

## obituaries

## Sen. Charles H. Smelser

Carroll County farmer and World War II veteran became a longtime state legislator known for his fiscal conservatism

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Charles H. Smelser, a revered former state senator who represented Carroll, Frederick and part of Howard counties, and had fought in World War II, died of cancer Thursday at his Union Bridge home. He was 88.

A newspaper article once called him "the embodiment of the citizen-legislator — a farmer for nine months, a legislator for three."

When Mr. Smelser, a Democrat, announced in 1994 that he would retire from the state Senate, a *Sun* editorial said, "For a state bureaucrat who failed to justify a budget request at a hearing, Sen. Charles H. 'Buck' Smelser could be the 'meanest man on the face of the earth,' as one reporter once jokingly referred to him. But for a constituent seeking help on a personal problem or a legislative matter, Mr. Smelser couldn't be more attentive or courtly — or caring."

The editorial went on to say that Mr. Smelser enjoyed a reputation as one of the most admired lawmakers in the State House. It said he brought "a fiercely independent, non-ideological, common-sense approach to government."

The editorial called him a fiscal conservative long before it was politically popular: "He never worried about polls or the national ideological ebb and flow," the editorial said, adding, "When it came to deciding public policy, Mr. Smelser followed his conscience."

On Friday, Sen. David R. Brinkley, a Frederick County Republican, choked up as he told senators that Smelser — his mentor — had died. Mr. Brinkley said he had grown up idolizing Mr. Smelser. "He was a man of few words and even fewer bills," Mr. Brinkley said. "When he did take the floor to speak, people listened."

Mr. Brinkley said he last spoke with Mr. Smelser on Jan. 14, the first day of this General Assembly session. When they spoke by phone, Mr. Smelser said that the only pain medication he was on was Advil and advised him to spend the state's money wisely.

Other senators also stood to tell stories. Sen. Ulyses Currie, a Prince George's County Democrat, recalled how Smelser was such a fiscal conservative that he wanted the Senate's budget documents printed on both sides of the paper to cut costs. Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller, a Democrat, said, "If you wanted a local bond project, you had to beg and plead" with Mr. Smelser to approve it.

The Senate adjourned Friday in Mr. Smelser's memory.

Born in Uniontown, he spent time on his grandfather's farm. Family members said he loved farming and studied agronomy at the University of Maryland, College Park and received his bachelor's degree in 1942. He was a member of Alpha Tau Omega fraternity.

He enlisted in the Army Air Corps and was trained as a pilot — he had excellent eyesight. He flew a B-17 on 35 combat missions over Germany, while serving with the 8th Air Force.

"The B-17 was very stable," he said in a 2000 *Sun* story. "That plane took a lot of beating. It would take

an awful lot of physical damage to the plane and still fly. We flew under some pretty adverse conditions, including English weather."

He recalled taking off as one of the last of 2,500 planes for a flight over Berlin in late 1944.

"I knew when I saw that, the war couldn't be much longer," he said. He was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal with five oak-leaf clusters.

After the end of hostilities, Mr. Smelser flew humanitarian missions over Europe and dropped food and other supplies.

"He was a great American," said former state Sen. Julian L. Lapidés. "He never looked for glory but truly deserved it."

Mr. Lapidés said that while they entered politics as enemies, they became close friends.

"He saved the state of Maryland millions of dollars by stopping frivolous spending," Lapidés said.

Mr. Smelser worked for a short time for his father-in-law in cosmetics manufacturing in New York. In 1947, he returned to Maryland and began dairy farming on his wife's family farm.

He began his political career in 1955 in the House of Delegates. He served there until 1963.

After losing his first race for a Senate seat, Mr. Smelser won in 1967 and served until 1995. He was then awarded the First Citizen of Maryland Award, presented to him on the floor of the Senate.

Mr. Smelser served on numerous committees, and was Senate Chair of the Joint Subcommittee on the State's Capital Program.

In 2001, former Gov. William Donald Schaefer said in a *Sun* article: "He used to vote against everything I wanted in the state legislature. He was totally conservative.

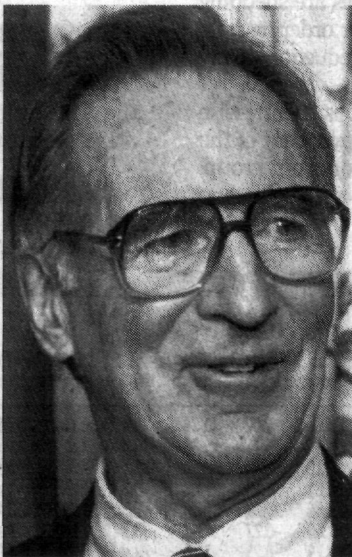
And I used to say, 'Oh, I'd like to mash him.' But after he was out, he and I were the best of friends. I was wrong about him. He had a philosophy. He was totally conservative, but I couldn't see it. I wanted to spend money, and he didn't want to spend money, and I couldn't understand him."

In addition to his political work, he served as a director and later president of the New Windsor State Bank before retiring in 1997. He also served on the board of directors of the National Museum of Civil War Medicine in Frederick and was a former member of the Frederick County Farm Bureau, past president of the Capitol Milk Producers Cooperative and past president of the Libertytown-Unionville Lions Club. He was a member of Linganore United Methodist Church.

Services will be held at 1:30 p.m. tomorrow at Hartzler Funeral Home, 11802 Liberty Road, Libertytown.

Survivors include his wife of 62 years, the former Betty Krueger; a son, Bernard C. Smelser of Libertytown; a daughter, Barbara S. Gammeter of New Market; a sister, Mary Lee Matthews of New Market; a granddaughter; and two great-grandsons.

Baltimore Sun reporter Julie Bykowicz contributed to this article.



**Charles Smelser, a Democrat, served Carroll, Frederick and Howard counties in the state legislature.**