

Everett McKinley Dirksen

(1896–1969)

Everett McKinley Dirksen was born in Pekin, Illinois, and represented his home state as both a U.S. representative and senator. After studying law in Minnesota, Dirksen enlisted in the U.S. Army and served in World War I. He returned to Pekin in 1919, entered local politics, and won a seat on the city council in 1926. Six years later, he was elected as a Republican to the U.S. House of Representatives, bucking the Democratic landslide of 1932 that was fueled by Franklin Roosevelt's first presidential campaign.

In Washington, D.C., Dirksen completed law school at night and was admitted to the bar in 1936. He served in the House for 16 years, where he was known for his independence and moderate political views. An eye disease kept him from running for reelection in 1948. Two years later, after recovering from the serious ailment, Dirksen ran for a U.S. Senate seat and defeated Senate Democratic leader Scott Lucas, thereby beginning a second career in politics. In 1959, Dirksen was elected Republican leader of the Senate, and during the ensuing decade he helped shepherd through the Senate such legislation as the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963 and the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

During the 1960s, Dirksen's strong, effective leadership made him among the most powerful and respected Republicans in Washington. Dirksen was quick-witted and an artful persuader, but his greatest asset as a statesman was his ability to compromise and change his position on an issue while never compromising his convictions. He remained the Senate Republican leader until his death in 1969. Speaking at his memorial service, his son-in-law, Senator Howard Baker, Jr., of Tennessee, compared Dirksen to Abraham Lincoln: "Both men understood with singular clarity that a great and diverse people do not speak with a single voice and that adherence to rigid ideology leaves little room for compromise and response to change."¹

In 1968 artist Richard Harryman made an offer to Senator Everett Dirksen to paint his likeness. A willing Dirksen sat for the artist in the spring of 1969. Harryman worked on the portrait throughout the summer and completed it a few weeks before Dirksen's death on September 7, 1969. The portrait was given to Dirksen's son-in-law, Senator Howard Baker, Jr., who hung it in his Republican leader's suite in the Capitol. In 1984 Baker asked Harryman to make three replicas of the portrait. The following year, after his retirement, Baker donated one of these replicas to the Senate. The other two pictures were given to The Dirksen Congressional Center in Pekin, Illinois, and to the Capitol Hill Club in Washington, D.C. In addition to portraits, Harryman paints people and scenes of the Chesapeake Bay region.



Senator Everett Dirksen's oratorical skills were legendary: he was known as the "Golden Voice of the Senate."

(U.S. Senate Historical Office)

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Richard Hood Harryman (born 1928)

Oil on canvas, 1984

39½ x 29¾ inches (100.3 x 75.6 cm)

Signed (lower right corner): Harryman.

Gift of Senator Howard Baker, Jr., 1985

Accepted by the U.S. Senate Commission on Art, 1985

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