

NEWS OBITUARIES

# Otto Bang was a go-to state legislator for 20 years

Mpls. ST 1-8-09

● He represented Edina as an Independent Republican but was well-respected on both sides of the aisle.

By BEN COHEN  
bcohen@startribune.com

Otto Bang of Edina, who represented Edina in the Minnesota Legislature for 20 years, left his mark on legislation, such as the state sales tax, the loosening of advertising restrictions on liquor, and, yes, a firecracker law.



**Otto Bang** served in the House from 1963 to 1972, and the Senate from 1973 to 1982, died Dec. 29 at Hennepin County Medical Center after suffering a head injury in a one-vehicle crash Dec. 21 in Hopkins. He was 77.

His concerns in the Legislature often centered on energy, taxes, unemployment and workers compensation. As a member of the House in the early 1970s, the Independent Republican was chairman of the Financial Institutions Committee.

George Pillsbury, a former Minnesota state senator, said he was highly respected and well-liked by members from both sides of the aisle.

It took guts for Bang and others to introduce a bill to raise the state sales tax from 4 percent to 5 percent in 1981, said Pillsbury.

"He should go to the head of the class," said Pillsbury.

In 1949, the Minnesota native graduated from Mayville High School in North Dakota.

He worked in publishing after earning a bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota in the early 1950s.

When he was elected to the House, he was an insurance salesman for Liberty Mutual, later going into business for himself, eventually serving as president of Consumers Casualty Insurance in the Twin Cities.

Doug Ewald of Tonka Bay, a former Minnesota legislator, said many legislators envied his popularity with voters and colleagues.

"I have been graced in my life to know him," said Ewald. When you met him, "you knew you were going to like him."

When Ewald was a rookie legislator, he was approached by people in the acoustics business, who tested sound in buildings by setting off a firecracker. Minnesota outlawed

the practice, so Ewald asked Bang to take on a bill that would allow the use. He did, and it passed, said Ewald.

He was the go-to guy for help with bills for many lawmakers, said Ewald.

Chuck Slocum, a former state GOP chairman, said Bang was business oriented and public spirited.

"He had a way of agreeing or disagreeing with people, but you always came away liking him," said Slocum. "It's a mark of a good politician."

He played leadership roles in more than a dozen civic groups, such as the Zuhrah Shrine, the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota, the Edina Community Foundation and the Minnesota Legislative Society.

His wife, Mary, of Edina, said the key to his leadership ability was that "he was a good

listener."

He finished his career as an independent insurance broker, retiring three years ago, but he continued to serve as an insurance consultant until his death.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by his daughters, Cathleen Anderson of Inver Grove Heights, Rebecca Kerstiens of Denver, Colo., and Laurie Melichar of Burnsville; son, Thomas of Edina; sister, Jacqueline Fink of Eden Prairie, and four grandchildren.

Services will be at 1 p.m., Jan. 16 at Normandale Lutheran Church, 6100 Normandale Rd., Edina.

Visitation will be from 5 to 7 p.m. Jan. 15, followed by a Masonic ceremony, in the Washburn-McReavy Edina Chapel, 5000 W. 50th and Hwy. 100, and at noon Jan. 16 in the church.

Reprinted by permission of the Star Tribune (Minneapolis, MN).