
Book Review

Advice from the Generation that Worked

by Nancy Spannaus

Making Government Work

by Ernest F. "Fritz" Hollings, with Kirk Victor
Columbia, S.C., University of South Carolina
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360 pp, hardcover, \$29.95

We need Alexander Hamilton, whose vision was not a nation of consumers but a nation of producers, of builders.

This quote, from the conclusion of former Sen. Fritz Hollings' (D-S.C.) autobiography, reflects part of what is extraordinary about this retired lawmaker, a veteran of World War II, who served as state legislator, South Carolina governor, and U.S. Senator for 29 years. While I could argue with him about those of his policies which I believe deviate from those of our revolutionary first Treasury Secretary, his outlook on questions of trade, regulation, agriculture, and industry, probably come the closest to that of Hamilton, than anyone else in the Senate over the past 40 years. It is to the detriment of the nation that he no longer serves there.

Having been involved in the political battles over the past 40 years, particularly over economic policy, I have to admit that I was surprised to read about many of Hollings' battles. The Senator's name was blazoned in lights on the 1985 Gramm-Rudman-Hollings budget-balancing bill, and that is the major context in which I thought of his record. That legislation, in my view, was a monetarist fraud, which would condemn the country to disaster by treating all budget items as "equal."

But Fritz Hollings, unlike the economic whiner Phil Gramm, is not obsessed with number-crunching, or, like the modern conservative economist, with cutting

off heads to equalize the supply with the number of hats available, as Pope Paul VI so eloquently put it.

Rather, Hollings' career developed around a number of crucial battles which went against the tide, especially that of the dominant wing of the Democratic Party, itself a bunch of consumerist, post-industrial ideologues. First and foremost, Hollings fought to maintain industry, especially the textile industry, and to provide the protection which it required. He approached this task from the standpoint of another of Hamilton's principles, which he also quotes: "Not only the wealth, but the independence and security of a Country, appear to be materially connected with the prosperity of manufacturers. Every nation . . . ought to endeavor to possess within itself all essentials of national supply. These comprise the means of Subsistence, habitation, clothing and defense." (This comes from the 1791 *Report on Manufactures*.)

Hollings lost that battle again and again, but he never gave up.

Another of the crucial areas where Hollings fought against the tide, was in the area of deregulation. As early as the late 1970s, when President Jimmy Carter was following the Trilateral Commission script in ripping up the nation's transportation regulatory structure, Hollings took the issue on. "Government must not off-load its responsibilities to protect citizens from rapacious pricing schemes and in-different service," Hollings write.

From early in his career, Hollings distinguished himself as a close collaborator of the Kennedy family, an association which caused him no end of trouble in South Carolina, especially on issues such as race. However, he consistently followed through on such fronts as government ensuring food for the poor (both internationally and domestically). Later, he maintained the same principled outlook in pursuing just relations with other nations (reflected in his support of the Panama Canal Treaty, which was also very unpopular in his state).

Hollings also made a name for himself in advocating government support for modernizing our nation's infrastructure, specifically the high-speed rail corridors which the nation so desperately needs.

It's refreshing to read about a Senator with guts, and a commitment to Hamilton's philosophy of government and economy. I recommend you read this book.

