

WENDELL ANDERSON 1933-2016

'Miracle' maker left mark on state

Ex-governor's property tax deal became symbol of government that works.

By PATRICK COOLICAN and PAUL WALSH
Star Tribune staff writers

Former Minnesota Gov. Wendell Anderson, who appeared on the cover of Time magazine in 1973 with a big northern pike and wide grin as a symbol of his state's good life, but then alienated voters when he appointed himself to a vacant U.S. Senate seat, died Sunday, a state official said.

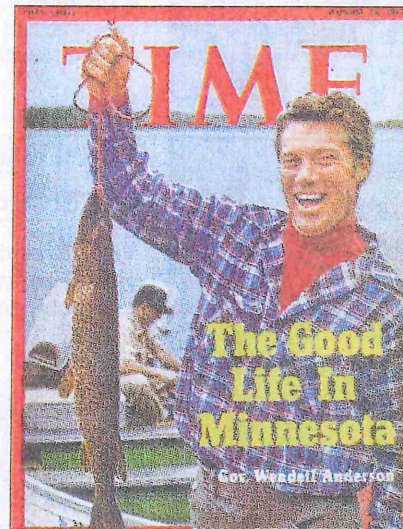
Anderson, 83, had struggled with Alzheimer's for some time before dying of pneumonia while in hospice in St. Paul, said his son, Brett Anderson.

"Old age was his least favorite part of life," Brett Anderson said a few hours after his father's death, which followed a "precipitous physical decline" in the past few months.

"He had a good run," the former governor's son said. "He played hockey until well into his 70s."

Gov. Mark Dayton said in a statement that "Governor Anderson was one of Minnesota's greatest governors. His transformational 'Minnesota Miracle'

See **ANDERSON** on A9 ►



DAN MCCOY

Then-Gov. Wendell Anderson posed for this Time magazine cover in 1973. See more photos at startribune.com

With 'Minnesota Miracle,' Anderson left his mark on state



GLEN STUBBE • gstubbe@startribune.com

Former Vice President Walter Mondale, left, and former Gov. Wendell Anderson attended Gov. Mark Dayton's second-term inauguration in 2015. Anderson was discussed as a running mate for Jimmy Carter in 1976, but Mondale ended up as the choice.

"I feel it created a watershed moment for the state. We were no longer a flyover state. He set up our national standing that we still enjoy today."

Former state Sen. Roger Moe, of Wendell Anderson and the so-called "Minnesota Miracle"

◀ **ANDERSON** from Al — which he achieved through one of the most momentous bipartisan agreements in our state's history — has dramatically improved the quality of our state's public education."

'Above all, a Minnesotan'

Dayton's office also released a statement from the family that read: "Wendell Anderson was many things: A kid from east St. Paul, a Gopher, an Olympian, an elected public servant of the highest order. But above all else, he was a Minnesotan. His love for the state and its citizens was second only to his love for his family."

U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota said her parents passed on to her a copy of that Time magazine cover. Klobuchar noted that from Anderson's "groundbreaking work on state education funding ... to his sunny optimism about our state, he truly gave us 'the good life' in Minnesota."

Dayton said state flags would be lowered to half-staff to honor Anderson's service to Minnesota.

In just six years in office, Anderson upended Minnesota government, shifting the tax burden from property levies to the more progressive income tax, while equalizing school funding between rich and poor districts — a policy and political achievement so stunning that historians have dubbed it the "Minnesota Miracle."

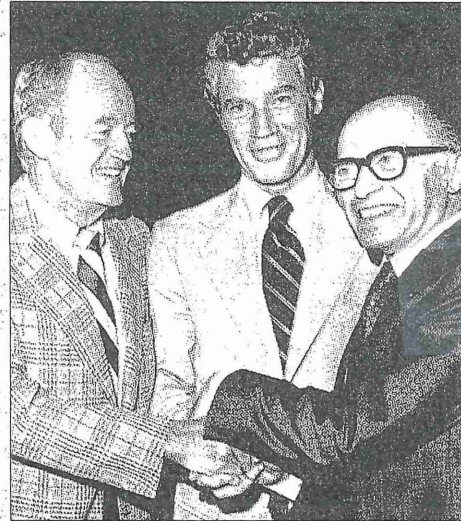
"It's one of the key reasons we have one of the best if not the best public education systems in the country," said Dayton, a fellow DFLer. "It allowed us to provide funding to improve schools and curriculum and attract and retain the best teachers, and it made it possible to do that everywhere, not just in areas with high property values."

Anderson, elected in 1970 at age 37, became a political wunderkind who projected youthful vigor, achieving his policy goals — despite initial resistance from conservative legislators — with a telegenic presence and considerable political gifts that allowed him to bridge GOP and DFL, labor and business, the working class and the rich.

He was considered for Jimmy Carter's running mate until fellow Minnesotan Sen. Walter Mondale got the nod.

A rising political star

Anderson was born on St. Paul's East Side to working-class parents, graduating from Johnson High School before earning a bachelor's degree from the University of Minne-



Star Tribune file

Sens. Hubert H. Humphrey, left, and Wendell Anderson, center, greeted Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin on Capitol Hill in 1977. After arranging to have himself appointed to the Senate in 1976, Anderson lost re-election in 1978.

sota in 1954. During his undergraduate years, he played on the U hockey team and won a silver medal at the 1956 Winter Olympics. The competitive streak that drove him on the ice served him well in politics while also connecting him to hockey-loving Minnesotans, said Roger Moe, who served in the Senate while Anderson was governor.

After a stint in the Army and while still in law school at the U, Anderson was elected to the Minnesota House in 1958 and won re-election in 1960. In 1962 and 1966, Anderson was elected to the Minnesota Senate. He served as chairman of

the 1968 Hubert H. Humphrey for President campaign in Minnesota.

In 1970, he defeated Republican Douglas Head for governor after a campaign in which he vowed to increase state support for K-12 education and address high property taxes.

Anderson's goal in pushing what eventually came to be known as the "Minnesota Miracle" was to narrow disparities between rich and poor school districts, partly by reducing schools' dependence on locally collected property taxes.

At the time, the state funded 43 percent of local school

operating costs. Anderson proposed increasing state support to 70 percent by raising a host of taxes — on individual and corporate income, inheritances, utilities, banks, liquor and cigarettes. The cost — \$762 million a year — represented a 37 percent increase in the state budget from the previous biennium.

After the longest special session in state history — 157 days — Anderson, who hung tough after vetoing the opposition party's first school aid bill, secured passage of a compromise that raised state taxes by \$580 million and boosted state support for schools to 65 percent of operating costs, slightly shy of his original goal. The measure was a boon for schools in larger, poorer urban school districts.

Appeal crossed party lines

Anderson's leadership was critical to the plan's success. In December 1970, a statewide poll showed that Minnesotans opposed it 60 percent to 25 percent. But the new governor — young, telegenic and articulate — proved to be an effective salesman, traveling across the state campaigning for his plan.

Anderson succeeded despite that fact that in 1971, both houses of the Legisla-

ture were controlled by conservatives. (Legislators were elected on a nonpartisan basis until 1974, though most members of the "conservative" caucus regarded themselves as Republicans, and most "liberals" were DFLers.)

"Wendy's ability to bridge gaps and make friends across partisan lines was so important," said Tom Berg, who served in the House when Anderson — or "Wendy," as he was known — was governor, and wrote a book called "Minnesota's Miracle: Learning From the Government That Worked."

Al Quie, a Republican who served as governor after Anderson, said Anderson helped him immensely when he was elected.

"He shared with me very deeply the workings of state government but also the people," Quie said. "It helped me throughout my gubernatorial career, and it showed a commitment to the state, and not just his party," he said.

Others say the significance of the "Minnesota Miracle" cannot be overstated.

"I feel it created a watershed moment for the state. We were no longer a flyover state," said Moe, who was also referring to the wave of national publicity that treated

Anderson and his young family like the Kennedys of the North Star state. "He set up our national standing that we still enjoy today," Moe said. In addition to tax and education reform, Anderson pushed for environmental regulations that remain the foundation of the state's protections of air, water and soil.

The voters at the time agreed with Moe's assessment, as Anderson won the 1974 election by carrying all 87 counties.

A fall from popularity

As Anderson's star rose, there was speculation that he might become a national political figure. He was chairman of the 1976 Democratic National Convention platform committee and was discussed as a possible running mate for Jimmy Carter.

But it all ended quickly when he arranged to have himself appointed to the U.S. Senate seat that had been held by Mondale, who had become vice president. Although the provenance of the decision is unknown, the result was certain: Voters took a dim view of his ambitions, and Republican plywood magnate Rudy Boschwitz defeated Anderson in the 1978 race for that Senate seat.

A comeback attempt in 1984 failed, and other than a stint as a regent for the University of Minnesota from 1985 to 1997, Anderson was relatively young when he left public office.

By many accounts, his departure was a source of ongoing sadness.

"He was out of public life the rest of his life, and that's what meant the most to him," said David Lebedoff, chairman of Anderson's 1970 campaign, speechwriter and longtime friend.

In 1992, Anderson fell on hard times, behind on property taxes, payments to his ex-wife and other debts.

In recent years, he made occasional public appearances. In June 2015, he joined about 100 people protesting the demise of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Citizens Board.

Wendell Anderson is survived by two brothers, Rod and Orv; three children with former wife Mary Christine McKee, Brett and Amy Anderson and Elizabeth Crow, and five grandchildren.

Staff writer Pamela Miller contributed to this report.
patrick.coolican@startribune.com
651-925-5049
paul.walsh@startribune.com
612-673-4482