



OREGON SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER PRESS RELEASE

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Senate Republican Caucus Mourn the Passing of Former Oregon Senate President Gene Derfler

SALEM, Ore. – The Oregon Senate Republican Caucus is mourning the passing of **former Oregon Senate President Gene Derfler**, who died at the age of 101.

Gene Derfler devoted decades of his life to serving his state and his country as a World War II naval aviator, successful Salem small business owner and realtor, and a generational leader in the Oregon Legislature. He served in the Oregon House of Representatives from 1988 to 1994 and in the Oregon Senate from 1994 to 2002, including terms as Senate Majority Leader and Senate President.

During his time in the Legislature, Derfler played a central role in reforming Oregon’s workers’ compensation system and championed policies aimed at strengthening opportunities for workers, families, and small businesses.

On February 24, 2026, Derfler returned to the Capitol, where he [received a Senate courtesy](#) and joined **Senate Republican Leader Bruce Starr (R-Dundee)** at his desk on the Senate floor.

“Gene Derfler was the kind of leader who left Oregon better than he found it. It was an honor to welcome him back to the Senate just weeks ago,” said **Leader Starr**. “Those of us who had the privilege to serve alongside him saw firsthand his steady leadership, sharp mind, and deep love for this state. Oregon is better because of Gene Derfler’s life of service, and he will be greatly missed.”

Derfler was born in Portland on May 24, 1924. After serving as a naval aviator during World War II, he built a successful furniture and appliance business in Salem and later worked in real estate before entering public service. In the Legislature, he became known for his focus on practical reforms and bipartisan problem-solving.

After retiring from public office, Derfler remained active in Salem, pursuing woodworking and crafting intricate carvings of native Oregon fish and wooden toys for local children. One of his pieces—a lifelike Chinook salmon—is displayed in the lobby of the Senate Republican Caucus office.

He and his beloved wife, Thelma, were married for 77 years and raised three children together. She passed away in 2022.

The Oregon Senate Republican Caucus extends its condolences to the Derfler family and all those who knew and admired Gene’s remarkable life and legacy.

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