

Date: Wed, 29 Oct 1997 11:40:11 -0800 (PST)  
From: Coni Edick <edick@ariz.library.ucsb.edu>  
To: library@ariz.library.ucsb.edu  
Subject: Message From Chancellor Henry T. Yang (fwd)

-----  
Coni Edick  
Library Personnel Office  
University of California at Santa Barbara  
(805)893-2187 edick@library.ucsb.edu  
-----

----- Forwarded message -----

\* \* \* PLEASE GIVE WIDEST DISTRIBUTION \* \* \*

TO THE UCSB COMMUNITY

October 29, 1997

SENDER WIDE CLARK ROOF

ACTING CHAIR

Dear Campus Community: RELIGIOUS SPIRIT

You have all learned by this time the terribly shocking news of Professor Walter Capps' untimely death.

Professor Capps touched the lives of tens of thousands of students. He was a prominent scholar and teacher, highly respected by colleagues and students at UCSB and throughout the academic world. Walter was well loved by colleagues, students, staff and community friends. and been intelligence who will be deeply missed.

Professor Capps was also a Congressman who worked and traveled tirelessly for the well being of our community and district. He was a good man, filled with energy, humanity, and vision. All members of

I have just formed a campus memorial service committee to plan a celebration of Professor Capps' life. Dr. Robert S. Michaelsen and Vice Chancellor John M. Wiemann will consult with Lois Capps, and they have graciously agreed to co-chair this committee. I will meet with Lois and will express our feelings of heartfelt condolence and profound loss. All members of

On this day, I urge us all to remember the way in which Walter's life illuminated our lives and how we may sustain each other in this loss.

Sincerely,

Henry T. Yang

=====  
Bernadette Weinberg Email: pl00bhw@ucsbvm.ucsb.edu  
UCSB Human Resources, Administration (805) 893-4119 FAX -8645  
=====

Date: Wed, 29 Oct 1997 11:09:37 -0800 (PST)  
From: Coni Edick <edick@ariz.library.ucsb.edu>  
To: library@ariz.library.ucsb.edu  
Subject: Walter Capps Book of Condolences (fwd)

-----  
Coni Edick  
Library Personnel Office  
University of California at Santa Barbara  
(805)893-2187 edick@library.ucsb.edu  
-----

----- Forwarded message -----

October 29, 1997

TO THE UCSB COMMUNITY  
SENDER WADE CLARK ROOF  
ACTING CHAIR  
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
RE WALTER CAPPS BOOK OF CONDOLENCES

For more than 30 years Walter Capps was a member of the Department of Religious Studies. During this time he touched the lives of tens of thousands of students, many faculty, staff, and friends of the university. He was a warm, compassionate person with a sharp wit and keen intelligence who will be deeply missed.

The department has set up a BOOK OF CONDOLENCES in the corridor outside the department office on the third floor of the Humanities and Social Sciences Building. All members of the campus community are warmly invited to sign the book, which will be available for the next ten days. The book will be given to the Capps family at the time of the university-wide Memorial Service.

=====  
Bernadette Weinberg Email: pl00bhw@ucsbvm.ucsb.edu  
UCSB Human Resources, Administration (805) 893-4119 FAX -8645  
=====

Capps was a member of the 1974 freshman class, narrowly defeating Republican incumbent Andrea Seastrand to become the first Democrat elected since World War II from what is now California's 22nd House District.

He had been a professor of religious studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara for more than 30 years. He wrote 14 books and was nationally recognized expert on the issues of American foreign policy and peace and conflict studies.

After teaching a college course dealing with the Vietnam War, Capps had invited Sen. Bob Kerry, D-Meb., a veteran of the conflict, to be a featured lecturer.

It was Kerry who encouraged Capps, also a native of Nebraska, to make another run for the House after he lost Seastrand by only 1,000 votes in 1984. In the second race, he defeated Seastrand by more than 12,000 votes.

Date: Wed, 29 Oct 1997 14:31:27 -0800 (PST)  
From: Sylvia Curtis <curtis@humanitas.ucsb.edu>  
To: library@ariz.library.ucsb.edu  
Subject: Walter Holden Capps, 1934-1997 (fwd from AP, 22:24 EST) (fwd)

...More on Walter Capps.

----- Forwarded message -----

Date: Wed, 29 Oct 1997 03:43:06 +0000  
From: "J. Shawn Landres" <jshawnl@IX.NETCOM.COM>  
Reply-To: UCSB Religious Studies Forum <ANDERE-L@UCSBVM.ucsb.edu>  
To: ANDERE-L@UCSBVM.ucsb.edu  
Subject: Walter Holden Capps, 1934-1997 (fwd from AP, 22:24 EST)

Filed at 10:24 p.m. EST

By The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Freshman Rep. Walter Capps, a California Democrat who came to Washington as a rare liberal in a traditionally Republican district, died Tuesday afternoon after being stricken by an apparent heart attack at Dulles International Airport.

Colleagues said Capps, 63, of Santa Barbara, was en route back to Washington as the House prepared to vote on a defense authorization bill and other issues Tuesday afternoon. Word spread quickly and two lawmakers, who spoke on condition of anonymity, confirmed that he had died.

Capps collapsed about 6 p.m. EST at the airport, said longtime friend Marty Stone.

The congressman's press secretary, Lisa Finkel, confirmed that Capps had died but could not provide other details. Congressional staffers said his body would be flown back to California late Tuesday or Wednesday.

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

He was taken to Columbia Reston Hospital near the airport after he fell ill. The hospital would not comment on his death.

Capps was a member of the 1996 freshman class, narrowly defeating Republican incumbent Andrea Seastrand to become the first Democrat elected since World War II from what is now California's 22nd House district.

He had been a professor of religious studies at the University of California in Santa Barbara for more than 30 years. He wrote 14 books and was a nationally recognized expert on the issues of American democracy and peace and conflict studies.

After developing a college course dealing with the Vietnam War, Capps had invited Sen. Bob Kerry, D-Neb., a veteran of the conflict, to be a featured lecturer.

It was Kerrey who encouraged Capps, also a native of Nebraska, to make another run for the House after he lost Seastrand by only 1,600 votes in 1994. In the second race, he defeated Seastrand by more than 12,000 votes.

Shortly after being nominated, Capps and his wife were injured when their car was hit by a drunk driver.

He suffered from head and leg injuries which kept him from campaigning most of the summer. "I never want to forget what it's like to go through the world in a wheelchair," Capps

said at

a news conference.

Days before his death, Capps circulated a letter among lawmakers urging Chinese President Jiang Zemin to release political dissident Wei Jingsheng as a "positive confidence-building measure."

Earlier this month, Capps was responding to a deluge of constituent complaints about using federal money to convert Ronald Reagan's ranch into a state park. Capps said he had to cut off his daily jog to respond to the angry calls and letters.

The oldest of four brothers, Capps was raised in Omaha, graduated from Portland State University in Oregon and received a masters and doctors degree from Yale. He also earned a master of sacred theology from Yale Divinity School.

He and his wife have three grown children and one grandchild.

-----  
NB: My home address in California is changing -- contact me for details.  
-----

J. Shawn Landres | shawn.landres@lincoln.oxford.ac.uk  
Lincoln College | - - - - -  
Oxford OX1 3DR | Institute of Social & Cultural Anthropology  
United Kingdom | 51 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6PE, UK  
-----

tel: 01865 279 800 (intl callers: dial 44-1865-....)  
fax: 01865 279 802 (College fax)

REUTER  
© 1997 Reuters Limited.  
All rights reserved. Reproduction or  
redistribution of the  
contents are expressly prohibited.  
Reuters price sensitive  
information

Clayton issued a statement mourning the death of a man he called "a rare and  
someone able to fuse intense spirituality with a devotion to his community and country."  
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.  
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  
technology 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 common sense, a clear perspective and a sense of moral grounding that  
public life too often lacks, but will surely miss," Clayton said in his statement.  
House Democratic leader Richard Gephardt issued a statement expressing his shock at  
Capps' sudden death.



[www.coolsavings.com](http://www.coolsavings.com)

[News](#) | [Business](#) | [Sports](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Sci-Tech](#) | [Nation](#) | [World](#) | [Lifestyle](#)

## Top Story News

Updated 6:43am EST October 29, 1997

## More Top Story

### California Cong. Walter Capps Dead at 63

[Clinton Meets With J](#)

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.

[China Critics Jeer](#)

[U.S. Stocks Rise](#)

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.

[Fed: US Prosperity N Threatened](#)

[US: Iraqi Action 'Un:](#)

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.

[US Durables Orders I](#)

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

[Jury Deliberates Nam](#)

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

[Britains Asks Biggs'](#)

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."

[Charles Grateful For](#)

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.

REUTER

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.

© 1997 Reuters Limited. reserved. Replication at redissemination of the co screen are expressly prohi Reuters prior written con Reuters

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

#### **Related Stories**

[Freshman Lawmaker Walter Capps Dead at 63 \(10:25pm EST October 28, 1997\)](#)

[Another Day of Deliberations in Nanny Trial \(Previous story\)](#)

[Britain Seeks Extradition of Train Robber \(Next story\)](#)

**News Search**

[Search Tips](#)

[News](#) | [Business](#) | [Sports](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Sci-Tech](#) | [Nation](#) | [World](#) | [Lifestyle](#)

**excite**

**News Channel**

▶ **Home** ▶

©1997 Excite Inc.  
[Credits Disclaimer](#)

- North Coast
- North County
- SLO City
- SLO County
- SLO Online
- South County
- Sports
- Weather
- MP3s/MP3

"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

- About The TT
- Back Pages
- Business
- Cal Poly
- Classifieds
- Columns
- Comics
- Community
- Contents
- Guesta
- Education
- Elections
- Feed Back
- Focus
- Food
- Front Page
- Letters
- Links
- North Coast
- North County
- SLO City
- SLO County
- SLO Online
- South County
- Sports
- Weather
- What's New

## Friends, colleagues stunned by "tragic loss"

By Carol Roberts and Jamie Hurly  
Telegram-Tribune

SLO COUNTY - State Sen. Jack O'Connell and fellow Democrat Walter Capps had been friends for more than 20 years. O'Connell choked back tears shortly after learning of the congressman's death Tuesday evening.



"I am absolutely stunned," said O'Connell. "We were very close. We talked a lot -- every week on issues affecting our district. We really worked well together. We've been to each other's houses."

O'Connell said his heart goes out to Lois Capps and the Capps' children. "What a tremendous loss."

He believes Capps will be missed by everyone. "He loved his job and worked so hard to attain that job. He loved serving an area he loved and had lived in for three decades."

The state senator also said Capps was easily the most popular professor at UCSB with students and faculty alike.

"He has helped so many people for so long. It is a loss to our entire community," said O'Connell. "Everyone liked Walter."

The suddenness of the death also surprised San Luis Obispo County Supervisor Harry Ovitt, who is president of the California State Association of Counties.

"I don't think anybody was thinking about a health issue when he was back there," Ovitt said. The only indication of any health problem was the spring 1996 automobile 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," Ovitt said. "It hasn't been easy on them. My condolences go out to the family."

Ovitt praised Capps for immersing 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) Bordonaro 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, Ovitt 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

process for cities and counties to get permits from the Army Corps of Engineers to do creek repairs in advance of El Nino.

"Walter did a wonderful job to help us get some permits through the Army Corps of Engineers. I'm very grateful."

Geoffrey Land, director of the Environmental Center of San Luis Obispo, said Capps was philosophically committed to environmental issues.

"He was on his way to accomplishing a lot," said Land. "He was working on getting funding for Morro Bay, park user fee issues and securing the Carrisa Plains as a permanently protected area. He had a lot of ideas." Capps had a full agenda of environmental programs and solutions he was working on, Land said. "Unfortunately, the future of some of these projects is now uncertain."

Land said he met with Capps several times but didn't get to know him personally. "But I think he had a real genuine soft-spoken approach that would have gone a long way in dealing with some of the polarized land-use positions and environmental challenges we have on the Central Coast."

Capps, Land added, seemed genuinely interested in coming up with community-based and environmentally sensitive solutions to problems.

"This is a tragedy for his district as well as his family."

San Luis Coastal school Superintendent Edwin Denton said Capps was a strong ally when it came to educating kids.

"Walter Capps was for public education," said Denton, who talked occasionally with the congressman about issues. "We had a good working relationship. I found him to be someone I could relate to easily. It would have been a pleasure to know him personally."


Capps' first term indicated he was following up on his campaign promises, said Denton. "I liked the direction he was taking."

Denton, a supporter during Capps' campaign, said he is concerned for the family. "The shock of losing someone that way is always traumatic. I am so sorry."

County Democratic Central Committee member Marty U'Ren of Atascadero was working by himself at the Democratic Party headquarters in San Luis Obispo late Tuesday afternoon when the news came in.

"I think that the tragedy of his loss is particularly acute for Democrats in this district, but I think time will show it is a loss for all voters of this district," he said.

**Published Oct. 29, 1997**

 [Related story](#)



- Home
- Local News
- North Coast
- North County
- SLO City
- SLO County
- SLO Online
- South County
- Sports
- Weather
- What's New

...according to a life partner, ...

...to Christus Reston Hospital Center in ... according to The Associated Press. He was ... by his wife, Lois Capps.

... congressman was returning to Washington ... as the House prepared to vote on a defense ... and other issues Tuesday afternoon.

Capps had attended the season-opening performance of the San Luis Obispo County Symphony on Saturday night at the ... Arts Center, where he was introduced along with his ...

The next evening, the couple attended St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Arroyo Grande.

Capps defeated Republican incumbent Andrea Seastrom last November in a rematch of their 1994 race, when Seastrom squeaked out a slim victory in Capps' first foray into election politics. Capps won handily in 1996 following a bitter and expensive campaign for a seat coveted by national leaders of both parties.

Once in office, Capps spent his first year in the House focused primarily on education and human rights issues.

A scholar who authored 14 books, Capps unabashedly spoke of education as a balm for many of society's ills. "I think education is almost the answer to everything," he repeatedly said during his two campaigns.

Capps also spoke passionately of mending partisan wounds.

"I like to get people on both sides of an issue to agree to stay in the room and talk it out together. That's democratic government," he said last week during an interview with the Telegram-Tribune.

- About The TT
- Back Pages
- Business
- Cal Poly
- Classifieds
- Columns
- Comics
- Community
- Contents
- Cuesta
- Education
- Elections
- Feed Back
- Focus
- Food
- Front Page
- Letters
- Links
- North Coast
- North County
- SLO City
- SLO County
- SLO Online
- South County
- Sports
- Weather
- What's New

# Walter Capps dead at 63

## Congressman suffers apparent heart attack at Washington airport

By Dave Wilcox  
Telegram-Tribune

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- Rep. Walter Capps, a grandfatherly college professor who entered the rough-and-tumble world of politics three years ago, collapsed and died Tuesday evening leaving a plane near Washington, D.C.



The first-term Democrat apparently suffered a heart attack at Dulles International Airport, according to Lisa Finkel, the congressman's press secretary.

Capps, 63, was taken to Columbia Reston Hospital Center in nearby Reston, Va., according to The Associated Press. He was accompanied by his wife, Lois Capps.

The Santa Barbara congressman was returning to Washington from his district as the House prepared to vote on a defense authorization bill and other issues Tuesday afternoon.

Capps had attended the season-opening performance of the San Luis Obispo County Symphony on Saturday night at the Performing Arts Center, where he was introduced along with his wife.

The next morning, the couple attended St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Arroyo Grande.

Capps defeated Republican incumbent Andrea Seastrand last November in a rematch of their 1994 race, when Seastrand squeaked out a slim victory in Capps' first foray into elective politics. Capps won handily in 1996 following a bitter and expensive campaign for a seat coveted by national leaders of both parties.

Once in office, Capps spent his first year in the House focused primarily on education and human rights issues.

A scholar who authored 14 books, Capps unabashedly spoke of education as a balm for many of society's ills. "I think education is almost the answer to everything," he repeatedly said during his two campaigns.

Capps also spoke passionately of mending partisan wounds.

"I like to get people on both sides of an issue to agree to stay in the room and talk it out together. That's democratic government," he said last week during an interview with the Telegram-Tribune.

He embraced the ideal of a citizen-politician, and expressed a desire to return to the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he spent 32 years as a religious studies professor.

Capps "brought constant values, a rare perspective and a sense of moral grounding that public life too often lacks, and will sorely miss," President Clinton said in a statement. Clinton made his final campaign stop in Santa Barbara last year to stump for Capps on the weekend before the election.

Two former colleagues of 22nd District Rep. Walter Capps were stunned to hear of his death.

Former White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta, now a distinguished scholar at California State University Monterey Bay, called Capps' death a tragic loss for the district and the nation.

"I think he was one of the most decent and conscientious members of Congress," Panetta said. "Unfortunately, that quality of individual is the exception rather than the rule in Congress. He will be sorely missed."

"The last time I saw him was when I spoke at Cal Poly for graduation (in May)," Panetta said. "We talked about issues and the challenges of dealing with Congress. At that time, he seemed hopeful and very up."

Panetta added, "He felt, at that time, the right position would prevail. That was one of his great qualities."

Said Sen. Dianne Feinstein: "I was shocked and deeply saddened to learn of the tragic death. The House of Representatives and the people of California have lost a very special man. Walter served the people of his district with a thoughtfulness and forthrightness that is all too rare in Washington these days."

Feinstein added, "He measured his actions by whether or not they were true to his moral compass. We had dinner nearly three weeks ago and he vividly expressed to me how much he truly enjoyed representing the people of his district. He will be deeply missed."

Legislation pushed by Capps during his 10 months on Capitol Hill included bills to streamline Medicare payments for people suffering from Lou Gehrig's Disease and to secure funding for dredging Morro Bay. He also chastised the Clinton administration for refusing to sign a global treaty to ban land mines.

His years as a lecturer didn't transform Capps into a skilled orator on the stump, and at times he appeared painfully uncomfortable when trying to fire up supporters.

But the national exposure generated by his races against Seastrand wasn't entirely new to Capps.

An immensely popular class on the Vietnam War's impact that he created within the religious studies department at UC Santa Barbara in 1979 caught the attention of "60 Minutes," which featured the course during a segment. The class also helped Capps forge contacts with national political figures including Democratic Sen. Bob Kerrey of Nebraska, who was a featured lecturer at the

class.

Kerrey became a close friend and political confidant of Capps, a Nebraska native, and encouraged him to run against Seastrand in 1994. He lost the race by 1,600 votes.

"He showed people that a man can be decent and principled in the House. He will be sorely missed," Kerrey told The Associated Press. "He was just getting his sea legs in the House. But even if he had never passed any legislation, his spirit left a mark with us. He showed us how to live."

Capps joined the first group of American educators on a tour of Vietnam in 1991.

He was "one of the few people in the U.S. who spent an enormous amount of time on the Vietnam War after the Vietnam War," said Bob Mulholland, a Vietnam veteran who joined Capps and others in 1988 on a trip to Moscow.

"His devotion to students is probably what he should be remembered for."

Mulholland, who now serves as campaign adviser for the California Democratic Party, said Capps' decision to run for office demonstrated his interest in public service.

"While many are thinking of retiring, he decided to run for public office."

"I think as an educator and as a politician, he spoke with a different voice," said Marty Stone, who Capps defeated in the 1994 Democratic primary.

Stone, now western political director for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, had Capps as a professor while attending UCSB.

"He was not a typical professor, and that's why he was so popular."

Lanky with a hunched gait, Capps was surprisingly athletic. He tossed a football to aides while walking precincts and always kept a baseball glove in the trunk of his car in case there was a chance for a game of catch.

In recent years, however, Capps had to battle back from health problems.

He suffered a scare in March 1996 when he fainted in the lobby of the KVEC radio station. Paramedics rushed him to French Hospital Medical Center, where he was hospitalized overnight.

A doctor blamed his collapse on an erratic heartbeat, which returned to normal without treatment. There was no evidence of heart disease, according to the physician.

His brother, Doug Capps, said at the time that Walter was evaluated by doctors in 1989 after suffering a similar fainting spell and has had an irregular heartbeat most of his life.

Two months later, Capps nearly died in a May 1996 car crash caused by a drunken driver that kept him from campaigning for most of the summer.

He was forced to spend the better part of three months in physical therapy rehabilitating after breaking an arm and a leg in the crash. By August, he was getting around without crutches or a cane and was again scheduling occasional campaign stops.

Despite the setbacks, Capps, who never held office, garnered 102,915 votes to Seastrand's 90,374 in the 22nd Congressional District race in November.

It was a much different result than in 1994, when Capps -- virtually unknown in San Luis Obispo County prior to his candidacy -- lost to Seastrand by less than 1 percent of the vote in a contest that contained far less mudslinging than the repeat campaign.

In 1996, Seastrand lost points with many voters with relentless, negative television ads. The most controversial depicted Capps, who opposes the death penalty, next to Richard Allen Davis, the convicted killer of 12-year-old Polly Klaas.

Only two people were disappointed by Allen's recent death sentence, the ad said: Davis himself and Capps. Capps didn't counterattack, although ads critical of Seastrand were aired by labor unions and environmentalists.

Capps credited his Middle America roots with providing the values that later guided him.

He was the oldest of four brothers who grew up in a tight-knit family in Omaha.

Capps graduated from Portland State University, then spent the next few years training for the seminary. He earned a master's degree and doctorate from Yale and a degree from Yale Divinity School.

He arrived in Santa Barbara in 1964 to establish a religious studies department at UCSB.

Capps was 29, married, and his wife was expecting the first of their three children.

Family and education were touchstones for Capps. His three brothers all earned advanced degrees and stayed close through their adult lives.

His brother, Doug, was Walter's campaign manager during the 1996 race.

"I often thought of our parents," Capps said last year a couple of weeks before the election, "how pleased they would be to see their oldest son and youngest son working side-by-side."

Congressional staffers said Capps' body would be flown back to California. No funeral arrangements were announced.

Published Oct. 29, 1997

🌐 [Related story](#)

---

© San Luis Obispo County Telegram-Tribune

*E-mail: [slott@slnt01.sanluisobispo.com](mailto:slott@slnt01.sanluisobispo.com)  
<http://www.sanluisobispo.com>  
805-781-7800*

---