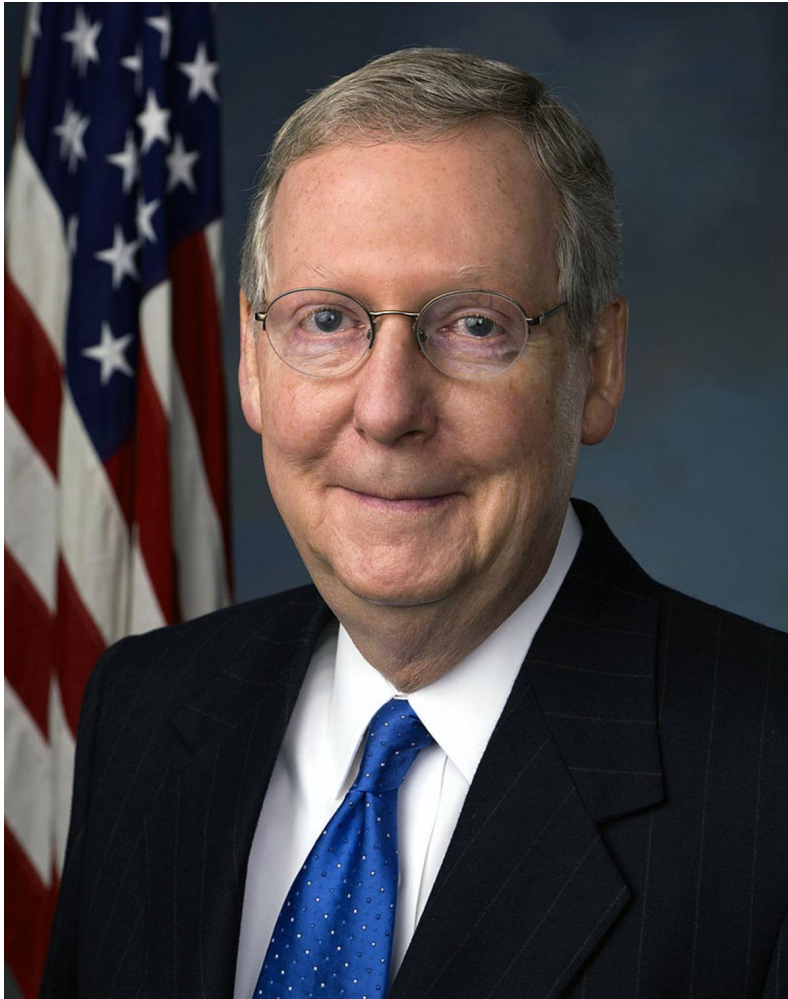


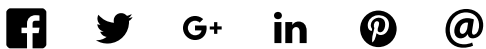
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## Athens native Sen. Mitch McConnell looking forward to busy opening session

Karen Middleton for The News Courier Dec 28, 2014



courtesy photo



Soon-to-be Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky, said last week he wishes to clear up a misconception about his origins. Widely reported that he was a Tusculumbia native, he says, in fact, his family lived in Athens when he was born.

McConnell lived the first eight years of his life in Athens.

“People think I was born in Tuscumbia, but we lived in Athens,” he said. “My mother’s doctor was in Tuscumbia. I was born at Colbert Hospital — now Helen Keller Memorial Hospital. By the way, as an interesting aside, I was born in the same hospital the same year as Fred Thompson.”

Freddie Dalton “Fred” Thompson, a Republican, served in the U.S. Senate representing Tennessee from 1994 to 2003. He also is an actor who played Arthur Branch on “Law & Order,” attorney, lobbyist, columnist and radio host. He is seen most recently in advertisements touting reverse mortgages.

“Dad went to fight in WWII in 1944,” said McConnell. “When he went overseas we went to live in lower Alabama in Lafayette, which was not far from Columbus, Georgia. I came down with polio at the age of 2. Warm Springs was not far from Columbus. My mother took me there and they taught her a physical therapy regimen for me.

“She kept me off my feet for two years, from 2 to 4, if you can imagine that. She watched me like a hawk all the time doing therapy. One of my first memories is riding home from my last appointment at Warm Springs and we stopped at a shoe store and purchased a pair of low-top oxfords for me.”

McConnell said his father was discharged in 1946 and the family returned to Athens where the McConnell roots go deep.

“My great-uncle, Addison Mitchell McConnell, was Limestone County Probate Judge from 1928 to 1946. My dad was named Addison Mitchell McConnell II and I was Addison Mitchell McConnell III. After my great-uncle died, my dad dropped ‘the II’ and I became ‘Jr.’

“My grandfather, Robert Hayes McConnell, went into business with his brother, Add, and bought what became McConnell Funeral Home, which still carries the name, although being sold.”

McConnell well remembers his playmates, who were North Houston Street neighbors, such as Helen Miller Greenhaw and Dickie McGrew, son of the late Steele McGrew, who was publisher of one of The News Courier’s predecessors. He also remembers his first day of first grade at Athens Elementary School where Miss Huber was his teacher.

"I have a great comfort level with small towns," he said. "I remember walking by myself to what we then called 'the picture show' to watch Saturday morning westerns. When I think about it that was a big step for my parents to allow me to walk that far on my own."

McConnell remembers his first Christmas memory of the childhood years he spent in Athens as the "Christmas of the Falling Christmas Tree."

"My father wasn't yet home from the military and we were struggling to make do," said McConnell. "My mother and I were putting up our first Christmas tree by ourselves. It kept falling over. My mother was perplexed. We lived in a rental house next to Athens College. We always lived in rental houses because we couldn't afford to own our own house at that time.

"But at my age, it was a wonderful experience. I remember getting popguns and a four-wheel pedal-driven vehicle. I learned to ride a bicycle in Athens."

"I keep up with Alabama politicians. I keep up with my fellow legislators Sen. Jeff Sessions and Sen. Richard Shelby. I kid them that I'm the 'third senator.'"

McConnell said that his original American ancestor emigrated from County Down, Ireland, to North Carolina.

"He served in the Revolutionary War and then later relocated to Kentucky, then Tennessee, then North Alabama. Every generation after that was born in North Alabama. My great-grandfather was a circuit-riding Cumberland Presbyterian minister. We still have his original saddle in my wife's and my archives in Louisville."

When the Senate reconvenes after the first of the year, among the bills McConnell will preside over are a jobs bill and the Keystone pipeline, which was voted down earlier in the fall.

When asked about President Barack Obama's reaching out to Cuba to normalize relations after more than 50 years, McConnell called it "a big mistake."

"What Cuba needs right now is money," he said. "This will give them the currency to continue to suppress their people. I feel the same way about this as Sen. Bob Menendez (R-New Jersey) and Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Florida), both Cuban-Americans.

“There is new management in the Senate, a new direction. Things we can do together we will to strengthen the country. The American people have sent us the message that they want to take a different direction.”

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