

A fighter is gone

Former U.S.
Senator Arlen
Specter died Sunday
at the age of 82

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The death of Arlen Specter, one of Pennsylvania's most storied politicians and the state's longest serving U.S. senator, has provoked an outpouring of grief from the White House to the state capital and City Hall.

"Arlen Specter was always a fighter," said President Barack Obama in a statement. "From his days stamping out corruption as a prosecutor in Philadelphia to his three decades of service in the Senate, Arlen was fiercely independent — never putting party or ideology ahead of the people he was chosen to serve."

The president on Monday ordered all flags on federal property flown at half-staff in honor of the late senator. Gov. Tom Corbett and Mayor Michael Nutter have done the same for flags at state and city facilities.

"He cared about people, gave voice to the voiceless, and stood up for everyday Philadelphians, Pennsylvanians and Americans at every opportunity," Nutter said. "His door and resources were always open and available to virtually any request I made on behalf of the City. He displayed gutsy, bold, strategic leadership on any number of issues."

Specter, 82, died at home at 11:39 a.m. Sunday, from complications of non-Hodgkins lymphoma. He had been bat-



Sen. Arlen Specter arrives at Citizens Bank Park in Philadelphia as he campaigns in 2009, across Pennsylvania for the Democratic nomination to run for re-election. Specter, longtime Senate moderate, died Sunday at the age of 82.

ting cancer since 2005.

The former senator first underwent chemotherapy in 2005 and was treated again in 2008. In August, he was hospitalized battling the cancer for a third time.

Specter wrote of his illness in a 2008 book, "Never Give In: Battling Cancer in the Senate," saying he wanted to let others facing similar crises "know they are not alone."

"He brought that same toughness and determination to his personal struggles, using his own story to inspire others," Obama said. "When he announced that his cancer had returned in 2005, Arlen said, 'I have beaten a brain tumor, bypass heart surgery and many tough political opponents - and I'm going to beat this, too.' Arlen fought that battle for seven more years with the same resolve he used to fight for stem-cell research funding, veterans' health, and countless other issues that will continue to change lives for years to come."

During the course of his career - more than 40 years holding public office - Specter served in a number of offices, starting as a prosecutor in the city's District Attorney's office and rising to U.S. senator, an office he held from 1981 to 2011.

His first elected post was as Philadelphia District Attorney, a job he held from 1966 to 1974. Specter lost re-election as district attorney in 1973 and went into private practice. Among his most notorious clients as a private attorney was Ira Einhorn, a Philadelphia counterculture celebrity who killed his girlfriend in 1977.

Finally, in 1980, Specter

Services for the long-serving senator will be held at noon on Tuesday, Oct. 16 at Har Zion Temple, 1500 Hagys Ford Road, Penn Valley. Burial will follow at Shalom Memorial Park, Pine and Byberry roads in Huntingdon Valley. The family requests that, in lieu of flowers, contributions be made to Philadelphia University or another charity.

won the Senate seat vacated by retiring Republican Richard Schweiker, defeating former Pittsburgh Mayor Pete Flaherty.

In 1995, he launched a presidential bid, denouncing religious conservatives as the "fringe" that played too large a role in setting the Republican Party's agenda. Specter bowed out before the first primary because of lackluster fundraising.

Unusually, he held office bearing both the Republican and Democratic standards at different points in his career, a fact that first earned him the nickname "Benedict Arlen" after he switched his party affiliation from Democrat to Republican in 1965. He made the switch to run for District Attorney against his boss, James Crumlish, a Democrat. Famously, he switched back to Democrat in 2009, saying his views aligned more with Dems than the GOP.

Though the tactic garnered him much ridicule each time, it served his constituents well, said two men who worked closely with him.

"No public servant or elected official has done more for the people of Pennsylvania in their career, with the possible exception of Benjamin Franklin," said former Gov. Ed Rendell. "Arlen, as a Republican, did more to protect the people of Philadelphia and the people of Pennsylvania from harm being wreaked upon them than anyone else."

U.S. Sen. Bob Casey agreed.

"Arlen was a statesman and a problem solver who was able to work with Democrats and Republicans in the best interest of our commonwealth and our country," said Casey.

Indeed, elected officials from both sides of the aisle expressed their condolences.

"Pennsylvania has lost a political figure whose career stretched from Philadelphia's City Hall to the chambers of the U.S. Senate. We are saddened to hear of his death," Corbett said in a statement.

The man who ultimately unseated Specter, U.S. Sen. Pat Toomey, noted his predecessor's impact on the state and nation.

"His impact on a state and public policy will not be forgotten," Toomey said in a

statement.

Specter had an uncanny knack for appearing at historic moments. He served on the Warren Commission, investigating the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, where he was the chief author of the theory that a single bullet had hit both Kennedy and Texas Gov. John Connally, an assumption critical to the conclusion that presidential assassin Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. The theory remains controversial and was the subject of ridicule in Oliver Stone's 1991 movie "JFK."

In addition, Specter was a crucial voice in shaping the U.S. Supreme Court during his tenure on the Senate's judiciary committee where he was the crucial voice in shooting down the nomination of Robert Bork and voted to confirm Justice Clarence Thomas. The first move infuriated conservatives, the second liberals.

In 1987, Specter helped thwart Bork's nomination to the court, earning him conservative enemies who still bitterly refer to such denials as being "borked." But four years later, Specter was criticized by liberals for his tough questioning of Anita Hill at Thomas' Supreme Court nomination hearings and for accusing her of committing "flat-out perjury." The interrogation, televised nationally, incensed women's groups and nearly cost him his seat in 1992.

As a senior member of the powerful Appropriations Committee, Specter pushed for increased funding for stem-cell research, breast cancer and Alzheimer's disease, and supported several labor-backed initiatives in a GOP-led Congress. He also doggedly sought federal funds for local projects in his home state.

Specter's independence caught up with him in 2004. He barely survived a GOP primary challenge from Toomey by 17,000 votes of more than 1.4 million cast. He went on to easily win the general election with the help of organized labor, a traditionally Democratic constituency.

Over the years, Specter had fought two previous bouts with Hodgkin lymphoma,

overcome a brain tumor and survived cardiac arrest following bypass surgery.

Specter started fellow senators in April 2009 when he announced he was again switching parties, becoming a Democrat. He said he was "increasingly at odds with the Republican philosophy," though he said the Democrats could not count on him to be "an automatic 60th vote" that would give them a filibuster-proof majority.

"My change in party will enable me to be re-elected," Specter famously said in TV news footage that became part of his opponents' attack ad.

The announcer ends the ad saying, "Arlen Specter changed parties to save one job - his, not yours."

Democrats picked Sestak, a retired Navy vice admiral, over Specter in the 2010 primary, ending his decades of service. Sestak lost Specter's seat to conservative Republican Rep. Pat Toomey in the general election by 2 percentage points.

Born in Wichita, Kan., on Feb. 12, 1930, Specter spent summers toiling in his father's junkyard in Russell, Kan., where he knew another future senator - Bob Dole. The junkyard thrived during World War II, allowing Specter's father to send his four children to college.

Specter left Kansas for college in 1947 because the University of Kansas, where his best friends were headed, did not have Jewish fraternities. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1951 and Yale law school in 1956. He served in the Air Force from 1951 to 1953.

After leaving the Senate in January 2011, the University of Pennsylvania Law School said Specter would teach a course about Congress' relationship with the Supreme Court, and Maryland Public Television launched a political-affairs show hosted by the former senator.

He also occasionally performed standup comedy at clubs in Philadelphia and New York. He played squash nearly every day into his mid-70s and liked to unwind with a martini or two at night.

Specter is survived by his wife, Joan, and two sons, Shanin and Steve, and four granddaughters.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

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