

Ex-legislator Stanley Holmquist dies at 93

By Trudi Hahn
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Stanley Holmquist, who pushed for tax money to improve K-12 education and was the last Republican state Senate majority leader, died of leukemia Thursday at a nursing home in Bloomington. He was 93.



Holmquist was the last Republican state Senate majority leader.

Holmquist, a Republican who was majority leader from 1967-72, was an architect of the 1971 "Minnesota Miracle," a legislative package that funneled millions of dollars in new taxes to schools while slashing property taxes.

"He really, more than any other state legislator, is responsible for the improvement of state education over the past 40 years," said former Gov. Elmer L. Andersen.

The two men were kin, having married sisters. Get-togethers often included games of gin rummy — "at the end of the summer, I always owed him money," Andersen said — and vigorous political conversation.

"There wasn't always agreement, but always a friendly spirit," he said.

Former Gov. Wendell Anderson said Holmquist "was always a perfect gentleman — easy to work with, respected by both sides."

Anderson, now a Minneapolis lawyer, was the DFL governor who faced revolts around the state in 1971 because of high property taxes, a good portion of which was going to schools. Holmquist, a moderate Republican, cajoled reluctant GOP House members into increasing state income taxes by 25 percent and the sales tax by a third in order to pour more state money into schools and cut the property taxes.

"Stanley was the father of the Minnesota Miracle," Anderson said. The Republican Holmquist and the DFL governor worked together to get the bill passed — in a 157-day special session, the longest in state history.

The bill raised about \$700 million in new revenue, Anderson said, all of it going to education or to revenue-sharing with municipalities.

Holmquist, ever optimistic, had been working to improve education and reduce property taxes since his political career began.

Born in 1909, he grew up on a wheat farm near Hallock, Minn., and left school after the eighth grade to work on the farm. When he turned 20, an older sister helped pay for him to attend a Lutheran high school in Minneapolis, where he met his wife, Edith.

They married in 1938. Holmquist, who had graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1936, was teach-

ing in Grove City, and working his way up to superintendent of schools, when he was elected a state representative in 1946.

As a freshman legislator, he helped establish the original pupil-unit formula for state aid to schools. In 1953, as chairman of the Education Committee, he put freshman DFLer Karl Grittner on the panel and worked without any partisanship to get things done.

"He did not look at you as an enemy — he looked at you as someone elected by the people of Minnesota," said Grittner, who in the 1960s was Senate minority leader working with Majority Leader Holmquist, who had been elected to the Senate in 1954. The two cosponsored a bill in the 1967 session that established a pilot program for retarded citizens, including respite day care.

In 1961, Holmquist was instrumental in passing the state's first implied-consent law, which required a chemical test of drivers suspected of drunken driving.

The maverick senator often took tax stances that put him at odds with conservative GOP members. In 1961, he sponsored the first law for collecting state income taxes through withholding, and in 1967, helped override GOP Gov. Harold LeVander's veto to enact Minnesota's first sales tax, which was designed to help schools while relieving property taxes.

"The sales tax absolutely saved Minnesota," Holmquist said in 2000. "If people can't blame the schools for high property taxes, the public's appreciation for schools will go up."

Holmquist, who had built a family lumber business starting in 1942, retired from public life in 1972 with at least one political wish unfulfilled — he never could get a bill passed for a unicameral legislature.

His wife of 64 years, Edith, died in February at age 88.

"My father loved my mother with all his heart . . . and we children knew it," Mary Saboe said. A cousin once told her that the greatest gift a man can give his children is to love their mother. "That gift was always ours."

In addition to his daughter, survivors include sons Willard and Charles of Grove City; five grandchildren and six great-grandchildren; a sister, Helen Carlson of Spokane, Wash., and brothers Glen of Nekoosa, Wis., and Charles of Crookston, Minn.

Services will be held at 2 p.m. Thursday at Trinity Lutheran Church, Grove City. Visitation will begin at noon.

The Associated Press and staff writer Lori Sturdevant contributed to this report.

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