

NEWS OBITUARIES

He represented, and wrote about, Wood Lake

● As a legislator and as a newspaper publisher, Curtis Warnke focused on issues close to his heart.

By BEN COHEN
bcohen@startribune.com

9-7-06

Curtis Warnke, a former legislator from Wood Lake and the western Minnesota town's former newspaper publisher, died of cancer in Granite Falls, Minn., on Aug. 27. He was 74.



Curtis Warnke

Warnke, a DFLer, was particularly proud of letters he received from Ronald Reagan and Hubert Humphrey complimenting his columns, typically about politics, while he was publisher of the Wood Lake News from 1966 to '94.

His brother, Alan (Butch), of Wood Lake, said Warnke was a delegate to the 1968

Democratic National Convention in Chicago when Humphrey was nominated for president. "It was a highlight of his life," his brother said.

Warnke, a football player who contracted polio in 1948 while still in high school, spent about a year in Minneapolis in rehabilitation. He was a student at the University of Minnesota, studying political science and history, when he was elected to the Minnesota House in 1956.

At the time he told the Minneapolis Star: "A fellow once said to me, 'You always want to remember your brains are above your shoulders, and not in your legs or feet.'"

As a legislator, Warnke worked on issues involving fish and game, and children and people with disabili-

ties. He served on a legislative commission on employment and education of the disabled.

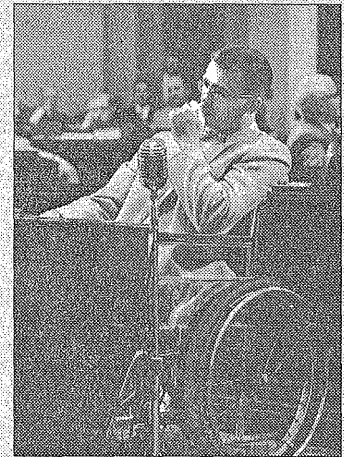
"He complained very little about anything," his brother said. "You have got to be happy with yourself or life is going to be miserable," he would say.

As a publisher, Warnke tailored the News to small-town life and made sure he was front-page news when he was pulled over on a traffic charge. He sold the paper in 1994 and opened a gun and tackle shop but continued to write columns for the News, which eventually closed.

He then wrote columns for its successor, the Wood Lake Messenger, and served as a mentor to rookie publisher Jessica Stölen, a former reporter. "If it hadn't been for him, the town wouldn't have [a] newspaper," Stölen said.

He wrote his last column for the Messenger in July.

His book-in-progress, "In



Rep. Curtis Warnke is shown at the State Capitol in this file photo dated Jan. 8, 1957.

Pursuit of the Jack," (referring to northern pike, his favorite quarry) is based on his more than 100 trips to Canadian fishing destinations.

In addition to his brother, he is survived by his sister, Judy Rebers of Echo, Minn.

Services have been held.