

A minister of the people

Gabriel (Gabe) Alexander Bywaters

Politician

Born: September 2, 1914; Gawler

Died: November 2, 2004; Adelaide

ONLY six months before his death, Gabe Bywaters, a former Labor minister of agriculture, was delivering meals on wheels to elderly residents in the Semaphore area.

The Advertiser reported in 1994 that "every week for the past decade, Gabe has saddled up his white Mercedes and delivered meals to 30 lonely, often helpless, senior citizens and disabled people who live near his house at Semaphore".

He was described as "an unsung hero".

Mr Bywaters was the Labor member for the rural seat of Murray from 1956 until 1968 and from 1965 was agriculture minister in the Walsh government, in which he initially held five portfolios.

He was minister for lands, repatriation, irrigation, agriculture and forests and continued as a minister in the Dunstan government.



Premier Mike Rann told Parliament he knew "first-hand that former premier Don Dunstan thought very highly of Gabe". Mr Dunstan had made his admiration clear in his 1981 memoirs *Felicia*, writing: "Gabe Bywaters was also articulate, able and determined. He was a lay preacher of the Church of Christ, had campaigned and canvassed hard and was soon extremely popular in the district." Mr Dunstan had also said of Mr Bywaters' ministerial work: "In the agriculture portfolio, Gabe Bywaters was an outstandingly good minister and made decisions which were difficult but necessary."

Mr Rann said Mr Bywaters had been "a lovely, decent man" who had always taken the time to speak to the young MPs on both sides of the Parliament.

When the Dunstan government was swept from power in 1968, Mr Bywaters also lost his seat of Murray - although he unsuccessfully recontested it in 1970 - and began a 15-year membership of the Metropolitan Milk Board.

Opposition Leader Rob Kerin said that throughout Mr Bywaters' parliamentary career, he had continually pushed for more industry and housing in regional areas and for incentives to encourage business to locate away from Adelaide.

"He was very concerned with what he saw as the inequalities that those in country towns had to endure, and those hardships were typified by the great River Murray flood of 1965 which impacted significantly on the people of Murray Bridge and led Mr Bywaters to comment that this event brought him into contact with his constituents in a way that he would never forget," Mr Kerin said.

Mr Bywaters' wife, Gwen, died three years ago. He is survived by a son, daughter, four grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.