

Trent lott



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Trent Lott, senior senator from the state of Mississippi, is one of the foremost figures in the United States Senate and one of the most recognizable figures in all of politics. This recognition comes from the stances which he has taken, the fact that he has been a formidable figure in the Senate for many years, the fact that he was the Majority Leader in the Senate for the Republicans from 1996 until 2001 as well as controversial comments which he made in 2002 and which brought back a great deal of resentment as well as a reminder of the history of racial conflict that the United States and especially the South endured in America's history.

Despite this, Trent Lott is still a highly respected member of the United States senate and at a time when the approval rating of Congress is currently at a dismal 14%, for many in Mississippi, he represents one of the very few bright spots in all of Congress. (Page, 2002 pg. A14)

He has maintained a strict party line when voting but has not been afraid to vote against his party when the time and circumstance called for him to do so. Despite being raised as a Southern Democrat, Lott, feeling that his beliefs were more in tune with the Republican Party, joined the party and has been a strong Republican ever since. Those Americans consider themselves republicans because they believe in strong faith and family values, the sanctity of human life and marriage and the rule of law as it applies to limited government, find comfort in Trent Lott.

Those who disagree with Republicanism and/or Trent Lott on the majority of his issues, can also rely upon the fact that he will always respect the other side of the debate and will not resort to underhanded tactics in order to win.

At a time when less people have a favorable opinion of Congress than in all of American History, such people serve as a breath of fresh air for all those who are interested in politics and how it will reshape the landscape and the future of the country.

Trent Lott was born in Grenada Mississippi on October 8, 1941. His father Chester was a shipyard worker and his mother was a teacher. Trent Lott started from humble beginnings but soon rose in the social and political ranks of the state to establish himself as one who was not going to spend his entire life in Mississippi, though he would be hard pressed to forget where he came from and the people and places which helped to establish the man who is Trent Lott.

Trent Lott was introduced to a more social life when he was attending the University of Mississippi where he earned a degree in public administration in 1965 and a law degree in 1967. (Mercurio, 2002) After he graduated, he moved to Pascagoula where he opened up a law practice and still lives to this day. It was also during this time that Lott began his life in politics. He served as an assistant to the House Rules Committee chairman William Colmer from 1968 until 1972. ( Smith 2005)

Despite the fact that Colmer, for the past forty years, was one of the leading segregationists of the state, he still endorsed Lott as one capable of replacing him when Colmer retired. Despite the fact that Lott ran as a Republican; a party which had not had much success in the South since the beginning of the Civil War, Lott was by a landslide. People could see beyond

the labels which all too often seem to identify everything there is to know about a candidate.

However, there were other factions involved during this time which helped Lott gain the seat that was vacated by Colmer. During the 1960's especially after the 1965 Civil Rights Bill, there appeared cracks in the solid Democratic South that was so apparent in the decades before.

The Democratic Party was losing converts to its cause left and right and more and more people were willing to vote on the Republican ticket. In the 1964 Presidential Election, despite the fact that Barry Goldwater was routed by President Johnson, Goldwater, Senator from Arizona won 87% of the popular vote of Mississippi. ( Smith, 2005) Trent Lott was on the cusp of this political change and he was going to make the most of it for himself and the legacy which he sought to create in politics. The only question was where Trent Lott was going to end up and how far his aspirations and the people of Mississippi were willing to take him.

During the 1970's, a time when the South and Mississippi was lending most of its support to Republican candidates, Trent Lott was enjoying the success that his adopted party was giving him. That, coupled with the people of Mississippi and their ability to relate to somebody in politics who still seemed approachable, Lott became in 1974, the first Republican to get reelected from the state of Mississippi since the end of Reconstruction in 1877. (Page 2002 pg A14)

Lott would be re-elected six more times and won easily. In 1978 he even ran unopposed since Lott had established himself so strongly in this part of the

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country. It was becoming apparent that Trent Lott was going to be in Congress for some time to come. It was also during this time in the 1980's that Lott served as the House Majority Whip for the Republican Party from 1981 until 1989. (Smith, 2005) In doing so, he was the first southern Republican to hold such an office. The Republican Party was becoming a strong hold for the South and so too was Trent Lott.

It was now time for Trent Lott to rise in his political career. The Senate seemed like the next logical answer. The House of Representatives has 435 members and the number of representatives which each state sends to Congress is directly based upon the population of that particular state. Mississippi had a number of representatives like Trent Lott which were expected to represent the state. In the Senate, only two members from each state, regardless of how populated the state is, are sent to Congress. This would mean that Lott would have much more power and influence within Congress in which his views would affect the state of Mississippi and the country to a greater degree.

When Lott ran for the senate in 1988, he again was taking advantage of the political climate of the day. President Bush ran and won a resounding victory in the Presidential election as voters sought to continue the Republican success that had come under eight years of the previous President, Republican Ronald Reagan. Lott ran and won a resounding eight point victory over incumbent Wayne Dowdy. Lott was re-elected in 1994, 2000 and 2006 with there existing no sizable Democratic opposition. (Smith, 2005)

Lott continued to benefit from the success that the Republican Party was having at this time. From 1993 until 2001, Democrat Bill Clinton was President of the United States and enjoyed high approval ratings throughout most of his administration. However, it was the Republicans who enjoyed a sizable lead in the Congress through a good portion of the 1990's. Lott became Senate majority leader of the Republicans in 1996. (<http://archives.cnn.com>)

Lott was best known for the role that he took in the impeachment of President Clinton who, it later turned out, lied to a grand jury about his relationship with a White House intern. Lott preceded in the trial of President Clinton but eventually acquiesced to suspend the proceedings in the Senate. Even though the House had voted to impeach the President, Senator Lott knew that the Republicans in the Senate numbered far short of the necessary votes in order to make the impeachment complete.

After the 2000 election when a highly partisan country resulted in a deeply divided Congress and a 50-50 split occurred in the Senate, Vice President Dick Cheney's vote gave the Republicans the majority in the Senate once again and Trent Lott was again the leader of the Senate. This was short lived when Vermont senator Jim Jeffords became an independent, thus giving the Democrats the majority in the Senate, Trent Lott then became the Senator Minority Leader.

However, 2002 would provide more problems for Trent Lott and possibly the Republican Party when Trent Lott made some controversial comments about the nation's and state's past which helped to bring to the forefront, a history

and hurt feelings and resentment which many in the state as well as the country had tried hard to bury.

The spotless record which Trent Lott had spent his entire private and political life building, ended on December 5, 2002 when at a 100th birthday celebration for Senator Strom Thurmond, longtime senator from South Carolina and who in 1948, ran for President under the Dixiecrat ticket which appealed to mostly segregationist southerners. Commenting on that regrettable chapter in American history, Senator Lott commented instead: "When Strom Thurmond ran for President, we voted for him.

We're proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over the years either." (<http://archives.cnn.com>) This was a comment which was blown up for a number of reasons. The first reason is the historical significance of the 1948 election and the role that Senator Thurmond in his strict stand for segregation. The political and social atmosphere had changed and what was previously seen as acceptable in the way of racial prejudice, in our present time, has finally been seen for what it is worth; completely unnecessary and an impediment on the freedom of every individual in America.

The second problem was that Senator Lott was from the South and represented the South. Despite coming a long way from the times of slavery and segregation, there still existed a strong awareness of history in the South; especially the history of race relations. Such comments helped to bring up a great deal of pent up anger and issues which many had hoped had finally been resolved.

IN many degrees it may have been, but this comment by Senator Lott helped to open up a wound that had many thought had been healed. The last problem with the comment, aside from the comment itself, was the voting record of Senator Lott. He had voted against the renewal of the Voting Rights Act as well as the formation of a national holiday for Martin Luther King Junior when it was made a law in 1986.

The comment gained strength as the NAACP and Black Entertainment Television BET called for the resignation of Senator Lott. A good deal of political commentators on television also called for the resignation of Senator Lott and the Republican Party, feeling the backlash towards a public, many of which was suspect towards their history of race relations, and feeling a loss of power, compelled Senator Lott to step down from his position as the Minority Leader in the Senate on December 20, 2002 and was replaced by Tennessee Senator Bill Frist.

Despite these comments and how in the minds of many, they have forever associated Senator Lott with the Republican Party of the past, Lott has proven that he is not one who will always vote the strict party line. Within his own party, Lott blasted what is referred to as " pork spending."

(<http://archives.cnn.com>) This refers to the fleecing of Americans and their hard earned taxes through kickbacks, deals made in smoke filled rooms and money being placed under the table in order to repay one political favor for another.

A senator would try to have a disproportionate amount of federal aid sent to his state or local district in order that such efforts would then be repaid by



getting the senator elected. There will never be the full disclosure of how popular this is within the Senate but there is an unwritten law among the members of Congress not to speak out against this.

“ Despite their on camera antics and fighting, the members of the House and to a greater degree the Senate, constitute a private club in which each member supports and defends the other.” (Smith, 2005) Trent Lott was not one of these men. After the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina and the all too real reality of forty years of political corruption in Louisiana, which led to much of the troubles during that natural disaster, Senator Lott commented: “ I’m getting damn tired of hearing from them. They have been nothing but trouble ever since Katrina. “ (http://archives. cnn. com)

Many would say that they have been trouble ever since the Congress was formed at the end of the 18th century. Lott became an outspoken critic against a Congress which had been traditionally made up of “ good old boys” who fleeced the tax payers with their nonsense projects and grafting procedures.” (http://archives. cnn. com) It was comments like these which helped cement the reputation of Senator Lott as one that was above being bought or being swayed by public opinion.

As much as politics is polarizing and such comments can raise the ire with people as it is human nature, most free thinking individuals can see beyond the partisan back biting which many casual observers cite as the reason for their disinterest in politics. Trent Lott is an exception to what is becoming the norm: partisan members of Congress who will vote the party line and what is popular among the people who voted them in order to continue their role in

the Senate. Lott has thought differently and still has been able to make a name for himself in the Senate.

Another issue in which Senator Lott angered much of his conservative base was over the issue of immigration. A recent CNN poll cites more than 85% of the American public want the immigration laws to be strengthened in order to stop what is becoming a severe impediment to the country as a whole. (Dobbs, 2005) There is no doubt that illegal immigration needs to be fixed. The inability of the Congress to do anything about it helps to create such low approval ratings.

This is because, despite the country being in agreement about the fact that illegal immigration needs to be stopped, there is still much debate as to how exactly that is to be accomplished. There are a number of factions within the Congress as there is in the country and all have strong opinions. The Democrats seem to be a little more lenient and propose for an easy road to citizenship.

Most Republicans feel that illegal immigrants broke the law and compromised the security of the border and propose anywhere from the deportation of twelve million people to strict fines and being pushed to the end of the line in the path towards citizenship. Some of these feelings are strengthened through talk radio which is currently monopolized by conservatives; many of whom have very strong opinions about what should be done about the problem. Lott made his opinion clear and called for resolve and moderation.

Lott sought to do this by listening to his conscience more than what his people tell him to do, which he felt, was asking for more than what was right in this situation. Lott commented: "Talk radio is running America. We have to deal with the problem.... I'm sure senators on both sides of the aisle are being pounded by these talk radio people who don't have a clue what is even on most of these bills. They are ill informed to comment so." (Dobbs, 2005)

Senator Lott reached across the aisle and teamed up with the very liberal Senator Ted Kennedy for their comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007.

Throughout the whole process, Senator Lott was a voice of reason who called for a moderate approach to the problem so that some immigration bill could be passed. He commented: "Can we do anything more? I don't like a lot of these amendments. Some people were acting like this is a sinister operation. I don't believe so. Everybody knew there was an effort underway.... Do you have faith in me after 35 years?" (<http://archives.cnn.com>) Despite his best efforts, Senate Leader Harry Reid, Democrat from Nevada killed the bill after less than a week of debate.

Since Senator Lott has resigned from his leadership position in the Senate, he still has remained a voice of reason and is not hesitant to vote his conscience over the strict party line. Senator Lott received a mild, though strong Democratic following when he called for the resignation of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld before most Republicans even contemplated the move.

He battled with President Bush over the closing of military bases in the state of Mississippi and was an outspoken critic of Karl Rove, President Bush's chief advisor. On July 18, 2006, Trent Lott even voted in favor stem cell research; a bill which President Bush in July 2007, vetoed because in the process, the stem cell, which would eventually become a fetus, was viewed by Christians to be a human life and therefore felt that such measures acted as like an abortion.

On the other side of the issue, stem cells can be used, researchers think, to grow healthy cells and combat various diseases which attack the brain, spine and nervous system. Senator Trent Lott voted for this research and in the process, alienated himself from much of his base. He knew this before casting his vote but he has gained the respect of his peers on both sides of the aisle for being motivated by what he thought to be right and not necessarily what was popular within his own party or with the nation.

Whether Trent Lott is alienating his base or voting with the majority, he has been a voice of reason and moderation for most of his career. Trent Lott has been a mainstay in Congress for the last thirty years and even though he has voted in ways that he later regretted and made comments which have hurt him and his legacy in the long run, to the people who like honest talk, both in his home state of Mississippi and in the country at large, have come to respect him for all that he has done.

Even after he made those now infamous comments about Senator Thurmond, most Democrats in Congress, despite seeing a political opportunity to increase their support from African Americans and other

minorities, realized that the comment was not a true testament to the feelings, the beliefs and the life work which had become Trent Lott.

The former leader of the Senate for the Democrats and a figure which had no trouble raising the ire among most Republican supporters, commented on that recent turn of events: " There are a lot of times when he and I go to the mike and would like to say things we meant to say differently, and I'm sure this is one of those cases for him as well." (<http://archives.cnn.com>)

This is the case with free thinking individuals who, despite raising the hatred and ire for many Republicans through his years in the Senate and could further increase the support of his base by responding their calls to vilify the man, such people who have known Senator Lott for any period of time, though they might not agree with the man and his politics, respects his morals, values and the ways in which he conducts himself. This is hard to do sometimes as the persona cross the isle might be causing a great deal of trouble in one's political pursuits and perhaps had even exerted efforts to derail their bid for re-election.

Nevertheless, the millions of people in America who feel that the actions of the Congress and the beliefs of the men and women who make up such an exclusive club is more important than what the current popculture icon is wearing or dating, can recognize a genuine person. Those who want to stay in touch with current events and the politics which shape them but still cannot resort to such efforts, cite the fact that in their opinion, there is a severe shortage of people whom they feel to be " real."

This is most likely true as observers for both Presidential campaigns can record the amount of back peddling that each candidate makes in order to maintain the highest level of political power; regardless of whether or not that is their real opinion. It is unlikely that Trent Lott, despite his high popularity, will never even contemplate running for President. And it is to the advantage of all those who believe in him that he does not. This is because Trent Lott, with his inability to be disingenuous, shoots from the hip and when asked, tells people what he believes more times than not. Sometimes the words will come out wrong and he will regret what he says. However, isn't this true for all of us.

If every formal word of ours over the last 35 years was recorded, how well would others regard us? It is to the benefit of millions of people that is not the case and for those like Senator Lott who has been in the public eye for thirty five years, his record will stand for itself and by itself in this highly partisan climate which is currently choking Washington with no hope of reviving the healthy action of dissent across party lines when an issue does not react well to their own beliefs; the beliefs in which they were elected.

Senator Trent Lott is not a member of the former class but stands alone as not only one who apologizes for his mistakes, but also is willing to cross party lines and let the criticism come as they may. This is the true test of one who has earned the trust of the people. It would behoove Washington and the American people if there were more such people in politics.

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