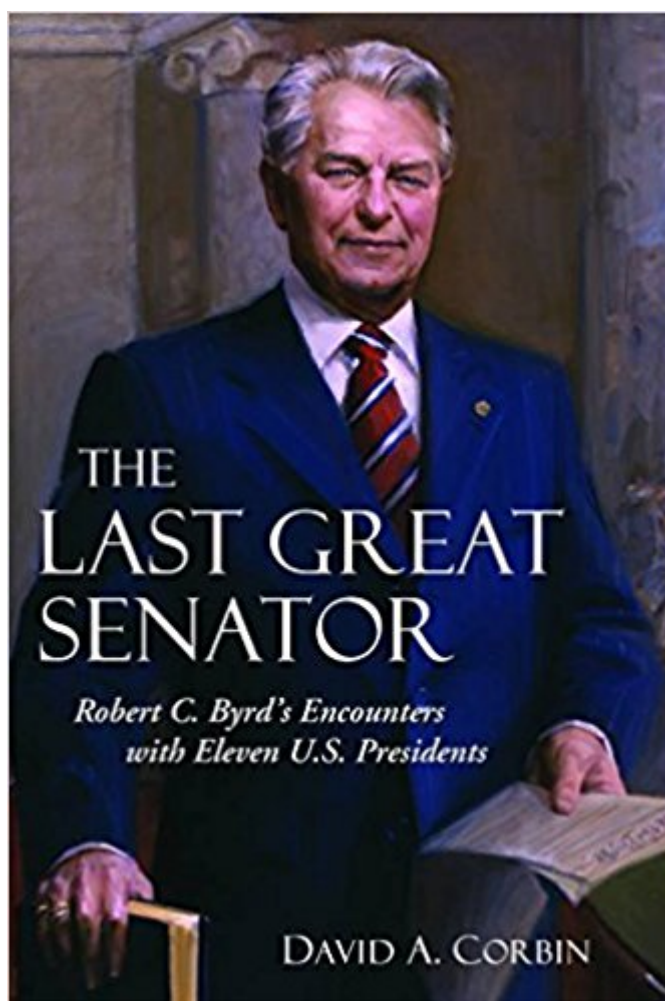


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# The Last Great Senator: Robert C. Byrd's Encounters With Eleven U.S. Presidents



## Synopsis

No person involved in so much history received so little attention as the late Robert C. Byrd, the longest-serving U.S. senator. In *The Last Great Senator*, David A. Corbin examines Byrd's complex and fascinating relationships with eleven presidents of the United States, from Eisenhower to Obama. Furthermore, Byrd had an impact on nearly every significant event of the last half century, including the Cold War, the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, Kennedy's New Frontier, the Watergate scandal, the Reagan Revolution, the impeachment of President Clinton, and the Iraq War. Holding several Senate records, Byrd also cast more votes than any other U.S. senator. In his sweeping portrait of this eloquent and persuasive man's epic life and career, Corbin describes Senator Byrd's humble background in the coalfields of southern West Virginia (including his brief membership in the Ku Klux Klan). He covers Byrd's encounters and personal relationship with each president and his effect on events during their administrations. Additionally, the book discusses Byrd's interactions with other notable senators, including Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Russell, Mike Mansfield, and especially Robert and Edward Kennedy. Going beyond the boundaries of West Virginia and Capitol Hill, *The Last Great Senator* presents Byrd in a larger historical context, where he rose to the height of power in America.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Superbly written, enhanced with extensive notes, a bibliographic essay, and a comprehensive

index, *The Last Great Senator: Robert C. Byrd's Encounters with Eleven U.S. Presidents* is a unique and highly recommended contribution..."  
•Review, *The Midwest Book Review*, January 2013 (*Midwest Book Review*)  
"In my Senate leadership lecture on July 14, 1998, I discussed how Sen. Robert Byrd and I made an agreement to work together to make the Senate operate smoothly and productively. It was an agreement, I said, that we never broke, not once in the eight years we served together as Republican and Democratic leaders of the Senate.  
Determined to document Byrd's place in American history, David Corbin has detailed the incredible career and accomplishments of the distinguished Senator from West Virginia by focusing on his encounters with the last eleven presidents. I hope this book will become a must read for people interested not only in Senator Byrd, but the U.S. Senate and the presidency. I thank David for putting this book together about my good friend and former colleague.  
•Sen. Howard Baker (R-TN), former Senate majority leader (Sen. Howard Baker)  
"Sen. Robert C. Byrd was my predecessor as the majority leader of the U.S. Senate. When he cast his twelve thousandth vote in the Senate, I stated, There are few honors greater than to be able to say that we served in the U.S. Senate with Robert Byrd.  
Now David Corbin has produced this much-needed account of Byrd's life and career: how he embodied the Senate as an institution, how he was a powerful reminder to presidents and senators of the need to abide by the Constitution, and how he was a crucial part of American history for more than a half century. And he always remained so proud of his southern West Virginia roots. This is an important story that needed to be told, and David tells it so well.  
•Sen. George Mitchell (D-ME), former Senate majority leader (Sen. George Mitchell)  
"Robert C. Byrd grew in stature remarkably over his six decades of political power. From his beginning as a self-described rustic boob from West Virginia, he slowly rose to become the mighty conscience of the Senate  
one of the few brave enough to oppose George W. Bush's unnecessary Iraq invasion. I was Byrd's first press secretary when he entered the Senate in 1959, and I watched him evolve. David Corbin does a superb job of telling this important American story.  
•James A. Haught, editor, *Charleston (WV) Gazette* (James A. Haught)

No person involved in so much history received so little attention as the late Robert C. Byrd, the longest-serving U.S. senator. In *The Last Great Senator*, David A. Corbin examines Byrd's complex and fascinating relationships with eleven presidents of the United States, from Eisenhower

to Obama. Furthermore, Byrd had an impact on nearly every significant event of the last half century, including the Cold War, the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, Kennedy's New Frontier, the Watergate scandal, the Reagan Revolution, the impeachment of President Clinton, and the Iraq War. Holding several Senate records, Byrd also cast more votes than any other U.S. senator. In his sweeping portrait of this eloquent and persuasive man's epic life and career, Corbin describes Senator Byrd's humble background in the coalfields of southern West Virginia (including his brief membership in the Ku Klux Klan). He covers Byrd's encounters and personal relationship with each president and his effect on events during their administrations. Additionally, the book discusses Byrd's interactions with other notable senators, including Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Russell, Mike Mansfield, and especially Robert and Edward Kennedy. Going beyond the boundaries of West Virginia and Capitol Hill, *The Last Great Senator* presents Byrd in a larger historical context, where he rose to the height of power in America. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

I was fascinated by this well written book. I am a little biased, because I was born and raised in Southern West Virginia, and lived through much of this history. Senator Robert C. Byrd was a man apart. Do I agree with all he proposed? No, but with a great deal of it. At the end of the book, President Clinton says of him in his eulogy to Senator Byrd: "He had the wisdom to believe that America was more important than any one individual, any one president, any one senator....". Oh do we need that wisdom in America today.

My husband received this as a gift for Christmas and he loved it. He stated that this is a book everyone should read.

less than I expected

Can't wait to read it. I always admired Senator Byrd, as I grew up in Va., so we were neighbors.

This is, without question one of the best books I have ever read. There is so much history in it, yet it is easy, even enjoyable to read. I have read Dr. Corbin's two books on the southern West Virginia coal miners, so I expected to learn a lot of Byrd's youthful background in the coal fields, and I did. It was fascinating to read just how humble Byrd's childhood background really was, and to read of his real, well-documented experiences in the coalfields. This is in contrast to the one everyone thinks

they know. But once Byrd is elected to the U.S. Senate in 1958, the book becomes more intriguing. It is no longer just a biography of Byrd but an account of encounters with the presidents--eleven of them, from Eisenhower to Obama. That is one-fourth of all the presidents in American history. I agree with the statement by former Republican Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker on the book's dust jacket that this book should become a "must read" for people interested not only in Senator Byrd, but the American presidents as well as the U.S. Senate. I easily give it five stars. I would give it more if I could.

Senator Byrd was a remarkable man for a number of reasons. His mother died when he was an infant and he was reared by an aunt and uncle. Their economic circumstances were very difficult. As Senator Byrd once said, "On my ladder of success, the bottom rungs were kicked out." Despite this, he was an excellent student and received an excellent education in the rural schools of Raleigh County, West Virginia. He was a ferocious reader with a virtually photographic memory. He worked hard all of his life. He didn't have hobbies. He once described the New Year's Day on which he watched football games. He enjoyed them, but at the end of the day, he said he was no better off than he been at the beginning. He didn't watch any more football games. Altogether, he was very very smart, worked very very hard and remembered virtually every event associated with his life. For all of his accomplishments, he was kind and always gracious, with a sense of humor that most often put a twinkle in his eye. But the most remarkable objective fact about Senator Byrd is that he served at the very pinnacle of the United States government for fully a quarter of the life of the Republic. Doctor David Corbin, who is a distinguished professional historian, worked as a staff member in Senator Byrd's Washington office for several decades. He drafted many of Byrd's most notable speeches and articles. No historian has been in a better position than Doctor Corbin to observe his subject. As a result, this extremely interesting and well-written account of Senator Byrd service with 11 presidents is an indispensable addition to the history of the nation, the Senate and West Virginia. It should be required reading of anyone elected to or working for the United States Congress as well as anyone who has an interest in learning more about one of the greatest public servants in the history of the Republic.

Because the author had worked for Senator Byrd I expected a book that just praised him. Instead, I found it to be remarkably honest and balanced story of the Senator's life and and what he had to overcome. I knew the Senator first as a law school student and then as a young aide when I worked in the Senate. He came to teach a class in the legislative process at the American University Law

School every Saturday for a semester. When I went to work in the Senate, he befriended me. Later, I supported him in the only serious campaign for reelection that I think he ever had after he came to the Senate .I

David Corbin's book is well written and a fascinating story of the longest lasting senator, Robert Byrd. Corbin has a splendid chapter on the terrible conditions of coal country in West Virginia and how the coal companies and the county Democratic machines opposed young Byrd. Byrd joined the Ku Klux Klan --a fact that he was criticized for the rest of his long life. I did not know that the Klan was seen locally as a check on the coal companies. Byrd said that this was one of his mistakes, another was the opposition to Thurgood Marshall for the Supreme Court, and his opposition to the Civil Rights Bill of 1965 pushed by his patron Lyndon Johnson. He later regretted that vote as well. Byrd drew liberal opposition to his criticisms of the welfare culture in Washington DC, which with other racial issues enabled liberals like Ted Kennedy (later a friend) to brand him a hillbilly racist. Of interest is that Richard Nixon came to respect the self made man and was considering him for the Supreme Court, but the liberals again killed any such talk. Corbin gives us not just a good biography, but also a fine study of the 11 presidents he served with. Still Corbin wants to know why has Byrd been so quickly forgotten. One should say that the men whose names are engraved on the Senate office buildings, Russell, Hart, and Dirksen, are also forgotten. We do not remember senators any more, certainly not representatives or justices. If these giants are not remembered, what about the pigmies now. We are a presidential nation, and so we honor them instead. Corbin has given us a fine study, and Byrd has given us a fine two volume history of the Senate which will last even longer than his votes.

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