

Ted Kennedy, longtime senator, patriarch of famous family, dies at 77

WASHINGTON - Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, who died late Aug. 25 at the age of 77, stood firmly on the side of the Catholic Church on a wide range of issues from immigration reform to the minimum wage during his 47 years as a U.S. senator from Massachusetts.

But the youngest son of one of the nation's most famous Catholic families ran into criticism from leaders of the U.S. Catholic Church for his stand on abortion. He opposed the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act, supported Roe v. Wade and was a chief sponsor of legislation to limit protests outside abortion clinics and to permit the use of federal funds for research projects using fetal tissue.

Kennedy died at 11:30 p.m. at his Massachusetts home on Cape Cod after a yearlong battle with a malignant brain tumor. His family was at his side, as was a Catholic priest, Father Patrick Tarrant. Funeral arrangements were pending.

The senator took the helm of one of the most prominent American Catholic political families of the 20th century after his two older brothers, President John F. Kennedy and Sen. Robert Kennedy, were assassinated in the 1960s.

His death came exactly two weeks after the death of his sister Eunice Kennedy Shriver, 88. The only surviving sibling is Jean Kennedy Smith, 81.

"An important chapter in our history has come to an end," President Barack Obama said in a statement Aug. 26. "Our country has lost a great leader, who picked up the torch of his fallen brothers and became the greatest U.S. senator of our time.

"And the Kennedy family has lost their patriarch, a tower of strength and support through good times and bad," he added.

Kennedy had served in the U.S. Senate since he was first elected in 1962 to fill his

brother John's unexpired term after he became president.

As the second-most senior member of the U.S. Senate, Kennedy joined with Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., in a bipartisan effort for immigration reform, which the Catholic Church backed but which was ultimately unsuccessful. In earlier years, he championed a national health insurance plan that church leaders supported, except for its inclusion of abortion as a covered health service.

Since Obama's election he had supported the president's push for passage of health care reform this year. He helped draft the Affordable Health Choices Act under consideration by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. It would require individuals to purchase health insurance except in hardship cases.

Addressing a Senate committee in 1993, Sister Maryanna Coyle, a Sister of Charity who then chaired the board of trustees of the Catholic Health Association, praised Kennedy for his longtime support of a U.S. health care system that covers everyone.

"CHA shares your belief ... that the goal of universal health care coverage is and must remain the one non-negotiable item throughout the coming debate on health care reform," she said.

Kennedy also served as a co-sponsor and/or co-author of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act, the State Children's Health Insurance Program, and legislation raising the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.25 per hour.

Born Feb. 22, 1932, in Brookline, Mass., Edward Moore "Ted" Kennedy was the last of the nine children of Joseph P. and Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy. After his graduation from Harvard University and the University of Virginia Law School, he managed the Senate re-election campaign and then the presidential campaign of his brother John.

He was 30, the minimum age for serving in the Senate, when he was elected to fill his brother's unexpired term in 1962. But the history of Kennedy family tragedies that had begun with the deaths of his brother Joe and sister Kathleen during and after World War II continued in 1963 with the assassination of John. In 1968 his only surviving brother, Robert, also was assassinated, while campaigning for the

Democratic presidential nomination.

Edward Kennedy's political career was nearly derailed in 1969 when he drove a car off a bridge on Chappaquiddick Island in Massachusetts, drowning his passenger, Mary Jo Kopechne. He won re-election to his Senate seat easily in 1970, but lost his post as Senate majority whip by a close vote.

Although he was considered a potential presidential candidate in 1972 and 1976 he did not make a serious run until 1980, when he unsuccessfully challenged incumbent President Jimmy Carter for the Democratic nomination.

His stature in the Senate continued to grow with his successive re-elections. In the 111th Congress he was chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee and ranking member of several committees and subcommittees.

He was a vocal opponent of both the Vietnam War and the war in Iraq and a strong supporter of the civil rights movement, increased federal funding of public schools and early education programs such as Head Start, universal health coverage, the rights of workers to organize and to earn a living wage, and immigration reform that would lead toward citizenship.

On most of those issues Kennedy's stance was on the same side as Catholic leaders, but on abortion they diverged sharply.

He did not begin his Senate career as an abortion supporter, however, according to a 1971 letter that surfaced many years later.

"While the deep concern of a woman bearing an unwanted child merits consideration and sympathy, it is my personal feeling that the legalization of abortion on demand is not in accordance with the value which our civilization places on human life," Kennedy wrote a year and a half before *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision that lifted most state restrictions on abortion.

"Wanted or unwanted, I believe that human life, even at its earliest stages, has certain rights which must be recognized - the right to be born, the right to love, the right to grow old," he added. "When history looks back at this era it should recognize this generation as one which cared about human beings enough to halt

the practice of war, to provide a decent living for every family, and to fulfill its responsibility to its children from the very moment of conception.”

In recent years, however, Kennedy earned a nearly 100 percent negative rating from the National Right to Life Committee and a 100 percent positive rating from NARAL Pro-Choice America for his abortion-related votes in the Senate.

Kennedy had been married since 1992 to the former Victoria Reggie, a Washington attorney. He and his first wife, the former Virginia Joan Bennett, married in 1958 and were divorced in 1982. They had three children – Kara Anne, Edward M. Jr. and Patrick Joseph.