

Transcript

Senator Helms: "Here's Where I Stand"

Sen. Jesse Helms (R)

Retired North Carolina Senator

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In his newly released memoir "Here's Where I Stand," retired North Carolina Senator **Jesse Helms** (R-N.C.) gives a candid account of his three decades in the U.S. Senate and the hot-button issues he was involved in, from *Roe v. Wade* to the AIDS crisis. Helms recounts his childhood in a small North Carolina town and his first run for political office, as well as his encounters with figures such as Presidents **Richard Nixon**, **Jimmy Carter**, and **Ronald Reagan**. Helms addresses a myriad of developments in his professional life, such as conservatism, the role of the Religious Right, and his tenure as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Retired North Carolina Senator **Jesse Helms** (R-N.C.) was online **Friday, Sept. 16, at noon ET** to discuss his newly released book, "Where I Stand: A Memoir," and his career in the Senate.

Read The Washington Post's review of "Here's Where I Stand" [here](#).

The transcript follows.

Burlington, N.C.: You said in your book that you saved taxpayers a great deal of money by not employing press secretaries. Do you feel that politicians today are too poll driven and press conscious?

Senator Jesse Helms: It seems to me that many elected officials are surrounded by staffers who encourage them to make decisions based on poll numbers and anticipated public or media response.

Takoma Park, Md.: Senator Helms,

First I want to praise you for recognizing that AIDS doesn't discriminate, and that it's not a black/gay/poor etc disease, but a human disease. Please continue to fight to end this horrible plague on humanity.

My question: Have you changed your opinion on the issue of gay civil rights, in particular marriage equality?

Senator Jesse Helms: First, let me say that I believe all citizens have rights guaranteed by our founders and described in our constitution.

Secondly, let me say that I believe that the institution of marriage pre-dates any human laws and was originated by God as the union of a man and a woman. We ought not to tamper with God's directives.

Philadelphia, Pa.: What was it that made you decide to go into public office? Were there particular goals you wanted to obtain while in office and, if so, what are some of the issues that first concerned you?

Senator Jesse Helms: I went into public service at the urging of others who thought I would stand up for conservative principles if I got elected -- which I never expected I would be. I was concerned about the growth of the Federal government and the intrusion into so many areas that had always been the responsibility of the individual states. And, I was concerned about our national drift away from traditional values.

Lyme, Conn.: The current Bush administration has abandoned the policies of even the elder Bush administration that the United States is more willing to act alone with building international consensus before it acts. Do you believe one philosophy is better than the other?

Senator Jesse Helms: I believe that our overarching principles must be protecting our national sovereignty, promoting a strong national defense and pursuing a moral foreign policy. Then, each issue must be examined individually. There are times when allies rally around and that is good, but there are times when we must act in our national interest even if ultimately that means standing alone.

Harrisburg, Pa.: What do you believe should have been the American response to mass deaths in Sudan? What should our policies have been?

Senator Jesse Helms: I believe we should have a moral foreign policy and that we must always speak out against abuse and urge the world community to take that same stand. The role of the UN peacekeeping forces is to step into these tragic situations.

New York, N.Y.: Where do you stand now of gay and lesbian issues? I am a lesbian and do not support the gay marriage issue, but do support Civil Unions. Do you support Civil Unions at all? Thanks.

Senator Jesse Helms: These are issues for the legislatures and the courts to adjudicate.

Jamestown, N.Y.: Who's the best conservative candidate for president in 2008 who can win against the likely Democrat candidate?

Senator Jesse Helms: As long and drawn out as the process may seem, primaries are an excellent proving ground for candidates. Naturally I hope a strong conservative wins in '08 over any liberal opponent.

Bethesda, Md.: Senator, thank you for your service. We did know where you stood, and this is in sharp contrast to those in the Senate today. For example, Sen. Feinstein said yesterday she didn't know whether she would vote for or against Judge Roberts, and Sen. Schumer said he had an open mind!

Balderdash. Why do you think the press lets these people get away with assertions such as that?

Senator Jesse Helms: It's always been my impression that the press is a little more generous with its treatment of liberals.

Roselle, Ill.: Senator, Thanks for taking my question. Please, could you explain to me why Republicans did not bat an eye lid when it came to spending \$300 billion on nation building in Iraq but are having all sorts of deficit jitters when it comes to spending (possibly) \$200 billion in our own country, rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina? Might it be because it overwhelmingly involves blacks here in this country or is just rank insensitivity towards this country's poor?

Thank you once again.

Senator Jesse Helms: Your question is based on false assumptions.

Winston-Salem, N.C.: It strikes me that you were overly kind to Jimmy Carter in your book. What did you REALLY think of him? How would you describe him, as president, in one word: poor, fair, good, or excellent?

Thank you, Senator.

Senator Jesse Helms: I'll let history make that decision.

I applaud what he's done with Habitat for Humanity.

Washington, D.C.: In your opinion and ideal world, what should the federal government be involved in vs not involved in?

Thanks.

Senator Jesse Helms: The answer to this would take a book --- and I happen to have written one.

San Francisco, Calif.: What present politician do you admire most?

Senator Jesse Helms: I have lots of favorites. The more conservative they are, the better I like them.

Washington, D.C.: What do you see yourself doing during the next few years?

Senator Jesse Helms: I'm looking forward to spending more time with my family.

Providence, R.I.: Mr. Helms, in your memoirs you have said that integration should not have been forced on the south by the federal government, instead local authorities should have been left to determine the matter themselves. Do you believe that the south would have voluntarily ended segregation? And if so why do you believe this?

Senator Jesse Helms: I know the people of the South and they are good people. That is why I believed that they would do what was right and do it in a way that did not create animosities.

Cleveland, Ohio: Senator Helms, thank you for taking your civic responsibilities so seriously during your years of service.

I am a law student who is contemplating either a career in public service or at the least devoting a large portion of my practice to it. What advice can you offer on balancing the desire to genuinely help one's community as a young professional and as a concerned citizen?

Senator Jesse Helms: I applaud your interest in public service and know that many young people go directly into such a career from law school. That is good, but in the long term it is often helpful to bring to public service the experience of working in the private sector. Of course, you may find like I have, that over the years your career will take you in and out of public service and that offers a good balance, too.

Charleston, S.C.: Senator,

Do you feel that President Bush has been a disappointment as a fiscal conservative?

Senator Jesse Helms: It is not fair to judge the President before his term is over so I will not comment specifically. I can say that in all my years in public office, in fact in all my years of life, no President has ever been as fiscally cautious as I would have wanted him to be.

St. Louis, Mo.: Senator Helms, you have indicated that you believe that the individual States would have ultimately done the "right" thing with regard to civil rights if left to themselves. I would submit that the history of the United States prior to the Civil Rights movement does not support that assertion. What is your basis for the assertion?

Senator Jesse Helms: My basis for my belief is that I was there. I knew people of good will who were making great progress.

Baltimore, Md.: Will we ever again see a balanced federal budget?

Senator Jesse Helms: We can hope.

Birmingham, Ala.: Did you ever support Gov. George Wallace for President and if so, when and what was the scope of your involvement?

Senator Jesse Helms: No.

Washington, D.C.: From what you know, what type of chief justice do you think John Roberts will make?

What standard did you use to vote for/against Supreme Court justices? How did you vote on Ginsburg?

Senator Jesse Helms: I do not know Judge Roberts but I trust the opinion of people like Fred Thompson who have gotten to know him well.

My criteria for approving judges has always been based on their commitment to uphold the Constitution and not take on the role of unelected lawmakers.

Winston-Salem, N.C.: A lot of D.C.-types criticized the way now-Sen. Burr ran his campaign last year, yet he won comfortably. What are your thoughts on his campaigning style/strategy, and how do you think he's doing thus far in his first year in the U.S. Senate?

Senator Jesse Helms: I think Senator Burr is doing a great job in his first year. I'm proud to have had the opportunity to campaign for him.

Washington, D.C.: Any predictions for the 2008 Presidential race?

Senator Jesse Helms: No, it's much too early. I'm interested, as always, in the size of the crowd at the starting gate.

Washington, D.C.: Senator Helms:

Do you feel that the labels "conservative" and "liberal" are sometimes overused, and at times in a derogatory manner?

Senator Jesse Helms: I'm more inclined to say they are often misused or misappropriated.

Washington, D.C.: How do you feel about Ken Mehlman's apology for the "Southern Strategy?"

Senator Jesse Helms: How can you apologize for something that, to my knowledge, never existed?

Boise, Idaho: Did LBJ's support for civil rights legislation surprise you?

Senator Jesse Helms: I did not know him personally so I did not know his views.

London, U.K.: Could you comment on your work with the United Cerebral Palsy organization? Thank you.

Senator Jesse Helms: It has been one of my favorite causes for many years. They do wonderful work in caring for children.

Burlington, N.C.: What are views on the U.S. relationship with China over the past 10 years?

Senator Jesse Helms: I appreciate the opportunities open to American business as a result of a closer relationship with China. At the same time, I do not think we should do anything that would indicate a reduced commitment to the independence of Taiwan or the rights of Chinese citizens to enjoy the free exercise of their religion -- or pursue their hope for a democratic society.

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