

Former U.S. Senator Ernest F. (“Fritz”) Hollings on “Silent Conspiracies”

By [Richard C. Cook](#)

Region: [USA](#)

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I met Senator Ernest F. “Fritz” Hollings (D-SC) in 1985 in the aftermath of the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster. I had testified before the Rogers Commission after I leaked documents to the *New York Times* about NASA’s past knowledge of flaws with the O-ring joints whose failure caused Challenger to blow up. Later I told commission investigators and the press it was political pressure from the Reagan White House that likely caused NASA to overrule the engineers who tried to stop the launch.

Senator Hollings, then senior Democratic member of the Republican-controlled Senate Commerce Committee, thought the same thing. He wanted the Senate to conduct its own investigation, but the Republicans blocked it.

One day Senator Hollings invited me to his office for a chat. He was both brilliant and humorous. Though he eventually backed off the issue, the work we did together led to a major article I wrote for the *Washington Monthly* entitled, “The Rogers Commission Failed.” My collaboration with the senator is described in detail in my book *Challenger Revealed: An Insider’s Account of How the Reagan Administration Caused the Greatest Tragedy of the Space Age* (Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2007).

Senator Hollings retired from the Senate in 2006 after 38 years of service. He remained a Democrat and kept his seat after the rest of his region went with the Republicans in 1968 through Richard Nixon’s “Southern strategy.” As a moderate he worked in the shadows of Democratic stalwarts like Walter Mondale or Ted Kennedy, and his run for the presidential nomination in 1992 went nowhere. But he was a reliable supporter of civil rights legislation and, with Strom Thurmond, the younger of a duo that became the longest-serving tandem from the same state in Senate history.

Today Fritz Hollings is 87 years old and going strong. As a senator, he opposed free trade as favoring corporate wealth over workers and families. While in the Senate he once said, in his customary tone of sarcasm, “We hear those in Congress running around and saying, ‘Free trade, free trade, I am for free trade,’ when they know free trade is like dry water. There is no such thing.” In his book *Making Government Work* (University of South Carolina Press, 2008), he wrote that it was protectionism that was instrumental in building modern America.

In April 28, 2009, Fritz published an article on the *Economy in Crisis* website that President Barack Obama and his economic team, along with every member of Congress, should be required to read. It is entitled, “Silent Conspiracies.”

<http://www.economyincrisis.org/articles/show/2785>

The first conspiracy he discusses is the growth of debt. He writes, “President Reagan started a strategy of growth for the economy – cutting taxes, borrowing, spending, and growing the national debt instead of the economy.” After President Bill Clinton’s policy of fiscal restraint, George W. Bush came along. Fritz writes: “Under President George W. Bush, Democrats joined Republicans in a conspiracy of debt....”

Now we have the Bush-Obama bailouts. Fritz writes: “After six months of bail-outs and another trillion stimulation, there has been no ‘jump-start’ to the economy. In order to ‘jump-start’ the engine there must be an engine under the hood. To ‘jump-start’ the economy there must be an economy under the hood.”

So why isn’t there an economy? Simple: through free trade we exported it. Through this conspiracy, says Fritz: “We have offshored the economy, and no one mentions this problem. Investment, research, development, production, jobs are in flight to China, India and Mexico. Republicans and Democrats join in a ‘no-no’ to enforce our trade laws and compete in globalization. Globalization is nothing more than a trade war with production looking for a country cheaper to produce.”

Fritz doesn’t mince words. He knows how the political system works: “The President and Congress continue in their conspiracy of ‘free trade’ in order to get the campaign contributions from corporate America and the financial community.” eHe He writes that “these silent conspiracies must be exposed,” and he is doing it in a way that puts almost every other present or former politician in the U.S. to shame.

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