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# Legislator Alpha Sunde Smaby dies; was active in politics, antiwar effort

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Alpha Sunde Smaby, 81, a former two-term state legislator who helped shape Minnesota's anti-Vietnam War movement and changed the voice of women in politics, died Thursday of cancer at her home in St. Paul.

Smaby was elected as an at-large candidate to represent portions of southeast and northeast Minneapolis in the House of Representatives in 1964. Three years later, she helped

found Minnesota Concerned Democrats, a DFL subgroup that protested U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Opposing the war, for Minnesotans, meant opposing native son Hubert Humphrey, who was then vice president and became the Democratic Party's 1968 presidential nominee. Minnesota Concerned Democrats ran into steep opposition but scored impressive victories through grassroots politicking in the DFL caucuses in March 1968.

By late 1967, the group had a Minnesota antiwar candidate for president, Sen. Eugene McCarthy. Smaby supported McCarthy over Humphrey and later helped South Dakota Sen. George McGovern in his 1972 bid for the presidency. Smaby lost her legislative seat in 1968.

"Labor was so mad with me (for opposing Humphrey), they went with the Republicans," she said in a 1987 interview at a 20-year reunion of

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## Smaby/ Active in women's movement

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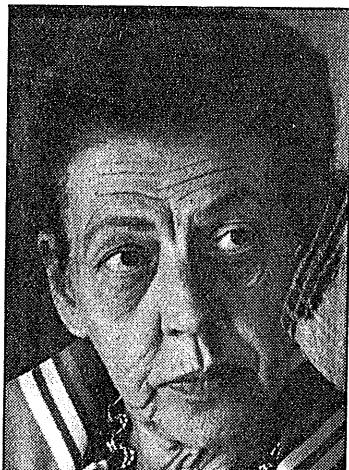
antiwar protesters.

"Smaby was ahead of her time when she was in the Legislature," said state Rep. Willard Munger, DFL-Duluth. "She was one of the outstanding liberals. In fact, I think she was the beginning of liberalism as far as women were concerned in the Legislature."

"She was there for two terms, but she delivered more influence than some of them who have been there for 10 years," he said. "She was an aggressive legislator. She wasn't satisfied with the present; she was a farsighted person. She had a vision that was probably 10, 12 years ahead of the rest of the women legislators."

At age 72, Smaby earned a master's degree in history and retreated to her home on Lake Vermilion, near Cook, Minn., to turn her thesis into a book, "Political Upheaval," based on the years of social and political tumult and on the state's antiwar movement. It was published in 1988.

"She was a woman of the '80s and '90s who was active in the '50s and '60s," said George Farr, former state chairman of the DFL Party. "She was one of the early people to take a position, not on the basis of being a



Alpha Sunde Smaby  
1973 photo

woman, but she insisted on being a person who could speak on the issues and not take a back seat to anybody. She believed strongly and passionately and was willing to work for what she believed."

Smaby was born in Sacred Heart, Minn., and grew up in Peterson, Minn., where her father ran the cooperative creamery. She graduated from Winona State Teacher's College. She taught in Minneapolis for four years

and worked at Cargill Inc. for a short time before marrying Arthur J. Smaby, president of Midland Cooperatives, in 1939.

When her children were in school, she returned to the University of Minnesota to finish her bachelor's degree. She was a homemaker turned political activist and, finally, politician.

"She didn't ever jump on a bandwagon, she led the bandwagon," said her daughter, Marit Smaby-Nowlin, of St. Paul. "And she was never afraid to say what she believed in, whether or not it was a popular view. There was something that was very inspirational and courageous about living with her."

Former vice president Walter Mondale said, "She was an extraordinary, special person. Very bright, very caring, very much the progressive. When she believed something you heard it. She didn't muffle it or avoid it, and that was her effectiveness I think. People knew she was direct and honest."

Smaby made an unsuccessful bid for Minneapolis City Council in 1969. In 1973, she ran for an at-large spot on the Northern States Power Company's board of directors as a "consumer candidate." Although NSP blocked

her election, the company has had a representative from the community on its board every year since then, her daughter said.

She moved from her lake home to St. Paul two years ago. She stuffed envelopes for U.S. Sen. Paul Wellstone's campaign last year and worked the phone banks for Arne Carlson as long as she was healthy, her daughter said.

Her husband died in 1972. Besides her daughter Marit, survivors include daughters Jan Smaby, of Shoreview, who is co-host of KTCA-TV's "Almanac," and Karlin Symons, of Minneapolis; a sister, Connie Benson, of Illinois, and four granddaughters.

A memorial service will be held at 4 p.m. Monday at St. Mark's Cathedral in Minneapolis. Visitation will be held from 4 to 8 p.m. Sunday at 740 River Dr., St. Paul. Memorials to the Alpha Sunde Smaby Fund at KTCA-TV are suggested.