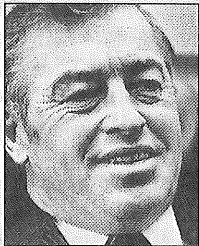


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**Clarence Purfeerst** Longtime, quotable state senator

# Former legislator leaves legacy of horse racing, malapropisms

By ADAM BELZ • adam.belz@startribune.com



Clarence Purfeerst was the Yogi Berra of the Minnesota Senate.

"Correct me if I'm right," he said once, or, "If I make a mistake, let me know in advance."

When a matter in the Senate was postponed, he said, "We'll just let our predecessors figure it out."

A farmer from Faribault who served in the Senate for 21 years, Purfeerst died Sept. 25 at his home in St. Paul. He was 89.

As a lawmaker, he was the Senate's point man on highways and trucking for two decades, sponsored "living will" legislation that allows Minnesotans to make advance decisions about life support, and helped bring betting on horse races to Shakopee.

But his most enduring legacy was his knack for the mangled axiom, which came to be known as "Purfer-isms."

Even in his final days, said his friend Janet Paulsen, Purfeerst was quotable. In hospice care, he had a kidney infection and his catheter was making him uncomfortable. "Would somebody just get that decapitator out of me?" he said.

"His math was wonderful but his English wasn't the King's English, for sure," Paulsen said.

Purfeerst grew up on a farm east of Faribault, attended a one-room schoolhouse and became a successful fourth-generation farmer, raising hogs until he lost them in a lightning strike and then dairy cows. He was active with the local school board, the Jaycees and the Elks.

"He joined every club in town and some out of town," said his wife, Rosemond Purfeerst.

Purfeerst was approached to run for state Senate as a Republican in 1969. His wife and children "worked like heck" to get him elected, she said. He defeated another Republican that year, which didn't endear him to GOP

leadership in St. Paul, so he joined the DFLers.

An agribusinessman himself, Purfeerst focused on roads and trucking and became chairman of the Transportation Committee in 1977, a powerful position he held until he stepped down in 1991. Malapropisms issued forth from the senator even on days of great import, such as when he rolled out the "living will" bill in the Senate, said Keith Langseth, a former state senator from Glyndon, Minn.

"He stood up to present the bill and started, 'When you take your last gasp of death,'" Langseth said.

Purfeerst was a slightly left-of-center DFLer and Langseth said he was a popular man at the Capitol, friendly, colorful and a good legislator.

"He liked to drive Cadillacs," Langseth said. "He was a good businessman."

Purfeerst was the main Senate sponsor of the 1982 state constitutional amendment that authorized betting on horse races and the 1983 legislation that created the Minnesota Racing Commission. As a result, he got to blow the trumpet before the first race on the first day of racing at Canterbury Park.

He was Senate majority leader pro tem from 1987 to 1991, decided not to run for re-election after his term ended in 1991, and settled in St. Paul with Paulsen, who worked in the court system. They were companions until his death.

His wife remained near Faribault, where she still helps their son operate the farm.

"I'm going to do what I want, when I want, whenever I want" — that was one of his favorite phrases, and so I guess he did what he wanted," Rosemond Purfeerst said.

Purfeerst is survived by his wife and their six children, all of whom still live in Minnesota: Judy Hanscom, Jane Stoneburner, Jim Purfeerst, Joe Purfeerst, Mary Purfeerst, and Amy Nordstrom. He also is survived by 16 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren.

Services have been held.

Adam Belz • 612-673-4405

"He was very colorful. You knew he was around."

— former state Sen. Keith Langseth