

**Remarks by Speaker David H. Wilkins
Strom Thurmond Institute
Two Decades of Service
October 8, 2001**

Thanks to all of you for being here. It's an honor to help you mark two decades of service at the Strom Thurmond Institute of Government and Public Affairs.

Just like the Senator himself, what's most important about this Institute isn't the number of years it's been here but what it's accomplished in those years.

And just like Senator Thurmond, this Institute is impacting public policy and discourse here in South Carolina everyday.

As long as you continue to use Strom Thurmond as your role model you'll continue to do great things.

In more than two decades of public service in the South Carolina House of Representatives, I've had the great privilege of meeting and getting to know many influential people.

From the folks in my own district who influence every decision I make to national leaders like President George W. Bush it's been an honor to witness some of history as it's happening.

But when it comes to Strom Thurmond my being Speaker of the House gives me no greater access than a clerk at the local convenience store because to Strom Thurmond, every South Carolinian is equally important.

And that's what makes Strom Thurmond so incredibly unique, his relationship to the people of South Carolina.

There's not another state in the country who shares the kind of relationship with an elected official like the one South Carolina shares with Senator Thurmond. It is a true bond a partnership between the greatest statesman this state will ever produce and its people.

Strom Thurmond has literally served generations of South Carolinians and has touched so many lives. Folks in their 80's and 18-year-olds feel the same connection to him. He's revered and respected like no one else in this state has been or ever will be. He is literally a living legend who'd get elected in South Carolina as long as he wanted to.

This really hit home to me back in 1996 when I had the grate honor of being the Senator's campaign chairman and traveled the state with him.

It's been said “. . . patriotism is not a short and frenzied out burst of emotion but the tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime.”

Strom Thurmond has had an amazing lifetime. From the horse and carriage to the information superhighway, Strom has lived it all. And every step of his journey has been steeped in patriotism.

I thought about Senator Thurmond a lot on September 11 and the days since. I wondered if the terrorist attacks reminded him of the wars America has been involved in through the course of the last century. From two world wars to the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam, the Cold War, and the Gulf War he's seen them all.

For so many younger Americans the unnerving pictures of our own planes being crashed into our own buildings killing our own people was the first act of war on our nation they've ever witnessed.

And many hearts were changed that day.

The petty politics that divided our national family are history.

And we have new heroes.

I recall shortly after the Twin Towers collapsed and we lost hundreds of brave rescue workers, a city firefighter was asked how so many trained professionals could wind up dead. He said this: “Firefighters are trained to run into burning buildings not out of them.”

I think that's a perfect analogy of Strom Thurmond's life. Whenever there is risk professionally or personally he runs right into it bravely armed with a sense of duty and honor.

He is the only U.S. Senator ever to win election on a write-in vote. He ran for president in a dramatic run as a third-party candidate. And he switched parties at a time when Republicans in the south were almost unheard of.

But as much as anything, Strom Thurmond will be remembered as a hero and a patriot for his daring risks during World War II. He resigned a secure job of circuit judge to volunteer for the army at the outbreak of World War II. He practically forced his way into a combat division volunteering for combat when they wanted to give him a desk job.

Very few walked out of that glider. Strom Thurmond was one of them. He is a true patriot and hero in every sense of those words.

A wise clergyman once said, “A politician thinks of the next election; a statesman of the next generation. A politician looks for the success of the political party; a statesman for that of the state. The statesman wishes to steer, while the politician is satisfied to drift.”

For generations of South Carolinians Strom Thurmond has been our statesman, the steady hand steering our ship of state.

His greatest gift to all of us is not some grand piece of legislation branding his name not some monumental reform package though there are many.

His legacy is measured in thousands of quiet gifts of kindness to individual South Carolinians, to the army vet needing medical attention, to the senior citizen needing help with social security, to the struggling young mom, to the aspiring history student, and everyone in between.

Through some seven decades in public service, Strom Thurmond rarely forgets a name or a face. He is a proud South Carolinian who was never too proud to change with the times.

That's why rich or poor, black or white, Republican or Democrat, Strom Thurmond is beloved.

And that's what truly sets him apart.

There will never be another statesman in all of history who shares so strong a bond with his people, who is as connected to their past as he is to their present.

Folks outside of South Carolina don't understand why we keep sending a senior citizen back to the Senate to represent us. They think h
is age makes him ineffective. They just can't comprehend the strong bond and connection that South Carolinians of all walks of life have with Strom Thurmond.

But we know through almost 50 years of service on the hill that no one can do for us like Strom Thurmond can. He's earned our respect. And he continues to have our support. South Carolina has benefited from the service of Strom Thurmond in so many ways it truly can't be measured.

I feel especially blessed that I've had the privilege of knowing Senator Thurmond. And I know tens of thousands of South Carolinians feel the same way.

Strom Thurmond still has more than a year left on his term. And make no mistake it will be time well spent in faithful and patriotic service to South Carolina his country and his countrymen.

Thank You.
And God Bless America