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SOUTHERN STRATEGIES

The 1970 Election for the United States Senate in Virginia

by JAMES R. SWEENEY*

WHILE feminists marched in protest outside the Statler Hilton on the evening of 14 March 1970, President Richard M. Nixon, Vice-President Spiro T. Agnew, and Virginia's senior senator, Harry F. Byrd, Jr., attended the men-only annual banquet of the exclusive Gridiron Club, a group of fifty of Washington's most prominent male newspaper correspondents. The 500 guests enjoyed an evening of off-the-record speeches, satirical musical skits, and quite unexpected piano duets by Nixon and Agnew that "stole the show." As he was leaving, the president stopped at Senator Byrd's table and said, "Harry, I think it's about time for us to discuss Okinawa." Those who overheard assumed that Nixon was referring to the administration's plan to give the island of Okinawa back to Japan, a proposal that Byrd opposed. In fact, Nixon was talking about Byrd's possible switch from the Democratic to the Republican party. "Okinawa" was the code word both men had agreed to use when referring to this potential political bombshell.¹ The mere possibility of Byrd's joining the GOP in 1970 was indicative of the unsettled state of Virginia politics.

The presidency of Richard Nixon coincided with a major transition in Virginia's political history. By 1969, the long-dominant conservative Democratic faction led by Senator Harry F. Byrd, Sr., had disintegrated after a decade of political turbulence that began with the collapse of the Byrd-designed plan of massive resistance to school desegregation. The national

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¹ Claudia Levy, "Newswomen Protest At Gridiron Club Dinner," *Washington Post*, 15 Mar. 1970, p. A27; "Keyboard Hit: Nixon, Agnew," *ibid.*, p. A1 (first quotation); "A Roasting for the Powers That Be," *ibid.*, p. G2; interview with Harry F. Byrd, Jr., 15 Feb. 1996, Winchester, Va. (second quotation).



Harry F. Byrd, Jr., Papers (#10,320a-b), Special Collections Department, Manuscripts Division, University of Virginia Library

Educated at Virginia Military Institute and the University of Virginia, Harry Flood Byrd, Jr. (b. 1914), served in the state Senate from 1948 to 1965, when he was appointed to the United States Senate to fill the vacancy caused by his father's resignation. In 1966 he was elected to finish the rest of the term.

Democratic party had moved to the left with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and antipoverty legislation. Beginning in 1962 with the *Baker v. Carr* decision, the United States Supreme Court undermined the controlling influence of rural areas in the apportionment of state legislatures. The Byrd faction, which derived its power from rural areas and a restricted electorate, lost influence as Virginia became more urban and as the federal government struck down such barriers to voting as the poll tax and literacy tests. As the Byrd Organization declined in the mid-1960s, the Virginia Democratic party fragmented into three factions: conservatives, who remained loyal to Byrd; moderates, who sought to replace the older leaders with younger and more flexible men; and a liberal faction, led by state senator Henry E. Howell, Jr., of Norfolk, which appealed especially to blacks and organized labor. The first electoral consequences of the upheaval were the defeats of Organization stalwarts Senator A. Willis Robertson and Congressman Howard W. Smith in the Democratic primaries of 1966.²

² For a succinct discussion of the 1966 Democratic senatorial primaries, see J. Harvie Wilkinson III, *Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1945–1966* (Charlottesville, 1968), chap. 12. On Smith's defeat, see Bruce J. Dierenfield, *Keeper of the Rules: Congressman Howard W. Smith of Virginia* (Charlottesville, 1987), chap. 8.

Virginia Republicans viewed these changes as an opportunity to displace the Byrd regime and bring two-party competition to the Old Dominion for the first time in the twentieth century. More than an interested observer, Richard Nixon participated in efforts to build the Republican party in Virginia. Yet the president's involvement in the 1969 gubernatorial and the 1970 senatorial elections did not produce the results he sought. His so-called southern strategy came into conflict with those of A. Linwood Holton, Jr., the Republican party's successful gubernatorial candidate in 1969, and Senator Harry F. Byrd, Jr., who succeeded his father in the Senate in 1965.

Nixon was very much aware of what J. Harvie Wilkinson III called "the changing face of Virginia politics."³ Although Virginia was considered a one-party, Democratic state, presidential Republicanism flourished in the 1950s and 1960s. Only Barry M. Goldwater in 1964 failed to win the commonwealth's twelve electoral votes for the Republicans. In 1968 Nixon carried the Old Dominion by nearly 150,000 votes, and Virginia Republicans reached parity with the Democrats in the state's delegation in the House of Representatives. The Democrats, however, retained both United States Senate seats as well as the governorship and other state offices. Most Democratic officeholders were disciples of the late Senator Byrd, whose conservative ideology was closer to the right wing of the national Republican party than to the prevailing liberalism of the national Democrats. Further complicating the situation for Virginia Republicans was a growing ideological rift within their own ranks.⁴

By the early 1960s, two factions had emerged in the Virginia GOP. Historically, the party's areas of strength were the Shenandoah Valley and the mountainous region of southwest Virginia. The mountain-Valley Republicans, staunch opponents of the Byrd Organization, favored more generous funding of public health and education and abolition of the poll tax. They also opposed the Byrd policy of massive resistance.⁵ Although they were not numerous enough to win statewide office, mountain-Valley Republicans offered a progressive alternative to the Byrd orthodoxies of pay-as-you-go fiscal conservatism and last-ditch defense of racial segregation.

Republicans in eastern and northern Virginia were different. Philosophically they were very conservative, and many were admirers of Senator

³ The quoted phrase appears as part of the title of Wilkinson's perceptive study.

⁴ Frank B. Atkinson, *The Dynamic Dominion: Realignment and the Rise of Virginia's Republican Party Since 1945* (Fairfax, Va., 1992), pp. 53, 144, 161, 178–79; Wilkinson, *Harry Byrd*, pp. 214–15.

⁵ Wilkinson, *Harry Byrd*, pp. 91–92, 203–7, 209, 232; Atkinson, *Dynamic Dominion*, pp. 62–63, 157; Robbins L. Gates, *The Making of Massive Resistance: Virginia's Politics of Public School Desegregation, 1954–1956* (Chapel Hill, 1964), pp. 184–87.

Byrd. A good example was Congressman Joel T. Broyhill, who was elected from northern Virginia's Tenth District in 1952. Preferring not to oppose Byrd Organization incumbents, this faction sought to build the party by electing conservative Republicans to replace Byrd Democrats who retired or were defeated by anti-Organization liberals in Democratic primaries.⁶ Starved for victories in statewide elections, Virginia Republicans maintained the appearance of unity, but the decline of the Byrd Organization revealed the party's fault lines. Not even Richard Nixon could avoid the factional divisions that split the commonwealth's Republicans.

To understand Nixon's involvement in Virginia politics, it is necessary to review the South's role in his nomination and election in 1968. Nixon owed a substantial political debt to southern Republicans, especially to South Carolina senator J. Strom Thurmond. A former Democrat, Thurmond had switched to the GOP during the Goldwater campaign of 1964. Nixon began to court him in 1966 when he accepted the invitation of Thurmond's protégé, South Carolina's Republican chairman Harry S. Dent, to attend a fund-raising dinner for the Palmetto State's GOP. Nixon told the press that Thurmond, an ardent segregationist, was "no racist" but "a man of courage and integrity." As historian Dan T. Carter has written, "To Thurmond, laboring under the burden of his past as the 'Dr. No' of American race relations, it was like being granted absolution from purgatory by the pope of American politics." Wooed by Nixon, the senator from South Carolina played an indispensable role in the former vice-president's nomination in 1968. At the Republican national convention Thurmond, ably assisted by Dent, persuaded southern delegates to remain faithful to Nixon despite the seductive attraction of Governor Ronald Reagan of California.⁷ Nixon assured southern delegates that he would do "the absolute minimum" to execute court orders requiring school desegregation. Political analysts soon agreed that Nixon's appeal to the sensibilities of white southerners and his alliance with Thurmond were part of a southern strategy.⁸ This strategy

⁶ Atkinson, *Dynamic Dominion*, pp. 13, 134; interview with Joel T. Broyhill, 23 May 1996, Arlington, Va.

⁷ Harry S. Dent, *The Prodigal South Returns to Power* (New York, Chichester, and Brisbane, 1978), pp. 76–77 (first and second quotations), 96–98; Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York, London, and Toronto, 1995), p. 329 (third quotation).

⁸ Dent, *The Prodigal South*, pp. 89–90; Carter, *Politics of Rage*, pp. 328–29 (quotation); Hugh Davis Graham, *The Civil Rights Era: Origins and Development of National Policy, 1960–1972* (New York and Oxford, 1990), p. 303.

seemed to be vindicated when Nixon carried five southern states in the fall election.⁹

Early in his first term, Nixon's southern strategy remained a matter of consuming interest for political pundits. They found ample evidence that the president, with an eye toward the 1972 election, was repaying a political debt to Thurmond and catering to southern white voters to undercut the continuing appeal of former governor George C. Wallace of Alabama. Nixon named Harry Dent to the White House staff as a political coordinator. Observers interpreted the administration's efforts to relax pressure for school desegregation, to modify the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and to appoint a "strict constructionist" southerner to the Supreme Court as further evidence of the southern strategy.¹⁰

Although Nixon, Dent, and Agnew denied the existence of a southern strategy, such a plan did exist. In 1969 Kevin P. Phillips, an aide to Attorney General John Mitchell, published *The Emerging Republican Majority*, a prescription for GOP growth. Phillips recognized the importance of fear, especially whites' fears of blacks, as a means to secure a Republican majority. In the South specifically, exploiting apprehensions of blacks' enfranchisement and their growing role in the Democratic party was the key to Republican success. Dent summarized for Nixon Alan L. Otten's review in the *Wall Street Journal* of Phillips's book. Otten described Phillips's plan as "conservative enough to entice the South from George Wallace" while not alienating middle-class whites in such swing states as Ohio. Dent advised the president that "we must develop a response" to Phillips's book "if for no other reason than to boost the morale of our own party workers in the large industrial states." For that reason, Dent counseled, "[w]e should disavow Phillips's book as party policy and assert we are growing in strength nationally because the public is increasingly conscious of the soundness of our philosophy." Nixon concurred. The president and his adviser were not repudiating Phillips's plan on its merits; but they did not wish to be publicly associated with it. There was no denying its appeal to an administration committed to building the Republican party in the South by attracting conservative southern whites. Such a strategy,

⁹ Graham, *The Civil Rights Era*, p. 303; Carter, *Politics of Rage*, pp. 338–39, 347; Dent, *The Prodigal South*, pp. 109–10; Alvy L. King, "Richard M. Nixon, Southern Strategies, and Desegregation of Public Schools," in Leon Friedman and William F. Levantrosser, eds., *Richard M. Nixon: Politician, President, Administrator* (New York, Westport, Conn., and London, 1991), p. 143. Nixon carried the former Confederate states of Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.

¹⁰ James Boyd, "I gave Thurmond 100% loyalty and now I give Mr. Nixon 100%," *New York Times Magazine*, 1 Feb. 1970, pp. 13, 46, 48; Tom Wicker, *One of Us: Richard Nixon and the American Dream* (New York, 1991), pp. 490–94; "No Southerner for the Court?" *New York Times*, 11 Apr. 1970, p. 30; Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon and the Southern Strategy," *ibid.*, 12 Apr. 1970, sec. 4, p. 1; "Primary Gains and Losses," *ibid.*, 7 May 1970, p. 42; "Southern Strategies . . .," *ibid.*, 4 June 1970, p. 42.



Virginia Historical Society

Campaigning on the theme “It’s Time for a Change” in the first gubernatorial election since the abolition of the state poll tax, Abner Linwood Holton, Jr. (b. 1923), became the first Republican governor of Virginia in the twentieth century. His coattails were not long enough to pull out victories for his running mates, H. Dunlop “Buz” Dawbarn and Richard D. Obenshain. Instead, Holton (left) took the oath of office on 17 January 1970 with two Democrats, Lieutenant Governor Julian Sargeant Reynolds (1936–1971) and Attorney General Andrew Pickens Miller (b. 1932).

however, was problematic when applied to the complexities of Virginia’s political scene.¹¹

The Virginia gubernatorial contest was the most important election in the South in 1969. The Republican candidate was A. Linwood Holton, Jr., a mountain-Valley Republican from Roanoke. Throughout his political

¹¹ Kevin P. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle, N.Y., 1969); James M. Naughton, “Agnew Calls Jobs an Integration Key,” *New York Times*, 10 Mar. 1970, p. 26; “Transcript Of President’s News Conference On Foreign And Domestic Matters,” *ibid.*, 21 July 1970, p. 16; Joan Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (New York, 1994), p. 79; Hugh Davis Graham, “Richard Nixon and Civil Rights: Explaining an Enigma,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26 (Winter 1996): 94; Carter, *Politics of Rage*, p. 379; Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 13 Oct. 1969, folder 45, box 2, Harry S. Dent Papers, Special Collections Unit, Robert Muldrow Cooper Library, Clemson University, Clemson, S.C. (quotations).

career, Holton had been deeply committed to ending the one-party domination of Virginia that he believed was stultifying progress in the state. A racial moderate, Holton made a creditable run for governor in 1965 but lost to a Byrd ally, Lieutenant Governor Mills E. Godwin, Jr. During that campaign Nixon came to Virginia to stump for Holton. The two men formed "a great relationship," which continued as Nixon decided to seek the presidency in 1968. Holton was a member of the six-person Nixon For President Committee, announced in 1967. The following year he served as Nixon's manager for the Middle Atlantic states in both the prenomination and the general election phases of the campaign.¹²

In 1969 Holton's chances were much better than they had been four years earlier. The senior Byrd had died in 1966. The Democratic factional divisions of that year had further intensified by 1969. Lieutenant Governor Fred G. Pollard, the candidate favored by the remnant of the Byrd Organization, received only 23 percent of the vote in the first gubernatorial primary. In the runoff, conservatives supported the moderate, William C. Battle, who won a narrow victory over liberal state senator Henry Howell. Conservative Democrats' bitter attacks on Howell aroused the anger of the AFL-CIO and the Crusade for Voters, a statewide black political organization. Both groups decided to endorse Holton in the autumn in an effort to "nail the coffin shut" on the Byrd Organization. Ironically, a large group of prominent conservative Democrats, predominantly from the Richmond area, who had been voting Republican in presidential elections for years, also decided to abandon Battle in the fall. These "New Republicans" found Battle unacceptable because he seemed too closely associated with the national Democratic party.¹³

During the 1969 campaign, Holton sought to identify himself in the public mind with the president. Political analyst Charles McDowell called

¹² Charles McDowell, "Notes from the Mountains and Valleys of Virginia on the Resurrection of the Grand Old Party and the Ambitions of Linwood Holton," *The Washingtonian*, 6 Sept. 1969, pp. 44–45; interviews with A. Linwood Holton, Jr., 14 May 1996, 13 Jan. 1998 (quotation), Richmond, Va.; J. Harvie Wilkinson III, "Linwood Holton: An Idealist's Demise," in Edward Younger and James Tice Moore, eds., *The Governors of Virginia, 1860–1978* (Charlottesville, 1982), p. 395.

¹³ Ralph Eisenberg, "Virginia: The Emergence of Two-Party Politics," in William C. Havard, ed., *The Changing Politics of the South* (Baton Rouge, 1972), pp. 74–79 (quotation); Atkinson, *Dynamic Dominion*, pp. 188–92; Michael Lottman, "The Coalition of the Future," *Ripon Forum*, July–Aug. 1970, pp. 81, 84; "Va. 'Crusade' Backs Holton; Split on Ranks," *Norfolk Journal and Guide* (national edition), 4 Oct. 1969, p. 1. William C. Battle was a son of former governor John S. Battle. William Battle's friendship with John F. Kennedy dated from World War II, when both served as PT boat skippers. In 1960 Battle managed Kennedy's presidential campaign in Virginia. Subsequently Kennedy appointed him ambassador to Australia. See James R. Sweeney, "Whispers in the Golden Silence: Harry F. Byrd, Sr., John F. Kennedy, and Virginia Democrats in the 1960 Presidential Election," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (hereafter cited as *VMHB*) 99 (1991): 3–44. Holton also received the endorsement of the Community Progress Committee, a black political organization in Hampton. See *Norfolk Journal and Guide* (national edition), 25 Oct. 1969, p. 10.

Holton's association with Nixon "the heart of his campaign strategy."¹⁴ Nixon and Dent appreciated the significance of Holton's candidacy. A victory would provide a major boost to southern Republicanism and, more important, to Nixon's prestige.¹⁵ As the campaign moved into high gear in late September, H. R. Haldeman, Nixon's chief of staff, told Dent that "[t]he President would like to consider a slightly higher degree of participation." Nixon had suggested making television tapes for Holton. Dent agreed but also raised the possibility of a presidential visit to Virginia.¹⁶ Holton has recalled that Nixon telephoned him almost every Sunday "to see how the campaign was going." Arrangements were made for the president to speak at a rally for Holton in Roanoke on 28 October, one week before the election. Dent was skeptical about "how well [Holton's] labor and Negro support [was] holding up" but noted that Nixon's approval rating in Virginia was 75 percent. Dent also believed the visit would be proof of Holton's "personal friendship and good relationship with the President."¹⁷

Nixon's appearance in Roanoke was a superbly timed climax to the campaign. Speaking to a capacity crowd at the Civic Center, the president asserted that he supported Holton "because he is the best man for Virginia[,] . . . bringing it new leadership and new strength." Newspaper photographs showed Holton and Nixon smiling and waving to the crowd. Many years later Holton recalled that the "rally helped us to peak . . . at exactly the right time."¹⁸

¹⁴ McDowell, "Resurrection," p. 45 (quotation); Wilkinson, "Linwood Holton," pp. 395–96.

¹⁵ In July Dent assured Holton that Nixon had been "very strong in urging" a delegation of Republican governors to help him. See Harry S. Dent to A. Linwood Holton, Jr., memorandum, 22 July 1969, folder 443, box 17, Dent Papers. Dent wrote the president in August that "[t]he campaign has come a long way organizationally since it began. A full-time professional staff is in charge, and it appears that the final drive is ready to start right after Labor Day. The morale of the troops is high, and there is a spirit of confidence. . . . [A]ny further moves to publicly show a bond between this candidate and the President will be very helpful in a race that is definitely uphill" (Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 22 Aug. 1969, folder 67, box 2, *ibid.*).

¹⁶ H. R. Haldeman to Harry S. Dent, memorandum, 24 Sept. 1969, folder 45, box 2, *ibid.*; Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, 26 Sept. 1969, "memos to the President" folder 3, box 2, Harry S. Dent Files, 1969–70, White House Special Files (hereafter cited as WHSF): Staff Member and Office Files (hereafter cited as SMOF), Richard M. Nixon Presidential Materials, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md. The president made the tapes for Holton on 7 October. See Dwight L. Chapin to Harry S. Dent, 3 Oct. 1969, folder 74, box 3, Dent Papers. Agnew, Reagan, and Governor Louie Nunn of Kentucky were already scheduled to campaign for Holton. See Marvin Collins to Harry S. Dent, 25 Sept. 1969, folder 74, box 3, *ibid.* Collins was Holton's campaign manager.

¹⁷ Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 26 Sept. 1969, folder 45, box 2, *ibid.*; interview with A. Linwood Holton, Jr., 14 May 1996, Richmond, Va. (first quotation); H. R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York, 1994), p. 90 (27 Sept. 1969); H. R. Haldeman to Harry S. Dent, memorandum, 30 Sept. 1969, folder 74, box 3, Dent Papers; Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 24 Oct. 1969, folder 75, box 3, *ibid.* (second and third quotations).

¹⁸ Shelley Rolfe, "Nixon Asserts Holton Is Best for Virginia," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 29 Oct.

Within the administration, however, the Holton campaign was striking some discordant notes. On the Thursday before the election, Gordon S. Brownell of the White House staff mentioned to Dent a newspaper report of a Holton speech “calling for ‘the old, the young and the black’ to join the GOP in Virginia.” Brownell recalled that Dent had told Nixon that “[s]uch a policy . . . is not going to work down South. It also is not in accord with the true Southern Strategy.”¹⁹

Holton’s triumph by 65,000 votes seemed to be a turning point in Virginia politics. The first Republican in the twentieth century to be elected governor of the Old Dominion, the jubilant Holton accepted the president’s invitation to a victory luncheon at the White House. At a news conference Holton gave Nixon credit for his decisive win. “The President’s prestige was at stake here,” the governor-elect declared. “. . . I have a great respect for this man.” What pundits overlooked, however, was that Holton had employed a strategy different from Nixon’s in 1968. In fact, Holton had been disturbed by Nixon’s pursuit of the southern strategy during the presidential campaign, but he had remained quiet. He still hoped that Nixon would favor “middle-of-the-road southerners” in building the Republican party in the South.²⁰

Holton’s election intensified Nixon’s interest in the political future of another Virginian, Senator Harry F. Byrd, Jr. Appointed in 1965 to serve out Harry Byrd, Sr.’s term, the younger Byrd was almost indistinguishable philosophically from his father. The son’s political career began with his election to the Virginia Senate in 1947. Compiling a record described by one historian as “undeviatingly conservative,” he was best known for the Byrd Tax Credit Act of 1950. That law provided that, if the state’s revenues for a given year surpassed budget estimates by a certain percentage, individual and corporate taxpayers would receive a reduction by that percentage in their state income tax. In Virginia, state services had traditionally been starved for funds, and budget surpluses had been used to finance new buildings and equipment. Under the Byrd Act, such underwriting became impossible. During the years after the *Brown* decision, the younger Byrd was involved in formulating Virginia’s response to court-ordered school desegregation. His political philosophy and his stands on issues as well as his physical appearance and his speech caused the

1969, p. A-1 (first quotation); Charles McDowell, Jr., “Nixon Ties Stressed By Holton,” *ibid.*, p. B-1; interview with A. Linwood Holton, Jr., 14 May 1996, Richmond, Va. (second quotation).

¹⁹ Gordon S. Brownell to Harry S. Dent, memorandum, 31 Oct. 1969, with attached clipping from the *Washington Post*, 31 Oct. 1969, folder 29, box 1, Dent Papers.

²⁰ Eisenberg, “Emergence of Two-Party Politics,” p. 80; “Holton Gives Nixon Credit for Decisive Victory,” *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*, 6 Nov. 1969, p. A-1 (first quotation); interviews with A. Linwood Holton, Jr., 14 May 1996, 13 Jan. 1998 (second quotation), Richmond, Va. Photographs of the Nixons and the Holtons on the White House lawn appeared in both the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 6 Nov. 1969, pp. A-1, A-4, and the *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*, 6 Nov. 1969, p. A-1.

Washington Post to describe him as “not . . . just a chip off the old block, but . . . an extension of the original.”²¹

By the mid-1960s, Harry Byrd, Jr., must have been aware of the changing political environment in Virginia. The implications were clear in the presidential race of 1964. It was the first time since 1900 Virginians could cast their ballots in a presidential election without paying a poll tax. African-American political organizations worked hard to register blacks, and an estimated 160,000 voted. Those ballots undoubtedly made the difference in giving the state’s twelve electoral votes to the Democratic candidate, Lyndon B. Johnson, who emerged the victor in Virginia by 76,704 votes over Republican senator Barry M. Goldwater of Arizona. Johnson was the first Democrat to carry the Old Dominion in a presidential election since 1948. When Byrd ran in 1966 for the remaining four years of his father’s term, he also experienced the shifting currents of Virginia politics. Challenged by Armistead L. Boothe, a Rhodes scholar and moderate former state senator, Byrd narrowly won the senatorial primary by 8,225 votes. It was the closest call either Byrd had ever had. The defection of many hard-line conservatives, especially in the Southside, contributed to his difficulties. They were angry that several leaders of the Byrd Organization had endorsed President Johnson in 1964. Although the junior Byrd had remained silent in that race, the leaders of the new Conservative party were determined to punish him and any other statewide officeholder who remained in the Democratic ranks. Therefore, they advised party members to refrain from voting in the Democratic primary of 1966.²²

By 1966, the Byrd Organization was clearly in decline, but Harry Byrd, Jr., had no intention of trying to save it. His decision not to replace his father as leader of the state political machine was a wise one. In fact, he was following the advice of the senior Byrd, who had counseled him that “[i]t was a lot easier to become head of the Organization than it would be to get out of the leadership once you got in.”²³ To advance his political career, the younger Byrd would have to chart his own course.

An admirer of the senior Byrd,²⁴ President Nixon looked on the late senator’s son as a potential convert to the Republican party. For Holton,

²¹ Ed Grimsley, “A Look at Senate Candidates Boothe and Byrd,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 5 July 1966, p. 6; Wilkinson, *Harry Byrd*, pp. 99, 308–9 (quotations).

²² James R. Sweeney, “A New Day in the Old Dominion: The 1964 Presidential Election,” *VMHB* 102 (1994): 307–48; Wilkinson, *Harry Byrd*, pp. 108, 270–72, 326–27, 333, 339.

²³ Interview with Harry F. Byrd, Jr., 15 Feb. 1996, Winchester, Va.

²⁴ After Nixon concluded his term as vice-president, he wrote to Harry Byrd, Sr., in the spring of 1961 that “[t]he nation will forever be in your debt because of your courage in always putting your country first and your party second” (Richard M. Nixon to Harry F. Byrd, Sr., 5 Apr. 1961, “Richard M. Nixon 1961–65” folder, box 275, Harry F. Byrd, Sr., Papers [#9700], Special Collections Department, Manuscripts Division, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville [hereafter cited as ViU]).



Richard M. Nixon Presidential Materials, National Archives and Records Administration

Hoping to gain a Republican majority in the Senate in 1970, President Richard M. Nixon plotted strategy with his chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman. A key piece of the plan would be to persuade Democratic senator Harry F. Byrd, Jr., of Virginia to switch parties, or at least to vote with the Republicans in organizing the body.

this was bitter medicine. He did not want a Republican party “built on the remnants of the Byrd Organization” and “was determined to destroy the Byrd machine if I could [because] . . . at the heart of it was race.” Nixon, however, was hopeful of gaining a Republican Senate in 1970, and Byrd, a loyal supporter of administration policies, could provide a crucial vote to give the Republicans a majority in the Senate.²⁵ In the summer of 1969,

²⁵ Interview with A. Linwood Holton, Jr., 14 May 1996, Richmond, Va. (quotation). The Republicans needed to gain six seats and persuade Harry Byrd, Jr., to vote with them to achieve a 50–50 split in the Senate, in which case Vice-President Agnew would have cast the deciding vote to organize the body. During 1969 Nixon sent personal messages to Byrd bearing the initials “RN” and thanking the senator for his support of the Safeguard antimissile system, Vietnam War policy, and tax reform legislation and for his vote for the confirmation of Clement F. Haynsworth, Jr., of South Carolina as a Supreme Court justice (notes, “Richard Nixon” folder, box 232, Harry F. Byrd, Jr., Papers [#10,320a-b] [restricted], ViU). The *Congressional Quarterly* listed Byrd among the eight Democrats with the highest percentages of support for legislation favored by Nixon during the 91st Congress.



Harry F. Byrd, Jr., Papers (#10,320a-b), Special Collections Department, Manuscripts Division,
University of Virginia Library

During the Christmas holidays in 1969, Harry Byrd determined the course he would steer in his reelection bid, but he did not reveal his decision to the public until 17 March. Here, Byrd and his wife, Gretchen, socialize with George Weissman, president and CEO of Philip Morris, 1967–73.

Dent cautioned Holton, “The Big Man [Nixon] has been interested for some time in trying to get your Senator [Byrd] to swing over. We keep getting reports that he would not be welcomed by you and some other Virginia Republicans. In fact, this seems to be holding up the momentum a little at the present time.”²⁶ Despite his personal feelings about Byrd, Holton could not afford to ignore White House pressure.

During the fall of 1969, the White House increased its lobbying to bring Byrd into the Republican party. Dent had “several people working on Senator Byrd,” but all they had received were “sympathetic comments.” In

²⁶ Wilkinson, *Harry Byrd*, p. 308; Eisenberg, “Emergence of Two-Party Politics,” pp. 67–69; Wicker, *One of Us*, pp. 635–36; Paul Hope, “Senator Byrd Being Urged To Switch Parties,” *Newark [N.J.] Evening News* (clipping), 29 Oct. 1969, in “political correspondence, Nov.–Dec. 1969” folder, box 236, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers; Harry S. Dent to A. Linwood Holton, Jr., memorandum, 22 July 1969, folder 443, box 17, Dent Papers (quotation).

October, Byrd's assistant, William Nelson Utz, noted that the senator "simply [had] not made up his mind what to do."²⁷ After Holton's victory, White House efforts to woo Byrd intensified. Nixon suggested to Haldeman that "the time may be ripe" for a presidential meeting with Holton and P. Bryce Harlow, the president's chief of congressional liaison, "to lay out a plan for talking to Byrd." Instead of setting up a White House meeting, Harlow traveled to Richmond on 26 November to have lunch with the governor-elect. Holton told Harlow that he had hoped that his law partner, M. Caldwell Butler, would defeat Byrd in the 1970 election. He said that Virginia Republicans would much prefer to have their own candidate, "not a Democratic renegade." Responding to Nixon's interest, however, Holton readily conceded the symbolic importance of Byrd's becoming a Republican. In fact, he revealed that on "at least three occasions" he had communicated to Byrd that the senator "would be welcome in the Republican party" and that he would win the Republican nomination, but the senator had not responded. Holton and Harlow agreed to use Thomas C. Boushall, chairman emeritus of the Bank of Virginia, as a liaison to raise the issue with Byrd. The governor-elect also prevailed on J. Harvie Wilkinson, Jr., another Richmond banker, to accompany Boushall to Washington and try to convince Byrd to switch parties. The meeting at the Metropolitan Club was cordial, but Byrd made no commitments.²⁸

In late 1969 and early 1970 Harry Byrd, Jr., was exploring his options. He could remain a Democrat and take his chances in the primary, or he could ensure his nomination by accepting the Republicans' invitation. A third possible course of action was to seek reelection as an Independent. An Oliver Quayle poll commissioned by Byrd in October projected that he held narrow leads in both the primary and general elections. The Quayle study highlighted the risk of running in a Democratic primary in which blacks and union members would participate in disproportionate numbers. Byrd began to read about Senator George W. Norris, a Nebraska Republican who successfully sought reelection as an Independent Republican in 1936.

²⁷ Harry S. Dent to Ken Cole, memorandum, 23 Oct. 1969 (first and second quotations), Harry S. Flemming to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 22 Oct. 1969, "political affairs, 1969-70" folder, box 47, WHSF: Central Files (hereafter cited as CF), Confidential Files, Nixon Presidential Materials; Jack A. Gleason to Harry S. Dent, memorandum, 3 Oct. 1969, folder 99, box 4, Dent Papers (third quotation).

²⁸ H. R. Haldeman to P. Bryce Harlow, memorandum, 20 Nov. 1969 (first and second quotations), P. Bryce Harlow to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 26 Nov. 1969 (fourth and fifth quotations), "political affairs, 1969-70" folder, box 47, WHSF:CF, Confidential Files, Nixon Presidential Materials; P. Bryce Harlow to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 26 Jan. 1970 (third quotation), P. Bryce Harlow to H. R. Haldeman, memorandum, 12 Jan. 1970, "A-H 1969-70" folder, box 52, WHSF:CF, Confidential Files, *ibid.*; interview with Harry F. Byrd, Jr., 15 Feb. 1996, Winchester, Va.

During the holiday season Byrd and his wife, Gretchen, spent a week in the Caribbean where he could walk the beaches and think and “determine what [he] should do in 1970.”²⁹

While vacationing Byrd apparently reached at least a tentative decision to seek reelection as an Independent. Byrd’s aide, William Utz, recalled years later that Gretchen Byrd told him the senator would take long solitary walks in the morning and spend the rest of the day with her, although he remained preoccupied. Then one day he returned from his walk on the beach relaxed and exhibited a renewed interest in their vacation. Utz stated that “[s]he knew that he was finished. He had decided what he was going to do.” Byrd, however, did not disclose the nature of his decision to his wife at that time. Returning to Virginia, he conferred with several of his closest allies. His friends offered no consensus on the wisdom of an Independent candidacy. Typical was former governor William M. Tuck, who expressed “considerable enthusiasm” for such a step when he met Byrd in Richmond. Several days later, however, Tuck advised his friend that “it would be best for you to seek the Democratic nomination.”³⁰

Fascinated by the political situation in Virginia, Nixon asked Kevin Phillips to prepare a detailed study of the 1969 gubernatorial election, a document subsequently leaked to the press. Phillips attributed Holton’s victory to the votes of former Byrd Democrats, rather than those of organized labor and blacks, added to the traditional Republican base. Tom Wilkinson of the *Washington Post* concluded that “[t]he analysis . . . nods generally in the direction of the so-called ‘Southern strategy’—calling for Republican emphasis on attracting the white vote in the South.” When asked for his reaction, an annoyed Governor Holton remarked: “That’s utter nonsense. If the Richmond businessmen had voted Democratic, of course I would have lost. But what Phillips ignores is that if the Crusade For Voters or the AFL-CIO had switched, I would also have lost.”³¹

²⁹ Interview with Harry F. Byrd, Jr., 15 Feb. 1996, Winchester, Va. (quotation); voter survey by Oliver Quayle, 3–17 Jan. 1970, box 51, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers.

³⁰ Interview with William Nelson Utz, 13 Sept. 1996, Farmington Country Club, Charlottesville, Va. (first quotation); interview with Harry F. Byrd, Jr., 15 Feb. 1996, Winchester, Va. (second quotation); William M. Tuck to Harry F. Byrd, Jr., 12 Jan. 1970, “political correspondence, Jan.–Mar. 1970” folder, box 236, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers (third quotation). Byrd also consulted former governor Albertis S. Harrison, Jr., Benjamin Lacy, clerk of the Virginia Senate, M. J. “Peachy” Menefee, his father’s longtime administrative assistant, and D. Lathan Mims, editor and general manager of the Harrisonburg *Daily News-Record*, a publication owned by Byrd.

³¹ Samuel E. Carpenter to John R. Ritchie, Jr. (misspelled “Ritchey”), 12 Feb. 1970, “Harry Dent” folder, box 86, A. Linwood Holton, Jr., Executive Papers, Library of Virginia, Richmond; Kevin P. Phillips, “The Constituency and Significance of the 1969 Republican Gubernatorial Victory in Virginia,” Feb. 1970, “campaign background” folder 1, box 50, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers; Tom Wilkinson, “GOP Memo Cites Holton Win,” *Washington Post*, 18 Mar. 1970, p. A7 (first quotation); Alan L. Otten, “For Holton, Moderate Stance Pays Off,” *Wall Street Journal*, 11 Sept. 1970, p. 10

Encouraged by Phillips's study, Nixon continued his courtship of Byrd. By mid-March, rumors abounded that Byrd was working on a statement that would clarify his plans. Nixon, therefore, made his suggestion at the Gridiron Club banquet that they meet to discuss "Okinawa." By that time Byrd had made up his mind and was prepared to announce his decision on Tuesday, 17 March. When the president's office called on Monday to set up a meeting, Byrd knew that he must decline in order not to give the impression that the White House was involved in his choice.³²

The administration was active on another front during these critical days. On 16 March Bryce Harlow reported he had talked to Holton about acquiescing in "supporting Byrd as an 'independent candidate.'" The governor declined because the Virginia Republican party "would not take it" and the "only result would be that [his] power base in the State would be destroyed."³³ He added, "If I make a deal with Byrd now, after all this delay, it will destroy everything I have tried to do to build a Republican Party in Virginia." Furthermore, Holton believed that "Senator Byrd would bring in the red necks if he joined the Party now, and this would destroy what we have been doing extremely well in Virginia. The present Republican Party in Virginia has no desire to befoul its ranks with white supremists." Here Holton was referring to those conservative Democrats who had supported massive resistance and were gravitating toward the Republican ranks by 1970.³⁴

During the weeks before Byrd's announcement, the Democratic State Central Committee made the senator's choice easier by adopting a loyalty oath in late February. The oath required that Democratic nominees pledge their support for all party candidates, including presidential electors, at the next general election. Citing the loyalty oath as the principal reason, Byrd announced on 17 March that he would seek reelection as an Independent Democrat.³⁵ (He later dropped the word "Democrat.") He asked for "the

(second quotation). Samuel E. Carpenter was chairman of the Virginia Republican party during the 1969 campaign. John Ritchie, his correspondent, was executive assistant to Governor Holton.

³² Interview with Harry F. Byrd, Jr., 15 Feb. 1996, Winchester, Va.; "Byrd Slates Statement On Plans," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 14 Mar. 1970, p. B-2.

³³ Holton also stated that he was committed to someone who would "attract the same coalition that elected me." It is most likely that he was referring to M. Caldwell Butler, who was minority leader in the Virginia House of Delegates. See P. Bryce Harlow to H. R. Haldeman, memorandum, 16 Mar. 1970, "political affairs, 1969-70" folder, box 47, WHSF:CF, Confidential Files, Nixon Presidential Materials (quotations); and Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 22 Apr. 1970, folder 191, box 6, Dent Papers.

³⁴ P. Bryce Harlow to H. R. Haldeman, memorandum, 16 Mar. 1970, "political affairs, 1969-70" folder, box 47, WHSF:CF, Confidential Files, Nixon Presidential Materials (quotations); interview with A. Linwood Holton, Jr., 13 Jan. 1998, Richmond, Va.

³⁵ Technically Byrd would not have been bound by the oath to support the Democratic presidential nominee in 1972. Under the terms of the oath, the next general election would have been the one in November 1970. Because he would be elected to a six-year term in 1970, Byrd chose to interpret

support of all Virginians—Democrats, Republicans, independents.” Describing his course as “an uncharted one,” he declared, “I would rather be a free man than a captive senator.”³⁶

While Byrd undoubtedly objected to the loyalty oath, he could not have ignored new data that indicated his survival in a Democratic primary was problematic. He had commissioned from Oliver Quayle a more detailed poll based on interviews in January. The Quayle analysts found that in a hypothetical primary contest with Henry Howell, the poll gave Howell a four-point advantage among Democrats.³⁷ The pollsters declared that, if Byrd decided to avoid the primary, then his support among independents and Republicans was “an extremely healthy sign.”³⁸ The most important conclusion to be drawn from the Quayle survey was that Byrd should abandon the Democratic party for his own political self-preservation.

Before taking such a major step, Byrd consulted with two of his Senate colleagues, Richard B. Russell of Georgia, the president pro tempore, and Russell B. Long of Louisiana, chairman of the Finance Committee, of which Byrd was a member. Russell, whom Byrd considered his “closest friend in the Senate,” at first said he wanted to see the Virginian returned to Washington and “he didn’t care much” how he ran. Like Tuck, however, Russell soon reconsidered. He expressed doubt that Byrd could be re-elected if he campaigned as an Independent. It was just “too much of a risk to take.” Russell, however, assured Byrd of his continued support if he returned as an Independent and subsequently had difficulties in the Senate. Byrd and Long were not close, but Byrd was concerned about keeping his seat on the Finance Committee. When he explained the situation to his Louisiana colleague, Long, smashing his fist in his other hand, exclaimed: “Harry, that’s a ten-strike! You do it. . . . You’ll set yourself aside from all the other politicians. It will be a ten-strike for you. I urge you to do it.” The support of Russell and Long was most encouraging to Byrd. He believed that he could handle whatever discontent developed in the state, but the Senate was another matter. The conversations with his colleagues affirmed that Byrd could depend on “two very influential senators . . . who would

the oath as binding him to the party’s 1972 nominee. “I cannot, and will not, sign an oath to vote for and support an individual whose identity I do not know and whose principles and policies are thus unknown,” Byrd declared (“Text of Sen. Byrd’s Statement,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 18 Mar. 1970, p. B-3).

³⁶ Ibid. (quotations); Harry F. Byrd, Jr., statement, 17 Mar. 1970, in Harry F. Byrd, Jr., scrapbook, Jan.–June 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers; Atkinson, *Dynamic Dominion*, p. 209; “Demo State Central Committee Votes To Require Loyalty Oath of Candidates,” *Winchester Evening Star*, 23 Feb. 1970, in Harry F. Byrd, Jr., scrapbook, Jan.–June 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers; James Latimer, “Byrd Severs Ties With Democrats,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 18 Mar. 1970, p. A-1.

³⁷ Including Republicans and independents who were likely to vote in the primary gave Byrd a four-point lead (voter survey by Oliver Quayle, 3–17 Jan. 1970, box 51, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers).

³⁸ Ibid.

back me up insofar as trying to quiet any rebellion that there might be against me in the Senate.”³⁹

During the weeks after Byrd’s announcement, Holton sought a meeting with the president to explain his position on Byrd’s Independent candidacy. Hugh W. Sloan, Jr., the president’s staff secretary, explained to a skeptical Haldeman that “[t]he purpose of the meeting from the President’s point of view would be to attempt to persuade Governor Holton to back away from his hard line position toward Byrd.” On 1 April Holton told a news conference that Byrd could not be reelected as an Independent and could not get the support of Virginia Republicans unless he joined the party and sought its nomination. Holton added that Byrd would also have to comment on the president’s statement on school desegregation, in which Nixon had declared his “personal belief” that the *Brown* decision “was right in both constitutional and human terms.” Briefing Nixon before his meeting with Holton, Dent wrote that Byrd was “particularly peeved because Holton publicly laid down certain conditions” for Republican support.⁴⁰

A week before his White House visit, Holton met with Republican national chairman Rogers C. B. Morton and the party’s congressional leaders. Holton explained his position regarding Byrd and the necessity of nominating a Republican senatorial candidate in 1970. All expressed support, and Senator John G. Tower of Texas was dispatched to discuss the matter with Byrd. Tower was undoubtedly seeking a commitment from the Virginian to vote with the Republicans to organize the Senate in January 1971. Byrd, however, explained that he “would make no further concessions.” Dent reported that after Holton’s meeting with the party leaders the governor believed that he was gaining support for fielding a Republican candidate “everywhere except at the White House.”⁴¹

Years later Dent and Holton had much different recollections of the governor’s meeting with the president on 23 April. Dent recalled that he and Nixon stressed the importance of Byrd’s voting with the Republicans in organizing the Senate. Nixon explained that Byrd’s election was part of a

³⁹ Interview with Harry F. Byrd, Jr., 15 Feb. 1996, Winchester, Va.

⁴⁰ Harry S. Dent to P. Bryce Harlow, memorandum, 2 Apr. 1970, “political affairs, 1969–70” folder, box 47, WHSF:CF, Confidential Files, Nixon Presidential Materials; P. Bryce Harlow to Dwight L. Chapin, handwritten note, 6 Apr. 1970, on Harry S. Dent to P. Bryce Harlow, memorandum, 2 Apr. 1970, *ibid.*; H. R. Haldeman, handwritten comments on Dwight L. Chapin to H. R. Haldeman, memorandum, 6 Apr. 1970, *ibid.*; Hugh W. Sloan, Jr., to H. R. Haldeman, memorandum, 8 Apr. 1970, *ibid.* (first quotation); Helen Dewar, “Holton Spurns Byrd Until He Joins GOP,” *Washington Post*, 2 Apr. 1970, in Harry F. Byrd, Jr., scrapbook, Jan.–June 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers; James Latimer, “Holton Says Byrd Needs GOP To Win,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 2 Apr. 1970, p. C-1 (second and third quotations); Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 22 Apr. 1970, folder 191, box 6, Dent Papers (fourth quotation). Haldeman scrawled across Chapin’s memorandum in reference to the proposed meeting with Holton: “What is the purpose? What does the P[resident] do or say? What do we get out of it?”

⁴¹ Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 22 Apr. 1970, folder 191, box 6, Dent Papers.

In 1969 financier and philanthropist Lawrence Lewis, Jr. (1918–1995) led 165 other business and community leaders in endorsing the candidacy of Linwood Holton. The financial backing of these former Byrd Democrats was critical to the Republican victory in the autumn. These “New Republicans,” again led by Lewis, hoped the party would support Byrd’s run for the Senate in 1970. Lewis served as treasurer of the Virginia Historical Society, 1980–83, and as president, 1984–86.



Virginia Historical Society

historic opportunity to bring about a southern realignment to be completed before the 1972 presidential election. According to Dent, both he and the president “left the meeting” believing that “Holton was going to cooperate . . . and not be an obstructionist.”⁴² In other words, Holton would not insist that the Republicans nominate their own candidate against Byrd.

Holton recalled a much different conversation. He agreed that Nixon discussed the need for a Republican majority in the Senate and said that “Harry Byrd is a possible ally in that.” The president added, “We would like you to join me in an invitation to him to become a member of the Republican party and run as a Republican . . . for reelection.” Holton replied that Byrd would not switch parties, but “if anybody can get him to do it, it’s you.” Nixon then turned to Bryce Harlow and said, “Bryce, go talk

⁴² Atkinson, *Dynamic Dominion*, pp. 213–14.

to [Byrd] and put it to him ‘cold turkey.’” In the event that Byrd chose to remain an Independent, Nixon said that he knew Holton would have to support a Republican candidate. On the other hand, Nixon would have to remain neutral, and that stance would be interpreted as favorable to Byrd. Holton recalled that he “never gave [Nixon and Dent] any indication that I would accept [Republican] endorsement of Byrd as an Independent or would support the party’s refraining from nominating a candidate to oppose him.”⁴³ Whichever version is true, there is no doubt that Nixon dispatched Harlow to see Byrd.⁴⁴

Bryce Harlow met with Byrd and painted a scenario of how the senator could comfortably enter the Virginia Republican party with assurance he would receive its nomination. “The president,” he suggested, “will invite you to the White House and invite Governor Holton to the White House, and both of them will say, ‘You are our man.’” Byrd considered this proposal to be utterly foolish. As an Independent he wanted the support of all Virginians and “wasn’t in a position to make anybody mad if I could help it.” Gaining little headway, Harlow declared that the White House staff was convinced that Byrd could not win as an Independent. Byrd, bristling, insisted that Harlow tell the White House staff, “I’m going to run as an Independent, and I’m going to be elected as an Independent.”⁴⁵

The White House was not the only source of pressure on Byrd. On 23 April seven conservative businessmen from Richmond, all former Democrats who had supported Holton in 1969, conferred with the senator. They also believed that Byrd could not be elected as an Independent and that he should join the Republican party. Many years later Byrd described the session as “one of the toughest meetings I’ve had” because the businessmen were his friends and he knew that he must disappoint them. Failing in their main purpose, the delegation asked Byrd to drop the word “Democrat” and refer to himself only as an Independent. Byrd agreed. Lawrence Lewis, Jr., the leader of the delegation, told Dent that Byrd would not change his Independent stance, but he would “make a statement saying he needs and welcomes support, and—probably—wants the endorsement of the Republican party.”⁴⁶ Lewis was correct. Byrd wanted as wide a base as possible but was unwilling to make any pledges to Republicans in return.

⁴³ Interview with A. Linwood Holton, Jr., 14 May 1996, Richmond, Va. (first, second, third, and fourth quotations); Atkinson, *Dynamic Dominion*, p. 216 (fifth quotation).

⁴⁴ Based on the evidence, Holton’s version seems the more accurate account.

⁴⁵ Interview with Harry F. Byrd, Jr., 15 Feb. 1996, Winchester, Va.

⁴⁶ Ibid. (first quotation); Helen Dewar, “Byrd Will Remain Independent,” *Washington Post*, 24 Apr. 1970, p. C2; LaRose Smith to Harry S. Dent, memorandum, 23 Apr. 1970, folder 225, box 7, Dent Papers (second quotation).

As their state convention approached in late June, Virginia Republicans faced three choices. They could endorse Byrd's Independent candidacy, take no action, or nominate a Republican to oppose Byrd and the winner of the Democratic primary. Conservatives, favoring an endorsement of Byrd by the state convention, formed Republicans for Byrd, which was secretly financed by Lee R. Nunn, chairman of the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee. When Byrd filed as an Independent on 15 June, he publicly stated that he would welcome Republican endorsement of his candidacy, but he would still make no commitments.⁴⁷

Led by Congressman Joel Broyhill, the pro-Byrd forces in the Republican party worked to obtain the Republican convention's endorsement of the senator. They hired Brad Hays, a political consultant, to manage the campaign. Hays contacted delegates by phone and mail to sway them to Byrd. According to Richard T. Short, who was active in Republicans for Byrd, they were "making progress," but they were divided on tactics. Some of Broyhill's associates, concerned about Holton's reaction, suggested that the convention make no nomination. Ultimately they won the congressman to their point of view.⁴⁸ Undoubtedly those favoring compromise calculated that a resolution calling for no nomination had a better chance of passing than an endorsement of Byrd.

At a banquet on the eve of the convention, Holton made a rousing speech urging the delegates to field a Republican candidate in the Senate race. Knowing that the pro-Byrd forces would present a resolution making no nomination the next day, the governor delivered an oration that has become known in Virginia political lore as the "fire engine" speech. "I've seen speculation in the papers that you'll go home having done nothing," Holton told the delegates. "Frankly, I can't believe it. We're the biggest, strongest and the best party in Virginia. . . . I can't believe we'll do nothing. Doing nothing would be like having the biggest, shiniest, newest fire engine and not taking it to a fire."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 9 June 1970, "June 1970" folder, box 6, WHSF: President's Office Files (hereafter cited as POF), Handwriting File, Nixon Presidential Materials; George Kelley, "Byrd Officially Files Candidacy, Would Welcome GOP Backing," *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*, 16 June 1970, p. A1; Shelley Rolfe, "Byrd Makes Official Bid For Election," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 16 June 1970, p. B-1; Helen Dewar, "Byrd Files Independent Candidacy, Invites GOP in Va. to Endorse Him," *Washington Post*, 16 June 1970, in Harry F. Byrd, Jr., scrapbook, Jan.-June 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers.

⁴⁸ Atkinson, *Dynamic Dominion*, p. 214; Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 9 June 1970, "June 1970" folder, WHSF:POF, Handwriting File, Nixon Presidential Materials; Helen Dewar, "Virginia GOP Agonizing Over Byrd," *Washington Post*, 26 June 1970, in Harry F. Byrd, Jr., scrapbook, Jan.-June 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers; Shelley Rolfe, "GOP Group to Seek Defense Against Byrd Endorsement," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 18 June 1970, in *ibid.*; interview with Richard T. Short, 12 Dec. 1995, Norfolk, Va. (quotation); telephone interview with Richard T. Short, 22 Aug. 1996.

⁴⁹ Shelley Rolfe, "Holton Asks Republican as Candidate," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 27 June 1970, p. 1, in Harry F. Byrd, Jr., scrapbook, Jan.-June 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers.

WHAT
Holton
HAS DONE FOR VIRGINIA
Garland
CAN DO FOR THE NATION



Senate Candidate Ray Garland has the enthusiastic support of Virginia Governor Linwood Holton.

VOTE REPUBLICAN NOVEMBER 3, 1970

YOU KNOW WHERE HE STANDS!
Ray Garland
FOR U. S. SENATE

Garland-for-Senate Campaign Committee:
State Sen. James C. Turk &
Del. Vincent Callahan

VOTE REPUBLICAN NOV. 3, 1970
FOR U. S. SENATE

Ray
Garland



will
win on
the
issues

A. Linwood Holton, Jr., Executive Papers, Library of Virginia

A native of Roanoke, Ray Lucian Garland (b. 1934) taught history at Roanoke College for eight years before being elected to the General Assembly. During his unsuccessful bid for the United States Senate in 1970, he endorsed Nixon's welfare reform proposals, decried attempts by Congress and the states to abridge the right to bear arms, and supported a constitutional amendment to preserve neighborhood schools. He served in the House of Delegates from 1968 until 1980 (the last two years as assistant minority leader) and in the state Senate from 1980 to 1983.

Even Byrd's supporters acknowledged the effectiveness of the governor's speech. Broyhill recalled it as "a devastating speech, a most effective speech, no question about that." When Holton pleaded, "You know, I hope there will be a victory for a Republican candidate tomorrow," about half the delegates present stood and applauded. After the speech and during the next day, Holton invited delegates to the governor's mansion in his continuing effort to persuade them to nominate a candidate.⁵⁰

Although the convention was a triumph for Holton, it was an unpleasant experience for Broyhill. Early in the proceedings he allowed his enthusiasm to get the better of his judgment when he expressed the view that, if the Republicans tapped Byrd or refrained from nominating a candidate, Byrd would vote with the Republicans to organize the Senate in January. D. Lathan Mims, Byrd's campaign manager, immediately called the senator in Washington and told him of Broyhill's comments. Byrd issued a statement disavowing the congressman's remarks and maintaining that he had made "no commitments to anyone." The next day Broyhill offered his resolution making no nomination amid a chorus of boos and jeers from the delegates. In an emotional debate he called for the party to sit out the 1970 race. Opposing the resolution, Caldwell Butler argued that "[t]he Republican party is not a sometimes thing. We've taken our place in a strong two-party system which we promised the people of Virginia. We have obligations and, by God, we will discharge them." Butler's speech seemed to sum up the feelings of the majority at the convention. Broyhill's resolution was defeated by a margin of more than 200 votes. The convention then nominated Ray L. Garland, a little-known state legislator from Roanoke whom Holton had recruited to run.⁵¹ The governor had been unable to persuade any prominent Republican to challenge Byrd, but his speech and his personal politicking had convinced the delegates to nominate a Republican candidate for the Senate. To Don Hill of the *Roanoke Times*, it

⁵⁰ Interview with Joel T. Broyhill, 23 May 1996, Arlington, Va. (first quotation); Shelley Rolfe, "Holton Asks Republican as Candidate," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 27 June 1970, p. 1 (second quotation); Ken Ringle, "Byrd Backers' 'Hired Gun' Tells How He Missed," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 29 June 1970, p. 1; telephone interview with Richard T. Short, 22 Aug. 1996; Melville Carico, "'Mountain Valley Boys' Give Holton Victory," *Roanoke Times*, 29 June 1970, in Harry F. Byrd, Jr., scrapbook, Jan.-June 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers.

⁵¹ Atkinson, *Dynamic Dominion*, p. 215; *Lynchburg News*, 27 June 1970, in Harry F. Byrd, Jr., scrapbook, Jan.-June 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers (first quotation); interview with Harry F. Byrd, Jr., 15 Feb. 1996, Winchester, Va.; George Kelley, "Va. GOP Nominates Garland," *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*, 28 June 1970, p. A-1 (second quotation); James Latimer, "Quiet Huddle 'Killed' Move to Back Byrd," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 29 June 1970, p. B-1; interview with A. Linwood Holton, Jr., 14 May 1996, Richmond, Va. Broyhill's resolution was defeated by a vote of 634.8 to 419.2. Garland received 630 votes to 358 for Dr. Kenneth M. Haggerty, a member of the Arlington County board of supervisors. During the spring Haggerty had been the only announced candidate for the Republican nomination.

seemed that Holton and his allies had “administered a defeat to the southern strategy concept.”⁵²

Although Nixon may have been upset with Holton about the results of the Republican convention, the White House did not view the outcome as a defeat. After Byrd’s rebuff of Harlow, the president had refrained from direct intervention in the Virginia Senate race before the Republicans convened in June. In late May the White House commissioned a poll at the request of Holton. The results must have been more pleasing to Dent and the president than to the governor. The figures revealed that Byrd would have “no major problem” in a three-way race because such a contest would “split the anti-Byrd vote, not the pro-Byrd forces.” As the state convention approached, Dent informed the president of the activities of the Republicans for Byrd, but his memoranda reveal little anxiety about the nomination. He predicted that the convention would “either endorse Byrd or nominate a weak candidate. Thus, Byrd should win.”⁵³

To the annoyance of some anti-Byrd Republicans, Dent made a visit to the floor of the convention in Richmond. His appearance could easily have been interpreted as White House interference in Virginia’s affairs. To Broyhill, however, it was an “unobtrusive way of subtly conveying” that the “President is in support of what we are doing.” Dent had not informed the governor that he was coming, and he spent most of his time with Brad Hays, who was managing the pro-Byrd effort. Holton was surprised by Dent’s appearance, but, as his aide John R. Ritchie, Jr., told columnist Rowland Evans, he was “not upset . . . especially since [Dent’s presence] appeared to have a negative effect.” Dent’s visit was brief, and he suggested to Broyhill that he “not press the fight at the convention” for Byrd. Broyhill persisted because he believed “he could win or come close” on the resolution not to nominate a candidate. After the convention Dent informed Nixon that “[t]he liberal newsmen are rejoicing over Holton’s defeat of Byrd at the GOP convention.” Dent, however, regarded the outcome as Holton’s victory in “a personal battle on his own turf, but,” Dent concluded, the governor “probably lost the war.”⁵⁴

⁵² Don Hill, “What Will Byrd Do?” *Roanoke Times*, 13 Sept. 1970, in Harry F. Byrd, Jr., scrapbook, July–Oct. 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers.

⁵³ Interview with confidential source, 10 June 1996; Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 27 May 1970, folder 475, box 19, Dent Papers; Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memoranda, 9 (quotations), 12 June 1970, folder 225, box 7, *ibid.* The confidential source heard Nixon criticize Holton at an Oval Office meeting after the November election.

⁵⁴ Ernest B. Furgurson, “Bright Day for the Virginia GOP,” *Baltimore Sun*, 30 June 1970, in Harry F. Byrd, Jr., scrapbook, Jan.–June 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers; Adam Clymer, “Dent Buys Byrd Forces in Virginia GOP,” *Baltimore Sun*, 27 June 1970, in *ibid.* (first and second quotations); John R. Ritchie, Jr., to A. Linwood Holton, Jr., memorandum, 29 June 1970, “Republican Convention, June 26–27” folder, box 23, Holton Executive Papers (third quotation); Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 29 June 1970, folder 225, box 7, Dent Papers (fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth quotations).

HOW BYRD USES HIS SENATE VOTE AGAINST THE PEOPLE OF VIRGINIA

(From official roll-call votes on key issues recorded in THE CONGRESSIONAL RECORD)

Tax cuts and tax reforms that help all Virginia taxpayers	BYRD AGAINST
Protection of postal workers' union security in postal reform bill	BYRD AGAINST
Protection of security of workers' unions through repeal of Taft-Hartley Section 14b	BYRD AGAINST
Safeguarding free collective bargaining without the threat of compulsory arbitration	BYRD AGAINST
Helping fight water pollution by increasing funds for community water and sewer facilities	BYRD AGAINST
Providing minimum social security payment to Virginia's elderly of \$100 a month for individuals and \$150 to married couples	BYRD AGAINST
Reimbursement of drug costs for Virginia's elderly under Medicare program	BYRD AGAINST
Effective aid to education programs that help Virginia's grade and high school students	BYRD AGAINST
Increasing higher education aid to open up colleges to more Virginia youngsters from low and middle income families	BYRD AGAINST
Adequate funding for construction of community mental health centers	BYRD AGAINST
Improving unemployment compensation	BYRD AGAINST
Minimum wage increases	BYRD AGAINST
Providing free school lunches for children of the poor	BYRD AGAINST
Protecting right of unions to participate in politics	BYRD AGAINST

Let's Stop Two Byrds With One Vote

Vote for the Man who'll Vote for You

VOTE RAWLINGS
U. S. Senate — November 3

Virginia Historical Society

George C. Rawlings, Jr., of Fredericksburg entered the General Assembly in 1964 as a proponent of the progressive programs of the New Frontier. In 1966 he successfully challenged Organization stalwart Howard W. Smith in the Democratic primary but lost the race for the Eighth District's congressional seat to conservative Republican William L. Scott. Four years later, the self-styled "Roosevelt-Truman-Kennedy Democrat" came out swinging against Harry Byrd, Jr.

Richard Nixon ignored Republican nominee Ray Garland and instead made known his preference for Harry Byrd in Virginia's Senate race. In one of several high-profile appearances, Byrd was Nixon's guest at a state dinner honoring Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1911–1979), the president of Mexico.



Harry F. Byrd, Jr., Papers (#10,320a-b), Special Collections Department, Manuscripts Division, University of Virginia Library

Although Byrd would have preferred a two-man race and a Republican endorsement, he was fortunate in his opponents. As his aide, William Utz, recalled years later, “We probably couldn’t have picked two better candidates to run against.” The only possible Democratic candidate who might have posed a challenge to Byrd was the popular young lieutenant governor, J. Sargeant Reynolds. During the spring, however, Reynolds called on Byrd at his Washington office and informed him that he would not seek the Senate seat. Reynolds cited two reasons: “Number one, I don’t think I can beat you. Number two, even if I beat you, there would be a substantial percentage of the people who wouldn’t forgive me for the rest of my political life.”⁵⁵

Neither did Henry Howell express interest in running for the United States Senate. His ambition was to be elected governor. Political scientist Larry J. Sabato described the July Democratic senatorial primary as “the most apathetic state election in Virginia’s recent history.” Fewer than

⁵⁵ Interview with William Nelson Utz, 13 Sept. 1996, Charlottesville, Va. (first quotation); interview with Harry F. Byrd, Jr., 15 Feb. 1996, Winchester, Va. (second quotation).

CRUSADE FOR VOTERS

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
SAMPLE BALLOT

CITY OF RICHMOND

GENERAL ELECTION

Tuesday, November 3, 1970

For United States Senator
(Vote for Not More Than One)

☐ RAY L. GARLAND

☒ GEORGE C. RAWLINGS, JR.

☐ HARRY F. BYRD, JR.

**For the House of Representatives in
Congress from the Third District**
(Vote for Not More Than One)

☒ J. HARVIE WILKINSON, III

☐ DAVID E. SATTERFIELD, III

TAKE THESE SAMPLE BALLOTS
INTO THE POLLING BOOTH
WITH YOU

Polls open 6:00 A.M.
close 7:00 P.M.

For transportation to the polls
call 643-1146 or 643-5147

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
SAMPLE BALLOT

CITY OF RICHMOND
GENERAL ELECTION
Tuesday, November 3, 1970

PROPOSED
CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

Proposal No. 1
Main Body of the Constitution

Question: Shall the Constitution be generally amended and revised, as agreed to by the General Assembly at its 1969 and 1970 sessions (except for the three proposals separately stated below)?

☒ YES

☐ NO

Proposal No. 2
Lotteries

Question: Shall the Constitution be amended by repealing Section 60 (which prohibits lotteries), leaving it to the General Assembly to decide whether to authorize or prohibit lotteries?

☒ YES

☐ NO

Proposal No. 3
General Obligation Bonds

Question: Shall the Constitution be amended to permit the General Assembly, subject to approval by the people in a referendum, to authorize general obligation bonds for specific capital projects, the total not to exceed 1.15 times the annual income and sales tax revenues of the Commonwealth?

☒ YES

☐ NO

Proposal No. 4
Revenue Bonds

Question: Shall the Constitution be amended to permit the General Assembly, by a 2/3 vote, to pledge the full faith and credit of the Commonwealth to revenue bonds issued for revenue-producing capital projects if the Governor certifies that the anticipated revenues from such projects will be sufficient to pay principal and interest as they become due, the total not to exceed 1.15 times the annual income and sales tax revenues of the Commonwealth?

☒ YES

☐ NO

Virginia Historical Society

In 1970 the Crusade for Voters endorsed Democrat George C. Rawlings, Jr., in the Senate race and Republican J. Harvie Wilkinson III, a protégé of Linwood Holton, in the Third Congressional District. "We must stick together and vote together," urged crusade president M. Philmore Howlette on the back of this sample ballot. "The last remains of the Byrd Machine is spending thousands of dollars to break up the Crusade's S-O-L-I-D-A-R-I-T-Y of vote. We don't have the money to fight back, BUT WE DEPEND UPON YOU—TO CLOSE RANKS AS USUAL—AND VOTE OUR RECOMMENDATIONS ON ELECTION DAY. You can't beat honesty and solidarity."

130,000 voters went to the polls as former delegate George C. Rawlings, Jr., an ally of Henry Howell, defeated Delegate Clive L. DuVal II by only 700 votes. The meager turnout encouraged Byrd. The voters seemed to be waiting to cast their ballots in the fall election.⁵⁶

Garland, a thirty-six-year-old former college professor who was associated with his family's drugstore chain in the Roanoke area, had no statewide following, and his candidacy experienced difficulties from the beginning.⁵⁷ He needed to keep as much of Holton's winning coalition of 1969 intact as possible, but many conservative Republicans had no intention of forsaking Byrd for the moderate Garland. This group included the wealthy former Democrats who had financed Holton's bid. Without their backing, Garland would have to run a low-budget campaign unless he could obtain significant aid from the national party. Holding the support of blacks and organized labor also proved to be impossible because the Democratic nominee, George Rawlings, a self-described "Roosevelt-Truman-Kennedy Democrat," was a liberal whose views were more attractive to those constituencies. Both the Crusade for Voters and the AFL-CIO endorsed him.⁵⁸

The Garland campaign looked in vain to the White House and the national Republican party for help. In fact, Dent recommended that no financial assistance be given to Garland. Nixon's aide still hoped that Byrd would vote with the Republicans to organize the Senate "if the actions of the Virginia Republican Party don't scare off his vote."⁵⁹

There was one instance, however, when Garland received endorsement from an administration figure, but it was most likely inadvertent. On 26 October a reporter asked Vice-President Agnew at an airport rally in Raleigh, North Carolina, if his support of Republican candidates included Garland. Agnew responded, "Yes, that's fair to say." He added that he did not intend to go to Virginia to campaign, but that those plans had nothing

⁵⁶ Larry Sabato, *Virginia Votes 1969-1974* (Charlottesville, 1976), pp. 23-24. A third candidate, Milton Colvin, a professor at Washington and Lee University, received 9.5 percent of the vote.

⁵⁷ "Placards Read Nominate and GOP Did," Harrisonburg *Daily News-Record*, 29 June 1970, in Harry F. Byrd, Jr., scrapbook, Jan.-June 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers.

⁵⁸ Atkinson, *Dynamic Dominion*, p. 217; Tom Wilkinson, "Byrd Singles Out Rawlings in Attack," *Washington Post*, 1 Oct. 1970, in Harry F. Byrd, Jr., scrapbook, July-Oct. 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers (quotation); David D. Ryan, "Voters' Crusade Backs Rawlings And Wilkinson," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 28 Sept. 1970, p. B1; "Garland Loses Swing Vote to Rawlings Which Makes Byrd an Obvious Favorite," *Roanoke Times*, 1 Oct. 1970, in Harry F. Byrd, Jr., scrapbook, July-Oct. 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers.

⁵⁹ Warren B. French, Jr., to Harry S. Dent, 12 Aug. 1970, "Honorable Ray L. Garland, U.S. Senate" folder, box 22, Holton Executive Papers; Harry S. Dent to H. R. Haldeman, memorandum, 5 Oct. 1970, "1970 politics" folder 2, box 10, Harry S. Dent Files, 1969-70, WHSF:SMOF, Nixon Presidential Materials (quotation).

to do with the candidates. "But you notice," he emphasized, "I didn't duck your question. I endorse Ray Garland."⁶⁰

After he returned to Washington, Agnew either realized or was informed of his blunder. Bryce Harlow called Byrd, who was in Lynchburg after a long day on the campaign trail. "Senator, a great American wants to talk with you. I'll put the vice-president of the United States on the line," Harlow said triumphantly. Agnew confessed:

Senator, I want to tell you before you read it in the papers. I was in North Carolina today, and at the airport the press accosted me and asked whether I was supporting all the Republican nominees for the Senate. I told him, 'Yes, I am.' [The reporter] said, 'Does that include Virginia?' You know, in order to protect my credibility, I had to say, 'Yes, I am supporting the Republican nominee in Virginia.'⁶¹

Byrd was furious. He snapped: "Ted, that's a lot of bunk, and you know it. Protect your credibility? That's a lot of bunk. When you went to New York, you didn't endorse the Republican [Senator Charles E.] Goodell; you endorsed his opponent, Jim Buckley [the Conservative party candidate]. So don't tell me you had to endorse my opponent to protect your credibility."⁶²

Agnew responded sheepishly, "Well, I'll guarantee you that I'll not mention the Virginia campaign once again, ever again."⁶³

While Agnew was speaking out of turn in North Carolina, the president was doing what he could to indicate his preference for Harry Byrd, Jr. The most dramatic instance of Nixon's benevolent neutrality toward Byrd was his invitation to the senator to join him at the western White House at San Clemente, California, to discuss the administration's welfare bill, called the Family Assistance Plan. In addition, Nixon asked Byrd to be a guest at a state dinner honoring the president of Mexico. Nixon's actions communicated his preference.⁶⁴

Many Virginia Republicans deeply resented the White House's attitude toward the Virginia Senate race. Columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak reported in mid-October that "[p]arty workers are demoralized [and] money is scarce." An exasperated Holton expressed his frustration with the lack of support from the national GOP, which was "seriously

⁶⁰ Helen Dewar, "Agnew Endorses Garland," *Washington Post*, 27 Oct. 1970, in Harry F. Byrd, Jr., scrapbook, Oct.-Dec. 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers.

⁶¹ Interview with Harry F. Byrd, Jr., 15 Feb. 1996, Winchester, Va.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Wayne Woodlief, "Byrd To Meet With Nixon," *Norfolk Ledger-Star*, 2 Sept. 1970, in Harry F. Byrd, Jr., scrapbook, July-Oct. 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers; Garnett D. Horner, "Nixon Trying Again To Get Family Aid Bill to Full Senate," *Washington Evening Star*, n.d., in *ibid.*; "Byrd In California For Welfare Talks," *Strasburg Northern Virginia Daily*, 3 Sept. 1970, in *ibid.*; Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon Is Host to the President of Mexico in California," *New York Times*, 4 Sept. 1970, p. 2.

hurting our efforts to build a strong Republican party in Virginia.” He perceptively noted that the strategy encouraged Democrats who were considering joining the Republican ranks to switch their support from candidate to candidate in various campaigns “without regard to party labels.” He believed that “[t]he creation of this new force [would] postpone into the indefinite future the opportunity to make Virginia a solid Republican state.” Holton’s prediction was accurate. There emerged a nebulous entity known as the Coalition, a group of Byrd conservatives who did not affiliate with the Republican party but continued to regard themselves as independents.⁶⁵

Throughout the fall Byrd stressed not only such standard conservative themes as federal spending, welfare, and crime but also his opposition to busing to achieve racial balance in the schools. Court-ordered busing once again moved the emotional issue of race to the forefront of Virginia politics. In late July federal district judge Robert R. Merhige, Jr., approved a desegregation plan that called for the busing of 13,000 students in the city of Richmond. According to historian Robert A. Pratt, “Busing had clearly become the new symbol of the federal government’s encroachment upon state’s rights,” an issue long exploited by the Byrds.⁶⁶

For Linwood Holton, Merhige’s busing edict posed a direct challenge because he had three children in the Richmond public schools. Holton was determined to set an example of compliance with the law during the busing crisis. On the first day of classes, he accompanied his thirteen-year-old daughter to the predominantly black John F. Kennedy High School, while his wife escorted their other two school-age children to a middle school in which they were the only whites in their respective classes. Holton’s action shocked many conservative Virginians, whose anger was transferred to the governor’s ally, Ray Garland. This hostility caused Garland to stress his

⁶⁵ *Evans-Novak Political Report*, 14 Oct. 1970, p. 3, in “Republican Senatorial Candidate” folder, box 22, Holton Executive Papers (first quotation); A. Linwood Holton, Jr., to Harry S. Dent, 22 Oct. 1970, folder 225, box 7, Dent Papers (second, third, and fourth quotations); Atkinson, *Dynamic Dominion*, pp. 291–93. On the same day in late October that Holton wrote Dent, Warren B. French, Jr., asked the president to reevaluate the situation in Virginia and support Garland through a brief presidential visit, “the customary campaign picture” with the president, or a press statement. See Warren B. French, Jr., to Richard M. Nixon, 22 Oct. 1970, “Honorable Ray L. Garland, U.S. Senate” folder, box 22, Holton Executive Papers.

⁶⁶ Tom Reilly, “Byrd Assails Budget ‘Fat,’” *Norfolk Ledger-Star*, 10 Sept. 1970, in Harry F. Byrd, Jr., scrapbook, July–Oct. 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers; “Byrd Criticizes Welfare Spending,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 26 Sept. 1970, p. B-1; Melville Carico, “Byrd Blames Court For Crime Increase,” *Roanoke Times*, 18 Aug. 1970, in Harry F. Byrd, Jr., scrapbook, July–Oct. 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers; Helen Dewar, “Byrd Asks Prevention of Busing,” *Washington Post*, 6 Aug. 1970, in *ibid.*; George M. Kelley, “A Ready-Made Rallying Point for Byrd, Jr.,” *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*, 9 Aug. 1970, p. C-3; George M. Kelley, “Busing Issue Haunts Senate, House Races,” *ibid.*, 18 Oct. 1970, p. C-3; Robert A. Pratt, *The Color of Their Skin: Education and Race in Richmond, Virginia, 1954–89*, Carter G. Woodson Institute Series in Black Studies (Charlottesville and London, 1992), pp. 49–50, 58 (quotation).

Also on the ballot in November 1970 was a proposal to ratify a new state constitution. Lieutenant Governor J. Sargeant Reynolds, terminally ill with a brain tumor, returned from treatment at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in New York in October to campaign with Holton for approval of the document. In the special election held after Reynolds's death to fill the lieutenant governor's post, George P. Shafaran, Holton's hand-picked nominee, finished third.



Virginia Historical Society

opposition to busing, a stance that made it even more difficult to gain black support.⁶⁷

On election day, Harry Byrd, Jr., won an impressive victory. He garnered 54 percent of the vote to 31 percent for Rawlings and 15 percent for the hapless Garland. The turnout was the largest in a senatorial election in Virginia history. White House polls had been accurate in forecasting that the incumbent's opponents would split the anti-Byrd vote. Factional divisions enabled Byrd to draw support from both parties.⁶⁸

After the election, Dent remained intent on attracting Virginia conservatives into the Republican party as the first step toward a party realignment. Although the Republicans had failed to gain the necessary seats to make Byrd's vote decisive, the White House continued to hope that the Virginian would join with the Republicans in organizing the Senate. Dent expected that this assistance would be part of a party realignment

⁶⁷ Pratt, *Color of Their Skin*, p. 59; Atkinson, *Dynamic Dominion*, pp. 217–18.

⁶⁸ Sabato, *Virginia Votes*, pp. 24–28, 33–35. In mid-June Dent informed Nixon of a Bucci survey conducted in late May. "The pollster," he wrote, "says . . . [t]he probable effect of a Republican entry would be to divide the anti-Byrd forces, thus assuring Byrd's re-election" (Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 12 June 1970, folder 225, box 7, Dent Papers).



*Harry F. Byrd, Jr., Papers (#10,320a-b), Special Collections Department, Manuscripts Division,
University of Virginia Library*

Byrd won reelection as an Independent for a second time in 1976. He received 57.2 percent of the vote over Democrat Elmo R. Zumwalt (38.3 percent) and Independent Martin H. Perper (4.5 percent). Here, Byrd congratulates the recipient of a grant from the Department of Energy in October 1979.

that would include former governor Godwin, who had supported Byrd's reelection, two or three Virginia congressmen, and numerous state legislators.⁶⁹

In mid-November Dent visited Byrd in his office in Winchester. According to a memorandum Dent sent to the president, Byrd "unquestionably indicated an interest in moving [into the Republican ranks] sooner than 1972." Dent also recalled Byrd's remark that he previously had told the president that he would make the switch in 1972 but "had never

⁶⁹ Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 27 Nov. 1970, folder 191, box 6, Dent Papers; Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 2 Dec. 1970, "Nov. 1970–Dec. 1970" folder, box 8, WHSF:POF, Handwriting File, Nixon Presidential Materials; George M. Kelley, "Byrd Gets Godwin's Support," *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*, 13 Aug. 1970, p. A-1; "Byrd Group Will Be Led By Godwin," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 9 Sept. 1970, p. B-1.

revealed this [intention] to anyone else." Byrd, however, has denied that he ever made such a commitment to Nixon or Dent.⁷⁰

If Byrd had been considering switching to the Republican party, there were serious obstacles to such a move. Determined to retain his committee assignments, he was aware of a Republican caucus rule that limited Republican senators to only one of the four principal committees. He believed that by voting with the Democrats he could retain two important committee seats for the conservative viewpoint, seats that might otherwise be filled by liberal Democrats. Byrd also had personal reservations about switching party allegiances. He had a close relationship with the southern Democratic committee chairmen. To vote with the Republicans would have meant voting against his "closest friend in the Senate," Richard Russell of Georgia.⁷¹ Byrd also enjoyed a cordial personal relationship with Democratic majority leader Mike Mansfield of Montana. He was not as close to the Republican minority leader, Hugh D. Scott, Jr., of Pennsylvania.⁷²

Byrd and the president met in the Oval Office on 11 December to discuss the senator's political plans. Byrd explained why he had to support Russell in the key vote to organize the Senate. Either the president or Dent suggested he might abstain, but Byrd expressed his desire to vote on the matter. Although stating his own admiration for Russell, Nixon declared that Byrd's vote "could give the impression that [he] had reverted to the Democrat party and that this would undo all the good that had been done in breaking the ice as an Independent on the road to becoming a Republican before 1972." Nixon emphasized the significance of Byrd's

⁷⁰ Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 10 Dec. 1970, folder 191, box 6, Dent Papers (quotations); interview with Harry F. Byrd, Jr., 15 Feb. 1996, Winchester, Va.

⁷¹ Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 2 Dec. 1970, "Nov. 1970–Dec. 1970" folder, box 8, WHSF:POF, Handwriting File, Nixon Presidential Materials; Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 10 Dec. 1970, folder 191, box 6, Dent Papers; interview with Harry F. Byrd, Jr., 15 Feb. 1996, Winchester, Va. (quotation). White House assistant Lamar Alexander had mentioned this situation in a memorandum to Bryce Harlow in May. "Byrd's oldest loyalties," Alexander wrote, "are to the Southern Democrat Committee chairmen (Russell, Stennis, etc.) who Byrd, Sr. used to bring home to Virginia while Harry was growing up. He would not be inclined to cast the vote that would deprive them of their chairmanships" (Lamar Alexander to P. Bryce Harlow, memorandum, 4 May 1970, "Senate" folder, box 15, White House Central Files [hereafter cited as WHCF]: Subject Files, Nixon Presidential Materials). After a lengthy conversation with Byrd on the flight east from the western White House, presidential assistant William E. Timmons wrote Nixon that he believed "there is very little chance [Byrd] will help organize a Republican Senate." Among other considerations, Timmons cited the senator's "close relationship with the southern Democratic Chairmen" (William E. Timmons to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 5 Sept. 1970, "Senate, 1969–1970" folder, box 22, WHCF: Subject Files, Nixon Presidential Materials). Byrd's aide also stressed the close relationships Byrd had with senior Democrats. "These were people he had known for many, many years. It was almost as if he had served in the Senate with these people [for decades]" (interview with William Nelson Utz, 13 Sept. 1996, Charlottesville, Va.).

⁷² For evidence of Byrd's relationship with Mansfield, see Mike Mansfield to Harry F. Byrd, Jr., 5 Aug. 1970, "correspondence—senators and congressmen 1970" folder, box 238, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers; and Maureen Mansfield to Harry F. Byrd, Jr., 13 Oct. 1970, *ibid*.

switching parties not only in Virginia and in the Senate but also “all across the country.” Byrd remained unconvinced. He mentioned that Majority Leader Mansfield “had been helpful” in his race as an Independent, “whereas Senator Scott had tried to help bring about his defeat.”⁷³

Despite what they interpreted as Byrd’s promise to join the Republicans by 1972, Dent and Harlow agreed that, if Byrd did not change before Congress convened in January, he would likely remain an Independent “and continue as a nominal Democrat for seniority and Committee assignment purposes.” In frustration, Dent warned, “[W]e may never get him across the line.”⁷⁴

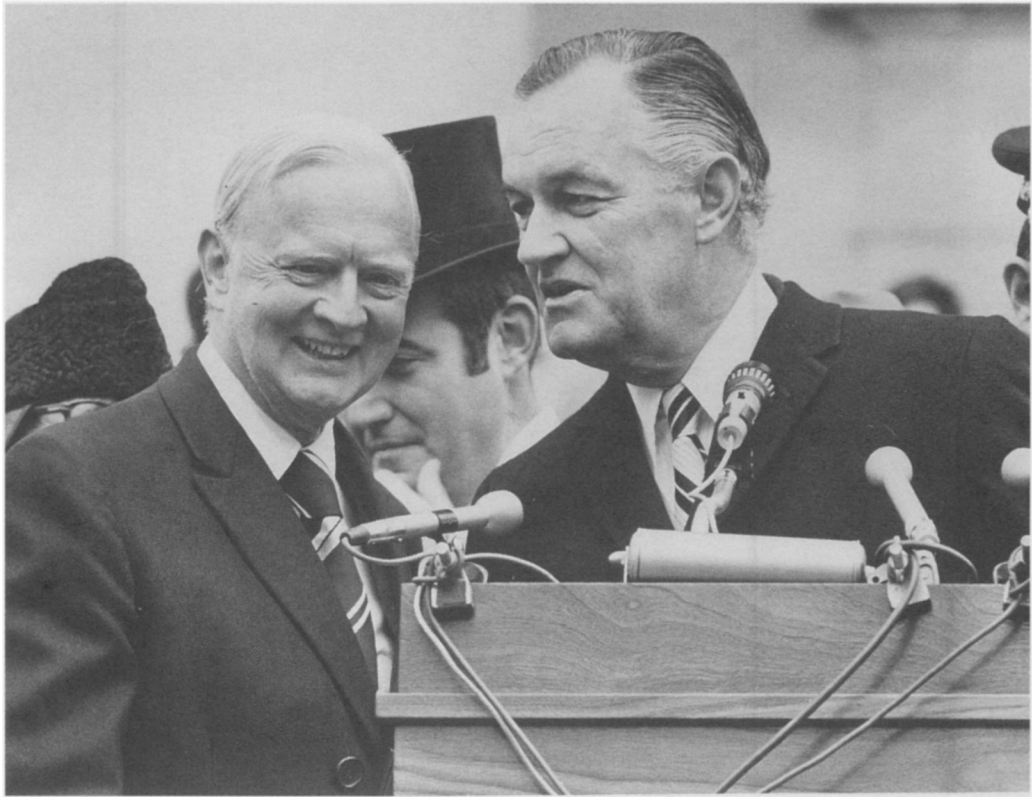
Resisting the entreaties of a popular president as well as some of his closest friends in Virginia, Byrd continued to vote with the Democrats in organizing the Senate. Henry Howell, the leader of the liberal faction in the Virginia Democratic party, wrote to Mansfield and other prominent Democratic senators imploring them to bar Byrd from the party caucus and strip him of his seniority in committee assignments. Senators Sam J. Ervin, Jr., of North Carolina, William Proxmire of Wisconsin, and Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia sent Byrd copies of their responses sharply disagreeing with Howell. On the subject of party loyalty, Ervin declared, “I do not view the Democratic party as a monolithic party like the communist party where every member must hew to a party line or suffer banishment.” Despite the objections of a few liberals, such as Fred R. Harris of Oklahoma and Harold E. Hughes of Iowa, Byrd was warmly welcomed into the Democratic caucus when the new Congress convened. Pursuing a carefully calculated course of action throughout 1970, Byrd had saved his political career, preserved his status in the Senate, and outmaneuvered the president of the United States.⁷⁵

Of the three political strategies adopted in the Virginia senatorial election of 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr.’s was the most successful. He was reelected

⁷³ Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 11 Dec. 1970, folder 191, box 6, Dent Papers.

⁷⁴ Harry S. Dent to Richard M. Nixon, memorandum, 10 Dec. 1970, folder 191, box 6, *ibid.*

⁷⁵ Henry E. Howell, Jr., to Mike Mansfield, 3 Dec. 1970, “correspondence—senators and congressmen 1970” folder, box 238, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers; Henry E. Howell, Jr., to Robert C. Byrd, 8 Dec. 1970, *ibid.*; Robert C. Byrd to Henry E. Howell, Jr., 18 Dec. 1970, *ibid.*; Sam J. Ervin, Jr., to Henry E. Howell, Jr., 16 Dec. 1970, *ibid.* (quotation); William Proxmire to Henry E. Howell, Jr., 15 Dec. 1970, *ibid.*; Atkinson, *Dynamic Dominion*, p. 237; Paul Hope, “Take Byrd’s Seniority, Hughes of Iowa Urges,” *Washington Evening Star*, 24 Nov. 1970, in Harry F. Byrd, Jr., scrapbook, Nov.–Dec. 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers; Warren Weaver, Jr., “Liberal Democrats Press Senate Seniority Reform,” *New York Times*, 1 Dec. 1970, p. 38; Wayne Woodlief, “Sen. Mansfield Believes Byrd Assignments Safe,” *Roanoke World News*, 12 Nov. 1970, in Harry F. Byrd, Jr., scrapbook, Nov.–Dec. 1970, Harry Byrd, Jr., Papers.

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Unhappy with the direction the state party was moving, former Democratic governor Mills Edwin Godwin, Jr. (b. 1914) endorsed Nixon in 1972 and served as advisory chairman of the Virginia Committee for the Re-election of the President. The next year, Godwin announced that he would seek another term as governor. Lawrence Lewis, Jr., Thomas C. Boushall, Richard T. Short, and other business leaders who had endorsed Holton in 1969 urged Godwin to join the Republican party formally. With the encouragement of Harry Byrd, Jr. (left), Godwin made the switch and narrowly defeated Henry Howell in an election the pundits dubbed “Armageddon.”

as an Independent in 1976 without official Republican opposition. Retiring from the Senate in 1983, Byrd never joined the Republican party, despite a plea from President Ronald Reagan in 1981. As political commentator Charles McDowell observed in 1980, “Now [Senator Byrd] has the best of all worlds. He sits in the Democratic caucus, gets good committee assignments from the Democrats, supports the Democrats on organizational issues, and then votes with the Republicans. He doesn’t even have to run in primaries or take sides in factional fights.”⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Atkinson, *Dynamic Dominion*, pp. 238 (quotation), 304–5; Tyler Whitley, “Rally guests offer tepid support,” *Richmond News Leader*, 25 Sept. 1981, p. 1-A.

For President Nixon, Byrd's refusal to join the Republican party was a disappointment but not a major setback. Byrd's vote would not have changed control of the Senate in 1971. In his excellent study of the Virginia Republican party since 1945, Frank B. Atkinson described Byrd's action in 1970 as an "Opportunity Lost" to bring about a thorough party realignment in the state.⁷⁷ Byrd's course, however, did not prevent former governor Mills E. Godwin, Jr., from switching to the Republican party when he sought a second term in 1973. The 1970s became the most successful decade in the history of the Virginia Republican party as it won the governorship in 1973 and 1977, two races for the United States Senate in 1972 and 1978, and additional seats in the House of Representatives. It is true that the party did not win control of the state legislature. Two factors prevented conservative members of the General Assembly from switching parties. Legislators were members of local political elites who had long derived their power from the state party. They declined to jeopardize their influence in the General Assembly through a precipitate change in parties. At the same time, the Watergate scandal made the Republican label less appealing.

Atkinson understandably overemphasized the significance of Byrd's decision. He was writing on the heels of a Democratic decade in which the party won all three statewide offices in 1981, 1985, and 1989, took a Senate seat in 1988, and increased its share of Virginia's delegation in the House of Representatives from one after the 1980 election to five in 1989.⁷⁸ The 1990s, however, have seen a Republican resurgence as the party has won the governorship in 1993 and 1997 and attained parity in both houses of the legislature. In general the victorious Republican candidates have been closer ideologically to the Nixon brand of Republicanism than to that of Linwood Holton. From a perspective of nearly thirty years, it seems that Nixon's southern strategy has been vindicated in Virginia.

The only strategy that clearly failed in 1970 was that of Linwood Holton. His stand, based on principle, proved to be politically costly. After supporting another ineffective moderate candidate in a special election for lieutenant governor in 1971, Holton saw his influence in the party diminish. At the 1972 state convention, conservatives ousted a Holton supporter as state chairman in favor of Richard D. Obenshain, a brilliant and passionate advocate of conservatism. Holton never won another election. In 1978 he sought the party nomination for the United States Senate. At the state convention, running a distant third to Obenshain and John W. Warner, he withdrew after the third ballot. Increasingly Holton became an outcast in

⁷⁷ Atkinson, *Dynamic Dominion*, p. 209.

⁷⁸ Larry J. Sabato, "The 1988 Presidential Election in Virginia," *University of Virginia News Letter* 65 (1988-89): 24.

his own party. After almost three decades, however, he has no regrets. He has no intention of leaving the Republican party, although he notes today that "its principles are foreign to my thinking in many ways." He believes his course in 1970 was right and will ultimately be vindicated. "Clearly the Byrd record in Virginia was racist," he has stated. "I just didn't want that in there. . . . But if I'm a pariah on the basis of trying to keep out the white supremacy element, I'm proud of it."⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Atkinson, *Dynamic Dominion*, p. 355; interview with A. Linwood Holton, Jr., 13 Jan. 1998, Richmond, Va. (quotations).