

Beat: Vips

Former U.S. House Speaker Tom Foley dead at 84

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USPA News - Tom Foley, the Democratic politician from Washington state who went on to become the most powerful member of the U.S. House of Representatives, died Friday at his home in the nation's capital, his wife and Congressional officials said. He was 84. Foley, originally from Spokane in the state of Washington, represented the state's 5th congressional district for 30 years from 1965 until 1995. He served as Majority Whip and then Majority Leader before becoming Speaker of the House in June 1989, making him the most powerful member and putting him second in the presidential line of succession.

But the career politician lost his bid for re-election in November 1994, when he lost by just a few thousand votes to Republican newcomer George Nethercutt, making him the first House speaker to be ousted since the Civil War. But even if Foley had won re-election, the speaker's job would certainly have gone to Republican Newt Gingrich as Republicans were taking control of the House. Foley's wife, Heather, said her husband died on Friday at his home in Washington, D.C. as a result of complications from a stroke he suffered in December 2012. He was also hospitalized for pneumonia in May of this year, but Foley was released about a week later and had been on hospice care ever since. "America has lost a legend of the United States Congress," U.S. President Barack Obama said in a statement on late Friday. "For thirty years, Tom Foley represented the people of Washington's 5th district with skill, dedication, and a deep commitment to improving the lives of those he was elected to serve." Obama praised Foley's straightforward approach that helped him find common ground with both Democrats and Republicans, leading to his election as the 57th Speaker of the House. "(First Lady) Michelle and I send our thoughts and prayers to Tom's wife, Heather, and the entire Foley family," he added. Former President George H. W. Bush, who was in office when Foley became Speaker of the House, described the Democrat as a "good man and great public servant" who represented "the very best" in the country's political system. "He always fought for his principles; he was always well-informed and well-reasoned; but Tom never got personal or burned bridges," Bush said. "We didn't agree on every issue, but on key issues we managed to put the good of the country ahead of politics." Former President Bill Clinton, who was in office during Foley's last years as Speaker of the House, described him as a "skilled and knowledgeable" lawmaker. "For three decades - including three terms as Speaker of the House - Tom never forgot that principled compromise and respect for opposing viewpoints are essential foundations of our democracy," Clinton said in a joint statement with his wife, former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. The Clintons, whom also praised Foley's service as Ambassador to Japan from November 1997 until April 2001, added: "His good, warm heart and keen mind will be a lasting example for all who choose to devote their lives to public service. Our thoughts and prayers are with Heather and his entire family, and with Tom's many friends throughout the world." John Boehner, who is the current Speaker of the House, said Foley's "solid sense of fairness" remains a model for any Speaker or representative. "Take it from the great Henry Hyde, who used to say of Tom, 'I wish he were a Republican,'" Boehner said. "With his passing, the House loses one of its most devoted servants and the country loses a great statesman."

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