



Praise for U.S. Sen. Byron Dorgan, stepping down after nearly 30 years in Congress

By Jon H. Harsch

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Washington, Jan. 5 – Reacting to Tuesday’s surprise announcement by Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-ND) that he will not seek re-election, President Obama commented that “Senator Dorgan should be very proud of his more than 30 years of devoted service in the United States Congress and to the people of North Dakota. From fighting for our energy future to standing with North Dakota’s families through difficult economic times, Senator Dorgan has been a trusted leader for the people of his state. He has also been a champion for our family farmers and a powerful voice for Indian Country – particularly through his recent work to improve Indian health care services.”

What Obama didn’t mention is that Dorgan’s decision to focus instead on writing and work in the private sector on energy policy increases the likelihood that next November’s mid-term elections will end the Democrats’ ability to retain the 60 votes needed in the Senate to block Republican filibusters.

Dorgan himself released a lengthy statement explaining that “Representing North Dakota in the U.S. Congress for nearly 30 years has been one of the great privileges of my life. The work I have been able to do to expand our economy, create new opportunities in energy and water development, invent the Red River Research Corridor with cutting-edge world class research, build a stronger safety net for family farmers and much more has been a labor of love for me.”

Dorgan said he’d been planning to seek another six-year Senate term in this year’s elections but then concluded that “Although I still have a passion for public service and enjoy my work in the Senate, I have other interests and I have other things I would like to pursue outside of public life. I have written two books and have an invitation from a publisher to write two more books. I would like to do some teaching and would also like to work on energy policy in the private sector.”

Dorgan insists that “this decision does not relate to any dissatisfaction that I have about serving in the Senate” and that “my decision has no relationship to the prospect of a difficult election contest this year.” He added that he remains “confident that President

Obama is making the right decisions to put our country back on track.”

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) who now faces the prospect of one less Democrat in the next Senate commented that “Byron Dorgan is a friend and has been a strong voice for North Dakotans during his 30 years of service in Congress. I respect his decision to pursue other interests and wish him and his family the best in the future.”

Dorgan’s North Dakota colleague, Sen. Kent Conrad (D-ND), had this to say about Dorgan who began his public career when he was elected State Tax Commissioner at age 26: “Senator Byron Dorgan will have given 40 years of extraordinary service to North Dakota. It is a record of service unmatched in our state’s history. His good work can be seen in every corner of our state.”

Along with listing Dorgan’s achievements on a broad range of state and national issues, Conrad said Dorgan “persuaded colleagues to make important investments in our energy sector that will pay dividends for North Dakota and the nation for years to come.”

Conrad added that “Nationally he has been a foremost advocate for fair trade, fiscal responsibility, and economic growth. If his warnings had been heeded, the economic downturn might well have been averted. Over and over, he has been proven right on economic policy, trade policy and so much more.” Looking to the future, Conrad concluded that “Although Senator Dorgan is leaving the Senate at the end of 2010, I have a feeling that this will not be the last of his public service. It is my guess he will be on a short list of future Cabinet nominees to the Obama administration in the coming years.”

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