

Byrd: 'History Will Tell Us How to Judge'

On July 28, in the hall of the historic First Parish Unitarian Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Sen. Robert Byrd, Democrat of West Virginia, threw down the gauntlet, defining the 2004 election as one of the most important in his lifetime. Byrd, an octogenarian, who has served more than four decades in the Senate, has been the conscience of the U.S. Senate during the Bush regime, guarding against police state excesses, and opposing the Iraq War.

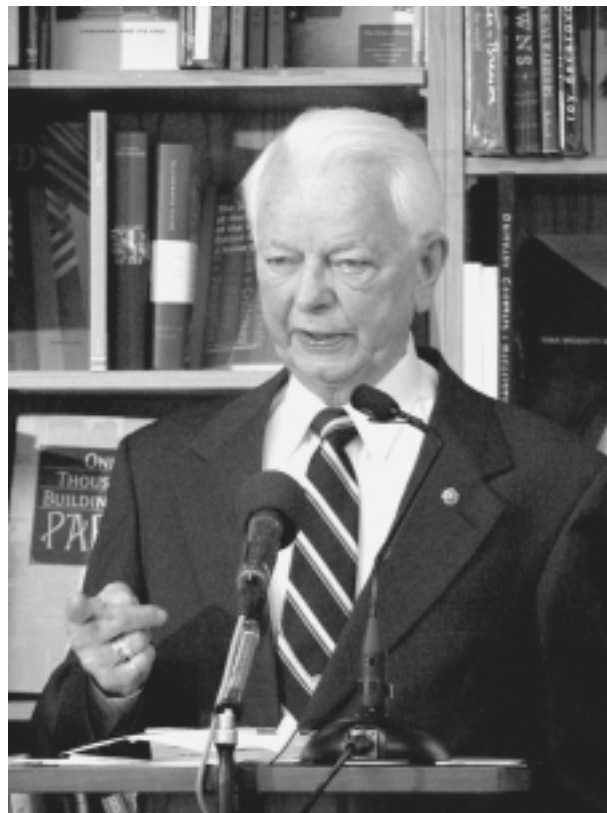
This venerable defender of the Constitution was considered "too radical" for a prime-time speech in the circus atmosphere of the televised convention and to the Democratic National Committee ringmasters. But, to the crowd of nearly 1,000 delegates and citizens who came to meet him, and hear him speak about his new book, *Losing America: Confronting a Reckless and Arrogant Presidency*, Byrd was at his best.

Byrd's address, introduced by former Presidential candidate Gen. Wesley Clark (ret.) and Sen. Ted Kennedy (Mass.), was not a side-event. It was part of an orchestrated effort to use the *best* the Democratic Party has to offer to mobilize for victory. Byrd unquestionably had a major impact on Sen. John Kerry, and in shaping Kerry's declaration that "America never goes to war because we want to, we only go to war because we have to."

Byrd described the secrecy and arrogance of the Bush Administration, and of Vice President Cheney, as the biggest threat to the Constitution he has ever known. Twice the audience rose in thunderous applause, as he held up his book in one upraised hand, and a small book of the U.S. Constitution, which he drew from his coat pocket, in the other.

"I wrote this book," he exclaimed, waving *Losing America*, to "save this one!" With that, he raised the Constitution a little higher.

"Our founding fathers struggled to escape the yoke of one King George. We must not submit to another!" Comparing the Bush-Cheney Administration to "a school-



Sen. Robert Byrd, Democrat of West Virginia

yard bully," Byrd said, "That is not America. . . . I fear today we see our government at its worst. . . . Enough is enough."

As the audience again cheered, Byrd, the classical orator, cried out, "Hallelujah. Make way for liberty. We're not going to sit silently." And calling on each and every individual, Byrd said that at a time when dissent is discouraged, "the strength of the individual is the only force" that can save America. Against the new King George tyranny, he said, "a single act of bravery can lead an army against great odds, and the precious light of liberty will again burn brightly."

Confident that the Democratic Party will win, he concluded, "History will tell us how to judge current events."

—Michele Steinberg