

[MUSIC PLAYING]

CATHY WURZER: And leading our program is news that former Minnesota US Senator Dave Durenberger died this morning. He was 88 years old. The centrist Republican started his Senate career winning a special election in 1978. He served in the US Senate until 1995.

Durenberger was known for his expertise on health care policy and remained focused on health care issues after he left the Senate. On the line with us right now is Tom Horner, a former Republican strategist who worked for Senator Durenberger both as a press secretary and chief of staff.

Hey, Tom, Thanks for joining us.

TOM HORNER: Oh, Cathy, on such a sad occasion, I'm delighted to have the opportunity to talk about Dave. He was a great person and a very close friend for 40 years, a huge influence on my life.

CATHY WURZER: And I am really sorry for your loss. Condolences because you were so close. Thanks for talking about the senator with us here today. There are, as you know, though, Tom, a couple of generations who've likely never heard of Dave Durenberger. What kind of impact did he make as a lawmaker?

TOM HORNER: Cathy, I think that's right. I mean, it's been 30 years since Dave was in office. And you look at his list of accomplishments, and you're not going to find a Dave Durenberger program or a Dave Durenberger law or a Dave Durenberger building.

But what you will see is every significant piece of environmental legislation that passed in the late '70s, '80s, '90s, the Water Control Quality Act, Clean Air Act, and maybe most significantly the Acid Rain Control Program that became part of the Clean Air Act of 1990, all were a result of Dave Durenberger's leadership. When you look at community service programs like AmeriCorps, it was Dave Durenberger and his then-Democratic colleague Paul Wellstone who created that program, built the foundation for that program.

And maybe the program that he was most proud of that, again, doesn't carry his name but would not be a law without Dave Durenberger is the Americans for Disabilities Act. It was that landmark program that opened America's society to people of all abilities. And Dave was the one who was able to craft the right balance of government regulations and marketplace solutions to make that law work, to make it effective, and to make it as embraced as it has become. So in all of these ways, Dave Durenberger and his work continues to touch the lives of many Minnesotans and people around the country.

CATHY WURZER: I mentioned in the intro he was well-known for his interest in health care policy. And didn't he actually shepherd, gosh, one of the first social HMOs for low-income folks through the process? He kind of was--

TOM HORNER: Correct.

CATHY WURZER: --the godfather of that.

TOM HORNER: Right. And one of the hallmarks of Dave's service is that he always looked first to Minnesota for solutions. And so as HMOs were starting to take shape in Minnesota, Dave learned from that and learned what worked, what didn't work, and really was among the first among the health care policy makers to make cost control secondary to quality and focus on outcomes. And he knew that only if you had high-quality health care for people could you get to cost control, could you expand access.

And so with social HMOs and other programs, his leadership in health care really helped define the health care marketplace and health care policy. And he continued to be a leader in that even after he left the Senate, creating the National Institute for Health Care Policy and continuing to serve as a sounding board and counsel for his colleagues on both sides of the aisle in the Senate long after he had left.

CATHY WURZER: How did he like to work in the Senate? I mean, some folks are showhorses, others are workhorses. How did he maneuver in that body?

TOM HORNER: He did it in a couple of ways. First of all, he always listened. He was respectful of all his colleagues. He learned from all of his colleagues. And he reached out. He was a big believer in building personal relationships based on trust and based on, frankly, affability. I mean, Dave was just an easy guy to like.

And secondly, he always came with good ideas, again, a lot of them coming from Minnesota. And it was never your way or the highway. It was always let's find common ground. Let's find where we agree.

There was a great program that your former colleague Gary Eichten monitored a few years ago over at St. Thomas where Walter Mondale and Dave Durenberger were on the dais together with Gary, and they both said the problem today is that it's not just that the Democrats and Republicans can't agree on solutions. They can't even agree on what the problem is. They can't define the problems in a way that helps get to solutions.

Instead, they always define it around their values, around their ideology. And if that's the starting point, then it is impossible to compromise. Dave always started with what's the solution-- what's the problem we're trying to solve? What is it that's going to make life better for Minnesotans and for people around the country? And if we can agree on what the problem is, then we can find ways to combine marketplace solutions, individual solutions, and government to get to the right solution for the most people.

He was such a strong believer in that longtime Minnesota Republican tradition of public service. He felt strongly that public service is not about personal gain. It's not about political achievements. It's about making life better for people. And to that end, government has a role that's important.

CATHY WURZER: And you can't talk about Dave Durenberger and all of his public service really without also addressing that he did, at one time, run into some trouble and at one point was censured by the US Senate. And I remember he told us at MPR News years ago that he encouraged even his supporters to vote to censure him. Now, we have a little bit of archival tape here, Tom. This was Senator Durenberger on MPR's *Midday* program back in 1989.

DAVE DURENBERGER: I'm in the Ethics Committee simply because 29 DFL lawyers in September of 1988, with the support of my then opponent for the United States Senate, filed this complaint. That's why I'm in the Ethics Committee. I have made statements about the appropriateness, or lack of appropriateness, of some of my action.

There is a question that the Ethics Committee has to deal with. But the reality is that it was instituted by a political process. I said I made-- I made mistakes, that if I hadn't-- if I hadn't been trying to maximize my heart's concern for my family, I would have been purer than the Caesar's wife under that circumstance. And I believe that I should be.

CATHY How did that whole incident change his career after that?

WURZER:

TOM HORNER: Well, a couple of things that are noteworthy in that tape. And maybe the most important is that Dave did always acknowledge that he had made mistakes. And it changed his career in the most obvious way that it probably made the difference in not seeking re-election in 1994.

But the other thing, Cathy, that I think is noteworthy and that people need to remember is that unlike so many people who find themselves in hot water today, Dave didn't run away from it. He didn't stay in Washington and become a high-priced lobbyist. He came back to Minnesota, and he worked with Minnesotans.

He had a very public profile with his National Institute of Health Policy and other programs and continued to do the work that he had a passion for and a great talent for. So, yeah, it is an unfortunate part of his legacy, but a small part. And I think there are so many other things for which he'll be remembered that as people think about the Americans with Disabilities Act, Acid Rain Control, his health policy work, the other environmental accomplishments that this quickly fades into the background.

CATHY And before you go, he was a man of faith, a quiet faith. Could you talk about that?

WURZER:

TOM HORNER: Sure. I mean, he grew up in the environment of the Benedictine monks at St. John's University. His father had been an athletic director there for some 40 years. And Dave literally grew up on that campus, influenced greatly by the monks and their values. And I think that was part of what gave him such a deep and lasting and spiritual commitment to public service.

He was a person who attended the prayer services in Congress, the weekly gatherings, not because it was good politics, not because it was good optics, but because he truly felt that by connecting with his colleagues on that spiritual level that it made him a better person, made him a better policymaker, and he hoped he contributed to improving their role as public servants as well. He truly was that person who believed in public service as a spiritual gift that he had and that he was going to exercise.

CATHY Well, Tom Horner, I appreciate your insights on former Senator Dave Durenberger and his life and now his

WURZER: passing. Thank you so much for talking about his legacy. And again, my sympathies, my condolences to you.

TOM HORNER: Thank you, Cathy. It's been my honor.

CATHY That's Tom Horner, a former staffer, a longtime friend of former Minnesota Senator Dave Durenberger, who died
WURZER: this morning at the age of 88.