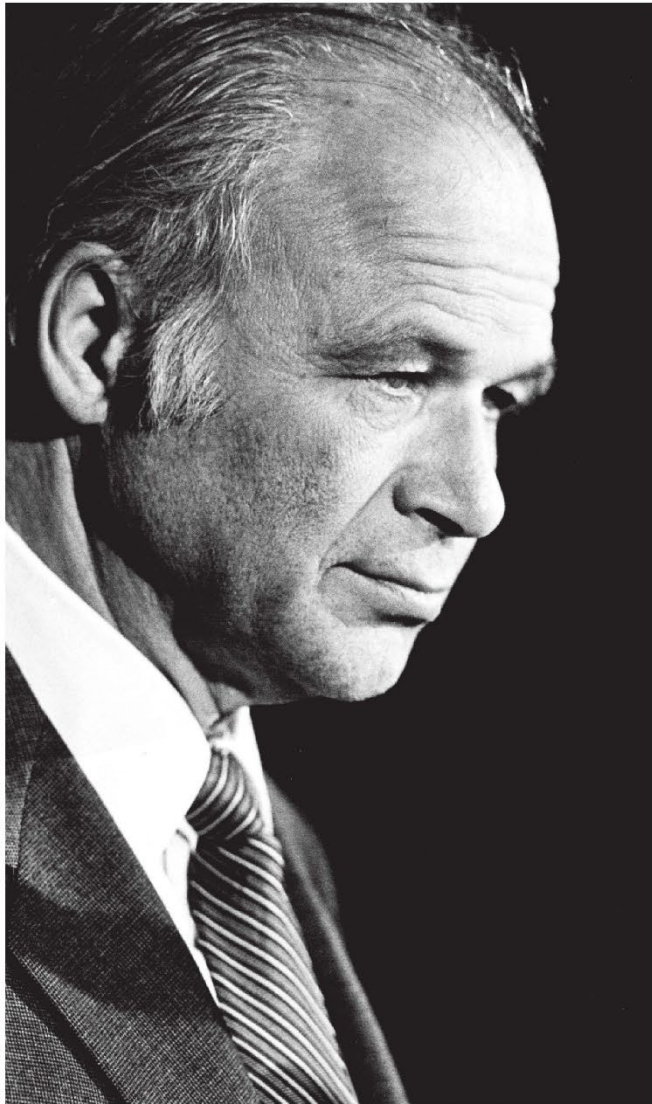


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AL QUIE • 1923-2023

A firm, kind hand, a different politics



Story by EMMA NELSON • Star Tribune staff • Photo by DAVID BREWSTER • Star Tribune

Al Quie, who represented southern Minnesota in Congress for 20 years before returning home at the end of his political career to serve one term as governor, died on Friday. He was 99.

Remembered for his stoic Norwegian demeanor and deep Lutheran faith, Quie died at his home in Wayzata. "He was surrounded by family and we are thankful for the last few days we all were able to say goodbye," Quie's son Joel said.

Quie was a third-generation dairy farmer and life-long Republican who, once in office, never lost an election over more than two decades. He rose from small-town Minnesota politics to become a powerful congressman and, near the end of his career in elected office, ousted an incumbent DFL governor in an election that came to be known as the Minnesota Massacre.

At the time, the sweeping defeat of the state's Democratic leadership was seen — accurately, it turned out — as a bellwether for the 1980 general election and the Reagan years to come.

But Quie represented a party and a political era that became a distant memory later in his life. He worked across the aisle throughout his career, focusing particularly on agriculture and education, and was able to win over Republican and Democratic voters alike — a knack that made him an appealing gubernatorial candidate post-Watergate.

"He was the guy with broad appeal," said Chuck Slocum, a former political adviser. "People that knew him liked him, and people that knew him trusted him."

Through it all, Quie maintained a humble faith that

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Bipartisanship, faith marked political career

•QUIE from A1
informed every part of his life. During his 1978 run for governor, he balked at reports that he believed God had called him to run and that he flaunted his faith on the campaign trail.

"I know he wants me to serve him, whatever I do," Quie said at the time. "But I don't like the whole idea of God magically telling me what to do. That's not the way God works in my life."

Early life rooted on family farm

Albert Harold Quie was born Sept. 18, 1923, on a farm in Rice County's Wheeling Township, the third of four children born to Albert Knute and Nettie (Jacobson) Quie. He grew up riding horses and playing pranks with his brother, Paul. When they were small, they'd milk the same cow — one brother on each side, because neither could reach around.

Like many men of his generation, Quie fought in World War II, enlisting in the U.S. Navy in 1943. Knowing that he would be fighting planes in the Pacific war theater, farther from home than he'd ever been, he turned to God. "I looked at myself as a person who was kind of timid," Quie said in an interview in March 2022, at age 98. "And I thought about that and prayed about it — that I was not going to be timid. I'll drive right in."

After the war, Al and Paul alternated attending school so that one of them could stay on the farm and help their father, who lost an arm in a 1947 farming accident.

At St. Olaf College, Al Quie made a splash on campus "when he flew an airplane upside down, at third-floor dormitory level, tumbling books from their shelves and pictures from their walls," the *New York Times* wrote in 1967.

It was at St. Olaf that Quie met Gretchen Hansen, a young art student who, more than seven decades later, he could still remember seeing for the first time as she walked across campus. They married June 5, 1948, and settled on the family farm, becoming the third generation of Norwegian dairy farmers to work the land.

Political beginnings

Within years, Quie found his way into politics. He'd led the St. Olaf College Republicans, and went on to clerk for the local school board and serve on the Rice County Soil Conservation District. In 1954, Quie won a seat in the Legislature — something his Norwegian-born grandfather, Knut Finseth, had done nearly a century before.

But Quie didn't finish the term. After Republican U.S. Rep. August Andersen died in office while representing Minnesota's First Congressional District, those who knew Quie urged him to run for the seat.

"It wasn't necessarily my dad's idea but he was encouraged by friends and then the local Republican members saying, 'Hey, Al, you would be an ideal candidate. Why don't you think about doing that?'" Joel Quie said.

Al Quie — then 34 years old and a father of four — defeated Democrat Eugene Foley in the February 1958 special election by just 635 votes. The *Minneapolis Star* attributed a strong DFL showing in the rural district to disenchantment with Republican policies — including farm policies.

And yet Quie, both a Republican and a farmer, held onto his victory through recount efforts. News photos showed him grinning before a herd of cattle with his toddler sons and standing in the family's old cow barn, squinting into the sun.

"He said during the campaign that the rich black earth and rolling contours of the farm, homesteaded 102 years ago by his grandfather, Halvor, a native of Norway, 'is in my blood; I love it,'" the *Minneapolis Tribune* wrote.

At the end of 1958, the family left the 240-acre farm for Washington, D.C., and stayed for nearly 20 years. It was a period when members of Congress lived in the D.C. metro area most of the year and commuted back to their districts together, creating a sense of camaraderie.

"In the recess, those of us who would be east of North Dakota would drive home," Quie said. "That's what got us visiting very intimately with each other about politics."

Quie served in Congress until 1978. It was four years after President Richard Nixon's resignation, and Republicans across the country were in trouble. With his track record of winning over Democrats and his straight-edged reputation, the congressman was an appealing antidote.

One-term governor

As a young man, Quie realized that he had a knack for persuasion and building trust. Early on, he felt guilty that he hadn't felt a call to use his talents as a member of the clergy. But the words of St. Olaf College President Clemens Granskau when Quie was in his early 20s — "Albert, there is no place where we need Christians more than in politics" — helped assuage that guilt, and continued to influence him decades later in his decision to run for governor.

After a lot of soul-searching about abandoning the clout he'd built in Congress to pursue the governorship, Quie took on DFL Gov. Rudy Perpich and won with 53% of the vote. Quie attributed his victory to DFLers' attempts to obscure a legislative audit of the Upper Great Lakes Regional Commission — and that he confronted Perpich about the cover-up during a televised debate.

Also helpful for Republicans was the fact that, two years prior, highly popular DFL Gov. Wendell Anderson had appointed himself to fill Walter Mondale's Senate seat after Mondale became vice president. Anderson's move, seen as self-serving, left a bad taste in voters' mouths.

"All the stars aligned where, OK, there's enough of a conflict here on the Democratic side that it might be an opportune time for some GOP candidates to come in," said Joel Quie, who worked on his father's 1978 campaign.

But it was a rocky four years. Quie faced criticism early on for establishing a "key club" that promised his time to wealthy donors and for leading a horseback ride through a state park where horses were prohibited for environmental reasons. In a strange episode, in November 1979, five foreign students were arrested for allegedly plotting to kidnap Quie, though they were later released due to a lack of evidence.

Most significant were the budget troubles



YEARS OF SERVICE: Gov. Al Quie, top, talked to reporters in 1982; above, with sons Danny, 4, and Joel, 2, he awaited results of a recount in the 1958 election for Congress on his farm; on opposite page, top, he showed his cow milking skills at the 1979 Minnesota State Fair; in middle, he was sworn in as governor in 1979 at the Capitol; with Vice President Walter Mondale, left, and Quie's wife, Gretchen, in his office in 1979.

Photos by Bruce Bieping, Karl Gehring, John Croft, Darlene Pfeiffer and Earl Seubert • Star Tribune file

— and poor financial advice — that plagued Quie's time in the governor's office, taking the state from a surplus to a deficit and forcing him to go back on his campaign pledge to cut taxes.

As he neared the end of his term, Quie was down in the polls and visibly unhappy. During a visit to Washington in late 1981, Minnesota U.S. Sen. Rudy Boschwitz had told Quie to "get your political act together" or withdraw his candidacy.

When Quie announced in January that he would not seek a second term, his relief was palpable. So was Gretchen's.

"We've been talking about this for months," Gretchen Quie told a reporter. "It's been topic Number 1 and I'm so tired of it. There's a big world out there waiting for us."

Books, paintings and John Wayne

Al and Gretchen Quie moved out of the governor's residence and settled in the Faribault area, where for a while they "recharged their batteries," Joel Quie said.

Al Quie became involved in the Prison Fellowship, a nonprofit Christian ministry, and rose to the positions of state and then national director.

In 1989, without interest from their children in taking over the family farm, Al and Gretchen sold the property. But they would drive by on occasion, and when the original barn burned down in 1994, Al Quie was devastated.

Even without the farm, Quie kept up his

passion for riding horses. He traveled the length of the Continental Divide on horseback over the course of six summers, and he kept riding until age 96.

Quie remained visible in Minnesota, occasionally commenting on politics. In 2010, he was among a group of prominent Republicans formally expelled from the state GOP in a narrow vote of party activists, for endorsing a former Republican mounting a third-party bid for governor. Quie said at the time he'd stick with the GOP despite the slight.

At the end of his life, Quie — still a tall and gentle man with a ready smile — lived in a one-bedroom apartment at an assisted living community in Wayzata. Bookshelves were packed with volumes on Norway, politics and religion. Physical therapy, lunch with friends and John Wayne DVDs filled his days.

Gretchen, who died in 2015, left behind a trove of paintings, prints and pottery that surrounded him. Displayed most prominently were paintings of the old farm and of a man on horseback, riding alone beneath a pale sky. Al Quie is survived by children Fred Quivik of St. Paul, Jenise Coffin of Fairfax, Va., Dan Quie of Greenfield, Joel Quie of Eden Prairie, Ben Quie of St. Paul, 14 grandchildren and 22 great-grandchildren. Quie's funeral will be held at Central Lutheran Church in Minneapolis at 1 p.m. on Sept. 9.

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