, he often worked out compromise solutions to vexing issues with both the Mayor's office and his colleagues on council. Jim's legislative initiatives on City Council were numerous but included landmark legislation on gay rights, environmental issues and police oversight (The Pittsburgh Police Citizens' Review Board).

Jim served as the elected representative of the 38th Senatorial District in

Pennsylvania which covered portions of Allegheny, Armstrong and Westmoreland Counties. He served in the state senate from January 2003 until his retirement in January of 2015. While a state senator, Jim introduced the first bills that later became the Alternative Energy Portfolio Standard, our Commonwealth's primary clean energy investment legislation. Jim was at the forefront of warning everyone about the environmental impact of the fracking industry and once said he was "freaking about fracking". He also helped found the Pittsburgh Energy Innovation Center and worked to bring millions of dollars of grants to get it started. Jim was the first openly gay member of the PA senate. He made an announcement and told reporters "I'm gay. Get over it." None of his friends were surprised.

Jim was an forceful advocate of health care reform to ensure access for all individuals. While a state senator he was the prime sponsor of Senate Bill 400 which would have created a Commonwealth Health Care Trust Fund to replace the broken system of third party payers, deductibles, and caps with a single payer system that retained Medicare and the private practice and patient choice model. Throughout his life Jim was a fierce advocate for a national health care system, or "Medicare for All" that would ensure health care was a right and not a privilege.

In his retirement, Jim was no shrinking violet. He remained involved in local politics and political campaigns and devoted a lot of time and energy into the Pittsburgh-Matanzas Sister City Partnership which he helped found. Jim's passion for bringing down the embargo of Cuba and his work with the sister city partnership led to many diplomatic and humanitarian trips to Cuba and helped foster great relationships between the two cities.

Jim will be remembered for his passion, his dedication and his energy. One of his favorite quotes was from Mother Jones: "Pray for the dead, but fight like hell for the living." That is what Jim would want all of us to do - continue fighting for justice.

Jim is survived by his sisters Lyn Ferlo, Carol Ferlo and Patricia (Ferlo) Thron

and her husband Jim, and by his brothers Thomas Ferlo and his wife Pat, and Leo Ferlo as well as numerous nieces , nephews, great nieces, great nephews and friends who he adopted into his family.

There will be no visitation. Family and friends will gather at the Fountain area just inside the main gate of Allegheny Cemetery 4734 Butler St., Pgh., PA 15201 Saturday at 11:30 AM to form a procession to the grave for a Noon Service.

Memorial Contributions may be made to Global Links or the Pittsburgh-Matanzas Sister City Partnership.

Professional Services trusted to D'ALESSANDRO FUNERAL HOME & CREMATORY LTD, Lawrenceville. www.dalessandroltd.com

Previous Events

Graveside Service

MAY **21**. 12:00 PM (ET)

Allegheny Cemetery
4734 Butler St.
Pittsburgh, PA 15201

Tribute Wall



“ *James Ferlo*

January 13, 2023 at 04:43 PM



“ *Daniel Muha lit a candle in memory of James Ferlo*



Daniel muha - May 22, 2022 at 10:33 PM



“ *To my friend James Ferlo you have left us to go home to the good lord you done your duty my friend my adviser a man of great knowledge we will love you forever god rest your soul rip james*

Daniel muha - May 22, 2022 at 10:33 PM



“ *Bye, Jimmy*

albert - May 22, 2022 at 11:38 AM

CT

“ *To The Ferlo Family and close Friends:
Jimmy Ferlo was one of those incredible progressive friends to me spanning 45yrs. I never had to defend my feelings about being black, a woman, low income, young, single mom when we met, intelligent or for being a socialist democrat. In reading his impressive obituary of service on behalf of the people, it reminded me of the many causes throughout those years that we took part in as true comrades and dear friends. I'm going to miss Jimmy so much. I will carry on the fight for justice for as long as I can, just like he did.*

*Celeste Taylor
Pittsburgh, PA*



Celeste Taylor - May 22, 2022 at 09:02 AM

LC

“ *To the Ferlo Family,*

I was very sorry to read of Jim's passing. Even though we belonged to different political parties, Jim was always friendly and respectful - to me and to the thousands of others that he helped throughout his career.

We sometimes had to battle the leadership of both parties when we worked together to achieve a number of good government projects, including Pittsburgh Council by District and property assessment reform.

Jim will be sorely missed by his many friends and supporters in Western Pennsylvania. May he rest in peace.

Larry Dunn, former County Commissioner - May 20, 2022 at 01:10 PM

LC

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Larry Dunn, former County Commissioner - May 20, 2022 at 01:09 PM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of James Ferlo.*



May 20, 2022 at 10:16 AM



“ *Sentiments of Serenity Spray was purchased for the family of James Ferlo.*



May 19, 2022 at 09:00 PM

KT

“ Jim was a long time friend of my mom's I can't remember them not being friends. My favorite memory of him is, when he chained himself to the Syria Mosque.

Kim Titus - May 18, 2022 at 07:44 PM

FM

“ Jim Ferlo and his sister Lyn were my neighbors on Hays Street in East Liberty in the mid 1980's. We were friendly with them and admired their beautiful flower garden. They gave me some beautiful purple giant irises which I transferred to my current yard. They are about to bloom this week, the first one tomorrow on Jim's birthday. Jim was also an occasional customer who I served while a bartender in the mid 1980's at Zacks Fourth Avenue, Downtown. He could easily enliven any happy hour conversation.

Jim was a good man who I always looked up to. I was so happy when he finally was elected to City Council even though because of gerrymandering he had to move from our street to have a chance at winning.

Over the years I didn't see Jim often, but he always remembered me and greeted me with a smile and by name when I did see him. I always enjoyed seeing him at the Bloomfield Bridge Tavern's outdoor event at the Pittsburgh Marathon.

Due to a previous commitment I cannot attend Jim's gravesite service, but I will be thinking of him. Jim was an inspiration to me. Rest in Peace my friend, Jim Ferlo.

Fred Mergner

Fred Mergner - May 18, 2022 at 01:34 PM

AM

“ Jim was a fighter for the underclass, and a decent and caring man. I originally met Jim, before he became a Pittsburgh city council person, by doing volunteer work with him, for the organization PA. Alliance for Jobs and Energy. He will be missed!

Arnold McWilliams - May 17, 2022 at 01:54 PM