



Anne B. McDonald, a Democrat who represented Stamford in the House of Representatives from 1991 to 2003, was a courageous leader and champion of public health.

Rep. McDonald's legislative career began in 1991, perhaps the most tumultuous year ever faced by state lawmakers. She took office the same day Lowell P. Weicker Jr. was sworn in as governor, the start of nearly a 12-month budget battle. Weicker vetoed three budgets, forcing passage of a tax on personal income in August. Legislators continued to debate, unsuccessfully trying to repeal and then alter the income tax. McDonald was an income tax supporter. Rep. McDonald served as chair of the Public Health Committee from 1994-2000, implementing many public acts improving healthcare and protecting physicians and patients. She spent countless hours trying to pass public health legislation that would curb the power of firms that provide managed healthcare. During the 1996 session, as she tried to hammer out a compromise that failed that year, Rep. McDonald spent her nights in a \$40-a-night hotel near the state Capitol. Her long commute from Stamford and painful rheumatoid arthritis made it difficult to work late nights at the Capitol.

The former sixth-grade teacher immersed herself in medical journals and interviewed doctors to learn as much as she could about the healthcare issue. A lobbyist representing opponents of the managed-care reform bill in 1996 said Ms. McDonald was one of the brightest legislators he had ever worked with, someone who grasped an extremely technical issue. She worked tirelessly with physicians advocating for patients and was instrumental in negotiating optometric scope of practice legislation.

Nearly a dozen years later, Rep. McDonald left office as the co-chairwoman of the finance, revenue and bonding committee, the panel responsible for writing taxes. As she demonstrated with an op-ed piece she wrote during a budget fight in 2002, Rep. McDonald thought taxes were part of the larger social compact. "The point is that those who complain the most about taxes often have the least to complain about. I have no great confidence that they will stop complaining, but if the legislature is to devise a just solution, we just may have to ignore the whining. The alternative would be to cut deeply into important services because, after you get past the mandatory spending in the budget -- debt service, court orders and collective bargaining agreements -- there's not much left to cut. So any reductions are wider and deeper, and thus more painful.

"We are left to conclude that taxes, like death, are indeed unavoidable. But as long as we're alive and seeking a better life, we should learn to at least tolerate taxes. They're not all bad. As Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said, 'Taxes are the price we pay for a civilized society.' " Rep. McDonald passed away in 2007 at the age of 74