

## Emma Long

### ***Pioneering city leader Emma Long dies***

*Long, 98, was Austin's first female city council member and advocate for integration, parks*

By Patrick George and Claire Osborn

Emma Long, Austin's first female City Council member and a liberal firebrand who fought for integration and fair housing, died early Sunday, according to family members. She was 98.

Long broke the gender barrier in Austin politics when she was elected to the council in 1948. She spent the next two decades pushing the policy envelope in what had been a more conservative, traditionally Southern city and was later honored by having a Lake Austin park named for her. She served until 1959 and again from 1963 to 1969.

Longtime friend and former American-Statesman reporter Anita Howard, 86, said Long grew increasingly frail in the last year of her life, though her mind and storytelling abilities remained sharp. Until last summer, Long hosted a famous Friday night poker game with friends at her Wilshire Woods home in East Austin. The game had been running since the end of World War II, Howard said.

Her son Jeff Long said she suffered a fall in recent days and did not recover.

Austin Mayor Lee Leffingwell on Sunday called Long "an icon for Austin."

"Emma Long will be remembered as a champion for the employees and the workers on the line who sought a supporter in government," Leffingwell said in a statement. "She will be remembered for her love of Austin and her work to maintain our unique quality of life. She will be missed."

Though her liberal views led many establishment Austinites to brand her a "communist," she accomplished much during her time on the council. Long fought for working families and pushed to end segregation and to dismantle city policies that treated blacks and Latinos, living primarily in East Austin, differently.

"She was a fiery little redhead who didn't take no for an answer," Jeff Long said. "She stood up to developers and helped integrate the city schools and libraries, and got a lot of parks in Austin."

He remembers his mother receiving a phone call at 2 a.m. from someone in need.

"Miss Emma, they turned off my power, and I have a sick baby at home," came the voice on the other end, Jeff Long recalled.

All it took was a phone call from Emma Long to turn the lights back on, he said.

"She was can-do and took care of the people," he said.

Long's political career, in effect, was birthed in Texas' infamous 1948 U.S. Senate election. After U.S. Rep. Lyndon B. Johnson won that disputed primary, Austin City Council Member Homer Thornberry ran for and won Johnson's seat in Congress. Long, with her son Jeff just a few weeks old, was persuaded by a circle of liberal Democrats to pursue the open council seat during the special election.

Long's campaign, playing to the mores of a time in which the newspaper at first referred to the candidate as "Mrs. Stuart Long," trumpeted that "the City needs a Good Housekeeper."

At that time, the city was looking a bit shabby. Many streets had been left unpaved, and buses were old and creaky, and Long dedicated herself to changing that.

"I won the hearts of the people of Austin by taking care of business," Long told the American-Statesman in 2007. "There was kind of an apathy among men on the council about the little problems of people like dogs barking, dusty streets and all those little housekeeping problems."

She pressed for an overhaul of the city charter, fought to lower phone rates and to raise salaries for firefighters and police, and created policies that led to the paving of more streets. She argued for the integration of Lions Municipal Golf Course in the early 1950s and of the city's main library.

She organized residents to fight against bus fare increases and pushed for decision-making that was open to the public.

By the time she ended her second stint on the council in 1969, Long was more associated with the term "fair housing" than "good housekeeping."

Her push for an ordinance prohibiting racial discrimination in housing sales, joined by a minority of what was by then a seven-member council, led to her defeat and the end of her political career. "She was the voice that wasn't often heard," Howard said.

Long saw the "incredible discrepancies" in how people on the east and west sides of the city lived and how their services were provided — or weren't, said former state Sen. Gonzalo Barrientos, D-Austin. She was one of the main voices on the council for changing that, he said.

"She recognized human beings were human beings, regardless of how they looked on the outside," said Barrientos, who met Long when he was a student at the University of Texas and a community organizer in the 1960s. Long served as a kind of mentor to Barrientos when he came to her and asked for advice on how to improve life in East Austin.

Barrientos said Long was a very caring, soft-spoken woman who was often smiling and laughing. "But when it came time to stand up for her city, she was tough," he said.

That ornery streak once moved her to speak for 13 hours straight at a council meeting.

Long's political influence also extended beyond Austin. She was a delegate to numerous national and state Democratic conventions, and in 1967 she was the U.S. representative to the World Population Commission in Geneva at the request of President Johnson, she said in 2007.

Emma and her late husband, Stuart Long, were longtime friends and supporters of LBJ. She said one of the highlights of her life was when LBJ invited them to spend the night in the White House.

Long was born Emma Jackson on Feb. 29, 1912, in tiny Lefors, near Pampa, in the Texas Panhandle. Her parents were ranchers, and she had two brothers and three sisters.

"She used to say, 'I'm from the Panhandle, and in the Panhandle, we have grit,'" 2009 Jeff Long said.

She attended high school in Hereford and graduated from the University of Texas in 1936 with a major in history and a minor in government.

She met her husband at UT, and they married in 1936. The two worked in various newspaper positions for several years. They returned to Austin in 1939 and she went to work as a reporter for the Austin American-Statesman. In 1943 she worked as an editorial clerk for the Army in Atlanta, where Stuart Long was training with the Marines.

After the war, they started the Long News Service at the Texas Capitol, which provided articles to The New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, the Chicago Sun and 26 daily newspapers in Texas.

Emma Long ran for the state Senate in 1957 but lost, and in 1959 she decided to take a break from the City Council. In 1961, she ran for the council again and lost, but she won in 1963.

She was named Austin's first female mayor pro tem in 1967 and the same year became the first person to turn on the lights of the Zilker Tree.

She went back to work as a reporter for the Long News Service and retired after Stuart Long died in 1977.

"Austin is a great city, and I love it and don't regret that it's grown. I like to see a vibrant city," she said in 2007.

The City Council, in recognition of her long years of service to the city, changed the name of City Park to Emma Long Metropolitan Park in 1984. "It was my greatest honor that the people named the park after me," she said.

*This article appeared in the Austin American-Statesman*

*1-16-11*