

FORMER LAWMAKER, 'COUNTRY DOCTOR' PEADEN DIES

By JIM SAUNDERS
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THE CAPITAL, TALLAHASSEE, June 24, 2015.....Former Sen. Durell Peaden, a soft-spoken Panhandle doctor who helped shepherd state health policy and funding, has died after suffering a heart attack early this month.

Senate Secretary Debbie Brown sent a memo to senators Wednesday morning informing them of the death of Peaden, 69, who served in the Senate from 2000 to 2010 and in the House from 1994 to 2000.

"Last night I lost a friend, cousin and mentor," Sen. Greg Evers, a Baker Republican and cousin of Peaden, said in an email to lawmakers Wednesday. "It is with a heavy heart that I bring you the news of the passing of Senator Durell Peaden. Please keep his family in your prayers."

Peaden's family dates back generations in Northwest Florida, with biographical information in the House clerk's manual indicating that a Peaden relative, John Wilkinson, served in the Legislature in the 1840s. Other members of the family also served later in the 1800s, in the early 1900s and in the 1970s.

With his soft, slow drawl, Peaden liked to describe himself as a "country doctor." He was a well-liked figure in the Legislature and would, at times, aggressively advocate for health-care money. He said the Senate Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee, which he chaired during part of his time in the Senate, dealt with "life and death" issues.

While in the House, Peaden --- who was widely known as "Doc" in the Capitol --- also took a lead role in helping establish a medical school at Florida State University. His pitch, at least in part, was that the school could help train primary-care physicians to work in rural and underserved areas.

Hailing from Crestview in the conservative northwest corner of the state, Peaden also was a leading supporter of gun rights. Perhaps most notably, Peaden in 2005 sponsored the "stand your ground" self-defense law.

Sen. Don Gaetz, R-Niceville, announced to the Senate on June 5 that Peaden had suffered a heart attack and was hospitalized in Pennsylvania. Evers last week told senators that Peaden was recovering.

In the memo to senators Wednesday, Brown said Senate officials were working with Peaden's family to gather information.

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