

Shilling on the Passing of Vel Phillips

Written by Wisconsin Senate, Kate Constalie

Wednesday, 18 April 2018 14:57 - Last Updated Wednesday, 18 April 2018 15:18



She was a woman of many firsts and broke through many gender and racial barriers, a true pioneer and leader during the civil rights movement, and a trailblazing woman throughout her life.

MADISON, WI – Senate Democratic Leader Jennifer Shilling (D-La Crosse) issued the following statement regarding the passing of former Secretary of State Vel Phillips.



“It is with a heavy heart that I learned of the passing of Vel Phillips. My father worked for Vel when she served as Secretary of State, and I met her several times as a young girl. At the time, I had no idea how much of an icon and giant she was in terms of her accomplishments. It was an honor to re-connect with her a few years ago and relive the stories of the past and pay homage to a trailblazing woman who inspired many.

“Vel was a woman of many firsts and broke through many gender and racial barriers. She was the first African American woman to graduate from the University of Wisconsin Law School, the first to win a seat on the Milwaukee City Council, the first to become a judge, and the first to become the Secretary of State in Wisconsin.

“She was a true pioneer and leader during the civil rights movement and fought to improve social and economic justice for underrepresented communities. Vel cared deeply about the

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Milwaukee community and her steadfast dedication to improving opportunities for families remained throughout her retirement. My deepest condolences to her family as Wisconsin celebrates the life of a remarkable woman.”

Velvlea Rodgers "Vel" Phillips was an American attorney who served as a local official and judge in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and as Secretary of State of Wisconsin, often as the first woman and/or African-American in her position. She died Tuesday, April 17, 2018 leaving a legacy of fighting for equality that has inspired generations.