

Daschle interview

04:01:30;16 04:02:20;07 mmi002-1 Senator Daschle

Well, Sen. Byrd is the institutional foundation that I think this senate so badly needs right now. Every time we have a new group of senators, the new class of senators, who come in after an election, one of the first things that we arrange is a meeting with Sen. Byrd so he can give them the history of the Senate, a better understanding of Senate procedures, a respect for senate practice and tradition. I think that is so important for fulfilling one's role here as a senator. I don't believe anyone does it better than senator Byrd, but he is the institutional memory; in some ways he is the institution itself.

04:02:23;09 04:03:13;10 mmi002-1 Senator Daschle

Well Senator Byrd, I think, has been here for fifty years himself, he is in a class by himself, a distinction that he holds alone. But beyond the longevity issue, I think it's the amazing capacity for legislating that he has demonstrated so ably for so long. He has held every position in our caucus. That's unusual. No one has ever done that before. He has become very prominent as the chair of the appropriations committee. His role there is one that is preeminent. There is no committee more important than appropriations. So he has so many distinctions, each of which make him a very unique member of the Senate, but also a unique person in history.

04:03:13;10 04:03:53;08 mmi002-1 Senator Daschle

Well Senator Byrd is one who very thoughtfully considers options before coming to any conclusions. He is inclusive. He talks to others. Part of the time he makes his decision, but once having made that decision he is defiantly determined to bring it about, to carry it through. And we use whatever tool is available to him to ensure success. I don't know of anybody who is viewed as a more successful strategist or tactician than Senator Byrd.

04:03:56;15 04:04:22;08 mmi002-1 Senator Daschle

No, Sen. Byrd probably hasn't examined a poll in his life. He doesn't do things by polls. He does things by conviction. He does things by what he believes to be in the best interest of the people of West Virginia and he holds those criteria very close as he makes decisions regarding his senate activities.

04:04:40;29 04:05:42;09 mmi002-1 Senator Daschle

Well, I think that's a good example of the way Sen. Byrd functions. The line veto was quite a historic and constitutional issue that I think historians will write about for a long period of time. I think that you would think someone as fiscally conservative and responsible as Senator Byrd would naturally be inclined to be supportive of the line item veto. But he felt it was an aberration of the role of congress to allow a president to take away some of the powers of the Congress as that president would make decisions with regard to spending. So he took it all the way to the Supreme Court and won. It's a remarkable demonstration, I think, of tenacity, of a student of good government and of the constitution, but also of just the nature of Sen. Byrd himself.

04:06:04;19 04:06:57;03 mmi002-1 Senator Daschle

Well, Sen. Byrd 's life story could be summarized in one sentence: "Yes, you can." Because I think that's what it says. It says to people all over this country you can become all that you want to be if you've got the dedication, persistence, and the character required. He has overcome so many obstacles. He has provided, I think, a roadmap to young people that would be one that I couldn't recommend more highly. It is the opportunity for anybody in this country that wants to become a United States senator to learn how to say for him or herself, "Yes, I can."

04:07:04;05 04:07:59;02 mmi002-1 Senator Daschle

Well I think that when you look at the tremendous dedication of public service he has made, first and foremost I think it's that as a role model. I don't know that anybody can serve as a more able role model than he can. Secondly, I think that for those of us in the Senate to see somebody like Sen. Byrd who has successfully steered a course through fifty years of change, and done it so admirably and with the great affection of all of those with whom he has worked is an accomplishment in and of itself. But his extraordinary contribution to public policy, both in foreign policy as well as domestic is something that's virtually unparalleled.

04:08:05;10 04:08:45;25 mmi002-1 Senator Daschle

Well I think that the time I remember most fondly are those times when Senator Byrd would come to the floor and without a note regale us with stories and poetry by heart. He can make

his case without a note. He can make history come alive and I think of all the things that mean the most to many of us, it's a recognition of the power of his mind and his ability to communicate that makes him such a treasure.

04:08:49;18 04:09:09;07 mmi002-1 Senator Daschle

Well there are stories about those who have crossed Sen. Byrd, and paid a dear price for it. As I say, he is a fighter, he believes strongly in honor and in a man's word, and he expects the ones around him to live up to his expectations.

04:09:14;20 04:10:17;21 mmi002-1 Senator Daschle

Well the one thing that we haven't talked about that I know you know and I would hope others would know.... I don't know... often times in public life the man gets separated from the family. The pressures of public people are great and those pressures sometimes create turmoil within families and I would imagine there's a higher level of family pressure and turmoil in political lives than almost in any other walk of life. But Sen. Byrd has made family his utmost priority. As important as it is to be a United States Senator, to represent the state of West Virginia, there is something even more important, and that's his wife Erma, his family, his grandchildren, and how much he cares about them.

04:10:20;26 04:10:36;03 mmi002-1 Senator Daschle

He doesn't. It's a rare evening that Sen. Byrd will come out. He often times will join us for caucus events, but only if Mrs. Byrd can be there with him.