

Henry Reuss

Reuss was born on February 22, 1912, in his parents' home on North 26th Street in Milwaukee. "My heritage is wholly German," he noted in his book, "When government was good." Descended from a line of Old World needlemakers, the Reuss family was prominent in Milwaukee banking and German social circles by the time of Henry's birth. His early education included years at Milwaukee's German-English Academy, which aimed to provide students with the rigorous education of the German Realschule. In his book, Reuss claimed that he and a friend, Everett Hyman, finished in a dead heat to become the youngest Eagle Scouts in the world.

His father, Henry wrote, "was a gentle soul, more interested in his hobbies than in banking." Among those hobbies was forestry, and he "planted a stand of white pine in 1991 at North Lake that is ninety feet tall today," Reuss wrote in 1999.

After obtaining a law degree at Harvard in 1936, Reuss practiced law in Milwaukee for a time, but then answered the call of duty. He entered the U.S. Army as a private in January 1943, and served in the European Theatre until his discharge in January 1946. He was awarded the Bronze Star for action at the Rhine Crossing, and was later a lieutenant colonel in the Infantry Reserve.

After a brief stint at banking at Marshall and Ilsley Bank in Milwaukee, where his grandfather and father had work, Reuss set out on his political voyage. He ran unsuccessfully for mayor of Milwaukee. "I had decided that a public life, at least modestly on the left, was what I wanted," he wrote. Reuss lost to Socialist Frank Zeidler in that race. (Zeidler would serve until 1960. Reuss would again seek the position, even as he served in Congress, losing to Henry Maier.)

Losing in 1948 opened a door to other involvements. That year, he and his wife, Margaret, and two young sons went to Paris. There he served in the Economic Cooperation Administration, which ran the Marshall Plan in post-war Europe. They returned to Milwaukee a year later.

He ran as a Democrat for state attorney general in 1950. Campaigning was at a different pace in those days. "Whenever I could, I combined my 1950 campaigning with trout fishing. I always carried a rod and net in my car and between engagements fished many of Wisconsin's famous trout streams." Republican Vernon Thompson trounced

Clean Water Act of 1972,” Reuss wrote in 1999. “Though much remains to be done, the nation has made great strides in cleaning up its waters.”

Reuss was quick to hand out credit for Wisconsin’s Ice Age Trail to others, especially Hall of Fame inductee Ray Zillmer. Milwaukee attorney-hiker-mountaineer Zillmer first approached Reuss in 1958 with an idea to set up a national park, to be called the Wisconsin Glacier National Park.

In the Portage County Gazette shortly after Reuss’ death, environmental and conservation writer George Rogers noted: “Former Congressman Henry Reuss, who died Jan. 12, was known as an expert on economics and international finance, but he may be best remembered for his work with Wisconsin’s Ice Age Trail. The idea was Ray Zillmer’s, but Reuss wrote the legislation for it in 1964, served on the trail foundation board and wrote a booklet about it, called ‘On the Trail of the Ice Age.’ In the mid-1950s Zillmer...had come up with the idea of a national park to preserve the evidence of the last great glacier – eskers, kames and other topographical features. It was to have been a long, narrow park snaking across Wisconsin along the terminal moraine, the ridge that marks the glacier’s farthest advance. In 1958, Zillmer traveled the route with National Park Service officials, accompanied by Reuss...Zillmer’s dream of a national park didn’t materialize, but the Ice Age Trail is the next-best thing...When complete, it’ll be a thousand miles long. You can give Henry Reuss much of the credit.”

Reuss’ bill to create a federal reserve became law in 1964. “Sadly, Ray Zillmer had died four years earlier,” Reuss recalled in his memoirs. In 1980, Congress designated the trail a National Scenic Trail, on a par with the Appalachian and Pacific Crest National Scenic Trails. Reuss also worked hard to partner national and state funding for the trail, and to encourage volunteer and public-private partnerships to extend the trail.

Reuss was also interested in sustainable city life. His Subcommittee on the City had no power to create legislation, but it did work to outline new ideas for America’s urban areas. In his 1977 book, “To Save a City,” Reuss noted, “In a time of scarcity, the city is the Great Conservator of land, energy and resources.” He pointed out that sprawl wasted energy in transportation, heat loss and other areas. “The country cannot afford more urban sprawl,” he wrote, adding: “The role of the city as the Great Conservator of land, energy and resources can be enhanced by city planning to encourage...walking,

Rhine Crossing, and is a Lt. Colonel in the Infantry Reserve.

BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY

CAREER ACTIVITIES

Henry S. Reuss served in the U.S. Congress, D-WI., from 1954 until his retirement in 1982. He chaired the House Committee on Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs (1975-1981); the Joint Economic Committee (1981-1983); the Subcommittee on Conservation; and the Subcommittee on International Exchange and Payments. He was legislative author of the Peace Corps, the Federal Reserve Reform Act, and the Mass Transit Research Act.

Prior to his election to the House of Representatives in 1954, Reuss practiced law in Milwaukee.

He served as assistant corporation counsel, Milwaukee County.

He served as Assistant General Counsel of the Office of Price Administration in Washington, as acting General Counsel of the Marshall Plan in Paris, and as Director of the Milwaukee School Board as well as other posts.

He was a founding director and supporter of Green Empowerment.

AFFILIATIONS

Enterprise Foundation; Washington Institute for Foreign Affairs.

Association to Unite the Democracies.

Committee on Developing American Capitalism.

AUTHOR

“When Government Was Good: Memories of a Life in Politics,” 1999.

“To Save a City,” 1977.

“On the Trail of the Ice Age, A Hiker’s Guide to Wisconsin’s Ice Age National Scenic Reserve and Trail,” 1976, 1981.

“Critical Decade, on Economic Policy of American and the Free World,” 1964.