

April 23, 1998

Robert Testo, 78, House Speaker In Era of Change in Connecticut

NEW HAVEN, Conn., April 22— Robert J. Testo, the former Speaker of the Connecticut House, who is given credit for shepherding the General Assembly into the modern era, died on Tuesday at Yale-New Haven Hospital. He was 78 and lived in Milford.

The cause was a heart attack, the family said.

Mr. Testo represented the 134th District in Bridgeport from 1959 to 1969. He became Speaker in 1967 after court-ordered reapportionment formed legislative districts according to population. Before that, each of the state's 169 cities and towns had been sending two representatives each to the State Capitol.

His colleagues said Mr. Testo ran one of the most productive sessions in the history of the Legislature. He helped create the Department of Community Affairs, which focused on urban issues. He was also largely responsible for the state's no-fault divorce law and for changes that led to a Miranda-style notification of rights to criminal suspects.

Mr. Testo left the General Assembly after 10 years, and moved to Milford.

He became a Superior Court judge in 1969 and served as a member of the executive committee, chief administrative judge of the criminal division, a member of the Public Defender Service Commission and administrative judge of the Fairfield Judicial District. He retired in 1986.

Mr. Testo was a native of Bridgeport. He received a bachelor's degree in liberal arts from Fordham University in 1943 and a law degree from Fordham University Law School in 1949.

After leaving law school, he practiced law privately in Bridgeport, and in 1965 he became city attorney of Bridgeport. He held that position until 1969.

He is survived by his wife, Grace Kirkland Testo; seven daughters, Mildred Sacks of Fairfield, Mary Booth and Romona Ciccaglione, both of Milford, Laura McConville of Glastonbury, Donna Stewart of Stratford, Diana Ricitelli of Trumbull and Rosalee Quick of Auburn, Calif.; three sons, Robert Jr. and Vincent, both of Milford, and Christopher, of Batesburg, S.C.; a brother, Anthony, of Fairfield; two sisters, Gladys Christiani of Easton, and Jean Schneider of Sunnyvale, Calif., and 22 grandchildren.