

NEWS OBITUARIES

# Robert McEachern, a 'most colorful' legislator

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● The former teacher and high school football coach once led the Minnesota House Education Committee.

By BEN COHEN  
bcohen@startribune.com

When Robert McEachern led the Education Committee of the Minnesota House of Representatives, he could be gruff, mischievous and fun.

But the former high school teacher and football coach was very serious when it came to public education.

McEachern, who served in the Legislature representing the St. Michael area from 1972 to 1992, died on Feb. 6 in Buffalo of complications from Alzheimer's disease.

McEachern, 80, lived most recently in Buffalo.

The former mayor of St. Michael and former head coach of Minneapolis DeLaSalle football team had an "abiding commitment to education," according to a

March 17, 1991, Star Tribune article.

He began leading the Education Committee in the early 1980s. He ran for majority leader in 1986 and lost.

Some were taken aback by his pranks, some by his gruffness.

In the civil atmosphere of the Legislature, he called folks by their last names, and could be sarcastic, wrote a Star Tribune reporter. But for many who knew him, McEachern made work fun, and he was "productive."

"He was one of the most colorful legislators in the last 40 years," said Bob Vanasek, former DFL House speaker. "He was direct, but he had a heart of gold."

When budgeting, Vanasek said he and other leaders would low-ball McEachern on the budget, knowing he would fight hard for more.

Vanasek recalled walking near the state office building and hearing someone on

a bullhorn calling to then-Gov. Rudy Perpich: "Rudy, Rudy, send me more money," boomed McEachern out his office window.

Vanasek said he wasn't afraid to stand up to educators. "If he was unhappy ..., he wasn't afraid to tell them to their face," Vanasek said.

McEachern lost his House seat in 1992.

McEachern, who grew up in Delano, served in the Navy during World War II and the Korean War. After Korea, he completed a bachelor's degree in education in North Dakota.

From the mid-1950s until 1972, he was a social studies teacher on a North Dakota Indian reservation and in Minnesota schools in Sleepy Eye and St. Michael. In the early 1960s, he joined the staff of DeLaSalle High School, where he worked for 10 years.

At DeLaSalle, then an all-boys' school, he was the head football coach, a popular teacher and "ironically" the dean of discipline, said his former student, Mark Mal-

lander, who is a Minnesota House staffer.

McEachern taught the curriculum, "But what you most remember were the life lessons that he liked to talk about," said Mallander, who added that McEachern was a successful football coach.

In the House, McEachern is also remembered for his support of community education. He believed "beyond its educational value, community education involves people in the school that ordinarily wouldn't be connected to the school," Mallander said.

He retired in 1992, but worked as a substitute and driver's education teacher and enjoyed lake life in Maple Lake, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Dorothy, of Monticello; daughters, Mary Williamson of Maple Lake and Susie Seestrom of Annandale; sons Patrick of Monticello, Terry of Maple Lake, William of Los Angeles, and Thomas of Monticello; 14 grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

Services have been held.



Robert McEachern