

# The Washington Post

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## Former Rep. Major Owens dies at 77; represented Brooklyn congressional district for 12 terms

**By Associated Press, Published:  
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NEW YORK — Major Owens, a New York City Democrat who served 12 terms in the U.S. House and was credited with helping to pass the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, has died at age 77.

Owens died Monday night at NYU Langone Medical Center of renal failure and heart failure, his son Chris Owens said. The family posted on Owens' Facebook page that "the brave heart of Congressman Major Owens stopped and he joined the ancestors."

Owens represented a Brooklyn congressional district from 1983 to 2007.

"Today, our country mourns the loss of a devoted public servant who dedicated his life to lifting up the voices of those who too often go unheard," House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi said in a statement. "From the classroom to the halls of Congress, Congressman Owens taught all of us what it means to serve with strength, compassion, and commitment to the public good."

New York City Comptroller John Liu said: "New York City has lost a champion who exemplified the very best of what a Congress member can be. His work in helping to pass the Americans with Disabilities Act will serve as one of his lasting legacies."

Owens was born in Collierville, Tenn., and earned a bachelor's degree from Morehouse College and a master's of library science at Atlanta University. He worked as a librarian at the Brooklyn Public Library before entering politics.

In the 1960s, Owens worked on anti-poverty programs in the administration of New York City Mayor John Lindsay, and he was elected to the state Senate in 1974.

He was elected to the U.S. House in 1982, succeeding Shirley Chisholm, who retired. Owens' diverse

Brooklyn district included heavily Caribbean-American neighborhoods, upscale Park Slope and a large Hasidic area in Crown Heights.

U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer said Owens “had many outstanding traits but none finer than his passion for justice, which burned so brightly in his soul throughout his career and his life.”

U.S. Rep. Jerrold Nadler called him “a strong and passionate advocate for workers, those in poverty, Americans with disabilities and others who are too often forgotten by those in power.”

Asked to assess his own legacy at a 2006 retirement party, Owens said he was most proud of an amendment to secure funding for 107 historically black colleges. He also said: “I spent my time and energy organizing people. I certainly didn’t do it by raising money. Fundraising was my greatest failure.”

After leaving Congress, Owens taught in the Department of Public Administration at Brooklyn’s Medgar Evers College.

Owens’ survivors include his wife, Maria; five children; and eight grandchildren.

His son Chris, a Brooklyn political activist, ran unsuccessfully for the Democratic nomination to succeed his father. Yvette Clarke won the election and has held the seat since Owens retired.

Another son, Geoffrey Owens, is an actor who played Bill Cosby’s son-in-law Elvin on “The Cosby Show.” He is currently appearing in the Broadway production of “Romeo and Juliet” starring Orlando Bloom and Condola Rashad.

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