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California and the West

Ken Maddy, Former State Senate GOP Leader, Dies

February 20, 2000 | [CARL INGRAM](#) | [TIMES STAFF WRITER](#)

SACRAMENTO — Former state Senate Republican leader Ken Maddy of Fresno, a master consensus builder and political moderate whose legendary candor crippled his 1978 race for governor, died early Saturday of lung cancer. He was 65.

Maddy, whose political influence extended far beyond the agricultural San Joaquin Valley districts he represented in the Assembly and Senate for almost three decades, was forced out of the Legislature in 1998 by term limits.

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He died at Sutter General Hospital in Sacramento. Maddy, a nonsmoker, was diagnosed with lung cancer last year. As he fought to regain his health, he suggested to friends that the many days and nights he spent in lawmakers' proverbial smoke-filled rooms might have made him vulnerable to the disease.

Sal Russo, a longtime friend, business partner and confidant, said Maddy requested that no public memorial service be held, noting that "Ken hated long speeches." Russo said, however, that a celebration of Maddy's life will be held soon in Sacramento.

Former Gov. Pete Wilson, a Republican, praised Maddy as "one of the truly great legislators of the 20th century." He said Maddy "not only had brains and guts, but heart."

Democratic Gov. Gray Davis called Maddy "one of my heroes. He was a man of grace, good humor and a man of extraordinarily good judgment."

Senate President Pro Tem John L. Burton (D-San Francisco), who served with Maddy in both houses, also saluted his Republican colleague. He asserted that "one of the worst things to happen politically to the people of California was Ken Maddy not being elected to the office of governor."

Politically, Maddy supported abortions rights and certain gun controls and helped engineer passage of welfare reform laws under Wilson. He was an opponent of Proposition 13, the 1978 ballot initiative that slashed property taxes.

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Maddy, an owner and breeder of racehorses, was the force behind a bill that brought licensing relief to California's racetracks, saving them millions of dollars.

Some friends believe that Maddy's honesty fatally damaged his race for the 1978 GOP nomination for governor. At the time, he admitted to a broadcaster that he had used marijuana twice, a disclosure that was more politically risky then than it would be now.

"It didn't do anything for me," he said later, noting that he remained an opponent of decriminalizing marijuana and other drugs.

But the admission threw his campaign off track. At least one opponent used it against him and Maddy was never able to recover. "Our fund-raising plunged overnight," one of his supporters recalled.

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In 1987, Maddy's name was on GOP Gov. George Deukmejian's short list for appointment to succeed Democrat Jesse M. Unruh as state treasurer. But the governor nominated Dan Lungren (whom the Senate refused to confirm) and later cited Maddy's marijuana admission as a "negative."

In each case, Maddy publicly hid his pain and plunged ahead, running interference in the Democrat-dominated Legislature for Deukmejian's budgets and programs and those of his successor, Wilson.

But the final blow for Maddy, a pragmatic moderate who negotiated compromise settlements with Democrats, came at the hands of fellow Senate Republicans, whom he had served as floor leader since 1987.

In an overnight coup in 1995, conservative members of the GOP caucus teamed up behind newcomer Sen. Rob Hurtt of Garden Grove, a millionaire contributor to political campaigns, and toppled Maddy. They blamed Maddy for failure to recapture control of the Senate. Under Hurtt, Republicans fared even worse at the polls.

Maddy married Beverly Chinello in 1957. They divorced in 1980. He married Foster Farms heiress Norma Foster in 1981. They divorced in 1998.

He is survived by a son, two daughters, five grandchildren, his mother and a sister.

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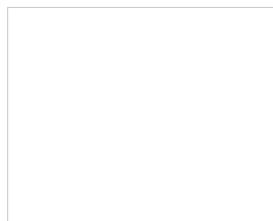
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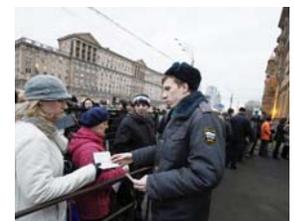
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