

Robert C. Byrd Traveling Exhibit - Greetings and Welcome

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I want to welcome everyone here today. Marshall University is honored to be one of the stops of the traveling exhibit paying tribute to the life of Senator Robert C. Byrd. I think the title is most appropriate: Senator, Statesman, West Virginian.

Senator Byrd knew that states like West Virginia and the other small and poor states needed leaders who would stand up and fight for their people. Senator Byrd fought for West Virginia and all West Virginians have profited and continue to profit from his time in Washington. There is no question that he loved his home state and was honored to fight for West Virginia.

I consider myself very lucky because I got to meet Senator Byrd. I was a high school graduate when I got the huge honor of being one of two delegates from Mississippi to the National Youth Science Camp in Bartow, West Virginia.

As part of our camp experience over the four weeks, we traveled to Washington, D.C. and I got to be in Senator Byrd's Office. I realized then that he was a man who cared about education and who cared about the National Youth Science camp. So I have had a fondness in my heart for the Senator and for all of West Virginia since 1977.

I was reminded again of Senator Byrd while associate provost at Mississippi State University because I was in charge of making sure we had a Constitution Day Observance on September 17. The requirement was created by an amendment to the Omnibus Spending Bill in 2004. He, like John Marshall, held the Constitution in great reverence as the foundation of American freedom and liberty. He felt like more people needed to study and know the Constitution. He always kept a copy in his pocket.

Robert C. Byrd made his mark on West Virginia and on Marshall University. We have the Robert C. Byrd Institute for Advanced Manufacturing and the Robert C. Byrd Biotechnology Center, as well as the Erma Byrd Clinical Sciences Building.

I will not comment much on his life but only to say this. When you look at the Senator's bio you will discover that he was not perfect. I believe that he more than redeemed himself and left this earth a man with a very impressive record of service to all people.

I am pleased to report that Senator Byrd attended Marshall College in the early 1950's. Interestingly, he did not graduate from Marshall at that time. But on May 7, 1994, at the age of 76, Senator Byrd did receive a bachelor's degree in political science from Marshall University.

President Wade Gilley looked back at his record and transferred in enough credits for Senator Byrd to receive his degree.

So we welcome to Marshall this exhibit and the memory of this Marshall alumnus. We are proud that we will be able to share his exhibit with people in our community.

I will conclude my remarks by sharing with you some of Robert Byrd's words to the graduating class of Marshall University from his 1994 Commencement Address. He said: "Never stop growing. Never cease wondering. Never end your quest for excellence."

We are indebted to Senator Byrd for his leadership that has enabled Marshall University to continue its never ending quest for excellence.

He was a Senator, a Statesman, a West Virginian, and a Son of Marshall.

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