Obituary: Tim Hodson had diverse roles in state's politics

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Published Wednesday, Oct. 26, 2011

Tim Hodson, a widely recognized expert on California politics who spent 35 years working, teaching and preparing future leaders for the state Capitol, died Tuesday at age 61.

Mr. Hodson, who previously had prostate cancer, revealed to friends in August 2010 that he had been diagnosed with brain cancer. News of his death was announced in an email from his wife, Ruth Holton-Hodson, state deputy controller for health and consumer policy.

Mr. Hodson, who began his Capitol career as a Senate staff member, retired a few weeks ago as executive director of the Center for California Studies at California State University, Sacramento. In February, he completed a four-year term on the state Fair Political Practices Commission, a watchdog agency.

As leader of the Center for California Studies since 1993, he oversaw expansion of the Capital Fellows Program, a nationally recognized internship that counts more than two dozen judges and current or former elected officials as alumni. He started the LegiSchool Project, which promotes civic engagement among high school students.

"Tim was an interesting combination of somebody who had serious academic skills but really liked real-world politics," said Ted Lascher, the center's interim executive director. "He really believed in public service."

Mr. Hodson was a professor in the departments of government and public policy and administration at Sacramento State. He also taught at the University of Southern California and began teaching in 1976 at Claremont McKenna College.

"He has legions of students who love him because he mentored them and helped them get jobs," said Barbara O'Connor, former director of the Institute for the Study of Politics and Media at Sacramento State. "He was never too tired to talk to a student. He was a full-time, engaged human being."

An expert on elections, reapportionment and government reform, Mr. Hodson wrote articles on California politics for academic journals and newspaper op-ed pages. He was quoted often in The Bee and national newspapers, including the Los Angeles Times and New York Times.

His expertise on California's political process was rooted in his experience at the Capitol from 1978 to 1993. He worked for the Select Committees on Political Reform and Government Regulation, the Senate Office of Research, and the Senate Elections and Reapportionment Committee.

"Tim was a consummate public servant whose brilliance was belied by his dry wit and down-to-earth personality," Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg said in written statement.
"Most importantly, he maintained a lifelong commitment to sharing his knowledge and his insights, leaving an indelible mark through mentoring and training the next generation of leaders."

Timothy Alan Hodson was born in 1950 and raised in Santa Ana. He graduated from California State University, Fullerton, and earned master's and doctoral degrees in political science at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

He lived in the Land Park neighborhood with his wife, a former executive director of California Common Cause. He had a son during a previous marriage, which ended in divorce.

A former board member of Capital Public Radio, he enjoyed reading and attending San Francisco Giants games. He was a history buff who explored Civil War battlefields on family vacations. He traveled to the Grand Canyon, Galapagos Islands and Alaska.

As a California native, Mr. Hodson "reveled in the state's history, present and future" and "loved helping develop careers of people going into public policy and government," said his son Matt.

"Someone said he was like a maple tree whose seedlings are throughout California," his son said. "That's exactly what he would have wanted."

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