

Mother of Nancy Reagan dies

President to visit Phoenix for funeral of Edith Davis

By Christine Donnelly
The Associated Press

PHOENIX — The mother of first lady Nancy Reagan has died at her home here, causing President Reagan to visit Phoenix during a period of turmoil for the state's freshman governor.

The White House announced that the Reagans would board Air Force One at 7 a.m. MST for the flight to Phoenix. Reagan's itinerary calls for him to fly to West Point, N.Y., for a luncheon Tuesday, then return for the Wednesday funeral of Edith Lucket Davis.

Mrs. Davis, 91, died of a stroke Monday.

Last year, Reagan endorsed Republican Gov. Evan Mecham in a television commercial, but Burton Kruglick, the state GOP chairman, said Monday that the party wouldn't bother Reagan with politics despite Mecham's facing recall and a legislative probe which could lead to impeachment.

"I'm sure the president is concerned about what is going on here, but whether he makes a political statement during such a personal time is really up to him," Kruglick said. "I wouldn't ask him to, I don't think it's the appropriate time for that sort of thing."

Mecham is the target of a recall movement which claims to have received more signatures — 343,000-plus — than Mecham had votes in 1986, and the GOP-dominated state House of Representatives has hired a special counsel to determine if

Mecham had committed an impeachable act in failing to list a \$350,000 campaign loan.

Kruglick said he did not know whether Mecham would seek a meeting with Reagan or a statement of support, Ken Smith, Mecham's press secretary, did not return phone calls to his home Monday.

Mrs. Davis, a former actress who was the widow of Chicago neurosurgeon Loyal Davis, had been ailing for several years.

The White House said she died at 2:15 EST of a cerebral thrombosis, a blood clot in the brain and a form of stroke.

Reagan learned of the death about 45 minutes later from Elaine Crisp, Mrs. Reagan's press secretary, and spent the rest of the afternoon with his wife.

Mrs. Reagan, who underwent breast cancer surgery Oct. 17 and returned to the White House last Thursday, was described by Mrs. Crisp as "very upset."

"She's going through some old photographs of her mother. (She's) very teary," Mrs. Crisp said.

Mrs. Davis had been ill for some time and died in her sleep, Mrs. Crisp said.

Tom Chauncey, a family friend who visited Mrs. Davis several times a week, was at her home when she died. He informed Mrs. Crisp, who said she told the president because she thought he "should be the one to be with her."

Mrs. Reagan last saw her mother Aug. 13 before joining her husband



Edith Davis

at their ranch for a summer vacation. Mrs. Reagan visited with her mother, who has been confined to a wheelchair for several years, several times a year.

Mrs. Davis had lived in Phoenix since 1963, where she retired with her husband. The couple moved to the Southwest when Davis retired as head of the surgery department at Northwestern University.

Davis died in August 1982 of congestive heart failure at age 86.

Mrs. Davis, often known by her nickname of "Lucky," was born July 16, 1896, the ninth and last child of Sarah Whitlock and Charles Edward Lucket of Petersburg, Va. Her father worked for the Adams Express Co., and was transferred to Washington, D.C., where she spent her childhood.

Throughout her life, Mrs. Davis

was known for her vivacity and kindness.

"They broke the mold after they made my mother," wrote her daughter Nancy in a tribute to her mother in 1984. "If I could be half the woman she is, I'd be happy" Her daughter described her as having a "delicious, wicked wonderful sense of humor" and a "fierce loyalty to her family."

Mrs. Reagan wrote that her mother got her first break at age 14 when her brother Joe gave her her first job in a theater he ran. The singer Chauncey Alcott was to appear with his sister as an accompanist, but she fell ill.

Edith's brother took her in to see Alcott, who asked whether she played the piano. She replied in the affirmative, even though she had no idea how to play, and Alcott hired her on the spot.

Her career on the stage included appearances with George M. Cohan and Spencer Tracy — who later became a close friend. She also worked with Walter Huston, Zasu Pitts, David Belasco, Louis Calhern and Alla Nazimova, the famous actress who became her daughter's godmother.

The young actress was married briefly to Kenneth Robbins, a New Jersey businessman, but the union ended shortly after Nancy's birth, and the couple was later divorced.

In recognition of her work, Mrs. Davis received the Arizona Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association of Retarded Citizens of Arizona in 1983.

In 1982, Northwestern established an endowed chair in the Davis' names to recognize the couple's association with the medical school.