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Hon. Sal Carpio

In July, 1975, Sal Carpio, Sam Sandos and Cathy Donohue were elected to the Denver City Council. Soon they formed an alliance with Hon. Bill Roberts who was the only veteran council member who understood what they were experiencing as newcomers. This 4-vote minority became the voice of opposition to some of the discriminatory and costly deals Mayor McNichols made with Denver's power brokers. For seven long years the team of four did not gather enough votes to influence any needed changes in any Mayor's plans (except zoning). During this time Sal Carpio displayed his political savvy by maintaining a cordial relationship with McNichols.

There was one historic system that Sal devised a few months after we were sworn in. The four dissenters realized that 8 or 9 members of Council controlled all votes on Zoning. We were unable to vote for what we believed was best for our constituents. He proposed that each individual council member would decide what the outcome of zoning proposals should be, and the other members should not vote against them. His skills as a politician were evident, as councilmembers accepted this plan. For 20 years there were no zoning changes that were influenced by campaign contributions. That system was abandoned when Hickenlooper became mayor. Influence peddling entered into the picture, and zoning became a free-for-all benefiting the developer. Today, Council has returned to the system that Sal first conceived. Hickenlooper named it "Courtesy Zoning". Courtesy zoning directly benefits the citizens who come before Council to express their support or denial of a particular zoning.

Sal led the effort to change the City Charter so that all contracts valued over \$500,000 had to be approved by Council. This action alone brought sunlight into the deals that were made by any Mayor. (It should be noted that since that time all mayors of Denver have submitted countless contracts for \$499,000 in order to circumvent this law.) Public battles have occurred between the Mayor and Council because of this change; however it remains in effect.

Sal was elected as the first Hispanic Council President because of his leadership. He supported a failed effort to change the number of votes needed to amend the city's budget. After a failure in 1982 the budget amendment finally was approved by the voters in 1991.

There has been a dramatic reversal in the relationship that exists between the Mayor and the Council regarding budget matters. Unlike the past, many battles that historically were lost by the Council are resolved during the annual Budget meeting held by the Mayor and Council. There have been very few public disagreements during the past 20 years. Only once did a Council pass an amendment to the Budget that needed 9 votes.

This Charter amendment has been the single most significant change in the relationship between the two branches of city government in more than 100 years, and Sal Carpio was a leader of the movement when it started in 1982.

It took a bare knuckles political battle to begin the process of reforming bad policies. He was a leader who paved the way for others. That is the legacy of Sal Carpio and all politicians like him who fight for basic "good government" practices. Today, we have people like Councilwoman Debbie Ortega who continue his legacy. She was the young council aide who worked for the Hon. Sal Carpio when he began his political life in Denver. Today she remains as one who remembers and advocates for good government.