

He is known across his State for his unflagging support for his constituents and the future and welfare of those people of West Virginia. In 2001, he was named by his State "West Virginian of the 20th Century."

Today marks a great achievement for the senior Senator, but in some ways it is also bittersweet.

Today, Erma Byrd, the Senator's wife of nearly 7 decades, would have turned 89 years old. The Senator has said that his love for Erma was greater than anything in his life. Without her, he could not have reached such great heights, nor could he have endured the inevitable rough patches of political life.

On the occasion of their 65th wedding anniversary, the Senator paid an eloquent tribute to his high school sweetheart. His words:

Erma and I are complete and whole, a total that is more than the sum of its parts. In my life, Erma Byrd is the diamond. She is the priceless treasure, a multifaceted woman of great insight and wisdom, of quiet humor and common sense.

Senator BYRD has said that, for him, today's achievement will pass with little fanfare or pride. Today, he will do what he has always done on June 12. He will honor his dear wife Erma, remember her and pray for her.

So we will celebrate on his behalf and pay honor to them both—Senator BYRD for his lifelong service to his country, and Erma for her quiet and steady support for the country gentleman from West Virginia.

When history is written, I am certain that Senator BYRD will hold a prominent place as a Senate legend—and in no small part because of the love of a kind and gentle lady, Erma Ora Byrd.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The minority leader is recognized.

TRIBUTE TO SENATOR ROBERT C. BYRD

Mr. REID. Mr. President, it is Monday. The Galleries do not have many people in them. We have a new batch of pages. Others graduated recently. But everyone here—pages and those in the Gallery—should recognize that today is a day of history in America.

Public service is about personal sacrifice for the greater good. It is about reaching for the better angels of our human nature.

That quote is a great quote for today, but that quote is from ROBERT BYRD, which should come as no surprise because the description fits him to a tee.

As we have heard from the distinguished majority leader, Senator BYRD passes Strom Thurmond, who I had the good fortune to serve with, and becomes the longest serving Senator in American history, with 17,327 days—17,327 days—of service in the Senate.

You add that to his 6 years in the House of Representatives, and ROBERT

BYRD has served in the Congress 25 percent of the time we have been a nation. Seventy-five percent of the time other people served in the Congress. But this one man has served 25 percent of the time we have been a country. This gives us some perspective of what a significant day this actually is. The U.S. Senate first met in New York City in 1789.

ROBERT C. BYRD has served a distinguished career. His career in the Senate is significant, important, and impressive. But his life is impressive.

America is a place where everyone has a chance. It does not matter that you are an orphan at age 1. It does not matter that you are raised with an aunt and uncle. It does not matter that your new parents work very, very hard in the coal mines of West Virginia. Because, you see, in America people can succeed no matter what the status of their parents.

ROBERT BYRD is testimony to that. He graduated valedictorian of his high school class. He went to work in the depths of the Great Depression because he had no way of paying to go to college. He worked at a number of different jobs. He worked odd jobs wherever he could find them, pumping gas, selling produce, working as a meat cutter, a butcher, and even during World War II doing some welding on "Liberty" and "Victory" ships.

After the war, he returned to West Virginia and began his distinguished career of public service.

The West Virginia House of Delegates was his first elected position. Then he was elected to the West Virginia Senate. Then he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in the early 1950s. In 1958, he was elected to the U.S. Senate.

His career of leadership is unsurpassed and will always be unsurpassed. He has been a mentor to me for all these many years and a leader for whom all of us in this body have the highest respect.

But as we have already heard, for all of his accolades—and there have been many—Senator BYRD himself will tell you his greatest success truly came on a late day in May, 1937, when he put on his best suit, traveled to the nearby town of Sophia, WV, and married his high school sweetheart, Erma. Today is her birthday.

Now, I had the good fortune to travel, on a couple of occasions, with Erma Byrd and the Senator. We had work to do around the world. What a wonderful, wonderful woman. She was kind, thoughtful, and quiet, but with a great presence about her. I remember having the honor, really—and it was that—of Senator BYRD asking me to go to West Virginia. We had a parliamentary exchange with the British Parliament.

I had heard this song, "West Virginia Hills," but it never meant anything to me until that occasion in a mesa in West Virginia where we gathered with those British parliamentarians for an evening event to listen to some blue-

grass music, to watch the Sun go down in those West Virginia hills. That is something I will always remember of ROBERT BYRD and his lovely wife Erma.

There has been no greater advocate in the almost 18,000 days this man has served in the Senate, and the more than 18,000 days he has served in the Congress, no greater advocate for the State of West Virginia than Senator ROBERT BYRD.

He has fought to improve access to education and health care. The things he has done for transportation in West Virginia are legend. He has brought jobs there. He has done things to protect pensioners.

We just passed on May 24 an example of what Senator BYRD does for West Virginia. The Mine Improvement and New Emergency Response Act of 2006 was passed on May 24. President Bush will sign this into law. Again, it is important legislation for miners across the country. It means a lot to me. I have spoken to Senator BYRD about miners. My father was a miner. And I am proud of the work Senator BYRD has done for West Virginia because it helps all miners.

I asked, as I was coming here, my long-serving personal assistant Janice Shelton: What do you want me to say about Senator BYRD? She has worked with me all the time I have been in the Senate.

She said: No Senator comes and talks to the country like Senator BYRD.

The Fourth of July you prepare your own speech; you read your own speech about the Fourth of July. Thanksgiving, if we are here, you give a speech on Thanksgiving. Christmas, Mother's Day, wonderful—I can still remember your speeches on Mother's Day. The reason those speeches are so important to every one of us—of course, they are important to you; they reflect upon your mother, the woman who raised you—is because it causes us to reflect on our own mothers. Every time you gave one of those speeches, I thought of my red-haired mother working so hard, taking in wash so that I could have clothes like the other kids. So every speech you give is not only for the people of West Virginia. It is for the country. It is for the people who work here with you.

I have had the good fortune—in fact, I visited with one of my friends who I practiced law with for 12 years. A brilliant man, he is so smart. He reads books, has from the time he was a boy until now, many books each week. I have always admired Rex Jemison and how smart he is. But Senator BYRD, to those of us who have worked with you, you have no peer.

I can remember as if it were yesterday when you decided you were going to take over the Appropriations Committee and no longer have a leadership position. We had an event in the Russell Building, the caucus room. There was no press, Senators, very limited staff. You stood and talked to us a little bit. You told us things we thought

we always knew, and I have retold this story so many times. I am going to retell it again. You told us you could get in your car in Virginia, drive to West Virginia and back—and it takes about 8 hours—reciting poetry over and back without stopping and never recite the same poem twice. Think about that. Calculate it for a minute. How many people have read the Encyclopedia Britannica from cover to cover? Senator ROBERT BYRD. How many people have sat down when we have a break and read the dictionary? This man has done this. How many people can recite poetry as he did? I have just talked about this. How many people can recite Shakespeare verse after verse, passages out of Scripture?

Senator BYRD gave a series of speeches here, 10 speeches, each lasting for 1 hour. The subject was the line-item veto was going to ruin the Senate. The comparison was to the Roman Empire, the rise and fall of the Roman Empire. Senator BYRD gave 10 speeches. When I was not able to listen personally, I listened to the recording. So tremendous were those speeches that the head of the political science department at UNLV, Dr. Randy Tuttle, taught a course on ROBERT BYRD based on these 10 speeches.

I asked Senator BYRD: You gave those speeches, you quit right on time, you had an hour set aside. How did you know when to stop?

He said: It was easy. I memorized all 10 of them.

When we met with the British parliamentarians, as I just recounted, in West Virginia, the blue grass music stopped, and Senator BYRD had staff pass out a little tablet and pencil to everybody. He said: If I make a mistake, write it down. And he proceeded to give us a demonstration of memory that I have never seen before, starting with the first ruler in Great Britain, the years the person served, the name, how to spell it, and very briefly what was accomplished during that period of time, from the beginning to the present Queen Elizabeth. Those parliamentarians were dumbfounded. How could an American do something they had never even thought about without a note?

There are some professors, I am sure, who are experts on ancient Rome, but I would tell all those academics, they don't have anything on the Senator from West Virginia as far as knowledge of the Roman Empire.

I consider myself so fortunate to have been able to serve in the Senate with ROBERT BYRD. And not only serve in the Senate with ROBERT BYRD, but all the time I have been here, I had the good fortune of serving on his Appropriations Committee.

The great Senator Daniel Webster said that ours:

... is a Senate of equals, of men of individual honor and personal character, and of absolute independence. We know no masters, we acknowledge no dictators. This is a hall for mutual consultation and discussion; not an arena for the exhibition of champions.

The prayer that was uttered today by Reverend Black, our Chaplain, says exactly what Daniel Webster said. That was a wonderful prayer, tremendously well done for this occasion. But I would say in response to the great Daniel Webster, there are champions among us. There are giants as well. I have served in public office a long time, but no one can dispute the fact, as far as I am concerned, that ROBERT BYRD is a giant.

I want him to know how much I appreciate all he has done for me. I care a great deal about this man. I love ROBERT BYRD. I love ROBERT BYRD. He is a person who sets a standard for all of us.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. THOMAS). Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business until 3 p.m., with each Senator permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to pay tribute to our distinguished colleague from West Virginia who, as the majority leader and the Democratic leader pointed out, celebrates today truly a momentous occasion, becoming the longest serving U.S. Senator in the history of our country.

Senator BYRD's record and achievements have been covered by the majority leader and the Democratic leader. I would like to make a few different observations.

When Senator BYRD came to this body in 1959, he was a member of a very large Democratic class. His party had had a very good day. It was the second term of President Eisenhower. In his class were such people as Eugene McCarthy and Tom Dodd and Phil Hart. Lyndon Baines Johnson was the leader of his party in the Senate at the time. In fact, Senator BYRD was accompanied to the well on his first day in office not by the senior Senator from his State, as is tradition, but by Majority Leader Johnson, his future mentor.

Shortly before the distinguished Senator from West Virginia got here, Majority Leader Johnson had appointed a committee to pick out the five greatest United States Senators in history. John F. Kennedy was appointed to be the head of that committee. After due deliberation, they picked out five Senators: Henry Clay from my State of Kentucky, Daniel Webster, John C. Calhoun, Robert La Follette, and Robert Taft. Those five Senators, who were designated as the five greatest Senators of all time, are depicted out here off the Senate Chamber in the waiting room.

Six or 8 years ago, we decided to consider adding two more to the list. I had the opportunity to be on a committee that reviewed the possibility of adding two more. We concluded there were two more who should be added, one Democrat and one Republican.

Our colleagues on the Democratic side picked Robert Wagner of New York, who was the author of most of President Roosevelt's New Deal legislation. After due deliberation, the Republicans on the committee, of which I was one, concluded that Arthur Vandenberg was the appropriate selection for us, based upon his willingness in the late 1940s to make the Truman containment policy, the Marshall plan, and other initiatives at the beginning of the Cold War that basically set out the strategy that we followed until the Berlin Wall came down in 1989. We thought that Arthur Vandenberg would be the appropriate one for us. So two more Senators were added—Arthur Vandenberg and Robert Wagner.

Today I think it is safe to predict that some day in the future, some Senator will decide to revisit the issue of what other great Senators might be added to this pantheon off the Senate floor that now includes seven United States Senators in our history. I think I can confidently predict that near the top of the list, if not at the top of the list, some day down the road will be the distinguished Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. President, today, June 12, 2006, is our good friend from West Virginia's 17,327th day in the Senate, making him the longest-serving Senator ever.

Senator ROBERT C. BYRD's first day as a Senator was January 3, 1959, when he was 41 years old. He is the 1,579th Senator. Some of his contemporaries were John Sherman Cooper, Hubert Humphrey, Everett Dirksen, John F. Kennedy, and Richard Russell.

Over his nearly 50 years of service here—he has been elected to eight full terms—Senator BYRD has served with 405 Senators, out of a total of 1,885 Senators who ever served. That is 21.5 percent of the total number. Over a fifth of all Senators who ever served can say they served with Senator BYRD.

And I add that Senator BYRD is only the second Senator ever to be elected to eight full terms.

As the Senators from two coal-producing States, Senator BYRD and I have worked together on a number of issues over the years to ensure that coal remains a safe, cheap, and plentiful source of energy, and that coal miners and their families can continue in this industry. Together we ensured that the Capitol complex would continue to be heated by coal. And we work together as members of the Appropriations Committee. I thank the Senator for his friendship over the years.

As astounding as the Senator from West Virginia's service in this body is, I must point out that he has even more experience representing the people of West Virginia. Senator BYRD served in the West Virginia House of Delegates from 1947 to 1950, the West Virginia Senate from 1951 to 1952, and the U.S. House of Representatives from 1953 to 1959. He was elected to his first office in 1946.