
Editorial

‘I Will Not Be Silenced’

Amidst the current circus-like preparation for war ongoing in the United States, insufficient attention has been given to the relevant statements of Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.V.). Those familiar with the private views of other Senators, know that everything Senator Byrd has said, is shared by many, even of those who have supported war in public, under pressure. But Byrd says, “I will not be silenced.” Whence the difference? Whence the surer moral compass?

Born in 1917, Senator Byrd represents the generation of those who were adults during World War II. In contrast, those who became adults during the decadence of the 1960s, were in general morally destroyed. Most who have shown the courage to defy Dick Cheney’s madmen on this issue, have either been of Byrd’s World War II generation, or else those younger men who actually saw combat in Korea or Vietnam. Senator Byrd is also a committed constitutionalist, who has given the Senate the equivalent of two full-semester graduate-school courses, one on U.S., and one on Roman constitutional history. Byrd spoke on war against Iraq on the Senate floor on Sept. 20, and again on Sept. 25 following Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle’s criticism of the administration for its use of the war issue in the elections. Byrd voiced a much broader concern:

“I am disgusted by the tenor of the war debate that has seemingly overtaken this capital city. Here is the President of the Senate, the Vice President of the United States, out campaigning. The President is campaigning using war talk to win the election. The Vice President of the United States is barnstorming for Republican candidates. There, in at least one instance, he was telling voters that electing Republicans would aid the war effort.

“Is the President determined to make his party—that great party of Abraham Lincoln—the war party? What would Abraham Lincoln have to say if he were here? . . . The distinguished Majority Leader used the word “outrageous.” He is exactly right. It is despicable that any President would attempt to use the serious matter of impending war as a tool in a campaign war. I am not going to continue to be silent. The blood of our sons and daughters, our soldiers, sailors, and airmen, has far more value than a few votes in a ballot box. There is

nothing more sobering than a decision to go to war, but the administration has turned the decision into a bumper sticker election theme. . . . For the President to suggest the Senate is not interested in the security of the American people is outrageous. It is insulting. It is wrong, wrong, wrong. . . . I have been in this Congress 50 years. I have never seen a President of the United States or a Vice President of the United States stoop to such a low level.

“It is your blood, your sons and daughters. Those who are looking at the Senate through the electronic lenses: It is your blood, your treasure. For the first time in the history of the Republic, the Nation is considering a pre-emptive strike against a sovereign state. *I will not be silenced*. I have no brief for Iraq, but I am not going to be silenced. . . . I will give the benefit of the doubt to the Constitution. I will give the benefit of the doubt to the American people who will soon be called upon, if this President has his way, to give their sons and daughters, the blood of this country. . . .

“You silence me, if you can. There are others in this body who are going to speak up for their people. This administration is making the war their battle cry. That is their bumper sticker politics. They are putting it front and center. They don’t want to talk about domestic issues. They don’t want to talk about those things. So they choose to make the war center stage. Okay. ‘Lay on, McDuff. /And damn’d be him that first cries, “Hold, enough!” ’

“My people in West Virginia expect me to speak out. If the Lord lets me live, I shall do that. . . . Each of you has sworn to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic. There it is. That doesn’t give this President, this Nation, a right to launch an unprovoked attack on a sovereign nation. America fights wars, but America does not start wars.”

Senator Byrd’s office summarizes the end of this talk in words reminiscent of Socrates after his frameup trial. “The American people have serious questions. The Nation’s allies have serious questions. And Members of this body have serious questions. [They] must be answered before going to war. It is not unpatriotic to ask questions.”