

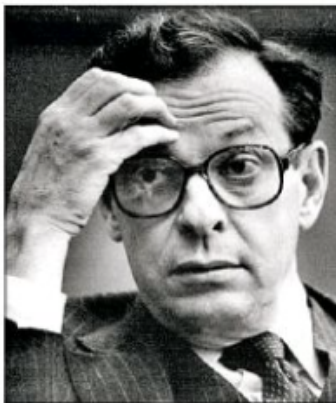
DON FRASER 1924-2019

'A true champion for good'

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A soft-spoken and unassuming man, Don Fraser had staying power in the elected offices he held in St. Paul, Washington, D.C., and Minneapolis over his nearly 40-year political career.

He advocated for ideas ahead of his time, pushing for human rights reform while in Congress and championing the power of early childhood education during his years as mayor of Minneapolis. He remains the longest-serving mayor



in the city's history.

"In his own quiet way, he always won the day," said George Latimer, former mayor of St. Paul.

Fraser died Sunday morning at home in Minneapolis, surrounded by family. He was 95.

Fraser was born in 1924 in Minneapolis. He attended the University of Minnesota before briefly serving in the Pacific theater during World War II. While working as an attorney, he became active in the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party in the

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Longtime Minnesota politician Don Fraser dies at 95

• **FRASER** from Al 1940s and worked on political campaigns, including Hubert H. Humphrey's 1948 race for U.S. Senate.

His own political career began in 1954 when he was elected to the state Senate. He served for seven years before becoming a Democratic member of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1963 to 1979.

"He was not your prototypical politician," said his son, Tom Fraser. "He persuaded people by the power of his argument, not the volume of his speech."

In 1978, Fraser announced his run for the U.S. Senate seat held by Humphrey. He lost the primary election because he lacked rural voter support, in part because of his work to pass laws protecting the Boundary Waters Canoe Area.

"The political opposition didn't matter to him," Tom Fraser said. As a teenager, Don Fraser had canoed in the Boundary Waters, and he continued to take his family there well into his 80s.

Kevin Proescholdt, conservation director for Wilderness Watch, worked with Fraser as a volunteer wilderness advocate and credits him with the passage of the BWCA Wilderness Act.

"Don remained steadfast in fighting for protection of the BWCAW throughout the time, even when his advocacy for protecting this gem may have cost him votes," Proescholdt said.

Losing the election offered him an opportunity to get out of D.C. and return to Minneapolis, where Fraser was first elected mayor in 1980.

"He relished the opportunity to return home," his son said. "He truly found the mayoral job to be the most rewarding of his career because he could translate his ideas into action more quickly."

Outside of his elected offices, Fraser was a dedicated father to his six children, his son remembered. He was a relaxed and tolerant one, too, Tom Fraser said — at one point, a jungle gym was allowed in the living room. He also enjoyed swimming,



Walter Mondale, left, and Muriel Humphrey Brown, far right, joined in as Don Fraser and Hubert Humphrey celebrated their congressional wins on Nov. 4, 1970.

EARL SEUBERT • Star Tribune

canoeing, sailing and weekly games of tennis, which he played into his mid-80s.

Fraser was also an avid tinkerer, his son said. He was the go-to person for any computer fixes and enjoyed spending time in his shop, where he worked on radio-controlled cars and boats.

Latimer remembers Fraser as someone who thought deeply and had a quiet strength. His length of service spoke to his integrity and the trust his constituents put in him each election year, Latimer said Sunday night.

"I never heard a word from him, in all the hours we spent privately, that he would not have said publicly," Latimer said. "There was no wall between the public and the private him."

For Latimer, Fraser falls

into the group of Minnesota leaders — Walter Mondale, Hubert Humphrey and Orville Freeman — who lived with a simple dedication to do good and be just.

"I don't think he was ever understood for the greatness he represented," Latimer said.

In a statement, U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar called him a "true champion for good."

"As a congressman he fought for the environment and human rights and exposed human rights abuses around the world. As the Mayor of Minneapolis he advocated for early childhood education," she said. "His mission? Ideas matter in politics. He lived that."

Fraser's wife, Arvonne, died in August 2018.

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Twin Cities Mayors George Latimer of St. Paul and Don Fraser of Minneapolis got a kick out of being presented personalized Wheaties boxes in 1987.

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