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HEADLINE: DOWN THE STRETCH; Term limits will put an end to Ken Maddy's distinguished career in state politics.

BYLINE: Mike Lewis, The Fresno Bee

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BODY:

It's the heart, Ken Maddy is saying, relieved to answer a question that doesn't probe his past or speculate on his future. A winning horse doesn't just look the part, proper bloodlines and all. It has something inside "we call heart or class," he says. "They want to win."

Maddy, an attorney, race horse owner and career Fresno legislator, knows something about heart, about desire to win. Here in Frank Fats, the venerable Capitol restaurant and watering hole, are the fruits of winning. Waylan Fat, the owner's son, drops by the table repeatedly to make sure the senator's glass is full, that his filet mignon is perfect and that his almond cookie is waiting at dinner's end.

Lobbyists drift by to say hello and pay respects. Women glance over, whisper to each other and smile because at age 64, Maddy remains athletic, tanned, handsome and, for now, single.

Maddy loves this place, loves the way it always has the proper table and treatment for a winner.

And on this night, as the senator enters the final days of the forced end of his political career, he and Frank's Fats are closer than ever, bonded in a way neither intended.

Both are products of the California Legislature's heady days before term limits, when "professional politicians" -- not dirty words then -- packed these narrow booths and cut the deals that built the nation's most populous state.

But Fats, with its dated decor and menu, no longer commands the palates of the political elite.

And Maddy no longer represents them, shunted from 28 years in the Legislature by an indiscriminate term limits law that wipes out both good and bad because it can't distinguish between the two.

But all of that is put aside temporarily when Maddy talks horses. He's still speaking about heart and class, about how much of a horse's potential comes from within the beast, about how all the promise in the world sometimes won't live up to expectations.

Then he stops. Suddenly, the man who was considered one of the Republican party's brightest lights, whose political rivals say could have been governor, who Willie Brown Jr. called "without a doubt" the most talented politician to emerge from the Central Valley in a generation, realizes some would say the horse is him.

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It's August. The end of the legislative session is near. And the celebrations, tributes and memorials -- rather, the unsuccessful attempts at such -- have made Ken Maddy an irritable man.

Outside, Sacramento is baking under a third consecutive 100-degree day. Inside, Maddy is sitting in his fifth floor office in the Capitol's annex building. He's done his business for this year. He scored big for his 14th District, bagging \$ 25 million for Fresno's new burn and trauma center. He pulled enough strings to give the horse racing industry a fabulous parting gift: a \$ 40 million tax cut that not only is the largest the industry has ever seen, but the largest for any single business group in the state, budget experts say.

Other duties, such as tracking pending legislation or planning for next session, don't keep his interest. Make no mistake, the moderate senator from the 14th District didn't want to check out this manner, largely disinterested in a job he loves. But the voters spoke and they said term limits. It appears that Maddy, with one month to go in the session and 90 days after that until he's permanently replaced, would just as soon leave right now.

Here's a truth about term limits: It doesn't just free incumbents to vote without the burden of re-election fundraising. It also can, especially in the final year of the final term, reduce leverage to zilch. That's why Maddy, who some say knows California's byzantine budget better than any current lawmaker, didn't get a seat on a key budget subcommittee.

Earlier in the summer, Senate leader John Burton gave the position to another legislator, Southern California Republican Cathie Wright. Wright, simply, would be here next year. Burton opted to keep her happy.

The decision stung Maddy. A spot on the committee would have put him once again in the middle of the fray during tough, pressurized budget negotiations.

As it was during Maddy's seven-year run as Senate Republican minority leader, being at the center of the state's policy discussion mattered as much to him as the policy itself. "I think its fair to say I liked the wheeling and dealing," Maddy says. "I like negotiating. I liked to be involved."

Gov. Wilson says he has relied heavily on Maddy's legislative talent. California's welfare reform, Wilson says, might not have happened without the senator.

"He's a very skilled legislator," Wilson says. "One of the best I have seen here or at the federal level."

Term limits largely have made the professional politician an endangered species. And while that might satisfy the public's desire to get back at entrenched politicians, it doesn't serve the state well, says David Provost, a California State University, Fresno professor and an expert on Valley politics.

"One of the things that has bothered me a lot about term limits is the loss of expertise," Provost says. "Clearly when you lose someone like a Maddy ...where are you going to go to find that expertise?"

With one month remaining in his legislative career, Maddy lacked a stage for his negotiating skills -- the source of his considerable reputation, influence and ego. So one of Sacramento's last best professional politicians is trying to exit quietly. He turns down Burton's request for a tribute on the floor -- "I worry that I'll get too emotional," Maddy says.

Friends say he hates attention he hasn't sought. But they also say he would hate it more if no one made the effort at all.

That's the paradox of Ken Maddy. In nearly 30 years of public office, he never comfortably squared the dual demands of the job.

In a profession that demands a measure of self-aggrandizement and personal promotion, Maddy refused. He rarely issued news releases or held press conferences. He didn't "tombstone" bills -- stamping a law with his last name, such as the Marks-Roos Act -- while other legislators created a graveyard's worth.

He was an unwilling, uncomfortable fundraiser, a trait that underscored his final major political defeat, the 1995 loss of the Senate Republican leadership to wealthy Orange County Republican Rob Hurtt, a policy lightweight who could match the Democrats dollar-for-dollar.

Maddy's friends say this was a strength, because he never embraced politics' seamier side. His detractors, Hurtt included, say Maddy didn't want to do what was necessary to win.

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Bouncing along Fresno County farming roads in his Ford Explorer, John Harris doesn't look or talk like the millionaire he is. His checkered shirt is half tucked in, his ranch boots are dusty and his gray hair is elaborately disheveled.

Right now, Harris is distracted. He's been asked if Maddy could have achieved more as a politician.

Harris hesitates. Harris doesn't know what to say.

He and Maddy are co-owners of several race horses, including Work the Crowd, a \$ 7,000 mare that earned more than \$ 600,000 in winnings.

But their roots run deeper than business. Harris' late father, Jack, put a fair amount of campaign money into making sure Maddy's politics thrived. So has John.

Talk to enough people about Ken Maddy and the same political cliché surfaces: fire in the belly. It is said that a lack of this made Maddy the ideal legislator because his own ambition rarely clouded his policy goals. But it's said just as often that the lack of fire held back the veteran legislator every time he appeared ready to transcend the Legislature.

"I would say (Maddy) did have the tools. He may just not have had sufficient motivation," Wilson once noted.

"The man is talented, anyone can see that," Harris says. "He's a clear thinker. Maybe he could have been anything he wanted. U.S. senator. Governor.

"He did try, you know."

* * *

Sal Russo and Doug Watts knew Valley farmers hated Gov. Jerry Brown. They knew the agriculture industry didn't have a strong advocate among the existing Republican candidates for governor in 1978 -- Attorney General Evelle Younger, Los Angeles Police Chief Ed Davis and San Diego Mayor Pete Wilson.

So the two aides to Assembly Republican leader Paul Priolo began selling Maddy, even distributing flyers about him at the 1977 state Republican convention. Priolo, sensing their real goal was a Maddy leadership coup, fired both of them.

"We needed jobs," says Russo, "so we talked Ken into running for governor.

The campaign remains the stuff of Capitol lore. Midway through, Maddy admitted to Los Angeles disc jockey Mike Sugarman that he had twice tried pot.

"We actually went up in polls among young people," Russo says, "but they don't vote in Republican primaries."

Maddy also opposed the hugely popular Proposition 13. He finished third in the primary with 18 percent of the vote -- ahead of that San Diego mayor. The surprisingly strong showing by an unknown from the Valley convinced Maddy and others that he could be a player in statewide politics. (So did the nearly \$750,000 that poured in from the Valley agristocracy.)

But the defeat also left him gun shy. Unlike Wilson, who saw the race as a building block toward success in the U.S. Senate and governor's office, Maddy took the loss personally. What Wilson saw as a challenge, Maddy saw as a rebuke.

"The losses always hurt Ken," says his longtime chief of staff, Jo-Ann Slinkard. "He can take things very personally."

None more personally than the loss 10 years later.

* * *

By 1987, Maddy was riding high again as the newly elected leader of the Senate Republicans.

Then he was told by Gov. George Deukmejian's office that he was the leading candidate for the state treasurer's position opened by the death of Jess Unruh.

Maddy knew the implications of the appointment. This wasn't just a chance to serve out a term in a constitutional office. It represented the Republican Party's chance to put a chosen successor to Deukmejian in a statewide office, ready for the 1990 election.

Maddy wanted the job badly.

"He really expected that it would be him," says Karney Hodge, part owner of a Fresno men's store and one of Maddy's oldest friends and political benefactors. "He really expected that it would be him. He called me the night before the announcement to let me know he would be nominated the next day."

But the announcement was never made. The reason why remains a mystery. Some say the conservative governor was worried about Maddy's pot smoking admission in 1978. Also, while Maddy was under consideration, Congress rejected Supreme Court nominee Douglas Ginsburg for the same admission.

In a recent interview, Deukmejian allows only, "I remember (Ginsburg) was in the news at the time, but I can't say it affected anything."

The governor chose Dan Lungren, an arch-conservative congressman from Long Beach who the Democrats opposed.

"I was very disappointed," Maddy says. "I was madder at myself than anything. I always had a defense mechanism to not want anything so badly that it would leave yourself open for hurt. But I got so wrapped up in it."

After contentious hearings, legislators rejected Lungren as too conservative. Democrats openly worried that it gave Lungren a leg up to the governor's seat. Brown, Assembly speaker at the time, said Senate Democrats would have agreed to confirm Maddy. "He was a lock," Brown says. "Maddy had as much Democratic support as any Republican in history. He understood the issues. And even when we disagreed with him, we trusted him."

Despite the setback, party operatives remained convinced of Maddy's value. In August 1988, at the Republican National Convention in New Orleans, Maddy and Russo were summoned to a private meeting with Donald Bren, president of the multibillion-dollar Irvine Co.

Bren, as wealthy as he is media shy, exists in the epicenter of California Republican politics, calling the financial shots for many GOP politicians. He and his associates wanted to make Maddy a deal: U.S. Sen. Pete Wilson would stay in the Senate if Maddy accepted their backing as a candidate for governor.

Russo was shocked. These were Wilson's supporters after all. "We walked out of the room and I said to Ken, 'There it is, if you want it.'" Maddy remembers not saying a word in reply.

But the loss of the treasurer job had shaken his confidence. His 1981 marriage to Foster Farms heiress Norma Foster, who wanted him to make the bid, had left him comfortable financially. and he thought she didn't understand the level of press scrutiny she and her family would fall under in a governor's race.

Moreover, he liked his job in the Senate, especially as minority leader. And he knew that Wilson, perhaps the most tenacious politician in California today, would never couch his own ambitions and bow out so easily.

In January 1989, the day before his gubernatorial bid was to be announced, Maddy walked into Russo's office and said he wouldn't run.

"And that was it," Russo says. "I couldn't change his mind."

This didn't mark the end of Maddy career ambitions, but it did focus them. He never seriously considered running for statewide office again, although he was subsequently courted for treasurer, attorney general and lieutenant governor, party sources said.

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Francis Stizzo, Maddy's longtime secretary, says the phone rang at 9 a.m. on Thursday, Aug. 24, 1995. Stizzo had worked for Maddy for 15 years. She had watched him rise from freshman senator to the GOP's top leader in the state Senate, a competitive position in California politics that puts a legislator both at party's power center and its bull's eye.

On that day, it would switch from the former to the latter.

Over the previous two years, the party's highly conservative end had been making inroads into California politics, uprooting moderates. Orange County Republicans, led by millionaire businessman Hurtt, pressed for a role deeper than deep pockets: They wanted a crack at directing efforts to return the Senate and Assembly to Republican control after years of Democrat domination.

Maddy knew trouble was brewing. For two years, he doled out the perks, the campaign funds and committee chairmanships that buy loyalty. But it wasn't enough.

In what is regarded as one of the most effective ambushes in Capitol history, Maddy was dethroned by a 9-7 vote of GOP caucus, ending eight years of leadership.

Sitting in the back of the Senate chambers three years later, Hurtt says Maddy should have seen the coup coming. And he should have done more to prevent it.

"At that point, he just wasn't as engaged as he should have been," Hurtt says. "Maddy is a talented legislator, but he had grown too comfortable.

* * *

At dinner at Fats, Maddy explains his reluctance to celebrate his career.

"I'm not going anywhere, I'm not dead," he says, slightly exasperated. "I'm still going to be in Sacramento and I'm still going to be in the building."

But as a visitor. He won't have "the vote." For Maddy, this matters more than anything, more than the fawning attention from lobbyists, more than the near misses at statewide offices and, in a way, more than his marriages, both starved by his professional devotion.

His first marriage in 1957 to Fresno native Beverly Chinello married ended in 1980. His second, to Foster Farms heiress Norma Foster, legally ended this year but the two had been separated for three years prior.

He admits that having the vote was both cause and comfort. And he says a life without the vote is going to take an adjustment. "But I can do it," Maddy says. "It isn't like I didn't have a life before this."

Which is true. But that life built toward this one.

Maddy, his sister and brother grew up almost in the shadow of Los Angeles's famed Hollywood Park race track.

"Horse racing was the only thing we did as a family. It was the only thing my mom and dad agreed on."

As a child he did everything he could to stay near the track and the horses. He mucked stables, worked as a groom and later a "hotwalker," the low-paid help that walks the horses after races to cool them down.

While he was low on the track's totem pole, school was another matter. The list of accomplishments would irritate anyone but a mom: Inglewood High School football team captain. Star student. Mr. Popularity.

"I always seemed to end up in a leadership position," he says. "Deep down, I guess that's where I felt I belonged."

The trend continued through college football at Fresno State College (where as a standout offensive lineman he played against a San Jose State College football player named Bill Walsh), as Sigma Nu fraternity president and into the Reserve Officers Training Corps, where he was in placed charge of his peers.

It was at Fresno State that he met and married Bev. During his first hitch in the Air Force, his father-in-law, who ran a Fresno law firm, asked him what he was going to do with his life. "I looked at him and I said, 'Law school,'" Maddy says, grinning. "What was I going to say?"

He graduated from UCLA law school on 1963. He and Bev moved back to Fresno and he joined his father-in-law's firm. Maddy liked the law, but he liked his community volunteer

work much more. So when the local Republican Party came calling in 1969 for the vacant 32nd seat, he listened.

In a district where only 31% of the registered voters were Republicans, Maddy took 57% of the vote. He would hold the Democratic district for eight years. He held his Senate seat for another 19. Through that time, he wrote hundreds of bills (45 for the horse racing industry), directly negotiated seven state budgets while taking a large role in many others, delivered substantial pork to his district (while seldom showing up to see it put to use) and employed roughly 105 staffers.

Now Maddy isn't sure what he'll do. Rumors in the Capitol say he's being courted by most of the largest lobbying outfits and law firms. He's likely command a six-figure salary if that is what he chooses.

He says he's looking forward to a new life, to having more time with his three children, seven step-children and 13 grandchildren. He's also looking forward to more time for golf and of course at the track. After all, Work the Crowd has a new foal.

"She's a beauty," he says.

But with all that, it still doesn't seem like a fair trade. "I would like to have had the choice to leave, although I never would have become one of those guys that has to be carried out."

Maddy says he'll miss his staff and he'll miss his status. And when pressed, the man who has enjoyed more legislative success than most state politicians admits he's worried that people will see it as not enough.

"To a degree, if there is anything that somewhat bothers me, is the perception that I might have fallen short of my expectations or other people's expectations," he says over dinner. "It's that people think I didn't do as much as I should have done. I mean, close friends will tell me that."

He considers this a moment. The crowd at Fats has thinned now and Maddy is ready to leave. He says the regrets pale in comparison to the pleasures. And there is little, if anything, he would have done differently.

Getting up from the table, he pauses: "I'm not sure I could ever like anything better."

GRAPHIC: PHOTOS BY ERIC PAUL ZAMORA -- THE FRESNO BEE

Ken Maddy, shown during one of his final days on the state Senate floor, has been one of California's most powerful politicians for nearly 30 years, but he didn't get chosen state treasurer in 1987, and when he had the backing for governor in '88, he decided not to run. Ken Maddy, center, and Sen. Ralph Dills, left, share a laugh with Sen. Jim Costa. Maddy will lose his seat this year because of term limits. What will Maddy do once the term ends? "It isn't like I didn't have a life before this," he says. From his early days (top) to last month (left), Maddy has been depicted as an excellent negotiator who many say had the makings to be the state's governor.