

Haskins felt he'd fulfilled God's purpose

By James T. Hammond

CAPITAL BUREAU

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As Terry Haskins flew toward Houston's M.D. Anderson Cancer Center last year for another torturous round of cancer treatment, the Greenville Republican told his wife Gloria he knew he was in the last chapter in his life.

The House Speaker pro tempore had led the campaign to banish video poker from the state, and he felt he had fulfilled God's purpose for his life.

"He said, 'I knew there was something big the Lord was holding me on for. This was it, and it's over,'" Mrs. Haskins said Tuesday afternoon.

Haskins, 45, died early Tuesday at Greenville's St. Francis Hospital, five years after he discovered a lump under his arm that turned out to be malignant melanoma, an aggressive and deadly form of cancer.

A service for Haskins will be held at 2 p.m. Friday at Rodeheaver Auditorium on the Bob Jones University campus, where the Haskinses met more than two decades ago. Burial will be at Woodlawn Memorial Park.

Gloria Haskins said throughout her husband's illness, his paramount concern was for their sons David, 18, who was elected speaker pro tem in the student Legislature last summer in Columbia and now a student at Bob Jones University; Bryan, 16, who leads the band at Wade Hampton High School; Hayden, 11, a sixth-grader at Providence Center for Classical Studies; and Harlan, 5, a kindergartner at Lake Forest Elementary School.

"We had asked the Lord for five years, long enough for Harlan to be in kindergarten and for David to be in college. It was providential, just right," she said.

Gloria Haskins said it was love at first sight when she and the young Michigan native met in college. They were engaged within two months and married in six.

"This morning, after Terry died, and I was alone in the room, I got on my knees and thanked the Lord for having let me live and be a part of Terry's life, that he chose to bring us together," Gloria Haskins said.

His final weeks were "very, very peaceful," she said.

"He just wanted to make sure the boys were OK and that I was OK. He told the boys, 'You'll still be a team, you just won't have this captain,'" she said.

The "final goodbye" came on Monday, when a circle of friends who have prayed with him regularly gathered at his hospital bedside.

"Before all the big treatments, they would come and hold a circle of prayer," she said of the group that included state Sens. David Thomas and Mike Fair.

Others who paid a visit recently knowing it would be their last included Gov. Jim Hodges and U.S. Rep. Lindsey Graham. U.S. Sen. John McCain called "just about every day," Gloria Haskins said.

Hodges, often a political adversary of Haskins, said, "I have always cherished my friendship with Terry and deeply mourn his passing." He ordered the flags on all state buildings to fly at half staff in Haskins' honor.

Haskins spent 13 years representing Greenville in the General Assembly. He rose to the No. 2 post in the House in 1994. Haskins was seeking an eighth term and was unopposed in District 22 in the Nov. 7

election. The seat will be declared vacant, and a new filing period and a special election will be announced.

Bob Jones III, president of Bob Jones University, said he and Haskins conferred privately in the past year over their positions on removing the Confederate flag from the Statehouse.

"He was interested, as I was, in seeing it removed, feeling it was an unnecessary barrier. Terry worked really hard on that, and he took considerable flak over his position," Jones said Tuesday afternoon.

And, after backing McCain's candidacy for the Republican nomination for president, Haskins broke with McCain when he attacked Bob Jones University for hosting rival Texas Gov. George W. Bush.

"I thought that was his courageous, shining moment," said Jones, noting that Haskins had been criticized by friends for supporting McCain.

"After McCain took his vitriolic position against the school, what appeared to be a strong, anti-Christian position, it really upset Terry," said Jones. "He said in good conscience he had to sever that relationship. It was a hard thing for him to do."

Jones said visitors in recent weeks knew it was time to say goodbye.

"He knew his days on this earth were numbered. His family knew it. They talked a lot about the Lord, about heaven. It was warm time for the family. It was not hard to give up the one they loved so much because they knew he was far better off," Jones said.

Haskins helped get video poker out of the state and the Confederate flag off the Statehouse dome, but his greatest legacy could very well be the faith and determination he showed during his illness.