

Former 9-term North Carolina Congressman Cass Ballenger Dies at 88

By Administrator

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HICKORY, (AP) — Cass Ballenger, a nine-term congressman who also served more than a decade in the North Carolina Legislature, died Wednesday. He was 88.

Ballenger, who authored a state law to protect scenic vistas in the North Carolina mountains, died at a local hospice in his hometown of Hickory after an extended illness, said Tommy Luckadoo, a long-time Ballenger aide.

Ballenger, a Republican, served in the North Carolina House from 1975-77 and in the state Senate from 1977-86. He also served on the Catawba County Board of Commissioners from 1966-74.

While in the General Assembly, Ballenger introduced the Government In the Sunshine Act of 1976, the first substantive open meetings law enacted in North Carolina.

“Cass was wholly dedicated to serving the people of North Carolina and I often look to the example he set in his sincere attention to his constituents,” Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., said in a statement.

North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis described Ballenger as a leader in efforts to control the growing size and scope of the federal government and limit its burden on hardworking families and small businesses.

In the U.S. House, Ballenger made headlines in 2001 when then-Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez showed up at Ballenger's home in Hickory with most of his Cabinet for a barbecue. Ballenger and Chavez met often while Ballenger was a House international subcommittee chairman.

Near the end of his tenure in Washington, Ballenger became a magnet for controversy. He cast a key vote in December 2001 that helped pass hotly contested legislation giving President George W. Bush authority to negotiate global trade agreements and submit them to Congress for a yes or no vote. Waiting until time had expired on the roll call, Ballenger was one of a small number of Republicans who stepped forward to assure a one-vote majority for the measure.

Ballenger called the Council on American-Islamic Relations a “fundraising arm” for terrorist groups and said he reported the group to the FBI and CIA. He also said Cynthia McKinney, at the time a black congresswoman from Georgia known for her abrasive style, had stirred in him “a little bit of a segregationist feeling.” He later apologized for what he called “pretty stupid remarks.”