



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on June 3, 2013

N.J. Senator Lautenberg Dies at 89

Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J., shown), who was the oldest member and last World War II veteran in the Senate, died Monday following complications stemming from viral pneumonia. He was New Jersey's longest-serving U.S. Senator, first elected in 1982, retiring in 2000, then elected again in 2002.



[Fox News](#) noted that the door was opened for Lautenberg's initial run for the Senate 1982 when long-serving Democratic Sen. Harrison Williams resigned after being convicted of bribery in what became known as the Abscam scandal. During that sting operation, FBI agents posing as Arab sheiks offered bribes to government officials and seven members of Congress, including Williams, were convicted.

Lautenberg won the N.J. Democratic Senate primary that year, topping eight other candidates, and spent \$4 million of his own money to defeat the popular Republican Rep. Millicent Fenwick.

After serving three terms in the Senate, Lautenberg announced his retirement in 2000. But two year later, when incumbent Democrat Sen. Robert Torricelli decided not to run for reelection, party leaders convinced Lautenberg to run again. He won the election and was reelected in 2008.

Born to poor Polish and Russian Jewish immigrants in Paterson, New Jersey, in 1924, Lautenberg joined the Army after graduating from high school and served in the Army Signal Corps in Europe during World War II. After the war, he attended Columbia University on the G.I. Bill and earned a degree in economics. He joined two boyhood friends in founding the nation's first payroll services company, Automatic Data Processing, becoming ADP's first full-time salesman and eventually chairman and CEO of the firm. The success of ADP made all three men millionaires.

Lautenberg was diagnosed with b-cell lymphoma, a cancer affecting his stomach, in February 2010. After several months of chemotherapy, he was declared cancer-free.

Lautenberg had suffered from physical ailments such as muscle fatigue and weakness in his legs in recent months. Back in February, he announced his decision to retire from the Senate following his current term, joking that he wanted to run for vice president in 2016.

Following the procedure specified in the Constitution, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, a Republican, will appoint a replacement to fill the remainder of Lautenberg's term, which ends in January 2015.

An article about Lautenberg's Senate career in [The Record](#) (the Garden State's second-largest circulation newspaper) noted:

Lautenberg was a reliable — some might say predictable — Democrat. He was pro-choice and pro-gun control and fierce in his opposition to the war in Iraq launched by a Republican president,



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George W. Bush. Based on his votes on key social, economic and foreign policy issues, Lautenberg was ranked by *National Journal* magazine as the fourth most-liberal senator in 2009. A favorite conservative target was Bush's vice president, Dick Cheney. In a scathing 2004 Senate speech, Lautenberg — who served in the U.S. Army Signal Corps during World War II — called Cheney the “lead chicken hawk” among Republicans questioning the military credentials of Democratic presidential candidate and Vietnam War veteran John Kerry.

“We know who the chicken hawks are,” the article went on to quote Lautenberg. “They talk tough on national defense and military issues and cast aspersions on others. When it was their turn to serve, where were they? AWOL, that’s where they were.”

There is little doubt that Lautenberg was a committed liberal on most issues — particularly on domestic spending and social issues. However, the above report uses the tired “conservative Republican hawk” vs. “liberal Democrat dove” stereotypes to describe foreign policy positions. Such oversimplified analysis ignores the more meaningful opposing stands between neoconservative Republicans such as Cheney and Senator John McCain and libertarian-constitutionalist Republicans such as former Texas Rep. Ron Paul.

Interestingly, in reply to [a question from CNN's Soledad O'Brien](#) on January 4, 2012 on the program *Starting Point* concerning Newt Gingrich's assertion that Rep. Ron Paul would be a “dangerous” candidate because of his opposition to undeclared wars such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, Paul used the same term Lautenberg employed against neoconservative Cheney — “chickenhawk” — to describe neoconservative Gingrich:

When Newt Gingrich was called to serve us in the 1960s during the Vietnam era, guess what he thought about danger? He chickened out on that and got deferments and didn't even go. Right now he sends the young kids over there and the young people come back and the ones in the military right now, they overwhelmingly support my campaign....

So Newt Gingrich has no business talking about danger because he is putting other people in danger. Some people call that kind of a program a “chickenhawk” and I think he falls into that category.

While few will dispute Lautenberg's unabashed liberalism, his opposition to the Bush administration's interventionist foreign policy was a poor example to cite. In fact, his stand in that area might have been one place where he was in accord with strict constitutionalists.

In other areas, Lautenberg showed typically “liberal” colors, however. As was pointed out in an article in [The New American on February 15](#), Lautenberg backed intrusive legislation to ban the ownership of guns by people convicted of “domestic violence,” no matter how trivial. Larry Pratt explained the consequences of such a law in his book, *On the Firing Line*:

Lautenberg federalizes state laws dealing with husband and wife relationships and even those of parent and child — that's all covered under the term “domestic.”

Lautenberg's measure means that if one were convicted of any kind of domestic violence misdemeanor (a slap, a foul mouth, spanking of a child), one is forever prohibited from owning a gun....

Who is affected [the most] by the Lautenberg gun ban? An increasingly large number of women are being kept from owning their best means of self-defense. This is because police are more and more



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arresting both partners in a domestic dispute and getting domestic misdemeanor convictions against both the man and the woman.

Lautenberg's extreme liberalism was also showcased in another [article for *The New American* on March 31 2011](#), which quoted from a speech the late senator delivered in front of a bus Planned Parenthood had been driving around the country in order to build up support for receiving tens of millions in taxpayer dollars for the nation's largest abortion provider.

"Planned Parenthood is under attack by Tea Party Republicans who have put their extremist ideology above women's health," Lautenberg said.

When a pro-life counter-protester shouted, "Shame on you, Lautenberg," he fired back: "These people [referring to the pro-life advocates] don't deserve the freedoms in the Constitution."

Perhaps then realizing the extreme nature of his statement, he added, as an afterthought, "but we'll give it to them anyway."

Though Lautenberg stood fast with his more liberal Democrat allies, the Senate long has been, first and foremost, a club whose members share a collegiality that transcends partisan politics. In that spirit, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) released a [statement](#) honoring Sen. Lautenberg that read as follows:

The entire Senate is saddened today by the loss of our colleague, Senator Frank Lautenberg. The Senate's last remaining World War II veteran, Frank was a patriot whose success in business and politics made him a great American success story and a standout even within the fabled Greatest Generation. Elaine and I send our condolences to Bonnie, the Lautenberg children, and the entire Lautenberg family.

Photo of late Sen. Frank Lautenberg: AP Images

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