

# REMEMBERING

**Gordon Voss** Former state representative

## Blaine legislator left his mark on tax policy, amateur sports

By ERIC ROPER • eroper@startribune.com



Gordon Voss arrived at the Minnesota Legislature with a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering. But he soon made a name for himself as a whiz on a range of other complicated topics, including the tortuous realm of property taxes.

“Of all the legislators I’ve worked with, I wouldn’t be at all surprised if he had the highest IQ,” said Joel

Michael, who has worked in Minnesota House research for four decades. “He was one of the ... quickest learners that I’ve ever been associated with.”

Voss, a DFLer who represented Blaine in the House for 15 years, died June 21 in a Wayzata car crash. He was 79.

He is perhaps best known as the namesake of the “Voss report,” still published by the Minnesota Department of Revenue, which examines property taxes as a share of income. The report illustrated that the tax burden on metro-area residents was higher than it had appeared, relative to greater Minnesota.

“He was proud of that and he was a huge proponent that taxes should be based on the ability to pay,” said his son, Greg Voss.

Voss’ tenure at the Legislature included stints as chairman of the appropriations, local and urban affairs, energy, and tax committees. He left the Legislature to serve as one of the last leaders of the Metropolitan Waste Control Commission, which oversaw the region’s wastewater treatment before it was wrapped into the Metropolitan Council.

Among other accomplishments at the Legislature, Voss helped put Blaine on the map for amateur sports by pushing to fund the National Sports Center complex. With the support of Gov. Rudy Perpich, Voss carried the bill through the House.

“He really helped guide us through that whole effort in

terms of implementing the legislation,” said Elwyn Tinklenberg, who was mayor of Blaine at the time. “Gordy was just dogged in his determination. When he really got behind something, he could be persistent and determined.”

Voss was known for his strong opinions, intellect and occasionally blunt style.

“He was never threatened by lots of bright people around him, because he always figured he was the brightest guy in the room, and he generally was,” said former House Speaker Dee Long. “And he didn’t particularly suffer fools gladly, which some of us found quite appealing about him.”

Former state Rep. Bill Schreiber, a Republican representing Brooklyn Park, recalled getting to know Voss when they pushed to designate Hwy. 610 as a state trunk highway. Schreiber preceded Voss as tax committee chairman.

“We would argue about tax policy. But it was always respectful and friendly,” Schreiber said. “And I can remember a lobbyist saying, ‘You know, I’d come to tax committee just to hear you and Gordy debate.’”

Voss was born in Duluth. His daughter, Kirsten Voss, said her mother, Elaine Voss, prodded her father, then a University of Minnesota engineering professor, into public service. He first ran for president of the local PTA, then was elected to the Legislature in 1972.

Blaine at the time had just over 20,000 residents, about a third of its current population.

Voss later moved to Maple Grove and Wayzata. In Blaine, Kirsten Voss said, her father enjoyed tending to his large garden, where he grew fruits and vegetables. He also was fond of making fudge, crullers, apple crisp and apple pie.

Voss is survived by his wife, Elaine Voss, of Wayzata; a son, Gregory, of Apple Valley; a daughter, Kirsten, of Minnetonka; a sister, Nancy Mount, of Two Harbors, Minn.; a brother, John Voss, of Saginaw, Minn.; and four grandchildren.

A memorial service has been held.

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