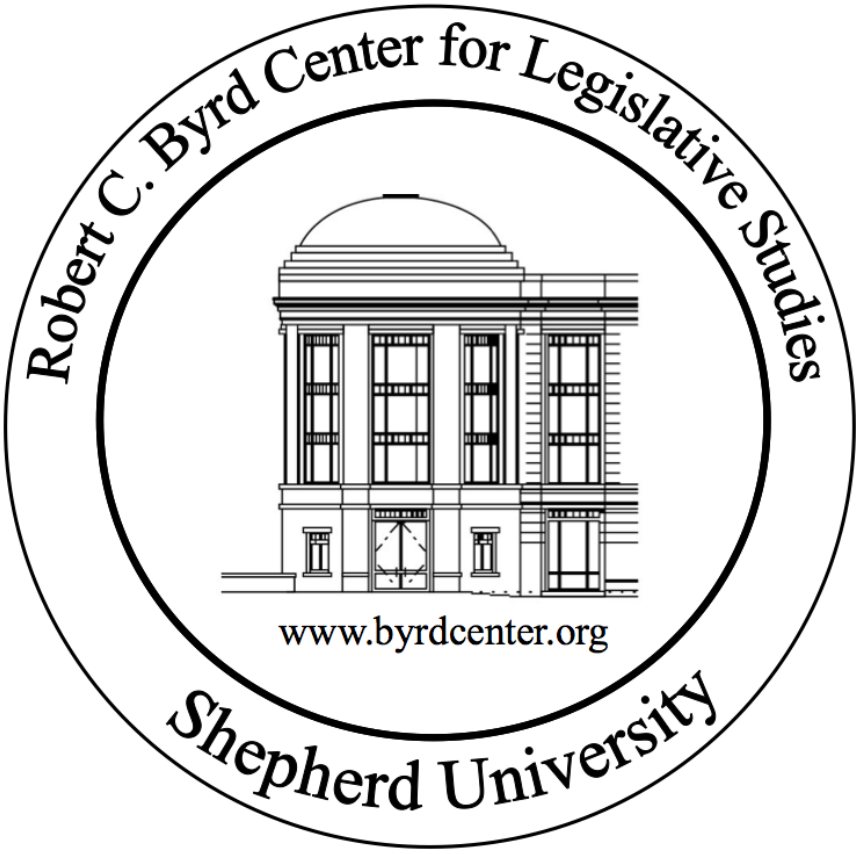
Robert C. Byrd Legacy Project

Oral History Interview

Daniel Jones

June 19, 2013



Preface

By James J. Wyatt

Daniel (Danny) Jones is the incumbent mayor of Charleston, WV. Currently serving his third term, Jones, a Republican, was first elected in 2003 and then reelected in 2007 and 2011. His prior political experience includes four years as sheriff of Konawha County and a two year term in the West Virginia House of Delegates. Outside the political realm, Jones spent several years as a restaurateur and also hosted a radio talk show. He is a veteran of the Vietnam War, having served in the U.S. Marine Corps.

Jones begins the interview by explaining how he got to know Senator Byrd while working with him to successfully prevent the Base Closure and Realignment Commission (BRAC) from closing or shrinking West Virginia's National Guard and Reserve bases. Jones remembers Senator Byrd as a "wise" and respected public figure dedicated to serving all of West Virginia's citizens, a fact that made him popular among the state's Republican and Democratic voters. He recounts Senator Byrd's role in gaining federal funds for the construction of state-spanning highways and, more specifically, for several Charleston projects, including the city's federal courthouse, the University of Charleston's Center for Pharmacy Education, and the cover for the Haddad Riverfront Park, the latter of which was one of the senator's last earmarks for the state.

Branching beyond the West Virginia state borders, Jones also expounds on Senator Byrd's political evolution during the 1970s, when he moved into a leadership position within the Democratic Party and onto the national stage. He situates the senator among contemporaries such as Senators Richard Russell, James Eastland, and Edward Kennedy. Explaining that Dwight Eisenhower was Senator Byrd's "favorite Republican president," Jones details Byrd's thoughts on and feelings for other recent U.S. presidents, including Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton. Jones concludes the interview with a brief commentary on Senator Byrd's legacy in West Virginia and the nation.

About the interviewer: Alan Sturm is a retired educator, former teacher, principal, and assistant superintendent of Upshur County Schools. He also served for two terms on the Jefferson County Board of Education. He has a BA in history from West Virginia Wesleyan and an MA in Public School Administration from West Virginia University. He has made the study of West Virginia political history his lifelong hobby, and he has been working to collect interviews for the Robert C. Byrd Oral History Project since July 2012. He lives with his wife, Libby, in Shepherdstown, West Virginia.

Interview #1
Wednesday, June 19, 2013

Sturm: Today is Wednesday, June 19, 2013. I'm Alan Sturm. I'm working with the Robert C. Byrd Center for Legislative Studies on the oral history segment of the Robert C. Byrd Legacy Project. Today I'm speaking with the Honorable Danny Jones. He is currently serving his third term as mayor of Charleston. He has formerly served as sheriff of Kanawha County and represented Kanawha County in the West Virginia House of Delegates. He is a lifelong Charlestonian. He is a former restaurateur, talk show host, and general man-about-town of Charleston. We're conducting this interview in Mayor Jones' office in Charleston, West Virginia.

Mayor Jones, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview about Senator Byrd.

Jones: Certainly.

Sturm: As you know, this session is being recorded. Is that all right with you?

Jones: Sure. That's fine.

Sturm: I will ask you a few questions today, but for the most part, I want you just to feel free to talk about Senator Byrd as you knew him and studied him over the years. I'd like for you to share stories, personal observations, and anything that you would be comfortable in discussing with me. Let's start out by having you tell us a little bit about you and your background here in Charleston.

Jones: Well, you mentioned all the different things that I've done. I was in the Marine Corps for a couple years and actually registered to vote in a motor pool in Vietnam back in 1971. But I'm somewhat of a political junkie, and Senator Byrd's been one of those characters that I followed, that kind of fascinated me and I followed through the years. I thought that he was around long enough to go through quite an evolution and yet still keep respect. He was always smart, but as he got older, he became so wise, and he was defined by his wisdom. I thought he was just a wonderful person.

Sturm: When did you first get to know him or come in contact with him?

Jones: I met him in 2004. I, of course, had watched him, but I met him at the University of Charleston. His staff wanted me to meet him, and we hit it off. I've got the picture of the meeting right in my office. He talked to me and about me, and he had a little fun at my expense at the podium.

Then we got together when the BRAC Commission [Base Closure and Realignment Commission] tried to take the National Guard out of here, and that was a team effort. We'd never have had a team if it hadn't been for him. But we all got involved and fought and kept our National Guard presence.

Sturm: You might explain what the BRAC is.

Jones: BRAC is the base closure commission. Of course, we don't have any bases here in West Virginia; we've just got a presence in the National Guard and the Reserves. Secretary Rumsfeld, at the time he's fighting wars on two fronts, wanted to take part of our presence away, so we all fought it.

They had a chairman of the commission; I think his name was Principi [Anthony J. Principi]. We all knew that the data they were using, they had to make a presentation as to why it should be closed, and they gave the data to the BRAC Commission, the base closure commission, and we looked at the data and studied it, and felt "garbage in, garbage out," because it wasn't good data, it wasn't accurate, and we were able to refute most of the points in it.

But once again, Senator Byrd, he was standing there in front of the BRAC Commission. They had to look down at him when they were having their conversations. I mean, there's the longest-serving member in the history of the United States Senate standing right in front of them. I think they were intimidated by the little man. [Laughs] We were able to keep our presence in the commission.

Sturm: Now, was this something he actually had to vote on or did he just have enough power as a senator to stop—

Jones: They had to vote on it, and they decided not to take it. Anytime they close anything, they have to go through BRAC and the base closure commission. It's part of the system if they want to close a base.

Sturm: And ultimately, it's better for, I guess, in the Senate, but this never got to the Senate.

Jones: No, I'm not sure how that goes, but the BRAC Commission has to approve it, and they did not approve it.

Sturm: So he killed it.

Jones: He did kill it. We all participated.

Sturm: Who all was involved? You and Senator Byrd.

Jones: Myself and Senator Byrd and Governor Manchin and Congresswoman Capito and the county commissioners; anybody that wanted to get involved. We went to Charlotte, and that's where the BRAC Commission met. We made our presence felt, and I thought we did rather well. Of course we did rather well, because we won.

Sturm: [laughs] Well, with him there, it was hard to lose.

Jones: Yes. We had a room there, just a room where we were hanging out. I was standing over against the wall, and I thought he didn't see me. So he started walking down through the people, and then he just walked right into me, his shoulder just right into me, to let me know that he knew I was there. It was a gesture of warmth. He started walking a little bit to an oblique, and he just walked right into me. "I know you're here, Jones. Don't you try to hide."

Sturm: You'll remember that forever.

Jones: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Sturm: Now, you're a Republican, right?

Jones: Yes.

Sturm: Okay. How did he play generally with Republicans? We know that he was elected nine times, and to do that he had to have a lot of [bipartisan support].

Jones: I remember when he ran for reelection in 1970. I was on Okinawa in 1970, and my dad and I were corresponding by audiotape. We'd send these tapes back and forth and talk to each other. In 1970, he ran against—the picture right over there on the wall—Elmer Dodson, who was mayor of Charleston, and Senator Byrd got 76 percent of the vote in that election and my dad said he voted for him. My dad was a hard-core Republican. And he explained, he just said that Senator Byrd had always been fairly conservative and he thought he had done a good job as senator. I thought that was interesting.

I watched later that year as his leadership stance changed—and I guess we'll get into that—in the Senate, because that was in the beginning.

Sturm: But if you want to talk about this now, go right ahead. That's fine.

Jones: Well, I went to Vietnam either at the end of December or beginning of January in 1971, and, I can't quite remember if I spent Christmas on Okinawa or in Vietnam. I don't remember, but that's about the time I went to Vietnam. I had a battery-operated radio, and I listened to Paul Harvey and the news every single day, and I read the *Stars and Stripes* cover to cover. It was the armed forces newspaper. And they didn't try to hide anything. When there were a half-million people on the Mall there in D.C. that were protesting the war, it was right on the front page. And they had columnists in there. They had Jack Anderson. I don't know if Drew Pearson was still alive. They had Evans and Novak. They had liberals and conservatives, and it was a very well-rounded newspaper.

I read where Senator Byrd had become the Whip, the third-ranking member in the Senate, and the job had belonged to Senator Teddy Kennedy. And he, with the help of his southern conservative friends and the leadership in the Senate, and the fact that he was a hard worker and Senator Kennedy probably wasn't—he had some other things he did—

Sturm: Did well.

Jones: But working probably wasn't one of them, even though he was a good legislator. Senator Byrd was able to wrestle that leadership post away from him. That happened, and Senator Richard Russell died about the same time. And I think that was the big turn for Senator Byrd, because before that, he had been in the Senate for twelve years. I'd say his leader was the person who he worked under who would have controlled the allies, the ideologically placed people would have been Senator Richard Russell, who was a remarkable man from Georgia, but he was a segregationist. If he hadn't been a segregationist, we'd have never heard of him, because that's who they elected back in those days. Senator Russell died, I think at the beginning of 1971, about the time Senator Byrd got to be the Whip, the third-ranking senator. If he was going to be the leader of all the senators, he could not stay loyal completely to just the southern conservative Democrats, because that was changing also.

Senator Stennis was an old man, so was Senator Eastland, so were all those Dixiecrats. I think that was when the real evolution of Senator Byrd changed, because in the seventies, when Gerry Ford became president, Senator Byrd became the Majority Leader, and he stayed as the Majority Leader until the Republicans took the Senate in 1980. Then he got it back in '87 for two years, and then he was supposed to have had a contested race here in '88 for the United States Senate, and he became chairman of the Appropriations Committee.

As part of his campaign, he talked about bringing money back home here, which people around the country detested, because they thought we were getting a disproportionate amount. What I would say to those folks is, he was elected to the Senate nine times, and it's not a big state, so we were going to get a lot of projects under Senator Byrd. Anybody that was involved in the appropriations process was going to bring money home to their state. That's what they're there for. And he was able to do it not just because he was good at it, which he was, but also because he was there for so long. And when they say, "Well, all these things are named after him," well, who do you expect us to name them after? I mean, somebody we've never heard of?

This state made a huge investment in Senator Byrd, and I think it paid enormous dividends. Out there on Haddad Riverfront Park there's a cover, and that may very well have been his last earmark, because that was when he was not doing well.

Sturm: Let me ask you, specifically here in Charleston, you mentioned the Haddad cover. What other things did he do specifically for Charleston as senator?

Jones: That Federal Building right there, which probably cost $100 million.

Sturm: The Courthouse, Federal Courthouse. [Robert C. Byrd Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse]

Jones: Yes. And down there in the Memorial Complex of CAMC, it's probably affiliated with WVU and it's an education center of some kind. He also was able to get a grant to University of Charleston to help them build their pharmaceutical school, which if my memory serves me correctly, was around $4 million. But most of the money that Senator Byrd brought to

this state was brought in the form of roads, because when he first became a member of the House of Representatives, the State of West Virginia only had four miles of four-lane highway and he was bound and determined to change that, and change that he did.

Sturm: He also not only saved the National Guard, but did he not expand the facility at Coonskin Park? I know he did in Martinsburg. They built the new runway and the hangar.

Jones: I'm not sure about that.

Sturm: I think he probably did, because they brought the C-130s down here and the C-5s into Martinsburg.

Jones: We had nine at one time.

Sturm: I think you've got all of them now. [laughs]

A couple other things that you mentioned, I want to back up and pursue with you just a little bit. You mentioned Vietnam. Senator Byrd initially supported President Johnson and was a hawk on Vietnam. Over time, by the early seventies, apparently, his views had changed.

Jones: He was always a hawk.

Sturm: Well, though, he helped write the War Powers Act.

Jones: That was an executive power.

Sturm: Then he became, though, the leading dove when we started to invade Iraq.

Jones: I remember the speech. It's on YouTube.

Sturm: I want you to expand on that a little bit.

Jones: It's on YouTube. It's divided into two parts. In 2008, after the Republican Party took such a tumble, I wrote an op-ed piece where I asked for people—I said one of the downfalls of President Bush and the Republican Party was that war. I don't know, besides Senator McCain, who I really like, too many Vietnam veterans that think the Iraq war was a very good idea. I thought it was a terrible idea. It's what happens when ideologues get themselves perched in the Defense Department, people like Wolfowitz. That was the architect of the Iraq War. I mean, we fought it on the cheap. We didn't pursue it right. We stayed in there too long. We embarked on nation-building, which President Bush says he wouldn't have done. He criticized Vice President Gore during the debates he had.

But in the speech that Senator Byrd gave on the floor, why he was against Iraq, he said that—it was a haunting prophecy—he said Saddam Hussein is an enemy, but he's not *the* enemy. And he wasn't the enemy. It would have made more sense just to nuke 'em. What we did was just so foolish, and the damages that come from that war will long expire my life. Because the

damages that came from Vietnam, we're still paying for. I mean in PTSD and prostate cancer, which I've had, and all the different afflictions that the Veterans Administration is now having to pay for because of not the people that died, but the people that lived. Agent Orange and all these things that are happening, and it's going to be worse in Iraq with the chemical exposure and people that came back with no legs. See, so many more people would have died in Iraq, but they had body armor and all those sophisticated guards, but we didn't have any of those kinds of things in Vietnam, so we lost 55,000 or 58,000, how many there were.

In Iraq, so many more people would have gotten killed. Well, they just came back without any arms or legs. What a foolish enterprise for us to be involved in, and I said so then. And in 2004, I think I made a statement to the press about it. I remember one Republican that had given me money called Rod Blackstone, my top deputy mayor, and says, "Don't call me again. Don't ask for anything for the city." And yet this individual, he had a son that was of age to go, but he didn't go. These wars are being fought on the cheap, but also with lower-income folks. Because I was drafted, and there is no draft and there hadn't been since 1973.

Sturm: But you think that he didn't ever really change his view on Vietnam?

Jones: I don't think so. I don't think he had to. We had signed the Armistice in the beginning of 1973. President Nixon had "peace with honor." They had the POWs home, had the big party at the White House. Then two years later, the Congress cut off the money, and you couldn't expect what was left of South Vietnam to be able to defend themselves with no money, with no arms, so people fled.

No, I don't remember that happening. As a matter of fact, what I remember about that era is during Watergate, when Senator Byrd talked about the fact that there were 25 or 30 percent of the people in the country that still thought President Nixon was innocent. He said those people deserve a hearing, and he said that's why he was not all that particular in a hurry to push Nixon out of office. Those weren't his words; those are my words. But that was his feeling, and I believe if you go back and check, you'd find out that's what he said. Because he said those people, they deserve a hearing, too, because there were pockets of people.

I was a Nixon guy, and Senator Byrd, in our last conversation in his office, he told me his favorite Republican president was Dwight Eisenhower. But he knew I liked Nixon, and I'm still one of the, I guess, people that are in denial about Nixon. He just told me, "I like Nixon, too, but Nixon had a dark side." And that's exactly what he said, because President Nixon almost put Senator Byrd on the Supreme Court.

Sturm: I was going to ask you about that. What kind of a justice do you think he would have made had Nixon appointed him, knowing what you know about Senator Byrd?

Jones: I think he would have made a great justice. I think he would have become very independent and probably his turn to the left would have gone a little bit faster. I'm glad he didn't because—

Sturm: Why do you think he didn't? Did he ever talk to you about that?

Jones: No. But it wasn't him that was going to make the appointment; it was Nixon.

Sturm: But didn't he withdraw his name, though?

Jones: He may have.

Sturm: I think he did.

Jones: I don't remember that part. Maybe he did.

Sturm: I may be wrong, but that's my understanding, that he told President Nixon he really wasn't interested.

Jones: Remember, Nixon had had two losers: Haynesworth and Carswell. Haynesworth they should have confirmed. He was on the Richmond—he was on the Fourth Circuit. They should have confirmed him. Carswell, no, I wouldn't say that. He turned out not to be too good.

Sturm: Well, let's go back to something else. You mentioned Senator Byrd and his relationship with Richard Russell, but he was identified during that period when he was first elected and up until probably, as you said, Richard Russell died and things began to change, but he was identified as a Dixiecrat along with [Strom] Thurmond and John Stennis and James Eastland.

Jones: There were mild Dixiecrats and there were harsh Dixiecrats, and Eastland would have been a harsh one. Senator Stennis would have been a mild one. Senator Byrd would have been mild, even though he said some unkind things about Martin Luther King [Jr.] during that civil rights debate. I think it was in 1964. But he went on to evolve and change, and I think when he became a full bona fide leader in the Senate in 1971 with the death of Senator Russell at the same time, I think that's when it happened.

You've got to remember, the next year McGovern was nominated to be president, and then Jimmy Carter, who was a southerner, but who was an integrationist, and Senator Byrd became the leader of the whole Senate, and he went on to grow as we all grow and we all evolve. I think his speech against the Iraq War was his finest hour, and I'd urge anybody to go watch that. It's on YouTube. What an incredible speech it was. But to get back to the racial part of it, I think, yes, his views were somewhat conservative.

Sturm: Do you think initially he was a racist?

Jones: I don't know about—you know, we throw that word around.

Sturm: Yes, we do.

Jones: We throw that word around so easily. I don't think he was a hater at any time. I think he was probably a segregationist, and I think he got over that. I think he grew, and I

believe he evolved and became a leader of all the people in West Virginia, and that includes all the black people.

Sturm: What changed his view? Because you know he voted against the Civil Rights Act. Although he had voted for a couple before that, he voted against the big one in '64. At the time he died, as you said, he had evolved. He was given good marks by the NAACP. What triggered all this?

Jones: Seventy-one. I think it was '71, and I think when the Republicans—you know, Richard Nixon had something that people criticized, his southern strategy back in '68, which was put together by a man named Dent, and Dent was a creature of Strom Thurmond's. Harry Dent was his name. He was responsible for Richard Nixon's southern strategy. Well, there's nothing wrong with Nixon having a southern strategy. I mean, it's his job to get votes. He didn't do anything racist.

But Senator Byrd watched the Republican Party slowly take over the South, and Al Gore's dad got beat in 1970 by Bill Brock, and now the Republican Party pretty well owns the Deep South and it's very formidable in other parts of the South. Senator Byrd would have had to have seen that happen, and his evolvement changed then too. But remember, he became leader of all the Democrats. You can't be a segregationist and be leader of all the Democrats. He proved that he could do that, and he chose to evolve, as we all evolve.

Sturm: But you think it was a sincere evolution.

Jones: Absolutely.

Sturm: Rather than politically expedient.

Jones: No question about it. It wasn't political. It was personal.

Sturm: Because there are people who feel that it was all show.

Jones: I don't care. [laughter] They're welcome to their views, but they're not welcome to the facts. He was a good man with a good heart, and he changed. And it wasn't something that happened overnight. It happened. And a lot of people change. A lot of people, people that had hardcore racial views can change, they can be educated and realize their heart was misplaced.

Sturm: I guess George Wallace is a prime example of that in his latter days.

Jones: George Wallace, you know, he became such a pitiful creature at the end. He was a great politician, but he did anything to attract attention. Then he realized the type of attention he was attracting was hurting people, and he caused a lot of pain to people. And then when he had pain of his own, he realized what pain was about, because he stayed in pain till he died. I feel sorry for him. I felt sorry for him, what happened to him, with him getting shot and he stayed in pain for the rest of his life.

Sturm: He absolutely did.

Now, let's talk about your observations of Senator Byrd on the West Virginia level. Not so much the national level, because there are some people that say that Senator Byrd was sort of out of sync many times with the state Democratic Party, that he had his own party mechanism based on his personality and his needs, and he ran Robert C. Byrd's campaign and the state Democratic Party ran the rest of them. Do you think that was true? Was he a team player, in your perspective?

Jones: I think that he was leader of all of us, including us Republicans, so maybe he wasn't. When he came here in 2004, Senator Kerry was running for president, and he and Teddy Kennedy and Senator Kerry came here and he spoke at a rally for Kerry. Then in 2008, he spoke at a rally on Lee Street. Senator Biden was there to speak, and he spoke in favor of Barack Obama. That was in 2008.

I think he was a team player. I don't think he was going to get involved in the minutiae of local state Democrat politics. Rockefeller hasn't. Rockefeller gave $1,000 to my opponent in 2003, but he didn't come here and say unkind things about me. I mean, those people are going to express their loyalty. They'll go to the dinners. If they're asked to speak, they'll speak. But his job's in Washington. What is he supposed to do? Come here and get involved in the sheriff's race?

Sturm: Well, okay, I was going to say on the local level, particularly here in Charleston, since this is the state capital and it's sort of the center of things in the state, did he frequent state or local party things? Did he endorse candidates?

Jones: No.

Sturm: Did he speak on behalf of candidates?

Jones: He would come to speak at the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner, and I would see him there, but he wasn't going to come get involved in a local county commission race or the sheriff's race.

Sturm: How about congressional races?

Jones: Oh, yes. He got involved when Anne Barth ran against Shelley. Oh, yes. And Jim Humphreys ran against Shelley. He cut commercials for Humphreys. But by that time, he had developed a real animus for President George W. Bush, and the reason is because—and if I've got my history wrong, somebody can point it out. He didn't like President Clinton, because of his behavior, at all. He didn't relate to that, his activities with these women. So when President Bush came in, a very religious man, I think Senator Byrd liked him. Then we had 9/11, and then the former governor of Pennsylvania became Homeland Security—

Sturm: Tom Ridge.

Jones: Tom Ridge became Homeland Security guy. There wasn't an official thing for him yet; he was just an employee. He was an advisor to the president. So Senator Byrd wanted him to come down and testify on Capitol Hill, and the Bush people said, "No, he won't come." And that caused a real divide, I believe. I believe Senator Byrd got angry and never quite got over it. So then when Humphreys ran, he got involved, and then when Anne ran, he got involved. He really got involved with Anne Barth.

Sturm: Because she had worked for him for close to twenty years, yes.

Jones: Yes, and he really liked her and he got her into the—he really encouraged her. But nobody was going to beat Shelley at that time. He didn't say unkind things about Shelley; he just said nice things about the Democrat.

Sturm: Were you able to observe what sort of relationship he had with any of the governors who have been in office while he was in the Senate?

Jones: I'd say his best relationship would have been with Governor Caperton.

Sturm: Governor Caperton. I'm going to talk to him tomorrow morning.

Jones: I'd say that was his best relationship.

Sturm: Did he get along with the Republicans? Did he get along Underwood? Did he get along with Moore?

Jones: I think he liked Arch okay. I mean, he and Underwood came out of the same generation. Remember, Underwood only served twice. He would have been in the House of Delegates with Byrd.

Sturm: I think that's true. I think he was.

Jones: They were. They were in there for at least two or four years together, because Underwood got elected to the House in '44, and then by the time he ran for governor, he was an accidental governor in '56 and he was again in '96. I mean, I like Cecil, but—

Sturm: What do you mean, accidental?

Jones: The Democrats elected him. Mullihan had a scandal and Charlotte Pritt wasn't what the Democrats wanted. The establishment Democrats, they didn't want her. They would have taken Joe Manchin, but they did not want her. That was a gift that Joe Manchin was beat that year. That was a gift to him.

Sturm: You've obviously observed Senator Byrd, even though you didn't know him personally, from afar for a long, long time. Another thing that is frequently said about him—and

some of his close staff have said this—that he never had many close friends. Did you observe that to be the case?

Jones: He would call. He didn't hang out with anybody.

Sturm: That's, I think, sort of what they meant. One told me, "You'll never find anybody who used to sit on the porch and tell stories with him."

Jones: He would call [Allen] Tackett on a weekly basis.

Sturm: General Tackett.

Jones: And he would call me at home sometimes. He would do things like he'd go to Walter Reed and visit people that were injured. Even though he hated the Iraq War, he'd go visit those people. Nobody ever knew about it. He just did it. He didn't do it for the press. I think that's a sign of character in somebody. No, I don't think he had any "gumbas." He became friends with Senator Kennedy, I guess. I mean, Robert Byrd's not going to be anybody's drinking partner.

Sturm: That emerged from a political—

Jones: Yes. Was he friends with the senator from Hawaii? [Daniel Inouye] Maybe.

Sturm: Have you observed anything about his relationship with Senator Rockefeller? Were they close, not close?

Jones: I don't think so.

Sturm: You don't think they were close?

Jones: I think you'd better ask Gaston that question.

Sturm: Okay. I certainly will do that.

Jones: I don't know what he'll tell you.

Sturm: We may ask Senator Rockefeller, too, because since he's announced that he's not going to run for another term, why, he—

Jones: You won't get a straight answer.

Sturm: Won't get a straight answer. [laughs] Okay. We're moving right along here with this. I think we've got some very interesting perspectives.

A lot of people—now, this goes back to his changing views over the years—a lot of people say that from his first election in Congress in, what, '52 up until his death, there were

actually two or three different Robert Byrds. Other people say there was one man with a basic core belief who grew and changed.

Jones: I think the one man with basic core beliefs, he changed, the country changed, his views evolved. There's not too many people that you could compare him to because not too many people, with the exception of Congressman [John] Dingell, stayed in the Congress that long.

Sturm: And he surpassed him, I believe, last week.

Jones: But he wasn't in the Senate, and he certainly didn't have the power that Senator Byrd did. Senator Byrd, because he was there so long, you can say, well, he wasn't the same in the nineties as he was in the fifties. Well, I hope not. I hope none of us are. I've changed.

Sturm: As you look at some politicians, though, some haven't. Some seem stuck.

Jones: Look at the way the parties have changed, the Democrat Party and the Republican Party. I'm very uncomfortable with the direction the Republican Party has taken. I don't judge the Democrats, because I'm not a Democrat, but I'm very uncomfortable with what's going on in my party. The fact that both these parties apparently have been taken over by the fringe ideologues in both parties, I'm not comfortable with it.

Sturm: The Republican Party has not always been as it is now, especially during Byrd's tenure, but why were they never really able in West Virginia to field a candidate who could give him any sort of a contest at all?

Jones: Maybe they were too mainstream. When I was in the House of Delegates in 1989, we only had twenty members. Now they have forty-six, and they actually run things. They are the informal majority. The Republicans are running the show up there. They may get the formal majority next time or the time after. I'm not sure. Most of the Republicans that ran against him, I think, were mainstream, and then they tried to create some differences with Cleve Benedict and with Jay Wolfe. They just were fringe candidates, and nobody took them seriously. And people like my dad would have voted for Byrd.

Sturm: Could Benedict have stood more of a chance had he put any of his own money into the race when he ran against him in '82, do you think?

Jones: He might have.

Sturm: Because many people say that he was the only real serious candidate that the Republicans put up against Byrd. Because he was a sitting congressman at the time he ran. He had succeeded Harley Staggers.

Jones: I don't think it would—

Sturm: You don't think so?

Jones: No, I don't think that was going to happen. He had Elmer Fike and they had all kinds of weird people.

Sturm: Bye, Bye, Byrdie Committee.

Jones: All that silliness. You can't be silly. Now things have really changed. In the Republican Party, President Reagan—I voted for Reagan, but he became president in 1980. He was elected in '80, and he brought all these people on the far right into the party, and then he left 'em there. [laughter] And the mainstream folks like me became mayor, and I was sheriff. I got elected in '84, and then I became mayor. I took thirteen years off, and became mayor in 2003. Being mayor is not a job for an ideologue; it's a job for somebody that really wants to make things happen. But you still have this fringe element, and it's mainly made up of white men, and it can't last because the white people are dying quicker than they're being born. I mean, look at Barack Obama, not in 2008, but he won decisively in 2012. The Democratic Party is a party of groups.

Sturm: That's true.

Jones: They have enough groups to where they put this national coalition together, and plus their ground game is so incredibly good. They had more volunteers in Florida than Governor Romney who was, I thought, a good candidate. They had more volunteers in Florida than Romney had in the entire country.

But to get back to your question, there was nobody that measured up to Senator Byrd. Nobody was taken seriously. I mean, there was no difference. The regular people just voted for Byrd, I mean, like my dad. They liked him.

Sturm: We already mentioned he was conservative. But in West Virginia, do you think part of that was based on his attitude? He was a law-and-order Democrat.

Jones: Sure he was, and he voted for conservative members to the Supreme Court, and quite frankly, he should have. I mean, a lot of the people on the left would criticize him for voting for [Samuel] Alito and [John] Roberts. Roberts, number one, is brilliant. I mean, the president deserves his pick. And if they're reasonable people, which both those men are, they ought to be put on there, just like [Elena] Kagan was and just like [Sonya] Sotomayor were. They just happened to be—from the philosophical perspective of the Republican, that goes to the victor. I think he should have voted for those, and he generally liked conservative members of the Court. But also, he was a labor guy, and he was liberal on social issues, I mean on economic issues. He would have been for President Johnson's Great Society, all that foolishness. [laughs]

Sturm: I think his break with Johnson was over Vietnam, being lied to, not necessarily over the issue—

Jones: I didn't mean—I was just kidding. When I said "foolishness," I was just kidding.

Sturm: Well, there are those who believe that.

Jones: Some of the Great Society didn't prove to work out that well, and some of it did.

Sturm: I believe you still have a Job Corps here in Charleston, don't you?

Jones: It's up on the hill now.

Sturm: Because we have one in Jefferson County too.

Jones: Never should have been downtown. You're not supposed to put those kind of kids on the streets. You're supposed to put them in a pasture setting.

Sturm: You've observed Byrd. You know all the stories about his younger days, poor, very little education, meat-cutter, and all those different things. How did a man with that background become probably at one point, arguably, maybe, the second most powerful man in the United States? How did that happen?

Jones: I think focus and intelligence, and the fact that he didn't sit on the porch with anybody, except his family. He just focused on what he wanted and what he thought he could do. He didn't grow up poor; he grew up *dirt* poor. That story he told me about listening to the Dempsey-Tunney fight on the radio—

Sturm: Go ahead. Tell us about that story.

Jones: I think it's in his book—or I'm not sure it's in his book. But he told me that there was a radio up front with no speakers, but it had headphones. So the guy who had the headphones on would relay to the group of people in the coal camp that had come to gather to listen to Dempsey-Tunney what was going on. So there's this guy just repeating things, because the real announcer was only heard by the man with the headphones. And he says, "I was for Dempsey because my daddy was for Dempsey." He was seven years old at the time. He was nothing. And then he said if he'd have kept his original name, Cornelius Sale, "They'd have probably called me Corny." [laughter]

Sturm: I wonder if he'd have kept his original name, if he'd have accomplished what he accomplished.

Jones: I don't know.

Sturm: Sometimes names can play a role in what happens to you.

Jones: Everything happens for a reason.

Sturm: It does.

Jones: And he was a very religious man.

Sturm: How did he exhibit his religion?

Jones: He would pray and he would talk about God, and he would exhibit his religion in his castigation of Bill Clinton for his behavior. It really disgusted him, the way President Clinton acted, and the stories, the women. He voted not to impeach, or not to convict, but, boy, he was really disappointed.

Sturm: Why do you think he voted not to impeach?

Jones: I think it was a Democrat thing. And that's fair. It was a partisan vote on both sides. I wouldn't have voted to impeach him, but—

Sturm: But Byrd was a man who was never afraid to break with his party when he thought he was right.

Jones: Well, but especially when he wasn't a leader, but when you're one of the leaders—he told Clinton, "Don't tamper with this jury." I remember he made that speech on the floor, but when it came right down to it, I don't think he was going to vote to impeach a Democrat president over lying about sex. And it was lying. He did lie. He lied under oath. Senator Dole wrote a great story before that. The House of Representatives, before they voted to impeach, Senator Dole wrote an op-ed piece in *The New York Times* and he said, "Censure him. Don't impeach him."

Interesting the way that happened. Henry Hyde was chairman of the committee. He really didn't want to impeach Clinton, so he called [Howard] Berman, who was the one reasonable Democrat, because that whole committee thing turned into a food fight anyway. But Berman, this Jewish Congressman from California, was a pretty reasonable guy, and he was friends with Hyde. Hyde called him and says, "Look, this thing's getting away from me." [laughs] So Berman called Bob Strauss. Bob Strauss got Dole to pen an op-ed piece, but it didn't work, because the mainstream people, the reasonable, decent people, the people that I like to identify—and I love Senator Dole; I got to spend half a day with him once—they weren't part of the Republican Party there.

Sturm: You said it was a food fight, but don't you think part of it was a blood fight over what happened to Nixon too? Because they were still—

Jones: Or Clarence Thomas.

Sturm: Yes, or Clarence Thomas.

Jones: I think it was more Clarence Thomas. President Bush, Sr. said we need to not criminalize our political differences, and it's become a big food fight out there. I'm really not comfortable with it, and I'm glad I'm here. You couldn't give me one of those jobs.

Sturm: I know he's not been gone that long, and [during] the last year or two had lost some of his effectiveness because of his health, but how do you think he would react to what's going on in the Congress now, in the Senate?

Jones: Oh, he was upset by it then. He'd be more upset by it now. He was friends with Mark Hatfield. He would have been friends with Howard Baker. He would have been friends with some of the older Republicans. I'm sure he liked Senator Dole.

Sturm: He and John Warner were close.

Jones: Yes, but not now. You've got people up there that are—I mean, Senator Reid comparing the Republic Party, because they were against the healthcare thing, would probably have been for slavery. I mean, the whole thing just gets crazy. I mean, just gets silly. You know, name-calling, silliness.

Sturm: Unfortunately, that's what a lot of it seems to be.

What do you think Byrd's legacy's going to be for the state, for West Virginia, and the nation?

Jones: Oh, I think a giant little man. I hope that people study him and read his book, and realize what a self-starter he was. I hope he inspires a lot of people to do for themselves as he did for himself.

Sturm: Everybody that I've talked with has a favorite story about him. Have you already told yours, or what is your favorite story about Senator Byrd?

Jones: Well, maybe it's his staff. I remember when I went up there to see him, they tricked me and had Bono waiting there. So I got to meet Bono, because he was going in there to see him. But I think that day I covered him. And I wish I still had that radio show.

Sturm: I wish you did too.

Jones: Because he made all those speeches, and he would say all those things about the three things a West Virginian has: Sears and Roebuck catalogue, and this and that, and Robert C. Byrd. And then he talked about Bob Wise. He said he's a steam engine in britches, because Bob was so full of pep.

Sturm: What happened between him and Wise?

Jones: I don't know that anything happened.

Sturm: Nothing? Because a couple of people have told me that he was really slow to endorse Wise when Wise ran for governor, that he didn't endorse him initially.

Jones: Well, maybe Cecil was in it. I don't know that—I mean, what was he going to do? Come down here and do a dance down the boulevard? I mean, he was a Democrat and the public was going to pick. You can't swing votes for people. People have to go out and get their own votes. He would have never endorsed me, but I don't think he'd have done anything to hurt me. And I got elected on my own, thank you. [laughter]

Sturm: Well, I think you're a very independent man. I can see how that happened.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Jones: No. I'm for Charleston. I'm just for Charleston. Is that it?

Sturm: Well, I certainly appreciate your time. Thank you very much.

[End of interview]