

# LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP



RUDY BOSCHWITZ AND  
THE RISE OF THE MODERN  
CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT  
IN MINNESOTA

A PROJECT OF THE FREEDOM FOUNDATION OF MINNESOTA







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## Foreword

It has been more than 35 years since the “Minnesota Massacre” of 1978 upended the state’s political establishment and set on course an emerging conservative movement in Minnesota. In this report, the Freedom Foundation of Minnesota examines the origins of the conservative movement in Minnesota, and makes the case that Rudy Boschwitz was the catalyst for its growth.

Two years ago, the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota partnered with the Freedom Foundation for this research project by generously awarding a Mondale Research Fellowship to help tell the story of Boschwitz’s service to Minnesota and the nation.

Our primary goal was to produce a report that records and salutes the remarkable achievements of Senator Boschwitz that focused on his political rise to power as well as his role in ushering in the modern conservative movement in Minnesota—a movement that has dominated Minnesota right-of-center politics for nearly 40 years and has been proven durable even in the face of many challenges.

We are very thankful for the many Minnesotans who helped us achieve this goal. Specifically, Tony Sutton’s tireless and exhaustive research was the driving force behind this challenging project. This project benefited greatly from Tony’s meticulous review of news archives, Party documents, and other historical records, as well as his oral interviews with key figures who provided contextual background throughout this report.

A special note of gratitude to several key figures and political leaders who gave generously of their time to sit for extensive interviews, without which this project would have been impossible: especially Senator Rudy and Ellen Boschwitz, Vin

Weber, Senator David Durenberger, Jann Olsten, Bob Brown, Chuck Slocum, Gary Russell, Paul Magnuson, and Jack Meeks. We would also like to thank the staff of the Minnesota History Center and the former staff members of Senator Boschwitz, who provided a virtual treasure trove of anecdotes and historical insights pertaining to Boschwitz's official career and political rise. And of course, we are extremely grateful for the partnership of Professor Larry Jacobs and the Center for the Study of Policy and Governance at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs. I also want to extend my gratitude to Rick Nelson for his invaluable counsel and guidance throughout this project.

There would be no report without Jonathan Blake's outstanding editorial assistance. The Freedom Foundation is blessed to work with one of the finest writers and prolific researchers in Minnesota today. We're very thankful to have him write, edit and provide additional research throughout this project.

Our editor and designer Joel Sorrell makes each page of this report a real pleasure to read. We are truly thankful to work with a consummate professional like Joel who shares our conservative passion *and* keeps us on deadline.

It would be safe to say that all of this research would be for naught if Erika Roland hadn't worked tirelessly on our behalf to make sure the lights remained on at the Freedom Foundation and that the necessary funds were raised to support this project and produce this report.

Finally, I cannot begin to tell you how thankful I am to Rudy and Ellen Boschwitz and their gracious family for their assistance and guidance on this project. Rudy has lived a life marked by a fervent belief in the power of freedom. His remarkable achievements changed many lives and also ushered in a new political movement in Minnesota—one that remains in place today and shows little sign of waning. That is a story that needs to be told and the Freedom Foundation is honored and humbled to be able to tell it.

Of course none of this would be possible without each of the many friends and supporters of the Freedom Foundation of Minnesota. As an educational and

research organization, we wanted to embark upon a very special project that would make this milestone memorable for everyone involved. Studying Rudy Boschwitz's legacy in ushering in the modern conservative movement in Minnesota seemed to strike exactly the right note to us then as it does now.

Rudy Boschwitz's lasting political legacy is a testament to his indomitable spirit, his belief in the American Dream, and his unwavering commitment to protecting freedom in all its forms. It is both an honor and pleasure to pay tribute to that great legacy.

Annette Thompson Meeks  
CEO  
Freedom Foundation of Minnesota  
November 2014

## Preface

Much has been written about liberal dominance in Minnesota politics since World War II, and the indelible mark left on the state and nation by liberal icons like Hubert H. Humphrey, Jr., Walter F. Mondale, and Paul Wellstone. In contrast, little has been written about the state's conservative experience, its leaders, or their impact. November 7, 2014 marks the 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary of conservative victories in the 1978 elections, commonly known as the "Minnesota Massacre." For Republicans and conservatives, this election "massacre" was a seminal event. This anniversary presents an appropriate and timely opportunity to examine the legacy of Rudy Boschwitz, who was one of the victors in that election. Rudy Boschwitz was a transplanted New Yorker who came to Minnesota to sell plywood, but rose quickly to be elected United States Senator. Boschwitz became a champion of freedom whose 1978 campaign was the catalyst for the rise of the conservative movement in Minnesota.

It can be argued that the modern conservative movement was born of the ashes of the Watergate scandal with the help of a coalescing conservative movement. It was in that historic 1978 election Minnesota Republicans bounced back from the crushing defeats of 1974 and 1976, and escaped the toxic cloud of Watergate. Congressman Al Quie was elected Governor, State Representative Arne Carlson was elected State Auditor, David Durenberger was elected to the United States Senate, and a 47-year-old entrepreneur and plywood salesman named Rudy Boschwitz improbably became Minnesota's junior U.S. senator. Almost four decades later, the legacy of that election still looms large in the state's conservative movement.

Rudy's personal story and path to prominence are unique among his contemporaries. More conservative in nature than the Republican establishment of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Boschwitz was more in tune with the coming Reagan revolution and the transformation of the Republican party taking place at both the state and national level. This is an origins story tracing the beginnings of the mod-



ern conservative movement in Minnesota and the often under-appreciated role Rudy Boschwitz played as one of its founders and leaders, chronicling his rise as a first-generation immigrant with humble roots to become one of Minnesota's most influential political figures in recent history.

What led this self-made plywood salesman to get into politics? Why did the New York-raised Boschwitz choose to live in Minnesota? How did he chart an independent and conservative course within a rudderless Republican Party? Which themes and bedrock principles guided Boschwitz throughout his public and political life, and what exactly is his legacy?



## Berlin - 1933

Rudolph Ely Boschwitz was born in Berlin, Germany on November 7, 1930, the son of Ely, a stockbroker and manufacturer, and Lucy. Despite a comfortable middle-class life, the Boschwitz family was not long for Germany, leaving for a new life in the United States when Rudy was just two years old.<sup>1</sup>

It is not difficult to imagine what motivated the Boschwitz family to leave Germany. On January 30, 1933, President Paul von Hindenburg selected Adolf Hitler as the newly minted Chancellor of Germany. Hitler had been the leader of the National Socialist German Workers' Party for nearly a decade, during which time the Party had propagandized that Jewish people and their businesses were the scapegoat for all of Germany's economic and social ills, including the inflation of the 1920s. In his manifesto *Mein Kampf*, Hitler made clear his intention to rid Germany of all Jews.

Ely Boschwitz took Hitler at his word and, on the day Hitler was appointed Chancellor, Ely told his family they must leave Germany and never return.<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of the Hitler regime, many German Jews believed Hitler and the Nazis were something to be endured and that they would eventually fade away. However, Ely and Lucy Boschwitz saw them as a very real threat and were immediately determined to escape oppression and seek a better life. Even so, it was a difficult decision, which took foresight and courage.

Ely was a stockbroker and a manufacturer of household goods. He also served as a judge in the German judicial system at a time when very few Jews were afforded the opportunity.<sup>3</sup> Leaving Germany was a financial risk as it meant giving up his successful business and starting anew in America. The difficult decision to uproot the family and seek a new life was a two-year process, beginning with a family "vacation" to Czechoslovakia in July of 1933, then on to Switzerland, the Netherlands, England, and finally the United States in 1935.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the war in 1945, all but one Boschwitz relative who remained in Germany had been killed by the Nazis.<sup>5</sup>

Ely and Lucy settled their young family in New Rochelle, New York, with great optimism for the future and quickly got about rebuilding their lives. Although very young at the time, the experience of fleeing Nazi Germany left a deep impression on Rudy Boschwitz, one that would forever permeate his worldview and help shape his ideology. And as an immigrant fleeing the horrors of oppression for the promise and opportunity that America represented, the Boschwitz family story is in many ways the embodiment of the American Dream.

### **“Sons often follow in the footsteps of their fathers”**

Ely Boschwitz’s work ethic greatly influenced the young Rudy, motivating him to emulate his father in both business and civic life. Reflecting on his own entrepreneurial spirit, Boschwitz said, “Sons often follow in the footsteps of their fathers.”<sup>6</sup> The desire to be like his father caused Rudy to push himself academically. He attended the prestigious Pennington Prep School in Mercer, New Jersey, and at the age of 16 enrolled in Johns Hopkins University. Much like his father, Boschwitz had an interest in both law and business. After his sophomore year at Johns Hopkins, he transferred to New York University and earned a B.S. from the university’s prestigious Stern School of Business. He went on to earn his Juris Doctor from the New York University Law School in 1953, at the age of 22.<sup>7</sup> Rudy’s academic career was remarkable not only because of his status as a relatively new American citizen but also his early ambition and drive for success. He was determined to make his mark on the world, and determined to do it his own way.

### **Lake Placid, New York, Summer of 1953**

On summer break after graduating from law school, Boschwitz accepted his father’s invitation to spend time with him at the family’s cottage near Lake Placid. Ready for a little rest after graduation, Boschwitz was looking forward to a relaxing but brief visit. Instead, he would stay the entire summer, having met a high school senior by the name of Ellen Loewenstein.<sup>8</sup> He was taken with Ellen from

the beginning. Boschwitz recalls, “Getting together to see Ellen was a real family affair. Ellen’s parents insisted on chaperoning us everywhere, and my father, widowed at the time, felt since her parents were tagging along he should come with us as well. I ended up proposing to her later that summer and she accepted.”<sup>9</sup>

Much like the Boschwitz family, the Loewenstein’s also fled Europe out of fear of the Nazi threat. Living in Switzerland, and fearful of Hitler’s intentions, Ellen’s father decided it was time to leave Europe escaping during the war through Vichy France, and by way of Portugal and then Brazil made their way to a new life in America.<sup>10</sup>

Not only did Ellen and Rudy eventually raise four boys together (Gerry, Ken, Dan and Tom), but also a true and enduring partnership emerged from their marriage. Ellen has been a true partner with Rudy, helping found and run a successful business as well as navigating the rough and tumble world of politics together. As much as any political ideology or movement, Ellen has been a key part of Boschwitz’s success. An inseparable couple, Ellen has been his main sounding board and chief adviser for almost six decades.

### **From Oahu to Minnesota**

Having earned his law degree and passed the bar exam, Boschwitz began practicing tax law when, almost immediately, he was drafted into the Army and assigned to the Signal Corps. The Signal Corps is responsible for managing and coordinating military communications. Despite being stationed in Hawaii, Boschwitz’s entrepreneurial tendencies began to blossom. While assigned to the Signal Corps, Boschwitz spent his free time running a small “shopper” newspaper he purchased.<sup>11</sup> It is here that Boschwitz first demonstrates his entrepreneurial spirit: a driven man who is presented with a unique opportunity, does his research, makes an investment, then leads the enterprise in a new direction to new heights. Boschwitz ran the newspaper until his hitch in the Army was over in 1955, selling it before he left Hawaii.<sup>12</sup>

After the service Boschwitz went back to New York to practice law, but not with the same enthusiasm he had previously experienced. In the summer of 1956 he married his Lake Placid sweetheart Ellen Loewenstein and continued to practice law until the following summer. It was then the young couple decided Rudy should accept a job offer from his brother who was running a plywood mill in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.<sup>13</sup> They had both grown tired of New York, and Boschwitz realized practicing law was not what he wanted to do for the rest of his life. Driven by an entrepreneurial spirit he inherited from his father he later said he found legal work “too confining...so I decided to become a client instead.”

Boschwitz worked with his older brother Franz in Oshkosh for six years, learning the business, and starting a family. But it was not challenging enough. Opportunities for personal growth and enrichment at the mill were limited. Rudy was there because of his brother. However, the mill was the family business of his sister-in-law’s family. As such, her family members were certainly “in line” for senior positions in the company ahead of Rudy.<sup>14</sup> Admittedly, Boschwitz wasn’t sure he wanted to work for someone else. He decided early on in his career that he wanted to start his own business and be self-sufficient like his father. So Rudy and Ellen decided to move further west and in September 1963 opened what would become the first Plywood Minnesota store in an old railroad warehouse in the Twin Cities suburb of Fridley.<sup>15</sup>

**“I wanted to make money”**

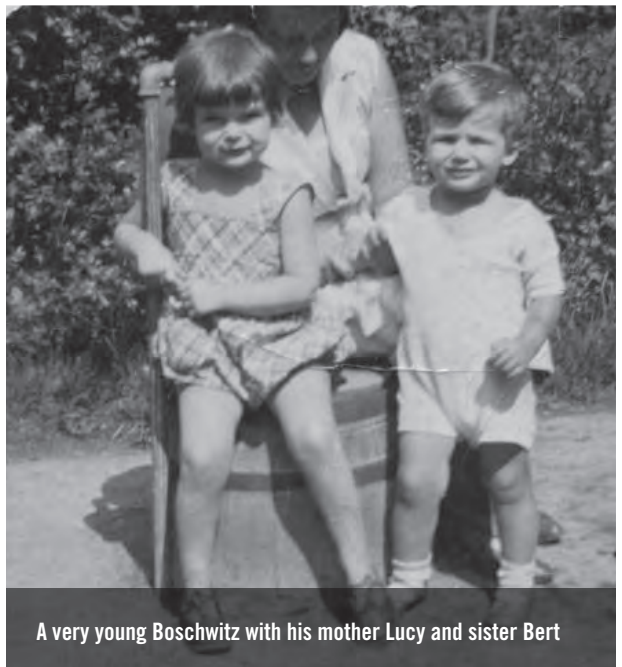
Plywood Minnesota was one of the first “direct from the factory to you” home improvement stores.<sup>16</sup> Like any good entrepreneur he saw an opportunity that others didn’t with the growing trend of home improvement. The business was strong from the beginning and it began to expand and grow rapidly. Additional company owned locations soon opened. As Boschwitz later traveled the state for politics he saw the opportunity to franchise the concept to local business owner/operators in cities all across Minnesota. “I had never traveled much around Minnesota prior



A young Rudy with his sister Bertha ("Bert")



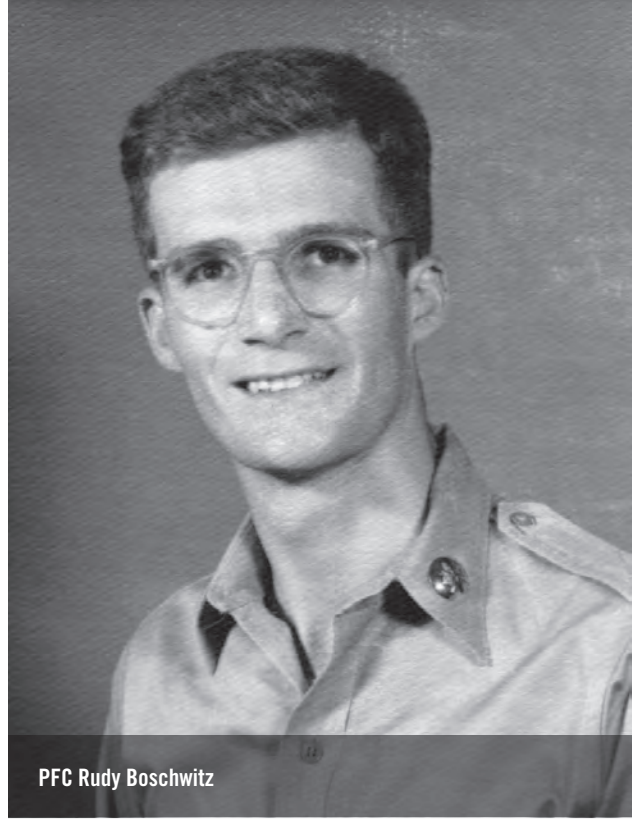
Rudy with his sister Bert



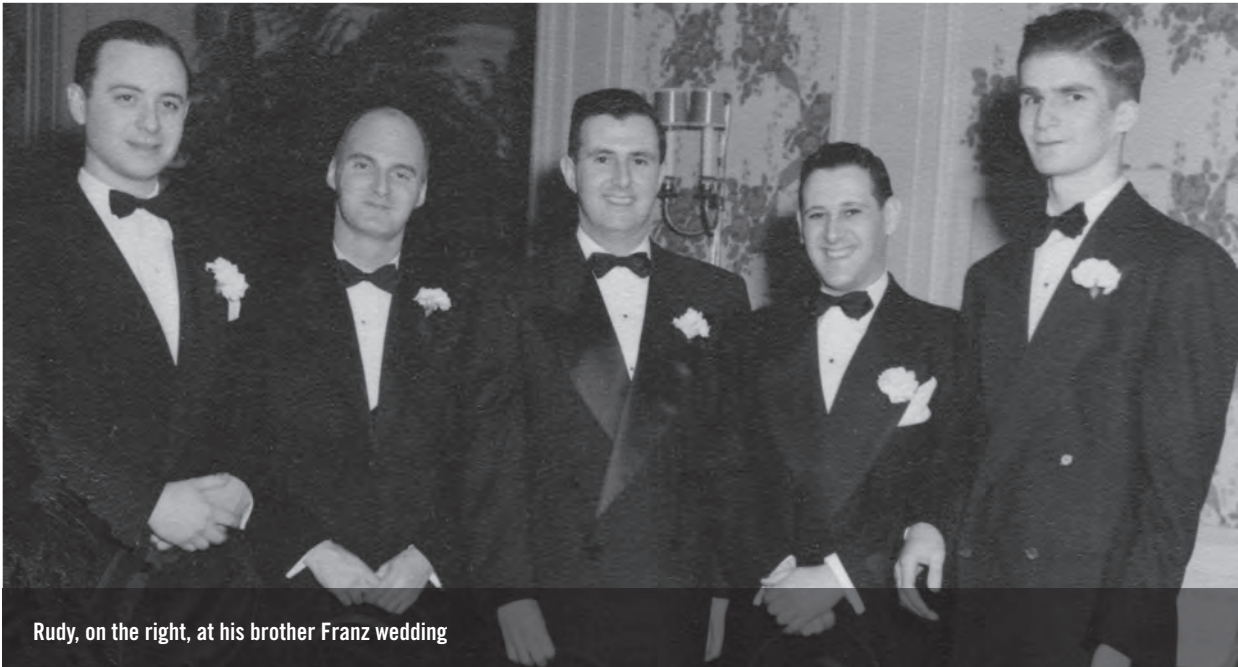
A very young Boschwitz with his mother Lucy and sister Bert



Rudy with his future wife Ellen and his father Ely at Lake Placid New York in 1955.



PFC Rudy Boschwitz



Rudy, on the right, at his brother Franz wedding

to my political involvement,” said Boschwitz. “It was my political travels that opened my eyes to the expansion potential around the state for Plywood Minnesota.”<sup>17</sup> Boschwitz was a natural salesman, who loved to give the pitch and make the sale. These same traits would later make him a prolific political fundraiser. No detail was too small for Boschwitz who would walk the showroom floor every night, adjusting the prices—raising them on the fast selling products and lowering them on the slower moving items.<sup>18</sup> Jann Olsten, who later worked for the Boschwitz ’78 campaign as well as in his US Senate office, described Boschwitz as a “true merchant” who loved retail business.<sup>19</sup> Retail sales and politics have a lot in common and the traits Boschwitz learned as a salesman would later serve him well on the campaign trail. At its height, Plywood Minnesota had 1,200 employees in 70 stores (many franchised) all over the Upper Midwest.<sup>20</sup>

### “Our best shot all the time”

Boschwitz loved to sell, but he also understood the importance of marketing to getting customers in the door. A key to Plywood Minnesota’s early business success (and Boschwitz’s later political success) was its remarkable and unconventional television advertising campaigns that always ended with the tag line “our best shot all the time.” Other off-beat, attention getting slogans used by Plywood Minnesota included “Unite the Twin Cities: Fill in the Mississippi” and “Keep Bullfighting Out of Minnesota.” Twin Cities marketing guru Mel Jass played an important role in inspiring Plywood Minnesota’s off-beat approach.<sup>21</sup> Jass was a well-known television advertising personality and hosted a popular afternoon movie program, “Mel’s Matinee Movie.” Boschwitz took to heart Jass’ philosophy on selling. Jass believed successful salesmanship required making a personal connection with the customer. As a part of making this personal connection Boschwitz began appearing in Plywood Minnesota’s television ads. These ads not only helped sell wood paneling and other home improvement supplies, they also created in the minds of Minnesotans an image of Rudy Boschwitz as a genuine,



“down to earth”, engaging and honest person. This image would later be very appealing politically in the post-Watergate America of the mid-1970s in which cynical voters sought authentic and honest candidates, most of whom were found outside the current political establishment.

### **Not a Run of the Mill Republican**

Boschwitz’s first experience in politics was donating money. In the mid-1960’s, shortly after coming to Minnesota, “I would attend Elephant Club meetings (the major donor organization of the Republican Party of Minnesota) and became known as a Republican contributor,” Boschwitz recalled.<sup>22</sup> Never having been involved in politics before he thought of himself as a liberal Republican, but found himself “feeling more comfortable with conservatives.”<sup>23</sup> Boschwitz’s first active experience beyond being a donor was as state co-chairman for the Nixon for President campaign in 1968. The 1968 nomination fight between the more liberal Nelson Rockefeller and the more conservative Richard Nixon created much acrimony within the Minnesota Republican Party. The local Rockefeller campaign had surprisingly outmaneuvered the Nixon campaign at the state convention capturing more delegates than expected making Nixon backers unhappy. While Nixon went on to win the GOP nomination at the Miami Beach Republican National Convention the in-fighting had dampened the enthusiasm about his candidacy among the Minnesota GOP leadership. Boschwitz suspects he was asked to be the state co-chairman after Nixon secured the nomination because he was an outsider and not a part of the previous internal battles. “I had only been in the state for five years. I think they asked me because I hadn’t been a part of the political infighting up to that point and because they felt I was not a run-of-the-mill Republican,” said Boschwitz.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps best illustrating the fact he was not a run of the mill Republican came earlier in 1968 when he was denied entrance to a GOP fundraising event at the private and exclusive Minneapolis Club because when he arrived at the club, he was wearing a Plywood Minnesota windbreaker and plaid shirt

instead of the required coat and tie.<sup>25</sup>

Boschwitz's leadership role in the Nixon campaign would take him to all corners of the state, meeting with activists and stumping for the Nixon/Agnew ticket. Boschwitz found politics to be interesting and a new challenge. However, his father did not approve. "He told me politics was bad for business," said Boschwitz, "he advised me to stay focused on making money."<sup>26</sup> But it was too late. Politics and public policy, which had always interested Boschwitz, became a passion. For Boschwitz, the 1968 presidential campaign was a crash course in retail politics and Party machinations. His prominent role with the Nixon campaign would afford him the opportunity to rub elbows with the state's key political players, some of whom would later play an important part in Boschwitz's own political career. Despite sowing the seeds of Boschwitz's rise to prominence, the Nixon campaign faced a decidedly uphill battle in Minnesota, trying to defeat a sitting Vice President who enjoyed vaunted favorite son status. Of course, Nixon won the 1968 election, but garnered just 41 percent of the vote in Minnesota to Humphrey's 54 percent. Nixon carried just one congressional district in Minnesota, though he bested Humphrey in more than twenty of the state's 87 counties.<sup>27</sup>

Nonetheless, Boschwitz made a positive impression on many Republican activists throughout the state with his hard work and his tireless campaigning. While working on building Plywood Minnesota, he sought out additional opportunities to remain involved in Republican politics, both as a contributor and an activist. In 1971 an opportunity to run for Republican National Committeeman created an opportunity that would not only propel Boschwitz to become a leader within the Republican Party, but also put him on the road to the United States Senate.

### **The Lay of the Land**

The Republican Party that had largely dominated Minnesota politics since statehood was being overwhelmed in elections by the merged Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party (DFL). The results for the DFL in those mid-century elections remain

landmarks even today. In 1948, Minneapolis Mayor Hubert H. Humphrey, Jr. was elected to the U.S. Senate and went on to serve as the 38<sup>th</sup> Vice President of the United States under President Lyndon Johnson. One year later, Eugene McCarthy was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives where he served until 1959 when he was elected to the U.S. Senate, a position he held until 1971. By 1970 Governor Harold LeVander saw the emerging dominance of the state's powerful DFL party and declined to seek re-election after only one-term. DFLer Wendell Anderson was elected governor that year, defeating Republican Attorney General Doug Head by a wide margin with Anderson receiving 54% of the vote.

This string of electoral defeats led to serious soul searching among activists in the Minnesota Republican Party. The Republican leadership attributed the defeats largely to poor campaigning and a lack of organization. Boschwitz had a different view. His political involvement had convinced him the Republican Party in Minnesota had a serious image problem. He believed the party's "country club" image as well as being defenders of big business was hurting its ability to compete for blue-collar and suburban middle class voters.<sup>28</sup> "Maybe I never really liked country clubs because as a Jew I wasn't allowed into many of them," reflected Boschwitz.<sup>29</sup> Whatever the reason, Boschwitz identified the need for the Republican Party to change and his motives were rooted in the same kind of populism that drove many of the newly emerging conservatives to become involved in the political process. It was a populist streak that would later serve him well.

### **"I wanted the job"**

In June of 1971, the members of the Republican State Central Committee met at the Holiday Inn Central in Minneapolis to elect a new Republican National Committeeman.<sup>30</sup> George Etzell, the party's committeeman of nearly two decades, was stepping down due to poor health.<sup>31</sup> Boschwitz sought this position because he believed it was the best way for him to help change the image of the party. Boschwitz also chose to run for Republican National Committeeman because he

thought it was the “best job in the Party.”<sup>32</sup> The position had few officially enumerated duties, and was largely whatever its holder made of it—and Boschwitz intended to make the most of the opportunity if elected.

A shrewd businessman, Boschwitz instinctively knew demographics were changing with the growth in the suburbs and the Minnesota GOP had to change its image if it was going to actively compete with the dominant DFL party for those voters. Plywood Minnesota’s customers were part of this emerging suburban middle class, which eventually became the bedrock of the growing conservative movement, and were the very demographic Republicans would need to win elections.<sup>33</sup> In early 1971 he presented his ideas about modern politics in a report he co-authored to the state Republican Party in which he stated that Minnesota and nation were entering a new phase of politics, moving from the “politics of organization [procedure] to the politics of communication.”<sup>34</sup> Boschwitz knew as important as phone calls, door-knocking, and other tactics were for winning elections, message and image were even more important in this new and emerging electronic era of political persuasion. He thought he could make a difference as National Committeeman to help change the Party’s image and attract these important emerging groups. As Boschwitz himself states bluntly, “I wanted the job.”<sup>35</sup>

He had always marched to the beat of his own drummer and the decision to seek this position was no different. Rather than saddle up to those in the existing power structure, Boschwitz decided to go it alone, touting his own vision for the Party, which he believed had become “moribund with organizational charts, meetings and a lack of communication.”<sup>36</sup> Boschwitz’s chief opponent was downtown Minneapolis attorney John Mooty, whose base of support was from the so-called “Hennepin County Mafia,” the more liberal and dominant establishment wing of the party.<sup>37</sup> Mooty, a well-respected member of the Twin Cities business community, also had the support of most of the prominent Party leaders and elected officials. This did not dissuade Boschwitz, who had built a grassroots follow-

ing beginning with his days on the Nixon campaign. Another major candidate was Henry Berghuis, the Douglas County Chairman and head of the Republican Party of Minnesota's Elephant Club, a major donor club of the state party. All of the candidates (including two additional minor candidates) except for Boschwitz, had ties to the Party establishment.

However, Boschwitz's 1971 campaign for National Committeeman benefited from the transformation taking place within the party. Ever since the Goldwater campaign of 1964 the conservative wing of the Republican Party of Minnesota had slowly grown. Nationwide, Barry Goldwater's campaign had introduced what is today the philosophical foundation of the modern conservative movement. This conservative ideology had inspired many new activists to get involved in the Republican Party. In 1966 the conservative wing joined forces with rural delegates to give Harold LeVander the endorsement for Governor over John Pillsbury.<sup>38</sup> By the 1970s Goldwater's arguments against "the welfare state" and the "Soviet Menace" evolved into conservative policies supporting a strong national defense, a smaller federal government with power devolved back to the states, and renewed respect for traditional American values, which after the 1973 landmark Supreme Court decision on *Roe v. Wade* would later include Right-to-Life supporters. The growing conservative movement was a reflection of the political polarization taking hold in society at-large, resulting in a new "left-right" dynamic between the two political parties. Within the Republican Party this new left-right dynamic was creating tension as the new conservative wing began to conflict with the less ideologically driven (and less conservative) establishment.

It was a pronounced and on-going ideological battle for many years in states across the nation but significantly so in Minnesota where the tug-of-war between the so-called "establishment" wing of the party continued to wrestle for control from the emerging conservative group of activists. Largely a leaderless movement within Minnesota in the early 1970's, the Boschwitz campaign for National Committeeman gave conservatives a figure around which to rally within the Repub-

lican Party, if for no other reason than to oppose establishment Republicans like John Mooty or Henry Berghuis. Simply stated, Boschwitz was the right candidate at the right time to catch the rising wave of conservative activism.

Under the rules of the Minnesota Republican State Central Committee, the candidate with the fewest votes on each ballot had to drop out. While he led on every ballot, it took five ballots to elect Boschwitz.<sup>39</sup> As each unsuccessful candidate dropped out, they endorsed John Mooty. Henry Berghuis, dropping after the fourth ballot and with the field now down to two candidates for the fifth and deciding ballot, called Boschwitz “a helluva colorful fellow,” but urged the delegates to vote for the less colorful Mooty.<sup>40</sup> The term “colorful” was not intended to be a compliment. For the old timers, Boschwitz’s outspokenness about the direction and image of the Party had stepped on toes and more importantly represented a threat to the status quo. For the rising conservative wing of the party, Boschwitz’s outspokenness was evidence to them that Rudy was unafraid of the establishment and represented a bold change within the party. Berghuis’s endorsement of Mooty didn’t matter and Boschwitz was elected on the next ballot with a vote of 161-134.<sup>41</sup> The *Minneapolis Tribune* characterized it as a major change in direction for the State GOP:

*“In choosing Boschwitz, a flamboyant personality who is relatively new to politics over four other candidates, the party is indicating...that it wishes to make a sharp break with the past...the key to Boschwitz victory was a widespread desire within the Party’s [grass-roots] leadership in virtually all sections of the state for a change of image.”<sup>42</sup>*

It was clear the Boschwitz victory was built on a desire by the grassroots activists of the Party who were seeking a new direction and to change the image of the Party with voters. Many of these new activists were tired of the DFL dominance in statewide elections and sought bold change from what many believed to be a party that was too accommodating to the opposition. Newspaper reports from

that time refer to Boschwitz as “energetic”, “colorful”, and “flamboyant” which his opponents believed to be pejorative descriptions of Rudy; grassroots activists saw these descriptions of their party’s new leader as a step in the right direction.

Speaking privately Democrats were concerned about the election of Boschwitz because he was “colorful and imaginative.”<sup>43</sup> As it turned out, DFL leaders in 1971 who expressed concerns about the election of Rudy Boschwitz as Republican National Committeeman were well-founded. He defeated a well-known and well-respected long time party leader by running on a platform which stressed that the Republican party needed to shed its country club image and do a much better job of appealing to middle-class, suburban families. Boschwitz’s victory represented more than just his colorful personality. It was a reflection of the larger ideological change taking place within the state. The Republican Party got more than just a national committeeman or a change of image; the growing conservative movement in Minnesota got a leader.

### **Biding His Time**

As National Committeeman Rudy Boschwitz was determined that the Republican Party would field a strong candidate for United States Senate to take on popular incumbent U.S. Senator Walter Mondale (DFL) in 1972. A rising national Democratic star, Mondale was seen by many as unbeatable in his first re-election campaign to the US Senate. There had even been an effort to recruit Boschwitz to run. Boschwitz had other plans, however, and wanted to bide his time for the right opportunity. Instead, the newly elected party officer devoted his time towards finding a viable candidate to lead the Minnesota ticket and eventually recruited Phil Hansen to run for Senate.<sup>44</sup> A political conservative and Lutheran minister Hansen was well known for his development of effective alcohol and chemical dependency treatments (the relationship was a close one as Hansen later chaired Boschwitz’s 1978 campaign). At the same convention that endorsed Hansen insurgent conservatives led a revolt against the proposed platform they perceived as

being too liberal. The “minor mutiny” resulted in a platform with a slightly more conservative “tinge.”<sup>45</sup> While Hansen was later defeated by the popular Mondale in the general election, his recruitment by Boschwitz and endorsement by the Republican Party, as well as the platform fight at the state convention, were further outward signs of the growing power of the conservative movement within the Minnesota Republican Party.

The 1972 elections were a disaster for Minnesota Republicans beyond just losing the Senate race. While incumbent President Nixon carried the state for Republicans for the first time since 1956, the victory had no positive coattail effect for the other GOP candidates on the ballot. The popularity of Governor Wendell Anderson and the re-election of U.S. Senator Walter Mondale helped liberal Democrats take control of both houses of the Minnesota legislature for the first time in state history (prior to 1972, legislators were elected without official party designation on the ballot; political leaders kept score, however, of the political affiliations of those elected).<sup>46</sup> This defeat, combined with the setbacks in the 1970 elections, did not bode well for the future of the Minnesota GOP. The DFL Party with its new crop of promising young elected officials seemed like the party of the future. Boschwitz and many grassroots activists were frustrated with state party leadership who concentrated on the mechanics of elections, but were tone deaf on messaging.<sup>47</sup> In his trademark bluntness Boschwitz stated, “the leaders aren’t leading.”<sup>48</sup> Many of the newer conservative activists at the time believed the GOP would be more successful in future elections if they highlighted the issue differences between the two parties, stressing the economic conservatism of the Republican Party vs. the ‘big spending liberals’ in the DFL.

### **A Changing of the Guard**

Boschwitz’s 1971 National Committeeman election proved he was unafraid to take on the establishment to pursue what he believed was the right course and he wasn’t afraid to step on a few toes to do it. But to fundamentally transform the



Party process and change the image and messaging of the Party, he knew more changes in leadership were necessary to move the Party away from the course that had been set by the GOP establishment which he referred to as “the club.”<sup>49</sup> It was too late to make those changes prior to the 1972 elections, but Boschwitz was already formulating plans to capture those political offices when the Party leadership elections took place in the spring of 1973. The incumbent state chairman was David Krogseng, a liberal Republican who previously served on the staff of several elected officials. Boschwitz had publicly challenged the chairman’s management of the party and tried to dramatically alter the party’s approach on messaging and fundraising.<sup>50</sup>

While Boschwitz’s effort to change the messaging of the Minnesota GOP was “defeated by the Republican hierarchy” he appealed to the grassroots activists to back his ideas for change.<sup>51</sup> Given the results of the 1972 election Krogseng decided not to seek a second two-year term as Chairman at the GOP State Central Committee meeting in 1973. As part of his plan to reform the GOP, Boschwitz recruited and actively supported grassroots conservative State Senator Bob Brown for state chairman over the more liberal candidate Lars Carlson (brother of recently elected State Representative Arne Carlson).<sup>52</sup> Lars Carlson had been state campaign manager of the Rockefeller for President campaign in 1968, and had garnered the support of virtually all of the senior Republican Party leadership and elected officials. At the June 1973 State Central Committee meeting in Saint Louis Park Boschwitz was the only Party leader of any significance to support Brown and the *Minneapolis Tribune* referred it as the “Brown-Boschwitz Team.”<sup>53</sup>

Boschwitz believed this particular inter-party battle for control of the state Republican apparatus would be key in determining the electoral success of the party for years to come. He was determined to win this party election because he strongly believed this was an important step towards winning elections. While Boschwitz and Brown did not have the backing of the establishment they did have the support of grassroots conservative activists, which ultimately turned out to be

more important. Brown won the chairmanship of the Minnesota Republican Party in a close election and press reports attributed his success to Boschwitz's personal intervention and aggressive support. It was also attributable to the growing political clout of the conservative movement.<sup>54</sup> The *Minneapolis Tribune* coverage made clear that Brown's election was a "public spanking for the establishment that has controlled the state's Republican Party for years and failed to alter its approach to politics even when its emphasis on organizational matters produced only defeat at the ballot box."<sup>55</sup> Brown's election, as well as Boschwitz's earlier election as Republican National Committeeman, was a repudiation of the more liberal establishment and a victory for the "free-wheeling" Boschwitz efforts to "break the party's traditional mold."<sup>56</sup> Brown believed Rudy Boschwitz helped fill the leadership vacuum among the grassroots.<sup>57</sup> The growing conservative movement was beginning to flex its muscles within the Minnesota Republican Party.

### **The Impact of Watergate**

Much has been written about the negative effect the Watergate scandal had on the 1974 mid-term elections nationwide for the Republican Party. The outcomes were no different in Minnesota. On August 9, 1974, President Richard Nixon became the first U.S. president to resign from office. At the time Boschwitz said, "I'm really tempted to say that now Dick Nixon doesn't have us to kick around anymore...the country can begin functioning without the cloud of Watergate."<sup>58</sup> Regardless, the "cloud of Watergate" had already done its damage to the GOP and the 1974 Republican candidates for Minnesota Governor and the U.S. Senate: they were defeated by sizable margins. A legislative change was made during the 1973 legislative session that allowed candidates for the state House of Representatives to run with "party designation" on the ballot for the first time since 1913. The change couldn't have come at a worse time for Minnesota Republicans. Attaching the name of the political party next to a GOP candidate's name at the height of the Watergate scandal was political poison to GOP legislative candidates

in the 1974 election with Republicans winning just 31 of 134 legislative seats.<sup>59</sup> While Watergate was a political disaster for the party for several years, in the long term it did have the effect of clearing away many liberal Republican office holders. This opened the door for the new conservatives within the Party to seek elective, appointive and political offices, allowing for the promotion of many new leaders in the aftermath of the devastating political storm.

### **Building an Organization**

In spite of the disastrous 1974 election results, Boschwitz continued to travel the state on behalf of Republican candidates and causes. GOP activist Jerry Robbins made it clear that “During the lean years of the Republican Party when we would need somebody, when we needed money, or somebody to appear at a fundraiser, he was there.”<sup>60</sup> He was also occupied at this time by a rapidly growing business as well as a rapidly growing family of four young sons. As he traveled the state, Rudy methodically collected the names and contact information for those whom he met on the campaign trail. In those less-technological times, he traveled with a small cassette tape recording machine in his pocket. Using this rudimentary device he recorded the contact information of everyone he met with eventually building himself a database of contacts from across the state.<sup>61</sup> Boschwitz would frequently communicate with this growing grassroots community by publishing a newsletter in which he would comment about the issues of the day. The newsletter, much like Ronald Reagan’s speeches given on behalf of General Electric two decades earlier, gave Boschwitz a chance to hone and develop his conservative voice.

Boschwitz also became active in the philanthropic community, raising money for the American Cancer Society, the Minnesota Kidney Foundation, the Minnesota Mental Health Association, the United Jewish Appeal as well as several other philanthropic and religious organizations.<sup>62</sup> Just as in his business or political efforts, Boschwitz reveled in “making the sale” to raise money and awareness for whatever cause he supported. The practical effect of these efforts was to enlarge

his network beyond the business or political communities where he was increasingly well-known. He was also rapidly becoming a household name due to the Plywood Minnesota television ads which prominently featured Boschwitz, creating a positive, appealing image of the salesman Rudy, clad in what became his signature plaid shirt and implanted the image of “plywood salesman” in people’s minds long before he decided to seek high office.

### **The Conservative Movement Coalesces**

During the mid-1970s the modern conservative coalition was coalescing. This movement merged fiscal watchdogs and small government advocates with social conservatives and foreign policy hawks. These three pillars formed the foundation of the modern-day conservative movement in America. In 1976 former California Governor Ronald Reagan became the defacto leader of modern-day conservatives by challenging the incumbent President Gerald R. Ford, who had ascended to the presidency in August of 1974 upon the resignation of Richard Nixon, and who was considered to be a moderate Republican. The 1976 Republican National Convention in Kansas City saw the emergence of an ideological coalition devoted to smaller government, a strong national defense, and respect for human life from conception to natural death. While conservatives at the convention eventually dropped their opposition to Ford’s nomination, they were successful in nominating Kansas conservative Senator Bob Dole to replace Ford-appointed Vice President Nelson Rockefeller. Several of the leading conservative delegates at the 1976 convention would later become conservative leaders in Congress, where they, eventually with their newly elected ally Rudy Boschwitz, continued their fight to move the party to the right.

Some of the most significant convention battles in Kansas City occurred during the party platform deliberations. Delegates were successful, for the first time, at inserting a pro-life plank in the party platform. The ideological battle between Reagan and Ford represented the beginning of the changing of the guard

nationally within the Republican Party, while also setting the table for the Minnesota 1978 conservative revolution.

Back in Minnesota, Rudy Boschwitz had his hands full with his growing business but also kept a keen eye on the political landscape. He had made the decision to run for statewide office, but was awaiting the right opportunity. Yet, it was not immediately clear to many which office Boschwitz would decide to seek. As early as 1974 he commissioned a study on the record of then-incumbent Senator Walter Mondale in preparation for a possible run. But like so many other Republican politicians that year, Boschwitz's plans were disrupted by the Watergate scandal. With few statewide opportunities in the 1976 election, Boschwitz cast his gaze to 1978. Privately, he considered his options for both Governor and U.S. Senate. Some long-time Republican activists thought the first-time candidate should set his sights a bit lower, urging him to run for the state legislature.<sup>63</sup> But a growing number of conservatives believed Boschwitz had the potential to win statewide.<sup>64</sup> Boschwitz would be a new kind of Republican—in the mold of the “businessman/candidate” that many believed would provide a winning contrast with state Democrats and appeal to the growing suburban middle class voter. It was that combination of business experience and robust conservatism that drew the attention of conservative leaders throughout the state. Boschwitz also melded economic and social conservatism, a novelty at the time, and a first for the movement in Minnesota.

### **The Impact of *Roe v. Wade***

On January 22, 1973, the Supreme Court of the United States issued a ruling that would reshape American politics for decades to come. In short order, the reverberations of *Roe v. Wade* would be felt in Minnesota. While the Republican Party of Minnesota had previously been supportive of legalized abortion, the growing and very vocal grassroots conservative movement increasingly swayed the party toward a pro-life position, as these new political activists added a social element

to the conservative movement. Prior to 1973, Republican Party politics was dominated almost exclusively by economic and national security conservatives. Now, with social conservatives in the fold, many of whom were encouraged to enter politics by their religious leaders, battle lines were drawn and these new activists pushed candidates and elected officials in both parties to take a stand one way or the other on abortion. Politicians found themselves pressured to discuss issues that previously were outside the political realm.

As a candidate for the U.S. Senate, Boschwitz came out with a strong pro-life stance. That was neither an obvious nor an easy decision, and he would take withering criticism from many members of his own party. However, as he later made clear “[I] cannot in good conscience take anything other than a pro-life stand.”<sup>65</sup> He was convinced by medical research showing that the genetic code that makes each person unique was determined at conception. Boschwitz was also greatly influenced by Father Paul Zylla.<sup>66</sup> Zylla, chairman of the pro-life activities of the St. Cloud Diocese, gained notoriety at the time for his letters to Senator Hubert Humphrey urging the Senator to consider a pro-life position. Finally, Boschwitz’s friendship with a young political operative named Vin Weber would also solidify Boschwitz’s stance.<sup>67</sup> Weber was a native of Slayton, Minnesota, where his family was active in Republican politics for several generations. Weber served on the board of directors for Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life (MCCL), the largest and most influential right-to-life group in Minnesota. Weber would play an essential and enduring role in Boschwitz’s political pursuits for decades to come.

### **The Making of a Senator, 1978**

In 1976, Democrats were still riding the electoral fallout from Watergate to victory at both the national and state levels. Minnesota’s own U.S. Senator Walter Mondale was selected by Georgia Governor James Earl (Jimmy) Carter, Jr. to be his running mate in their successful campaign against incumbent Gerald Ford.

In an effort to distance themselves from the national party of a disgraced

president, in 1975 Republican State Chairman Chuck Slocum proposed changing the Party's name to the "Independent-Republicans of Minnesota."<sup>68</sup> The state convention supported that proposal and on November 15, 1975 made it official. It was a move the image and message conscious Boschwitz supported, and would remain the official name of the Party for almost two decades. Notwithstanding the Party's rebranding efforts, an ailing Hubert Humphrey easily won reelection over a little-known Republican opponent Jerry Brekke by over 30 percentage points.

The 1976 presidential election did promise to shake up the local political lineup as the election of Mondale as Vice President created a vacancy for his U.S. Senate seat. Minnesota law called for the governor to appoint a replacement to serve for the remainder of the term, which expired after a replacement was selected at the 1978 election. Popular and energetic Governor Wendell Anderson, who had been featured on the cover of *Time* magazine for leading a "state that works," was easily reelected to a second term in 1974, and made history by winning a majority of the votes cast in each of the state's 87 counties, a state record that still stands.

Anderson quickly determined that he was more interested in the senate vacancy than he was in remaining governor. However, instead of appointing himself to fill the vacancy, Anderson resigned as Governor, elevating then-Lieutenant Governor Rudy Perpich to the governor's office, so that Perpich could then appoint Anderson to the Senate. On December 30, 1976, Governor Perpich appointed former Governor Wendell Anderson to fill the vacancy in the U.S. Senate. Critics derided the ham-handed arrangement as a brazen power grab by the ambitious Anderson, and to a lesser extent Perpich.

Anderson's appointment and subsequent firestorm energized Republicans throughout the state who began to see the 1978 elections as an opportunity to reverse their decade of election night disappointments. Coming at a time of intense Watergate-inspired cynicism only made the fallout for Anderson more intense, creating a golden opportunity for Republicans. In addition to the Governor's race, the death of Hubert Humphrey meant two U.S. Senate seats would appear on the up-



Rudy Boschwitz as state campaign Chairman for Richard Nixon in 1968 with GOP Congressman Ancher Nelsen



Rudy Boschwitz founded Plywood Minnesota in 1963



Boschwitz taking the oath of office for United States Senator in 1978. Pictured left to right: Dan, Tom, Rudy, Ellen, Walter Mondale, Ken, Gerry



Boschwitz

PEOPLE FOR BOSCHWITZ

People for Boschwitz  
Bumper Sticker

# Wendell Anderson says he doesn't have the second worst voting record in the U.S. Senate.

## The Congressional Record says he does.

Attendance Record for the 520 U.S. Senate, 94th Congress, Second Session Votes as of End of Session:

1. Proxmire	100%	35. Morgan	93%	69. Biden	87%
2. Jackson	99%	36. DeConcini	93%	70. Bumpers	86%
3. Lugar	99%	37. Garn	92%	71. Long	85%
4. Zorinsky	99%	38. Javits	92%	72. Laxalt	84%
5. Byrd, H.	99%	39. Hayakawa	92%	73. Percy	84%
6. Byrd, R.	99%	40. Matsunaga	92%	74. Curtis	84%
7. Metzenbaum	98%	41. Packwood	92%	75. Hatfield, M.	83%
8. Glenn	98%	42. Stevenson	92%	76. Scott	83%
9. Leahy	97%	43. Bartlett	92%	77. Young	82%
10. Nelson	97%	44. Hodges	92%	78. Huddleston	82%
11. Stone	97%	45. Bentsen	92%	79. Sparkman	81%
12. Hansen	97%	46. Heinz	92%	80. Gravel	81%
13. Chiles	96%	47. Thurmond	91%	81. Hatfield, P.	81%
14. Danforth	96%	48. Church	89%	82. Mathias	79%
15. Schweiker	96%	49. Moynihan	89%	83. McGovern	79%
16. Hatch	96%	50. Allen, M.	89%	84. Baker	79%
17. Sarbanes	95%	51. Clark	89%	85. Pearson	78%
18. Dole	95%	52. Wallop	89%	86. Humphrey, M.	76%
19. Schmitt	95%	53. Pell	89%	87. Stennis	76%
20. Williams	95%	54. Sasser	89%	88. Inouye	76%
21. Chafee	94%	55. Burdick	89%	89. Domenici	74%
22. Hart	94%	56. Kennedy	89%	90. McClure	74%
23. Roth	94%	57. Muskie	89%	91. Goldwater	73%
24. Culver	94%	58. Case	89%	92. Griffin	73%
25. Magnuson	94%	59. Eagleton	89%	93. Brooke	73%
26. Cranston	94%	60. Randolph	89%	94. McIntyre	72%
27. Hollings	93%	61. Stevens	88%	95. Hathaway	71%
28. Ford	93%	62. Tower	88%	96. Johnston	69%
29. Melcher	93%	63. Talmadge	88%	97. Eastland	63%
30. Cannon	93%	64. Ribicoff	88%	98. Haskell	52%
31. Durkin	93%	65. Stafford	88%	99. ANDERSON	48%
32. Riegle	93%	66. Weicker	88%	100. Abourezk	43%
33. Nunn	93%	67. Bellmon	88%		
34. Bayh	93%	68. Helms	87%		

Source: Congressional Record

Wendell Anderson says he has a good voting record in the U.S. Senate.

Let's look at what the Congressional Record has to say. *First*, for the entire time he's

been in the U.S. Senate, only three Senators have worse voting records than Wendell Anderson.

*Second*, this year in the U.S. Senate, Wendell Anderson ranks 99th out of 100 in voting attendance.

*Third*, among the 22 U.S. Senators running for re-election this year, Wendell Anderson ranks 22nd.

Who are you going to believe? Wendell Anderson or the Congressional Record?

**Rudy Boschwitz  
for U.S. Senate**

Prepared and paid for by the "People for Boschwitz," P.O. Box 10, Minneapolis, MN 55401, Rev. Phil Hanson, chairman.

Sample of campaign ad from 1978

coming midterm ballot with an unpopular Democratic president presiding in Washington, D.C. Historians have long noted a contrarian trend in Minnesota's midterm elections where the party in power in D.C. often does not prevail in the North Star State. With an unpopular president presiding in Washington, this new band of Minnesota conservatives saw 1978 as an opportunity to run one of their own.

### **The Decision is Made**

Anderson's "self-appointment" tipped the scales for Boschwitz in favor of running for the U.S. Senate.<sup>69</sup> Boschwitz also decided the Senate was a better fit for him because of his passion for foreign affairs and economic policy. Furthermore, the Senate would allow him to continue operating his business, something he could not do as a state's chief executive.<sup>70</sup> Boschwitz was always somewhat conflicted by his father's warning that being politically active could harm his business. This weighed heavily on Boschwitz's political decision-making process since by 1977 Plywood Minnesota was booming with dozens of locations and hundreds of employees throughout the state.

Vin Weber and other political leaders in Minnesota felt "Boschwitz the businessman" cut a strong contrast with career politician Anderson. Both men were lawyers by training, but that is where the similarities begin and end. Unlike Anderson, Boschwitz was a self-made businessman and entrepreneur, and still something of a political newcomer. In the post-Watergate era, the public had become skeptical or even cynical about political insiders, regardless of party. Boschwitz and Anderson were also easily contrasted in terms of style and demeanor: Rudy carefully planned his laid-back, populist approach to the campaign by emphasizing his natural, volunteer-based style of retail campaigning throughout the state, always wearing his signature plaid shirts. Anderson had a more reserved and customary, buttoned-down approach to campaigning.

Of course, while Rudy Boschwitz was a first-time candidate, he was not exactly a political novice. All the years of traveling the state on behalf of Re-

publican candidates, all the years of raising money for others, all the years of building a network had laid the groundwork for Boschwitz to run for statewide elective office. And nearly a decade of ubiquitous Plywood Minnesota marketing and advertising had made Rudy Boschwitz into something of a household face and name; yet the methodical Boschwitz took nothing for granted. To test the waters for a statewide campaign, a draft committee was formed with a seemingly whimsical, but actually carefully selected name: “A lot of People who want Rudy Boschwitz in the U.S. Senate.”<sup>71</sup> The name fit the overall strategy and approach of the Boschwitz effort—to reinforce the image of Boschwitz as a folksy, populist, political outsider who was in touch with the average Minnesotan. In addition to testing the waters, the effort was also designed to make the case among Republicans that the populist and popular Boschwitz was best positioned to defeat the suddenly unpopular Anderson. The effort stressed Boschwitz’s credentials as a businessman and an unusual politician—a sharp difference when compared with the newly “self-appointed” senator.<sup>72</sup>

Despite Boschwitz’s almost ten years of volunteer work on behalf of the Independent-Republican Party he faced opposition by some of the same establishment forces he had been battling since the beginning of his political involvement. *St. Paul Pioneer Press* columnist William Sumner wrote that the “mossbacks” in the Party who were embarrassed by Boschwitz’s “colorful behavior” were “missing their best shot” at winning against Anderson.<sup>73</sup> Sumner argued Boschwitz was exactly the kind of candidate Republicans needed against the incumbent Anderson because he was “an honest, open, free-swinging individual...he stands as a representative specimen of what this country is about,” values that were desperately needed in Washington.<sup>74</sup>

### **Candidate Boschwitz**

With the groundwork laid, the waters tested, and the environment right, Boschwitz jumped in to the race with both feet. On October 17, 1977 Boschwitz officially

announced his campaign and immediately started running campaign television ads one year before the election, something unheard of up to that point in Minnesota. The Boschwitz strategy was simple. Blitz the airwaves with the largest television campaign the state had seen and back it up with the most extensive statewide grassroots campaign ever mounted to turn out the vote.<sup>75</sup> The goal was to outspend Anderson on television by a ratio of 2 to 1.<sup>76</sup> From a messaging perspective the plan was to emphasize Boschwitz's "free-wheeling" style as someone who was a friend of the common man.<sup>77</sup> This also involved enhancing his image as a successful businessman who was a believer in the free-enterprise system. There were already too many lawyers in Washington, the campaign would argue; it was time to send a businessman to Washington. The overarching strategy of the campaign was to always maintain control of the debate—to never let the Anderson campaign get the chance to gain the initiative. Boschwitz's announcement virtually cleared the field of serious Republican candidates to run against Anderson. Boschwitz's only challenger of note from within the Independent-Republican Party came from Harold Stassen, who had been Governor in 1938 and a serious presidential contender in 1948; by this point was better known as a perennial presidential candidate. Boschwitz easily defeated Stassen in both the endorsement and in the September primary.<sup>78</sup>

Boschwitz's campaign plan was largely developed by Vin Weber, who later was elected to Congress in his own right, but who at the time was one of the rising stars among the young conservative operatives.<sup>79</sup> The election of Republican Tom Hagedorn to Congress in Minnesota's Second Congressional District in the tough 1976 election had intrigued Boschwitz, especially Weber's work on that campaign. In late 1976 Boschwitz met with Weber and was impressed.<sup>80</sup> In their conversations, Weber convinced Boschwitz that a businessman like him could win statewide office. Boschwitz became convinced Weber was the person to lead his campaign. Weber was smart and savvy beyond his years. He was a part of the emerging conservative youth movement that had been developing on college

campuses in the 1960s and 1970s. While not garnering the same media attention of the campus anti-war protestors of the 1960s, these young conservatives proved to have terrific organizing skills. Weber, along with other young recently graduated conservatives such as John Frydenlund, Jack Meeks, Tony Trimble, and Mark Piepho formed a core group of supporters for the Reagan for President campaign in Minnesota in 1976 (and later in 1980).<sup>81</sup> These Young Turks met and formed a relationship in College Republicans and were trained, hired and promoted under the tutelage of college Professor and Party Chairman Bob Brown.<sup>82</sup>

### **A Well-Oiled Machine**

Although no political prognosticators could have predicted what would happen on Election Night, overall 1978 was shaping up to be an important watershed election for conservatives in Minnesota. Longtime First District Congressman Al Quie, genial and well liked, was recruited to run for Governor against a vulnerable Rudy Perpich. David Durenberger, a lawyer and corporate executive at H.B. Fuller as well as former Chief of Staff for Governor Harold LeVander, was convinced to drop his campaign for governor and instead run for the late Hubert Humphrey's seat in the U.S. Senate. Durenberger's political lineage was linked through LeVander to Harold Stassen, Elmer L. Anderson and the remainders of the "diaper brigade" moderate Republicans who first came to prominence in the later 1930s. Quie and Durenberger were well liked by the traditional establishment of the State GOP. Due to their establishment backing they ran campaigns that would be considered more traditional when compared with Boschwitz's approach.

Throughout the 1978 campaign season, the Boschwitz campaign gained a reputation among political veterans of being a well-oiled machine. Rudy believed in running his campaign like a business, mixing detailed planning with decisive action and operational efficiency.<sup>83</sup> He was frustrated by the traditional campaign approach of endless meetings in which decisions were made through slow consensus building. In a dynamic modern campaign environment that kind of analy-

sis-paralysis could be death for a campaign. An important aspect to the Boschwitz campaign success was the campaign's ability to make quick and decisive decisions. The candidate and the campaign team led by Vin Weber and Jann Olsten knew where they wanted to go and had a plan to get there. As a result they could focus on execution. They could be decisive, but not inflexible, allowing themselves enough freedom to react to changing dynamics in the political landscape. But one key to their success was their ability to actively shape events, rather than reacting to them, which helped control the debate and put their opposition on the defensive.<sup>84</sup>

To introduce Boschwitz statewide, the campaign produced an early television ad campaign stressing Rudy's down to earth approach, featuring the catchy jingle "Gather Round Minnesota, Gather Round", showing Boschwitz as a "man of the people". The spots, which were developed by advertising executive Bob Goodman, reinforced the folksy style of the Mel Jass-inspired Plywood Minnesota ads but polished them for a political audience.<sup>85</sup> The ad campaign's theme was that Boschwitz was a new, fresh face, genuine and likeable—and always on point that Rudy was a "successful businessman." This theme was important because it carried the implication that government ought to be run more like a business—efficient and cost effective. This was an important theme for conservatives, but also matched Boschwitz's core belief that free enterprise was essential for a strong economy and a free people. It was also complimented by his Milton Friedman-inspired economic belief that government was getting in the way of sustainable economic growth and prosperity.

### “Abortion, Boundary Waters and Canoes”

Part of the strategy developed by Weber and the Boschwitz campaign was to exploit the growing fissures within the DFL Party regarding abortion as well as divisive Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA) legislation.<sup>86</sup> As much as the Republican Party had been impacted by the issue of abortion in the wake of the *Roe*

v. *Wade* decision, so was the DFL Party.<sup>87</sup> Twin Cities pro-choice liberals were at odds with pro-life rural Democrats. Wendell Anderson, who was opposed to abortion, had begun to waffle on the issue in an attempt to appeal to voters on both sides of the issue. Instead he alienated activists and voters on both sides. Boschwitz, on the other hand, had taken a firm and unwavering pro-life stand.

A similar situation occurred with the issue of the BWCA. DFL U.S. Representative Bruce Vento who represented the Fourth Congressional District (Saint Paul area) had sponsored legislation which banned motorboats, snowmobiles and logging over wide swaths of the northern Minnesota wilderness area that bordered Canada. As U.S. Senator, Wendell Anderson carried similar legislation in the Senate, but the Senate version of this legislation was much less restrictive on the use of outboard motors and snowmobiles. Anderson's version appealed to many northern Minnesota DFLers who believed that Congressman Vento's BWCA legislation would eliminate many jobs and small businesses that depended on tourism. Anderson's approach, however, upset many Twin Cities-based conservationists and environmental activists who favored a complete ban on the use of outboard motors and snowmobiles in this pristine wilderness area. In contrast to Anderson, Boschwitz supported a plan that restricted the use of motors. He said at the time, "I think it is a unique area of the state and ought to be preserved."<sup>88</sup> On a practical level, the Boschwitz campaign didn't expect to get many votes out of Northeastern Minnesota regardless of their position, but "Boschwitz might be able to deprive Anderson of environmentally minded DFL and Independent votes in other parts of the state."<sup>89</sup>

Abortion and the BWCA became key wedge issues, dividing Democrats and driving votes from Anderson to Boschwitz. As 8th District DFL Congressman Jim Oberstar lamented, DFL unity hinged on finding some common ground on the "ABC's"—Abortion, Boundary Waters and Canoes.<sup>90</sup>

## The Influence of Milton Friedman

The political and economic philosophy of Milton Friedman was one of the most significant influences on the political, economic, and general life philosophy of Rudy Boschwitz. “I remember as a young man writing to my parents and discussing the economic philosophy of Milton Friedman...I was always an economic conservative,” Boschwitz said.<sup>91</sup> Boschwitz came to believe free markets, with minimal government intervention, were the key to sustained prosperity and a strong democracy. While Friedman later became an advisor to President Ronald Reagan, Boschwitz looked to Friedman’s views on free market principles as the bedrock of his political philosophy from his earliest days. Boschwitz’s view on free enterprise was very much in line with his philosophy of looking out for the little guy. “Free enterprise,” he said, “should not connote a series of corporate giants growing larger. It means people that have access into the economic mainstream and that the economic system responds to supply and demand.”<sup>92</sup>

This influence is shown in the 1978 Senate campaign as Boschwitz came out early in support of the Kemp-Roth tax plan, which called for reducing taxes by 33% in three years. The Boschwitz campaign took out full-page newspaper ads touting “The Rudy Boschwitz Tax Attack” in which Boschwitz outlined a four-point plan for tax relief.<sup>93</sup> In addition to cutting taxes, the plan included indexing income taxes to inflation, inheritance tax exemptions for farmers and small business, and one “equitable tax table” regardless of marital status. It was a message grounded in the Milton Friedman inspired free market principles that had always guided his life. It was also a message aimed squarely at middle class voters. The newspaper ads even included the tag line: “He’s you and me.”<sup>94</sup> This was echoed later in the campaign when Boschwitz was critical of President Carter’s plan for wage and price controls to deal with inflation. Boschwitz was blunt in his assessment that “wage and price controls are not going to work.”<sup>95</sup> Boschwitz made it clear he believed inflation could not be brought under control until the spending of the federal government was brought under control.



## Closing the Sale

While Boschwitz led early in the campaign against Wendell Anderson, public opinion polls showed that the senator had been able to narrow the gap considerably by Labor Day. Anderson appeared in television ads apologizing to Minnesotans for the seemingly self-serving nature of his appointment to the Senate. The apology ads worked: many undecided DFLers finally made up their minds to vote for Anderson. Dick Goldman, the Boschwitz campaign's pollster, told the campaign his survey research was showing the tide was turning and the campaign had to change its messaging.<sup>96</sup> He believed the campaign could no longer rely on just the positive "Gather Round" theme for the rest of the campaign. While these ads had created a positive image of Rudy Boschwitz in the minds of many voters, it wasn't enough. The campaign needed to create a bigger contrast with Anderson and remind voters about the self-appointment issue. Bob Goodman, based in Baltimore, was not able to turn new ads around fast enough.<sup>97</sup> Campaign chairman Jann Olsten and campaign finance chairman Bruce Thomson turned to the local Minneapolis talent of Ron Anderson with Bozel & Jacobs to develop new TV and print ads to regain momentum.<sup>98</sup>

The theme of the new ads went back to the self-appointment issue, but with an added, new twist: the new television advertisements shared with voters Anderson's attendance record in the Senate, which was 99<sup>th</sup> worst out of 100. The message was simple and direct—since Anderson appointed himself to the job you'd think he'd show up, and if he wasn't showing up, he wasn't doing his job. One advertisement went even further and reminded voters of the brazenly ambitious nature of Anderson's self-appointment. The television ad displayed a series of photographs of liberal leaders and elected officials who Anderson could have appointed to the Senate. The final picture was one of himself with a voice over tag line: "Wendell Anderson wanted to get to the U.S. Senate in the worst way. And that's exactly how he got there."<sup>99</sup> Again, simple and direct, the ad was a powerful reminder to voters of why they disliked Anderson's actions in the first

place. This provided the contrast the campaign was looking for of a political insider who would do anything to advance his political career versus the fresh faced successful businessman who didn't need political office to be successful, but who was truly interested in serving. Polling showed that this approach was working. Soon thereafter, the Boschwitz campaign regained momentum and Anderson's campaign went back on the ropes.

### **A Conservative Wins**

It is somehow appropriate that election night 1978 was also Rudy Boschwitz's birthday.<sup>100</sup> Hosting a birthday party at the Hotel de France and watching the election returns roll in, it was apparent Boschwitz would not merely win, but win big, garnering almost 57% of the vote. The historic election became known as the "Minnesota Massacre", in which the GOP elected two U.S. Senators, a Governor, and a State Auditor, and nearly doubled their state House delegation from 35 seats to 67, resulting in an evenly split chamber.

The 1978 election was also an important test for the conservative movement in Minnesota. It showed that even in the land of Hubert Humphrey and Walter Mondale their conservative message appealed to voters. While Quie, Durenberger and Boschwitz all benefited from DFL missteps, it would be a mistake to dismiss their victories as flukes, especially in the case of Boschwitz. While Anderson's self-appointment was important in setting the stage, the voters would not have turned him out of office without a credible alternative. Boschwitz's 1978 campaign provided validation that a coalition of fiscal and social conservatives could win with the right type of candidate. Boschwitz had presented himself as a self-made businessman who understood real-world problems and firmly believed in the principles of the free market. He was also the best messenger for appealing to the growing suburban middle class, a key demographic target both at Plywood Minnesota and throughout his Senate campaigns. He knew how to appeal to their sensibilities about limited government and fiscal responsibility. Boschwitz was

also able to appeal to the yet unnamed “Reagan Democrats” with a message of fiscal restraint and common-sense populism.

By proving that an unflinching conservative could win in Minnesota, Boschwitz set the stage for many campaigns of unapologetically conservative candidates. Boschwitz 1978 campaign manager Vin Weber credits Boschwitz campaign for being the catalyst of the modern conservative movement in Minnesota.<sup>101</sup> “We were confident in our policies. We were confident we were the majority,” said Weber, “a majority within the Party and with the general public as well.”<sup>102</sup> Rudy Boschwitz helped bring the conservative movement to maturity in Minnesota two years before the Reagan Revolution in 1980 that resulted in a permanent altering of the political landscape of America. Weber contends without Rudy Boschwitz there would be no conservatives like Tim Pawlenty, Norm Coleman, Rod Grams, Gil Gutknecht, John Kline, Erik Paulsen, Mark Kennedy, Chip Cravaack, or Michele Bachmann.<sup>103</sup> From the D.C. perspective, Minnesota’s reputation as a liberal bastion gave way to a more balanced view of a competitive, if somewhat left-leaning, state where the right conservative candidate had a fighter’s chance. For Minnesotans this meant leaner government and greater accountability.

### **Life in the Senate and Beyond**

As energetically as Boschwitz pursued his business and his campaign, he pursued his work in the Senate with even greater vigor. Despite his public image as the plywood pitchman in a plaid shirt Rudy Boschwitz “was a real intellectual and policy wonk” who understood the major legislation he was voting on.<sup>104</sup> Upon his swearing in, Boschwitz’s assignments included Agriculture, Small Business, Foreign Relations, and Budget committees. His seat on the Agriculture committee was of key importance in Minnesota. While agriculture had not been an initial area of expertise he understood its importance to Minnesota and quickly became a real leader in the Senate on agricultural issues.<sup>105</sup> His former Chief of Staff Gary

Russell recalled, “it is remarkable how quickly he became an expert on agricultural issues, and quickly he gained the respect of his Senate colleagues.”<sup>106</sup> His expertise and advocacy on behalf of farmers did not go unnoticed and in 1983 President Reagan said: “Rudy has been a major force on agricultural policy in the United States Congress. He’s never forgotten what the industry means to this State, and he’s fought hard to see that Minnesota’s farmers get a fair break in Washington.”

However, it was in other areas of federal policy that Boschwitz most embraced free-market principles and advanced the causes of personal and economic freedom. Boschwitz spent considerable time in his efforts in Washington where he was driven to cut wasteful spending programs and reduce the size and scope of government. Many of his favored policies can be seen as a precursor to the ideas being pursued today by two generations of Congressional conservatives who have followed Boschwitz.

### **Reforming the Budget and Cutting Wasteful Spending**

From day one of Boschwitz’s Senate career, he made it a leading priority to cut bureaucracy and waste in the federal government. During a debate on the Rural Development Policy and Coordination Act of 1979, Boschwitz challenged the bill’s sponsor, Sen. Patrick Leahy, about the bill’s \$20 million price tag. Columnist James J. Kilpatrick described the debate: “On the section 111 grants, Boschwitz wanted \$10 million, Leahy wanted \$20 million; they agreed on \$15 million. Boschwitz offered an amendment to that effect. Said Leahy: ‘By the force of sheer eloquence and perseverance Senator Boschwitz has worn me down. He has appealed to my own lopsided sense of fiscal responsibility, and because of that, I would join him in this amendment.’” In summary, Kilpatrick noted: “Rudy Boschwitz saved the taxpayers five million bucks the other day...”<sup>107</sup> This is an illustrative example of Boschwitz’s independent streak and willingness to take on the establishment, even as a Senate newcomer.<sup>108</sup>

Another example of this is a Boschwitz proposal entitled the Fair Play Budget, which would have limited annual growth in federal spending to 5 percent. The proposal was intended to “accomplish that most elusive of goals—a balanced budget.”<sup>109</sup> The Republican Senatorial Inner Circle described the 1984 Fair Play Budget as “one of the first major attempts to slow the growth of government.”<sup>110</sup> On introducing the Fair Play Budget, Boschwitz explained: “When I entered the Senate in 1979 the first budget I worked on grew at a rate of 18 percent. That’s a doubling every four years. Now the growth rate is 11 percent (a doubling every 7 years). But the budget is still growing too fast.”

Boschwitz also repeatedly sponsored the Common Sense Budget Act along with Minnesota Representative Bill Frenzel. The Common Sense Budget Act was a budget reform measure that would “require both the President and the Congress to draft a budget based on estimates of current fiscal year spending, proposing increases or decreases based on this level (rather than on an estimated baseline).”<sup>111</sup> The bill often attracted conservative cosponsors including Senators Jesse Helms, Chuck Grassley, and Trent Lott, but was ultimately unsuccessful in achieving passage. In describing his rationale for the budget reform measure, Boschwitz said “Let’s say the government spends \$100 on a program in one year with projections having it spend \$105 on that same program in the next year. If you bring it down to \$104, that’s somehow currently called ‘cutting’ the budget by \$1. We need to change the vocabulary.”<sup>112</sup> Boschwitz remained a champion of reducing wasteful and inefficient government spending throughout his entire tenure in the U.S. Senate.

## Taxes

Even before reaching the Senate, Boschwitz had strongly endorsed a sweeping tax cut proposal from Congressman Jack Kemp and Senator William Roth.<sup>113</sup> Boschwitz strongly supported the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981 (ERTA), or the Kemp-Roth Tax Cut, which dramatically reduced personal marginal income tax rates, cut estate taxes, and indexed tax rate thresholds to inflation to

avoid so-called “bracket creep.” The centerpiece of the tax plan was the across-the-board income tax cut, which reduced the top rate from 70 percent to 50 percent and reduced halved the bottom income tax rate to 11 percent. The bill also created individual retirement accounts (IRAs) that allowed workers to make pre-tax contributions that could be withdrawn at a lower tax rate after retirement. The option was especially appealing for younger workers and parents saving for their children’s education. This investment tool remains among the most popular and enduring elements of the tax cut package. The ERTA of 1981 and the 1986 tax reforms that followed were crowning achievements of President Reagan and conservatives in Congress during that era.

### **True to his principles on deficit reduction**

Boschwitz was not afraid to challenge those in his own party, at times taking confrontations public, including with the Reagan White House. In 1986, Boschwitz circulated a draft letter to his U.S. Senate colleagues intended for President Reagan, stating their opposition to tax reform without deficit reduction. Among the demands articulated by Boschwitz, Pete Domenici, and other senators, was that any additional revenues generated from a tax overhaul would be applied first towards deficit reduction. Boschwitz strongly advocated prioritizing deficit reduction over tax reform. “Fifty senators, including seven members of the Finance Committee, wrote to President Reagan on March 4 [of 1986] requesting him to delay the tax bill until there was agreement on reducing the deficit. According to the originator, Senator Rudy Boschwitz (R-Minn.), who, Dole said, spoke for a majority, the Senate would ‘neither consider nor debate’ the tax bill until the second round of Gramm-Rudman had been settled.”<sup>114</sup>

At a meeting with Boschwitz and other conservative deficit hawks, President Reagan’s chief of staff “said there was no need for Boschwitz to continue circulating a letter telling the president there must be action to reduce the budget deficit before the Senate considers tax overhaul legislation.” Boschwitz remarked

after the meeting: “They weren’t too thrilled with the letter” but added, “I think we’re going to go forward with the letter.”<sup>115</sup> Despite threatening to hold up the tax reform package, Boschwitz would eventually support it. The bill lowered personal income tax rates to 15 percent and 27 percent. “What we had then was tax complication. What we have now is tax reform. I am left breathless by this bill” he said after before the bill’s passage.

### **President Reagan on Boschwitz**

President Reagan understood Boschwitz was a true conservative leader on budget and fiscal issues: “When we were trying to get Federal spending under control, [Rudy] stood with us. When we were trying to get taxes, he fought—or to cut taxes, I should say—he fought the good fight. When we tried to bring about regulatory reform and open up an opportunity in American commerce and industry, he helped lead that fight...Rudy’s been a battler and a leader on the most important issue of the past few years—that of returning America to economic growth and prosperity.”<sup>116</sup>

Notwithstanding the occasional policy dispute with the White House, Boschwitz was a consistent supporter of President Reagan’s attempts to rein in the federal budget and the size of scope of the federal government.<sup>117</sup> He believed Reagan was driven not by politics, but by deeply held convictions about the proper role of government in American life, even when those convictions met strong political opposition.<sup>118</sup>

### **Strong national defense and support of Israel**

Boschwitz was a consistent supporter of the “peace through strength” approach to foreign policy as well as the robust national defense such an approach required. During the Cold War, Boschwitz “stressed the need for military parity with the Soviet Union.”<sup>119</sup> He understood what conservatives have always understood; it is only when America is strong that peace can be secured. It is impossible to se-



Rudy Boschwitz pictured discussing enterprise zones with Baltimore Mayor Donald Schaeffer and President Ronald Reagan.



Boschwitz conferring with President George H.W. Bush in the Oval Office.



Boschwitz with Sen. Bob Dole and President Reagan





Boschwitz working at his well-known Minnesota State Fair Super Duper Milk House

cure the peace if your enemies sense you are unable or unwilling to defend your country. Boschwitz was also committed to fostering strong strategic alliances to protect the interests of the U.S. and its allies. “Boschwitz understood history and knew how to apply the lessons of history to the world of today,” recalls former Chief of Staff Gary Russell.<sup>120</sup> Boschwitz understood the global threat presented by Communism and likened it to Hitler. He believed if the world had stood up to Hitler in the 1930s history would have been much different and that we could not repeat that mistake with Communism.<sup>121</sup>

Nowhere is Boschwitz’s commitment to these principles more evident than on matters affecting Israel.<sup>122</sup> Even as a freshman senator, Boschwitz had considerable influence over issues affecting Israel due to his seat on the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and chairmanship of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee’s Subcommittee on the Middle East. At times, this support would lead to clashes with fellow Republicans, and even the Reagan White House.

In 1981, Boschwitz fought against the Reagan administration’s plans to sell Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. At the time, the extraordinary controversial arms deal represented the largest sale of U.S. arms in history.<sup>123</sup> According to a history of Jewish American political leaders, “The Minnesota senator waged a furious fight against the Reagan administration’s sale of AWACS radar planes and missiles to Saudi Arabia, and played a pivotal role in forcing the administration to withdraw its proposed sale of arms to Jordan.” Boschwitz also urged American Jews to make their opposition known to other members of Congress.

In October 1981, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved a resolution recommending disapproval of the AWACS sale. The resolution passed by a razor-thin vote of 9-8, with Boschwitz siding with the committee’s eight Democrats.<sup>124</sup> Nonetheless, Boschwitz and Israeli advocates were unable to dissuade the Reagan administration on the AWACS sale, but the senator’s advocacy for Israeli security continued. He was especially instrumental in building congressional sup-

port for foreign aid to Israel. Douglas Bloomfield, former legislative director for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), credits Boschwitz and Jack Kemp with building support among Republicans in the 1970s and 1980s for a strategic alliance with Israel, making the case that “aid to Israel did more for us, dollar for dollar, than what we were spending for NATO.”<sup>125</sup>

Boschwitz’s support of Israel and Israeli policy, though strong, was not a rubber stamp. In one illustration of that independence, historian Rafael Medoff writes: “In early 1988, Jewish critics of Israeli policy persuaded two Jewish senators, Rudy Boschwitz and Carl Levin, to initiate a letter mildly critical of statements by Israel’s prime minister indicating reluctance to make additional territorial concessions to the Arabs.”<sup>126</sup> Due to his unique position, Boschwitz often acted as a mediator as well as an advocate, to bring people together to get things done that supported Israel but was also in the best interests of the United States.<sup>127</sup>

Following his Senate career, Boschwitz would serve on the boards of AIPAC and the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs.

### **Earned income tax credit**

Although first enacted in 1975, the earned income tax credit (EITC) began to gain favor among some conservatives in Congress and the Reagan Administration during the 1980s. In 1988, Sen. Boschwitz and Rep. Thomas Petri proposed reforming and expanding the program to account for family size. The tiered EITC would “create both a benefit tier for families with three children and a benefit tier for families with four or more children.”<sup>128</sup> Economists “praised the proposal”, and it gained some bipartisan support.<sup>129</sup> Boschwitz “argued during the wage debate that a better way to target aid to the working poor was to expand the earned income tax credit, indexing it to the number of children in families.” The proposal “won wide popularity in both parties.”<sup>130</sup>

While Boschwitz was unsuccessful in reforming the EITC in 1988, subsequent expansions have accomplished some of the same goals. In addition to in-

flation indexing included in President Reagan’s 1986 Tax Reform, “Congress has further made it more generous, with the maximum credit for a worker with three children increasing from \$400 in 1978 (about \$1,400 in 2012 dollars) to \$5,891 in 2012.”<sup>131</sup>

### **Enterprise zones**

Boschwitz’s background in business also informed his efforts to revitalize economically depressed areas. In 1989, Boschwitz advocated the creation of enterprise zones, “a package of tax incentives to encourage the development of new businesses to revitalize depressed inner cities and rural areas.”<sup>132</sup> The proposal was praised by the Heritage Foundation: “With the bipartisan enterprise zone legislation introduced in the House earlier this year (H.R. 6) by New York Congressman Charles Rangel, and the similar legislation introduced in the Senate by Minnesota Senator Rudy Boschwitz, we have at last an opportunity to enact strong and effective enterprise zone legislation to help revive the inner cities.”

Describing one feature of the legislation: “Payroll costs are the other major obstacle for small firms in depressed neighborhoods. The Rangel-Boschwitz legislation now before Congress addresses this by applying non-refundable income tax credits for certain types of employees.”<sup>133</sup>

### **Human rights and advocacy for refugees**

Boschwitz also made his mark as an advocate for refugees and human rights, issues that would play an important role throughout his public service and post-Senate career. While in the U.S. Senate, Boschwitz “traveled to Thailand to learn about Cambodian and Hmong refugees, and in the hope of ‘helping those in the United States stay there’”<sup>134</sup> Boschwitz also sought freedom for oppressed populations in foreign nations, including Soviet dissidents and Vietnamese political prisoners. He cosponsored a bill to identify “Jews and Evangelical Christians in the Soviet Union and Vietnamese registered with the Orderly Departure Pro-

gram to be [refugees].”<sup>135</sup> And in 1990, as one of his final acts as a U.S. Senator, Boschwitz sponsored a successful joint resolution designating October 30, 1990 as Refugee Day.<sup>136</sup>

In 1981, Boschwitz opposed President Reagan’s nomination of Dr. Ernest LeFever to be Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs.<sup>137</sup> Boschwitz shared the concerns of many of his colleagues on the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations regarding LeFever’s alleged ethical lapses involving his non-profit organization’s finances as well as a decidedly hands-off approach to addressing some nations’ human rights violations.<sup>138</sup> LeFever had told the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations: “In a formal, a legal sense, the U.S. government has no responsibility—and certainly no authority—to promote human rights in other sovereign states.” Boschwitz joined four Republicans and all eight Democrats in the committee in rejecting LeFever’s nomination, after which he withdrew his name from consideration for Senate approval. It was the first time a Reagan nominee failed to gain confirmation.

### **Agricultural Policy and Promotion**

After his 1984 US Senate re-election, Boschwitz played a major role in crafting the five-year farm bill that became law in 1990, the final year of his second term. By this time, Boschwitz had become one of the Senate’s most experienced and respected leaders on farming and agricultural production issues, which would help him shepherd the farm bill through a contentious process in the Senate Agriculture Committee. Democrats on the committee had insisted on including inflationary increases in the crop target prices upon which subsidies are based. Republicans balked at increasing subsidies, and ultimately prevailed, freezing most crop subsidies while also providing greater flexibility to farmers to rotate their crops. The committee passed the bill with just four dissenting votes. Boschwitz was pleased with the hard-earned consensus, calling it “particularly encouraging, considering that many members of the committee wanted to ‘turn back the clock’

toward greater government involvement in the pricing and production of agricultural commodities.”<sup>139</sup> He also touted it as a free market victory: “The most important feature of this bill is that the market element of agriculture still has a chance to work. Target prices were frozen, loan rates were not raised. The 1985 farm bill made progress toward free markets. This bill didn’t stop that.”

Boschwitz also made agricultural advocacy a major part of his activities in Minnesota. In Rudy’s first year as a senator, he began a tradition at the Minnesota State Fair that would endure even after his senate career ended, and was indelibly linked to the Boschwitz name. Rudy’s “Super Duper Milk House” was a place where Boschwitz encouraged fairgoers to “try some root beer milk, or one of the other flavors we have, or just let me know what’s on your mind.”<sup>140</sup> The booth was a way for Rudy to appeal to the state’s farmers, and market Minnesota-produced milk at a time when farmers were concerned about growing commodity surpluses. It was also an opportunity for Boschwitz to market himself to Minnesotans and was a popular State Fair destination.

Television news anchor and author E.D. Hill wrote about Rudy’s State Fair milk booth: “Like most of our country’s lawmakers, it seems Senator Boschwitz was a very wealthy man. But he was a self-made millionaire and never lost touch with the people he represented. Each year at the fair he’d be in his dairy booth, apron on, serving milk. Not just any milk, mind you...This was a man who loved milk and wanted to share his passion.”<sup>141</sup>

### 1984 Senate Re-election

In his first re-election campaign for the U.S. Senate, Boschwitz faced popular DFL Secretary of State Joan Anderson Growe. Growe had earned DFL Party endorsement after a 19-ballot marathon endorsement battle, which exposed major intraparty rifts. The *Washington Post* reported in October 1984, “the DFL organization is exhausted and divided after years of internal feuding over the abor-

tion issue. At the party's state convention in June, pro- and anti-abortion forces slugged it out for 26 hours straight hours before Growe, a feminist, won the Senate endorsement on the 19<sup>th</sup> ballot.”

From the beginning, Growe was overmatched and outspent by the charismatic and well-liked Boschwitz. Liberal columnist Ellen Goodman noted a similarity between Minnesota's U.S. Senate race and the presidential race that year: “The parallels between the presidential campaign and the Senate campaign have not been lost on the people in Fritz Mondale's home state. Republican Sen. Rudy Boschwitz is something of an anomaly in politically moderate, issue-oriented Minnesota.”<sup>142</sup> Anomaly or not, most polls showed Boschwitz maintaining healthy, double-digit leads as the election approached.

Growe sought to make Boschwitz's wealth an issue, demanding that he release his entire tax return, not just a summary as he had already done. Like other attacks by Growe, this one also fell flat. Boschwitz even responded by featuring his accountant in a campaign ad. To help counter the

DFL claims that Boschwitz was supported by “fat cats” he created the Boschwitz “Skinny Cats” which was made up of thousands of donors who gave \$100 or

less to the campaign. Each donor, in recognition of their support, received an individually numbered pin and was invited to special “Skinny Cat” events. Not only did it show the diversity of Boschwitz's financial support, each donor, regardless of the size of their donation was now invested in the campaign and could be counted on for their vote.

The 1984 election would humiliate Democrats nationally, and somewhat so in Minnesota. While Mondale carried his home state, Reagan defeated him in



Skinny Cat button, individually numbered, given to donors who gave \$100 or less to the campaign.

the other 49, a historically lopsided Electoral College win. In the Senate race, Boschwitz rolled to a 17-point victory, earning 58 percent of the vote to Growe's 41 percent.

Following his 1984 U.S. Senate re-election, Boschwitz assumed a more prominent role within that chamber, chairing subcommittees in both Foreign Affairs and Agriculture. And, in 1987, Boschwitz was elected by his fellow Senate Republican colleagues to be chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC). He was just the second Minnesota senator to achieve a leadership position in his party. The NRSC exists to help Republican challengers and incumbents in their election efforts, focusing on providing assistance with fundraising and communications. Boschwitz was elected by his colleagues to this key leadership position after the dismal results of the Reagan mid-term election in 1986 where Democrats picked up a net gain of eight seats and regained control of the Senate for the first time during the Reagan presidency.<sup>143</sup> The presidential election year of 1988 was shaping up to be a difficult one for Republicans who occupied the White House for eight years and were fighting for control of Congress.<sup>144</sup> After his strong re-election effort in 1984, Boschwitz gained a reputation on Capitol Hill as a tireless campaigner and prodigious fundraiser—a perfect combination for this leadership position.

Boschwitz went right to work in 1987 as chairman of the NRSC, recruiting a formidable group of candidates, many of whom served in the U.S. House of Representatives. Successful House members running for the U.S. Senate in 1988 included Trent Lott in Mississippi; Connie Mack, III in Florida; and Jim Jeffords in Vermont. Other notable recruits included Congressman Beau Boulter in Texas who lost to incumbent Senator and 1988 Vice Presidential nominee Lloyd Bentsen as well as Brigadier General and Heisman Trophy winner Pete Dawkins who lost to a first term senator in New Jersey whose campaign was managed by future political luminaries James Carville and Paul Begala. Boschwitz's chairmanship of the NRSC also coincided with the second re-election campaign of his Minnesota colleague, Dave Durenberger who was set to face off against another well-known Minnesota



political name: Hubert H. “Skip” Humphrey, III. Durenberger bested Humphrey by winning re-election with 56 percent of the vote in spite of the fact that the Democratic presidential nominee carried Minnesota.

After giving it his best shot, on November 8, 1988, Republicans retained control of the White House with Republican nominee and incumbent Vice President George H.W. Bush winning 53 percent - 46 percent over Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis. Bush carried all but 10 states and the District of Columbia but didn’t provide coattails to help several Republican incumbent U.S. Senators who lost re-election that year. Both the House and Senate remained in control by the Democrats.

### **1990 Election—Defeat and Refocus**

Boschwitz’s 1990 campaign for reelection initially appeared to be an easier race than his 1984 run against Joan Growe. The DFL Party had endorsed a little known, under funded professor from Carleton College to challenge him named Paul Wellstone. Wellstone’s brand of progressive liberalism seemed too liberal for even some Democrats and Rudy Perpich’s Commissioner of Agriculture Jim Nichols challenged him in the primary. While Wellstone defeated Nichols he still seemed the distant underdog. However, he was able to turn a negative into positive, using inventive television ads to characterize himself as a fighter for the little guy. In many respects this was reminiscent of Boschwitz’s 1978 campaign approach. In addition to Wellstone’s creative campaign tactics, the Republican Party was embroiled in a scandal in the Governor’s race in which Republican nominee Jon Grunseth was forced to withdraw and was replaced by State Auditor Arne Carlson, who had lost to Grunseth in the GOP primary. Reflecting on it years later Boschwitz was philosophical, “When you are in office a long time, you tend to loose touch with the people who have a sense of your own importance....[I] fell into that trap.”

### **Post-Senate: Operation Solomon**

In 1991, President George H.W. Bush called on Boschwitz to serve as emissary

Boschwitz as the United States Ambassador to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, which met at the U.N. in Geneva, Switzerland



Rudy Boschwitz working a parade

Rudy Boschwitz Trademark Signature



Rudy, Laura Bush, President George W. Bush, and Ellen at the White House.

on a mission to Ethiopia. Boschwitz was tasked with negotiating the safe departure of the entire population of Ethiopian Jews. Ethiopia's government had been weakened by internal power struggles, and was vulnerable to overthrow. Jewish leaders from around the world were concerned that a new ruling government would threaten the security of Ethiopian Jews, a population known as Beta Israel. Boschwitz's trip to Ethiopia was the precursor to Operation Solomon, a daring operation in which 14,500 Ethiopian Jews were airlifted to Israel. The operation in late May saved the lives of nearly the entire Ethiopian Jewish population. It also resulted in the self-exiling of the Ethiopian president and ultimately brought about the end of the decades long Ethiopian civil war. For his role in these efforts, Boschwitz was awarded the Citizen's Medal by President George H.W. Bush.

Following successful completion of the top-secret operation, the *New York Times* reported: "Israel fell into joyous celebration tonight as the Government announced the successful conclusion of an emergency airlift of 14,500 Ethiopian Jews, nearly the entire Jewish population, in just under 36 hours. At the airport this morning, it was difficult to tell who was more joyful—the barefoot Ethiopians who cheered, ululated and bent down to kiss the tarmac as they stepped off the planes, or the Israelis who watched them aglow, marveling at this powerful image showing that their state still holds appeal, even with all its problems."<sup>145</sup>

### **Post-Senate: United Nations Commission on Human Rights**

On March 4, 2005, President George W. Bush nominated Boschwitz to serve as U.S. Ambassador and Head of the U.S. Delegation to the 61<sup>st</sup> Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (CHR). The U.S. Senate confirmed the nomination on a 99-0 vote. The 61<sup>st</sup> Session took place March 14 through April 22 in Geneva, Switzerland.

In an address to the Commission on Human Rights, Boschwitz called for the UN to more explicitly condemn specific nations that violate human rights:

“We are convinced that reinforcing positive developments when they occur is an important part of the work of this body. We are equally convinced that putting dictators and other human rights violators on notice that the international community is watching, and that there will be consequences for their misdeeds—what some refer to as naming and shaming—brings us closer to the day when all nations are part of the growing community of democracies, and tyranny and slavery exist only as sad chapters in human history.”<sup>146</sup>

Among other issues, Boschwitz was objecting to the UN’s unequal and discriminatory treatment of Israel compared to other states, especially as it relates to “Agenda Item 8,” which deals with the issue of Israeli settlements. On the issue of anti-Israel bias at the UN, Boschwitz objected to the UN Commission on Human Rights about “the inappropriateness and the genuine unfairness of the presence on the Agenda of this Commission an item—Item No. 8—that deals solely with a single UN member, Israel, while another agenda item—Item No. 9—suffices for the misdeeds of all the other 190 members of the UN.”<sup>147</sup>

In a separate address to the Freedom House in Geneva, Boschwitz also called for changes to the UNCHR and criticized its previous inaction on major human rights violations: “When we look around and ask ourselves which countries will defend human rights and restore the considerably battered reputation of the UN Commission on Human Rights, it is only logical and proper that those countries that respect the rights of their own citizens be at the forefront of this effort and be the ones best entitled to serve on this Commission. It is enigmatic at best that abusers sit on this Commission, band together to weaken or forestall resolutions against themselves and sit in judgment of others. The membership of the UN Commission on Human Rights must be the firefighters of the world, not the arsonists... The challenge for democracies at the 61<sup>st</sup> Commission is to not allow abuses of freedom to be glossed over or, worse, go unmentioned and unsanctioned. Who the abusers are is well known to us all. None should be in doubt.”<sup>148</sup>

In closing, Boschwitz noted: “Freedom is on the march. A Wave of Freedom

is happening world-wide. The Commission on Human Rights must not stand in the way. Indeed, Commission members should be the firefighters, not the arsonists of the world.”

### **The Growth of the Conservative Movement in Minnesota**

In the nearly four decades since Rudy Boschwitz first won office and the Minnesota Massacre shocked Minnesota’s political class and signaled the arrival of a new conservative movement, the legacy of the Minnesota Massacre is apparent in almost all aspects of state politics. The multi-faceted Boschwitz legacy can be seen to this day in the people, process, and politics of the conservative movement. Scores of the state’s most influential political leaders of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and new millennium are the political progeny of Rudy Boschwitz. Several of those leaders—including Vin Weber and Erik Paulsen—worked directly for Boschwitz before charting their own political path. Weber was elected to congress just two years after the Minnesota Massacre, sending him to Washington as the Reagan Revolution gave rise to an agenda of lower taxes, less burdensome regulation, and a strong national defense. Weber quickly became one of the key young conservatives in the House and, along with Newt Gingrich, helped forge a new direction for conservatives, setting the stage for the historic Republican Revolution of 1994.

Others who carried the ideological torch ran for office as political outsiders who, like Boschwitz, had come to politics after building successful careers in other fields. Before joining congress, Mark Kennedy was a top executive at Department 56; John Kline had a long and distinguished record of military service; and Rod Grams was a television news anchor. Like Boschwitz, none of them had legislative experience prior to their arrival in Washington.

Tim Pawlenty’s victory in his 2002 gubernatorial campaign was a watershed moment, proving that principled conservatism is viable and appealing to voters when it has the right message and messenger. Tim Pawlenty’s leadership on tax policy, state spending, labor policy, and education reform helped restrain the

growth of government and create a more prosperous Minnesota. And his conservative judicial appointments have changed the complexion of the state's judicial system. Norm Coleman, who became a Republican in 1997 when his pro-life views became anathema to the DFL's increasingly leftist base, carried on the Boschwitz legacy in the same United States Senate seat Boschwitz had occupied for 12 years. Coleman's voting record remains one of the most conservative of any U.S. Senator to represent Minnesota.

The conservative movement that Boschwitz catalyzed also took hold in state legislative races, as Republicans took control of the State House in 1984, 1998, and 2010 and for the first time since 1972 took control of the State Senate in 2010. And in 2014, after two years of one-party control, conservatives retook the State House.

Boschwitz would also have a lasting impact on Republican Party process and messaging. He believed that the Party had become too tactical in the 1970s and did not focus enough on formulating a broad vision and message that voters could relate to and rally behind. He was confident that Minnesotans believed as he did in the value of limited government and free markets, but also understood the necessity of strategic planning and strong messaging. In the 1980s, the Party platform came to reflect the so-called three-legged stool of conservatism, which has largely stood the test of time, even in the face of a growing libertarian wing of the Party. Those tenets of the free market system that Boschwitz espoused are now a permanent part of the GOP platform. Since Boschwitz first ran in 1978, conservative activists have also consistently dominated the candidate selection process in the Republican Party. Even the internal bickering between "moderates" and "conservatives" is largely a thing of the past with the state GOP solidly in control by conservatives.

Since his departure from the Senate nearly 25 years ago, Boschwitz has continued to be an advocate for individual liberty, free enterprise, and limited government. He has been a tireless promoter and fundraiser for conservative candidates

and causes. In 2011, on the anniversary of the Ronald Reagan's 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday, he traveled the state to speak to Minnesotans about Reagan's vision and leadership and pay tribute to his conservative legacy. Just as he did in 1978 Boschwitz continues to show the way for conservatives.

Rudy Boschwitz's rise to prominence in business, politics, and public policy is a testament to his perseverance shrewd intellect, tireless work ethic, and indomitable spirit. From refugee from Nazi Germany, to New York lawyer, to Minnesota plywood salesman, to U.S. Senator, the story of Rudy Boschwitz is a legacy of leadership and the embodiment of the American Dream. His political leadership has profoundly influenced entire generations of public servants, and helped advance the principles of free enterprise, individual liberty, and limited government. Nearly four decades after his first election, that legacy lives on.



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