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OBITUARIES

Services June 4 for John Burger, legislator in the '80s

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By Trudi Hahn
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Services will be held next Saturday for John Burger, a Minnesota Republican state representative in the 1980s who was known for trying to reduce every spending bill by 5 percent. The services also will be a memorial for his wife, Mary Jane, who died in March 2004.



John Burger died Jan. 11.

In four two-year terms representing the western Lake Minnetonka area from 1982 to 1990, John Burger saw his 5 percent amendment pass only once, in 1983.

"Actually, it was not a bad idea," said Rep. Barb Sykora, R-Excelsior. "He was trying to give people some motivation to figure out a way to spend less money."

He was against career legislators, salary raises for legislators and abortion. He supported a land-based taxing system, pushed for the death penalty, and in 1989 voted against the abolition of spanking in public schools.

Said Bob Weinholzer, chairman of the state Republican Party in the early 1990s when Burger was secretary-treasurer: "John was always able to get a good spin on things, get people laughing, loosen them up."

Still, the man who had taught leadership training for the Dale Carnegie Institute since 1947 had harsh words for his colleagues in his campaign literature for his last House election in 1988:

"As legalized Robin Hoods, lawmakers steal wealth from many citizens to give favors, advantages, privileges and unearned benefits to politically selected areas and individuals," he wrote. "Such laws broaden and deepen dependency of more and more people on government and increasingly exploit, discourage and punish taxpayers."

Burger died Jan. 11 in California of a type of pneumonia for which no antibiotic treatment could be found, said his daughter Melinda Colwell of Deephaven. He was 88.

Born in 1916 in Lafayette, Ind., he graduated from high school in Goodland, Ind., at age 15. He entered Indiana University at Bloomington, where he earned a bachelor's degree in business in 1935. He received his law degree in 1938 from the University of Minnesota.

Before he joined the Army Air Forces in 1941, he had married his wife, Mary Jane. During World War II, he served stateside in intelligence work.

After the war, he returned to Minneapolis and set up a law and accounting practice. He was named one of the 100 outstanding young men of Minneapolis by Time magazine and the Chamber of Commerce in 1953, two years after he joined General Mills.

With one detour to California to manage IBM's Automation Institute of America, Burger spent 24 years with the company as director of educational services, community relations coordinator and manager of training. He also served two terms as president of the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches in 1969-70.

As its president, he expressed the hope that Roman Catholic parishes would join the membership of 250 Protestant and Orthodox congregations. He retired from General Mills in 1979. In 1990, he ran for state treasurer but was defeated. He stayed active in state Republican politics, being elected secretary-treasurer in 1991.

He and his wife, Mary Jane, had lived in California for about 18 months before her death in March 2004. Their son John died in 1971. In addition to their daughter Melinda Colwell, survivors include another daughter, Susan Guldseth, Cherry Valley, Calif.; son Rick of Destin, Fla.; seven grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

Services will be held at 2 p.m. next Saturday at Wayzata Community Church, 125 E. Wayzata Blvd., Wayzata.

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