

Leslie Black Cordes obituary

04/07/1963 - 12/30/2025



Leslie Black Cordes, beloved wife of Bill, devoted mother of Nathan and Sophia, dedicated advocate on energy and climate issues, and lifelong friend and mentor to many, passed away on December 30, 2025. She was 62 and had battled triple negative breast cancer for more than two years.

Leslie was born in Los Angeles, California, to Sam and Carolyn Black and grew up in Malibu, California. After graduating from Santa Monica High School and the University of California at Berkeley, she moved to Washington, DC, where she completed a Master of Science in Foreign Service at Georgetown University.

In Washington, Leslie met and married Bill Cordes, a career budget analyst at the US Department of Education, and shortly thereafter had two children, Nathan and Sophia. She adored them both, and actively supported them through childhood and early adulthood, taking great pride in their accomplishments as Nathan began a career in finance and Sophia became a doctor of obstetrics and gynecology. Leslie was especially pleased to be able to join in celebrating Nate's marriage to Rachel Hill and Sophia's wedding with Kyle Schneider, both of which took place in 2025.

In 1987, Leslie began her professional life as a staff member on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, where she helped shape and enact the 1992 Energy Policy Act and updates to the Clean Air Act. She was especially proud of her role, on behalf Committee Member Senator Tim Wirth, in organizing the 1988 hearing with climatologist James E. Hansen that helped raise awareness of human-caused climate change.

Leslie's Senate accomplishments spurred a long career focused on public and private partnerships aimed at mitigating the global impacts of climate change. In 1995, she moved to the US Agency for International Development, where she helped manage greenhouse gas mitigation activities as part of the agency's Energy Efficiency Project. In 1998, she began an 8-year stint at the Alliance to Save Energy, an energy efficiency nonprofit with programs in the US, Eastern Europe, and the developing world. She started as Director of International Programs and ultimately rose to serve as Vice President for Program Development, leading efforts to develop and implement

initiatives related to climate change, energy efficiency, and water conservation.

Following two years at the Environmental Protection Agency, where she managed programs to limit climate change through the voluntary use of renewable energy, in 2008 Leslie began managing energy and climate initiatives at the United Nations Foundation. At UNF her proudest achievement was helping launch the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves (now the Clean Cooking Alliance). This initiative was aimed at helping end cooking over open fires or with inefficient stoves, a practice that threatens the health and safety of up to one quarter of the world's population—especially women and children—while also contributing to climate change.

Leslie retired in 2023 after holding additional positions at the Alliance for Justice, an organization focused on judicial nominations to Federal and State courts, and at CERES, a nonprofit advocacy organization aimed at building business support for market solutions to the challenges of climate change.

In recent years Leslie developed a strong interest in helping resettle immigrant refugees in the DC area. Working initially with local resettlement organizations focused primarily on refugees from Central America, she helped furnish new homes for immigrants often arriving with little more than the clothes on their backs. When those organizations became overwhelmed following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, Leslie stepped up and began to lead her own deliveries for newly arrived Afghan refugees who often found themselves sleeping on bare floors in empty apartments following their arrival in the United States. She also stayed in close touch with many of the families she helped resettle, offering support in finding jobs, rounding up school supplies for their children, and meeting financial needs.

Next to her family, Leslie's greatest joy—and one that sustained her through her long illness—was the extraordinary number of friendships she developed and nurtured over the course of her life. Despite her busy career and family life, she had a strong interest in the lives and well-being of others and always made time to catch up, share stories, and offer advice to family, friends, and colleagues. Leslie also was an avid gardener, reveled in making a "find" at thrift stores, and treasured her weekly Mah Jongg gatherings (where she greatly enjoyed the company but also played to win).

Leslie will be dearly missed by all who knew and loved her. A memorial service will be held in late February. To plant trees in memory, please visit the [Sympathy Store](#).

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