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A community champion.’ U.S. Rep. Carrie Meek remembered by friends, colleagues



State representative Carrie Meek at a 1994 gala in Miami where she welcomed Haiti’s then-president Jean Bertrand Aristide. CARL JUSTE/ MIAMI HERALD

By Bianca Padró Ocasio
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When Dorothy Fields first started gathering ideas from the community for the Black Archives History and Research Foundation in 1977, Carrie Meek — who was then an administrator at Miami Dade College — called to say she had some grant money she could offer the organization.

But Fields didn’t have a proposal ready to send her.

“She told me, ‘Listen, always have a proposal ready because you never know when money is going to be available,’” Fields recalled. “And she was right.”

It was the type of friendly advice, Fields said, that made Meek — who would go on to lead a trailblazing career in the Florida Legislature and Congress — such a great negotiator who knew how to build bridges between the sometimes impenetrable walls of Tallahassee government and the immediacy of the issues faced by her South Florida constituents.

“She was a community champion who worked tirelessly to improve conditions,” said Fields. “When Congresswoman Carrie Meek didn’t win, she would usually win the second time ... And she smiled at the people who voted against it.”

Meek, 95, died Sunday in her home after a long illness. A viewing will be held from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday at Booker T. Washington Senior High School. On Dec. 6, relatives will hold an evening wake for Meek from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Miami Dade College’s North Campus in the William and Joan Lehman Theater.

Meek’s [funeral and homegoing celebration](#) will be on Dec. 7 at the Antioch Missionary Baptist Church’s Miami Gardens Campus at 21311 NW 34th Ave. The service will be led by Pastor Arthur Jackson III at 11 a.m.

In lieu of flowers, the family is requesting donations be made to The Carrie Meek Foundation, Inc. at 4000 NW 142nd St. in Opa-Locka.

Since learning of Meek’s death, lawmakers and community leaders — from South Florida to Washington — have shared tributes. Many remembered her legacy as a social justice activist in Congress and a lifelong educator who mentored young people in the communities she represented.

Meek was the first Black lawmaker from Florida to serve in Congress since the post-Civil War Reconstruction. She served in the Florida Legislature before going on to break several barriers in Washington. Even after her retirement from public service in 2002, Meek continued to dedicate herself to social causes like housing and economic opportunities for poor residents through the Carrie P. Meek Foundation, based in Miami-Dade County.

Her children, Lucia Davis-Raiford, Sheila Davis Kinui and former U.S. Rep. Kendrick B. Meek, said in a statement that Meek was “our family matriarch,” a role they said she played for much of South Florida through her activism for Black immigrants and residents.

“Her approach was rooted in kindness and humility. Carrie Meek made our society stronger and more equitable — an outcome that is an everlasting tribute to our beloved mother. She was guided by her faith, always inspired by the outpouring of love and community support,” the statement said.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi also released a statement on Monday, saying Meek “not only made history, but made progress for our nation.” Pelosi served with Meek in Congress on the powerful House Appropriations Committee and said she had a “strong will” for the people in her community.

“The great Congressman John Lewis once said of Congresswoman Meek, ‘We see showboats and we see tugboats. She’s a tugboat.’ May it be a comfort to Congresswoman Meek’s children Lucia, Sheila and former Congressman Kendrick Meek, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren and all her loved ones to know that Carrie Meek’s courage, conviction and commitment made a difference for America,” Pelosi added.

In North Miami, Mayor Philippe Bien-Aime said the city is lowering all flags in honor of her life and service.

“Her activism and passion to defend the human rights of Haitian immigrants as well as immigrants from other nationalities has paved the way for many to live a life of freedom in the United States,” Bien-Aime said.

Florida Sen. Shevrin Jones, who represents parts of Miami Gardens and south Broward, said Meek was a friend who he will miss dearly.

“There are few words that can do justice for the congresswoman’s lasting legacy on our South Florida communities, state, and country at large,” Jones said. “Now more than ever, we must each recommit to using our voices and power for good, just as the congresswoman did during her many years of dignified service.”

Meanwhile, for Fields, Meek’s death is the loss of a wise friend with whom she formed a tight bond — both trailblazing women, both educators and advocates.

They often waged fights together. In the 1960s, the historic Chapman House in Overtown was almost acquired by the state Department of Transportation to be used as property to construct I-95. It was again threatened in 1979, when the Miami-Dade School Board tried to obtain the house, raze it and use it to build part of the campus of Booker T. Washington High School.

But Fields said she felt the home was important for the Black community in South Florida to know that, as early as the 1920s, Black residents were able to own homes that were spacious and beautiful.

In 1983, the city of Miami designated the home as a historic site, protecting it from destruction. Some years later, Fields got involved and lobbied Meek for state funds to be allocated for it to

be restored by the school board and used for programs for children. Meek was partly responsible for allocating over \$400,000 in 1986 to help restore the home.

“I went to her and she said she would help me and she did,” said Fields. “She always listened.”

Miami Herald writer C. Isaiah Smalls II contributed to this story.

This story has been updated to reflect new information about funeral services for former U.S. Rep. Carrie Meek.

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