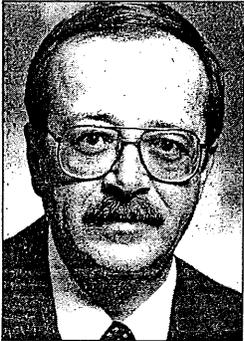


Ken Otremba dies at 48; served in House for 3 years



Despite battling cancer, Rep. Ken Otremba, 48, never missed a vote.

By Conrad deFiebre
Star Tribune Staff Writer

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State Rep. Ken Otremba, a low-key legislator who stuck to his job even while racked by the final stages of liver cancer, died Thursday at his farm home near Long Prairie, Minn. He was 48.

Otremba, a DFLer who championed rural health care and farm issues during his three years in the House, attended both special sessions of the Legislature this summer after spending five days hospitalized in a coma in early June. He didn't miss a single vote.

After Otremba addressed the House during the June 26 session,

fellow representatives gave him the longest standing ovation in many legislators' memories.

"He was a straight-shooter," said Rep. Steve Wenzel, DFL-Little Falls. "He really cared about people and their problems."

Otremba was told he was terminally ill before the 1996 election, said Long Prairie attorney Randy Brown, his friend and campaign treasurer. But he ran anyway. "But he elected to run anyway," Brown said. "He was hard-working, conscientious and sincere."

After handily winning reelection, Otremba would take cancer treatments early in the morning and show up for 8 a.m. meetings of

Wenzel's Agriculture Committee. "I don't know of any days he missed," Wenzel said.

Said Gov. Arne Carlson: "He will be remembered for his impressive work ethic and dedication to public service, especially in the face of personal adversity."

Carlson will order a special election to fill Otremba's seat in District 11B after the funeral, spokeswoman Jackie Renner said.

A former Navy radar technician who served two tours in Vietnam, Otremba was a dairy farmer for 20 years. Before his election to the Legislature he was a Reynolds Township supervisor and Todd County commissioner.

Otremba is survived by his wife, Mary Ellen, and four children: Andrew, 21; Timothy, 19; Kateri, 17, and Elizabeth, 11. Other survivors include his mother, Armella Dehler Otremba of Buckman, Minn.; nine brothers and two sisters, and his first cousin, Rep. Steve Dehler, R-St. Joseph.

Services will be held at 11 a.m. Saturday at St. Mary of Mount Carmel Catholic Church in Long Prairie. Visitation will be held from 2:30 to 9 p.m. today at the Stephan-Stein Funeral Home in Long Prairie and an hour before the funeral at the church. Burial will be in St. Mary's Cemetery in Long Prairie.