

Karl E. Mundt's service as South Dakota's representative in Congress and as United States senator spanned the Great Depression through the Vietnam War, making him the longest-tenured congressman in the state's history.

Mundt was born 3 June 1900 in Humboldt, South Dakota, to Rose Schneider Mundt and Ferdinand J. Mundt, a hardware store owner and bank cashier. In 1910, the family relocated to Madison, where Karl Mundt graduated from high school in 1919. Later that year, he enrolled at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, where he excelled in oratory and debate. He returned to South Dakota in 1923 with an economics degree and taught social studies at Bryant High School, becoming school superintendent in 1924.

While teaching in Bryant, Mundt spent his summers at Columbia University in New York, working toward a master's degree in economics. In 1927, he began teaching at Eastern State Normal School (now Dakota State University) in Madison and working with his father's loan company. He soon became well known throughout eastern South Dakota as a debate coach and public speaker.

Mundt declined an invitation to run for governor on the Republican ticket in 1934. His loss in the race for the United States House of Representatives two years later was his first and last election defeat. Beginning in 1938, when he captured a seat in Congress, he won nine consecutive elections, including the race for the Senate in 1948.

Mundt's congressional resume includes service on the House Foreign Affairs Committee in 1941, where he advocated United States participation in the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and launched legislation establishing the Voice of America broadcasting system. Mundt also promoted the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Food for Peace Plan. In 1948, along with Representative Richard M. Nixon, he led the House Committee on Un-American Activities, investigating alleged Communist spy Alger Hiss. In the 1950s, Mundt chaired the Army-McCarthy hearings, the first-ever televised congressional hearings. Mundt also worked for conservation and is credited with authoring the Endangered Species Act. He also spearheaded efforts to dam the Missouri River and insure that South Dakota received two interstate highways and the EROS data center near Sioux Falls.

Mundt suffered a debilitating stroke in 1969, completed his congressional career in 1972, and died in Washington, D.C., on 16 August 1974.

by John M. Duffy

## Dakota Images



**Karl E. Mundt**

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