

# Civic service defined career, from St. Paul to Washington

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Bert McKasy had a long business career, but he's best known for his role in government, serving as a state legislator, top state administrator and chief of staff to a U.S. senator.

"He was truly an outstanding public servant," said former Minnesota Gov. Arne Carlson. McKasy died of colon cancer on Feb. 8 at his home in Mendota Heights, surrounded by

family. He was 77.

McKasy grew up in St. Paul and attended St. Mark's Catholic School, where in second grade he met Carolyn Dieveney — whom he would marry in 1964. McKasy graduated from St. Thomas Military Academy and then got a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of St. Thomas.

In 1968, he graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School and worked as a lawyer until the mid-1970s when he became executive vice president of the Fritz Co., a candy distributor.

In 1983, he and Carolyn founded McKasy Travel Agency, which they owned for 35 years.

In 1982, McKasy won a seat in the Minnesota House of Representatives as an Independent Republican (IR) serving Dakota County.

"He was very well rounded," said Kathleen Blatz, a long-time IR representative who worked with McKasy on the tax committee and for a time sat directly behind him on the floor.

Blatz, who went on to become chief justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court, said McKasy worked well with other legislators, including DFLers. "He was quite the gentleman and could disagree reasonably with people."

After three terms in the house, McKasy went to Washington, D.C., in 1989, serving for two years as chief of staff

for Republican David Durenberger, then a U.S. senator from Minnesota.

"I was drawn to [McKasy's] ability to define a problem before he advanced solutions to it," said Durenberger, who served in the Senate for 17 years. "It was never about him, and that is a rarity in politics."

In 1991, McKasy returned to state government when he was appointed by Carlson to head the Minnesota Department of Commerce. His broad experience appealed to Carlson, also an Independent Republican.

"He had a business background, a political background and a legal background," said Carlson, Minnesota's governor for most of the 1990s.

McKasy left the Commerce Department in the summer of 1993 to run for the Senate seat of the retiring Durenberger. He lost a tough IR endorsement battle to Rod Grams, who was elected senator in 1994.

McKasy ran again to represent Minnesota Republicans in the 1996 Senate election against Democratic incumbent Paul Wellstone. McKasy lost in the IR primary to former U.S. Sen. Rudy Boschwitz, who then lost to Wellstone in the general election for the second time in six years.

In the mid-1990s, McKasy joined the law firm of Lindquist & Vennum (now called Ballard Spahr) and retired as a partner in December. He also served on the Metropolitan Airports Commission for more than a decade. He was on the Mairs & Power Funds board of trustees, retiring as its chairman in 2017, and a director of UCare from 2011 until resigning just days before his death.

McKasy also served as chairman of the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce, University of St. Thomas trustees and St. Paul Winter Carnival Association (serving it its centennial year of 1986).

He is survived by his wife, Carolyn; children, Kristi Hykes, Mark McKasy, Liz O'Brien and Shannon Kroon; and 10 grandchildren. Services have been held.

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Former U.S. Sen. David Durenberger