

Roger Laufenburger, 80, dies; state senator, mayor

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By Terry Collins
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Former state Sen. Roger Laufenburger, an early advocate for rural highways in Minnesota, died Thursday at St. Anne Hospice in Lewiston, Minn. He was 80.

Laufenburger had been in declining health. He was hospitalized for several months after suffering a stroke while helping a neighbor shovel snow last fall.

He served 18 years in the Minnesota Senate after being elected in 1962. He was legislator of the year in 1977 and was instrumental in reorganizing the state Department of Transportation.

Laufenburger was known for his liberal views. He also was described in a March 1963 Minneapolis Star article as a quiet man.

"I don't feel I should speak unless I have something to say," he said at the time. "When I do get up to speak, I say it quick and sit down."

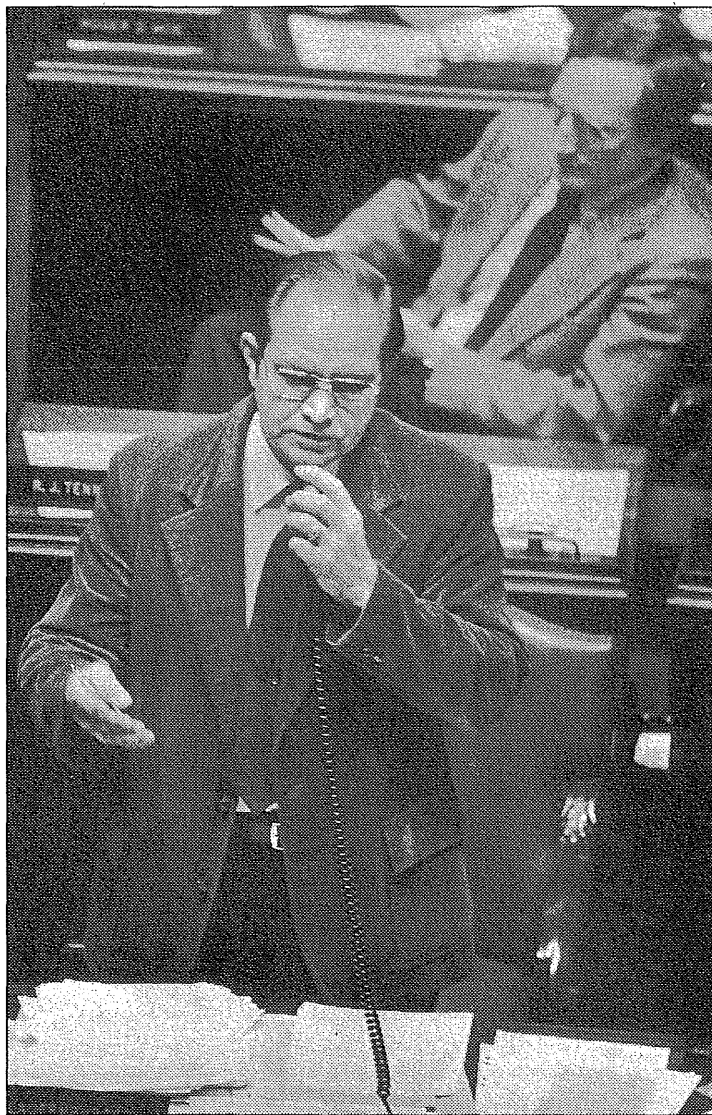
The son of a dairy farmer, he was a three-sport champion athlete at Winona High School. After briefly running his father's dairy, he went into the insurance business in 1946.

During the early part of his legislative career the DFLer was host of a weekly half-hour radio show called "Roger's Rumpus Room."

After nearly 20 years in office, Laufenburger was defeated for reelection in 1980.

He became a lobbyist for the Minnesota Retail Merchants Association the next year. In February 1981 he told the Minneapolis Tribune, "If I stay close to the legislative process, who knows what the future might bring? So I eventually concluded, yes, being a lobbyist for a group I believed in, that would be a career I'd like."

Yet his desire to lead came calling again, and he became mayor of Lewiston in 1992, a job that lasted until this year.



Star Tribune file photo

Roger Laufenburger, shown in 1980, served 18 years in the Minnesota Senate and was legislator of the year in 1977. He also was mayor of Lewiston, Minn., from 1992 until this year.

During his tenure he helped his town of about 1,400 improve its failing water system with a new well and water treatment plant through state grants and low-interest loans.

"Roger was quite an asset to the community, because we couldn't pay for those expensive things just on water and sewer bills," former City Council Member Dan Sullivan said Friday. "He knew what the town needed, and being a former legislator he knew who to tap and got things moving. For

a town of this size, he left an indelible impact."

The well is near completion and the wastewater plant is under construction, Sullivan said. Both should be operating by next year.

A memorial service will be held at 1 p.m. Monday at the First Presbyterian Church in Lewiston.

—The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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