

Alan Fram/Associated Press, Capitol Hill Reporter

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Sen. Byrd is unlike any other Senator. There are 99 Senator and then there's Robert Byrd. There are some people who arg that that is to his credit, that that is something that help him. And there are others who use that to criticize him. Mo other Senators are blow-dried haircuts, use sound bites very effectively. They know how to limit their quotes, keep them short. Sen. Byrd doesn't do that. Sen. Byrd, when he takes senate floor is likely to quote poetry, the Bible, talk abou the Peloponnesian War, the Constitutional Convention, You ne know what he is going to be quoting. His speeches can often lengthy and dramatic with pregnant pauses with finger thrust and they are just different than the way any other Senator w speak.

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Any personal observations?

I don't want to talk about that.

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(What is Byrd's role in the Senate?)

Well there are people who argue that he is one of the more effective Senators, especially for his state. There are oth who argue that he is the embodiment of pork, and is there fo playing a very negative role in terms of the federal budget. is very forceful. He makes his opinions known loudly and clearly.

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He is known for his knowledge of the Senate's rules and he i willing to use them to his advantage as any Senator would be He is the man the Democrats often rely on to help them out o parliamentary binds or to cause parliamentary binds when the want one. There are many people who say they fear tangling him in the Senate because of his knowledge of the procedures also views himself he takes his role as a Senator very seriously. He is often right in the middle of any disputes t pit the Congress and the Senate against the Executive Branch matter which party controls the White House. He is a very strong advocate of the rights and the power of the Legislatu vis-a-vis the President. He doesn't often back down from the

President. Be it over money or power, to declare or wage war anything like that.

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He was an early and very ardent opponent of line item veto legislation that for years went nowhere and when the Republic captured a majority in the Congress. They passed a line item veto law that President Clinton signed. And the Senator, I believe was in the middle of the legal fight to knock down that law was giving the President far more power than the founding fathers, that he was quoting, ever envisioned and although I believe his lawsuit was thrown-out because the federal court and some other lawmakers were not directly affected by the exercise of that law. The Supreme Court did subsequently find that law unconstitutional. That's right. He was not bashful about taking on a law that was signed by a Democratic President Clinton...and trying to remember specific examples of his taking on President Clinton on spending matters, I'm sure there are some, I am blanking out right now. On war, he is not afraid to speak up for the power of the legislature, what he views as the constitutional power of the legislature to make war or peace decisions, and to oppose presidents V-day, Republic from Democrats from going too far in exercising the power to wage war. I know that way before even I got here, he was a pretty strong supporter of U.S. involvement in Vietnam...but some of the U.S. military actions of the 1990s, in Somalia, Bosnia I believe, perhaps Kosovo, I am not sure, he played, raised a strong voice against unlimited U.S. involvement in those conflicts. His style, Senator Byrd's style is pretty unique. His manner of speaking is...here's where I am blanking out on words, I know right, I stare right at the computer but nobody is watching me when I do that, it looks like I am thinking. There are some that say Senator Byrd in many ways seems to have walked right out of the 19th Century. He is more of an orator, if I can use that word, than any of his contemporaries. His speeches can be very flowery, were he can quote from the Bible, the founding fathers, poetry, he can tell you how many days old he is. He can tell you how many Senate roll-call votes he has casted, that number is something over 16,000. He is very proud of the Senate and its traditions and can expound on them in detail and at length. And will use all the above to make his speeches more effectively. There are some that think that he does that effectively and there are others who agree that in this MTV age of short television sound bites that he is not one of the Democrats more effective speakers. That's right, he became the Senate majority leader in 1977, thereabout and served in that capacity through 1988. I was not covering this issue at the time, but I know that there were those who, back then argued that Democrats needed a more effective television communicator. Some of them viewed Byrd as their best communicator for television. His speeches tended to be too long. his sound bites, the short punchy sound bites that they wanted they felt just were not there. Senator Byrd, is by and large as a very powerful appropriations committee

chairman. A chairman who Senator majority leader Senator Das definitely has to listen to. He has a lot of power that flow him from that position because if Senator A wants a project have to think twice before the cross Senator Byrd. Senator B is said by many to have a long and effective memory when it comes to those who have worked with him and those who haven' So that's a committee that controls about a third of the fed budget . That's 700 billion dollars. That's a lot of money any given year. If you want something for your state, you d have to stop and think very hard about whether you want to t on Senator Byrd, or whether you want to play ball with him. I don't. I wish I did know. He was elected in 58' I think. N wish there was. The ground that I wanted to cover, was as yo reminded me, the mastery of the Senate and its rules. His ro as the appropriations committee chairman and his...the fact he is not bashful about taking on the Whitehouse. No, I have flipped through it, but I have not read it. It's four volume believe and he read a lot of it into the records standing be the Senate, speech by speech. No, I can't say that I have re it from cover to cover. Yeah, I don't know if he literally r all of it into the record but it was delivered during variou clauses in Senate business. The other thing he is known for delivering speeches on the floor of the Senate for various occasions. For the Spring time, for the Autumn, for the Summ and if there in session, for the Winter. Poetry about each o the seasons... I don't know if he has written the poems or i is reading the poems. There may be a little of both. He will take to the floor and read poems to commemorate the birthday the colleagues. There is one very nice poem that I should ha brought with me. I actually keep it with me on my desk, beca it is just a very lovely piece of poetry about how as one gr older you should not measure your age by the years but by th number of friends, and things like that. I have it sitting o desk, not here. Ok. I can just fax it to you. I don't think have the poets name but I do have the poem I think sitting somewhere on my desk. What else is he known for? Unique..yes Think anecdotes. Think anecdotes. Oh yeah, Again that was be my time. He was involved in one of the longer filibusters in Senate history. It lasted over 14 hours. It was during the debate over the 1964 civil rights act, which he opposed at t time. That's a vote and a filibuster that he has spent many years saying that he regrets. I don't know. I have never hea him address that myself...but he has apparently evolved over years, I am sure that you have research his Klu Klux Klan history. That's what he says. You know one thing that you mi want to do if you haven't already is get the tape of the confrontation that he had just a couple of months ago with Treasury secretary O'Neil. You've heard about that I assume. You've seen the tape. I wasn't there that day. I rushed over minutes afterward, that's when I heard it and then I viewed tape. It was very dramatic. It's two war-horses in full batt over not only the powers and prerogatives of the Senate, but their own personal backgrounds. There were two apparently poverty stricken childhoods that sounded very similar in a l

of ways. These were two proud old men, neither one giving an inch. It was just fascinating. I wish I was there for it. But not they had a copy of it over at the Senate budget committee which is where the face-off occurred. There over in the Durickson building. Well that's one that I am not comfortable talking about...I am not comfortable talking about buzz but as a reporter who wrote about it, I was not there personally. Just from viewing the tape, it was a tension filled face-off that was extraordinary. It seemed to almost become personal like I said neither one was backing down. They both had some very strong comments to make, their points of view on the issue of the power of legislature branch, and of the context of each of their personal histories. The Treasury Secretary had apparently made some comments about what some language he... can't remember if it was legislation that the Senate had passed or some comment the Senators had made that..it might have been legislation that Congress had passed that in the Treasury secretaries view was tying the hands of the Treasury department or the Bush administration to issue what O'Neil saw as effective, smart, efficient regulations...and if I am remembering correctly, O'Neil made some comments about...the regulations are not handed down from the mountaintop or something to that effect and Senator Byrd took strong objection to that. He noted that he himself has been elected to the Senate eight times, and noted that Treasury Secretary O'Neil has not been elected once. I think Senator Byrd made a reference to himself having faced the voters 20 odd times or years, compared to zero for Treasury Secretary O'Neil. It was just a remarkable confrontation on the whole subject of who controls what in town, which branch of government controls what in this town it evolved into this clash over... it almost seemed like a clash over the moral authority of first the Treasury Secretary and then the Senator...and the poverty stricken upbringings that both of them have brought to the table. That's one, I don't want to go there. But I can say...I can talk back into my supporters or Senator Byrd to say that he has been a remarkable advocate of a state that has had a lot of bad economic times. He has done a lot to help that state's economy...bringing home the bacon, sorts of projects, everything from museums to roads to bridges to pieces of federal agencies...and then he's got his critic who just view him as mister pork. There are pages on the websites of conservative groups in this town devoted to Senator Byrd and criticisms of him. No, but I just wish I could remember anecdotes.