

METRO

# Joseph Bruno, longtime New York state senator, dead at 91

By Carl Campanile

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Joseph Bruno, the powerful former Senate majority leader and ex-Army boxer who went **toe to toe** with disgraced ex-Gov. Eliot Spitzer — and twice beat corruption charges himself — died early Wednesday, sources told The Post.

Bruno was 91. He had prostate cancer.

Bruno, who grew up poor as one of eight children in Glens Falls in the Adirondacks region, was **majority leader** from 1994 through 2008 — spanning the governorships of George Pataki, Spitzer and David Paterson.

Bruno, a Republican, was first elected in 1976 to represent upstate Rensselaer County and Saratoga County in the state Senate.

As majority leader, he was part of the triumvirate — nicknamed Albany’s “three men in a room” along with the governor and Assembly speaker — that negotiated the state budget and legislation behind closed doors.

Bruno championed New York business interests and tax cuts and was a strong ally of fellow three-term Republican Gov. Pataki. And he also maintained close ties to the state’s powerful health care workers union, Local 1199 of the Service Employees International Union.

“Libby and I are deeply saddened by the passing of our good friend Joe Bruno. Joe left his mark as the leader of the New York State Senate,” Pataki said.

“For 12 years Joe Bruno was a tremendous partner in Albany as we tackled the tough problems to bring New York back from the brink of ruin. On issue after issue, Joe was an indispensable ally.

“From reforming our criminal justice system to keep violent criminals behind bars to jobs and economic development, Joe was a stalwart leader.”

But Bruno was not shy about publicly airing his grievances with Pataki or other Republicans as well as Democrats.

Pataki said he respected Bruno’s candor — if and when they disagreed.

“In the best of times and the worst, I could always count on Joe to be forthright with his opinion. And while we didn’t always agree, Joe’s handshake was his bond and together we made a difference.

“Joe will be remembered for his leadership, wit, candor, grit in the face of adversity and his fierce advocacy for the Capital Region.”

Bruno’s district included Saratoga Race Track and he was a staunch advocate of the horse racing industry. He was an avid outdoorsman and had a stable of horses on his farm.

While adhering to his beliefs, Bruno was a charismatic figure who could charm and disarm rivals and cultivate personal friendships across the aisle.

But Bruno said there was one political figure he detested — “Steamroller” Eliot Spitzer,

In his memoir, “Keep Swinging,” Bruno said he would not be bullied by Spitzer and recounted that he nearly came to blows with the “certifiably crazy” ex-governor.

“While I never claimed to own a crystal ball, I had to be among the first to recognize that Spitzer was unbalanced,” Bruno said.

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“I thought Spitzer was a spoiled brat with a chip on his shoulder. I knew this was the most incendiary charge that I could make against him, because I suspected at some level that he believed it about himself,” he recalled in his book.

After Spitzer threatened to “knock my head off,” Bruno said, he shouted in the governor’s face, “I’ve been threatened by mobsters — professionals. And I’ve dealt with thugs and bullies like you my entire life. I know how to deal with them. You’re an amateur. I’m not scared.”

Although Spitzer would soon resign in disgrace, Bruno faced his own scandals, with a 2009 corruption conviction that was later vacated, and a fraud indictment that ended [with his acquittal](#) in 2014.

But Bruno got along well with Spitzer’s successor as governor, David Paterson, who had been the lieutenant governor.

Paterson, a Democrat from Harlem, said he and Bruno were buddies who stayed in touch after both left office.

Before he became governor following Spitzer’s hooker scandal, Paterson was the Democratic minority leader while Bruno was the majority leader.

Paterson recounted a story about an agreement he had with Bruno that Democrats would join Republicans in overriding the governor’s vetoes in exchange for more funding for his members. Bruno held up his end of the bargain after Paterson complained that the majority’s leader’s staffers blocked the funding.

“When I became governor, Joe asked for a meeting. He brought two pieces of banana cream pie and a bottle of red wine. We had a toast,” Paterson recalled fondly.

“I knew I still had one friend left in Albany,” he quipped.

“I’m going to miss him. It’s a real loss,” Paterson said.

Former US Sen. Al D’Amato said he was “heartbroken” upon hearing of Bruno’s death.

“Joe was a terrific leader. If Joe Bruno had been leader now, we wouldn’t have these laws letting criminals out without bail,” said D’Amato, who drummed up GOP support for Bruno’s successful bid to become majority leader.

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“He was a wonderful, wonderful person. He fought for common sense and the common man.”

Bruno also swung at powerful GOP figures who he believed had betrayed the cause.

He mocked then-New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani as “Judas Giuliani” in 1994 for crossing party lines and endorsing Democratic Gov. Mario Cuomo — the father of current Gov. Andrew Cuomo — for re-election to a fourth term over Pataki, then a state senator. Pataki won.

Bruno later became a convert and supporter of Giuliani after approving of his policies running the Big Apple. He supported an aborted bid by Giuliani to run for US Senate against incumbent Hillary Clinton.

Bruno lived a vigorous life before entering politics.

 [Joseph L. Bruno](#)

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He served in the Korean War as an infantry sergeant and honed his skills as a boxer and became Army light heavyweight champion.

A successful businessman, he founded the Coradian Corporation, a firm that sold telephone systems to private businesses and government agencies.

Bruno is survived by his partner, Kay, four children — Joseph, Susan, Kenneth and Catherine — and many grandchildren.