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A TRIBUTE TO RETIRED SENATOR J. STROM THURMOND

CARROLL A. CAMPBELL, JR.*

I do not recall the first time I met Senator Thurmond, but I do remember first visiting him in the late sixties in Washington as a young Greenville businessman trying to make a life for my family.

I was just starting to become interested in politics and had decided that the struggling Republican Party most closely tracked my philosophy. Beyond that, I did not have a clue as to how, or whether, my life should intersect with politics.

He listened patiently as I talked about the state of political affairs as I understood them. His counsel: "Every citizen has an obligation to serve his fellow man in some capacity. You need to decide how you should serve and then do it with all your might." The Senator added that I could call upon him anytime I needed advice.

He probably regretted that generous offer because I occupied many hours of his time doing just that. I never made a major political move without consulting him. From my first run for the South Carolina House of Representatives in 1971 through my years as Governor, he served as mentor, counselor, and, at times, disciplinarian.

But the Senator's generosity with his time was not just for me—it was boundless.

Much has been written about his legendary constituent service. He had a rule: a request from a constituent had to be answered within 24 hours. While many of the problems could not be resolved in that time period, he insisted that the constituents at least get an acknowledgment that their concerns were being addressed.

An aspect of his life that does not get as much attention is the thousands of young men and women who, like me, he nurtured. The South Carolina Bar Association membership is dotted with attorneys who were trained as young lawyers on the Senator's staff. Some, such as Billy Wilkins, have risen to prominence in the legal profession in part because they were trained by the master.

Those who worked for him will say he was never too busy to take a personal interest in their lives. He salted the State with men and women of character. Today, they are lawyers, judges, businesspeople, and government leaders. It is a legacy unmatched

* Governor, State of South Carolina (1987-1995).

by anyone else in our State's history.

You can visit any part of the State—small towns, big cities, urban or rural—and you will find people who, in large ways and small, were touched by the Senator.

He is now enjoying retirement in his boyhood home of Edgefield. He can look out the window and see the trees he climbed and the soil he tilled as a boy. In many respects, Edgefield is still the same town where a young boy named Strom Thurmond thought great thoughts and dreamed big dreams. It is as though the land and the trees awaited his return.

One can only imagine what must go through the Senator's mind as he considers a life so well lived, so focused on public service, so purposeful.

I do not know his thoughts, but I do know the thoughts of a man who, through good fortune and God's blessing, benefitted from the Senator's kindnesses.

I am thankful for his friendship.