

Opinion Roundup: Robert Byrd -- A Lasting Legacy

AOL News

(June 28) -- *AOL News gathered opinions from across the Web on the life and legacy of Sen. Robert Byrd, who died at age 92 after having served 57 years in Congress.*

Byrd was a rare senator.

Most senators vanish without a ripple or a memory longer than next week. Byrd is one of the very rare ones who will merit study and, regardless of your political views, will be discussed at least within the Chamber for as long as its debates continue. -- [Hugh Hewitt, blogger.](#)

He was deeply committed to history ...

Renowned for carrying a copy of the U.S. Constitution in his left shirt pocket to brandish at colleagues and constituents, Byrd had a deep commitment to history. A master of Senate rules, he was by turns protective and disruptive of procedure, slowing debate with long, florid orations that invoked Greek philosophers, Roman generals and the Founding Fathers. But he could also pierce debate with a pointed comment. -- [Johanna Neuman, Los Angeles Times](#)

... and was a fierce defender of the legislative branch ...

Once TV coverage of the Senate began in the 1980s, Byrd delivered a celebrated series of lectures on the Roman Senate. His thesis was that the Roman Empire fell because its executive branch snatched power away from the legislative branch. In 2004, he warned his colleagues that the same fate could befall the United States. "Why so deferential to presidents? Under the Constitution, we have three separate but equal branches of government," Byrd said. "How many of us know that? How many of us know that the executive branch is but the equal of the legislative branch, not above it?" -- [David Welna, NPR](#)

... who opposed executive power grabs ...

The picture that will never leave my mind is Sen. Byrd railing at his Senate colleagues, because on the eve of the Iraq war no one was in the Senate chamber. That image of a lonely Sen. Byrd said it all at the time. Too many Democrats caved to cowardice to give George W. Bush leverage he didn't deserve without a declaration of war. Byrd understood this. It was Sen. Byrd [who] was the only one who warned Pres. Obama of his own Executive Branch power grabs, something that mimicked the Bush-Cheney era. -- [Taylor Marsh, blogger](#)

... and took the Constitution seriously, to a point.

Unlike most senators, Senator Byrd remembered that the Constitution delegates the power to make law and the power to make war to Congress, not the president. ... Alas, if he really took the Constitution seriously, he would have realized that the limited powers

it gives the federal government wouldn't include many of the New Deal and Great Society programs that opened up whole new vistas for pork in West Virginia. -- [David Boaz, Cato Institute](#)

Byrd lavished pork on West Virginia ...

As chairman or ranking member of the check-writing Appropriations Committee from 1989 to 1995, he steered so much pork to West Virginia that by one count there were fully 30 current or pending federal projects bearing his name there. He brought satellite offices of federal agencies such as the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives to the state. With bridges, tunnels, dams and highways he connected the famously tough-to-navigate terrain. -- [Massimo Calabresi, Time](#)

... whose voters thanked him repeatedly.

West Virginia returned the favor, maintaining him in office for more than half a century. His death truly marks the end of an era, the last gasp of the Solid South (at least solid for Democrats). -- [Dave Schuler, The Glittering Eye](#)

He was a KKK member ...

It was only in 1952 that Byrd severed his ties with the KKK. Since then he has apologized for his "youthful transgressions." However, he still defended the Klan in his 2005 memoir, *Robert C. Byrd: Child of the Appalachian Coalfields*, describing it "as a fraternal assembly of 'upstanding people' who at no time engaged in, or preached violence against, blacks, Jews, or Catholics." -- [Michael van der Galien, News Real Blog](#)

... who had a second act ...

Robert Byrd had a second act. And he used it to stand for equality and opportunity and against an unjust war and unconstitutional usurpations. The longest-serving senator in American history has passed, and as we look back at the arc of his life it is a testament to the dynamism of the American story. -- [Paul Begala, The Daily Beast](#)

... but whose past should have disqualified him.

Byrd's past affiliations should have disqualified him from public office. All people can be forgiven and there are many other ways he could have sought visible redemption. Giving him power of people over people he once believed could and should be eradicated was a travesty. -- [Bob Parks, BigJournalism.com](#)

He was an animal lover ...

His physical condition did not stop him from taking to the Senate floor in 2007 to decry dogfighting. An avowed animal lover, Byrd spoke often at committee hearings of his beloved dog. He did not take kindly to the dogfighting scandal that embroiled NFL quarterback Michael Vick. -- [Z. Byron Wolf, ABC News](#)

... and he was someone to believe in.

"There are four things people believe in in West Virginia," Byrd once said. "God Almighty, Sears Roebuck, Carter's Little Liver Pills and Robert C. Byrd." -- [Marty Kady, Politico](#)

