

# STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

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## FORMER COLLEAGUES REMEMBER SEN. FRED BERRY, 68

By Chris Triunfo

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STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, NOV. 13, 2018....Former state Sen. Fred Berry, a Peabody Democrat who spent 30 years on Beacon Hill has died after a "brief illness," according to a former aide. He was 68.

Berry's family said in a statement that the longtime lawmaker died peacefully Tuesday morning.

"The family appreciates all the support and well wishes they have received during this difficult time, and asks for privacy as they make final arrangements to celebrate Fred's life," the statement said.

Berry, a Democrat, retired in 2012 after 30 years in the state Senate, the last 10 of which he spent as majority leader. Born with cerebral palsy, Berry advocated for people with disabilities and his former colleagues on Tuesday recalled his quick humor and intellect. Outside of his public service, he ran his own nonprofit that worked with Northeast ARC.

In 1982, Berry won a five-way Democratic primary during his first run for state Senate as the only candidate who said he was pro-choice. Berry and his wife Gayle started and ran the Fred Berry Charitable Foundation out of their home in Peabody right after he was elected to the Senate. The charity raised more than \$1 million over three decades to help food pantries, homeless shelters, educational programs and other human service agencies.

In his Senate farewell speech in 2012, Berry said he first ran for Peabody City Council in 1979 hoping he could make government more successful and provide a voice for people who lacked one. Therese Murray, who was Senate president at the time, said then that Berry was responsible for many of the Senate's accomplishments. She said he fought efforts to reduce Medicaid benefits, played a role in requiring insurance to cover autism treatment and was the driving force to change the name of the Department of Mental Retardation to the Department of Developmental Services.

As a legislator, Berry represented Beverly, Danvers, Peabody, Salem and Topsfield. He had a major role in the expansions of Salem State University and North Shore Community College in Danvers, which named an academic building after him.

Berry had been in declining health since retiring, but continued to work for Northeast ARC. In August, Gayle Berry issued a statement saying he had been moved to hospice care.

Former Sen. Stephen Brewer contacted the News Service Tuesday to relay a story about a time when he was summoned to Berry's office during annual budget debate.

"I was Chairman of the Senate Ways and Means Committee and was defending our budget on the floor, all 1,200 amendments," Brewer wrote. "Since Fred had some ambulatory issues I determined I would go to his office. Now the advocates for this line item for the disabled were in the hallways leading to his office and they saw me heading to his office, kind of like the Lamb being led to the slaughter, said to me Good Luck. I had taken a very rigid approach to our budget and holding the line on spending.

"Well suffice to say, when I emerged, that account had 1 million dollars more in it then then when I entered. Such was the man Fred Berry. He never forgot what the challenges he encountered in life were for him and no one, no one was more effective than he in making the world a little less painful for those who needed help. We unfortunately will not see his like again."

Tributes from public officials poured in on Tuesday as elected leaders remembered Berry. Here are some of the local reactions to Sen. Berry's passing:

-- "Our thoughts and prayers are with his family during this difficult time. On behalf of the people of the Commonwealth, we are incredibly grateful to Senator Berry for his service and dedication to Massachusetts and our thoughts and prayers are with his family during this difficult time. He was a trailblazer for persons with disabilities, a great guy with a fantastic sense of humor, and someone who worked extremely hard for the people of the North Shore." -- Gov. **Charlie Baker** on Twitter

-- "I am deeply saddened to hear about the passing of my friend and former colleague, Senator Fred Berry. As someone with a sister who has Down Syndrome, it was a privilege to work with Fred on changing the name of the Department of Mental Retardation to the Department of Developmental Services, a critical step in promoting dignity and respect for all people with disabilities. Fred was a thoughtful and trusted member of the Senate and will be greatly missed. My thoughts are with his loved ones at this difficult time." -- Senate President **Karen Spilka** on Facebook



Former Sen. Fred Berry.

-- "Former Majority Leader Fred Berry was an outstanding Senator, a champion for the needs of his district and people across the state, and a dear friend. He was an extraordinary public servant with a kind heart, and a sharp intellect. Despite a lifetime impacted by cerebral palsy, Fred gave strength to those who needed a champion. In the years that we spent together in the Senate, I knew of nobody more capable of being both uproariously humorous and profoundly poignant, the effect of which often better informed the thinking of those in the Senate Chamber. Known not only for his abilities as a legislative leader, he was also acclaimed for his decades of civic engagement by helping those in need through his charitable work. Word of his passing is truly saddening and I extend my sympathies to his family and friends. I hope that they will be comforted by knowing that his legacy will live on through his lifetime of accomplishments, the close associations that he made, and the love that he shared with so many." -- Senate Minority Leader **Bruce Tarr** in a statement

-- "This morning we lost a great public servant and a dear friend, Senator Fred Berry. Fred possessed a fighting spirit and quick wit that few people have. No matter the situation, he could always make you see the the bright side. I will miss him more than words can express. Rest In Peace, my friend." -- former Senate President **Therese Murray**

-- "The world is a better place because of Fred Berry. We've lost an indomitable force for those who are on the fringes. His example of humility, hard work, charm and humor is unmatched. He was my mentor and my friend. Rest easy good and faithful servant." -- Essex County District Attorney **Jonathan Blodgett** on Facebook

-- "He was always the funniest guy in the room...by far. More importantly, he had an indefatigable zest for life and served Salem and nearby North Shore communities with distinction during his decades long service as our State Senator. Underneath his outward humorous personality, Fred Berry was a force to be reckoned with - a true champion who always stood up for those who didn't have a voice or political clout on Beacon Hill, in particular children in need." -- Salem Mayor **Kim Driscoll** on Facebook

-- "Sorry to learn former Majority Leader Fred Berry passed away. A #Peabody resident, Fred served our district w/class & distinction for 30 yrs. He leaves a great legacy & will be missed by all fortunate enough to have known him. My thoughts are w/him, his family & friends." -- Sen. **Joan Lovely** on Twitter

-- "The Middlesex Sheriff's Office mourns the passing of former Massachusetts State Senate Majority Leader Fred Berry. Fred's skill as a legislator was surpassed only by his kindness, devotion to family & friends, and his tireless advocacy for those he served. My prayers are with Gayle and Fred's entire family." -- Middlesex Sheriff **Peter Koutoujian** on Facebook

-- "So sad to hear of the passing of my former state senator, Fred Berry. You would be hard pressed to point to a more devoted elected official. He was a big supporter of #smallbiz & #mabiz . And what a wonderful & funny person." -- President of Retailers of MA **Jon Hurst** on Twitter

-- "My deepest condolences to the family of former Sen. Fred Berry. Freddy was a relentless advocate, a fierce competitor and a very good friend. I will miss his dry wit, sharp humor and compassion for his fellow man. Rest easy, my friend." -- CEO of O'Neill and Associates **Thomas O'Neill** on Twitter

-- "Very sad news, #SalemMA & the North Shore have lost a great man & a great leader with the passing of former State Senator Fred Berry. Always quick with a joke & ready to fight for the communities he represented. Condolences to Gayle & the family, and to his many former staffers." -- chief of staff to Kim Driscoll **Dominick Pangallo** on Twitter

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