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Darrel Peterson; served in Legislature, on PUC

Darrel L. Peterson, 54, a former legislator and chairman of the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, died Sunday at his home in Oakdale.

The cause of death was unknown.

Peterson, formerly of Inver Grove Heights, was born in Fairmont, Minn., and graduated from East Chain (Minn.) High School. He earned a bachelor's degree in agriculture from the University of Minnesota and operated a dairy and hog farm in Silver Lake Township.

The Independent-Republican represented Fairmont in the House from 1974 to 1976, and in the Senate from 1980 to 1986. He was an assistant minority leader.

"He was very active in educational and agricultural issues, and really tried to represent the small farmers," said his daughter, Anne Peterson, of Bloomington. "He always did what his constituents wanted, even if he was against it."

He was a member of the East Chain and Fairmont school boards in the 1960s and '70s. Anne Peterson said her father became interested in public service because he was taught that "if you see something that's wrong,

you have the power to change it."

He was appointed to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission in 1986. While he was chairman, the commission was criticized for two controversial decisions against the utilities it regulates: One blocked a merger between Minnegasco's parent company and an Arkansas utility, and the other denied Northern States Power Company's request for a rate increase.

He was reappointed to the commission, but resigned in 1992. Most recently he was a consultant for the Prairie Island Dakota community in its efforts to stop NSP from storing nuclear waste on Indian land.

Besides his daughter, Peterson is survived by his fiancée, Carol Wilson; two other daughters, Mary, of Minneapolis, and Elizabeth, of Ann Arbor, Mich., and a brother, James, of Edina.

Services will be held at 4 p.m. Thursday at Holy Cross Lutheran Church, 6355 N. 10th St., Oakdale. Visitation will be held from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesday at Wulff Family Services, Crestwood Park Mortuary, 1485 White Bear Av., St. Paul. Memorials to the family are suggested.