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SON OF LEGENDARY SENATOR QUILTS POST

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Strom Thurmond Jr. is stepping down next month as the state's chief federal prosecutor to become a private attorney in Aiken. Once criticized as a product of political nepotism, Thurmond has won over some detractors.

His last day as U.S. attorney for South Carolina, an appointed post, is Jan. 20, he said.

Thurmond said he is undecided about following his father, Strom Thurmond, into elective politics.

Thurmond, the late Sen. Thurmond's third child, was 29 and the nation's youngest and least experienced U.S. attorney when he assumed office. He was nominated by his father toward the end of his 47-year tenure in the U.S. Senate.

At 32, Thurmond said the "time was right" for him to return to the family home, where his father built a political legacy that dominated South Carolina political and social history and swayed national events.

Sen. Thurmond's 1964 move to the Republican Party is credited as birthing the party that now dominates the state and the South.

His 1948 race for the presidency as a Dixiecrat is viewed as a segregationist push against the civil rights movement.

The younger Thurmond leaves after three years, having helped prosecute the state's first federal death penalty case, and converting the opinions of many detractors.

Thurmond said he would join the law firm of Smith, Massey and Brodie, adding, "I guess we'll stick Thurmond in there somewhere."

He will practice criminal and civil law, and probably become a lobbyist, too, Thurmond said, though he won't begin signing clients until he leaves his federal post.

He is unsure about running for public office.

"I don't know. I've not made up my mind," Thurmond said. "I'm looking forward to returning to Aiken and immersing myself in the practice of law."

He is widely viewed as having a promising political future, especially because of his name recognition.

His family life drew national attention a year ago this month, when Essie Mae Washington-Williams, Sen. Thurmond's daughter from a African-American mother, went public.

The Thurmonds were widely praised for the grace with which they accepted her.

Thurmond chose this time to leave office because a new U.S. attorney general will be installed; President Bush, who approved Thurmond's nomination, begins a second term; and Thurmond has become a father.

"J. Strom" Thurmond III was born Aug. 2 in Aiken. The family lives in Aiken.

Thurmond announced his decision to his office staff last week. But he submitted his resignation letter Nov. 19 to outgoing Attorney General John Ashcroft.

"It has been the highest of honors and the opportunity of a lifetime to have served in your administration," he wrote.

Thurmond said he is most proud of participating in the death-penalty convictions this year of Chadrick Fulks and Branden Basham. They are the first defendants in South Carolina to have been prosecuted under federal capital punishment law.

He said Fulks and Basham also are the nation's first defendants sentenced to be executed without the government locating the bodies of the victims - Alice Donovan of Galivants Ferry and Samantha Burns in West Virginia.

Thurmond also hired 11 attorneys, or about one-fifth of the staff.

His reliance on the advice of his veteran federal prosecutors has won him praise from Republicans and Democrats.

"He knew when he needed to get involved (in cases) and when to leave the lawyers alone," said prosecutor John Barton, who retired in October after serving under seven U.S. attorneys.

"He was 10 years old when I started working at the U.S. attorney's office (in 1983), so I don't think there were many people more skeptical than I was.

"But I can now say without hesitation, I am a complete convert and think he's one of the best U.S. attorneys we've had.

"He showed wisdom and judgment far beyond his years," Barton said.

Thurmond had tried seven cases by himself as an assistant Aiken solicitor and had practiced law for three years when he was nominated for U.S. attorney.

Nationally, U.S. attorneys had an average of 22 years of legal experience and were 50 years old, an analysis by The State newspaper found at the time.

Rene Josey, a Democrat and Thurmond's predecessor for five years - the longest in recent history - said he was not among the early detractors.

In one case, Josey appreciated Thurmond's judgment to allow a youthful client of Josey's into a trial-diversion program rather than to prosecute him.

"In my interchanges with him . . . he has demonstrated thoughtful use of discretion," Josey said.

Another Democrat, Columbia attorney **Jack Swerling**, said Thurmond's performance in office, "should have put to rest any (competence) question that people had."

Swerling, 58, said he knew Thurmond personally and had little doubt he would succeed.

And **Swerling** has little doubt Thurmond will seek office and become a GOP leader in South Carolina.

"In my opinion, we have not seen the end of Strom. He will be back . . . serving the public . . . in politics someday - and should be."

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BIOGRAPHY

Here is an overview of Strom Thurmond Jr. and the mark he has left in public office:

Family life: Born Oct. 18, 1972, to Sen. Strom Thurmond and Nancy Moore Thurmond. Married Sept. 19, 1998, to Heather Holland Thurmond. They became parents to James Strom Thurmond III Aug. 2.

Public office: Became an assistant prosecutor in the 2nd Judicial Circuit based in Aiken in April 1999. Prosecuted seven cases before Sen. Thurmond nominated him to become U.S. attorney. The younger Thurmond was sworn in Nov. 19, 2001. He submitted his resignation three years later to the day.

- * Presided over the successful prosecution of two defendants in the kidnapping and death of Alice Donovan of Galivants Ferry.
- * Prosecuted about six environmental polluters.
- * Oversaw the creation in Charleston of what many say will become a national model to protect naval ports from terrorism.
- * Hired about one-fifth of the prosecutorial staff of the U.S. attorney's office.

Strom Thurmond Jr.



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