

Rep. Mills: Dependable, Unas

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The apparent suicide yesterday of Rep. William O. Mills (R-Md.)—a quiet, likable, backbench congressman whose interests were focused on the problems of his Eastern Shore constituents—stunned Capitol Hill.

"The news has shaken us all," said House Speaker Carl Albert.

"It just baffles me. I can't understand it," Mills' fellow Maryland Republican Lawrence J. Hogan said.

The portly 48-year-old congressman apparently had confided to only a few friends his anguish over news accounts this week

that his 1971 campaign had failed to report a \$25,000 contribution from the Finance Committee to Re-elect the President.

On the floor of the House on Wednesday when he voted to sustain a presidential veto, and later in the afternoon when he posed with the rest of Congress for the annual official photograph, Mills was jovial, smiling, looking unbothered by the publicity. That, many of his colleagues felt, was as it should be.

"I think this problem was a relatively minor one," Thomas N. Downing (D-Va.), a close friend of Mills, said of the alleged campaign violation. "It was a technical

thing, I think. But, in these days and times, people would probably construe it to be a part of Watergate."

News stories about the 1971 campaign contribution were the first major reports on Mills' Capitol Hill activities outside his own Eastern Shore congressional district and they left him shaken and thinking of resigning his seat, according to Rep. Bob Wilson (R-Calif.), who talked to Mills on Wednesday.

Although Mills issued a knowledge of the contribution, he continued to be troubled by what he called the "bad publicity," Wilson

recalled. "I hate to have it," Wilson said Mills told him.

Wilson told the Associated Press that when Mills told him he was telling the truth in his denial, Wilson assured him, "Then you don't have anything to worry about."

"He wasn't wringing his hands, but he reflected great pain," Wilson, the 1972 Republican Congressional Campaign Committee chairman, recalled in an interview with the AP.

Mills, who was born on the Eastern Shore, commuted to Washington, driving the 78 miles from his home to the House of Representatives in the morning

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and returning at night when the House was in session.

He left the Eastern Shore only once for an extended period—to serve in World War II. He won a bronze star for bravery while serving in Gen. George S. Patton's 3d Army after the crossing of the Rhine.

After the war, he came back to the Shore, where he worked in managerial posts with the telephone company until 1962.

In that year, Rogers C. B. Morton, who currently serves as Interior Secretary, was elected to his first term to Congress and Mills came with him as administrative assistant, Morton's right-

hand man. He was adept, congressional sources said, at finding his way around Capitol Hill and the federal bureaucracy and handled for Morton the special problems of his Eastern Shore constituents.

Mills' skill at helping the widow having trouble getting her Social Security benefits or getting federal aid to deal with pollution problems on the Chesapeake Bay helped maintain Morton's popularity on the Eastern Shore, while also freeing the congressman to spend time as Republican National Committee chairman, congressional sources indicated.

When Morton was appointed Interior Secretary in 1971,

Mills ran for the seat, easily winning in a special election in May, of that year and again in November, 1972.

His style as a congressman did not vary much from his style as an aide, according to the account of congressmen he worked with and to a junior aide to Mills. Mills' concern was still primarily the Eastern Shore and its problems.

He served on both the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee and the Post Office and Civil Service Committee but ranked low in seniority in both and, as a result, did not talk a major role in their deliberations, congressional sources said.

"As a new member he didn't take too much part in the full committee," said H. R. Gross of Iowa, the ranking Republican member of the Post Office and Civil Service Committee. "But he was constant in his attendance when needed in the full committee and a good man. If he said he'd be at a Committee meeting, he'd be there. He was entirely dependable."

"He was very dedicated to his job—a real pleasant kind of fellow," Downing said. "He was not talkative, and unassuming — which is a quality you don't find too much up here."