

**Sandy Keith** Minnesota statesman

# He served Minnesota in all branches of state government

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Alexander MacDonald "Sandy" Keith dedicated his life to public service and is believed to be the first person to work in roles across all three branches of Minnesota government. Keith served as a state senator, as lieutenant governor and as an associate and then chief justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court.

He died Saturday at his home in Rochester. He was 91.

Described as "engaged and engaging" by friends and family, Keith was driven by a love for politics and for people.

Born in Rochester in 1928, Keith went on to Amherst College and Yale Law School before enlisting in the U.S. Marine Corps during the Korean War. He served for a year in Korea as a first lieutenant.

After marrying his wife, Marion, and working in the legal department of the Mayo Clinic, Keith was elected as a member of the DFL to the Minnesota Senate to represent Olmsted County in 1959. He then served as lieutenant governor of Minnesota under Gov. Karl Rolvaag from 1963 to 1967. In 1966, he ran unsuccessfully for governor.

He practiced family law before being appointed to the state Supreme Court in 1989, where he served as an associate justice before becoming chief justice, a position he held for eight years until 1998.

In the early 2000s, Keith helped form the Rochester Downtown Alliance and became its first executive director. After serving his state and country, Keith focused on improving his hometown. He was also the first president of a group that pushed to bring a branch of the University of Minnesota to Rochester.

"While he had a tremendous legacy in these roles, he exemplified the qualities that an everyday person would connect with — he just cared deeply about people and

believed in them," friend John Wade said.

In his family law practice, Keith promoted mediation services. No matter his role, he enjoyed working through difficult issues and had a talent for knowing who and how to bring the right people to the table and find a resolution, said his son Ian Keith.

"He had a fearless determination, a buoyant spirit," Ian Keith said.

Sandy Keith was comfortable with anyone, Wade said. He would often stop by Wade's home around dinner time and walk in without knocking. He'd sit down, grab some food and start recounting whatever story was on his mind.

"He was a colorful character, but he was of great character," Wade said. "He was able to do all of this work without the vitriol that we often see today. He could get people together to work on issues both large and small."

Former Minnesota congressman Tim Penny called Keith an "influential leader" who served as a mentor for many in his local community and in elected offices.

"Even in the years after he left public office, he was still determined and passionate about serving," Penny said. His love of people was evident in the way he treated friends like family, Penny said. Keith even presided over Penny's wedding. When Penny and his wife returned from their honeymoon, they found a package from Keith. Inside, he'd included the remarks he made at the wedding as well as a handwritten note.

"It was the most special thing and so above and beyond," Penny said. "That's just who he was."

Keith also enjoyed his weekly breakfast group, walks with his dogs, skiing in Colorado and fishing in Canada with his sons and grandchildren.

Keith is survived by his wife of 65 years, Marion Sanford Keith of Rochester; his sons, Ian of St. Paul and Douglas of Pensacola, Fla.; and four grandchildren. A memorial service will be announced at a later date.

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