

Bhanté and John Vasconcellos at Dorothy Lytton's house in San José

Bhanté and I found ourselves in the San José area over a weekend.

Having a hunch that John Vasconcellos (then chairman of the Ways and Means committee of the California legislature) would be there relaxing.

Indeed, we found them. John seemed a bit distant, as if he was not pleased we had showed up without being scheduled.

We stayed and were graciously entertained for several hours.

As we left, Bhanté whispered to me that I should ask John to be careful about his heart as he is at risk of a heart attack. It was unusual for Bhanté to be so specific.

While John continued his highly focused, hard living life style in Sacramento, about a year later he suffered a non-fatal heart attack. After that, he did his best to eat and drink more sensibly and to walk / exercise regularly. His loyal chief of staff, Sur North, encourage him to do everything needed for him to survive and be well.

Many loved and respected John for his advocacy for education, a social safety net and for opportunities for the least among us within society.

A true, rare public servant who was respected and somewhat feared by his colleagues.

It was my privilege to become close with John when doing the indoor environmental quality report (Clean Your Room) for Richard Spohn at the Department of Consumer Affairs under Governor Jerry Brown.

While this brought me in contact with California and Sacramento politics and politicians, it somewhat immunized me from their world.

The exceptions stood out: John Vasconcellos and his proteges, Mark Leno, and a host of largely unsung heros and heroines and toiled mightily to help California prosper and be well.