



Fact Check Politics Politicians

Bye Bye Byrdie

A photograph of Hillary Clinton being kissed by Senator Robert Byrd has been widely circulated as a political statement.



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CLAIM: A photograph shows Hillary Clinton with former Ku Klux Klan member Robert Byrd.



TRUE

ORIGIN: Shortly after Donald Trump declined to condemn David Duke and the Ku Klux Klan during an [interview](#) on CNN's "State Of The Union" on 28 February 2016 (the Republican presidential candidate would later [blame](#) it on a faulty earpiece) a photograph purportedly showing Hillary Clinton with former Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia,

a former Ku Klux Klan member, was widely circulated online:



The photograph was posted by numerous web sites along with articles arguing that the news media were being hypocritical in their coverage of Trump's purported connections to a white supremacist hate group, while making no mention of Hillary Clinton. *The Daily Caller* also published a video of Clinton praising Byrd's service in Congress:

Despite mounting criticism for Donald Trump's failure to disavow former Ku Klux Klan grand wizard David Duke's support, Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton once heaped praise for late Klan leader Sen. Robert Byrd.

In a video uploaded to the State Department's official YouTube page on June 28, 2010, Clinton commemorated late Sen. Byrd by saying, "Today our country has lost a true American original, my friend and mentor Robert C. Byrd."

Secretary Clinton Comments on the Passin...



This photograph and video are undeniably genuine: The [photograph](#) was taken in July 2004, and the video of Clinton was filmed on 28 June 2010, shortly after Byrd's death.

It's also true that Robert Byrd was a member of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1940s and helped establish the hate group's chapter in Sophia, West Virginia. However, in 1952 Byrd avowed that "After about a year, I became disinterested [in the KKK], quit paying my dues, and dropped my membership in the organization," and throughout his long political career (he served for 57 years in the United States Congress) he repeatedly [apologized](#) for his involvement with the KKK:

"I know now I was wrong. Intolerance had no place in America. I apologized a thousand times ... and I don't mind apologizing over and over again. I can't erase what happened."

In 2010, even the [NAACP](#) released a statement honoring Senator Byrd and mourning his passing:

The NAACP is saddened by the passing of United States Senator Robert Byrd. Byrd, the longest serving member of congress was first elected to the U.S. House from [West Virginia] in 1952 and was elected Senator in 1958. Byrd passed away this morning at the age of 92.

"Senator Byrd reflects the transformative power of this nation," stated NAACP President and CEO Benjamin Todd Jealous. "Senator Byrd went from being an active member of the KKK to a being a stalwart supporter of the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act and many other pieces of seminal legislation that advanced the civil rights and liberties of our country.

"Senator Byrd came to consistently support the NAACP civil rights agenda, doing well on the NAACP Annual Civil Rights Report Card. He stood with us on many issues of crucial importance to our members from the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act, the historic health care legislation of 2010 and his support for the

Hate Crimes Prevention legislation," stated Hilary O. Shelton, Director of the NAACP Washington Bureau and Senior Vice President for Advocacy and Policy. "Senator Byrd was a master of the Senate Rules, and helped strategize passage of legislation that helped millions of Americans. He will be sorely missed."

Although this image was used to criticize the media for ignoring Hillary Clinton's connection to former KKK member Robert Byrd while simultaneously playing up Donald Trump's comments regarding former Klan member David Duke, several factors made the latter much more newsworthy in early 2016

First of all, Trump declined to condemn Duke and the Ku Klux Klan in February 2016, making the story current and newsworthy, while photograph of Hillary Clinton was taken more than a decade ago. The lack of current coverage isn't because the print media are ignoring the association, but because the photograph is a several-year-old story.

Second, while David Duke is no longer a member of the Ku Klux Klan, he is still an active member of another white supremacist organization, [NAAWP](#): the National Association for the Advancement of White People. Duke, a prominent Holocaust denier (although he describes himself as a "Holocaust [exposer](#)"), also has a more-than-passing interest in politics: the former member of the Louisiana House of Representatives has run for the U.S. Senate, governor of Louisiana, and President of the United States. Duke has spent his life founding and supporting various white nationalist and white supremacist groups, while Byrd, by contrast, spent the majority of his life publicly disavowing and repeatedly apologizing for his early KKK affiliation.

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