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TITLE=IN THE NEWS #495 – Senator Helms To Retire

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This is Steve Ember with the VOA Special English program IN THE NEWS.

Wednesday, one of America's most powerful Senators announced his plans to retire when his term ends in Two-Thousand-Three. Jesse Helms has served in the United States Senate for almost thirty years. He is a Republican from North Carolina.

Senator Helms made his announcement in Raleigh, where he once worked as a political commentator on radio and television. He told local voters he will not seek re-election in Two-Thousand-Two. He said he would be eighty-eight at the end of another six year term. He said he and his family decided he should not run again.

Mister Helms has suffered from health problems in recent years, including prostate cancer. He also has a nerve condition which caused him to lose feeling in his feet. He now travels around the Capitol building in a small electric powered vehicle.

Senator Helms is a leading supporter of conservative issues in the United States Congress. He has opposed civil rights legislation and the rights of women to end pregnancies. He opposes any expanding of the federal government. For years he strongly criticized the Chinese government and the United Nations. In Nineteen-Ninety-Six, he helped pass the Helms-Burton law, which increased restrictions on trade with Cuba.

Mister Helms was first elected to the Senate in Nineteen-Seventy-Two. He took control of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in Nineteen-Ninety-Five, after the Republicans gained control of the Senate. During his chairmanship, he helped defeat a nuclear test ban treaty. He also blocked several presidential nominations.

Senator Helms also used his leadership position to help reorganize America's foreign policy agencies. Recently, he released American debt payments to the United Nations in return for reforms in the organization. He lost his chairmanship of the Foreign Relations Committee after the Democrats regained control of the Senate in June.

Political experts say Mister Helms' retirement will mark the end of a period in politics that helped reshape the conservative movement. His decision may affect control of the Senate in Two-Thousand-Two. Democrats now have fifty seats, the Republicans forty-nine. One seat is held by an independent. Both major parties think they can win Mister Helms' seat.

One Republican reportedly interested in replacing Mister Helms is Elizabeth Dole.

She is a North Carolina native who campaigned unsuccessfully for president two years ago. Missus Dole has served on the cabinets of Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush Senior.

One Democrat, North Carolina's Secretary of State Elaine Marshall, has already announced she will campaign for job. Several other Democratic and Republican candidates are expected to seek Senator Helms' seat.

This VOA Special English program, IN THE NEWS, was written by Jill Moss. This is Steve Ember.

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