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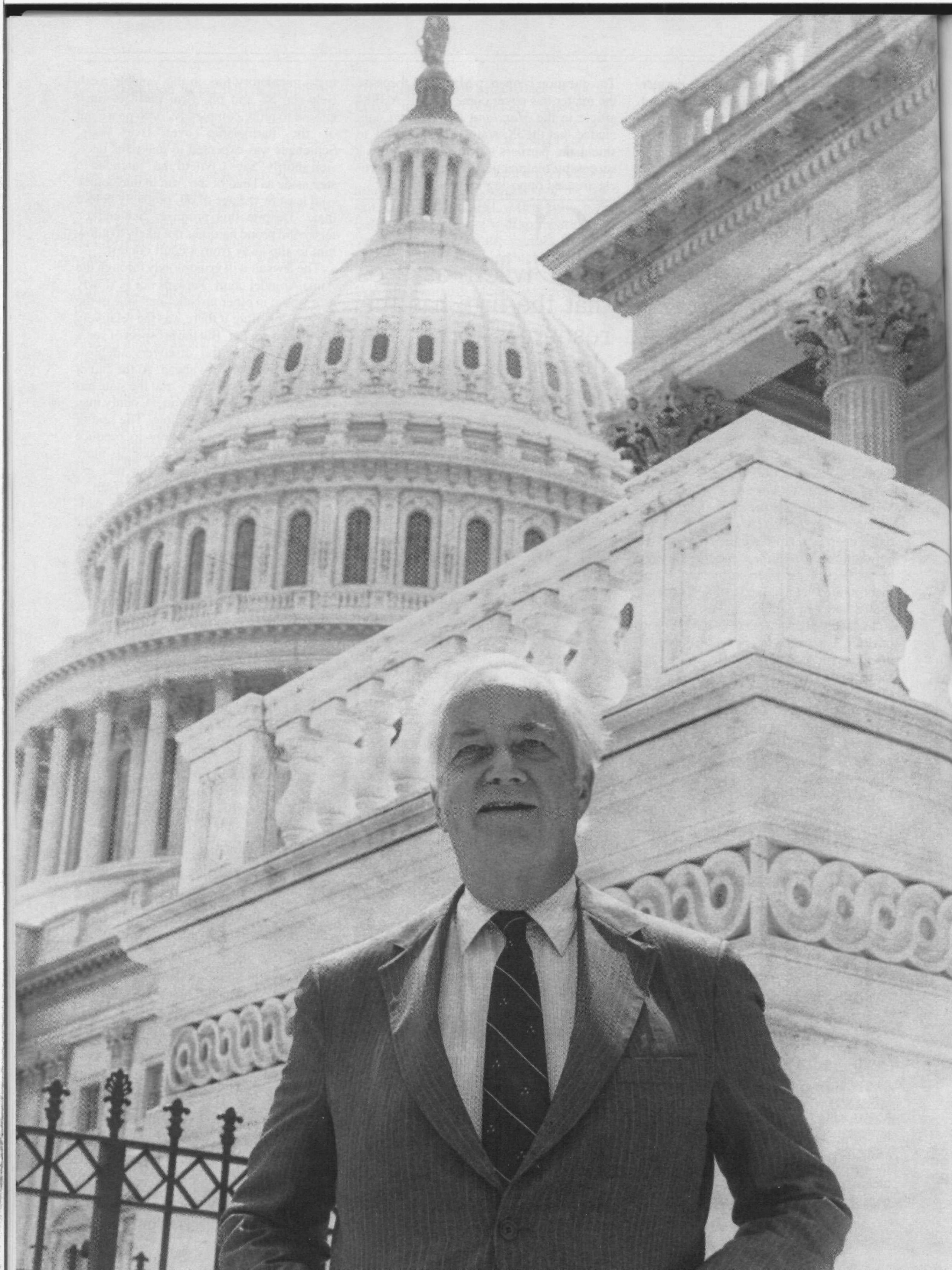


LEADERS

By Alan Crawford

The Long Goodbye

Mac Mathias is leaving the Senate after serving eighteen years, but his taste for class politics should live on

PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Peggy Fox*

Class understatement describes the technique: if your money and freedom and carelessness of censure allow you to buy any kind of car, you provide yourself with the meanest and most common to indicate that you're not taking seriously so easily purchasable and thus vulgar a class totem. You have a Chevy, Ford, Plymouth, or Dodge, and in the least interesting style and color. It may be clean, although slightly dirty is best. *Paul Fussell,* Class

Charles "Mac" Mathias's '66 Buick station wagon was nothing if not dirty. Back when the senator used to sputter around Capitol Hill in a '66 Buick, observers untutored in the subtleties of the American class structure routinely took the Maryland Republican's choice of car as a sign that Mac was, deep down, just folks. But the senator was merely demonstrating good breeding, according to Fussell's précis of American status symbolism.

Mac used to drive the old station wagon to and from his two-hundred-acre West Virginia farm, hauling farm implements, sacks of manure, even livestock in it. Legend has it that he once transported a ram, which stomped a hole clear through the cargo deck.

The farm itself gives you another idea about the senior senator's aristocratic roots and attendant "carelessness of censure." The farm has been in his family for years;

unfortunately, his family didn't settle in the state he later chose to represent. In fact, some refer to Mathias as the third senator from West Virginia. But the farm has held attraction for other statesmen as well. Another bit of Mathias lore maintains that George Washington once slept there. Washington was out in those parts, the story goes, one bitter cold winter evening as a surveyor for the colonial governor of Virginia. To ward off the chilblains, he wrapped himself in a bullskin and spent the night in a ditch. Mac's hideaway is close by Little Bullskin Creek.

When Mathias retires this year, he'll go back to the farm, though he's managed to take a good bit of it with him in his twenty-five years on Capitol Hill. He once hatched chicks in his office, and his black Labrador retriever—a symbol of patrician proclivities—has probably been around the Hill longer than many of Mac's colleagues.

Walk into that office and you think you're in a gentleman farmer's study. There's a rich rusticity about the place, which is all dark wood and marble and leather-bound books. Among the old maps and pictures of now-forgotten statesmen is a framed Union Party ballot from 1864. That was the year Abraham Lincoln headed the ticket and Col. Charles E. Trail ran for the Maryland Senate. Trail was Mac Mathias's great-grandfather. Mac's wife, the former Ann Hickling Bradford, is no parvenu either. Her father was former Massachusetts Governor Robert F. Bradford, whose family descends from the Pilgrim leader William Bradford.

If there's an American establishment, Mac Mathias is part of it, with all the strengths and weaknesses associated therewith. Endued with a sense of history, motivated more by an ethic of public service than personal striving, he has brought to his political career qualities of personal decency and independence of judgment which have served him—and the country—well at a time when Congress all too often seems dominated by hustlers and opportunists. "People yearn for simple answers as life becomes more complex," he says. "Simplistic rhetoric that has been offered by some Republicans has promised easy answers to complicated problems of modern life. ... But life is just not that simple."

At ease with himself and the world, urging his colleagues to go slowly, think carefully, keep the faith, and take the high road, he can also be something of a nag. Mac's grandfather was a Bull Mooser. His dad, a friend of Calvin Coolidge, was also a prohibitionist. A reformist by inheritance, Mathias is one of those well-meaning souls who exasperate their colleagues by reminding them, as Mac once did, that it's a "point of patriotism" for them to walk up flights of stairs like *he* does, rather than ride to their offices in elevators.

Ebb and flow is the natural condition of politics," says Mathias, who does not see the rise of the New Right as unique or permanent. But his wing of the GOP is an old, liberal segment that has all but ceased to exist.

His genial manner, flexibility, and fairness have won friends and influenced both multinational businessmen and inner-city activists. In this, Mac has the true aristocrat's ability to get on well with almost anyone, whatever their station in life. When Marylanders turned out in mid-July for a farewell dinner at the Convention Center, the diversity of well-wishers was impressive indeed.

Some twelve hundred friends, admirers, and colleagues appeared for what was billed as a "celebration of statesmanship," the proceeds from which will go to The Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, where Mathias will lecture when he leaves Capitol Hill. Dozens of speakers took their turns at microphones around the banquet hall, some like David Rockefeller just there to fete a friend but others, less celebrated themselves, who recalled some critical moment in their own lives when they needed help and Mathias came through.

Business leaders like developer James Rouse, who served as chairman and master of ceremonies, mingled with presidential aspirants like Senator Bob Dole of Kansas and civil rights activists like Benjamin Hooks of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Juanita Jackson Mitchell recalled how, back in the 1950s, she sued the city of Frederick to force integration of the opera house and received the help of the young city attorney who was white and Republican. Larry Simms of the Maryland Watermen's Association remembered how no politician would move on his complaints about the polluting of the Chesapeake Bay. Nobody, that is, but Mathias.

Taken together, they represented the unique constituency Mathias has served since entering politics—a constituency the cultivation of which is a veritable monument to one facet of Mac Mathias that has been overlooked by Mathias-watchers.

That is the man's almost uncanny survival skills. For three decades, he has shrewdly managed to hold his own—and sometimes triumph—as a liberal in an increasingly conservative party and a Republican in an overwhelmingly Democratic state. This has not been easy. It has required a higher degree of shrewdness than Mathias himself might want to acknowledge, but it is there nonetheless. Mathias may be, as his admirers insist, a great statesman. But he is certainly a consummate politician.

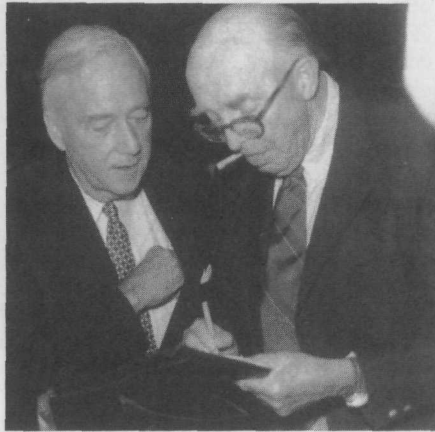
And now he's giving it up.

In an election year when the GOP is fighting to maintain its newly-found majority in the Senate, Mathias is all but assuring a seat to a Maryland Democrat. The party that controls the White House almost always suffers losses in its mid-term, sixth-year election. The Democrats, with only twelve seats to defend against twenty-two held by Republicans, need to pick up four seats to regain control. And control means not only over Senate seats but over committees, over appointee nominations, and over the legislative calendar.

Mathias is all but signing away one of those four, a fact that was not lost on Senator Dole at the Convention Center tribute. "We have been trying to urge him to delay this farewell party," he said. "We promised him a bigger crowd in 1992." But Dole hinted at the forces that can drive even a seasoned pro to the sidelines. Farmers lead "Dump Dole" rallies in Kansas, while senators and hopefuls in Idaho, Ohio, North Carolina, California, and elsewhere are carried off on their shields. "This is a very tough year," Dole said.

Although Mathias proclaims "I feel very comfortable in the Senate," surrounded by friends and allies, most are not in his party. The good relations he has enjoyed with liberal Republicans and most Democrats throughout the years has not extended to his party's conservatives, who are gaining power, and he has paid—and is paying—dearly for it.

The tide began to turn with Reagan's election. Mathias gained a position on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. But to do so he had to give up his seat on the



In July 1,200 friends and colleagues saluted Mathias at the Convention Center. They ranged from fellow Republican Bob Dole, *above,* who entered Congress the same time as Mathias, to (clockwise) Governor Harry Hughes, Maryland junior senator Paul Sarbanes, and tribute chairman Jim Rouse. Dole wanted Mac to stick *around* for *another* term; the Republicans face losing control of the Senate, and the Maryland seat is gone without him. "This is a very tough year," Dole said. Mac would face six tough years back in Congress. No thanks, he said.

pork-laden Appropriations Committee. Had he played his cards differently, he could have been chairman of the Judiciary Committee today—a post he would dearly love to occupy. But back in 1977, when the ranking GOP position on the panel became vacant and Strom Thurmond was next in line, the South Carolina right-winger sacrificed his position in two committees to switch to Judiciary, expressly to block Mathias. And in 1981 Thurmond abolished the Antitrust Subcommittee Mathias would have headed.

Mathias himself is in part to blame for the missed opportunities. Convinced, as liberal Republicans have been for years, that the nomination of a right-winger for the presidency would doom the GOP to a permanent minority status, Mathias went to great lengths to dissociate himself from the Reagan candidacy. He even refused to serve on a state Republican advisory committee for Reagan.

Although he was ultimately proven wrong, it is no great surprise that he felt as he did. For decades, the party's progressives enjoyed the adoration of the establishment press, which unfailingly upheld them as "respectable" conservatives to distinguish them from the frumpier and grumpier right-wingers. These were the guys, we were told, who didn't wipe their noses on their sleeves—and they didn't.

But along came a group of thoughtful, policy-oriented, and forbiddingly articulate individuals, many of them scholars out of the social sciences, who were explicitly conservative—men like George Gilder, Thomas Sowell, and Irving Kristol. These, were the neoconservatives (the alarums sound), men deeply skeptical of the Great Society, commanding a new respect from the establishment press and, ultimately, challenging the exclusive claims to respectability on which the progressives had dined out for years.

Look more closely at the constituencies from which the few remaining GOP liberals spring and you'll see that they represent a segment of the party that has all but ceased to exist. Theirs is the GOP that went down to defeat in the Cow Palace twenty-two years ago. The party that had once been most closely associated with the country club, Wall Street, and the Business Roundtable was being taken over by what Vance Packard once called the "limited-success class" of white-collar workers who, however poorly paid and low in status, still identified with management rather than labor and hated to pay taxes.

The party has changed hands and is now that of the raucous New Right, if not the Great Silent Majority. "The ultraconservative wing of the party has been allowed to gain power only because of a weakness of the moderates—and I have to plead guilty

to that," he says. "We moderates get so entranced with the business of governing and get so immersed in the day-to-day operations of Congress and the administration that we do not pay close attention to party affairs. We tend to leave that to 'others.' "

The "others" certainly haven't let the opportunity slip. The motley coalition that comprises the New Right has been quite busy trying to mold the GOP into the role of standard-bearer for its agenda. Ranging from geostrategists, warning of the danger of complacency in the war against communism, to the religious right, crusading against abortion and for its standards of morality, the New Right is vocal, vigilant, and increasingly sophisticated. Working in all facets of American political life, it is gaining increasing power in the political arena, and is making increasing demands on the GOP. There is no room for hedging.

Some have claimed that even President Reagan has betrayed them, and are searching for a new leader—one who, among other things, will advance their internationalist and interventionist world vision. To a group that considers defeatist a live-and-let-live stalemate with the Soviet Union and views a continuing war between the communists and the capitalists as a fact of life, there is no place for a Mathias who suggested in 1983, "We would advance our prospects better by seeking to understand the Soviet Union and where possible, to conclude durable understandings with it."

While the New Right disowns the likes of Mathias from his party, the Democrats have made steady inroads into the high-income suburbs and the booming "knowledge sector," whether the industrial parks ringing Cambridge, Massachusetts, or the high-tech plants of northern California. To survive at all as a Republican in a state like Maryland, Mac Mathias in all fairness had to be something of a liberal. Otherwise, given the nature of that constituency, he'd never have been elected.

And given some of the Democratic contenders Maryland has produced over the years, such as perennial loser George Mahoney, Mathias has in some cases been the only credible choice. But the players are changing not only in his own party but in the party that has supported him. Unlike the 1980 go-round with a forgettable Ed Conroy, 1986 presents Democratic liberals a good deal of options from within their own ranks. This year they don't need to look to a liberal Republican to espouse their views.

Moreover, Mathias's record of late has troubled some supporters and alienated others. His vote against halting aid to the Contras angered many liberals. Jewish constituents, generally in favor of his social policies, would hardly line up with votes and contributions after his *Foreign Affairs* article advised a more pragmatic, less Israel-centered, Middle East policy.

In 1964, into his third House term, Mathias achieved one of the first of his significant political coups: He was endorsed for re-election by the AFL-CIO. The labor support would help him win a Senate seat in 1968.

The future does not lie with politicians of his stripe, for good or for bad. Ambitious Republicans like Mathias have been dropping like flies, while Ronald Reagan—as if oblivious to their warnings—ignored their counsel and went on to win two of the most astonishing landslides in American history. But Mathias is sanguine. A quarter-century in Congress—one-eighth its history, as he likes to point out—teaches a lot about supposedly inevitable political movements. "Ebb and flow is the natural condition of politics," he says. "I don't think [the rise of the New Right] is unique. It's happening all the time. The tide goes out, and comes back in again." Only this time Mathias is going out with it.

CHARLES MCCURDY MATHIAS, JR., WAS born on July 24, 1922, in Frederick, where his father practiced law. At 18, he entered Haverford College, a staid old Quaker institution in Philadelphia, only to leave two years later, when Pearl Harbor was bombed. On December 7, 1942, he enlisted in the U.S. Guard, then transferred to the Navy. A friend who served with Mathias remembers him as an "easy-going kind of guy who could never stay in step—he sort of walked like a duck and still does."

Serving in the South Pacific, Mathias participated in the occupation of Japan and was one of the first Americans to visit Nagasaki and Hiroshima after the bombing. From then on, he has said, he would work to control the use of nuclear arms.

Back in the states, he attended the University of Maryland Law School and, upon graduation, practiced law with his father. In 1953, he became an assistant state attorney general, and from 1954 through 1959, served as city attorney of Frederick.

Entering politics in 1958, Mathias was elected to the Maryland House of Delegates, serving with only six other Republicans in a state in which membership in the GOP has never been politically advantageous. Chosen to speak at the General Assembly's 1959 observance of Lincoln's birthday, he urged his colleagues to follow Lincoln's "steadfast adherence to the basic concept of justice, to the necessity for integrity, to the virtue of charity, and to the ideal of liberty."

"That was the first major speech he ever made and you can see that sense of history that was there from the very beginning," his longtime political adviser Gordon Hawk recalls. "That was an amazing speech for such a young politician to have made and yet, even then, he had the sense that he was part of a broad historical tradition, that of Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt and all that was best in the Republican party. And he's never lost sight of it."

After two years in the House of Delegates, Mathias ran for Congress, defeating a one-term incumbent, Democrat John Foley, with 52 percent of the vote.

"Mac's roots are in Western Maryland and the people in that part of the state are a unique breed—one that respects Mac even when they haven't agreed with him," Hawk says. "They're an independent sort, like Mac himself, and they respect independence in others."

It didn't take long for Mathias to test their tolerance. His first major vote was regarded as something of an affront to the Republican regulars who helped elect him. Judge Smith, a reactionary Virginia Democrat, was then chairing the House Rules Committee and managing to stall every piece of civil rights legislation that came his way—which meant every piece of civil rights legislation in the House.

The Kennedy Administration, eager to get things rolling, initiated a move to expand the committee's membership by three members. This, of course, would diminish the chairman's power, and the Republicans opposed the plan. But not Mathias, who broke with his party to back the effort.

"You couldn't believe the heat he took from Montgomery County," Hawk says. "But he survived and he's survived ever since. It was a good thing, really, because it established his independence, especially

Mathias entered state politics in 1958 from his Frederick home base, stumping for votes in the wilds of Western Maryland. He quickly moved to Congress, where he would strike better chords with a Kennedy than with the Republicans who occupied the White House.

In his career Mathias has espoused civil rights and urged accomodation in foreign policy, hallmarks of the Eastern Establishment GOP that had its last heyday with Ike. Now the best platform for airing his views will be his new chair at the School of Advanced International Studies.

on civil rights issues, and he's kept on bucking the party on those issues and he's kept on getting re-elected."

Mathias was, nonetheless, more conservative then than he is today. "When I first met Mac Mathias, he was as conservative as I was," Senator Barry Goldwater says. "I recall when he first ran for the House being asked to come out and give a speech for him—somewhere out near Columbia Country Club. When I got there, I was amazed at how similar our views on many issues were. But, over the years, he's become a liberal." In that first campaign, in fact, Mathias characterized opponent Foley as a "lopsided extremist" who supported legislation backed by the "Americans for Democratic Action and other liberal groups." By 1974, however, Mathias would get high marks from ADA, which gave him a score of 90 percent, higher than any other Republican Senator. (The only "wrong" vote he cast was to confirm the nomination of Gerald Ford as vice president; ADA considered the Michigan representative too conservative.)

In 1964, into his third term, Mathias achieved one of the first of his significant political coups, the kind of accomplishment that would, more and more, mark his unique public career. He was endorsed for re-election by the AFL-CIO, which is almost unheard of for Republicans. This support from organized labor would, in fact, be a factor in his ability to win statewide election, which he did in 1968.

After eight years in the House of Representatives, Mathias ran for the U.S. Senate, exchanging a relatively safe seat for the unknown territory of the wildly diverse statewide electorate. Maryland, as mentioned, is not notoriously kind to Republicans. They constituted, at last count, something like 24 percent of its voters. State politics, back then, were pretty well dictated by the city of Baltimore, which by its sheer numbers could frequently impose its will on the rest of the state. Baltimore then was blue-collar, industrial, ethnic, and overwhelmingly Democratic. The state also has a large black population (now 23 percent, larger than any other state outside the South) who vote Democratic.

The one demographic development that might on the surface of things look promising to a rising Republican was the rapid expansion of the state's suburban populations. Suburbs, after all, have long been viewed as bastions of conservatism, the preserves of the newly-privileged where men in Bermuda shorts hose down their driveways, wives bake cookies, and everyone swears by *The Saturday Evening Post*.

Maryland's suburbs were booming, all right, but while Maryland has emerged as the only state in the country with a

suburban majority, its suburbs are the kind that elect Republicans. Almost a third of the state's voters live in Montgomery and Prince George's counties. Both are bedroom communities for federal government workers who make the commute, day after day, to their jobs in Washington, D.C. Prince George's is predominantly black while Montgomery, with one of the fastest-rising standards of living in the country in the last two decades, is not only white but white-collar. The well-paid bureaucrats, lobbyists, and defense workers live there and, however much they may differ from their neighbors in Prince George's County, this much they do have in common. Both depend, as perhaps no other constituency in America, on an ever-increasing level of government spending. These are folks who want taxes raised, not lowered, and vote for more, not less.

It was into these treacherous electoral waters that Mac Mathias had decided to step—and, as it turns out, with remarkable success. In the years to follow, he would manage to become the only Maryland Republican ever to be elected to the Senate three times and the only Republican to carry the city of Baltimore in a statewide race.

Considering the narrowness of that first victory, the achievements that followed are even more remarkable. Mathias didn't even win a clear majority. He had not one opponent, but two. The Democratic opponent was the incumbent Daniel Brewster —Mathias's law school roommate. But there was another candidate in the race, George Mahoney, a Democrat who ran as an independent and pulled down 13 percent of the vote. This took votes away from Brewster and allowed Mathias to sneak by at the wire.

Once again, Mathias lost little time in running up against his own party's leaders. That March, in his first speech on the Senate floor, Mathias broke with the Republicans and argued against deployment of the Safeguard antiballistic missile system. It was the first salvo in a series of skirmishes with the Nixon White House. A Vietnam War critic, he would also vote against the Supreme Court nominations of Clement Haynsworth and Harrold Carswell.

By 1974, when he was to seek re-election, Mathias was so strongly affiliated with the more liberal forces on the Hill that his Democratic opponent, Barbara Mikulski, would be able to accuse him of being too liberal for Maryland, at least on one issue. In one of the more amusing episodes in recent election history, the otherwise predictably "progressive" Mikulski would accuse Mathias of being "pro-busing." The charge didn't help her cause. Both union members and blacks defected in record numbers to the Mathias camp. In 1986, Mikulski is now the front-runner in the Democratic primary for Mac's seat; she no longer worries about liberals in Republican clothing.

If you spent a million in '80, you would have to raise $4 million in '86," says Mathias. The prospect of stocking such a campaign war chest was "one of the less appealing aspects" of a contemplated race.

Despite these heady moments, the Nixon years were trying ones for a Republican so highminded as Mathias. He found the finance practices of President Nixon's 1972 re-election committee particularly irksome and declared his own personal war on "the curse of big money." Refusing to accept contributions of more than $100 from individual donors, Mathias declared that the GOP "has a special problem since its own administration is the one that allowed Watergate to happen, so I think the Republicans face a special obligation and opportunity for reform." Even so, he managed to outspend Mikulski $329,845 to $74,311, or by more than four-to-one.

With Republican fortunes at low ebb and the nation more than a little cynical about its institutions, Mathias began to speak publicly of what columnist George Will would call "a race—a stroll, really—for the presidency" as a Republican. He turned down an offer from former Senator Eugene McCarthy to run together as independents.

His presidential notions came to nothing, of course, but the election of Democrat Jimmy Carter worked to Mathias's advantage nonetheless. "He was a lot more effective in the Carter years," one lobbyist said recently. "He got along famously with the Carter people because he was a sure vote for them."

That may be a bit strong, but it is true enough that these were good years for Maryland—and for Mathias. There were good relations between Mayor William Donald Schaefer and the Democratic administration, and Baltimore's revitalization moved full speed ahead.

Most of the projects in which Mathias takes the greatest pride—the subway system, the Fort McHenry Tunnel, the Social Security complex in Baltimore, the study that led to the cleanup of the Chesapeake Bay—occurred during the years between Nixon and Reagan.

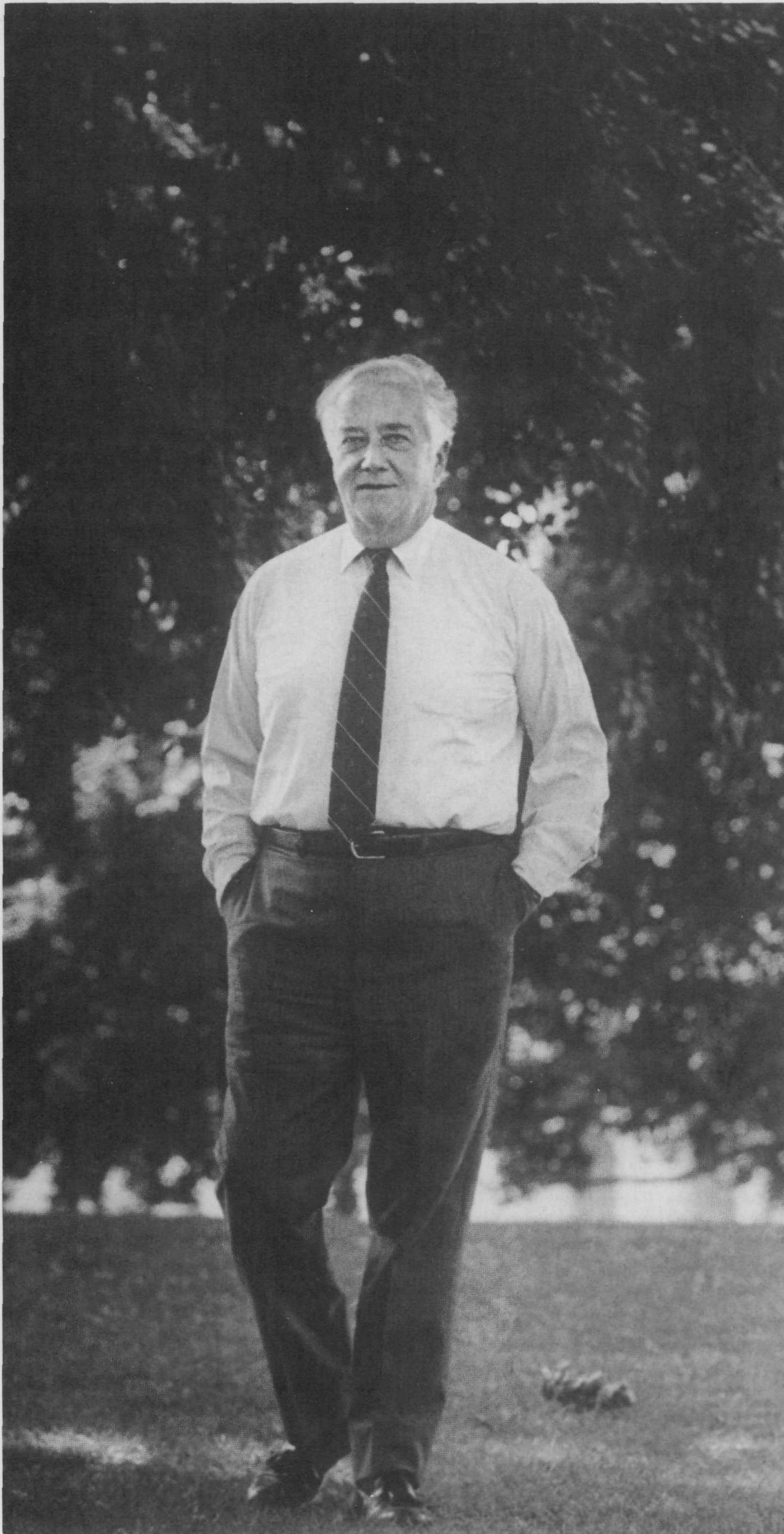
Things haven't gone so swimmingly since, for a number of reasons, despite the Senator's continued popularity in Maryland. The 1980 election may, in fact, have been his most impressive. In that campaign, the man who had refused to accept contributions of more than $100 per donor pulled out all the stops and raised $841,000 to Conroy's $46,500.

Accepting contributions up to the legal limit—$1,000 from individuals and $5,000 from political action committees—Mathias found that he had friends in very high places. Big corporations fell all over each other to help his cause. So did Big Labor. The Mathias campaign got money from the United Auto Workers, the Steelworkers, the International Union of Seafarers, the Communications Workers, and public employee unions like the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees.

Mathias even had enough in his campaign coffers to share some of it with the other party. At one point in the campaign, he contributed $10,000 to Baltimore's Democratic clubs to help print 75,000 sample ballots listing Mathias for Senate and an otherwise straight Democratic ticket. Democratic Congressman Parren Mitchell, a powerhouse in the black community, helped out by recording radio commercials endorsing Mathias.

When the returns were in, Mathias had not only crushed his opponent by a two-to-one margin, he had also carried all the counties in the state and the city of Baltimore. Pulling together his constituency of suburban liberals, labor unions, and blacks, he also managed to buck the national Reagan landslide. Maryland, which went for Carter, resoundingly returned its Republican senator to Washington.

But now Mathias seems back in his phase of disdaining the money that clings to candidates like puffballs. The prospect of stocking another war chest was "one of the less appealing aspects" of a contemplated race, he says. And the booty required would be enormous. "The rule of thumb that applies," Mathias notes, "is that if you spent a million in '80, you would have to raise $4 million in '86."



When not lawyering on Capitol Hill, Mathias will return to the family home—in West Virginia. Can't help it if your ancestors don't settle in a state you choose to represent.

That is not the level to which he aspires.

Mathias may be the last in a long line of patrician Republicans of high ideals but limited effectiveness—men like Elliott Richardson, Charles Percy, Jake Javits, George Romney, and William Scranton—about whose failing fortunes there has been something wistful and slightly sad.

If Mac Mathias seems like something of an anachronism, it just may be because he is. And that's not all bad. "Mac Mathias isn't like most people in politics today," says one liberal Republican. "Such influence as he has enjoyed has come about through the development of warm relations with people on both sides of the aisle and by a reputation for integrity and fairness. He's not the type to accomplish things by leaning on the XYZ agency to get a project located back in Baltimore and he isn't the kind of man whose self-esteem is wrapped up in being able to boast that he personally is responsible for locating the ABC plant in Gaithersburg. He isn't driven in that way and he'll be perfectly happy once he has left the Senate. He doesn't need it the way other politicians do."

But don't weep for Mac, whose retirement seems a most natural decision, under the circumstances. "To have run again, he'd have had to decide—and to gear up for the campaign—in 1985," Hawk explains. "Say he runs and is re-elected. He serves for six more years and that takes him clear through 1993 and he'll be 70 years old."

Which doesn't leave a lot of time for other things he wants to do with the rest of his life, which include writing, reading, working on his farm, and practicing "a little law." That, he explains, "means no wills, no title searches, and no lobbying."

To date Mathias has not chosen which firm he'll join. He says he's talking to ones in Washington, Baltimore, and elsewhere. But rather than pounding his old corridors, he looks forward to work in other areas—in international law, trade, and some domestic issues.

Most of all, he can be expected to speak and write regularly on foreign affairs. He is to become chairman of the American Council on Germany; he sits on the steering committee of the Bilderburg Conference; he has been president of the North Atlantic Assembly. He will pal around with Thomas Watson, formerly IBM chairman and Soviet ambassador, who made the final address at the July tribute. He will take his post at SAIS as the first Milton S. Eisenhower Distinguished Professor of Public Policy, which calls for regular lectures to budding diplomats and for sessions with visiting dignitaries. And, perhaps, for a replacement of his Buick. ■

Alan Crawford is the author of Thunder on the Right *and a free-lance writer.*