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HEADLINE: State politicians remember Maddy

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BODY:

A rare assemblage of California's current and former political elite, including two former governors, as well as friends and family of the late Sen. Kenneth L. Maddy gathered in the Capitol Saturday night to honor the longtime Valley Republican legislator, whom they called a great friend and a legislative giant.

Organized by Maddy's friend and political consultant Sal Russo, the catered reception to "celebrate" Maddy's life drew an estimated 1,000 people to a temporary reception hall adjacent to Maddy's favorite restaurant and watering hole, Frank Fat's.

Even by Capitol standards, the turnout was impressive. Former Govs. Pete Wilson and Jerry Brown spoke, as did Senate President Pro Tem John Burton and other Maddy family and friends.

Attending also were Reps. Gary Condit and Jerry Lewis, Fresno Sen. Jim Costa, former San Francisco Mayor Art Agnos and other current and former lawmakers.

San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown Jr., who served as master of ceremonies at the three-hour event, said the location was perfect. "Maddy ate at Wing Fat's joint every day of his life," he said, drawing laughter. Brown, a former Assembly speaker and friend and political sparring partner with Maddy for 26 years, delighted the crowd with funny anecdotes -- as required by Maddy's final instructions.

Maddy, a nonsmoker, died Feb. 19 after a 14-month battle with lung cancer. The senator, his son Don Maddy said, didn't want any "maudlin" stories told at his wake. Instead, Maddy said, he wanted people have a good time and remember the fun they had together.

Brown, back in the town where he made his career, was up to the task.

"We are going to go through Ken's life fairly quickly omitting lots, uh, because you know some of us are still indictable," Brown said, prompting waves of laughter.

He then poked fun at Maddy's love of horse racing: "Ken isn't here for a very good reason. Santa Anita is running."

Burton said he regretted not having a chance to work longer with Maddy, who termed out in 1998 after 28 years in the Legislature. He said the Democratic Party wasted a lot of money in the Valley fielding candidates against the popular and charismatic Republican who was first elected in 1970.

"I spent a lot of money on a lot of guys who didn't have a chance," Burton said. Then turning serious, Burton related a story about his final lunch with an ailing Maddy about two weeks before Maddy died.

Burton said he'd been angry about some dispute with Gov. Davis and spent a good portion of the meal complaining about his problem.

"Two hours later I get a call. It's Ken. I said 'What's up? What's wrong?' and he says 'What's wrong with you, I'm worried.' And I said, 'Pardon me?' and [Maddy said] said, 'You seem down. You seem depressed. Don't let [the dispute] get you down.'

"And I thought, 'Jesus, I am one of the world's great [expletives]. I'm worried about Gray Davis and here one of my good friends is fighting for his life.'"

Burton said the story showed the selflessness of Maddy. He said the state Senate will honor Maddy on Wednesday.

Former Gov. Jerry Brown, now mayor of Oakland, said that as a Democratic governor, he always thought very highly of Maddy. "When I would deal with Maddy, I would ask why are the Republicans so much more -- I don't want to use the wrong word here -- so much more intelligent?" he said, drawing laughter.

The liberal Brown joked that Maddy owes him a lot: "Due to my excessive devotion to all of my causes, particularly those that affected the Valley [such as] medflies, and the UFW [United Farm Workers] and stopping dam building and all the rest, I felt I probably raised more money for Ken Maddy than anyone else."

Former Gov. Pete Wilson, who depended on Maddy as his chief liaison to the Legislature during his eight years as governor, said during his career in both the U.S. Senate and in the Capitol, he never saw a more talented politician than Maddy.

Wilson, who finished behind Maddy in their bid for the 1978 Republican gubernatorial nomination, said he started admiring Maddy while running against him.

"My campaign was a haven for those who hate crowds," Wilson said. "I'm easily talking to more people right now that I did in the entire campaign. By the end of the 1978 campaign, I wanted to vote for [Maddy]."

Maddy was praised as a politician who eschewed knee-jerk partisan squabbling to become a powerful GOP leader and an honest deal maker who earned the respect and

trust of conservatives and liberals. He served eight years in the Assembly and 20 years in the Senate.

GRAPHIC: SCOTT LORENZO -- THE SACRAMENTO BEE State Senate President Pro Tem John

Burton, D-San Francisco, speaks at a memorial service for former Sen. Ken Maddy at Frank Fats on Saturday night in Sacramento. Many members of differing political groups came together to roast Maddy at his own request.

The former Valley lawmaker died Feb. 19.

SCOTT LORENZO -- THE SACRAMENTO BEE Former Govs. Jerry Brown, left, now an Independent, Republican Pete Wilson, right, and longtime GOP strategist Steve Merksamer were among those at Saturday's gathering.