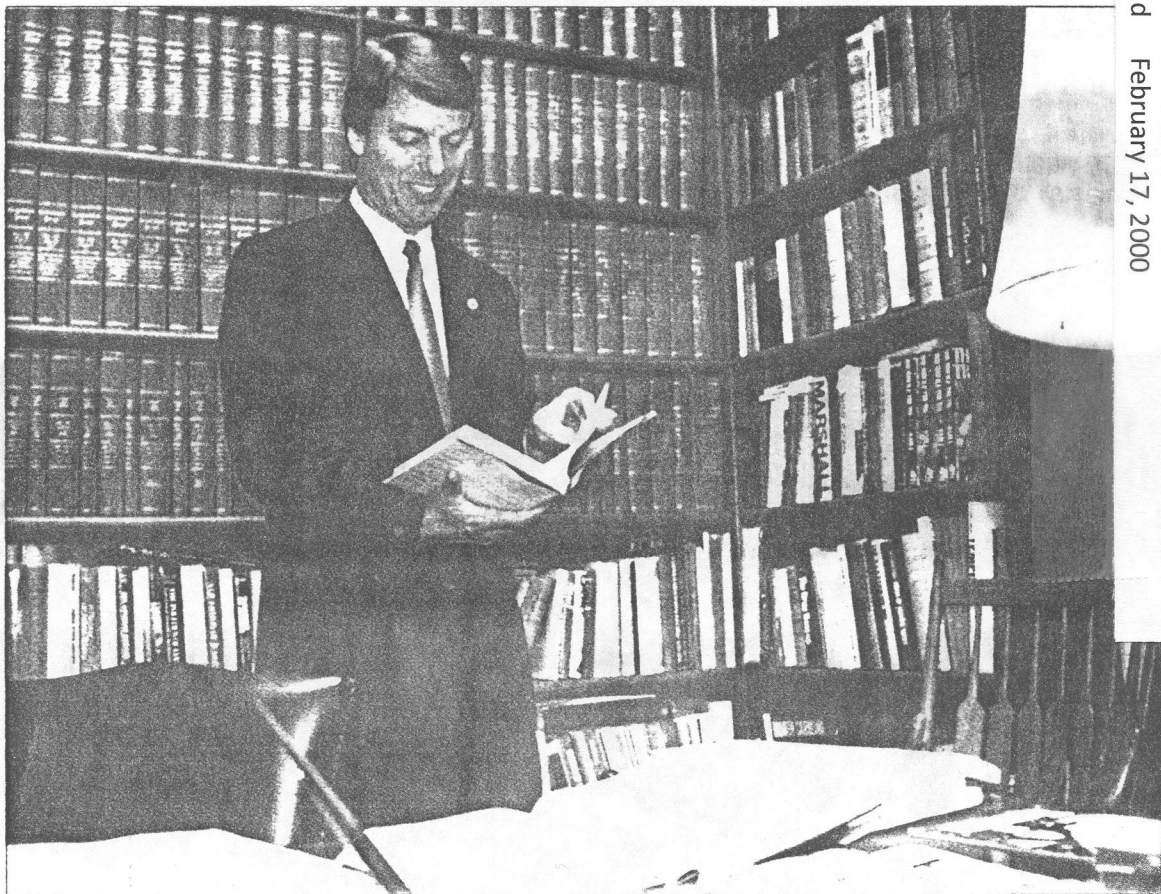


Filling big shoes



U.S. Sen. John Edwards looks through a book in the Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr. Library at WPCC on Wednesday afternoon. Staff photo by Mark Hannan

Senator cites Ervin family legacy inspiration

By JOHN CALLAHAM
News Herald Staff Writer

North Carolina's junior U.S. senator, John Edwards, made a brief visit to Morganton on Wednesday to talk to a small audience at Western Piedmont Community College and took a brief tour of the Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr. Library at the college.

Edwards, who holds the late Sen. Ervin's seat, said he was well aware he was filling some rather large shoes. "I gotta tell you, I am not sure I am up to it," he told an audience following a tour of the Ervin library.

"He believed in the same things I believe in," Edwards added, "which was a limited but effective federal government."

"One of the things I often say to myself

when I have to decide a difficult question is, 'What would Senator Ervin do?'"

Edwards also spoke of his admiration for the late Judge Samuel Ervin III, who died Sept. 18, 1999. Judge Ervin was the former chief judge of the U.S. 4th Circuit Court of Appeals.

"The truth of the matter is the Ervin family legacy is an inspiration to me, and I mean that," Edwards said.

Edwards also expressed some frustration that Judge Ervin's seat has yet to be filled.



Sam Ervin Jr.

"We have had two vacancies on the 4th Circuit that are the oldest vacancies on the circuit court in the country," Edwards said in an interview before addressing the audience.

Currently no judge from North Carolina sits on the 4th Circuit and Edwards and Ervin talked about who might fill the vacancy before Ervin's death.

"People in North Carolina are entitled to have representation in the court," Edwards added.

Edwards put the blame for the vacancies on fellow U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms. "I think that Senator Helms has kept any judge who has been nominated from getting a hearing," he said.

Edwards

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Someone has been nominated by President Clinton to fill the vacancy, according to Edwards.

"If he ever gets a hearing he will be confirmed," Edward said, "but he is being blocked from getting a hearing, which is also, by the way, not the way our constitutional process is supposed to work."

Edwards also spoke briefly on other issues in Washington that are of interest to North Carolina, including:

- **Flood relief.** Edwards feels the flooding caused by Hurricane Floyd last fall in the eastern part of North Carolina is still a major concern for everyone in the state and wants the government to help more. "We are continuing to press hard on that," he said.

Ervin told the audience his experiences visiting the areas devastated by the flooding were "absolutely heartbreaking."

- **Public Schools.** "There is no

more important issue in this country today than education," Edwards said. He supports reduced class size, the hiring of more teachers and more funds for the construction of new schools.

- **Patient's Bill of Rights.** Edwards wants to give individuals and families more control of how they choose their health care. "We have to preserve Social Security and Medicare. That is absolutely crucial," he added.

- **Environmental issues.** Edwards supports better protection of the state's natural resources. "The quality of the air and the quality of the water is critically important," he said.

Edwards said his first full year as a U.S. senator has been an "amazing year."

"I got sworn in as a senator," he said, "and the following day I was sworn in as a juror in the impeachment trial of the president of the United States."