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Updated 6:43am EST October 29, 1997

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### California Cong. Walter Capps Dead at 63

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Freshman lawmaker Rep. Walter Capps, a California Democrat, died Tuesday evening at a Virginia hospital after collapsing of an apparent heart attack at Dulles International Airport, a hospital spokeswoman said.

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Capps, 63, was preparing to board a taxi at the airport in order to return to Capitol Hill for a roll call vote when he collapsed, one aide said. He was returning to Washington from a weekend in his home district of Santa Barbara.

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Geri Owen, nursing supervisor at Columbia Reston Hospital said Capps was pronounced dead at 17:47 p.m. EST. She said his wife, Lois, was with him.

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The cause of death was presumably a heart attack, Owen said.

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The staff at Capps' Capitol Hill office were shocked to hear of his death and were waiting to learn more details.

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President Clinton issued a statement mourning the death of a man he called "a rare soul, someone able to fuse intense spirituality with a devotion to his community and country."

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Capps, a noted religious studies professor, narrowly won election in November 1996 in a district that has been traditionally Republican since World War II. He ran and lost in 1994 by less than one percent of the vote.

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He was a professor of religious studies at the University of California in Santa Barbara for more than 30 years, and was a noted authority on peace and conflict resolution studies.

The author of 14 books, Capps developed the first U.S. college class dealing with the Vietnam War, and also served as the director of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

In the House, he served on the House Science Committee, focusing mainly on aerospace, research and technology issues critical to the Central Coast. He also served on the House International Relations Committee and was involved in national security matters, trade issues, human rights issues and efforts to develop democracy.

"He brought constant values, a rare perspective and a sense of moral grounding that public life too often lacks, and will sorely miss," Clinton said in his statement.

House Democratic Leader Richard Gephardt issued a statement expressing his shock at Capps' sudden death.

"As a new member, Walter brought a combination of unbounding energy and commitment to the issues he cared so much about: making health care more accessible, reforming the campaign finance system and protecting the environment," he said.

Gephardt described Capps as a prominent voice in the chorus urging China to adopt human rights reforms and recently led a campaign in the House urging the administration to ban the importation of assault weapons.

During his tenure at UCSB, Capps received the university's Professor of the Year Award several times, and was twice nominated as National Professor of the Year.

The House adjourned late Tuesday in Capps' memory.

The oldest of four brothers, Capps was raised in Omaha, Nebraska. He received his bachelor's degree from Portland State University in Oregon, and his master's and doctorate degrees from Yale University. He also earned a Master of Sacred Theology from Yale Divinity School.

Capps is survived by his wife, three grown children, Lisa, Todd and Laura, who worked at the White House, as well as a two-year-old grandson, David. REUTERS

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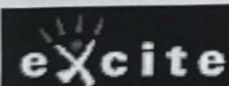
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"I don't think anybody was talking about a health issue when he was back there," O'Connell said. "The very indulgence of my health problem was the spring 1994 snowmobile accident, he said. Capps was seriously injured when his car was struck by a drunken driver."

"The family has been through a lot with the auto accident," O'Connell said. "It hasn't been easy on them. My condolences go out to the family."

O'Connell praised Capps for remaining himself in his job as a congressman and for being a bipartisan politician. "I think we've been fortunate with him, O'Connell and (Assemblyman Tom) Bodinero in that they work together on the issues that affect us. He's been there to try to help as best he could."

Capps worked with local officials on transportation issues and tried to improve cooperation with federal agencies, O'Connell said.

"It's a tragic loss," said San Luis Obispo Mayor Allen Settle. "He'll be greatly missed."

Settle commended Capps for his recent efforts to streamline the