

State Rep. George Mann dies; was 2nd most senior lawmaker

By Robert Whereatt
Staff Writer

State Rep. George Mann, the second most senior lawmaker in the Minnesota Legislature, died Monday morning at University of Minnesota Hospitals. Mann, a DFLer from Windom, was 66.

He had been hospitalized since suffering a heart attack April 29 following the 1984 session. He is survived by his wife, Alice.

Gov. Rudy Perpich ordered flags at state facilities to half-staff yesterday and today in memory of Mann. Funeral arrangements are pending.

Mann was first elected to the House in 1958. He served 12 terms over 26

years. In 1966 he was defeated for reelection and sat out two years before making his political comeback. Late in the 1984 session, Mann told colleagues that he would not run for reelection this fall.

Mann's House seat is expected to remain vacant until the general election this fall.

The only legislator with more seniority is Rep. Willard Munger, DFL-Duluth, who has been elected 13 times.

Mann was a quiet, unassuming grain farmer who chaired the House Transportation Committee for the past four years. Before that, he had



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chaired the Agriculture Committee. He took particular interest in improving roads in rural Minnesota.

Minnesota Transportation Commissioner Richard Braun said Mann considered rural roads vital for agriculture. "That's why he switched from being chairman of Agriculture to chairman of Transportation," Braun said.

For nearly 20 years, Mann's special legislative passion was to secure plans and funding to improve a section of Highway 60 from St. James to Worthington. The narrow, two-lane, bumpy road ran through Mann's southwestern district and past his farm.

A sign on Mann's office door read, "Pray for me. I drive Highway 60."

In 1983, the Transportation Committee chairman introduced House File 60 which called for a four-cent-a-gallon increase in the gas tax. The bill also listed a number of highway projects across the state in order of priority. Number one on the priority list was Highway 60.

The gas tax passed. The priority list was scrapped.

Next year, partly because of the gas tax increase, reconstruction of Highway 60 will begin with a 6.3-mile, \$6 million project. Other sections are planned in future years, according to Braun.

"Everything is cleared to go on, but George won't get to see it," said Robert M. Johnson, executive director of Minnesota Good Roads, Inc., a highway construction lobbying group.

Johnson, who knew Mann for almost two decades, said the legislator "was one of the kindest, fairest of all the men I've had an opportunity to work with in the Legislature. He would bend over backwards to give everyone a chance (in committee) to be heard."

Perpich also praised Mann. "Lola and I extend our condolences to Alice Mann and to their many friends," Perpich said in a statement. "George represented the Windom area for 12 terms and did so with great honor. He served his constituents well, and he also served all the people of Minnesota because of his interest in our transportation needs. He will be missed."

Mann was instrumental in passing several pieces of legislation, including the Family Farm Security Act, a law prohibiting foreign purchase of Minnesota farm land and the catastrophic illness act.

Mann was considered one of the more liberal members of the House when he was first elected, according to Johnson. His politics became more conservative over the years as the political composition of the district changed with reapportionment, Johnson said.

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