

Graham interview

04:12:22;14 04:15:51;09 MM1002-4 Graham

Well, the quickest way as a United States senator to have a reality check of yourself and your importance, is to sit down at your desk and pull the drawer out and read the names of the senators who have written their names in the drawer of your desk. It's an old tradition here. And one of the things you will immediately discover is, most of these people who were leaders in their day and in their time are totally unknown to you.

I am certain that that will not be true of Robert C. Byrd. When I think of people who have served in the senate, who were great senators, and I think of who would be the prototype of the modern era of a senator's senator, the name that always bubbles up to the top of the list is Bob Byrd.

Uh, he is a great senator. He loves the senate. He knows the rules. He's deeply committed to the things he believes in. He and I differ on many issues. I have learned a lot from Bob, uh, I have watched him work. I've worked with him in areas like our highway bill where we decided that states were being cheated. That in West Virginia, for example, folks were pulling up to the pump and being told, "the bad news is you're paying most of what you're paying in taxes, not gasoline. The good news is the money is going to build roads." But the problem was the good news wasn't true. 26 cents out of every dollar of gasoline taxes that was supposed to fund road construction was going to fund general government. So senator Byrd and I got together and we decided to change it. I think it's fair to say with broad opposition, but working together, bringing in all the outside groups that were concerned with highway construction, economic growth, people from states all over the union, we were able to put together a political base that was successful, so we were able to change the bill.

So I had the opportunity to work with Senator Byrd, uh, and I've had many opportunities to oppose Senator Byrd. But whether I was working with him or whether I opposed him, I've always respected him. Uh, so I think it's fair to say, if you did a survey and you really got people to level with you about how they feel, you would find some people that agree with Senator Byrd, some people that disagree with Senator Byrd, some people who like Senator Byrd, some people who don't, but you're not going to find any senator that doesn't admire Senator Byrd. And quite frankly, if I were trying to look at what I would want people to say about me, I would be perfectly happy with people saying, "there goes Phil Graham, uh, liked by some, disliked by others, but admired by all."

04:15:55;13 04:17:43;05 MM1002-4 Graham
(Is he a formidable opponent?)

He is a formidable opponent because A-he's smart, B-he knows the rules of the senate and C-he has what any great senator over time develops and that is people, uh, are afraid of him. And, uh, that's a very good thing to have. People don't want to do battles with Senator Byrd. I love it because he's a worthy adversary and I have discovered something long ago and that is if Senator Byrd believes that you believe in what you're doing, he would rather you be on his side than against him, but I have, what I consider, and excellent relationship with Senator Byrd even though more than not we're on opposite sides. When we're on the same side, we're almost always successful. Um, but, um, people go out of their way to not get in a battle with Senator Byrd- partly because he knows the rules better than they do, partly because he's relentless and I think there's a combination of respect and fear. And what did Machiavelli say, "in a choice as to whether you should choose to be loved or feared, it's better to be feared because people love at their own pleasure." (chuckles) And they fear at your pleasure. I think...people admire Senator Byrd and I think they're afraid of him. (laughing)

04:17:43;21 04:18:34;14 MM1002-4 Graham
(Do you think that's true of the President as well?)

Well look, uh...when my friend George Bush was elected, I told him one of the first people you need to talk to when you get to Washington is Robert Byrd, that he's a serious person. You can work with him. You're going to disagree with him on a lot of subjects, but his word is good and he'll appreciate if you came by and talked to him. And you will find that if you could convince Robert Byrd that something is in America's interest, he doesn't care about the partisan's position is, he doesn't care what the politics are, uh, if you can convince him, you can get his support.

And he did go and see Robert Byrd as one of the first people and I think it was a smart move.

04:18:45;01 04:19:34;14 MM1002-4 Graham
(How would you describe his leadership style?)
(talking between Diana and Graham through first part of bite)

His leadership style when he was majority leader, and then I was on the appropriations committee for a while, is to basically set out a policy, try to get everybody involved in it, but make it clear that he's moving ahead. And one of the things that I always admired as majority leader was that he was always willing to keep people in session late at night on Friday afternoon, until they got the job done. And what generally happened was that Senator Byrd was always willing to stay to have his way and

his opponents were not willing to stay to have their way and, as a result, he was successful.

04:19:54;13 04:22:12;10 MM1002-4 Graham

Well I've got lots of favorite stories about Senator Byrd..I've, uh,....he's a remarkable man. There's no question about that. When you look at his background, where he came from, how well educated he is..had Senator Byrd been born into, at another time, in another family, he probably would've become a college professor. He's a genuine intellectual. His knowledge, especially about the ancient Romans, is profound. As a person who cares about the classics, as a person who's read a lot about ancient Greek, about ancient Romans, there's nothing superficial about Byrd's knowledge of antiquity. I mean you've got a lot of people teaching the classics at good universities around America (laughing) who know less about Roman history and Roman philosophy than Robert Byrd. No question about that.

Uh, he has a very keen mind. And you've got to remember that I didn't know Senator Byrd when he was 40, but I can tell you today his mind is very good. He has a depth of knowledge and it's almost all self-taught. I mean one thing to me that is very admirable about Senator Byrd...he was saying to me the other day about how he had a son-in-law and a grandson who were physicists and that he remembers the night that his daughter who is married to the physicist and whose child is a physicist was born in a two-room mining shack. And it's a wonderful story because it's a story of America in action. It's an America that works. And uh, Robert C. Byrd is proof that America works, that talent outs. That if you're smart, you're ambitious and you're willing to work hard, no matter where you're born, no matter what the circumstances are in America, they can be overcome. I know they can be overcome because Senator Byrd is here.

04:22:41;10 04:23:38;14 MM1002-4 Graham

(What about children in schools who think...that could never happen to someone today?)

(emphatic)It happens everyday. In every age and every generation that the great service has been provided, that the great inventions have been made and so, you know, people at high school or college graduations sit in the audience and some guy sitting there, whether it's Senator Byrd or Bob Gates and they say, "that guy was at the right place and at the right time." But what they don't know is, is that whether it's Bob Gates or whether it's Bob Byrd, whether it's success in business or success in public service, they weren't in the right place at the right time, they made the place and they made the time. And the point is, there will be others who will do more.

04:23:43;04 04:25:00;16 MM1002-4 Graham

I think his greatest legacy will be as a great Senator. You know I once was giving...and this is a nice story. I'm glad I thought of it (smiling)...I once was giving a tour of the capital to some students and over in the reception room we had some paintings of famous senators- five of them who were selected by members of the senate when the room was being redecorated. They're painted in in little cameos. And I was asked by one of the students, which cameo I thought was most important. And I looked around and I pointed and said, "Those that are blank." The one that are yet to be filled in. They're the most important because they show there's still history to be written and they show that there's still room for great men and women. I believe that Robert C. Byrd's portrait will be in one of those empty cameos someday. I don't have any doubt about it.