

# Sen. Relph dies from COVID-19

St. Cloud Republican is first fatality among state legislators.

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State Sen. Jerry Relph, R-St. Cloud, has died of complications related to COVID-19, the first Minnesota lawmaker to succumb to the virus.

Relph, 76, was among a number of Republican legislators who contracted COVID-19 after contact with colleagues in mid-November. At the time, Rachel Aplikowski, the Senate GOP spokeswoman, said Relph tested positive after having had close contact with someone in the chamber who had the virus.

Relph started quarantining on Nov. 10 and did not attend that week's special session. He was also excused from a special session this week.

In a statement confirming the news of Relph's death late Friday, his wife, Pegi Broker-Relph, said her husband "dedicated his life to service."

"I can't count the number of times he would come home at night and tell me about helping solve a constituent's problem, or a story he heard from someone in a parade or at a public event, or even just someone he met during a 'day on the hill' event," she said. "He loved serving the people of St. Cloud in the Senate, and he cherished every minute of it."

First elected in 2016, Relph recently lost in a close race for reelection against DFLer Aric Putnam. Before serving in the Senate, Relph had a career as a small-business owner and attorney, and previously

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Sen. Jerry Relph, R-St. Cloud, contracted the virus in November.

## Sen. Jerry Relph dies after getting COVID

◀ **RELPH** from B1 worked for 3M. Relph served in the Marine Corps in Vietnam.

Shortly after the virus hit in March, Relph authored a \$21 million COVID-19 response bill to buffer the state's public health emergency response resources.

"He was already thinking of ways to have an impact on his community after narrowly losing his re-election," Senate Republican Majority Leader Paul Gazelka tweeted Friday.

The COVID-19 outbreak in the Senate in November included Gazelka and Sens. Dave Senjem, R-Rochester, and Paul Anderson, R-Plymouth. An unknown number of staffers also tested positive.

It was later reported that Senate Republicans hosted a postelection victory party at the Lake Elmo Inn, where some members didn't wear masks. At the time, DFL Minority Leader Susan Kent asked for Gazelka's resignation for lack of transparency over his handling of the outbreak.

Three House Republicans

and several staff members have reported COVID-19 cases since March, according to leaders. At least three DFL legislators have also tested positive since the pandemic began, though some lawmakers in both parties may not have disclosed if they've tested positive.

Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan, Attorney General Keith Ellison and U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar have all lost family members to COVID-19.

Condolences poured in late Friday from House and Senate colleagues, who remembered Relph as a kind man willing to work across the aisle.

"My deepest condolences to Jerry's family and loved ones," said Kent on Twitter. "He was a dedicated public servant and a truly kind man."

Republican Senate colleague Jim Abeler, R-Anoka, tweeted: "Rest in peace, good friend. You helped a lot of good people. Blessings to your family and all those many whose life you touched."

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