Beat: Vips

UPDATE1 -- Former D.C. Mayor Marion Barry dead at 78

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USPA News - Marion Barry, who served as mayor of the District of Columbia in the 1980s and went on to become one of the capital`s most influential politicians during the final quarter of the 20th century, died at a local hospital on Sunday, his family said. He was 78. "It is with deep regret that the family of four-time D.C. Mayor, and Ward 8 City Councilman, Marion S. Barry, Jr., announces that he has passed," the family said in an e-mailed statement.

Barry died just after midnight local time at the United Medical Center in Washington, D.C., just hours after his release from Howard University Hospital. The cause of death was not immediately disclosed, but the former mayor had suffered a number of health problems over the past few years, including prostate cancer and diabetes. He also received a kidney transplant in 2009. Vincent Gray, the current mayor of D.C., said he was deeply saddened to learn of Barry`s death. "Marion was not just a colleague but also was a friend with whom I shared many fond moments about governing the city. He loved the District of Columbia and so many Washingtonians loved him," he said. Gray added that he would work with Barry`s family and the D.C. City Council to plan official ceremonies "worthy of a true statesman of the District of Columbia." U.S. President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle mourned Barry`s passing in a statement issued by the White House, praising the politician for his work to advance the civil rights of all residents. "During his decades in elected office in D.C., he put in place historic programs to lift working people out of poverty, expand opportunity, and begin to make real the promise of home rule," Obama said. The president added: "Through a storied, at times tumultuous life and career, he earned the love and respect of countless Washingtonians, and Michelle and I extend our deepest sympathies to Marion`s family, friends and constituents today." Barry`s career as a public servant was nearly cut short before it took off: After taking office as a Member of the D.C. City Council in 1975, he was caught in a volley of gunfire in March 1977 when a group of Hanafi Muslims stormed the District Building, where he was due for a meeting of the Council`s judiciary committee. Barry was seriously injured but survived because the bullet narrowly missed his heart. The city councilman, who was hailed as a hero by some, campaigned for the requirement that all service contracts considered by the District government include a mandatory 35-percent participation for minority-owned companies. When he ran for mayor the following year, Barry won with an overwhelming 70 percent of the vote. The popular mayor went on to win re-election twice, earning him the nickname "Mayor for Life," until his arrest in 1990 when he was videotaped smoking crack cocaine after being caught in an FBI sting. He served six months in prison but later went on to stage a remarkable political comeback, regaining the mayor`s office for a fourth term from 1995 until 1999. Among other run-ins with the law, Barry was caught after failing to file tax returns from 1999 to 2004, and then - while still on probation - avoided jail time after failing to file his 2007 tax returns on time. He was also forced to apologize in February 2010 after it was revealed that he violated conflict-of-interest laws by improperly awarding a contract to a woman he had been dating. Barry is survived by his wife, Cora Masters Barry, and his only child, Marion Christopher Barry.

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