



Former Gov. Harold LeVander, who served from 1967 to 1971.

LeVander, affable 1-term governor, dies at 81

By Robert Whereatt
Staff Writer

Harold LeVander, a Republican who served one term as governor of Minnesota from 1967 to 1971, died Monday at Midway Hospital in St. Paul.

LeVander, 81, a South St. Paul lawyer, had been ill for several years. He died of complications from Parkinson's disease, family members said.

As governor he was forced to accept the state's first general sales tax, witnessed the state's first \$1 billion annual budget and oversaw the birth of such agencies as the Metropolitan Council, the Pollution Control Agency and the Human Rights Department.

He was the last Minnesota governor to oversee a relatively small state bureaucracy and to work with a Legislature that considered itself strictly a part-time body meeting every oth-

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File Photo by Earl Seubert

Governor-elect Harold LeVander at a budget hearing in 1966. He called public service "an honorable but temporary privilege."

LeVander/ Often blamed for sales tax he vetoed

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er year.

LeVander, a tall, affable man with a gravelly voice and considerable oratorical skills, was the state's 32nd governor, one of the few who entered office without prior state elective service.

Gov. Arne Carlson ordered flags at the State Capitol to be flown at half-staff until after memorial services Friday at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in St. Paul. He called LeVander "a distinguished governor who was gracious, kind and committed to the church and community."

Though LeVander's era was marked by social turmoil across the country, the enduring political mark of his four years as governor was the imposition of the sales tax in 1967. Though he vetoed sales tax bills twice, many Minnesotans blamed the tax on him, often calling the three-penny tax on a \$1 purchase "LeVander pennies."

He surprised the state's political establishment in 1970 when he abruptly announced less than a month before precinct caucuses that he would not seek re-election.

He called public service "an honorable but temporary privilege."

"He never looked on political service as a long-term or lifetime obligation," said his son, Harold (Hap) LeVander Jr. "It was something that citizens should do, if they were able, for a period of time."

U.S. Sen. Dave Durenberger, R-Minn., who practiced law with LeVander and later became the governor's executive secretary, said LeVander saw public service "as an interruption from private life, not a career in itself."

Sen. Jerome Hughes, DFL-Maplewood, was elected to the state Senate the same year LeVander became governor. "He was very sensitive to the needs of people of the state," said Hughes, now the Senate's most senior member. "He was willing to talk to people on both sides of the (legislative) aisle."

It was with the Republican side of the aisle that LeVander had his greatest political confrontation.

Republican legislators (then called Conservatives) were committed to passing a sales tax. LeVander had opposed it, and on the eve of the election vowed to veto any sales tax bill that reached his desk.

The 1967 session, his first as governor, focused on the tax as a way to raise additional state revenue and provide property tax relief. Over the objections of DFLers (then called Liberals), Republicans who controlled both houses pushed through the sales tax, the first major change to Minnesota's tax structure since the income tax was passed in 1933.

LeVander vetoed it. The House overrode the veto, but the regular session

ended before the Senate could act.

Without a tax bill, LeVander was forced to call a special session. Again, the Legislature sent him the sales tax bill and again he vetoed it. This time, both houses overrode the veto.

The state agencies created during LeVander's tenure were resented by rural residents, who saw St. Paul forcing bureaucratic controls on them. LeVander further alienated some in rural Minnesota when he released a speech that said some small towns would die, adding that some "should die," a recognition of economic verities in a changing state.

Reporters who covered him joked in mock fear of traveling with him by air. During his election campaign, a helicopter in which he was flying at night made an emergency landing in a farm yard when all its lights went out. On another trip, a two-engine plane in which he was riding made a belly landing at the Willmar airport when the pilot forgot to lower the landing gear.

LeVander had been active in Dakota County politics for years, but was not well-known statewide before launching his campaign for governor in December 1965. He won Republican endorsement on the 16th ballot, defeating John Pillsbury of Minneapolis.

He ran in a year in which the DFL Party was engaged in a nihilistic primary contest between Gov. Karl Rolvaag and Lt. Gov. A.M. (Sandy) Keith. Rolvaag won the primary, but LeVander beat him in the general election with the largest vote ever received up to then by a Republican candidate for governor.

After leaving office, he returned to the law firm of LeVander, Gillen and Miller in South St. Paul. He served as attorney for, among others, the South St. Paul Livestock Exchange, the National Livestock Exchange and the Minnesota Association of Electric Cooperatives.

LeVander was born Oct. 10, 1910, in Swede Home, Neb., the son of a Lutheran minister who had emigrated from Sweden. When he was 2 years old, the family moved to Minnesota.

He went to high school in Watertown. He graduated with honors from Gustavus Adolphus College in 1932 and from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1935.

He is survived by his wife, Ianthia; two brothers, Theodor LeVander of Rock Island, Ill., and Bernhard LeVander, of Arden Hills; his three children, Harold Powrie (Hap) LeVander, of St. Paul; Jean LeVander King, of North Oaks, and Dyan LeVander, of Madison, Wis., and four grandchildren.

Family services are private. Burial will be in Acacia Park Cemetery in Mendota Heights. A memorial service for family members and friends will be held at 11 a.m. Friday at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, 700 S. Snelling Av., St. Paul.

Harold LeVander, reluctant but admired former governor, dies

JIM GEORGE STAFF WRITER

Former Minnesota Gov. Harold LeVander, who admirers called a reluctant but excellent chief executive, died from complications of Parkinson's disease Monday in St. Paul. He was 82.

A tall, reserved Lutheran minister's son with a gift of oratory, LeVander has been closely associated with the birth of a state sales tax he opposed.

His son, Harold "Hap" LeVander, recalled with some humor that responsibility for the tax clung to his father like a

political albatross — even though the Legislature passed the 1967 tax over the Gov. LeVander's veto.

"I can remember going into stores to buy something and the clerk would say it was so much for the item and 3 percent for 'Harold'... it was the 'Harold Tax,'" Hap LeVander recalled. "At the time, it really made me mad."

But Harold LeVander will be remembered for much more than a tax "that was shoved down his throat," according to Sen. David Durenberger, R-Minn., who

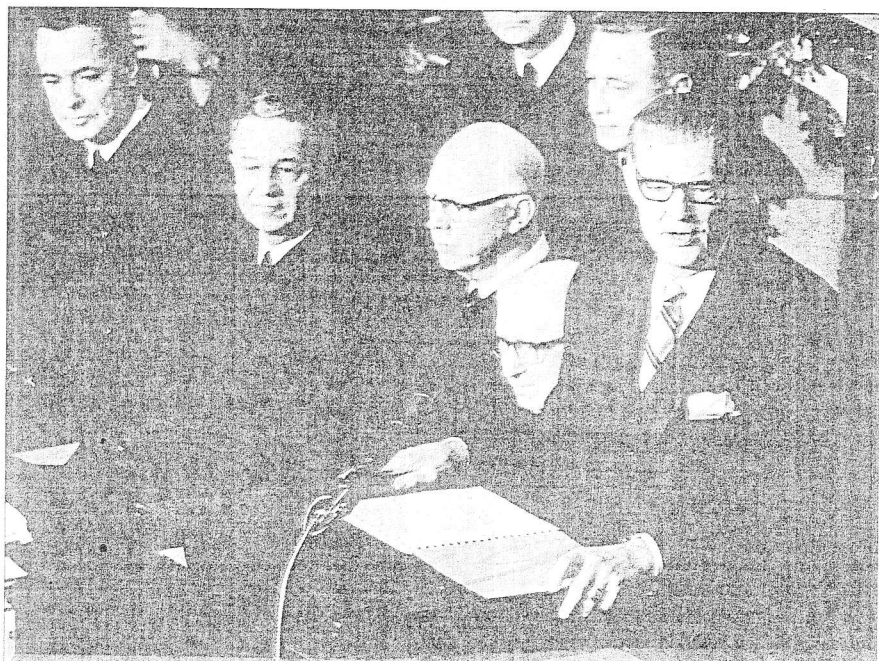
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LeVander helped establish the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, the Human Rights Department and the Metropolitan Council

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Gov. Harold LeVander with members of the state Supreme Court at his inaugural address in 1967.

LEVANDER/He served from sense of duty

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was LeVander's chief-of-staff during the governor's term.

The senator thinks his former boss should be remembered for such things as establishing the Pollution Control Agency, the Human Rights Department and the Metropolitan Council.

"The disappointing aspect of the sales tax was that the majority of the Legislature was conservative, his own party, and it overrode his veto," Durenberger remembered.

Durenberger had been an associate in LeVander's South St. Paul law firm for seven years before the stint at the state Capitol. He recalled LeVander as "not a great politician, but a great person who got into politics" from a sense of duty.

U.S. District Judge Paul Magnuson, another former partner in the law firm, agreed that LeVander sought the governor's post because he had a tremendous public service ethic.

"He firmly believed in the 'citizen politician' — someone who devoted part of his life to public

service and then returned to the private sector," Magnuson said. "And that's what he did... left after one term... feeling that the majority of the things he felt strongly about had been accomplished or had been set in motion."

Hap LeVander, a St. Paul lawyer, said his father thought Magnuson sometimes mumbled in public appearances. On Magnuson's last day at the office before being sworn to the federal bench, LeVander collared the new judge and insisted, "Now Paul, when you give your little talk tomorrow, make sure you speak up."

His son thinks LeVander's attraction to the spoken word might have started during his childhood in Swede Home, Neb., listening to the preaching of his Swedish immigrant father and clergyman, Peter Magni LeVander. Harold LeVander was an active lay leader in the former Lutheran Church in America throughout his life.

The governor honed his speaking skills at secondary schools in Atwater and Watertown, Minn., before attending Gustavus Adolphus College and winning a Na-

tional Peace Oratorical Contest while there.

Following graduation in 1935 from the University of Minnesota law school, he joined a South St. Paul law firm headed by former Gov. Harold Stassen. LeVander reluctantly agreed to interrupt more than 30 years of law practice in 1965 to go after the governorship.

LeVander was criticized early and often in his term for being indecisive. But Durenberger and Magnuson say the governor was being himself — prudent and judicious.

Hap LeVander said the governor tried to live his life by the inscription inside the ring his father gave him, which reads: "To succeed... serve."

In addition to his son, Hap, he is survived by his wife, Iantha; two daughters, Jean King of St. Paul and the Rev. Dyan LeVander, a Madison, Wis., pastor; two brothers, Theodor of Rock Island, Ill., and Bernhard of Arden Hills; and four grandchildren.

Memorial services will be at 11 a.m. Friday in Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, 700 S. Snelling Ave.