

Senator With an Eye for Detail

Robert Carlyle Byrd JUN 23 1970

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WASHINGTON, June 22—As the roll-call moved inexorably forward to overwhelming passage today, Robert Carlyle Byrd rested comfortably in his back-row Senate seat, one hand to his mouth, and savored the dimensions of his victory.

Though he was rebuffed in a vote last week despite the Nixon Administration's backing, he had just won approval for an amendment that he regarded as a significant contribution to the high-pitched Senate debate on Cambodia and the President's authority to make war. Only five of the most tenacious doves had opposed him.

In 24 years as a legislator—six back in West Virginia, six in the House of Representatives and 12 in the Senate—Mr. Byrd has learned to draw discernible satisfaction from such high points in his career, moments of victory painstakingly earned by his willingness to consider no senatorial favor too petty.

Pleased to Do the Favor

A dark, dapper man, given to gesticulation, the 52-year-old Mr. Byrd is known for his command of floor procedure, his ability to keep the machinery moving with his sometimes - astonishing stamina on the floor. His colleagues credit him with a fast mind, a keen memory. For four years Senator Byrd has been secretary of the Senate Democratic Con-

ference, a precarious perch on the outer reaches of the party leadership that he has built into a bustle of floor activity and a determined attention to detail, however small.

If a staff aide asks Mr. Byrd to insert another Senator's speech in the record, the West Virginian writes the Senator a letter telling him how pleased he was to do the favor. He keeps a copy in his files. When a Senator has a birthday, Mr. Byrd writes his congratulations; if the Senator replies, Mr. Byrd writes back to thank him for his letter.

"Bobby Byrd invests the most trivial act with a sense of self-importance," a long-time congressional observer said. "With two Senators on the floor, nothing happening and nothing likely to happen, he'll move to rescind a quorum call as though it were a high moment of political drama."

The long record of favors has not won the Senator acceptability in some Democratic quarters, notably those

allied with the Kennedy family. In 1960, when John F. Kennedy was testing the religious issue in the West Virginia primary, Mr. Byrd opposed him strongly while contending that he was not anti-Catholic.

That stance aroused some skepticism since Mr. Byrd had served as a kluge, or organizer, in the Ku Klux Klan during World War II. As late as 1946 he wrote a letter to the imperial grand wizard of the klan urging a rebirth of the "in every state in the Union."

In 1967 Senator Robert F. Kennedy clashed with Senator Byrd in one of the bitterest personal colloquies on the floor in recent years. Mr. Byrd had pushed through a voice vote on a measure Mr. Kennedy wanted to oppose on a roll-call in his absence. At the climax of their clash Senator Kennedy said: "I thought I could rely on that because I thought I was dealing with men."

Orphan on a Dirt Farm

Mr. Byrd, who is no kin of the prominent Byrd family of Virginia, was born Jan. 15, 1918, in Wilkesboro, N. C., and, he recalls, was raised as an orphan on a dirt farm. He was valedictorian of his high-school class but was too poor to go on to college except for some sporadic attendance while serving in the West Virginia Legislature.

In 1963, at the age of 45, he received a law degree University here. He had studied nights and weekends for, as a teetotaler, he has little interest in the social circuit.



Associated Press

No favor too petty

Senator Byrd is as painstaking about his political contacts back in West Virginia as he is in the Senate. Nearly every weekend he makes 50 or more telephone calls to constituents, many of them city and county officers or employes, asking about their children and their views on issues. He takes notes and keeps files so subsequent calls have a personal touch.

The West Virginian married Erma Ora James in 1937, and they have two daughters.

In West Virginia the Senator is regarded as all but unbeatable. Earlier this year there was a flurry of anti-Byrd activity but it came to nothing. He was renominated in the primary by a margin of better than seven to one over a more liberal candidate.