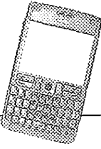


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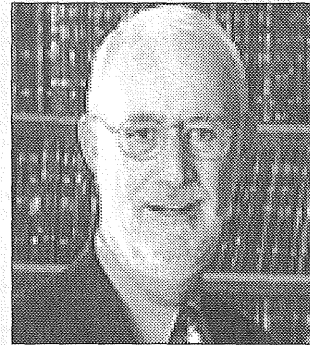


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Gary DeCramer FORMER STATE SENATOR

## Schools, rural areas lost advocate

By ROSE FRENCH  
rose.french@startribune.com



**« YOU  
LIKED TO  
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Gary DeCramer, a former state senator who taught at the University of Minnesota, was passionate about improving education in Minnesota and bolstering economic development in the state's rural communities.

DeCramer, a DFLer from Ghent who served in the state Senate from 1983 to 1993, was also the Minnesota director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Program.

"You liked to be around Gary because he made you feel decent and good. He stood for decent and good things," said Hennepin County Attorney Mike Freeman, who served with DeCramer in the Senate. "He was progressive and liberal, yet he was a very pragmatic southwestern Minnesota Democrat. He was a ... gentle, thoughtful person."

DeCramer, of Mendota Heights, died of a heart attack on Wednesday while visiting the University of Minnesota-Morris campus with his

high school-age daughter. He was 67.

At the time of his death, DeCramer was serving as a lecturer as well as director at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs' master of public affairs program. He previously had held the post of interim president of what is now Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall.

Born in Marshall, DeCramer grew up on his family's farm near Ghent. He attended seminary and thought about becoming a priest, then earned a bachelor's degree in English from the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul. He earned graduate degrees from that school and the University of Oklahoma.

DeCramer taught English at Gannon University in Erie, Pa., in the late 1960s and eventually moved back to Minnesota to run the family farm before being elected to the state Senate, according to his wife, Estelle Brouwer. The couple married in 1988.

"He cared about justice for ... people of color, for women, for people who are marginalized in many ways, for people

living in poverty, for people who may have developmental or physical disabilities," his wife said.

DeCramer, who served as a chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee, cared deeply about improving educational standards, particularly for the state's Indian population, Freeman said. He also strived to improve the lives of those living in Minnesota's rural communities.

"He cared deeply about the land, and he knew people in greater Minnesota needed the same kind of economic development dollars, or even more than we have in the cities, because they don't get as many opportunities and the rural kids need to have those," Freeman said.

Besides his wife, DeCramer's survivors include daughters Katie, Louise and Leila Vance; his mother, Bertha; two sisters, Pat Lenz and Sherry Anderson, and six grandchildren. A memorial service will be held at 4 p.m. March 20 at the Ted Mann Concert Hall at the University of Minnesota.

Rose French • 612-673-4352