



In Memory of a Champion & Advocate for Integrative Health & Wellness



Deborah Senn

MARCH 8, 1949 – FEBRUARY 18, 2022

One of the most passionate and successful advocates for consumer access to licensed and regulated integrative health providers has died. Deborah Senn, a lawyer and consumer advocate who served two terms as Washington State Insurance Commissioner in the 1990s, died in Seattle on February 18 from complications of metastatic pancreatic cancer. She was 72.

The Honorable Deborah Senn was responsible for implementing a groundbreaking law in Washington state that mandated inclusion for integrative health providers in healthcare insurance plans. This radically increased patient access to integrative health providers in the state and served as a model for national change through [Senator Tom Harkin's \(D-Iowa\) visionary Section 2706 \(non-discrimination\) federal legislation](#) in 2010; [legislation](#) which Integrative Health Policy Consortium stakeholders desired and resolutely backed.

“Her courageous work to transform healthcare inspires us here at IHPC. We are committed to ongoing work to honor her legacy and increase access and awareness of integrative health providers, their whole person approach to health and their tremendous value in creating a healthier, more equitable world,” offered Dr. Margaret Erickson PhD, RN, CNS; IHPC Co-Chair; CEO American Holistic Nurses Credentialing Corporation

A native of Chicago and lifelong progressive Democrat, Senn spent her career as a forceful advocate for the environment, consumers and the “little guy.”

As a consummate consumer advocate, she transformed the Office of the Insurance Commissioner from insurance company-friendly to a consumer-centric one when she won her first term in 1992, becoming the first woman to serve in that statewide elected position.

Senn was a national leader on a broad range of issues including implementing the nation’s first regulations for environmental cleanup claims, protecting victims of domestic violence from insurance discrimination, guaranteeing women direct access to ob/gyns, lowering the waiting period on pre-existing conditions, and implementing equal recognition of all licensed health care providers through every category of provider provision of law, including naturopathic physicians, chiropractic doctors, acupuncturists, direct entry midwives and massage therapists under the state insurance code. In 2010 Congress passed a federal law preventing insurance discrimination against licensed provider groups in all states, modeled on her landmark work in Washington State.

She was also the first US Insurance Commissioner to call for regulatory action on behalf of Holocaust victims denied insurances benefits after World War II, leading to the creation of the International Commission on Holocaust-era Insurance Claims in 1998, and resulting in tens of thousands of elderly claimants around the world to receiving long-delayed compensation.

Senn’s fearless, iconic work on behalf of consumers ruffled feathers in the business community, ultimately leading to the US Chamber of Commerce’s unprecedented attack ads when Senn ran, unsuccessfully, for Washington State Attorney General in 2004. The ads were later ruled by the State Supreme Court to have broken campaign finance laws. She also ran in 2000 for the US Senate, losing in the primary to now-Senator Maria Cantwell.

Senn returned to private practice, representing and advising a broad range of consumers, women’s rights groups, labor unions small businesses and integrative health groups. Through the US Department of Treasury, she consulted with finance ministries and central banks in developing and transitioning countries to strengthen their ability to regulate the insurance sector and effectively safeguard consumers. She also served as an expert witness in dozens of insurance cases.

In a notable 2014 lawsuit, Senn represented a container ship captain who won a major gender discrimination case after being denied a license to become the first female vessel pilot in Puget Sound.

Judaism played an important role in developing Senn's commitment to *Tikkun Olam*, the Jewish concept of "repair of the world," and her love of Jewish liturgical music, especially that of Max Janowski. She participated in the choir at Temple de Hirsch Sinai, was a movie, theatre and baseball buff, and wrote two plays. Senn also was a dedicated genealogist, and a mentor for dozens of women in politics.

She had few greater joys than her champion Vizslas, playing tennis, and spending time with her husband, especially on the side of a mountain, relaxing in Hawaii or traveling around the world. She was an excellent friend leaving a large community of loyal loved ones who will always cherish her.

She is survived by her husband and partner Rudi Bertschi, sister Roberta (New York) and brother Ralph (Illinois).

A community memorial service and celebration of Deborah Senn's life will be held 2:00 p.m. Sunday, March 27, 2022 at Temple De Hirsch Sinai in Seattle.

Tributes in support of Jewish Family Service of Seattle or local food banks are appreciated.

Deborah's web page at Dignity Memorial (Butterworth Funeral Home) [is at this link.](#) Tributes, loving memories, photos welcome. Each one will be a treasure for her family.

[Seattle Times Article: Health Advocate Deborah Senn, Washington's First Woman Insurance Commissioner, Dies at 72](#)

In sadness and celebration –

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