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## OBITUARIES

# Donald Savelkoul, lawyer and legislator, dies at 86

By **Trudi Hahn**  
*Star Tribune Staff Writer*

Donald Savelkoul, who as general counsel for the state AFL-CIO wrote most of the legislation proposed by Minnesota unions in the 1950s and 1960s before becoming a legislator himself, died of cancer Monday at his home in Fridley. He was 86.



**Donald Savelkoul in 1966.**

Savelkoul earned a master's degree from the University of Minnesota in 1939 and was working for the Wage and Hour Division of the U.S. Labor Department in 1941 when the United States entered World War II.

"He could have taken an occupational deferment because of his government work," said his son, Ed, of Blaine, but he chose to enlist in 1943.

He was with the Army in the Philippines in April 1945 as it prepared to invade Japan. The dropping of two atomic bombs in August brought a peace treaty instead of an invasion, and Savelkoul spent the next nine months involved in the reorganization of occupied Japan.

After the war, he earned his law

degree in 1951 from what is now the William Mitchell College of Law.

### The law of labor

In the early 1950s, he was appointed general counsel for the Minnesota unit of the American Federation of Labor, which became the merged AFL-CIO in 1955. Starting in 1953, Savelkoul lobbied for the state labor movement at every legislative session through the mid-1960s. Often, he was the author of the bills, which focused on workers' compensation and unemployment benefits.

Savelkoul won election to a two-year term in the Minnesota House in 1966, representing a new district that included Fridley, Spring Lake Park and Mounds View. Long a community advocate, he spoke against a metropolitan government that was being considered.

### Advocate for suburbs

"The feeling is that bedroom communities will never get any industry, tax base or anything else," he told a House panel in 1967. "The suburbs will be a bunch of small homes with a bunch of kids and a lot of school problems."

After a law partner died, he chose not to run for a second term. For the next two decades, he practiced law and

served on the board of the Fridley and Blaine State Banks, both of which he had helped start.

He performed a lot of pro bono law work throughout his career, said his sister, Miriam Gorman, of South St. Paul.

"My brother was a splendid example of what I admired about lawyers, so I went to law school in my late 40s," she said. He had integrity "above and beyond," and served clients small and large with no favoritism.

He retired from nearly all his professional activities in the late 1990s to care for his wife, Mary Joan, after she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, said his son.

Savelkoul's wife died in July 2003. Survivors, in addition to his son Ed and sister Miriam Gorman, include a son, Jeffrey, of East Bethel; a daughter, Jean Savelkoul, of Coon Rapids; eight grandchildren; two great-grandchildren, and sisters Delores Savelkoul, of Golden Valley, and Yvonne Savelkoul, of Minneapolis.

Services will be held at 10 a.m. today at St. Olaf Catholic Church, 215 S. 8th St., Minneapolis. Visitation is at 9 a.m.

*Trudi Hahn is at  
thahn@startribune.com.*