

Charlie Thone

January 29, 1973

(1 hour)

Re switch to Agriculture Committee. "Public Works is a good committee for the district, with the Missouri River, soil conservation and Highways. But Agriculture is a better committee. I guess that's the only way to put it. Agriculture affects 80% of the people in my district. It seeps into every town in the district--except Lincoln, of course, and maybe Fremont not so much. But you take Beatrice and Norfolk and every little town. All <sup>the</sup> businessmen on main street have one eye cocked to the weather and the crops. That's the only real issue Berg had in the farm areas. He would say, 'Charlie Thone says he's a friend of the farmer. Why isn't he on the Agriculture Committee then? That's where he could really help you.' It was a good issue but he didn't really develop it. He mumbled it two or three times. He didn't get any mileage out of it. (But you heard it.) Yes, I heard it--that's a good way to put it, Dick. I heard it, And he was right. I can help them more on that committee. Especially if the Administration is going to cut back on the farm programs as they say they are--on REAP and REA and the rest. So, politically, I thought it would be a wise thing to change. And I know farming. I don't mind it a bit. I have two brothers who farm. And, hell, I could go back to farming in a minute--in feed, not riding up and down. I could run <sup>a</sup> ~~or~~ feed lot for cattle--right now. And I was if feeding cattle just two years ago with my brothers. I suppose/I had

just been a lawyer in Lincoln, I wouldn't have considered it. But it was easy for me and it was good politics. Just between you and me, I wanted to give up Government operations and I told Jerry Ford I'd like to keep Public Works and Agriculture. That would have been perfect for me. Jerry laughed and said, 'So would a lot of others.' He said he'd try to work it out, but he called me a few days later and said 'Charlie, we're in the final marking and we've got a freshman who wants Public Works. We haven't anything else to give him except Government Operations and the District committee. So I said, 'Jerry, you're the boss. Whatever you say I'll go along with.' I suppose I could have had them both if I had insisted, but you can't do that with a top echelon person like Jerry. He wouldn't forget. The leaders have so many things they can do to you--things you'd never notice. They can make or break a young man here--things like putting in a good word for you at the White House. Now, Jerry will say, 'Charlie Thone's all right. He cooperates.' He'll remember what I did."

As I left he was heading for a seminar for new members of the Agriculture Committee. One is being held every afternoon this week. "I'm going to all of them. I have a general understanding; but on the technical side, I'm swimming. I don't know that. I guess it's the lawyer in me. A good lawyer always prepares his case. He gets the facts before he starts hitting here and there."

Pleased about his campaign. "I carried every county in the district--the first time it's ever been done. Why I even carried Saline County--Bohemian, Catholic and Democratic."

Talked about Berg. "He should have gone like gangbusters at the University. And I guess he started strong there. But he wore out his welcome and the University paper ended up endorsing me. He went to the beer halls, thinking that was a good way to meet students. And they even asked him to leave once. He had always been good working with young people. But they got tired of seeing him around, I guess. And he began to waver on the issues. He turned into a politician--something that happens to the best of us--but the students were turned off when he began to waver. I think what happened was that when he got outside of Lincoln, he ran into a great deal of popularity on my part, he began to get buffered a little bit and started to change his position to meet that buffering. And pretty soon he was nothing. The farmers, of course, were very leery of him. They thought of him as a radical, a Peace<sup>nik</sup>~~man~~, a minister and everything else. He had some pretty hard going outside of Lincoln. But he worked his ass off. I'd go to these little towns and he would have been there. He hit the county fair circuit--all of them. And that's one of the few times you can get one crack at the rural people. He didn't sit around thinking. He worked--a sustained physical effort for 7 months--a hell of a campaign. I always thought of myself as a hard campaigner--Ruthie and I, we work our asses off. He surprised us. But he would spend too much time with an individual voter. That's a terrible way to campaign. When we go to a town, we park the car at the end of the street and Ruthie and I each take a side.

All I say to each person is: I'm Congressman Charlie Thone and I'd appreciate your vote on election day! And then off I go. I don't stop to talk or argue or discuss. But Berg was out there trying to convince every voter on the issues, ~~to~~ to save souls. He'd spend 15 or 20 minutes trying to convert each casual voter. That's not the way to do it. Maybe he'll learn. He says he wants to run again. He was duck soup, yes he was really duck soup."

I asked if there were any groups that changed since last election. "A lot of people were very leery of me the first time because they thought I was too partisan a Republican. I had been State chairman and had thrown a lot of partisan comments around. And I was a tough chairman. I worked very hard to change that image. I said many times that I was a representative of all the people of the district, Democrats as well as Republicans. I supported the Administration most of the time; but I left them on the SST and I left them on the Lockheed Loan and a few things like that. I think those things helped quite a bit."

Then he also said he ran better among the farmers. "I don't know how many times farmers came up to me and said, Charlie you're sure looking out for us farmers, keep it up."

I asked what kind of candidate would be strongest against him. "With Nebraskans the way they are, it would have to be a conservative Democrat. Someone like a Clair Callan. He was born in a small town. His father had been in the legislature, on the budget committee and was

known as a fiscal conservative. That reputation had gotten around. Clair was tried and true. He ran a good office in Washington, a damn good office. And he's a nice man. Someone like Callan could make it tough. But not a liberal like Berg. He's a capable, articulate fellow, but he's wrong for this district. He's duck soup."

Talk about incumbents. "An incumbent House member who has half his smarts should never be beaten. Not if he uses the tools he has to work with." He mentioned that <sup>John</sup> Kyle and <sup>Shorman</sup> Lloyd hurt selves by not using the \$500 per quarter that Republican Campaign Committee gives them for PR. "I believe in public relations."

"I'm unhappy about my district office situation and I want to change it. I don't know when. I want a strong person there, someone who can go out and speak in place of the member and who will initiate things. All I have now is a ministerial operation. They do nothing on their own, just collect cases and inquiries and pass them on to Washington. I'd like to hire a smart newspaperman to run that office; newspapermen can find out what's going on. I've noticed a lot more members are going to a strong district office. Even Senators. Lawton Chiles has more staff in Florida now than he has in Washington."

He had been saying--in this context--that he wasn't going to be going home as much now. He's sold the Lincoln House and moved to Arlington. He says in 1971 and 72 he went home nearly every weekend. In 1973 he'll go home once a month; in 1974 twice a month. It was here

that he began talking about beefing up the district office. But he said he'd been unhappy about his district office set-up before the move to Washington.

Said his first campaign was "a zinger of a campaign," even though he only got 50.3% of vote. Callan didn't start till last 14 days of campaign and that surprised him.

He spent \$75,000 this time. "You never know in this business, but I've always said that a good candidate needs \$25,000 to win. I know I spent \$75,000, but you piss most of it away, and you never know whether it did you any good.

I asked re Nebraskan delegation and he said they had breakfast every Tuesday. Relations between Hruska and Curtis "are a little ouchy." "This place is so competitive here. You can see the strain." Hruska wants to get a Senate floor and speak and outshines Curtis there; Curtis doesn't have capacity that Hruska has. ("I know he made that mediocrity statement. But don't you sell him short. He's smart.") "Curtis is more considerate of people. He'll run all over Washington with five Nebraskans where Hruska could care less. He wants to be making a speech on the Senate floor."

He says he and McCallister "get along well" but that Dave Martin (he smiled) "is a pain in the ass. Oh, I get along with him all right. But he's a grouch. The wonder is that he's in Congress at all."

As for his close friends, he really does not seem to have any. "I don't have any really close friends. Partly that's because I was commuting

all last year; and that will change now." He spoke of his class group, Kemp, Robinson ("our wives hit it off") Terry (sat beside him on committee). Lamar Baker (committee). Crane (Acorns). But he isn't a leader of Acorns and he says they meet so briefly. Once a week at 5:00 that it's not much use. Says he goes faithfully, but there was no warmth as with BC--none at all. Indeed, he had trouble remembering the name of the group. <sup>no belonged to.</sup> Not a man of warm personal relationship, I think.

Trip to <sup>dedicate submarine</sup> Omaha at <sup>Graton, Conn.</sup> "What a fucking waste of time. ~~What~~ I wouldn't go on another one of those God damn trips if you paid me. Well, maybe once it was interesting. But never again. And you know who paid for that don't you, the Defense Department. Don't tell me there isn't fat in that Defense budget. Some Congressmen love that sort of thing. Not me. Ruthie and I agreed afterward we would rather have been home with the family."

He attributed the larger vote this time to the presidential campaign but when I pressed him he said he thought he gained "some Callan votes and some Burrows votes."

"The first two years here, I commuted to Nebraska--every weekend. I was one of those Tuesday to Thursday fellows. It takes an awful lot out of you; and the administrative work on your desk doesn't get done."