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## Charlie Weaver brought his vision of effective government to metro area



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The name of Charles Weaver Sr. is associated with one of Minnesota's most arcane laws — the Fiscal Disparities Act of 1971. I covered the enactment of the law and have written many times about its importance. Yet, I would never attempt a detailed explanation of how it works.

Weaver, 60, a former lawyer/legislator from Anoka who died of cancer last week, could explain the law and did so many times. He not only shepherded the measure through the Legislature, but he also returned regularly to defend the law when opponents would seek to repeal or weaken it.

Charlie Weaver — who later served as chairman of the Metropolitan Council and, until his death, as chairman of the Metropolitan Waste Control Commission — was part of a wave of thoughtful Independent-Republicans who gained election to the Legislature in the mid-1960s and helped modernize much of state government.

Weaver also played a role in the enactment of most of the major laws that have guided the development of the Twin Cities area.

Working with legislators like Harmon Ogdahl, Bill Frenzel, Joe O'Neill, Howard Albertson, the late Robert Ashbach and many others, Weaver helped pass the laws that created the Metropolitan Council and established regional sewage, transit and parks systems.

The Fiscal Disparities Act was an essential component of this legislative framework. It requires each community to contribute 40 percent of the annual growth in its commercial-industrial tax base to a metropolitan pool, which is distributed among all communities in the

region largely on the basis of population.

The law, which drew heavily upon a Citizens League report, has gradually reduced the gap between the "have" and "have-not" communities in the metro area. More importantly, it has reduced the pressure on communities to make land-use decisions largely on the basis of what might bring in the most property tax revenue. In the view of many, the law is the glue that holds the seven-county region together.

"Charlie Weaver was a visionary," says Gordon Voss, a former legislative colleague and now chief administrator of the Metro Waste Control Commission. "He brought a bipartisan approach to government that focused almost entirely on policy. He did not want to bicker about details."

There was also a very human side to Weaver. He was very devoted to his family and his beloved Anoka County, and he never took himself too seriously.

"He was first and foremost a family man," says Charlie Weaver Jr., who followed his father into the House of Representatives. "He would always be home for dinner. And he would talk about public policy and the importance of giving something back to the community."

Indeed, Charlie Sr. helped usher many of the Weaver clan into public service: His brother, John, also served in the Legislature; son Tom is chief counsel for the Metropolitan Transit Commission; and a niece, Martha, is public information offi-



Weaver

cer for the state Administration Department.

Weaver also has a lot of fans at the two metro agencies he headed. Rosemary Coleman, a former aide at the Metro Council, recalls that when Weaver's term ended, agency employees gave him a robe that bore the words, "Charlie, the Charming Chairman."

"That's what he was to his staff, and not just his senior staff," she said. "He always had time for people. He was a beloved chairman."

While conciliatory in his approach, Weaver did not back away from a good political fight — and he was a combatant in one of the more entertaining legislative floor debates I have witnessed.

In the early 1970s, then-Rep. Neil Haugerud, DFL-Preston, was attempting to pass a bill intended to reduce the complexity and expense of probate. Haugerud, a former sheriff of Fillmore County, never had much use for lawyers — and his bill essentially was a model statute that had been clipped out of a magazine.

Weaver and then-Rep. Tom Newcome, IR-White Bear Lake, took to the floor on behalf of the legal community, going through the Haugerud bill section by section and pointing out its numerous technical deficiencies. The bill, they argued, simply would not work as written.

Always believing that the best defense was a good offense, "Gentle Neil" — as Haugerud was known — took after the two lawyer/legislators. "You saw what they just did," he said of the lawyers. "They're trained like animals to do that."

As members of the House laughed uproariously, Weaver all but conceded defeat. "Members of the House," he said, "I only wish I could find the dirty, rotten lawyer who ran over Neil's bicycle when he was a little kid — because I would wring the guy's neck."

A few years later, Weaver got his revenge emceeding a roast for the retiring DFLer. "He did just a murderous job on me," Haugerud recalls. "We had a terrific time."