

Jim Rice remembered for his achievements

13-term House member dies

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Labor leaders remembered him as their strongest ally. The arts community said he was there for them, too. And fellow legislators remembered his humor and loyalty, as well as his political savvy.

A day after Jim Rice died of an apparent heart attack at the Capitol, friends and former associates of the longtime north Minneapolis legislator hailed his combativeness and compassion, his common touch and his classical erudition.

"When he was onto something, he was a bulldog," former Minneapolis Mayor Arthur Naftalin said Wednesday. "He gave no quarter. He believed in what he was doing, which is more than you can say for our present-day politicians."

Rice, 71, who had announced

his retirement because of health problems after 26 years in the House, was the Legislature's second-longest-serving member. Only Rep. Willard Munger, DFL-Duluth, a 40-year veteran of the Capitol, has served longer.

Rice, who served District 58A, was often a study in contrasts — a fierce opponent of legalized gambling who liked to place an occasional bet, a stalwart labor supporter who never held a union card, a constant critic of banks and insurance companies who worked as a financial analyst and insurance adjuster.

A former Army boxer and combat infantryman in World War II, he made headlines for everything from alleged ethical lapses to a 1975 restaurant brawl in which he scored a knockout over an off-duty policeman bouncer.

Turn to RICE on B7



Rep. Jim Rice

RICE from B1

Rep. Jim Rice remembered for hard work in Minneapolis

He also quoted Shakespeare in legislative oratory, read the classics in Greek and Latin, wrote poetry and championed funding for the arts. The Minnesota Orchestra dedicated its season-opening performances last month to him, and Minnesota Citizens for the Arts had scheduled a tribute next week. In between, he was honored at the Minnesota AFL-CIO convention.

"He was also one of the strongest supporters of the working man and the poor," said Sen. Carl Kroening, DFL-Minneapolis. "He tried to make their life better with parks and by supporting the arts. He was also after the rascals of the world, the money changers, the people who charge 21 percent for credit card loans and bank loans."

Rice also initiated legislation that put millions of dollars into Minneapolis neighborhood revitalization and riverfront redevelopment.

"Everything that Minneapolis got, it got because of Jim Rice and Carl Kroening," said Rep. John Sarna, DFL-Minneapolis. "They took care of Minneapolis."

In perhaps his last in-depth interview, late in the summer, Rice remembered turning Hubert Humphrey down when the senator asked him to work on one of his campaigns in the mid-1950s. The work, Rice explained, would force him to take too much time away from his family of eight children.

He remembered marching on Washington with Martin Luther King Jr. in 1963. He remembered having breakfast with Harry Truman and dinner with Tip O'Neill.

He proudly talked of his work as chief of staff for Gov. Karl Rolvaag in the 1960s.

After Rolvaag was defeated in 1966, Rice spent several years on the Hennepin County Park Board, then won election to the Legislature in 1970.

He was chairman of the House Appropriations Committee in the 1980s and maintained a strong hand in government finance throughout his 13 terms in the House.

Rice responded to criticism with aplomb and humor. When the Minneapolis Tribune reported that he had attended the Belmont Stakes horse race at public expense, publishing his picture next to that of winner Seattle Slew, Rice later put out a brochure including a picture of the Tribune's editor. It was captioned: "Seattle Slew, rear view."

Time to retire

Lingering health concerns after a near-fatal bout with pneumonia last year, coupled with the retirement of longtime friends and colleagues Kroening and Sarna, persuaded Rice that it was time to retire as well.

Rice endorsed Joe Mullery in the five-person DFL primary in September. Mullery won. Rice later offered this advice to him and to anyone else elected to public office.

"I would suggest they answer their own phone for the first few terms to keep very close to their constituents," he said. "I'd also tell them to go to the schools and talk to the students with an emphasis on what they can do."

Visitation for Rice will be held from 4 to 8 p.m. today at St. Bridget's Catholic Church, 3820 Emerson Av. N., Minneapolis. The funeral will be held there at 10:30 a.m. Friday. He will be buried in St. Mary's Cemetery, 4403 Chicago Av. S.