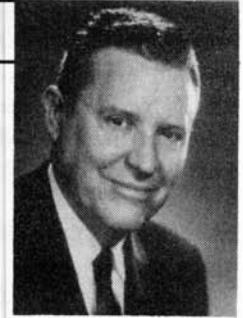


Interview: Ralph Yarborough



If they can't kill Clinton, they want to break his spirit

Ralph Yarborough was elected to the U.S. Senate from Texas in a special election in April 1957. He won reelection in 1958 and 1964. His 1964 election campaign, in which he defeated his Republican opponent, then-U.S. Rep. George Bush, is the subject of Chapter 9 in the influential book, George Bush: The Unauthorized Biography, which was published by EIR in 1992.

During his years in the U.S. Senate, Yarborough passed more legislation than any other Texas senator, before or after him. He was especially effective in passing legislation affecting education, health care, and veterans affairs. Still active today at 91 years old, he lives with his wife Opal in Austin. This interview was conducted in their home on Dec. 17 by Harley Schlanger.

EIR: We are speaking within several weeks of the November 1994 election, in which the Republicans won control of the House and Senate for the first time in 40 years. What are your thoughts on where the Democratic Party has to go in the period ahead to return to majority status?

Yarborough: I think it has to go back to Democratic principles. I don't think it should veer toward being pro-Republican, to try to sound like Republicans. If it returns to strong Democratic principles, then the voters will come back to it.

EIR: When you were in the United States Senate, there was a different orientation for the party.

Yarborough: There was an emphasis on education, on jobs, on economic growth, on the government improving conditions for the people. That's the right direction for today. If the Democratic Party abandons those [principles], the Democratic Party has lost its soul.

EIR: You were one of the initiators of the National Defense Education Act, which provided a college education for thousands of people in the sciences. The NDEA was discontinued after 1972. Do you think it is still necessary today to continue to place an emphasis on the sciences and technology in education, and should the government play a role in it?

Yarborough: I surely do. It is a serious problem that we are moving away from that, the Republicans are trying to pull us away from that. These are sound principles that are more than party matters, it's more than Republican or Democratic

Party; it's the principles upon which government is founded. Among other things, government should take care of the poor, and give them a chance in life.

EIR: Recently, the Speaker-to-be of the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, said that he believes that the government must change its approach to those in need, going so far as to suggest that children of indigent mothers should be taken away from their mothers and placed in orphanages. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Yarborough: I oppose that. There's no better custodian for children than their mothers, and to take them away and put them in public or private orphanages is a disastrous proposal.

EIR: When you were in the Senate, you served on the Education and Labor Committee with Sen. John F. Kennedy. When he became President, he emphasized the importance of science to the nation's well-being, especially the space program, with NASA. Today, there is talk of privatizing NASA, taking the government out completely. What do you think about that?

Yarborough: That would be a mistake, a big mistake. NASA helped push ahead progress in technology. The country's schools should be oriented toward developing technology, teaching science.

EIR: Recently, President Clinton has come under attack, especially over his foreign policy. What do you think about the media coverage, which has been saying that he is incompetent on matters of foreign policy?

Yarborough: Clinton is very bright, he's so bright he's scared the socks off the people that are lying about him and attacking his character and all. He's a very bright guy, you can tell that. How can you explain that he was elected to five terms as governor of Arkansas? It takes a smart guy in this rugged political territory in the Southwest to do that.

EIR: As we are talking today, we just got word that there were shots fired at the White House last night. As a collaborator and close friend of President Kennedy, you know well how damaging to the nation his assassination was. Are you concerned for the safety of President Clinton, given the climate of both verbal and physical attacks against him?