

filed: strom at 100

Mr. President, on December 5, our colleague, the senior Senator from South Carolina, Senator Strom Thurmond, will be 100 years old. He will be the first sitting United States Senator to become a centurian.

What an amazing record for an amazing man!

In his 100 years on this earth, he has also been a teacher, a coach, an attorney, a judge, a governor, a soldier, a college professor, an author, a lawmaker at both the state and federal level, a delegate to six Democratic national conventions and six Republican National Conventions, and a U.S. Senator who has served ___ years in this chamber and cast more than 15,000 votes.

Senator Thurmond was born into the Old South. His hometown of Edgefield was the home of the cane swinging Representative Preston Brooks who gained a place in history for beating a northern Senator who had insulted his family and his state. Senator Thurmond's grandfather, George Washington Thurmond, was with General Lee at Appomattox when he surrendered to Grant. His father, Judge J. William Thurmond, was a lieutenant of the legendary South Carolina Senator "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman. A product of the Old South, Senator Thurmond lived to become an important leader in the New South.

Senator Thurmond's amazing life has spanned twentieth century America. When he was born, the Wright brothers had yet to make their historic, heavier-than-air manned flight. He has lived to see man-made vehicles reaching the outer limits of our universe. What a change in a single life time.

Perhaps an even greater, more monumental change took place right here in the United States Senate. When Strom Thurmond was born, on December 5, 1902, U.S. Senators were not elected by the people of their states, but selected by their state legislatures. Senators did not have personal offices. Senators did not even have personal staffs. Boy, what a change he has lived to see here.

Even more amazing is how his life and career have mirrored so much of the history of twentieth century America.

In 1928, Strom Thurmond, a Democrat at the time, was elected to his first political office, superintendent of schools, Edgefield County, South Carolina -- when Calvin Coolidge was president,

In 1932, he was elected to the State Senate of South Carolina -- that was the year Franklin Roosevelt was elected President of the United States, and it was Roosevelt's Administration that marked the emergence of the Democratic Party as the majority party. I remind my colleagues that Senator Thurmond was a Democrat in those days.

In 1942, Strom Thurmond volunteered for service in World War II -- the war that marked the emergence of the United States as a super power. I might point out that Senator Thurmond could have stayed safely on the sidelines of that conflict. He was beyond draft age and, as a judge, he held a draft exempted status. Yet he volunteered to put himself in harm's way and heroically serve his country.

On June 6, 1944, paratrooper Strom Thurmond took part in the D-Day invasion that began the Allied liberation of Europe from Nazi tyranny and the defeat of worldwide fascism.

In 1946, Strom Thurmond was elected governor of his beloved South Carolina

In 1948, Governor Strom Thurmond ran for president as a State's Right's Democrat, carrying 4 states and winning 39 electoral votes. This means that President Harry Truman's great upset victory over Thomas Dewey in the 1948 presidential election included the defeat of Strom Thurmond.

In 1954, Strom Thurmond was elected to the United States Senate as a write-in candidate. This made him the first and only person in U.S. history elected to the Senate in this manner, indeed, he is the only person ever elected to any major office in the United States in this manner.

In 1957, Senator Strom Thurmond set a record for the longest individual speech ever delivered in the Senate -- 24 hours and 18 minutes, from August 28 to August 29, 1957.

In 1964, Senator Thurmond switched from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party -- a move that marked the beginning of the "southern strategy" that has reshaped the Republican Party.

In 1981, when President Reagan became president, Senator Thurmond was chosen President pro tempore

On December 5, 1995, Senator Thurmond became the oldest serving member of the United States Senate.

On May 25, 1997, he became the longest serving senator in the history of the United States Senate, surpassing the record held by Carl Hayden.

On December 31, 1997, Senator Thurmond's colleague, Senator Ernest Hollings became the longest serving junior member of the Senate, 31 years and 53 days, surpassing the "juniority" record of Senator John Stennis.

In 1998 -- Senator Thurmond became the second Senator to ever cast 15,000 votes.

As I have said, what an amazing life and what an amazing career!

But, I am pleased and proud to point out that, throughout it all, Senator Thurmond has always remained a man of his word, a devoted father, and a Senator ready to defend his state, his country, and his values. A distinguished leader who is revered in his home state of South Carolina -- a state that has built statutes in his honor, and has named buildings, roads, dams, and lakes in his honor. Foremost, Senator Thurmond has remained a Southern gentleman of the first order -- charming, polite, optimistic, and, enduring.

Happy Birthday Senator. God Bless you.

Count your garden by the flowers,
Never by the leaves that fall.
Count your days by the sunny hours,
And not remembering the clouds at all.
Count your nights by stars, not shadows,
Count your life by smiles, not tears.
On this beautiful morning,
Count your age by friends, not years.

