Dean of Senate Russell Dies at 73; Nixon Calls Him a 'Great Patriot'

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By William Chapman
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Sen. Richard Brevard Russell, dean of the Senate and an influential figure in its inner circles for two decades, died yesterday of a respiratory infection complicated by emphysema.

The 73-year-old Democrat from Winder, Ga., died at 2:25 p.m. in Walter Reed Army Medical Center here, shortly after the 92d Congress convened.

One of his last acts was to give Sen. Robert C. Byrd (D-W. Va.) his proxy vote in Byrd's successful drive to take the post of Senate whip away from Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.).

The tall, courtly Southener was a bachelor who lived alone in his Washington apartment. With him when death came yesterday were his sisters, Mrs. J. K. Stacey of Atlanta and Mrs. Hugh Peterson of Ailey, Ga. His physician, Lt. Col. Robert Zurek, announced the death.

RICHARD B. RUSSELL

Political friends and enemies eulogized him as a giant among legislators, as a senator who personally had come to symbolize the institution in which he had served since Jan. 12, 1933.

President Nixon said, "With the death of Sen. Richard Russell, America mourns the passing of one of her greatest sons. . . When the security of the United States was the issue, six American Presidents leaned upon this great patriot; he never failed them. I am honored to have served with him briefly in the Senate; I am honored to have known him as a friend."

Mr. Russell had been chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee from 1951 until 1969, when he voluntarily gave up that post because of illness. He retained chairmanship of the Senate Appropriations Committee until his death. Another Southerner, Sen. Allen J. Ellender (D-La.), 80, will take over that chairmanship and will also replace Mr. Russell as the senator with longest service, automatically qualifying as president pro tempore.

In Georgia, Gov. Jimmy Carter said he would nominate a successor in about one week.

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Political observers there said the choice is likely to be former Gov. Ernest Vandiver, 52. Vandiver probably would not seek election to the seat in 1972, the sources said, and a Democratic primary struggle may develop between Lt. Gov. Lester Maddox and former Gov. Carl Sanders.

Possible Republican contenders would be Rep. Fletcher Thompson of the Atlanta suburbs and Howard (Bo) Callaway, Republican national committeeman from Georgia.

In his senatorial prime, Mr. Russell presided over billions of dollars of defense spending and was a key figure in shaping military budgets through the cold war years

He was also perhaps the leading strategist among Southerners who opposed passage of civil rights bills. A master parliamentarian, he planned and helped sustain some of the chamber's longest filibusters against civil rights legislation.

He was hailed yesterday by one senator who fought his filibusters fiercly. "We have truly lost a great American and patriot," said Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.), the 1968 Democratic candidate for President.

"While steadfastly holding to his own views and political philosophy he commanded the respect and confidence of Presidents and his colleagues in both political parties," Humphrey said.

A Southern colleague, Sen. James O. Eastland (D-Miss.), said, "Russell was the rock upon which the Senate rested during periods of great danger and in time of great trials."