

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. May I ask the Senator to withhold for a couple minutes?

Mr. COBURN. Absolutely.

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HONORING SENATOR ROBERT C. BYRD

Mr. REID. Mr. President, last night I had the honor and pleasure of going to a birthday party. I, personally, never had birthday parties. My mother always said my birthday was too close to Christmas, so I guess we made up for it on Christmas. But the party last night was sensational.

Hundreds of people showed up. They showed up a few days early, but only a few days, because this coming week Senator Robert Byrd will be 90 years old. He holds all kinds of records. I often compare him with the greatest baseball player of all time, Babe Ruth, for obvious reasons.

What a pleasure it has been for me to serve in the Senate, but every day that goes by that I am able to serve in the Senate, I reflect upon how fortunate I am to serve with Senator BYRD and the many courtesies he has extended to me; from the first time I arrived in the Senate, when he asked: Senator, will you agree to conduct hearings for the Interior Subcommittee on Appropriations?

That was as good as scoring a touchdown, to have Senator BYRD ask me to conduct a hearing. He was chairman of that subcommittee, and I did that. When work was to be done on that committee, it didn't matter what I had scheduled, I set it aside so I could satisfy Senator BYRD and do a good job of conducting those hearings.

I wish Senator BYRD happy birthday. As I said last night at the birthday party, I also wish to tell him how much I appreciate all he has done for me personally, all he has done for the people of West Virginia, all he has done for the people of the State of Nevada, and all he has done for our country.

It is such a thought-provoking thing, to think that I have been able to serve with Senator BYRD and serve in some of the positions he has held: Minority leader, majority leader, minority whip, majority whip.

Last night I was so happy. Senator BYRD was his old self. There he was up there in front of everybody, without a note, reciting poetry from memory. I have said it before, but I will say it again, I want him to hear this and I want everyone else to hear this. I have a lot of favored stories about Senator BYRD, but this is my favorite.

I came back from Nevada. I was right back here. Senator BYRD said: What did you do this weekend?

I said: Senator BYRD, I grabbed a little paperback book out of my library and I read "The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe."

Senator BYRD did as I have seen him do many times: Robinson Crusoe? He was on that island 28 years, 6 months, 2 weeks, and 3 days.

I looked at him. I said: What is he talking about? I just read the book. I went back to my home and looked, and there it was. He hadn't read the book for 40 years, but in that computer he has that is a brain, he was able to recall that.

That is only one indication of the abilities of this orphan who is so proud of being from West Virginia. He may have been an orphan growing up, but he is not an orphan in the Senate. He has a family who loves him.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, when Robert C. Byrd was born, America had just sent its first troops to France, an angry mob had just abolished private property in Russia, and the New York Times published its first op-ed piece.

Unfortunately, the "Times" would continue to publish daily editorials in addition to those op-eds. But fortunately for the country and for us, his colleagues, the Lord granted Robert Carlyle Byrd the gift of years—a lot of them.

Next week, Senator BYRD celebrates one more milestone in a long and growing list of them: his 90th birthday. And I think I speak for every Member of this body when I say we are grateful to have lived in an age in which we could serve with such a remarkable man.

Writing about the foundation of any great society, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote:

Not gold, but only men can make a nation  
great and strong  
Men who for truth and honor's sake stand  
fast and labor long  
Real men who work while others sleep  
Who dare while others fly  
They build a nation's pillars deep  
And lift them to the sky

Robert Byrd is such a man. Indeed, those words seem almost to have been written with him in mind.

Senator, we revere you for your many achievements, we thank you for always bringing us back to our purpose here, we wish you a very happy birthday, and many more to come.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Oklahoma.

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EXPLANATION OF OBJECTION

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I will take a few short minutes because I know others want to honor Senator BYRD, and there is some other business to discuss. The bill I objected to today comes before us because we have some questions. The chairman of the committee, Senator KERRY from Massachusetts, and Senator SNOWE, the ranking member, have it right, wanting to help our veterans and to make sure they have great opportunities as they return. But I remind my colleagues that this last year, in the SBA, we stole \$26 million worth of their salaries to run that, to do directed earmarks. So we

have this great new leader at the SBA, Steven Preston. Yet we have handcuffed him in his ability to do what he needs to do at the SBA.

We noticed in the paper yesterday a tremendous, large number of loans where things have been faked. The SBA hadn't had the capability of managing the SBA properly. So our purpose in doing this is not to go against the veterans we see. Nobody stands as a greater supporter than I in terms of protecting their privacy, their second-amendment rights, and honoring them.

We do want to do this. The offset that is in this bill comes out of a microloan that is also designed to help veterans. So we are taking money from one area and not the other at the same time we are stealing money from the SBA's operational money to do earmarks that don't do anything to help veterans.

My pledge to both Senator KERRY and SNOWE is to look at this and see if we can't come to some resolution about our concerns over the intervening time between now and the time we come back and make a commitment to try to do that.

But most important is, what we want to do is preserve freedom. An ever-encroaching Federal Government does not preserve the very freedom that those veterans fought for.

I yield.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from West Virginia is recognized.

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HONORING SENATOR ROBERT C. BYRD

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, I rise today to wish a very happy birthday today to my colleague, Senator ROBERT C. BYRD, and to say a couple of things about him.

As the majority leader indicated, we had a wonderful reception for him last night, and what was interesting to me was not only the warmth of what it was that those who spoke said of him, but even more important was the fact that in the crowd of 2 or 300, I would say 80 percent of them had come up from West Virginia or were West Virginians who had come from other parts of the country.

It was actually the strongest statement of the evening because it reflects their love and their respect. These were people who would not ordinarily do something such as this because they have other matters they might need to attend to because they are public officials or because of their positions—they are scholars or whatever. But they made their way up here so they could pay their tribute by their presence, even though they could not say a word to Senator BYRD.

That meant a lot to me, to understand—as I do anyway—the way people feel.

I also wish to say one of the things I have always most admired about Senator BYRD is he grew up the hard way.