

Letter to Zell Miller: 'You Have Betrayed Our Trust'

By Jimmy Carter
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To Sen. Zell Miller:

You seem to have forgotten that loyal Democrats elected you as mayor [of Young Harris] and as state senator. Loyal Democrats, including members of my family and me, elected you as state senator, lieutenant governor and governor. It was a loyal Democrat, Lester Maddox, who assigned you to high positions in the state government when you were out of office. It was a loyal Democrat, Roy Barnes, who appointed you as U.S. senator when you were out of office. By your historically unprecedented disloyalty, you have betrayed our trust.

Great Georgia Democrats who served in the past, including Walter George, Richard Russell, Herman Talmadge and Sam Nunn, disagreed strongly with the policies of Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson and me, but they remained loyal to the party in which they gained their public office. Other Democrats, because of philosophical differences or the race issue, like Bo Callaway and Strom Thurmond, at least had the decency to become Republicans.

Everyone knows that you were chosen to speak at the Republican National Convention because of your being a "Democrat," and it's quite possible that your rabid speech damaged our party and paid the GOP some transient dividends.

Perhaps more troublesome of all is seeing you adopt an established and very effective Republican campaign technique of destroying the character of opponents by wild and false allegations. The Bush campaign's personal attacks on the character of John McCain in South Carolina in 2000 was a vivid example. The claim that war hero Max Cleland was a disloyal American and an ally of Osama bin Laden should have given you pause, but you have joined in this ploy by your bizarre claims that another war hero, John Kerry, would not defend the security of our nation except with spitballs. (This is the same man whom you described previously as "one of this nation's authentic heroes, one of this party's best-known and greatest leaders - and a good friend.")

I, myself, served in the Navy from 1942 to 1953, and, as president, greatly strengthened our military forces and protected our nation and its interests in every way. I don't believe this warrants your referring to me as a pacifist.

Zell, I have known you for 42 years and have, in the past, respected you as a trustworthy political leader and a personal friend. But now, there are many of us loyal Democrats who feel uncomfortable in seeing that you have chosen the rich over the poor, unilateral pre-emptive war over a strong nation united with others for peace, lies and obfuscation over the truth, and the political technique of personal character assassination as a way to win elections or to garner a few moments of applause. These are not the characteristics of great Democrats whose legacy you and I have inherited.

Sincerely, and with deepest regrets,
Jimmy Carter