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## Charlie Weaver, champion of tax justice

Charlie Weaver was an unlikely revolutionary. Affable and basically conservative, he was regarded by his colleagues — first in the Legislature, later in other state and metropolitan offices — as “a healer and uniter.” He hardly seemed the type to get out on the cutting edge of reform.

Yet two decades before his death Thursday at age 60, that’s exactly where Weaver put himself, and where he put the rest of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. His instrument, forged in the 1971 Legislature, was the still-unique regional tax-base sharing plan known as the fiscal disparities law.

That Weaver’s plan for redistributing property-valuation wealth remains bitterly controversial more than two decades after its adoption indicates how radically it departed from the traditional “them that has, gets” approach to local-government financing. That the law has remained in effect this long with only minor refinements shows how well it has worked.

Much can be credited to “fiscal disparities,” from better balanced urban development to higher-quality local services. But what Weaver mainly wanted to achieve was simple fairness. He believed that cities with a tax-rich commercial-industrial base should share some of that base with less fortunate

metro communities.

As he wrote in a Star Tribune Commentary article two years ago, “The fundamental goal of any tax policy should be to achieve equality between people who are similarly situated. In the case of income tax and sales tax, people who earn and spend the same amount with similar deductions pay the same amount of tax. However, since real-estate taxes are a function of valuation and spending in each taxing jurisdiction, we have always had tremendous disparities in real-estate taxes on properties of equal value in different communities even when local spending is the same . . . .”

After four terms in the Legislature as a Republican representing suburban Anoka County, Weaver went on to become chairman of the Metropolitan Council under Gov. Al Quie and later served on the Minnesota Tax Study (Latimer) Commission, as an attorney and lobbyist specializing in land-use and transportation issues and, at his death as chairman of the Metropolitan Waste Control Commission. Respected — even loved — by politicians of both parties, he will be greatly missed in the halls of Minnesota government. But his greatest contribution endures. Nothing can make paying property taxes a pleasant task, but credit Charlie Weaver with making it a whole lot fairer.