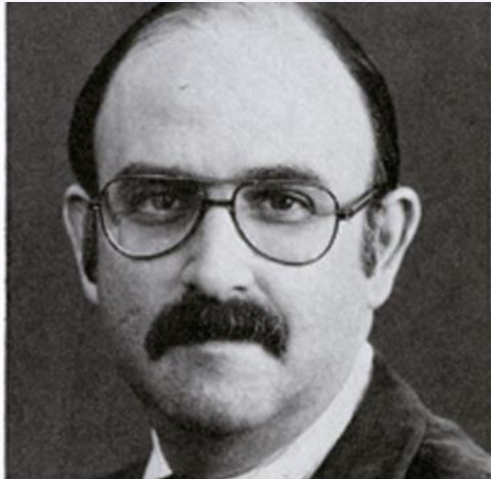


# Lee Greenfield's record of service still shines today

June 1, 2020



## ***Heroes of disability rights***

2020 marks 30 years' publication for *Access Press* and 30 years of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). We will spend the next year focusing on our heroes.

In our first issue in May 1990, one article focused on Rep. Lee Greenfield (DFL-Minneapolis). Greenfield, who served 11 terms in the Minnesota House, was a true disability rights champion.

Greenfield represented Minneapolis from 1979 to 2000. By the time *Access Press* profiled him, Greenfield had introduced more than 125 bills and built a strong record of getting legislation passed. His focus was health and human services. He brought a love of data and a scientist's mind to the capitol, along with a desire to improve the quality of life for Minnesotans with disabilities.

Greenfield was active in the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s. That work brought him to Minnesota, where he began an academic and political career. His activism also spurred a lifelong commitment to people marginalized by society.

A native of Brooklyn, New York, he earned a degree in physics from Purdue University and did graduate work at the University of Minnesota. In interviews

Greenfield often said his scientific background uniquely prepared him for his legislative work. It also led to his interest and involvement in health care issues.

During his capitol tenure, Greenfield served on housing, ways and means, appropriations, veterans' affairs, general legislation, rules and administration, judiciary, judiciary criminal justice, health and human services, and the health and human services finance division committees.

Perhaps the legislative achievement he will best be remembered for, and one will always be proud of, is being one of the "gang of seven" legislators. This group in 1992 helped establish MinnesotaCare, the state's health care system focused on health care access for all Minnesotans.

Greenfield was then serving as chair of the House Health and Human Services Finance Division. He worked with members from both parties and former Gov. Arne Carlson to pass the legislation that expanded the state's health coverage of the uninsured from children to all residents who did not have access to employer-supported coverage. Their efforts ensured that Minnesota was the first state to provide health care access for all.

The gang of seven included DFLers Sens. Linda Berglin and Pat Piper and Rep. Paul Ogren, and Republicans Sen. Duane Benson and Reps. Dave Gruenes and Brad Stanius. Of the seven, Berglin was the last to leave the capitol, in 2011. Three members have died – Stanius in 2014, Piper in 2016 and Benson in 2019.

Greenfield, in an exit interview with legislative media services, said he was proud of playing a part in helping to maintain and improve the state's programs for people with disabilities, community mental health services and expanding home health care for senior citizens. "Many of the most exciting things I'll ever do will have been done here in this chamber," he said.

He continued his work in health care policy for several years after retiring from the Minnesota Legislature.

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*The History Note is a monthly column sponsored by the [Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities](#)*