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Ralph E. Van Norstrand, 57, Ex-House Speaker in Hartford

By WOLFGANG SAXON

Ralph E. Van Norstrand, a former Republican Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives, died on Sunday en route from his home in Darien to a hospital. He was 57.

The cause was a heart attack, his family said.

Mr. Van Norstrand, a lawyer, served as minority leader in the General Assembly's House of Representatives from 1979 to 1985 and as Speaker from then until 1987. That term was the last time the Republicans elected a House Speaker until this year.

Though he was one of the most powerful Republicans in Connecticut, he was denied his party's renomination in 1986. He made a bid for re-election later but withdrew from the contest.

Born in Westfield, Mass., Mr. Norstrand graduated magna cum laude from the University of Connecticut and received his law degree from Yale University in 1961. He entered the Connecticut House, representing Darien, in 1976 after winning a special election to fill a vacant seat. He was a past trustee of the Darien Library and a selectman in the town of Darien.

At his death, he was of counsel to the Norwalk law firm of Slavitt, Connery & Vardamis. He focused his practice on real estate law and on probate and foreclosure law.

He is survived by his wife, Loretta Wallace Van Norstrand; a son, R. E. Van Norstrand 3d of New Canaan, Conn.; two daughters, Brook, of Rochester, and Marrylea, of Darien, and two stepdaughters, Kristin Fresch of Seattle and Sarah Story of Darien.

Photo: Ralph E. Van Norstrand (Associated Press, 1985)
