

Hollings inspires homage, humor at library ceremony

Biden pays tribute to ex-senator from S.C.

By WAYNE WASHINGTON

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JULY 24, 2010 -- Vice President Joe Biden paid homage Friday to his friend and former colleague, former U.S. Sen. Ernest "Fritz" Hollings, during a program that opened the new Hollings Special Collections Library at the University of South Carolina and doubled as an extended tribute to the 88-year-old retired senator.

Biden, who served with Hollings for 32 years in the U.S. Senate, said his former colleague is the most important political figure that South Carolina has produced.

Biden also credited Hollings for helping him reach the vice presidency. Hollings is "more responsible for my standing at this podium as vice president than any man alive. That is literally true. That is not hyperbole. That is literally true."

Friday's program offered up a mix of serious tributes to Hollings and big helpings of what easily could have passed as a comedy routine.

Consider Hollings' response to the vice president: Paraphrasing Biden, who was caught on tape earlier this year uttering an expletive during a bill-signing ceremony in Washington, Hollings said having the special collections library named in his honor is "a big bleepin' deal."

The \$18 million, 50,000-square foot special collections library will house the papers of Hollings and other top S.C. political figures, many of whom were on hand Friday to hear Biden and Hollings launch into occasionally

meandering, but pointed remarks that left many in the audience of 1,240 guffawing.

USC President Harris Pastides got the laughs started by relaying a story about how Hollings argued in favor of building the National Advocacy Center at USC instead of in Myrtle Beach.

"The senator said, 'Hell no, they'll spend all their time on the golf course!'" Pastides said, imitating some of the former senator's bombast before reverting to his own even, college president tone. "Thank you, senator, for your very eloquent advocacy on our behalf."

Pastides gave way to U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-Columbia, whose job was to introduce Biden, known for his foreign policy expertise, his long tenure in the Senate – and for occasionally stuffing his foot into his mouth.

Clyburn introduced Biden as "bright, articulate, clean," the same description Biden gave, in 2008, of then-presidential candidate Barack Obama in what was seen by some at the time as a backhanded, racist comment.

But Friday, with that black man as president and with Biden at his side as vice president, the audience was free to laugh. And they did.

Biden quoted poetry and told old political stories in praise of Hollings, who retired to South Carolina in 2005 but still reached out to his former colleague on those frequent

occasions when something in Washington got under his skin.

In the years before he left the Senate to become vice president, Biden said he often would pick up the phone and hear his former colleague's Charleston drawl. "Damn Joe!" Biden said in his own imitation of Hollings. "What in the hell are you doing?"

Biden said he misses the constructive criticism and guidance he often got from Hollings. And he admired his reverence for South Carolina.

"There was an Irish poet, James Joyce, who famously said, 'When I die, Dublin will be written on my heart,'" Biden said. "I think I can say without fear of contradiction, 50 years from now, when this man dies, South Carolina will be written on his heart."

Biden, noting his Irish ancestry, reached for another Irish literary luminary to sum up his remarks: "William Butler Yeats once said, 'Think where a man's glory begins and ends. And say I know where it was – that I had such friends.'"

Biden's quote was not a word-for-word replication of Yeats, but the audience got the point, as did Hollings.

The former senator then drew laughs, expressed some exasperation with Obama, with the budget deficit and with the failures of U.S. trade policies. But he happily accepted the verbal bouquets thrown his way by the vice president.

"We don't have to have any speech at the funeral," Hollings said. "All they gotta do is just play the Biden tape. I'm gon' play it every otha day."

About the Special Collections Library

1. Cost? \$18 million. Hollings helped secure \$14 million in federal money for its construction.
2. Is the building green? Actually, it's gold. It has a "gold" certification for its pro-environment construction and lower energy needs.
3. How big is it? Big. 50,000 square feet. That's only 16,000 square feet smaller than Bill Gates' house in Washington state.
4. Dusty, fake-wood shelves? Not quite. Try 47,000 linear feet of high-density, electronic shelves, which can hold 250,000 volumes of books, and 20 million manuscripts.
5. You can chill. The library has a reading room and work area for researchers, students and visitors. There are seminar rooms, a mini theater, exhibit galleries and a vault for rare items.
6. Let me in. Visitors enter through the Thomas Cooper Library. It's open to researchers, students and visitors weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. (So, don't believe your son or daughter if they tell you they were at Special Collections when you called at 11 p.m.)

7. USC President Harris Pastides suggested the new library be called the “Fritz.” Seriously.

8. What’s in the collection? Papers from Hollings, U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, former Govs. John C. West, James Edwards and Dick Riley will be housed at the Fritz. Mark Sanford’s paper’s will be there, too. (No. We’re not even going there.)

9. Researchers can apply for grants worth up to \$3,000 to work on their projects at the Fritz. An endowment raised in honor of former U.S. Rep. W.J. Bryan Dorn is used to pay the stipends.

10. Herb Hartsook is director of S.C. Political Collections at the Fritz. Nothing like a new \$18 million building to make a man smile.

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