

## Opinion: Legislature's Maddy was exceptional

By Dan Walters

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It was, in a sense, a gathering of the clan as about 100 mostly men – mostly middle-aged, or older, men – gathered in the venerable Senator Hotel office building, across L Street from the Capitol, one evening last week.

Most were lobbyists, along with a smattering of ex-legislators, a few newsies and Gov. Jerry Brown, all veterans of political jousting in and around the Capitol. They assembled to swap gossip, catch up on grandchildren and honor Ken Maddy, a legislator for 28 years who died exactly 15 years ago this week.

The reception was to raise money for the Fresno State University institute named for Maddy, an FSU graduate who epitomized an era of cross-party conviviality that began, more or less, when he was elected to the Assembly in 1970 and had ended by the time he left the Legislature in 1998.

Maddy was, to use an old phrase, a class act – movie star handsome, moderate Republican, unfailingly charming, articulate and pragmatic. But was his era – the period after the Legislature became full-time and before term limits arrived in 1990 – as golden as his celebrants recall?

In terms of camaraderie, yes, but it reflected the cultural homogeneity of an institution utterly dominated by middle-aged white men. There were very few women, very few Latinos, and very few African Americans, though Willie Brown was Assembly speaker.

Collegial as it was, the era was not particularly productive in effective public policy.

The Capitol fumbled on property tax relief, leading to Proposition 13, and mishandled its after-effects. It loaded up the prisons with new inmates but paid little attention to long-term impacts. It failed to deal with massive population growth and demographic changes.

And it was somewhat corrupt.

A federal undercover investigation exposed the Capitol's insular and smarmy ways, and voters imposed term limits that, with court-ordered redistricting after the 1990 census, opened the door for women and nonwhite politicians.

The Capitol's cultural ambiance changed rapidly and continued to change due to the mandatory turnover of term limits, making life more difficult for lobbyists and others who had been accustomed to stability and long-term relationships.

That's not to say that the Capitol's productivity improved because of those changes, which brought institutional problems of their own. But neither did its dysfunction worsen. It was just a different place.

Maddy was not so much representative of his era as exceptional.

Had the Legislature been dominated by Maddy-like legislators during the 1970s and 1980s – and there were a few others of note, such as Robert Presley, Al Rodda and Walter Stiern – California probably would have been better prepared for the socioeconomic changes that buffeted the state and wouldn't have some of the deeply seated problems it has today.

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