

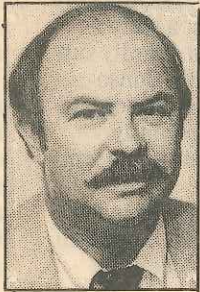
Remember what Younglund contributed ✓

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DENVER — Four years ago the voters in Weld County's House Dist. 51 returned State Rep. Walt Younglund, R-New Raymer, to private life.



He was politically astute and could see it coming.

While Younglund was hard-headed and sometimes irresponsible and usually outrageous, he wasn't dumb.

He had been in the Statehouse 18 years, had been a loyal water-carrier for the Republicans,

did what he was told and was appointed chairman of the House Agriculture Committee.

But Younglund had trouble living with the power that comes with political success. The Legislature changed and he didn't. The attractions of politics and Denver diverted his attention.

Service in the General Assembly and absence from his ranch and family cost him dearly. He lost most of the former and became estranged from the latter.

When the word reached the Statehouse on Wednesday that Younglund had been found dead at his ranch, the reaction was one of shock, of course, but not one of total surprise.

Long-term service in the Legislature puts a terrible demand on some individuals, physically and mentally and most certainly financially.

Some make a decision to leave, and can forget it.

Others are ousted and never get over it.

But nobody, regardless of how strong they are, escapes unscarred.

Younglund came to the House at 46 with a decent record of public service.

He was a Navy combat veteran with action in the South Pacific.

He belonged to the Farm Bureau, the VFW, the American Legion and other organizations.

And while he had not received much formal education beyond the eighth grade, was a member of the school board for three terms, with one term on a school planning reorganization committee.

When Younglund lost the election in November of 1986, few — and they counted themselves as his friends — took the loss hard. Younglund was no better or worse than other conservative Republican lawmakers as rank and file members of the Legislature.

But as a committee chairman he began to lose his credibility.

Younglund had always been one of the good ole country boys, hootin' and hollering and winkin' and nudgin' and cuttin' up in the way country boys do.

It is an understatement to say he was a little rough around the edges.

But after a while things began to get sour. His bawdy humor and practical jokes

weren't funny any more, and while people had once ignored in silence some of his rudeness as a committee chairman, that began to change, too.

("The chairman will make them decisions," he once snapped at a witness who had helpfully made a suggestion about testimony subsequent to hers.)

Before his last term ended, Younglund would be accused of everything from common vulgarity to racial bias to vote-trading.

He was never formally charged with anything. He was never formally censured or sued. But he was criticized by editorial writers and columnists and other political observers and, more seriously, his fellow Republicans.

Not many came to his aid in his last campaign for office. Most looked away or found other, more important campaigns to assist.

It is important, when the resolutions and condolences are offered by the Legislature, to remember what Younglund contributed to the process.

He contributed knowledge about water rights and grazing regulations; knowledge about crops and their diseases and rangeland drought and agribusiness problems; knowledge about what farmers need to move their machinery across highways — all the things important to rural Colorado, all the things that his more polished city colleagues never knew and don't care about and never will.

Walt Younglund should be remembered for the beneficial things that he did, and not for what others wanted him to be.

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