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Buckley, the golden retriever who served as the unofficial mascot of the state treasurer's office for more than a decade, died Saturday of cancer, breaking the hearts of the elected officials who had watched him greet guests on the first floor of the Capitol for a decade.

Buckley belonged to U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman,



(*Lyn Alweis, The Denver Post*) R-Aurora, who began bringing him to the office when he was a puppy and Coffman was the state treasurer.

Throughout Coffman's career changes — a tour of duty in Iraq, two years as secretary of state and a congressional win— Buckley stayed behind in the treasurer's office.

"The treasury just won't be the same without Buckley," said Republican Mark Hillman, who served as treasurer while Coffman was overseas.

Buckley's last day at the office was on Friday, where he was dropped off by Coffman's wife, Cynthia, who works across the street as the chief deputy attorney general.

Buckley died the next day.

"He developed internal bleeding from the cancer and it was time to let him go to a place without sickness and pain," Cynthia Coffman said.

She said she took him to Alameda East Veterinarian Hospital around midnight Friday, but didn't realize he was so sick because "goldens are known for being stoic." The veterinarian advised against bringing Buckley home.

"They gave us a room with a couch, rugs, aquarium, soft lights. Very much like hospice and not a vet hospital," she said, "He went to sleep on the couch in his favorite sleeping posture, head on a pillow with me holding his paw."

Coffman said the dog really became his wife's after he left for Iraq, which he told her in a note after Buckley died.

"I always admired the inseparable bond that you two had. I will never forget that whenever I would be sitting with him on the couch and you would leave the room that there would be sheer panic

"It's very sad but so touching that his last act was to extend his paw out to you so you could hold it for the last time. Thanks to you, Buckley had a wonderful life."

When Coffman first began bringing Buckley to the office, everyone marveled at how well behaved he was. No wonder. Coffman's administrative assistant, Natli VanDerWerken, was also a dog trainer.

Among Buckley's tricks: Carrying a tray of coffee and offering a cup to each guest. The plastic cups, by the way, were empty.

"We tried it with the cups full," VanDerWerken said in 2003. "It wasn't pretty."

That same year, when lawmakers were considering a resolution urging people to spay and neuter their pets, they received a letter from Buckley. The resolution "shows a wanton disregard for both my natural urges and my now nonexistent future offspring," Buckley "wrote."

He should have hired a lobbyist — the resolution passed anyway.

Buckley also served under treasurers Walker Stapleton, a Republican, and Cary Kennedy, a Democrat.

"Buckley was universally loved by all who worked in the treasurer's office," Stapleton said. "He will be missed."

Coffman said the day after he was elected secretary of state in 2006, a group of treasury employees demanded to speak to him about Buckley's status. That's when the arrangement was made to have his wife drop off the dog at the treasurer's office.

"They were not concerned at all about my leaving but wanted Buckley to stay," he said.

When Coffman was elected to Congress in 2008, the Denver Post ran a front-page story wondering what was going to happen to Buckley.

"The dog is far more popular than I ever have been," Coffman said, at the time.

Last November, Buckley's fans celebrated his 10th birthday party, a bittersweet event because it would likely be his last.

"Buckley possessed a limitless love for the people in his life. Whether he met someone only once as they passed through the Capitol on a tour or was a part of their daily routine, he connected and made a deep impression," Cynthia Coffman said. "Buckley was a gift to all of us. His grace, generous spirit, and tender heart live on even in his physical absence. He made our world a better place and we are grateful for his 10 years on earth."

By Lynn Bartels

[*The Denver Post*](#)

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