

Hollings Library gets lively launch

Dedication puts Lowcountry legend in spotlight

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COLUMBIA, July 24 -- Former U.S. Sen. Fritz Hollings was honored by longtime friend Vice President Joe Biden on Friday as the University of South Carolina dedicated a new library to the Charleston political icon.

The \$18 million Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections Library, which will contain papers from some of the state's most notable politicians, already is known to some as "The Fritz."

Biden called Hollings the state's most significant political figure, and the 88-year-old responded by showing that even though he left office six years ago, his heart and mind remain in the game.

Vice President Joe Biden (right) laughs with Fritz Hollings during a ceremony dedicating the Hollings Special Collections Library on Friday at the University of South Carolina.

Charleston Mayor Joe Riley was among the guests as the University of South Carolina dedicated the Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections Library on Friday.

Hollings served up a humorous but pointed critique of how President Barack Obama's trade policies weren't helping American manufacturing, and explained how exchanging the corporate income tax for a value added tax would help.

"Ladies and gentlemen, China has taken over, and it's not just trade. It's the investment, the research, the technology, the development, the product, the jobs and

trade. It's the entire economy, and that's what we're uptight about," he said. "We're not creating manufacturers, and we're not creating a strong economy."

Biden served with Hollings in the Senate for more than three decades, and both shared a reputation for speaking from the hip -- sometimes too much so. Hollings' legacy includes tackling childhood nutrition, establishing technical education in the state and fighting federal deficits, Biden said.

"I can go on and on and on, giving proof to the assertion I make that I think he's the most significant national figure ever to come out of this state in terms of the length and the breadth of his career and what he's done," Biden said.

He said Hollings still calls him on occasion to ask, " 'Joe, what in the hell are you doing?' ... This is the youngest man I know. Nothing, nothing, nothing ever slows him down."

Biden also said Hollings is more responsible for Biden's becoming vice president than anyone else. "That is literally true," Biden said. "That is not hyperbole."

The crowd of about 1,200 was a virtual who's who of Palmetto State politics, including U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, U.S. House Majority Whip James Clyburn and former Gov. James Edwards.

When Biden took the stage, he made a short side trip to shake hands with Charleston

Mayor Joe Riley, whom Biden called "my old friend."

Hollings, a lifelong Democrat, invited Graham, a Republican, to take his seat on the stage during Hollings' remarks by joking, "We believe not only in integrating minorities but also in integrating majorities."

Hollings, an Isle of Palms resident, joked that after Friday, he wouldn't need any speeches at his funeral. "All they have to do is display the body," he said.

For Hollings, it was a rare moment in the spotlight for a Lowcountry political legend who has mostly kept a low profile since retiring in 2004.

The hour-long event was full of good-natured ribbing, and Hollings might have gotten off the best line when he made fun of Biden's profane comment that was caught on tape after the president's health care bill passed this year.

"Any association with the University of South Carolina is an honor," Hollings said, "and to receive this distinction, to almost quote our distinguished vice president, 'This is a big blinking deal.' "

As USC Dean of University Libraries Thomas McNally warmed up the crowd, he said, "You know this is a dedication ceremony, but when I walked out here earlier, it felt much more like a party."

USC President Harris Pastides began with a quip about his school's baseball championship: "All of you, of course, came to get an autograph from Coach (Ray) Tanner."

Pastides also joked that the university received the Ernest F. Hollings National Advocacy Center, where prosecutors from all levels are trained, after Hollings objected to it going to Myrtle Beach, quoting Hollings as saying of that idea: "Hell no, they'll spend all their time on the golf course."

The new library, the second building on campus named after Hollings, was built after Hollings donated his personal papers to the university in 1989 and helped get \$14 million in federal money for it. Hollings, who served as governor from 1959-63, also persuaded other former governors, including James West and Edwards, to donate their papers as well.

Hollings' papers make up the largest part of the new library's holdings, but it also houses rare books from authors such as John Milton, Robert Burns, Giuseppe Garibaldi, Charles Darwin, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway, as well as a folio of John James Audubon's "The Birds of America."

What was said

House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn:

"I tell people all the time that I've learned a whole lot from Fritz Hollings, a lot of what to do and a lot of what not to say."

"Up there in Washington, especially on the floor of the House of Representatives, we refer to each other as 'my good friend' and we really don't mean it, but I really do mean it when I call Joe Biden 'my good friend.' "

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure for me to present to you a mainstream American who is articulate and bright and clean."

(While introducing Biden, a reference to Biden's famous campaign gaffe backhandedly complimenting Barack Obama.)

Vice President Joe Biden:

"These days, Democrats and Republicans aren't supposed to be friends, but (Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham) is one of my closest friends. He's one of my wife Jill's closest friends. ... Lindsey and I travel all

over the world. We always go to places where they're shooting at us, literally shooting at us."

"Fritz was the first person on a national political scale talking about how a child cannot learn, cannot develop, cannot have an even shot if they don't have proper nutrition when they are young,"

"I miss being referred to on a daily basis as Joltin' Joe."

(Biden on what Hollings used to call him.)

Fritz Hollings himself:

"(Senate Majority Leader) Harry Reid called me yesterday and he said Fritz, I didn't know you could read, much less (establish) a library."

"Joe, (Biden) I can tell you right now having served for 36 years as the junior senator for Strom (Thurmond), I have enough damned humility. I need a little arrogance, and you gave me a double dose."

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