

Jim Johnson  
11/80

Strangers here in Washington.  
Son - why can't I go? You did it, why can't I?/ Kids never thought of  
selves as                Children were raised to think of Colorado as home.

Wasn't consciously trying to get back at is, just sitting there and  
could it                Nancy wasn't home year and half - I commuted every weekend.

Not a place for honest person, religious person, thoughtful person.  
It's a place for manipulators, for dealers for traders. Life you lead is  
reflection of your religion - life is message don't denigrate other people

Doesn't talk about it.

Could have won, others dropped

Senate - It's not the place for

Father - independent - wouldn't take old shoes, wouldn't take no on cream separator, wouldn't go to Iowa.

That's where I got my independence - fought with father.

Degenerating                      with for                      not productive - drank a lot. 5-7 get home late - traffic not best home life. Tried to have one.

Lot of sitting around, listening to bullshit. You saw me today from not productive.

He admits that persuasion doesn't occur on floor--

I haven't talked to anyone else like this. I've been skirting around these things. You're a friend. I can trust you. But I wouldn't talk this way if you lived in Fort Collins. I don't want to sound preaching or judgmental. That's not in keeping with my religion. It wouldn't be productive. (Said that at beginning and later.)

It's not that I can't do things. I think I've learned to get things done--more legislation with my name than all Colorado delegation put together.

It's not that it's not worthwhile or fun. But it isn't important enough for me.

An interesting story. D                      Apologize - thought it was Armstrong's Bill. He was interested in taking shots at Democrats. Didn't care what they thought. He was interested in making Republican policy. He had a reputation he could never have lived down. And he couldn't get anything from Democrats. I would get things from Democrats. Phil Burton let me put name on other                      Trails Bill. It's not a great thing. But I'm proud of it. I had to go with the Democrats often and that put me out of step with Republican party.

Said he would continue to be good at getting things from Agriculture and Interior. (Agriculture more fun when they were writing agricultural bills). Interior more fun at end because they were doing things, Wilderness, Alaska at energy - but Agriculture Committee turned stuff over to Agriculture Department).

Talk about Secretary of Interior or Agriculture. Undersecretary Rhodes. "That was what I was afraid of. We don't see eye to eye on things. I don't want a Cabinet position. I don't want to come back here in any capacity. But if they asked me, I couldn't refuse. Could I?"

Anyhow - back to original idea which is that while he could go on passing stuff, "My real motivation for getting into politics was opposition to the war. I can see the military building coming again, rolling and rolling and I can't have any influence on it at all--the MX missile (said later that there hadn't even been a debate on MX--though we did have some good debates." B-1 Bomber.

Congress does what the public wants. If you want a war, Congress will give you one. If you want peace, Congress will give it to you. There is nothing anyone can do on these important things." These are the little things that are "fun" and accomplishments. But there are important things and on those he can have no impact.

Watershed was on Select Intelligence. "Rhodes asked me to back down. I knew I was playing the Democrat's game. I didn't change my views. It was the time that my views and Rhode's views diverged and it was the end of my career within the Republican party."

Said he would vote for Rhodes - who "didn't put thumb" on him and "recognized the independence of the members." Wouldn't "embarrass" members.

Said Rhodes would ask him for vote and usually would give it to him. I voted with the Republican party 85% of the time. So I wasn't as much of a maverick as people said I was. (Earlier he said he would call self "maverick") It was the important things that I disagreed most with the Republican party--defense, abortion, prayer, bussing.

Talked re Phil Burton - how he went fro JJ on minimum wage on basis of studying his voting record. He's totally honest. If he's going to cut your balls of he tells you beforehand. He never said layoff anyone. Can't keep secret--because he talks to too many people. Thinks he's subtle but is "My weakness" - that he doesn't do this. Talk in committee and when he gets it through committee, he doesn't do much legislative crafting.

Armstrong - not a legislative craftsman - policy maker - JJ lawyer - more intentional on detail - Armstrong likes Senate better - he says ambitious people in House get to know Senators.

Talked about how you get and hold his district - decentralized - no activity of normal - headquarters, press releases - Smith best candidate - lots of money "never in the race" - hired someone for N.J. to run campaign. Said he would have had no opponent in 1980 - Can't take it away from him - said that over and over.

Weaver story - "The major issue against me was my voting record against bigger defense. The polls all showed it was the issue. But it didn't hurt me a bit. Do you know why? Because my image in the district is that I'm a fighter and people just didn't believe that I could be anything but in favor of a strong national defense."

Tom Foley story - opponent puts out pamphlet. Would you vote for \_\_\_\_ list of bad things--and on back page Tom Foley did. Foley goes to county chairman. I don't see that you're in any trouble? I know my opponent is

Oh Tom we know you wouldn't be so foolish as to vote for those things."

Nomadic life - didn't like it only away over night for hour 2 times a year before he went to Congress - 2 meetings of Seminary once a month he went away for day to Seminary. Actually different life style."

Said he knew bible better than anyone he knew except preachers. Reads it more than anyone. (David Ford is new chaplain and he said Jim most solid on theology - not a fundamentalist.

Talked about way he liked to campaign and hate to - hated to talk to Republican groups liked to campaign in small town with bankers (small town banker is central to everything that is going on--in the farm, in the church in the business). Talked about how much he learned when he spent time in small town.

"Again that's the sense of community I feel comfortable with."

Said earlier he "needed" that sense of community. Said he was going back to a more wholesome life" in Ft. Collins.

Said how proud he was of district. "They are great people. The towns people aren't so \_\_\_? He distinguished between them. "I'm not comfortable with the townspeople."

"You can take the boy out of the country but you can't take the country out of the boy."

Admitted Fort Collins was less rural than it used to be. "I'll be going back to a rut but it has a lot of the advantages as well as the disadvantages of a rut. I'll be able to participate in the church, participate in the community... It will be a more wholesome life." He'll be with a different group of lawyers. "It's a little terrifying. You don't have the confidence you did when you first got out of law school... But if you succeed-- and I always have--you will have a sense of accomplishing productive work. You

will work all day and go home at night."

CSU presidency - he wanted it.

"If I saw a war starting up someplace, I would have no compunction about running again to make my voice heard."

I asked him why a Wayne Morse vote wouldn't appeal to him and he said he couldn't say why--it just didn't.

Said "I can make speeches about the important things I believe in and people will sit there and listen. They are polite. But their attitude is There goes Johnson, he's a nut on that subject. We'll let him talk; but we won't pay any attention. Everybody is allowed to be a nut on some subject. But that's all there is to it. You don't get anything accomplished. No votes are changed by speeches.

Said he persuaded Eddie Boland to make his Select Intelligence Committee report more intelligible and he did. But no one goes and reads it. This year 7 members did. Previous year 3 did. He wanted to go on Select Committee and Republicans wouldn't let him. How did he get on original committee? "That's before they learned what a traitor I was." Said no one wanted it. He was the bomb thrower" in committee across to Pike.

On committee - conversation with Schaffer. He and Dellums called each other "Bongo."

Pritchard voted with him on the release of CIA report. So he wouldn't be done.

What Nancy liked - women's groups. "I didn't marry you to have you gone."

Relations with Roncalio, Weaver, Burton,

Michel - Norder Jay

Talked about Denver press not reporting when he's home.

"Incumbent can manipulate the press."

Talked re. pensions keeping people in House because if they stay till 60 they get pension immediately. Otherwise it doesn't start till they are 62. He gets 15,000 starting in 1992.

Said he never put a deadline on his length of service, but people reminded him when he first ran that he had said 4-5 terms was about right.

Sense is that he had a good time.

When I first went after the job I went at it like I was killing snakes. Once I got the job I campaigned the way I liked to. "Liked the small town with Mac McGowen in between campaigns. "But the campaign, "I didn't like that."

Talked about getting out of touch. Said he used same people year after year in his campaign and "that's part of the problem."

Said Brown organized Adams County and carried it by 10,000. He never did organize heavily in Adams County. Said that opponents often came from Adams and person ought to win own county - went hard for Larrimer when he ran vs. Ogden.

B           jokes.

Moral majority

"He had an up role to play."

"Not with me he didn't."

"I was going to write in a vote, but I didn't dare."

His comment re. someone he likes "old shoe". Abdnor, Michel. Says new Senators "will be led around by someone else" and that none were as intelligent as people they replaced.

Special interest groups - easy thing to give 'em a vote - he got zero for conservative groups because he always went with the person whose district

Said 1978 - a consideration in staying was that Roncalio, Evans were leaving - left a hole in terms of experience from the region. It was in-- the west. That meant you got zero.

Applied for pres. of CSU - not considered in final.

Sees peace group as about 40-50 people in House - and he talked with Weaver.

Obey tells him he'd quite but has no good alternatives. Burleson - had nothing, gave up home - "where could he go back to." He'll stay around Washington. "Why anyone would want to stay around here I'll never understand." "I'll come back if someone pays me, but who would pay me to come back here." Story about Wiggins - paid \$100 an hour and it starts when he leaves home. He took nap in cloakroom--are you getting paid? Yes!"

Schroeder and Wirth claim credit - you'd think they ran Congress - he can't do that - will take credit for "little things" nothing very important.

District change had no effect on him - didn't feel any less at home with district.

Said he "made it look easy, that I wasn't having any trouble holding the district. That was the image I tried to convey--that I had no trouble. I didn't collect a lot of money and hold it like some guys do. But I worked my ass off to hold that district. You saw that--getting on the road to most all these towns."

Said if he had gotten on Intelligence Committee, might have changed his plans. "It might have; I don't know."

Englishmen. "You feel same way about your district as an Englishman feels about England." "You get a proprietary interest in your district."

Aspinall picked up hitchhikers - everybody knew him.



He gave Hank the experience of his campaign manager in 76 and Hank ran for Lieutenant Governor in 1978 "so he had it all organized and ready to go."

"Democrats haven't figured out how to win district. Don't talk to each other."

What is the accepted version of why you are leaving? What do you tell your colleagues? "I'm tired out and I want to go home." Is that taken as a sign of weakness or of strength? It's not taken any way at all. It's taken as an event of no great moment."

At party told story about going up elevator in his law office - Fella looks at him up room "Say, aren't you Hank Brown." (guy who replaced him.)

I've just come back from Jim's farewell party at the Capitol Hill Club--drinks, dinner and speeches. I sat with the Chaplain Jim Ford who told me. "Jim Johnson is the best theologian in the House. There are a lot of members here who think they know the Bible, and a few of them are pretty good. Paul Simon is very good. But none of them can touch Jim Johnson. He knows things I don't know. And he knows every inch of the Bible. He'll correct me on my dates. "You're 500 years off on that." And he'll be right. He'll hear something and say, that comes from Deuteronomy, open his Bible and there it is. He understands better than most the two stones of creation in Genesis. We've been carrying on a dialogue for a year and a half--ever since I met him. I didn't know who he was until the day the Department of Education Bill was up and someone had put in an amendment that said the Department should "promote" prayer in the public schools. He got up and started to talk against it. (Says Jim "school prayer is on public ceremony, it has nothing to do with prayer. That is something scripture says you do in a closet.") I was over on the Democratic side and I heard him. That took a lot of guts to do what he did. Most of the guys were ducking it or going along with it.

Well, he persuaded them to change it to "permit" prayer, or something like that. I said to myself, there's a man who is saying exactly what he believes. With most of these people you have to take 20% off the top. That's not true with Jim Johnson. He always says exactly what he believes. So I went over to him and said "I'm the next chaplain and I want to commend you on your speech." He said, "Sit down." I did. And he said "I didn't think we needed another institutional chaplain." There he was starting right off straight with me. I said, "I'm not an institutional chaplain." We've been going at it ever since. We have a study group; and we don't talk just about the moral majority. We talk about war and peace. That's what he's interested in. He takes the pacifist position. The other night we had a party and I gave him a key I had that said "the Key to the Kingdom" and I called him "The chief theologian of the House." He is. (Jim says, "I keep pushing him to be a pacifist; but the one thing he can't get past is World War Two"). Here I am a Lutheran pastor, I have spent 9 years in school studying the Bible. I've travelled all over the world and talked scripture with ministers of all paths. And I have to come here to the House of Representatives to find someone who knows as much about scripture as I do. That's Jim Johnson. People don't believe it because he uses such salty language and he jokes all the time. When there's a dispute among the members over some matter of scripture, I'll say go ask Jim Johnson. And he will know. He'll be arguing with people and cut them right down; but he keeps right on smiling. He's as moral as a man as I've ever met."

He's also as well read as anyone I know--Shakespeare. One night we were eating a meal and someone said that Shakespeare was on television. He got up and left that minute because he wanted to watch it.

"He walked out on the President's State of the Union address this year. When he announced the Carter Doctrine, that we should have a military buildup, Jim threw down his paper and walked out--the only one to do it."

Joel Pritchard said. "We're going to miss him. I tried everything I know how to keep him here. I called him a quitter--a summer soldier. I tried to shame him. But when he makes up his mind there is absolutely no shaking him. He is the most principled person I have ever met. He has the highest standards of integrity of anyone I have ever met. It's an honor to have served with him. That's the way I look at it."

Jim in the afternoon, said his father had taught him that the most important thing in life was his honesty and that he had tried to abide by that. Better to let other person take a little more from you than to have you take too much from him.

Honesty from father; independence from his father.

Story re. urinating on Chick Casteel's land. "He takes great delight in calling me and telling me that land I urinated on has just gone up 200 an acre. It's worth over a million dollars now."

"I'm keeper of the butter."                      Senator Jake.

Colonel means                      as Honorable absolutely nothing.

Old pastor being feted at retirement at church - gets up and says Thanks people who have worked with me for 50 years. My great friend Chairman of Deacons (and looking in his coat for the name) thanks other men (and looks inside coat for name) thanks ladies for dinner. Then ends saying that he wants to thank them for working together for 50 years in service of (and looks inside to read Jesus Christ).

Buzz Larsen of Denver Post - "I've always tried to keep arms length from these congressmen. But Jim Johnson and I have become very good friends. He's an exceptional man. And I think it's a problem for the country when people of his calibre lose interest. I think that's what's happened with Jim. He just lost interest."

Conversation - pastor and space scientist. "Doesn't it all come down to love they neighbor?" Doesn't it all come down to twinkle, twinkle little star?"

Tells story about his comment that Jerry Ford is first Republican since McKinley to be worth shooting at. Poage says "No that's not right. Teddy Roosevelt was shot at. But he was a Bill Morse. Yes, you're right. Ford was the first one since McKinley. Papers picked it up, Newsweek printed it, said it was blackest humor to result from the incident, never takes it to school for show and tell. Reaction is "Your uncle said that." But the press has been good to me. They've ignored me and that's been beneficial. But my friend Buzz Lance keeps reminding me that Hank Brown just won by 70% and that I never won by more than 61%."

Hilarious sketch by Pirtchard in phone ca-1 to Meese to get Jim a job. Butler, Chaplain, Henson, Moore (with letter from Tobacco Institute) also gave little talks re how to find Jim employment."

He toasts people who stay as "men of the mighty heart" quoting O. W. Holmes.

"I don't want you to print this, because I don't want to be self serving, or preaching or judgmental. But Congress is just not a place for an honest person. It's a place for manipulators, for dealers, for traders. I don't want you to write that, because it would not be helpful. But that's the way I feel. It's not a matter of my being unable to get anything done. It's not sour grapes. I have passed more legislation through the House than the whole of my state delegation combined. I have managed more legislation on the

floor than all of them. I have my name on more pieces of legislation than any of them. I don't say that isn't worthwhile or that is isn't fun. It is. And I could go on doing that for a long time to come. But it's not enough. The Congress does what the public wants them to do. You want a war, Congress will give you one. You want peace, Congress will give you peace. Right now the people want a military buildup--the Carter doctrine, the MX missile. You can feel it rolling, rolling. There is no way I can make a difference on that issue. It was the war that was the motivating factor for my getting into politics. For a while we could do something, because the public was opposed to the war. But everything has change now. There's nothing I can do to advance the things I believe in."

The other theme. "I felt I was degenerating. I was wasting too much time. You drink too much. You don't get out of here till 7:00 and so you go back to your office and drink with your buddies. Traffic is bad, so you wait and you don't get home till 9:00. What kind of family life is that.... Most of your time is spent listening to bullshit or jollyng. That's fun. But it's not productive work. You aren't using your faculties to the fullest. You degenerate."

There is a theme that it's "fun" but not "productive"--either personally or policy wise.

Ford - "There are two admonitions in scripture. One says so let your light shine among me, etc. The other says "go into the closet and pray." etc. Jim Johnson is the second kind."

Tells story about big lobbyist goes up to Jim "I want to talk to you about the Cargo Preference Bill." Jim looks at him right in the eye and says "Go fuck yourself." That's a vintage Jim Johnson story. I saw it and heard it.

Jim said he couldn't "brag on" myself. Larsen said he got wind of what Jim had done 2 days after it happened. Cleary says "We weren't very aggressive with the press."

Re Senate. "It would be nice to win. That's good for your ego--to win. For some of the guys around here that's all they care about. They win one election and then they sit around twiddling their thumbs till the next election. That's not enough for me. I don't tink I could accomplish any more in the Senat than the House--not with the public thinking the way it is. This just isn't the place for me."

Bureaucrats, anyone who thinks they aren't lying is a baby. They are thieves and liars. Thieves and liars - wouldn't been this way - but that's what I feel - don't tell truth re. alternatives.

Newspaper articles on retirement: Charles Boos - RM News "Johnson Decision to Quit fits his unpolitical style." 1st sent. "There is no end to the stories about Colorado's champion of unpolitics, Rep. James Johnson...

Mac McGraw "The truth is, he hates campaigning. He absolutely hates it. In fact, I guess he just doesn't campaign."

Hank Brown said JJ gave him 2 instructions as campaign manager in 76.  
1) "Number one, don't ask anybody for money;" 2) "Number two don't accept big contributions."

Jake Henshaw, Coloradan - "Rep. Johnson preferred unorthodox style." 1st sentence "Congress is losing one of its endangered species--a serious legislator who couldn't care less about media coverage. Rep. JJ Rep. Colo. seldom sends out press releases, has only held one press conference in 7 years and doesn't believe in wasting the time of the House with lengthy speeches."

Announced retirement by newsletter.

"And just to show how unconventional he is, Johnson has refused to take a final swipe at Congress and the members with whom he differs so greatly."

"Even though he won't discuss in detail why he is leaving...."

Mentions his "contrary streak." Calls him "a respected if sometimes stubborn legislator."

Issues one press release a month. JJ - "Nothing happens here because of one person, and they (press releases make it appear that one person is doing everything."

JJ "I think we are a militanistic nation."

Jim's newsletter's key sentence was "I never intended to make a permanent career in Washington and it is time to come home to stay.

It was on a box entitled "It's time to come home." Al Gordon RM News 1/7/80.

Another article re. ego problems "It's a subtle complex person - a combination of flattery, admiration and respect for your office " - public recognition feeds their egos... 90% of what people know about what you've done (in Congress) is the result of self generated, self congratulatory statements you've sent out yourself." Actually members have little influence in areas outside of committee.

Called self "not being in step with the hard line conservatives who control the Repb. part in Colorado and nationally."

Says it's "demeaning to tell people what a great guy I am."

Leonard Laven - 2/10/1980. "Johnson's lonely peacemongering."

Article by Otis Pike - in his column. "On the evening of Feb. 6 in the H of R, Rep. Cong. Jim J of Colorado gave an important speech. It is about

war. It should be required reading. Johnson is an intellectual, but not an orator. There are better speakers in the House, but none who have more to say. He writes his own speeches and speaks his own mind. It is a superb mind... Quotes from speech... He is also retiring this year, and the Congress and the nation will be poorer for it. No one in America heard his speech and almost no one outside the fourth District of Colorado has heard of Jim Johnson. He is going home to Colorado--weary, perhaps, of membership in a body so perpetually and relentlessly exposed to titillating stories of picayune wrongs while the larger stories of the larger things they are doing and saying don't get read or even written."

Denver Post - 6/7/80 - At a Denver roast for Johnson, Republican Party Chairman Phil Winn called him "The greatest enigma in Colorado politics." "Democrats think you're a radical. Republicans think you're a Democrat... we don't understand his voting records, the papers don't understand his voting record, the people don't understand his voting record. He never raised any money and he sure as hell never campaigned. But he kept winning."