



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on August 11, 2010

Former Sen. Ted Stevens, "Emperor of Earmarks," Killed in Crash

Former Alaska Sen. Ted Stevens, known for his hot temper and deep barrels of pork for his rural state, died Monday night in a plane crash. Stevens, 86, was the longest-serving Republican ever in the U.S. Senate, maintaining his membership in the upper house of Congress for an even 40 years. He was finally defeated in 2008 after a federal jury in the District of Columbia found he had concealed more than \$250,000 in gifts and convicted him on seven felony counts. The verdict came just eight days before Stevens lost his bid for a seventh term to Democrat Mark Begich, then the mayor of Anchorage.



As the *New York Times* reported, that conviction was thrown out by Judge Emmet G. Sullivan the following April at the request of Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. Holder, the *Times* noted yesterday, said prosecutors, who had been chided by the judge for withholding information from the defense, had concealed interview notes in which the chief witness against Stevens told a story different from the one he told on the stand.

Stevens was one of five people killed in the crash in a mountainous area of southwest Alaska as their plane was heading to a fishing lodge, Gov. Sean Parnell of Alaska said Tuesday. Four others on the plane survived. Stevens had survived a plane crash in Alaska in 1978, suffering injuries while his first wife, the former Ann Cherrington, and four others were killed.

Like former Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas, who once boasted he had been carrying so much pork home to his state he was "in danger of trichinosis," Stevens liked to remind his constituents of all that his frequent forays into the federal treasury had accomplished for the geographically largest and most sparsely populated state in the union. "From frozen tundra," he said in his 2008 campaign, "we built airports, roads, ports, water and sewer systems, hospitals, clinics, communications networks, research labs and much, much more." He drew large amounts of military spending to the state as well as money for small businesses.

His legislative work in the 1970s included passing major bills settling native land claims that had been left in limbo when statehood was established in 1959; creating the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, which made the state rich; and protecting the state's fisheries from exploitation.

In 2000, the State Legislature named Stevens the Alaskan of the Century, saying he "represents Alaska's finest contribution to our national leadership." In his farewell speech on Nov. 20, 2008, he told the Senate, "Working to help Alaska achieve its potential has been and will continue to be my life's work."

While Stevens won bipartisan praise for "bringing home the bacon" from Washington, he was, not surprisingly, a major villain to watchdog groups like Citizens Against Government Waste, which labeled



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him "a prolific procurer of pork-barrel projects," in the words of CAGW president Tom Schatz when Stevens finally left the Senate. While the recently deceased Sen. Robert Byrd of West Virginia was called the "king of pork," Stevens was the "emperor of earmarks," Schatz recalled. "Since we started counting in 1991, Senator Stevens has accumulated 1,452 projects worth \$3.4 billion. That is a record amount."

Stevens was nearly as prolific at finding defenses for the earmarks as he was at gaining them. Alaska had special needs because the federal government owned much of its land, he argued, and the state's rugged terrain and severe weather were obstacles to economic development. As the 49th state, Alaska needed to catch up with the other states, whose senators had the advantage of seniority. Its proximity to Russia made it strategically important and its oil and gas were national resources. Still, it requires legendary skills at rationalization to explain why a state that sends each of its residents a check for several thousands of dollars each year from oil revenues needs federal assistance.

Perhaps Stevens' most infamous pork project was the "bridges to nowhere," with hundreds of millions earmarked for bridges to mostly uninhabited islands. When Republican Sen. Tom Coburn of Oklahoma tried to shift \$452 million designated for the bridges to instead rebuild a highway in Louisiana devastated by Hurricane Katrina, Stevens threatened to wreak havoc in the Senate.

"If you want a wounded bull on the floor of the Senate, pass this amendment," he warned. Coburn's amendment was defeated, with only 15 Senators voting for it, but the Alaska project was later dropped after it had become the virtual poster project for wasteful government spending.

The much-derided boondoggle briefly entered presidential politics in the fall of 2008 after Sarah Palin, then Alaska's governor and the Republican vice presidential candidate, said repeatedly she had told the Congress, "no thank you" for the "bridge to nowhere." Later it was pointed out that Gov. Palin lobbied for the project, turning against it only after it had become an expensive national joke.

Stevens's conviction for seven violations of the Ethics in Government Act did not allege that he had traded any of this spending for personal favors, the *Times* recalled. The bulk of the gifts, which he failed to report on a Senate form, consisted of renovations to his home in Girdwood, Alaska, paid for by Bill Allen, a longtime friend and the owner of an oil services construction company.

Born in Indianapolis on Nov. 18, 1923, Theodore Fulton Stevens was the third of four children of George A. Stevens and the former Gertrude S. Chancellor. A World War II veteran of the Army Air Corps, the future Senator flew transport planes over the perilous "Hump" route in the eastern Himalayas to take supplies into China from India. He was awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses and two Air Medals.

After the war, he graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles, and Harvard Law School. He joined a law firm in Fairbanks, Alaska, in 1953 and soon afterward became the federal prosecutor there. In 1956, he went to Washington, D.C., to work in the Department of the Interior on Alaska statehood.

Moving back to Alaska, he opened a law firm in Anchorage, served in the Legislature, and made two unsuccessful runs for the U.S. Senate before he was appointed to fill a vacancy in December 1968. He was elected to fill the last two years of the term in 1970 and easily won re-election until his defeat in 2008. Republicans made him their Senate whip in 1977, though he was defeated in a bid for majority leader by Bob Dole in 1984.

Stevens was hard to categorize on the conventional liberal-conservative model. Despite his penchant for pork, he criticized President Ronald Reagan for excessive spending on the military. But he was



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consistently contemptuous of those he called "extreme environmentalists" for their opposition to development in Alaska.

"Most of them are hired people who are just hucksters selling slick-backed magazines and national memberships," he said in 1990. But in 2006, he opposed construction of the Pebble Mine, a vast open pit to extract gold, copper, and molybdenum, saying it would threaten the Bristol Bay salmon fishery.

He was critical of environmental objections to drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve. In 2003, after another effort to open up the area for drilling had failed, he said: "People who vote against this today are voting against me. I will not forget it."

Stevens supported the Title IX legislation to give women equal access in institutions receiving federal aid, backed spending for public radio, supported a ban on smoking in federal buildings, and endorsed tougher fuel efficiency standards for cars and trucks.

A man who took his legislative battles seriously, Stevens nonetheless seized on comic opportunities and was known for participating in Senate debates wearing a tie featuring the image of the Incredible Hulk, the comic book superhero. Republican devotion to fiscal conservatism was belied by the fact that Stevens was made chairman of the Appropriation Committee while the GOP controlled the Senate, an appointment roughly analogous to putting [Willie Sutton](#) in charge of guarding bank deposits. During his tenure as chairman, Stevens boasted of his "take no prisoners" style of political warfare. "I'm a mean, miserable S.O.B.," he bragged.

His legendary temper was voted the "hottest" on Capitol Hill in 2006 in a poll of congressional staff members by *Washingtonian* magazine. While he acknowledged it was "hot," the Alaska Senator denied he had ever lost his temper.

"I know right where it is," he said confidently.



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