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Former DC Mayor Marion Barry dies at 78

By Ben Nuckols
WASHINGTON (AP) - Diverse and flamboyant, maddening and beloved, Marion Barry shone every politician in the 37-year history of District of Columbia self-rule. But for many, his legacy was not defined by the accomplishments and failures of four terms as mayor and long vice on the D.C. Council. Instead, Barry will be remembered for a single night in downtown Washington hotel room and the grainy video that showed him lighting a crack pipe in the company of a much younger woman. When FBI agents burst in, he referred to her with an expletive. She "set me up," Barry said.

Barry died Nov. 23 at 78. His family said in statement that Barry died shortly after midnight at the United Medical Center, after having been released from Howard University Hospital on Nov. 22.

The year was 1990, and crack cocaine had exploded in the district, turning it into the nation's murder capital. In his third term, the man known as the "Mayor of Life" became a symbol of a wandering city.

Federal authorities had been investigating him for years for alleged ties to drug suspects, and while he denied using drugs, late-night partying was taking a toll on his job performance.

The arrest and subsequent conviction - a jury deadlocked most counts, convicting him on a single count of drug possession - was a turning point for Barry. He had been elected to his first term as mayor in 1978 with broad support from across the city. With his good looks, charisma and background in the civil rights movement, he was embraced the dynamic leader of the city's young government.

He led the Washington Post endorsed him in each of his first three mayoral runs, although the 1986 endorsement was unenthusiastic.

Barry's six-month term in federal prison was hardly the end of his political career. But it forever changed how it was perceived. To some, he was a pariah and an embarrassment. But to many district residents, particularly lower-income blacks, he was still a hero, someone unfairly persecuted for personal failures.

Barry returned to the D.C. Council in 1992, representing the poorest of the city's eight wards. Two years later, he won his fourth and final term as mayor. The electorate was starkly divided along racial lines, and Barry advised those who had not supported his candidacy to "get over it."

"Marion Barry changed America with his unmitigated will to stand up in the ashes of where he had fallen and come back to win," poet Maya Angelou said in 1999.

Barry's triumph, though, was short-lived. In 1995, with the city flirting with bankruptcy from years of bloated, unaccountable government, much of it under Barry, Congress stripped him of much of his power and installed financial control board. Barry held authority over little more than the city's parks, libraries and community access cable TV station. He decided against seeking a fifth term.

Barry spent a few years working as a municipal bond consultant, but he couldn't stay away from politics. In 2004, he returned to the council, again representing Ward 8, where he remained beloved. Many constituents still referred to him as "Mayor Barry," and he was re-elected in 2008 and 2012.

Barry was born March 6, 1936, to Marion and Mattie Barry, in the small Mississippi delta town of Ita Bena, and was raised in Memphis, Tenn., after the death of his father, a sharecropper.

While an undergraduate at LeMoyn College (now LeMoyn-Owen College), Barry picked up the nickname "Shep" in reference to Soviet propagandist Dmitri Shepilov for his ardent support of the civil rights movement. Barry began using Shepilov as his middle name.

Barry did graduate work in chemistry at Fisk University in Nashville, Tenn., earning a master's degree. He left school short of a doctorate to work in the civil rights movement.

His political rise began in 1960, when he became the first national chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, which sent young people into the South to register black voters and became known as one of the most militant civil rights groups of that era.

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FORMER WASHINGTON D.C. MAYOR MARION BARRY

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In 1970, The Post wrote: "Four years ago widely considered a young Black Power Militant with almost no constituency, (Barry) has become a man who is listened to - if not fully accepted - on all sides."

Barry's activism propelled him into local politics, first as a member of the Board of Education and then in 1974 as a member of the first elected city council organized under home rule legislation.

In 1977, he was wounded by a shotgun blast in the Hanafi Muslim takeover of D.C.'s city hall. A young reporter was killed. The shooting was credited with strengthening him politically.

In 1978, he defeated incumbent Mayor Walter Washington - the city's first home rule mayor - in the Democratic primary and went on to easily win the general election.

Barry's early years in office were marked by improvement in many city services and a dramatic expansion of the government payroll, creating a thriving black middle class in the nation's capital. Barry established a summer jobs program that gave many young people their first work experience and earned him political capital.

In his second term, the district's finances were rockier, and some of his appointees were caught up in corruption scandals.

Barry's annual turkey giveaway will go on despite his death.

Barry's spokeswoman LaToya Foster said Sunday at an early morning press conference at United Medical Center, where Barry died, that the annual Thanksgiving turkey giveaway for needy residents would continue because "that's what he would have wanted."

The giveaway is scheduled for Tuesday at Union Temple Baptist Church in southeast Washington.

Television station WJLA-TV (<http://bit.ly/11J2acS>) reported that 3,000 turkeys were scheduled to be handed out.



STEVIE WONDER

Obama awards Presidential Medal of Freedom

By Darlene Superville

WASHINGTON (AP) - President Barack Obama is presenting America's highest civilian honor to 19 artists, activists, public servants and others.

The distinguished group receiving a Presidential Medal of Freedom includes actress Meryl Streep, Ethel Kennedy, widow of the late Sen. Robert Kennedy, singer-songwriter Stevie Wonder and Rep. John Dingell, a Democrat and the longest-serving member of Congress. Dingell is retiring at the end of the year.

Others being recognized at a White House ceremony Nov. 24 are music theater composer Stephen Sondheim, NBC journalist Tom Brokaw and author Isabel Allende.

The list also includes Native American activist Suzan Harjo, actress Marlo Thomas, economist Robert Solow, golfer Charles Sifford, former Rep. Abner Mikva of Illinois and physicist Mildred Dresselhaus.

Posthumous medals will go to six individuals, among them civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, who were slain in 1964 as they participated in a historic voter registration drive among African-Americans in Mississippi.

Other posthumous awards will go to choreographer Alvin Ailey and Reps. Patsy Mink of Hawaii and Edward Roybal of California, founders of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

The Presidential Medal of Freedom is reserved for individuals who have made "meritorious contributions" to U.S. security, world peace or cultural endeavors.

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The 78-year-old Barry died early Sunday after collapsing outside his home. Barry served four terms as the city's mayor and had been the councilman for Ward 8, the poorest of the city's eight wards, since 2004.



U.S. REP. G.K. BUTTERFIELD

NC Rep. Butterfield Is Next Black Caucus Chairman

RALEIGH (AP) - North Carolina U.S. Rep. G.K. Butterfield is the chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus for the next two years.

The 67-year-old Wilson attorney and former state Supreme Court justice has served in the U.S. House for more than 10 years, representing the 1st Congressional District. Caucus members elected the Democrat on Wednesday after serving eight years within the group's leadership, most recently as first vice chairman.

Butterfield's chairmanship officially begins in early January. His office said the caucus will be the largest in the group's history, with at least 45 members.

Butterfield's district covers all or parts of 24 northeastern and eastern Piedmont counties, stretching from Elizabeth City to Durham.

Former North Carolina Congressman Mel Watt also was caucus chairman in 2005 and 2006.

Voter ID Laws - Advocates continue fight against Tenn voter ID law

By Lucas L. Johnson II

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) - A legendary Tennessee lawyer whose push for voting rights dated back to the civil rights movement died last summer, not long before a new federal report found evidence that he might have had a point about that state's voter identification law.

Now many of those who worked closely with him say they intend to keep the cause alive.

George Barrett died in August, two months before a new report by the Government Accountability Office found that states - including Tennessee - which toughened their voter ID laws saw steeper drops in election turnout than those that did not.

While there were few reports of voting problems in Tennessee following the Nov. 4 general election, voter advocates say the report justifies the need to examine the effects of the voter ID law in Tennessee, one of 33 states to enact laws obligating voters to show a photo ID at the polls. In doing so they hope to rekindle the efforts of Barrett, a one-man crusader whose courtroom advocacy dated back to the lunch-counter sit-ins of the early 1960s, when it was rare for a white attorney to take up the cause of black college students.

"We are running with the momentum George generated," said Hedy Weinberg, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Tennessee, which supported Barrett in a lawsuit filed in 2012 against the state's voter ID law. "His inspiration continues to give us the energy and the wherewithal to move forward, to ensure that access to the ballot box is available to all Tennessee citizens."

In a career that spanned more than 50 years, Barrett also represented corporate whistleblowers, fought for labor rights, tackled securities fraud, and handled a case that ultimately desegregated the state's public colleges and universities.

But he was passionate about the vote, and battled disenfranchisement up until his death at the age of 86.

"He remained undaunted in his pursuit of the franchise for all," Weinberg said.

The GAO report's evidence wasn't around when Barrett was pursuing his lawsuit against the state's voter ID law, which an appeals court rejected.

The report compared election turnout in Kansas and Tennessee - which tightened voter ID requirements between the 2008 and 2012 elections - to voting in four states that didn't change their identification requirements.

It estimated that reductions in voter turnout were about 2 percent greater in Kansas and from 2 percent to 3 percent steeper in Tennessee than they were in the other states examined. The four other states, which did not make their voter ID laws stricter, were Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, and Maine.