

Ex-Rep. John Zwach, who looked out for rural Minnesota, dies at 83

By Pat Pfeifer
Star Tribune Writer

Star Tribune

11-12-90, 11A

Former U.S. Rep. John Zwach, R-Minn., who established a reputation as an outspoken representative of rural Minnesota during 40 years of political life, died of lung cancer Sunday at Redwood Falls Municipal Hospital. He was 83.

Zwach spent 32 years in the Minnesota Legislature — 12 years in the House and 20 years in the Senate — before being elected to Congress in 1966 from the largely rural Sixth District. He retired from office in 1975.

He was one of 11 children born on a

farm in Gales Township in Redwood County. He almost didn't attend high school because free rural bus service was unavailable then, and his parents, immigrants from what is now Czechoslovakia, were too poor to make other arrangements. He ended up walking 10 miles to school, said his daughter, Barbara Sykora of Deephaven, who followed her father into politics and is now the state Independent-Republican Party chairwoman.

Zwach went on to earn a teaching certificate from Mankato State University in 1928 and a bachelor's de-

Zwach continued on page 6A

Zwach

Continued from page 1A

gree from the University of Minnesota in 1933.

Zwach was a farmer and teacher in 1934 when he won his first election from Redwood County with a budget of \$250 and entered the Minnesota House. One of the first bills he worked on concerned school transportation.

In the Senate, he was chairman of the interim commission on agriculture from 1955 to 1957 and chairman of the rules committee. He caucused with Republican-oriented conservatives before the law was changed to all IR and DFL party designation on election ballots, and was Senate majority leader from 1959 to 1966.

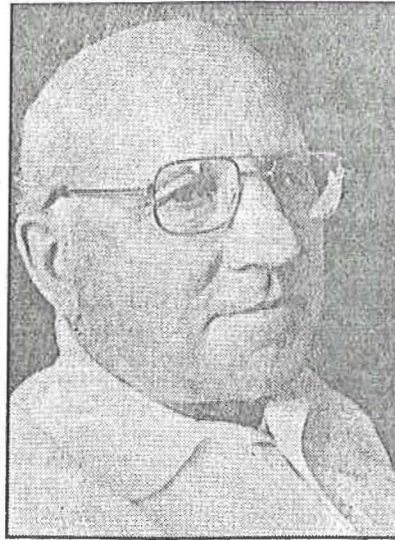
"John was the consummate politician when he was in the Legislature, the old-time politician," said former state Rep. Gary Flakne.

He had the demeanor of a farmer-legislator, which he was, Flakne said. Younger, newer legislators would think they were working with a rube, only to find that Zwach had taken their bills apart, he said.

During his eight years in Congress, Zwach often said that rural Minnesota was being shortchanged. Housing, care for the elderly, transportation and health care concerned him greatly. He was succeeded in Congress by former DFL Rep. Rick Nolan, who defeated IR challenger and then political newcomer Jon Grunseth, the IR candidate who ran for governor this year and pulled out of the race shortly before the election.

In a 1974 interview, Zwach said his principal accomplishments in Washington were his work on the target-price concept for calculating farm price-support payments, enacted in the 1973 farm bill, and his advocacy of rural development and congressional reform. He said he was proud that he was able to insert a provision in the farm bill that would permit construction of a \$50 million cooperative sugar-beet mill in Renville, Minn.

He served on the House Agriculture Committee as well as its subcommittees on livestock and feed grains, dairy and poultry, domestic marketing and consumer relations. He was on the veterans affairs committee and its subcommittees on education, hospitals and insurance.



John Zwach, in 1975

Rep. William Schreiber, IR-Brooklyn Park, remembered Zwach's efforts in Congress on behalf of the District of Columbia. The district was solely dependent on Congress before it was granted limited self-governing powers.

"In Congress, he was known as Mr. Washington, D.C.," Schreiber said. "He took a special interest in looking after the district."

Zwach, who lived in Walnut Grove, Minn., for many years, packed a camper in 1975 and headed to a retirement home in Lucan, Minn., about 20 miles east of Marshall, Minn.

Two years later he accepted a job as rural life director of the New Ulm Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church. He was the first layperson in the country to be appointed to such a position, and held it for three years, before retiring again. He was the diocese's representative at the National Rural Life Conference.

Zwach is survived by his wife, Agnes, whom he married in 1940; daughters Marie Iverson of Eagan, Ann Soupir of Milroy, Minn., and Barbara Sykora; sons John Jr. and Dennis, both of Walnut Grove, and 19 grandchildren. He also is survived by four brothers and three sisters.

The funeral will be at 10:30 a.m. Wednesday at Our Lady of Victory Catholic Church in Lucan. Visitation will be at 4 p.m. Tuesday at the church. A parish prayer service is set for 7:30 p.m. tomorrow. Burial will be in St. Michael's Catholic Church cemetery in Milroy.