

# Nelson C. L. Brown, at 89; former Conn. House speaker

By **Stephanie Reitz** | ASSOCIATED PRESS SEPTEMBER 09, 2011

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HARTFORD - Nelson C.L. Brown, a former radio broadcaster who parlayed his popularity as state House speaker into decades of lobbying for open government, has died at a hospice facility in southeastern Connecticut at 89.

Mr. Brown died Wednesday near his childhood hometown of Groton, said Mitchell Pearlman, a close friend of Mr. Brown's for decades and former executive director of the state Freedom of Information Commission.

Mr. Brown, a Republican who represented Glastonbury in the House of Representatives, presided over that chamber as speaker in 1957-58 and was active for 50 years afterward lobbying for open government legislation.

Often called the dean of former House speakers, Mr. Brown returned to the Capitol each year for ceremonies marking the General Assembly's opening day. He continued that tradition last winter when the 2011 session was convened, though the affable former lobbyist's declining health due to diabetes complications required him to use a wheelchair.

Word of Mr. Brown's death drew emotional reactions at the state Capitol, where he had been a fixture for decades. He often chatted in the cafeteria or enjoyed "rail time," grabbing moments with legislators and policymakers at the rails overlooking the Legislative Office Building's expansive atrium.

For Mr. Brown, much of that rail time was spent advocating for bills to expand access to public records and proceedings, or against legislation that he believed limited the public's information about its government.

"He was truly a model human being," said state Representative Andrew Fleischmann, Democrat of West Hartford, who served with Mr. Brown on the Connecticut Foundation for Open Government and choked up with emotion upon learning of Mr. Brown's death.

"Even when he disagreed with others, he had a way of expressing his disagreement that was so thoughtful and gentlemanly that it was extremely disarming," Fleischmann said. "I hope they name awards, or buildings, or both after him."

Mr. Brown graduated in 1940 from Fitch High School in Groton and served in World War II, then joined station WNLC in New London as a broadcaster.

He was elected to the House in 1952 and later rose to speaker, presiding over a chamber of 290 members - forcing Mr. Brown to spend up to an hour reading their names aloud for roll call votes, a task later erased when the Capitol installed electronic tallying equipment.

Mr. Brown remained active for years in the nonprofit Connecticut Foundation for Open Government, and was lobbyist for the Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information and the Connecticut Broadcasting Association.