

# Former U.S. Senator Jim Abdnor dies at 89

By **CHET BROKAW**  
Associated Press

PIERRE — Former U.S. Sen. Jim Abdnor, the South Dakota Republican who ousted George McGovern from the Senate only to lose his seat after one term to another prominent Democrat, has died. He was 89.

Abdnor, who was a farmer, teacher and World War II veteran before jumping into politics, died Wednesday, his family said in a statement. He had been in hospice care recently.

Despite three decades in public service, Abdnor never quite mastered the art of public speaking and even joked about it in campaign ads. But he served on the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee and earned a reputation for working hard to help farmers and win South Dakota water projects, including the WEB Rural Water System, and other benefits.

Abdnor, who grew up in the South Dakota ranching town of Kennebec and leased a 4,000-acre ranch nearby during his time in the Senate, once said

his many years of riding a tractor helped him represent farmers in Washington.

"I'm a farmer," Abdnor said in 1986. "I've dug more field dirt out of my ears than anyone in Congress. I treasure that heritage."

Abdnor was a four-term congressman when he defeated the 1972 Democratic presidential nominee as McGovern tried to win his fourth Senate term in 1980. Abdnor claimed that the liberal McGovern was out of touch with South Dakota — saying he couldn't even produce a state driver's license when he applied for a hunting permit.

Abdnor wound up receiving nearly 60 percent of the vote, part of the Republican wave that swept Ronald Reagan into the White House.

The highlight of his career, Abdnor said, was serving on the Senate Appropriations Committee because it helped South Dakota get attention even though the state had only one House member to help its two senators.

"You'd be surprised how these agencies like to talk to people that handle money that might affect them,"

Abdnor told The Associated Press in 1993. "When you're a small state like South Dakota, it's the only committee as far as I'm concerned when you only have two or three people representing you."

Abdnor survived a bruising Republican primary challenge while seeking re-election in 1986 by then-Gov. William Janklow, who called Abdnor a weak candidate and cited his lack of speaking skills. The senator embraced the criticism with humor, saying in a television ad: "So I'm not a great speaker. Heck, I'm not a great dancer either, but I'm a great fighter for South Dakota."

But he was defeated in the general election by then-U.S. Rep. Tom Daschle, who went on to serve three terms in the Senate before narrowly losing in 2004 to former Rep. John Thune, who considered Abdnor his mentor. Thune, an assistant to Abdnor during his Senate days, credited him for his own interest in politics.

"Jim Abdnor was one of the most decent people to ever serve South Dakota in public life and was a great inspiration to me toward public

service," Thune, now a second-term U.S. senator, said shortly before he was sworn into office in 2005.

When Abdnor lost his Senate seat, Reagan appointed him head of the U.S. Small Business Administration and he held the post for two years.

Then-Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole praised Abdnor shortly before he took on the job in 1987, saying: "It is Jim's commitment and understanding of small-town America, of small businesses, its special needs and concerns, that makes his nomination so right."

After leaving Washington, Abdnor lived alternately between homes in South Dakota in Kennebec and Rapid City and spent winters in recent years in Florida — though he always considered Kennebec, the central South Dakota ranching town where he grew up, as his home. He leased his 4,000-acre ranch near Kennebec while serving in the Senate.

"Kennebec is a little quieter than Rapid City. The streets were empty at 8 o'clock at night. It was quite an adjustment after living in Washington since 1972," he said in a 1993 interview.

Abdnor moved from Rapid City to a retirement facility in Sioux Falls in 2003, but spent winters in Fort Myers, Fla., where he played golf and went to spring training baseball games. He moved to assisted living in late 2010.

He was born in 1923, the son of Lebanese immigrants. He received a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Nebraska in 1945, and then taught school at Kennebec and Presho before becoming a farmer. He served in the U.S. Army during World War II. He never married.

Abdnor was elected to the South Dakota Senate in 1956, serving six terms in the Legislature. He then was elected lieutenant governor in 1968, filling that position until 1971. Before becoming a state senator, he had worked as an assistant clerk in the state House.

Abdnor donated his congressional papers to the South Dakota Archives in 1993.

A brother and sister preceded him in death, but nieces and nephews scattered across the country regularly visited him in Sioux Falls.

## AAA South Dakota predicts a 1.3 percent increase in Memorial Day travel

AAA projects 105,740 South Dakotans will drive 50 miles or more from home over the long Memorial Day holiday weekend, an increase of 1.3 percent — or 943 travelers — from the number of South Dakotans who traveled one year ago. The Memorial Day holiday travel period is defined as Thursday, May 24 to Monday, May 28. Nationally, AAA expects 30.7 million Americans to drive to holiday destinations this year, a 1.2 percent increase over Memorial Day, 2011.

"The overall domestic economic picture continues to improve slightly. However, potential travelers faced a new challenge this year as steadily increasing gas prices throughout the spring significantly squeezed many household budgets," said Marilyn Buskohl, spokeswoman for AAA South Dakota. "South Dakotans will still travel during the Memorial Day holiday weekend but many will compensate for higher travel costs by staying closer to home or cutting entertainment expenses." Air travel projections down — auto still the dominant transportation choice

AAA is predicting 5,351 South Dakotans will fly

on Memorial Day vacations this year, a 5.9 percent drop from the number who flew last year. Nationally, 2.5 million Americans will take to the skies over the holiday, a decline of 5.5 percent from the 2.7 million who booked flights one year ago. Almost nine out of ten holiday travelers (88 percent) will take to the nation's roadways during the Memorial Day weekend, keeping automobile travel in the traditional lead as the dominate mode of holiday travel transportation.

### IMPACT OF GASOLINE PRICES ON TRAVEL PLANS

A survey of intended travelers found that 53 percent said this spring's increases in gasoline prices would not impact their Memorial Day holiday travel plans. Of the remaining 47 percent of travelers who said gas prices would impact their travel plans, nine percent are planning to take a shorter trip, four percent will travel by an alternate mode of transportation and 34 percent will economize in other areas. Those who intend to economize in other areas plan to reduce spending on entertainment (65 percent), stay at a lower priced hotel (34 percent), stay with friends and

relatives instead of reserving a hotel room (31 percent) or stay in a hotel that includes value-added amenities like free breakfast and internet (27 percent).

National and state gasoline prices may have peaked in April despite seasonal highs in early spring when motorists experienced average price increases for all but four days in February and March. April experienced a full reversal as prices fell for 23 of 30 days during the month, helping to break a streak of 911 days since the national average price was lower than the previous year.

According to AAAFuelGaugeReport.com, the South Dakota statewide average price for regular self-serve gasoline today stands at \$3.66, compared to \$3.92 this time last year. Nationwide, the average today is \$3.72, which is 23 cents below the price last year.

### INCREASE IN SALES OF INCLUSIVE VACATIONS SETS EMERGING TREND

Many Americans consider summer travel a mainstay and are committed to traveling despite higher prices in many sectors impacting household budgets. As Americans seek ways to economize travel budgets, like the 65 percent of Memorial Day travelers who

say they will cut entertainment costs, a trend has emerged. To trim costs and maximize travel experiences, an increasing number of travelers are choosing cost-inclusive vacation options like cruises and tour travel packages. These valued added travel options provide consumers an effective way to budget, pay vacation costs up front and decrease entertainment costs during their holiday weekend.

The cost of a cruise typically includes cabin accommodation, entertainment, all meals, onboard gratuities, non-alcoholic beverages and taxes. Tour cost inclusions can vary from all-inclusive resort vacations that include all costs up front to multiple-destination tours that include accommodations, airfare, sightseeing and some meals. Some tours and cruises are now including free or discounted airfare.

### AVERAGE TRAVEL DISTANCE SIGNIFICANTLY LESS THAN LAST YEAR

According to a survey of traveler intentions, the average distance traveled by Americans during the Memorial Day holiday weekend is expected to be 642 miles, which is 150 miles less than last year's average travel distance of 792

miles. With high gas prices squeezing consumers' spending power this spring, consumers are responding by traveling shorter distances this Memorial Day holiday.

The decline in expected air travel is a factor in the travel distance decrease as fewer flying miles can be contrasted with the slight growth in automobile travel. Miles flown for weekend travel are typically longer than those driven. Last year, the shortest trips, those less than 150 miles, made up 19 percent of total travel compared to 21 percent this year, reinforcing the expectation that shorter trips are especially popular this Memorial Day weekend. Median spending is expected to be \$702, only slightly more than the \$692 median spending last year.

### AIRFARES AND CAR RENTAL RATES DROP, HOTEL RATES RISE

According to AAA's Leisure Travel Index, Memorial Day holiday airfares are expected to be seven percent lower than last year with an average lowest round-trip rate of \$189 for the top 40 U.S. air routes. Low cost carriers such as Spirit and Frontier contributed to the average cost decline with airfares for five of the top 40 routes declining by more than

40 percent. Hotel rates for AAA Three Diamond lodgings are expected to increase eight percent from a year ago with travelers spending an average of \$160 per night compared to \$148 last year. Travelers planning to stay at AAA Two Diamond hotels can expect to pay 10 percent more with an average cost of \$120 per night. Weekend daily car rental rates will average \$36, four percent (\$2) less than last year.

AAA's projections are based on economic forecasting and research by IHS Global Insight. The Boston-based economic research and consulting firm teamed with AAA in 2009 to jointly analyze travel trends during the major holidays. AAA has been reporting on holiday travel trends for more than two decades. The complete AAA / IHS Global Insight 2012 Memorial Day Holiday Travel Forecast can be found at NewsRoom.AAA.com.

A not-for-profit organization, AAA South Dakota serves its 92,190 members across South Dakota with emergency help on the road, auto travel assistance and a wide range of personal insurance, travel, financial and automotive services through its 10 branches, and the Internet at AAA.com.

## OBITUARIES

### John Harnois

John A. Harnois, 75, of Vermillion, passed away peacefully Monday, May 14, 2012, at his residence after a three-year battle with cancer.

John was born Oct. 19, 1936 in Vermillion, to Hector and Mary Rose (Weidenfeller) Harnois. He attended school in Vermillion, graduating in 1954. He attended the University of South Dakota and received his bachelor degree in accounting.

John married Maryln Mart on May 13, 1957 in Wakonda, and they lived in Vermillion 55 years. He and Maryln owned their family business, Vermillion Auto Parts, until 1986. He was a businessman for

over 60 years, taking his retirement from Sturdevant's Auto Parts in January, 2012.

John served as a Vermillion city councilman two terms. He was a lifetime member and past-president of the Vermillion Eagle's Club and a long-time member of Vermillion AA. John played saxophone in a dance band from age 15 to the year 1991. He was well-respected and had many friends.

He is survived by his wife, Maryln of Vermillion; four sons, Richard (Raquel) of Pierre, Harold (Jody) (Marcia) of Vermillion, John (Karmen) of Buffalo, MN and Thomas (Tina) of Pierre; a daughter, Karla Harnois of Sioux Falls;

and a sister, Judy (Joe) Nedved of Wagner. He is also survived by five grandchildren, Michael, Thomas, Michelle, Chantel and Sean; and six great-grandchildren.

He is preceded in death by his parents and one daughter, Michelle.

A celebration of life will begin at 10:30 a.m. Monday, May 21 at the St. Agnes Catholic Church in Vermillion with burial of ashes and military honors at the Calvary Cemetery in Vermillion. hansenfuneralhome.com.

## Dakota Smiles Mobile Dental Program to visit

Does your child need dental care? Has your child never seen a dentist? The Dakota Smiles Mobile Dental Program is coming to Vermillion the week of May 21-25. The "Smile Bus" provides comprehensive dental health care and immunization to children from birth to age 21 who have no "dental home." The Smile Bus, a fully equipped dental office on wheels, is a joint program of Ronald McDonald House Charities, the Delta Dental Philanthropic fund, and the South Dakota Department of Health.

Whether or not your child is Medicaid eligible or if you don't have dental insurance, find out if

your child qualifies for this program. Applications for dental screening and treatment are available at the Vermillion Public Library, the Clay County Public Health Nurse's office, The Welcome Table, and the USD Children's Center. Completed applications should be returned to one of the above locations by Monday, May 21. Parents/guardians of children who may qualify for this program should pick up and return applications as soon as possible.

The Smile bus is able to provide appointments for up to 75

youngsters during its week stay in Vermillion. The bus will be in the Vermillion Middle School parking lot.

The Theta Omega chapter of Epsilon Sigma Alpha International is partnering with Delta Dental and the Ronald McDonald House Charities to bring the mobile dental office to Vermillion. Other local sponsors are the Alpha Lambda Chapter of ESA, The Vermillion Lions Club, and the Vermillion Veterinary clinic. Dr. Matthew Knutson, will be providing the dental care.

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