



Arlen Specter

February 12, 1930 - October 14, 2012

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Arlen Specter, the long-serving United States senator from Pennsylvania whose independent streak made him a decisive vote on judges, crime bills and two impeachment trials, died of complications of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in Philadelphia on October 14, 2012. He was eighty-two.

He was born in Wichita, Kansas, on February 12, 1930, the son of Harry Specter, a Russian Jewish immigrant who worked as a scrap-metal dealer, and Lillie Shanin Specter. The family later moved to Russell, Kansas. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, served in the Air Force in the early 1950s, and earned a law degree from Yale. As a young Philadelphia prosecutor he worked on the Warren Commission's staff investigating the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and helped develop the single-bullet theory.

He was elected district attorney of Philadelphia in 1965 as a Democrat-turned-Republican reformer and won a Senate seat in 1980. Over five terms he chaired the Judiciary and Veterans' Affairs committees, helped write the seminal 1982 Armed Career Criminal Act, and co-authored the Specter-Mikulski stem-cell research bill. His questioning of Anita Hill during the Clarence Thomas hearings in 1991 drew lasting criticism; he later apologized for his tone while defending the Senate's duty to probe.

In 1999 he was one of the few Republicans to vote against convicting President Bill Clinton on both impeachment articles. In 2009, facing a tough primary, he switched parties and briefly restored a Democratic majority in the Senate before losing the 2010 Democratic primary. Through multiple bouts with cancer he kept a public diary of treatment and kept casting votes. He is buried in Shalom Memorial Park in Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. Colleagues in both parties remembered a prosecutor's mind that rarely took the easy partisan line.

Services

Died in Philadelphia, PA, October 14, 2012, aged 82. Portrait: Official U.S. Senate portrait (public domain), hosted by Notice Nearby.

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