

## **A Living Legacy Helms endures.**

*By John Dodd*

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Those of us who knew Senator Jesse Helms best have been deeply touched this past weekend by the tributes from both the famous leaders he worked with and the ordinary citizens he truly worked for — and whose interests he put first.

Mixed in with the salutes from the president and Senate leaders and individuals like Bono and Billy Graham are the remembrances of people who needed help in untangling the red tape that held up a claim for veteran's benefits or getting an urgently needed visa at a time of family emergency. In the pages of condolences and the clips of media interviews, there are comments about personal correspondence, time taken to visit with a group of students or a family visiting the Capitol. There are remembrances about his unfailing courtesy and his humility. Even his political opponents remarked on his personal graciousness to them and his quiet kindness. Truly, he was a man who will not fade from memory.

But there is something about Jesse Helms for which we may be even more grateful — something beyond his personal service to our nation — and that is his deliberate and unfaltering focus on mentoring young people. Jesse Helms understood both the value of teaching by example and learning through experience. He welcomed young people into what he called the Helms Senate Family and watched with pride when they graduated from their time in his office and took on new challenges in government or private life.

For 30 years “Helms University” nurtured the dreams and honed the skills of young people who recognized in Jesse Helms the virtues that they wanted to strengthen in their own lives. The lessons were not easy because there was never, ever, a compromise on honesty, accuracy, or respect for others. The hours were long because no matter what their titles, they shared the same job description — service to their country and to their constituency, all of the people of North Carolina. The pay was the lowest on Capitol Hill, but the benefit plan was the best because they worked with Sen. Helms. They were encouraged to excel; they were groomed for their own leadership roles. They were prepared to carry on the fight against policies and attitudes that would weaken America at home or abroad.

You may not yet know most of their names, but today they are already building careers in business, as elected officials, as advocates for public policy, as leaders on campuses and in churches, as advisers at the highest levels of government. Our nation is already benefiting from their decision to model their conduct after the man they proudly served as they demonstrate their own integrity and commitment to hard work in pursuit of high

goals.

But, there is more for which we can be grateful. Sen. Helms knew it wasn't enough to reach only those young people who would meet him. That is why he agreed to the creation of the Jesse Helms Center just outside of his hometown, Monroe, N.C. His strict instructions to its founders and to everyone involved, was to build an organization that would be centered on young people and assure their understanding of the blessings and opportunities that are uniquely found in the nation he loved so much. It was Sen. Helms's greatest hope that he would not be the last of his kind, but rather, just one of many who stood up for our country's Founding principles, lived out their faith, and made the way for new generations who would care about, and care for, the United States of America.

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