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A Tribute to Retiring Senator Ernest Fritz Hollings

A TRIBUTE TO RETIRING SENATOR ERNEST "FRITZ" HOLLINGS

SENATOR JOSEPH R. BIDEN, JR.*

When I was elected to the Senate in 1972, I quickly pledged that Fritz Hollings would be my role model. Little did I know that I would get what I wished for. Like Senator Hollings, I spent most of my 30 year career as the junior senator from my home state. For 28 years, I served with Delaware's senior Senator William Roth, and for 36 years, Fritz Hollings served with senior Senator Strom Thurmond. South Carolina has been blessed to have almost a century of combined service from two of the giants in the history of the United States Senate. Fritz Hollings' retirement next year will bring to an end the career of one of the finest and most dedicated public servants ever to serve in the nation's capitol.

Of the 304 members of the U.S. Senate with whom I have served with since January 1973, there are none I have worked with as closely as Fritz Hollings. A visitor to the Senate gallery during a Roll Call vote would notice that our Senate desks are next to each other. When you work daily with someone for 30 years, you get to know them like your own family. I know, from my personal experience and observation, that Senator Hollings is a public servant of unparalleled ability, integrity, and effectiveness. He is also endowed with all the Southern graciousness and manners you would expect from someone with his unmistakable lowcountry baritone. When my wife Jill and I were married, Fritz and Peatsy Hollings warmly welcomed us with a marriage party.

My friendship with Fritz Hollings predates our shared work in the Senate. As a 29 year-old county councilman, I decided to run for the United States Senate. Fritz Hollings came to Delaware to campaign for me and his support was invaluable in my election. A campaign brochure from my 1972 election, with a picture of us on the campaign trail, is still displayed in my state office in Wilmington. But the story of Fritz Hollings' public service started thirty years before I met him.

Fritz Hollings literally has fought for South Carolina, and his country, his entire life. After graduating from The Citadel in 1942, he received a commission in the U.S. Army. He served in the Second World War with distinction in North Africa and Europe, earning the Bronze Star and seven campaign ribbons while serving as an army officer. Following the war, he received his law degree at the University of South Carolina, where he was Note

* U.S. Senator, State of Delaware.

In 1948, at age 26, Senator Hollings began his storied fifty years of public service by being elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives, later serving as Speaker Pro Tempore. In 1955, he was elected Lieutenant Governor, and three years later, the people of South Carolina elected him to the Governor's office. At age 36, Hollings was the youngest person in the 20th century to serve as Governor of their state. During turbulent times, Fritz Hollings was a voice of reason on race issues and a proven leader in getting his state's economy moving again.

Senator Hollings was elected to the United States Senate in 1966 and re-elected six more times. He started his Senate career by working on poverty and hunger issues, leading to his now-famous "hunger tours" and his acclaimed 1970 book "The Case Against Hunger: A Demand for a National Policy." A leader on these issues, Fritz Hollings helped author national legislation that created the food program for Women, Infants and Children (or "WIC"), which he modeled after a pilot project in Beaufort County.

During his 37 years in the Senate, Fritz Hollings has been a national leader on the country's most important policy matters, including civil rights, the federal budget, defense spending, arms control, budget issues, telecommunications, and trade policy. As South Carolina's Governor, Fritz Hollings produced the State's first balanced budget since 1895. He carried that same notion of fiscal accountability to Washington. Long an advocate of a "pay-as-you-go" approach to federal spending, he sponsored the famed Gramm-Rudman-Hollings' deficit reduction bill. Senator Hollings has also served as a senior member of the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, where he has been a leading voice in the areas of transportation security, consumer protection, telecommunications, trade policy, and coastal preservation.

But just as important as his lasting imprint on the great national issues of our time, his constituents back home know that Fritz Hollings always put their interests first. He never forgot where he came from, and now he and Peatsy are readying to return home for good. Our nation is in the debt of South Carolina for "lending" us Fritz Hollings for almost a half century. The Palmetto State, America, and the world community are better places for it. We cannot repay our debt, but we can send our thanks for sharing him with us these last 37 years. I am thankful for his friendship and grateful for his leadership. The Senate will miss his voice, his intellect, his influence, and his deep commitment to making this a better nation.