

James Strom Thurmond

(born 1902)

U.S. Senator James Strom Thurmond—known by his middle name, Strom—was born in Edgefield, South Carolina, in 1902. A teacher in the South Carolina high school system, Thurmond later served as county superintendent of education. He studied law and was admitted to the South Carolina bar in 1930. Thurmond subsequently served as city and county attorney, a member of the South Carolina state senate, and a circuit judge. Already a United States Army reservist when the nation entered World War II, he volunteered for active duty and served in Europe and in the Pacific. While assigned with the 82nd Airborne Division, Thurmond participated in the Normandy invasion on D-Day in 1944. After the war he rose to the rank of major general in the U.S. Army Reserves, serving for 36 years. In 1946 he was elected governor of South Carolina, a post he held until 1951.

In 1948 Thurmond challenged Harry Truman for president of the United States, running on the States' Rights Democratic ticket. In 1954, after losing the South Carolina Democratic Senate primary, he sought election as a write-in candidate and won, becoming the first person to be elected to a major office on a write-in basis. Because of a promise he made to voters, Thurmond resigned his Senate seat in 1956 to force another election in which he could win by traditional means. He won the election, ironically filling the vacancy caused by his own resignation. Over the next four decades, he won reelection seven times—although he switched his affiliation from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party in 1964.

Senator Thurmond chaired the Armed Services and the Judiciary Committees, and he served as president pro tempore of the Senate from 1981 to 1987, and again from 1995 to 2001, when he was named president pro tempore emeritus. In 1957 he set the record for delivering the longest single speech in the Senate, which lasted 24 hours and 18 minutes. In 1997 he became the longest-serving senator in history, and he is the oldest person ever to serve in the Senate.

In 1995 friends and colleagues of Senator Strom Thurmond organized the Strom Thurmond Statue Committee, to commission artist Frederick Hart to create a bust of the senator. A life mask of Thurmond was made by artist Willa Shalit, and Hart then used a plaster cast of the mask as a reference for his work, refining the clay model through several sittings with Thurmond. The bust was cast in bronze at Joel Meisner & Company, Inc., a foundry in Farmingdale, New York. Although the committee planned to purchase the bust from Hart for the U.S. Senate, the artist decided to donate it.

The bust was unveiled at ceremonies honoring Senator Thurmond held in the Senate Caucus Room of the Senate Russell Office Building on June 5, 1997. The event marked a singular occasion: Eleven days earlier Thurmond had become the longest-serving member in the history of the Senate, having served 41 years and 10 months. The bust was formally accepted by the Senate Commission on Art on July 11, 1997. It was placed in the *Strom Thurmond Room* (S-238) in the Capitol, a space assigned to the president pro tempore that was named in honor of Thurmond by Senate resolution on November 23, 1991.

Frederick Hart gained international recognition for his *Creation Sculptures* at the National Cathedral and for his sculpture *Three Soldiers* at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, both in Washington, D.C. In addition to his numerous marble and bronze public commissions, Hart worked with acrylic resin to create figurative sculptures. He patented a process by which he embedded one clear acrylic sculpture within another, a technique he called “sculpting with light.”

The artist is also represented in the Senate by a statue of Senator Richard Russell (p. 324) in the Russell Senate Office Building. Hart was working on a bust of Dan Quayle (p. 312) for the Senate's Vice Presidential Bust Collection at the time of his death in 1999.



Frederick Hart and Strom Thurmond in the senator's office (SR-219) in the Russell Senate Office Building, 1997.

(Courtesy of Duke Short)


Strom Thurmond

Frederick E. Hart (1943-1999)

Bronze, 1997

23¾ x 19½ x 11 inches (60.3 x 49.5 x 27.9 cm)

Signed and dated (under subject's truncated right arm): FREDERICK HART / Sc. 1997

Foundry symbol (under subject's truncated right arm): 

Gift of the artist, 1997

Accepted by the U.S. Senate Commission on Art, 1997

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