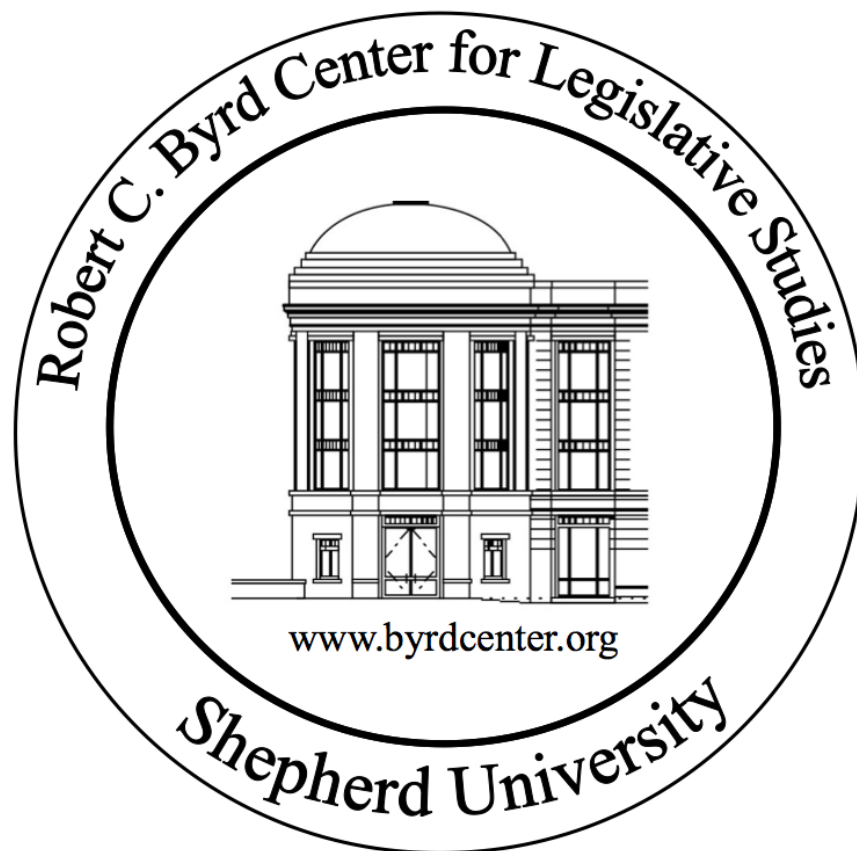


# Robert C. Byrd Legacy Project

Oral History Interview

**Michael Fulton**

August 1, 2014



**Preface**  
By Jay Wyatt

A native of Parkersburg, WV and graduate of West Virginia University, Mike Fulton is a public affairs and advocacy expert at the Washington D.C. office of the Asher Agency. He has been named a “Top Lobbyist” by *The Hill* four times, and he teaches Public Affairs in West Virginia University’s Integrated Marketing and Communications Program. Fulton began his career in Washington D.C. working on the staffs of West Virginia Congressmen Robert H. Mollohan and Alan Mollohan from May, 1979 to February, 1988, first as a projects assistant and later as appropriations counsel. He is a longtime member and past president of the National Capital Area chapter of the West Virginia University Alumni Association and the West Virginia Society of Washington D.C., for which he has served on the board of directors.

In this oral history, Fulton discusses his years working as a congressional staffer and some of his many interactions with Senator Byrd. He positions Senator Byrd as the leader of the West Virginia congressional delegation and a master of the legislative process. Fulton sheds light on the ways in which West Virginia’s congressmen often worked in concert to acquire much-needed federal appropriations funds for their home state through their powerful committee positions. He remembers Senator Byrd’s staff as among the most professional and well-prepared in congress and discusses the key roles that staffers play in the day-to-day operations of a congressional office. Fulton also highlights Senator Byrd’s longstanding support of West Virginia organizations, noting his willingness to appear and speak at a numerous functions throughout his career, including a 1994 tribute in his honor that was sponsored by the West Virginia Society of Washington D.C.

**About the interviewer:** Ray Smock is the director of the Robert C. Byrd Center for Legislative Studies in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. He is the former Historian of the U. S. House of Representatives (1983-95). He holds a PhD in history from the University of Maryland at College Park. His latest book, co-edited with Roger Bruns and David Hostetter, is *Congress Investigates: A Critical History with Documents* (2011), a two-volume compilation of scholarly articles and government documents covering the history of Congressional investigations from 1792 to 2006.

Interview #1  
August 1, 2014

**FULTON:** My name is Mike Fulton. I live in Kensington, Maryland. I was born in Bluefield, West Virginia, and I was raised by Bob and Pat Fulton in Parkersburg, West Virginia. I went to Parkersburg High School, graduating in 1975. I attended West Virginia University at Parkersburg from 1975 to 1977, earning an Associate in Arts degree in Humanities (pre-Journalism). I worked at the *Parkersburg News and Sentinel*, so it gave me an opportunity to cover members of Congress, city council, judicial activities, law enforcement actions and even sports. When you're an intern, you do a little bit of everything. Then I transferred to West Virginia University, and I entered the School of Journalism, just recently renamed the WVU College of Media. I was editor of the *Daily Athenaeum*, the student paper, and wrote editorials, feature stories, and investigative pieces for the paper the two years I was there.

I had accepted a full-time reporter's position at the *Parkersburg News and Sentinel* before I graduated at WVU, but one day I was in class (Journalism law), and my advisor passed around the latest job listings. In those days—it's before computers and iPhones or Blackberries—they passed around paper job opportunities among the classes that seniors were in. There was one that caught my eye: "Congressman Robert H. Mollohan is looking for a full-time staff person in his Washington, D.C. office." The legislative director, Meredith Robb, who was a WVU School of Journalism graduate from Weirton, came to Morgantown a few days later to interview applicants for the position.

And as I was leaving class that day, my advisor, Dr. Paul A. Atkins, pulled me aside and said, "You will be meeting with Meredith Robb when he gets here next week."

And I said, "Of course I will."

And so I did. I interviewed, and they called me two days later and offered me a job in Washington to start immediately after graduation in May. So, I started as a projects assistant in the office of Congressman Robert H. Mollohan right out of college, an absolute babe in the woods.

The West Virginia delegation was extremely powerful then. Senator Robert C. Byrd was Majority Leader. Rep. Harley Staggers, Sr. was chairman of the Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee. Rep. John Slack was on the House Appropriations Committee, chairing the Commerce--Justice--Science Subcommittee. Rep. Robert H. Mollohan was a senior member of the Armed Services Committee. Freshman Rep. Nick Rahall had just been elected to the House. Former Rep. Ken Hechler had run, of course, for governor, and he was defeated in the primary, so he switched gears and ran as an independent against Mr. Rahall. Mr. Rahall eked it out, and it took him years to catch up and raise enough money for all that he spent to win that House seat. And here it is 30 years later or more, and he's still in the Congress, but raising more money than ever this time around to win re-election.

I was hired to handle special projects for Bob Mollohan. When I was hired, I had no idea what that meant, but I was tutored by Meredith Robb, Mr. Mollohan's trusted legislative director. I carefully followed Meredith's tutelage, and I learned invaluable lessons from wonderful people on Senator Byrd's staff. Jennings Randolph was chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, and I met Phil McGance, his chief of staff. Tom Altmeyer, who's now lobbying with Arch Coal, was his energy staff lead. Ric Fenton worked for Senator Randolph and later worked many years for the National Mining Association. I can go on and on down the list. Rosemary Sanders was his projects person, my counterpart. Senator Byrd's projects person was Carolyn Giolito. We all worked together closely.

**SMOCK:** How do you spell that?

**FULTON:** G-i-o-l-i-t-o. And, I got to work with all of the senior, trusted appropriations staff, Terry Sauvain, Charlie Estes, Carol Mitchell, and there were others, but those were the principal three that I worked with then and over the many years. I worked nearly ten years in Congress for Rep. Bob Mollohan and his son, Rep. Alan B. Mollohan. I was recruited by a friend and former House staff colleague, Dan McGinn, to leave Capitol Hill in 1988 and to start lobbying for colleges and universities, hospitals, and other nonprofit entities that were looking principally for money and relationships in Congress.

From the time I came to Washington, D.C., I was probably in Senator Byrd's office in the Capitol, or at the time [1979] he was in the Russell Building, I was in the senator's two offices at least once a day, if not multiple times a day. Those visits were usually for meetings with federal agencies or meetings with constituents. It made sense for the two senators and Rep. Mollohan and his staff to be represented all in one meeting so that we were all on the same page on a project or a strategy, and also on how we were going to move forward with our respective powerful committees to get the job done. The Hart Building hadn't been constructed yet.

Senator Byrd was a master, a master, at knowing the right people to meet with, the right way to handle a meeting, what the "ask" should be, what the outcome should be, and the steps that you should take to get from Point A to Point Z. So, I learned from the master and his staff, who knew and were trained under his tutelage as well.

**SMOCK:** When you say what "the ask" should be, who's doing the asking and who's doing the appropriating? Explain that a little bit more if you can.

**FULTON:** Most of the meetings in Senator Byrd's offices were with federal agencies and the leaders from a community that needed our assistance. After we had received a formal "ask" from a city, a county, business or industry, a school, a university, or another entity, we would then look at the best possible ways to achieve a positive outcome. Some requests were to protect or create jobs in West Virginia by decisions made by federal agencies, like the Bureau of Public Debt, located in my hometown of Parkersburg, or they involved building a new housing project in a community through HUD [Department of Housing and Urban Development]-assisted rental assistance that helped make it affordable for West Virginians to live there. The money was going to go somewhere. Why not West Virginia? Why not northern West Virginia?

Our strategy was to try to get as much money as we could through the normal competitive rounds of funding, and then at the end of the fiscal year, if there was anything left over, we tried to recapture any unexpended money to steer it to West Virginia, and we always had projects and requests from cities and counties and other entities in our hip pockets ready to go in the event opportunities presented themselves.

Now, obviously, the West Virginia delegation had the authorizing areas of many different federal agencies covered through their powerful committee assignments. Senator Byrd was the chairman of the [Senate] Appropriations Committee [1989-1995, 2007-2009], as well as Senate Majority Leader [1977-1981, 1987-1989], so he exercised a great deal of power to bring pressure on agencies, especially in the months leading to October 1, the beginning of the fiscal year. It was prime time to encourage agencies to look more favorably on West Virginia during that period of time, when their spending bills were being marked up and considered by the Appropriations Committee. During that time, there were thirteen appropriations bills, and they were almost always approved and signed into law before the end of the fiscal year. In some years, only twelve of the bills were finalized. For some years during the 1990s, the Foreign Operations bill was not able to be finalized. Agencies that were part of the Foreign Operations spending bill were funded through a continuing resolution, but the other twelve bills were done in regular order and passed by October 1. We did a very good job, the West Virginia delegation, of bringing home projects and opportunities for West Virginia and its people. It made me very proud to work in the nation's capital and feel a sense of accomplishment for my home state. My focus was on the First Congressional District of West Virginia, but I learned about a lot of other West Virginia projects and how to work with other West Virginia Congressional offices.

**SMOCK:** How did Senator Byrd work with the West Virginia delegation and, particularly in your case, with Bob and then later Alan Mollohan? Did they go to him with requests? Did he come to them asking what they wanted? How did it work?

**FULTON:** Senator Byrd was always very collaborative with his Democratic colleagues in the West Virginia delegation and always brought them into meetings and discussions on matters that affected their Districts. It is unlike some cases now, as I still continue to advocate for a number of diverse clients in multiple states, I learn of senators, whether they're Republican or Democrats, or of the same party, even, undercutting each other or holding meetings without the others' knowledge. As we all know, duplicating efforts is a waste of time. Instead, Senator Byrd knew that we could get a lot more done if we worked together than if we worked separately.

Members of the West Virginia delegation went to see Senator Byrd with special requests, items that were personally important to them or projects that they couldn't have accomplished on their own. Obviously, back then the House moved first on appropriations bills, and it was always more advantageous to Senator Byrd if the House members could get at least a marker in the bill, report language or a planning grant or a mention of a potential project with even a little bit of money in there as a marker. Then, when the bill came over to the Senate, he could grow it to its fullest capacity or potential, not taking multiple years to do something, but expediting things because of his power and relationships.

Our office would go to Senator Byrd's office and share our priorities soon after the president's budget was released, usually in the first few weeks of February. The sooner you met with the Senator's sharp staff, the better, because they would know which bills were going to be at capacity with West Virginia projects, where the horse trading might take place, and how Senate Conference Committee negotiations would be conducted, and things of that nature.

But then, there's always that university, company, community economic development need or a crisis that occurs – a flood, bridge collapse, new infrastructure need to make way for a new manufacturer right at the end of the appropriations process, and we need to do something extra special to get that need taken care of in one of the spending bills. I learned to try to spread the projects out that Mr. Mollohan wanted with Mr. Byrd's help so you didn't have them all lumped together in the Labor-HHS-Education bill, in the VA [Veterans' Administration], HUD [Housing and Urban Development], and Independent Agencies bills or in the Commerce-Justice-Science bill. If you didn't spread your priority projects among various spending bills, it was possible that Reps. Staggers, Rahall, Slack, and others would have projects of their own, and ours could butt heads with them on occasion.

Sometimes the delegation didn't always agree. One case in point was the Stonewall Jackson Lake and Dam. The member of Congress who represented that area, whether it was Harley Staggers, Sr., Harley Staggers, Jr., or Bob Wise, were always adamantly opposed to that project because it took a lot of private land from constituents to offer the much-needed flood protection. A lot of that would benefit the district that Reps. Staggers and Bob Wise represented [WV, 2<sup>nd</sup> district], but it also benefited a portion of Mr. Mollohan's district [WV, 1<sup>st</sup> district] as well.

So Bob and Alan Mollohan were always, during the years of contention with the project's federal funding portion, fighting to save the project. Every year, in the Energy and Water Development appropriations bill, an amendment would be offered to strike the funding for the Stonewall Jackson Lake and Dam project. It was the second largest U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' public improvement project in the country, only second to the Tennessee-Tombigbee [Waterway] project in Alabama that Chairman Tom Beville, supported.

We had a great deal of respect for Mr. Beville and his leadership. The Stonewall Jackson Lake and Dam was one project where the delegation didn't see eye-to-eye. Bob Wise was successful in his first term in Congress in offering an amendment striking House funds for the flood relief project. Senators Byrd and Jennings Randolph had to personally get involved with the Energy and Water Development bill to restore the project's funding in the Senate version. They also encouraged the House to recede to the Senate in the House-Senate conference report. Mr. Wise's opposition to the project was well understood. He campaigned against the Stonewall Jackson Lake and Dam project, and in his very first appropriations cycle, he offered that amendment to strike funds to continue its construction. It was very hard for us [Mr. Mollohan was a freshman himself at the time] to win in the House because when you have the member of Congress where the project's going to occur opposed to it, it's pretty hard for other members from Texas, Arkansas, and California to say, "We're going to screw over a freshman member who doesn't want a project in his own district that's worth hundreds of millions of dollars that

we could utilize in other ways.” So we lost the House vote, and continued project funding for the Stonewall Jackson Lake and Dam was in jeopardy.

And while the Senate passed it and fully funded it, we had an issue in conference. Senator Byrd came to the House of Representatives and walked the halls of the House offices and met with members of Congress to seek their votes on the conference report, and we prevailed to restore funding for that project, which West Virginia is enjoying to this day. That was a fabulous victory to watch.

Literally, during that period of time, the Alan Mollohan staff worked collaboratively with Senator Byrd and Senator Randolph’s staff. We went in every morning—I forget what time, but it was six or seven o’clock. Each of us trying to restore funding had a three-ring-binder notebook, listing the House of Representatives’ member and how they had voted historically on the Stonewall Jackson Lake and Dam project. If they were incumbents and had voted in the past, and we knew how they voted on the Wise Amendment, we knew where we had leverage to turn people and earn our vote count. We did our vote-counting like any other major bill you would whip, and we succeeded. But it wouldn’t have happened without Senator Byrd personally coming over to the House of Representatives and walking the halls, meeting with people, making phone calls, writing personal notes, and working diligently with our staff to turn that vote around.

**SMOCK:** What year was that, do you recall?

**FULTON:** That would have been approximately 1982, ’83, because Rep. Alan Mollohan was just sworn in in ’82, so that probably happened in ’82 or in ’83, one of those two years.<sup>1</sup>

**SMOCK:** Okay. So he’s not chairman of the Appropriations Committee at that point, but he’s in the leadership.

**FULTON:** Yes.

**SMOCK:** And I imagine that he didn’t come over to the House very often to do that kind of direct lobbying. It might be a unique case with the Stonewall Jackson project, and maybe he did it on a smaller scale, but the way you’re describing it, that was rather unusual.

**FULTON:** Very unusual. I can’t remember another case where the senator came over to the House side and personally worked the members that way. That project was also near the end of its funding and at a pivotal point in its construction, and to lose the funding and lose that momentum would have been devastating to West Virginia, let alone Weston, West Virginia, which got flooded a number of years due to the lack of flood control in that region.

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<sup>1</sup> The U.S. House of Representatives voted to delete funding for the Stonewall Jackson Dam project on June 6, 1983, while the Senate approved the funds. Senator Robert C. Byrd led the effort to restore funding for the project. On June 19, 1983 the House and Senate approved a compromise bill that officially restored funding for the project.

Flooding over the years was a real problem in West Virginia and, fortunately, we had excellent relationships with FEMA, the Small Business Administration, the National Guard, and other agencies that had to deal with the mop-up. I can remember many cases when a big flood happened in West Virginia, keeping our offices in Washington and the district open extra hours and setting up special federal agency offices in West Virginia and sending more staff back to the state to help the people who were affected, who had lost their homes, their businesses, trying to get them back on their feet.

It was very special working in the West Virginia delegation, really all nine and a half of the years that I was there, because we all worked together. Gradually, as the state lost population, we started losing members of Congress after every census, and we went from five House seats to four and then down to three, even to the point where it pitted Mr. Staggers and Mr. Mollohan against each other. It was a painful situation, like watching brothers fighting against their brothers.

**SMOCK:** Now, in addition to the sort of formal work that you did with the offices and with the delegations that you've described, what other kinds of activities did you see Senator Byrd in action?

**FULTON:** I came to Washington, D.C., right out of college. I really didn't know that many people except for my coworkers and my friends within the West Virginia delegation, so I joined the West Virginia Society of Washington, D.C., which the senator was so supportive of, all the years of his service. He was president of the West Virginia Society in the 1950s. Each of the states in the nation has a state society. I think the principal reason for establishing the state societies—as authorized by Congress-- was for them to appoint a Cherry Blossom princess to represent each state for the Cherry Blossom Festival held annually in April. Many of the state societies like West Virginia did so much more – they held holiday parties, a congressional reception, awards ceremonies, or speakers. We'd celebrate the state's birthday every June 20<sup>th</sup>, and we would host inaugural balls occasionally at the Mayflower Hotel, and the senator and Erma Byrd were always receptive to attending quite often.

We did create an award program called the West Virginia Son and Daughter of the Year. I was in attendance when Mrs. Byrd was selected as the Daughter of the Year [1990], and I think a lot of people never heard Mrs. Byrd talk too much because she was so quiet and always deferred to the senator at these gatherings. But that night, it was her night, and I must say, I was so impressed. I always felt good about my senior senator, but when I heard Mrs. Byrd be so articulate and so wonderful and humble in winning that award, it was just fabulous to be in the room. And the senator had been named Son of the Year [1963], but I think before I came to the nation's capital. And it was also a very special night when Robert H. Mollohan was named Son of the Year by the West Virginia Society.

I loved volunteering in that group. I got on the board of directors, and I was editor of a ragtag newsletter that we put out called *The Echo*. I would paste it up, and we'd have Cantrell-Cutter Printing print it for us. Luckily, Glenna Cantrell was a native West Virginian, and she did it for free. I'd take it over there, all the news articles and photos laid out, and she would print it a couple days later. We used mail in those days. We had a very robust membership of West



Virginians who enjoyed each others' company and loved the state. We had a directory that was updated every year of all our members of the Society. Robert and Erma Byrd were listed just like everybody else.

**SMOCK:** How did the West Virginia Society break down in terms of party? Was it bipartisan, or was it mostly Democrats? How did that sort of aspect of it play out?

**FULTON:** It was bipartisan. You had Republicans and Democrats. Everybody laid down their swords at the door and worked together on the West Virginia Society. It was one for all and all for one. So, I really enjoyed it. I have a lot of memorabilia from the State Society that I was privileged to work on a lot of events. Because I did the newsletter, I got a lot of pictures that were put into the publication.

The West Virginia Society hosted a tribute of Senator Robert C. Byrd in 1994, and I served on the steering committee of that event and brought some items today that I'd like to share with you. That was a fabulous evening at the Grand Hyatt Hotel on New Jersey Avenue. Bill Clinton was president, and he came to the event and spoke on behalf of the senator. The senator's entire family was there. The head table seated at least twenty people, including the president of the United States. It was a fabulous, fabulous evening. We had sponsors that helped defray costs of the event. Many, many people came from West Virginia, all parts of the state were represented.

The Senator's favorite bluegrass band played that night, and he came down from the podium and jumped up onto the stage where the band was. The band was set up behind all the tables in the room and away from the head table, and he leapt onto the stage. I remember he sang "Old Joe Clark," "West Virginia Hills," and a number of other timeless tunes. We only wish he had been able to play the fiddle that night. He was in rare form that night and gave a wonderful speech. I brought a lot of things from that particular event.

Another organization I belong to that the Senator supported is the National Capital Area Chapter of the West Virginia University Alumni Association. I graduated from WVU, and I joined the National Capital Area Chapter of the WVU Alumni Association here in DC in 1979. I was fortunate to land a seat on the board of that group in 1980 and was even more fortunate in 1986 to be elected president. In 1986, I worked for Congressman Alan Mollohan. The WVU Alumni chapter in Washington started hosting an opportunity for the president of WVU to come speak to the West Virginia Congressional delegation and senior staff. Senator Byrd was most helpful, reserving the Mike Mansfield Room for the WVU Presidential luncheon we call, "The State of the University Address in the Nation's Capital," an event that still continues. So it was a smaller, more intimate event at first in the Mike Mansfield Room. The senator would secure the room for us, and then we would charge our alumni to attend, and the delegation and their senior staff would come. It usually was held in February, and it gave the president of the university a chance to speak about the state of the university as it relates to Congress and federal activities and projects that the members were working on behalf of WVU and the citizens of West Virginia. That meaningful event has continued for 36 years! We just held it July 10<sup>th</sup> at the National Press Club, and we had 325 people there for Dr. Gordon Gee. The event has grown exponentially each year, and I chair that event to this day.

Senator Byrd was a miraculous speaker at that event. I think one of the most memorable of these events with Senator Byrd present was right after Jessica Lynch had been rescued and had recovered. She's from the Parkersburg area, and she came to Washington at our invitation. At the luncheon, she announced on our stage that full scholarship opportunities had been offered to her by WVU, by Marshall, and maybe some other institutions. She accepted the WVU scholarship up on the stage that day with Senator Byrd by her side, and it was a fabulous day to be a Mountaineer.

**SMOCK:** Do you have any artifacts or memorabilia from that event?

**FULTON:** A lot, including this picture right here.



*To Mike Fulton, You always do an excellent job on WVU matters.  
Thanks so much  
Jay Rockefeller*

Front Row, From Left: Rep. Nick Rahall, Senator Jay Rockefeller, WVU President Dr. Neil Bucklew, Senator Robert C. Byrd, Rep. Bob Wise, Rep. Harley Staggers, Jr.  
Back Row, From Left: WVU Alumni Association members Jim Agee, Dick Polen, Mike Fulton, John Nicholas, Jr., Paul Farmer, Jay Pugh, & Senator Jennings Randolph

**SMOCK:** Describe that while we're talking about it. It's a framed photograph of you on one side and a very interesting group of congressmen and others on the other side. What's this image?

**FULTON:** Well, in 1986, when I was president of the WVU alumni chapter, we had a new president at WVU. This was great because Dr. Neil Bucklew had come back home to Morgantown and to West Virginia University to be president.<sup>2</sup> He came from the presidency at the University of Montana. This was Dr. Bucklew's first "State of the University in the Nation's Capital" luncheon. He had no idea about this event, and thanks to Senator Byrd, we held it once again in the historic Mike Mansfield Room. We were very fortunate because Jennings Randolph, who had previously stepped down as our senior senator, came back to the Hill for this particular lunch, and we had our new senator, former Governor Jay Rockefeller, with us. Rep. Nick Rahall is pictured along with Dr. Bucklew and Senator Byrd in the center, and also Reps. Bob Wise and Harley Staggers, Jr.

**SMOCK:** That's the front row.

**FULTON:** Yes. Then in the back are mostly WVU alumni leaders with Senator Randolph. This is the late Jim Agee.

**SMOCK:** On the far left in the second row.

**FULTON:** The late Dick Polen, who was alumni director at WVU, myself.

**SMOCK:** Mike Fulton right there.

**FULTON:** Next is John Nicholas, Jr., who our chapter's scholarship fund is named after along with his wife, Lucy. Paul Farmer, who was an attorney at Metro. Paul is retired now, but he runs our annual crab feast that has been going on for thirty-seven years. He's from Mullens, West Virginia. Jay Pugh, who ran Woodward & Lothrop department store in downtown Washington, and then Senator Randolph. Many of these folks were on our alumni board of directors of the National Capital Area chapter. As you can see from the banners, we were an outstanding chapter for many years, and we filled up that banner with honors over multiple years.

**SMOCK:** The picture of the group is signed to you and says, "You always do an excellent job on WVU matters. Thanks so much." And it's signed by Jay Rockefeller. Is that right?

**FULTON:** That's correct, and that autographed photo was sent unbeknownst to me. After the lunch, Mr. Rockefeller sent that wonderful autographed photo, and then at the same time—and I brought a copy of it today as well — former WVU President Dr. Neil Bucklew also autographed one for me.

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<sup>2</sup> Bucklew is a Morgantown native but none of his degrees are from WVU.

This was a significant picture. I also brought some publications where this very unique picture appeared. An important distinction is that one of the people who is not pictured from our delegation was my boss at the time, Alan Mollohan. Mr. Mollohan was not there, and he had a very good reason for not being with us. He was being sworn in as a new member of the House Appropriations Committee. Mr. Mollohan missed the lunch, but he met later that afternoon with Dr. Bucklew privately to talk about all things WVU.

**SMOCK:** I'm sure that President Bucklew was happy to have Alan being sworn in on Appropriations and miss this event instead. [laughs]

**FULTON:** Indeed. When you consider coming from the Montana delegation and having only two senators and one House member, even though Senator [Max] Baucus was very powerful for Montana, to inherit in West Virginia a gold class delegation back in your home state must have been a real thrill. Dr. Bucklew was also fortunate that all ten of the years he served West Virginia University, Senator Byrd and Alan Mollohan were serving on the Appropriations Committees and able to really help the university with its individual needs and the collective projects around the State of West Virginia.

**SMOCK:** Are there any of the other artifacts that you'd like to talk about while we have the tape recorder going that need maybe some explanation and might lead you to tell some stories?

**FULTON:** While I was lobbying for Ryan-McGinn, Inc. [acquired later by GolinHarris and its parent company], I worked with a company that was growing by leaps and bounds in Rocket Center, near Keyser, West Virginia. It was called Information Manufacturing Corporation. It shared the hilltop and a new, state-of-the-art office complex with ATK [Alliant Techsystems, Inc.]. Senator Byrd had helped with ATK's advancement on defense and munitions projects over the years, and it employed a lot of people from West Virginia and western Maryland. So, the senator had helped the companies and the community develop a Hilltop Office Complex that would allow for growth and advanced office capabilities. Actually, Marshall University brought one of their Robert C. Byrd Industrial Manufacturing Centers up there on the Rocket Center campus as well, and they participated in this gala office complex dedication event.

I was asked to help organize the dedication ceremony that was led by Senator Byrd. Alan Mollohan was chosen to introduce the senator, and we had two high school bands participate from the Keyser area. We had a wonderful turnout. It was an outdoor event under a tent. The senator gave a marvelous speech and recited several poems. That was one of my favorite things of hearing Senator Byrd speak to small or large groups over the years, hearing him recite from total memory poems that had a special meaning, that applied to that particular event and the people in attendance.

Our agency designed the program. We had a balloon release with the blue, yellow, and green balloons that were part of the program design. All the banners and decorations were those colors. I was very pleased to work with Senator Byrd's staff on that event and with the companies that were involved in hiring more West Virginians and other folks from that region at

the Hilltop Office Complex. It was named after Robert C. Byrd [Robert C. Byrd Hilltop Office Complex], and I have the newspaper article from the *Cumberland Times-News*. I have the press release from the event, from Senator Byrd's staff [Tom Gavin], a copy of the program, and a wonderful letter that Senator Byrd sent, thanking me and my firm for helping coordinate this event.

There were a lot of details to be worked out, but it flowed beautifully, and it was just a wonderful experience for me to work on that event and to be with Senator Byrd and with Alan Mollohan, my former boss, who I still keep in very close contact with. I brought these items along today and thought they represented a fabulous testament of Senator Byrd's stewardship for business and business growth, providing a strong economy in all parts of our state.

**SMOCK:** At the time of this event in 1999, in August of '99, Tom Gavin was Senator Byrd's press secretary, and he was his press secretary for a long time. Did you have many dealings with him? Tell me a little bit about when you weren't dealing with the principals and when the principals weren't getting together, what kind of staff interaction did you have with Senator Byrd's people?

**FULTON:** Well, to this very day in my advocacy and in my work when I am on Capitol Hill, it's with the staff. The big meetings, the big groundbreakings and dedications are with the members of Congress, but 90 percent of your work when you work on Capitol Hill or you're a lobbyist is with staff. It is unbelievable when you walk into an office and you are greeted with so many smart, talented people, people with experience, with great ideas or who can take a spark of an idea from your client or from you and make it come to life.

There are a lot of members of Congress up there on Capitol Hill that have not paid enough attention to their staffing, and you take ideas or projects in there, and if it's not served up on a silver platter, it's not likely to happen. But that was not the case in working with Senator Byrd's staff, whether they were on the personal staff or on the Appropriations Committee staff. These were seasoned professionals. The senator had great longevity with his staff. There was not any reason to leave when you work for somebody that could get the job done day in and day out. Even in the minority, Senator Byrd was more powerful than a lot of people in the majority, and his staff never backed down from any challenge or from any other member of Congress or staffer if they thought they were in the right for the people of West Virginia.

A lot of Senator Byrd's staff started in the front office and worked their way up. Senator Byrd promoted those people who delivered. I know Carol Dunn Wallace, Terri Smith-Glaze, Suzanne Groot Bentzel, and enjoyed watching them all grow from the front office to greater responsibilities in the office. All of them started in the front office, and they all had unbelievably successful careers, and they've worked hard to earn our respect. So, Senator Byrd's staff were incredible and were easy to work with..

[Interruption]

**SMOCK:** This is part two of the interview with Mike Fulton, and it continues where we left off. The date today is August 1, 2014. We will continue right now with Mike, and we're just discussing the question of working with Senator Byrd's staff.

**FULTON:** Mike Willard was the first press secretary that I worked with in 1979 and onward. Tina Evans became press person after Mike left, and then I remember when Tina had her children, Ann Adler came in and did press work before she was administrative assistant of the 311 Hart Office, and then Tom came after Ann. I'd work with other press people, too, over the years, and they were all sensational. We didn't start working with the press people at the outset. They usually came into the process near the end of a project's development, when the grand opening announcements and the picture-taking, or the groundbreaking or dedications were occurring.

Carolyn Giolito did projects for Senator Byrd for many years. Carol Wallace and Suzanne Bentzel were very involved in projects, and then they both worked more on appropriations in the later years of their tenure with the senator. I worked a lot with Terry Sauvain, and I still see Terry from time to time. He and his wife, Veronica, live in Garrett Park, which isn't far from where I live in Kensington. I worked very closely with Charlie Estes, and we still collaborate on some energy and environmental projects.

I worked with Carol Mitchell. In fact, I hired Carol when she left the U.S. Senate. She had the opportunity to really work anywhere she wanted, and I was very fortunate that she picked to work with me. We were together for fourteen years, until she retired from GolinHarris, and she just added a great value to my depth of understanding of, in particular, the Labor, HHS, Education appropriations portfolio. A lot of our clients were universities, hospitals, and medical centers. She was perfect to work at our firm – GolinHarris. I was also blessed to have Diana Gourlay Hamilton work closely with me and our clients for a number of growth years at our agency. I learned a great deal from both Carol and Diana, and they both dearly loved Senator Byrd.

I worked with two former senior staffers to Senator Byrd who wrote intersecting, timely books on the Senator's legacy – Dave Corbin (*The Last great Senator*) and Ira Shapiro (*The Last Great Senate*) to put on a book talk [[The Legacy of Senator Robert Byrd](#)], which was carried by C-Span several years ago. That brought together a lot of the Senator's former staff, the West Virginia Congressional delegation staffers, and admirers of the Senator. The West Virginia Society of Washington, D.C. sponsored the event at the historic Monocle Restaurant.

I keep in touch with a lot of Senator Byrd's former staff people. It's a great group of people. David McMaster (former legislative director to Senator Byrd) is with Rep. Rahall now, and Franz Wuerfmannsdobler (former energy legislative assistant) is with Senator Chris Coons of Delaware. Chris Gould is over at ASTHO [Association of State and Territorial Health Officials] now, and I come in contact with him. Jason Marino is over at the American Medical Association. I recall Jon and Deb Wood are dear friends. Jon was an energy LA [Legislative Assistant] in the office. His wife, Deb, was an office manager for the senator. I knew, of course, Jimmy Huggins, who's done a number of oral histories through the Byrd Center, and he's from

my hometown of Parkersburg. We always enjoyed a special friendship through that Parkersburg bond. I was at his wedding where Senator Byrd was his best man in Fairmont.

**SMOCK:** He's living in Florida now.

**FULTON:** In Florida? I haven't seen Jim for years. The last time I saw him, I saw him coming out of an elevator in the Rayburn House Office Building. He was lobbying at the time, and I think he had just come from Rep. Nick Rahall's office. I was going down the hallway, and we stopped and chatted for a little bit. He had Senator Byrd's ear in a big way.

I also went to college with Anne Barth. I think it's important not to think any less of the people on staffs who worked back in the state. I know that when I worked for Bob and Alan Mollohan, I counted on the staffers who worked in our Wheeling, Clarksburg, Fairmont, and Parkersburg offices to feed me the real scoop on what was going on and to help navigate me when I went back there for events. I soon learned that, if I walked in there thinking I knew it all, I could get whipsawed pretty easily because I didn't know everybody as intimately as the district staff did. So, it was a real education in learning how to trust the district staff.

I was very fortunate to know Anne Street Barth when she attended WVU with me. We were at the WVU School of Journalism together. Who would have thought Anne Barth would become Senator Byrd's state director, and I would work for Reps. Bob and Alan Mollohan. Anne and I are still close. She's at West Virginia TechConnect now, and our oldest daughters [Sally Barth and Amanda Fulton] both interned for Senator Robert Byrd the same year. It's great that my daughters know Anne's kids.

**SMOCK:** I don't know if you ever saw this, that Senator Byrd could be quite a stickler with his staff and be a pretty strict taskmaster. So, while the staff was competent in doing their job, did you ever see him demonstrate a strong hand as a senator with his staff, and could you describe anything like that?

**FULTON:** Yes, a couple things come to mind. Occasionally, you might call over to Senator Byrd's staff, and reach someone on their direct line, and they'd say, "I can't talk now. I'm in a grammar session."

And I would respond, "What?"

The senator would periodically, probably from reading the outgoing mail that had been prepared by staff, realize that there were some common misspellings or grammatical issues, or he wanted to make sure his staff was up to speed on the latest in terms of grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. So, he would occasionally shut the office down and bring the staff together as a group and conduct a session on the proper style and grammar he preferred.

I do know, as well, that he liked to have the office open at a certain time and closed at a certain time, and if you tried to get somebody to vacate the front office --for instance if you were there with a client or if you were there on business and you wanted to show them something outside the office -- they'd have to call someone else from the back office to come up to the front

office so that if any other people came in they were greeted properly by a staffer of Senator Byrd and not made to wait. He was a real stickler about the way his front office looked and the way it was staffed, and usually there were at least two people in the front office, if not sometimes a third. I've never been greeted by any other office nicer than I was greeted by Senator Byrd's staff over the years, and it was consistent over the years, spanning the Russell Senate Office Building staff to the Hart Senate Office Building staff.

I do remember one case where a company closed a manufacturing facility in Moundsville, West Virginia. It was a chemical company, and they pulled out over, I believe, a union dispute. They decided to leave Moundsville. There were at least 150 jobs lost, which, with the spinoff effect, would have probably affected 450 to 500 people in Marshall County. So obviously, the West Virginia delegation, the two senators and Congressman Mollohan, rebuked the company for its decision. Initially, we called the company and asked them very nicely why they might be leaving, to try to see if we could turn them around. But then, when the dialogue escalated to a negative side of things with the union issue boiling over, we knew they weren't ever going to come back, so then it was time to kind of bring out the strap. [laughs]

Well, the CEO of the company wrote the delegation a letter justifying its decision to close the plant, and I think they wrote a form letter to the two senators and to Congressman Mollohan. In that fateful letter, the CEO used the word—well, it's not a word. He used "irregardless." when he should have used "regardless." I was fortunate to be in the room when Senator Byrd called in the lobbyist and the CEO of that company for one last session to hash out the plant closing. In front of the entire delegation, and their projects staff, the senator laid into that CEO and asked him—he gave him a dictionary and he said, "Can you find that word in the dictionary?" And the CEO tried to look up "irregardless." [laughter] It was quite an exercise in futility, and it just showed the fastidious nature of the senator.

I also know that the senator did not like for his staff to be named in letters of thanks from constituents or any others for that matter. When I became a lobbyist and started working for West Virginia organizations, it would be commonplace for me and my clients to work with Terry Sauvain, Charlie Estes, Carol Mitchell, Carol Wallace, or any other staffer. Often, we wanted to write a thank you letter to Senator Byrd for his efforts, as well as the assistance of his staff, but I soon learned that he did not appreciate his staff being mentioned in official correspondence. When I worked for Congressman Mollohan, sometimes I would get a letter sent right to me, not even to the congressman, thanking me for my efforts. And so some of our clients wanted to write that same type of letter to Senator Byrd and his staffers, saying for example, "You are so fortunate to have Carol Mitchell on your staff."

Well, sometimes they [the staffers] would get that letter, and they'd call you up and say, "Please have the company," or the university or the other group, "send me another letter to the senator and take that phrase out."

The senator liked for his staff to be humble. They were trained to be very humble. They were not out there trying to pad their résumés for the future as they worked on programs or projects for West Virginia..



So, those are a few of the instances that I can think of, but there's no doubt about it, proper behavior and conduct was essential while you were representing the senator and the State of West Virginia. Any of us who work in the nation's capital or who follow politics hear about cases of people online doing things while they're at work or acting irresponsibly at a reception or something worse. That would have rarely happened with somebody who worked for Senator Byrd, and if it did, there would have been consequences, which I wouldn't say is true for every other member of Congress.

**SMOCK:** Interesting.

**FULTON:** I was retained by the Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce to help them promote the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the French and Indian War. If you go to any junior high history book, the French and Indian War might get a paragraph if you are lucky. But my eyes were opened in working on this project over a period of three to four years with the Pittsburgh Chamber and Laura Fisher of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development. The Chamber had a number of things they wanted to do to promote the French and Indian War, and they wanted to be collaborative in doing so. One of the priorities was the filming and airing of a four-hour PBS film with WQED-TV in Pittsburgh called *The War that Made America*, and we were seeking funding for that initiative. Our client did secure money through the National Endowment for the Humanities as well as from private individuals and foundations.

We also did a collaborative event with the National Governors Association when Bob Wise was West Virginia governor, and he was very, very supportive. We had a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for governors to work together to promote the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the states that funded the war or sent troops or supplies or where there were sites, forts or encampments or other historical aspects around the war. Twenty-eight governors signed that document, which became a traveling exhibit in and of itself with some other historical documents.

But the crème de la crème was our client going to New York and, at auction, purchasing a letter that George Washington wrote about his formative years as a general and how important the French and Indian War was to the country. Our client brought that document into the Senate Appropriations Committee room for one day, and one day only, so members of congress, federal agency leaders, historians and others could enjoy this rare manuscript. We asked Senator Byrd to host the showing of this document in the Senate complex. He asked Chairman Ted Stevens of Alaska, then chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, if he would allow us to use the Committee room for that one day. It meant we had to bring the document and everything else in – including our historians – and be out by late afternoon. Senator Byrd delivered a strong statement on the Senate floor about the French and Indian War and about the importance of the George Washington manuscript. That drove hundreds to come to the Committee room and enjoy this 12-page document and to meet with those of us promoting the War's anniversary.

**SMOCK:** Senator Byrd did?

**FULTON:** Yes, Senator Byrd gave a statement on the Senate floor about the document and encouraged his fellow members and staff to come up to the Appropriations Committee room

and see it in person, and a number of them did. We had a sign-in book, and all the visitors were anxious to sign it. Some of the visitors I remember included the National Park Service, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Education Department, the president of PBS, WQED, and the Pittsburgh Chamber and Allegheny Conference were well represented. We had an advisory board that was put together to help design and approve elements of the French and Indian War anniversary, and a lot of advisory board members and historians attended.

Now, the original document, as you can see from the one picture, is under glass and protected and is only able to be available to light so many hours a day. A copy of the manuscript was laminated front and back, and it allowed one to read all 10 pages of George Washington's memories. He [Washington] wrote on legal-size sheets front and back, so they were laminated and you could pick that up and hold it and read it more carefully. His handwriting was good, but the document had been interpreted by a number of people over the years with different meanings to the sentences. Dr. Fred Anderson wrote a book, a coffee table book, [\*George Washington Remembers: Reflections on the French and Indian War\*](#), and that was part of the campaign. We also got federal appropriations money and competitive grant funding from the Education Department that created K-12 educational materials so that, during and around the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the French and Indian War would be more alive to students, teachers, historians and scholars. I brought some other artifacts today that relate to this picture.

I had a wonderful conversation with Senator Byrd as I greeted him when he came into the room with his staff. Our historians and leaders of the anniversary campaign walked him through the document and its significance. He was immensely interested in this period of time. The French and Indian War led to the American Revolution, and it was the formative years of George Washington that led to him being general and being our first president. People from Mount Vernon were involved in the ceremony as well, and there were a lot of things around the character and leadership qualities of George Washington as part of our campaign.

**SMOCK:** What year was this event, do you recall?

**FULTON:** I don't. We'd have to look at some of the documents, but you'll see.<sup>3</sup>

It was a fabulous project. I had a lot of fun with it, and Senator Byrd's office was one of the most helpful in supporting our client. The late Rep. Jack Murtha and the late Senator Arlen Specter, both of Pennsylvania, were also very helpful. Rep. Frank Wolf in Virginia was responsive. George Washington's first office was in Winchester, Virginia, and Rep. Wolf represented Winchester, so it was no surprise. Those were the four most helpful members of Congress – Senator Byrd, Rep. Frank Wolf, Senator Arlen Specter, and Rep. Jack Murtha. Chairman Ted Stevens was also very excited to learn about our efforts. He and his chief of staff came into the room. They're pictured there looking at the documents.

We had a bronze medallion of our anniversary logo, which we presented to each member of Congress and Governor who helped or met with us, or signed this memorandum of understanding to work together to promote the seven years making up the anniversary of this

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<sup>3</sup> 2004 marked the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the French and Indian War.

global conflict. I brought one today for the Byrd Center. Both Senators Byrd and Stevens received one.

One of the most interesting takeaways from that Capitol event for me was I had no idea that Senator Ted Stevens' middle name was "Fulton."

Senator Ted Stevens pressed me, and he did not want to part ways until we figured out how we might be related. [laughter] I must say it was probably the longest conversation I've ever had with a United States senator of any party.

**SMOCK:** And it was on genealogy.

**FULTON:** It was totally genealogy.

**SMOCK:** Are you related?

**FULTON:** No, but it was an enjoyable encounter.

So that was another meaningful project, and Senator Byrd was extremely helpful, as was his staff. It was before 9/11, but we got to pull up into the Hart Building's small horseshoe entrance to unload our vehicle with all the historical memorabilia that we wanted to show, and then we got to keep the George Washington manuscript worth about 1.2 million dollars in the senator's office safe.

**SMOCK:** So while that document, while that million-dollar document was in the Senate, it resided in Senator Byrd's safe overnight?

**FULTON:** It did, and it was fascinating to be there to see the safe be opened and to see the document going in, and then the next morning to see it come out as we hand-carried it over to the Appropriations Committee. We had incredible help from Brian Booth of Senator Byrd's staff, and also Suzanne Bentzel, Carol Wallace, and two young interns who were working with the senator. One of the interns – Jonathan Rhyne – came over to our firm to intern the following summer. Jonathan is an attorney in North Carolina now. We learn every day that it's a small world when you meet people at these many special occasions.

**SMOCK:** When you were there and they had the document in Senator Byrd's safe, what else did you notice that was in the safe?

**FULTON:** I noticed that there were some books in the safe. I did not get to see the titles of those books, but they were obviously very valuable to the senator. I saw a Native American headdress in there, and I don't know the history behind that item. And, I saw some original tools from when he was a butcher back in Raleigh County, West Virginia, as a young man.

**SMOCK:** Was he describing these items?

**FULTON:** He was not there at the time. Only his staff.

**SMOCK:** And the staff was telling you that these were his butcher tools?

**FULTON:** Yes.

**SMOCK:** Anything else in the safe? [laughs]

**FULTON:** Not that I saw. No money.

**SMOCK:** It's interesting. We don't often get to look inside of a safe.

**FULTON:** That's right. I must say it's the only senate safe I've ever seen open.

**SMOCK:** Well, we did see—when we closed Senator Byrd's office, there were some items, but not some of the items—we didn't see the headdress or the butcher tools. There were books in there.

**FULTON:** Yes.

**SMOCK:** Now, we've been going at it for a good length of time, and if you'd like to continue on any other subject, we can. Or we could close off now and invite you back at some other time for some more stories.

**FULTON:** I'd love to come back.

**SMOCK:** Well, I appreciate that very much.

**FULTON:** The story has many dimensions. He [Senator Byrd] was a very complex person, that's for sure, and just when you'd think you knew him in one respect you'd learn of some new fact or some new nuance. He was a very, very complex person, and I am blessed for being able to work for West Virginia alongside he and his staff. I envy you for the task that you're doing in helping to unravel his story for all to appreciate.

**SMOCK:** Well, thank you very much, Mike, and we'll continue this dialogue in the future.

**FULTON:** You're welcome.

[End of interview]