

# Once again, Specter defies easy labeling

The feisty ex-prosecutor has an in-your-face style that can rankle even fellow GOP members.

By Chris Mondics  
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WASHINGTON — Arlen Specter's Capitol Hill office is chock-full of large color photographs depicting him in friendly grip-and-grin poses with Washington's power elite, the legacy of 17-plus years in the Senate.

Nothing about those pictures suggests the Arlen Specter who has been on display in recent weeks, fighting with his own Republican colleagues in an unsuccessful battle to save the nomination of Judge Frederica A. Massiah-Jackson to the federal bench.

But Specter relishes that persona — the moderate, independent politician in a generally conservative party — an image that plays better in Pennsylvania than it does here.

"In the Senate, there is clearly a club of members who everyone gets along with and everyone likes, and Specter is not in it," said Dave Mason, an analyst with the conservative Heritage Foundation. "Specter is a prosecutor, and he can sometimes display a prickly personality."

The fight over Massiah-Jackson, who withdrew her name from consideration on Monday, did not mark the first time that Specter has chal-

See **SPECTER** on B7

**Judge Massiah-Jackson** looks back at her ordeal and her decision to withdraw. In the end, she said, she did what felt right for her. **E1**

THE INQUIRER SUNDAY 3-22-88

**SPECTER** from B1  
lenged Republican colleagues or the leadership in the last year. Several weeks ago, he went up against party leaders by voting against legislation that would have barred minority set-asides in a massive highway-construction funding bill that is working its way through Congress.

He voted with 15 other Republicans to kill the measure. When that failed, he was one of only four members of his party to vote against the bill itself.

Last year, he bucked leadership by voting against legislation that would have limited Congress' power to sign off on international trade agreements, the so-called fast-track trade legislation, and by voting with Democrats for the nomination of William Lan Lee to head the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division.

Not surprisingly, Specter likes to ascribe selfless motives to his actions. He says it is his duty to fight for the underdog, regardless of the political cost.

"I came to the Senate because I don't like the way the government functions," he said.

But his willingness to buck the party also has produced, on occasion, substantial political benefits for him. This year, as he runs for his fourth term, he has no big-name opposition in the Republican primary, while the Democrats have endorsed little-known State Rep. William R. Lloyd Jr. of Somerset.

Specter's defense of Massiah-Jackson, who would have been the first African American woman to serve

on the federal District Court in eastern Pennsylvania, no doubt will help him with civil-rights groups, which backed the nomination. And his vote against the fast-track legislation won him points with labor unions.

His willingness to speak his mind and not just the party line has endeared him to television producers, who regularly invite him to appear on the Sunday morning news programs, giving him valuable national exposure.

Moreover, as a Republican from the Northeast, where voters tend to be more liberal than in other parts of the country, Specter cannot afford, as a practical matter, to line up always with the more conservative Republican mainstream.

And some analysts contend that his maverick role boosts his clout, given that the Republican majority in the Senate is relatively slim and party leaders have little margin for error.

"My view is it increases his effectiveness," said Michael Birkner, a political science professor at Gettysburg College. "The people who cross party lines have more leverage, because they often tend to be the key vote."

Specter's at-times-confrontational personality was in full view through much of the battle over the Massiah-Jackson nomination. He started twisting arms on the matter in November, as Republican Sens. John Ashcroft of Missouri and Strom Thurmond of South Carolina exercised their right under Senate rules to hold up a vote.

Specter persuaded Ashcroft and Thurmond to let the vote proceed in exchange for an agreement that the Senate hold a floor debate and a vote on the nomination, a most unusual arrangement considering that the Senate rarely debates nominations to the U.S. District Court.

By insisting on a debate and a floor vote, Ashcroft and Thurmond demonstrated their confidence that the nomination would fail, but Specter, in characteristic style, refused to let the matter drop — even though the outcome appeared preordained.

When Senate leaders began pushing for a vote in late January, he

persuaded them to give the judge another hearing, so that she could answer critics who had charged her with being lenient toward criminals and hostile toward police.

During the only floor debate on the nomination, Specter angrily clashed with Ashcroft. Then, two weeks ago, during a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing, Specter breached the unwritten rules of Senate protocol, interrupting committee chairman Orrin G. Hatch (R., Utah) as Hatch defended efforts by the Pennsylvania prosecutors to derail the nomination. Specter contradicted Hatch, calling those efforts "reprehensible."

Specter himself granted that he may have ruffled feathers in challenging Hatch, but he said he had to do it because his home-state nominee was being treated unfairly.

"I interrupted," he said. "Senators don't interrupt other senators, especially a chairman, but I did it because I was so outraged by it. It was a pretty tough thing to do, but I thought it was necessary."

One reason that Specter seems able to thrive under these conditions — he has been in the Senate since 1981 — is that he also can be a team player. Such was the case during the Clarence Thomas hearings, when his aggressive questioning of Anita Hill played a key role in the Republican strategy to save the Thomas nomination.

Anger over that questioning inflamed opposition against him, particularly among Democratic women, and nearly cost him his seat.

Specter also linked up with Republican colleagues last year during the Senate hearings into Democratic fund-raising practices, grilling Democratic witnesses as part of the GOP strategy to show that Democrats flouted campaign-finance rules.

But he is known more for going his own way, a reputation that was underscored by his defense of Massiah-Jackson.

"It was vintage Specter," said Terry Madonna, a political science professor at Millersville University. "I think he took the position in part based on principle and in part because of expediency."