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AN OPEN MIND

In the heat of the election year political campaign, I would like to pause a moment and look at some of the broader issues facing our state and Nation.

On the national level, there is a great struggle going on to decide whether Democrats or Republicans will be in control of Congress and the White House next year. As in any campaign, each party and each candidate portrays the opposition as dangerous or incompetent. We can rest assured, however, that our strong institutions will survive no matter who holds office.

Any of you who have followed my career in public office know that I have always been a moderate--strong on state rights, an advocate of defense, and a fiscal conservative. I also have an open mind. My political philosophy was forged by my rural background, my education in the schools of the state, my association with North Carolina politics, and through books

and discussions with my friends and colleagues. I think that I do represent North Carolina, because I have studied our people and our heritage.

I have never claimed to have all the answers to the problems of the world, and that is why I had rather listen than to talk, had rather hear all sides of an argument before I make a decision. There are politicians, and the number is growing, who have an automatic stand on every issue, men whose political ideology is so inflexible that there is no need for debate.

This inflexibility is what upsets me so much about the election this year. Have we come to the point in our history when an open mind, in inquiring mind, is a political liability? Have we forsaken the tradition of rational debate that formed our early history?

I raise this questions because for the first time on a large scale we are seeing people standing for office who are backed both by incredibly large campaign chests and who also obtain these funds from single issue groups. Not only do these groups have all of their eggs in one basket but they also know which came first, the chicken or the egg.

Recently, I have received questionnaires from such groups that ask me to state, yes or no, if I agree with a certain position. There is no space for comment, no room for an explanation, no other questions. Some of these issues are important to be sure, but what single issue is so important that the world will stand or fall on it? Indeed, most issues are complex and invite rational debate, yet some of these groups are so adamant that they refuse to entertain questions.

What disturbs me also is the intensity that these people exhibit. People have come into my office and threatened me with political defeat unless I agree with them. There is no attempt to convince me that their cause is just, no rational discussion of the issue--just the question, the indictment, and the judgment.

Now, perhaps I am old fashioned, but I have always thought that there were two sides to every question. Perhaps the modern world has come to the point where choices have been eliminated. But for the life of me I cannot believe that a country that produced Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin D. Roosevelt, could turn its back on a tradition of free speech and an open mind.

If there is one lesson that I have learned in the United States Senate, it is that debate is crucial. The Senate prides itself on the fact that there is unlimited debate, and although this sometimes leads to windy days in the Capital, it is also effective. From what I can learn from the press about this present campaign, there are people standing for office who do not believe in exchanging ideas.

I have raised this issue because I think that if our problems are to be solved we must attack them not on a single issue basis but rather on a broad philosophical front. If I had to choose a label for myself, it would be a Federalist. I think that States should handle their problems if at all possible. I think that you would agree that since the Great Depression and World War II we have seen more and more power concentrated under the Federal Government.

Some of this power is necessary at the Federal level, but I also realize that many States now want to see the scales tip the other way. Let me reiterate. If the trend is to be reversed, it will be with a heavy philosophical barrage-- not with random rocks from single issue sling shots.

I have studied this problem of increasing Federal power, and from time to time I have won victories over increasing the bureaucracy and government waste. The experience that I have accumulated in Washington will aid me in furthering this cause. I have won allies and made converts, and I am anxious to continue my pursuit of good government.

No, I do not claim to have all the answers, but I do have some good questions. And I have accumulated invaluable experience. And let me assure you that I am anxious to put all this to good use in the United States Senate.