

BILL FRENZEL 1928-2014

Longtime congressman championed bipartisanship

Republican represented the west metro for 20 years, then served as special adviser to President Clinton on trade.

By ALLISON SHERRY and PAUL WALSH • Star Tribune staff writers

WASHINGTON - Former Rep. Bill Frenzel, a two-decade Republican member of Congress who served the west metro suburbs until 1991 and was a leading party spokesman on trade and responsible federal spend-



Bill Frenzel

ing, died Monday. Frenzel was at his home in suburban Virginia, just outside Washington, with his family by his side, according to an announcement from the Economic Club of Minnesota, which he co-founded. He was 86.

Frenzel voluntarily left Congress after serving 10 terms, though his career afterward was about as active and interesting as it was when he was

a leading member of the House Budget and Ways and Means committees in the 1970s and 1980s.

He served as a special adviser to Democratic President Bill Clinton to help pass the North American Free Trade Agreement in the 1990s. The next president, Republican George W. Bush, tapped Frenzel for the Social Security Commission and the Advisory Committee on Trade Policy and Negotiations. Frenzel was a guest scholar at the Brookings Institution and an alternate member of the House of Representatives Office

of Congressional Ethics.

Rep. Erik Paulsen, a Republican who now serves the Third Congressional District, called Frenzel a mentor and role model. The two met every few months to talk, he said.

"I really do believe Minnesota and America lost one of our best public servants," Paulsen said Monday. "Frenzel was always pushing me, telling me what was right."

DFL Gov. Mark Dayton said Monday that Frenzel was his family's congressman when he was growing up

See **FRENZEL** on B6 ▶

Congressman sought bipartisan solutions

◀ **FRENZEL** from B1 in western Hennepin County.

"Everyone always had the greatest respect for him, for his intelligence, his knowledge of tax issues, his friendliness and his humanity," Dayton said.

Former U.S. Sen. Rudy Boschwitz, who knew Frenzel for 45 years, called him "the smartest member of the Minnesota delegation and truly, one of the brightest members of Congress." Boschwitz said Frenzel was an acknowledged expert on trade and tax law, and "he was so well-respected, his views so well-balanced, that he really achieved a great deal even though he was never in the majority in the 20 years he served in the House."

Frenzel never believed politicians should stay on Capitol Hill forever. With each new Congress, he introduced legislation, which never went anywhere, to limit service in the House to nine two-year terms. When he announced in 1990 that he would not seek an 11th term, he said he was sick

of the Republican Party being in the "seemingly permanent minority" and he wanted to be useful elsewhere.

"But I am not looking for any more 80-hour-a-week jobs," he told the Star Tribune.

Fiercely outspoken about moderation in fiscal spending, Frenzel riled some members of his own party because he was an abortion rights proponent and vocal in his support for the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s.

On a lighter note, Frenzel was known for his doodles, drawn while he was in meetings or on the phone. People all over Capitol Hill have "Frenzel doodles" pinned near their desks.

After he left the House, Frenzel was encouraged by prominent members of his party, including Boschwitz, to run for governor. Frenzel opted to stay near the Hill and continue working on trade issues.

One of his most noteworthy achievements came while working for the Clin-

ton White House: getting members of his own party to support NAFTA. Frenzel said in later interviews that he set up shop in an office on the House side and met with every Republican caucus member to convince them free trade with Mexico and Canada was a good idea.

Former Rep. Tim Penny joined with Frenzel and former Rep. Mark Kennedy to start the Economic Club. Penny, like Paulsen, called Frenzel a mentor. "I always knew I could trust the accuracy of his view on any given issue," Penny said Monday.

Frenzel was succeeded by Jim Ramstad, also a Republican, who called Frenzel "the last of an endangered species" of people who truly relished working across the aisle.

"He was highly respected for his moderation. He personified bipartisanship," Ramstad said.

Earlier this year, the Mexican government bestowed on Frenzel the highest honor it can give noncitizens — the

Order of the Aztec Eagle, presented by Mexican Ambassador Eduardo Medina Mora for Frenzel's work on NAFTA.

William Eldridge Frenzel was born in St. Paul on July 31, 1928, and graduated from St. Paul Academy. He received undergraduate and master's degrees from Dartmouth College and served in the Naval Reserve during the Korean War. He served eight years in the Minnesota Legislature before he was elected to Congress in 1970.

Frenzel is survived by his wife of 63 years, Ruthy, and daughters Debby, Pam and Mitty. Services are pending.

In a 1990 interview with the Star Tribune, Frenzel used a baseball analogy to explain his retirement from Congress.

"You ought to go out when you're hitting .300," he said, "rather than deteriorating."

Star Tribune staff writer Patrick Condon contributed to this report. Paul Walsh • 612-673-4482