



News - SC Politics

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## Ex-SC Gov. Dick Riley, once a ‘young Turk,’ turns 80

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COLUMBIA, SC — Two-term S.C. Gov. Dick Riley turned 80 Wednesday and spent his birthday working from his home in Greenville.

Riley, a Democrat, served in the S.C. General Assembly in the '60s and '70s as one of its “young Turks” who challenged establishment Democrats and pushed for reforms. As S.C. governor from 1979-1987, Riley made education central to his agenda. He was the first S.C. governor to serve two terms, overseeing a change to the state Constitution to make a second term possible. Riley was U.S. secretary of education from 1993-2001 under President Bill Clinton, who offered to appoint Riley to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1993, an offer Riley declined.

Riley is a senior partner in the Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough law firm, specializing in education-related law and consulting on education policy development.



May 31, 1984: Newly appointed SC Supreme Court Justice A. Lee Chandler is congratulated by SC Governor Richard Riley

and other well-wishers after being seated on the high court. Staff photographer Jeff Amberg

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**Q: What has your birthday been like so far?**

“I worked out this morning for a half hour, took a hot shower and ate a hard-boiled egg,” Riley said, adding he works out to a video called “Walk Away the Pounds.” Then, he started his work day.

**Q: What are you working on?**

Riley works with a Nelson Mullins subsidiary called EducationCounsel. Riley described the company as the “premier education law firm in Washington,”

He said much has changed in the education arena since he was secretary of education, especially the growth of the “standards movement.” When he came into office, there was “very little interest in standards. ... When I came out of office, all 50 states had standards. You cannot have accountability unless you have something to measure it by.”

**Q: What do you think of South Carolina’s move toward evaluating teachers based on student improvement on testing?**

Riley said he supports “a movement away from pure testing” as a way to measure education success. “21st century skills” also should be considered in measuring student growth, such as communications, technology, critical thinking, problem solving and the ability to work on teams.

“We need to be positive about teaching. You need to evaluate teachers, but you need to do it in a fair way,” Riley said. “(T)eachers need to help develop the best way to measure the professional teacher, and it’s not just test scores.”

**Q: What should S.C. lawmakers be doing to address public education issues that they aren’t doing?**

“Public education is the answer to South Carolina having a great future. It should be ... the overriding most important issue facing state government,” Riley said. “I don’t like to be critical of those doing the state work,” but the state could benefit from paying “more careful, positive attention” to improving schools.

“Instead of just criticizing public education all the time” stakeholders should be working together to answer the question: “What is South Carolina’s commitment long-term to quality public schools for all children?”

**Q: Will you celebrate your birthday tonight?**

Riley said he had no plans. Family and friends threw him a “giant surprise party” Friday night.