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OBITUARY

Iron Range legislator Carl D'Aquila dies at 81

By Ben Cohen
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Carl D'Aquila of Hibbing and St. Paul, who was a former state legislator from the Iron Range and a GOP candidate for lieutenant governor, was even better known for his behind-the-scenes social and political work.



Carl D'Aquila

D'Aquila, businessman and pillar of the Iron Range, died of adrenal cancer in his St. Paul home on Friday. He was 81.

"He was a friend to everyone," said

Veda Ponikvar, retired Chisholm newspaper editor and publisher, and still a columnist.

Ponikvar said that D'Aquila, a Republican who served two terms in the Minnesota House of Representatives from 1947 to 1951, advised politicians most of his life. "It didn't matter what party they belonged to," she said.

D'Aquila, who was the youngest serving legislator at the time, also hosted a radio show called "Your Legislature." While in the Legislature, he worked on a transportation bill, education legislation, and a tax bill that funded research and development of the taconite ore industry.

He left political office to pursue family and business interests, but ran for lieutenant governor in 1962. He lost, and when asked to run again in a later election, considered it and stepped aside.

The Daily Tribune-Hibbing reported that D'Aquila founded a number of successful businesses, including the Mesabi Radial Tire Co., which does much of its business with the mining industry.

During the 1960s, he was a fierce supporter of the taconite amendment, which gave industry incentives to use taconite ore rather than shipping iron ore from elsewhere. Ponikvar, who is widely seen as a driving force behind what turned out to be successful legislation, gives D'Aquila the same kind of credit.

Former U.S. Sen. Dave Durenberger said D'Aquila worked behind the scenes and without official affiliation, stumping on issues dear to the Iron Range, simply from a sense of good citizenship.

"Carl had the ability to see the big picture. That's why he had this lasting impact on the industry and the community," said Durenberger, who added that D'Aquila often held educational forums to bring community leaders together, teaching them about issues on the Iron Range.

Ponikvar said that D'Aquila played leadership roles in several foundations that supported education, including the Range Center for the Developmentally Disabled.

D'Aquila also broadcast a political commentary program in the 1980s. He served as a Metropolitan Airports Commissioner for about eight years until 2003.

He is survived by his wife of 56 years, Dolores, of Hibbing and St. Paul; daughters, Dr. Patty D'Aquila-Merickel of Willmar, Mary Kay Phillips of Michigan City, Ind., Barbara of St. Paul, and Margaret Mader of Lakeside Park, Ky.; son James of St. Paul; 11 grandchildren and one great-grandson. A son, Thomas, died in 2003.

Services have been held.

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