

Former Rep. Gloria Segal, champion of programs for the mentally ill, dies at 65

By Pat Pfeifer
Staff Writer

Gloria M. Segal, 65, a former legislator who was considered the conscience of the Minnesota House of Representatives when it came to funding for people with mental illness, the underprivileged and for women's issues, died Wednesday at her home in St. Louis Park.

She represented District 44B in St. Louis Park for 10 years and resigned in mid-December after surgery for a brain tumor.

Segal fought to persuade her colleagues to establish and support mental health programs and talked openly about one of her four children's battles with mental illness.

She was the instigator and a member of the Governor's Mental Health Commission in 1984. She was the chief author of the Comprehensive Mental Health Act in 1987 and the Children's Mental Health Act in 1989.

She had won awards from local and national organizations for such work. She recently received one of the most prestigious honors in the field when the American Psychiatric Association gave her its Jacob K. Javits Award.

Segal also was a leader in the national effort to raise \$250,000 to endow a chair at the University of Oklahoma Law School for Prof. Anita Hill.

She started the fund drive as a way of showing support for Hill, who was accused of lying when she told a U.S. Senate committee that she had been sexually harassed by Clarence Thomas, then a nominee for the U.S. Supreme Court.

Before Segal resigned last year, she was chosen to head the House's Economic Development Committee. She also sat on the Appropriations, Housing, Health and Human Services, Financial Institutions and Insurance committees.

"Gloria Segal was a compassionate advocate for the improvement of the lives of underprivileged people and a champion of women's rights," said Rep. Jerry Anderson, DFL-International Falls, speaker designate of the House.

Rep. Ron Abrams, IR-Minnetonka, said, "Gloria made outstanding contributions to the state, to the mental health community, as well as to St. Louis Park. She was a close friend, and I will miss her greatly."

Segal was born and raised in Minneapolis, where her father was a partner in the U.S. Fruit Co. She took care of her mother and her younger brother after her father died when she was 13.

She graduated from North High School and enrolled at the University of Minnesota but dropped out when she married Dr. Martin Segal in March 1949. Their first child was born nine months later.

"Back then you took care of the children, you didn't go to school," said her husband, retired head of pathology at Methodist Hospital in St. Louis Park.

She took classes irregularly, and eventually earned a degree in business from Metropolitan State Uni-



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versity. She later received a Bush Fellowship to attend a small-business management program at Harvard University.

"Before she was in the Legislature, she did politics as a hobby," her husband said.

As part of the Democratic Women's Forum, she campaigned and raised money for local and national candidates. She was chairwoman of the St. Louis Park DFL Party in the early 1960s and attended the Democratic National Convention in 1964.

Next came a 10-year involvement in the Cedar-Riverside housing development in Minneapolis. Although the project didn't meet all its goals, it led to the building of many low- and moderate-income housing units, her family said. Segal also helped establish a theater and arts district in the Seven Corners area.

She later was a stockbroker for a short time and ran arts institutions.

But the allure of politics was strong and, she decided, the best way to fight for what she believed in.

She was elected to represent St. Louis Park in the House in 1982 and was known as one of the strongest liberal voices for social issues.

One of Segal's greatest loves was vacationing with her husband and their three grandchildren. They took the children camping in Yellowstone National Park for 12 days. They went to the Black Hills and to Alaska. The two oldest grandchildren went with them on a rafting trip on the Colorado River in 1991.

Besides her husband, she is survived by sons Nolan Segal, of Golden Valley; Thomas Segal, of Minneapolis, and Robby Segal, of Excelsior; a daughter, Susan Segal, of Minneapolis; her mother, Sophie Berg, of St. Louis Park; a brother, Filmore Rodich, of San Rafael, Calif., and three grandchildren.

Services will be held at 1 p.m. Sunday at Temple Israel, 2324 Emerson Av. S., Minneapolis. Shiva will be held Sunday, Monday and Tuesday at 2221 South Hill Lane in St. Louis Park. Memorials to the Gloria M. Segal Endowment Fund for mental health services at the Jewish Community Foundation are suggested.

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