

Charles Thone

May 5, 1974

1. "I don't know that I had a preconceived plan on it. The family decided to split the school year--the first semester in Nebraska and the second semester here. So at first, I was a weekend warrior--and was home every week up through January, to the end of the first semester. After January, it dropped off to about an average of two trips a month. That lasted for the first two years. Then, when we sold our home in Lincoln and bought a home here, I stayed on the two trips a month routine until the Fall of last year; at one point in the Fall, I went home for 11 consecutive weeks--so my wife advised me. It dropped off toward the end of last year and the beginning of this year. But as I look at my schedule we'll be going home three or four weekends every month from now on. I didn't have any plan; it just grew like topsy. Circumstances dictated the pattern."

I asked him whether he had considered having some staff person in the district to work the district for him when he was not there. "I inherited a lady from my two predecessors. She was sharp as a tack on casework. She had worked in Washington for a while for a Senator, and so she knew the Washington scene. I was home every week for half a year and all of August. I was so available out there, travelling so much that I didn't feel the need to beef up the district office. Since I've been here more, I have strengthened the district office. I hired a

former radio news head as district coordinator. And I also added an additional lady in the office. I'm very constituent service minded, and that's the function they serve. The former radio man goes to every cat and dog fight you might say and tells them that the Congressman is interested. If you have a problem bring them in to us, he tells them. And I think it's a wise thing. I was talking with (Senator) Lawton Chiles the other day and he has more people in his district than he does in Washington. I think people are going to do that more and more."

2. "Geographically it covers the eastern one-third of Nebraska, it goes from the Kansas to the Oklahoma border, along the Missouri River, exclusive of the area around Omaha--twenty-seven counties. The basic industry is agriculture, but it's a diverse district. Lincoln is one-third of the population--dominated by the state government and education, of course; it's the state capitol. It's an independent minded constituency, with strong attachment to the work ethic. A good percentage is composed of people whose family <sup>came to</sup> immigrated from Germany, Scandinavia and Czechoslovakia. (I don't exactly know the figures but well over one-half the district is German. There are lots of Swedes and Norwegians and Czechs too.) I'll bet you they add up to 70%. And this goes back to the work ethic. They are a hardworking, independent people. They have a strong thought of keeping the government off my back--(we'll have) "we'll do alright ? here.' That's especially true in my 'out counties'; (Not so much of Lincoln, but when you go north and south--and this is a north-south district--they say leave us alone. They are very suspicious of big <sup>brother</sup> government."

*W. H. 1/14*

brother government in Washington."

4K. "It is a fairly competitive district with an edge to the Republicans. That's especially true when there is a Republican incumbent who actively represents the district. In all frankness, I'm in that category. I think the recent poll reflected that. But keep in mind that two Democrats have represented it--Brock in 1958 and Callan in 1964. But those were unusual circumstances."

I asked him if party strength was changing in the district and he said, "No, it's relatively stable. It's basically Republican in party affiliation."

I asked him if there were any districts like his or if any other Congressman had districts like his and he thought a little bit and then said, "No, all districts are different--just like all Congressmen are different." Then he thought a little bit more and said, "Larry Winn has a big university, the University of Kansas, and a rural constituency with it. His district abuts mine. Lawrence is a lot smaller than Lincoln; but he has Kansas City too. So if you put Lawrence and Kansas City together you have a Lincoln."

6. I asked him whether he could run as well in the other two Nebraska districts as he does in this one. He smiled and said, "I could run stronger in the third district. Any Republican could do that with his left hand." Then about the other district he said, "Yes, but Omaha is different. It's tougher to get known in a big city."

8B. What kinds of people or parts of the district do you get the least support from? He just didn't think there were any such people.

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He looked at the poll that had just been taken in the district (I have a copy of it) and it showed that he was strong across the board. "I get along fine with labor. I'm especially strong with the rural people. I'm strong in Lincoln, which has been, historically, difficult for Republicans. Ralph ~~Heerman~~ <sup>Bearman</sup> was beaten by the large majority against him in Lancaster County. But Lincoln is my home town." He did note "a little softness" among the farmers in the poll. But he also remembered, not even looking at it, that he held his opponent to a draw among the Democrats. So he was unable to designate or unwilling to designate parts of the district or people where he was weak and he was not willing --as we shall see--to say anything very marked about his strong support either.

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8F. He put traditional party loyalty as having the most importance "Throw a Republican in my district and he's going to get a goodly percentage of the vote." Second in importance he put his own individual record and personal qualities. "That's a factor--especially with those people out there. I enjoy the reputation of a worker."

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He said national issues were not important. Here, he said that Curtis had lost to Carpenter in his district. He said Curtis was identified with Nixon, and so there is a streak of independence in the district. "I ran much stronger than Curtis." He interpreted this question not strictly in terms of issues" but in terms of the national ticket versus himself. He said state and local issues played no part.

I then went over to question 21. And he said, "That's a tough question. The political answer is, 'voting record', but that's not the right answer in my opinion. It is more important now than it used to be. The local media are spotlighting our voting record more. So how do you know Joe Doaks is sizing you up by your voting or your service. People say, 'I like the way you vote, Charlie,' but are they saying it because they think it's the right thing to say? It's most important that you reflect integrity, hard work, responsiveness--these parts of your political personality. But it's a tough, tough question."

When I asked him about his committee work, he said "the least". Then he went on to say "The reason I'm on Agriculture is obvious. People look with favor on that." Later on he seemed to put a good deal more strength on the fact that he was on the Committee--though not on the substance of his work there.

8G. I asked him whether this waiting would be about what he would expect for 1974 and he said, "There will be a switch this year. The individual is more important now than ever. This is post-Watergate. People are paying more attention to the candidate, screening them more carefully, becoming more interested. The individual is going to be looked over with a glassy eye by a big percentage of the electorate."

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9. "There is no answer to that question in my kind of district."

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I can talk around about it. For example I lead the ticket in my home County of Cedar. There's a lot of local pride involved there. I

✓ have two brothers who are well known, I was in high school athletics there, I went to the University and made a success of myself. I am part owner of a ~~farm~~ there with my brothers. When I first ran we always thought the north country was Thone country. Now, I am stronger than horse radish in Lincoln. We've served Lincoln well--the University, the Federal Building that I had a lot to do with, some railroad relocations that were important to people--things like that. I'm always listed in the papers as Congressman Thone, Lincoln, Lincoln, Lincoln. So I get the advantage of this home town thing to compliment the north country. I am very lucky, I was born in the north and I practiced law in the south. I have the best of two worlds--north and south. And it's a north and south district." (I should go back and eliminate the comment earlier to the effect that it's a north and south district. This is where he put that in and not earlier.)

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✓ 10. "To be honest with you I couldn't have a difficult primary. No, I grew up with the party people and have kept up with them through the years. Let me tell you what I mean. I was the Lancaster County Republican Chairman. I was the State young Republican chairman. I was the State young Republican national committeeman; and I was a candidate for the national chairmanship of the Young Republicans. After that I became the State Republican Chairman. I've been in every home of every person active in the Republican party in my district. I've stayed in many of their homes over night. Before we had many motels out in the rural areas, it was a tradition that you would stay with the party people

over night. I have an ideal relationship with the party people. Nobody could touch me in a primary. I've been in and out of the party machinery since I was in college. I was even the head of the University of Nebraska Republicans. I had two primary opponents the first time I ran and they were pretty active. I got 88% of the vote. One of them was a women's libber and the other was a minister and they got about 4,000 votes each. When I was Republican State Chairman we had an organization that you won't see again. I had a busy law practice but I spent 8 hours a day for the Republican party."

12A. "They characterize me as independent, and that surprises my old rock-ribbed associates. But they knew from the past that I was a little independent. They had some alerts when we had our controversies. I think that's something of a plus for me." Clearly he thinks independence is a good thing to be known as.

13. He said, "Fiscal policies." When I asked him whether his people in the district agreed with him, he said, "You bet. A heavy majority are fiscal conservatives."

Then I asked him whether he wasn't saying that fiscal policies were of more interest to him personally than Agricultural policies and he said, "The two are very much tied up with one another. Inflation has the farmer on the run. God Almighty his production costs have sky-rocketed. And they believe, as I believe, that one of the chief causes of inflation is deficit spending out of Washington. Our life blood is agriculture. And anyone who doesn't agree, naturally, with the farmer doesn't cut the mustard out there."

"I may have passed up a chance to go on the Ways and Means Committee. John Rhodes and some others talked to me about it and I said no. If I leave Agriculture, I'll leave my people behind. They wouldn't understand that and they would hold it against me. They would say--even though they might vote for me--that I was more interested in the Potomac than I was in their welfare. As long as I'm in the House I'll be on the Agriculture Committee--Appropriations, Ways and Means, and Rules be damned. There are three members from Nebraska and one of them has to be on Agriculture."

17. I asked the question a little more broadly, in terms of what the opponent will do in the election. "He's having a heck of a time, from what I hear. He'll find some amendments, I suppose. After all, if you cast 500 votes, people are going to find some to criticize. For a while he was against me on the minimum wage. That was two years ago when I voted against it and the President vetoed the bill. This year I voted for it, and the bill was not vetoed, so I guess you could say that popped his balloon there. I've been aggressive on Agriculture and Education--two big areas. He can't sell wild-eyed spending to that district. He's in a box on that." He didn't seem to be able to think of any logical strategy for the other fellow. But he did say--he said it when I first came into the office--that he was out there working very hard, that he had spent something like \$30,000, that he said that he was going to spend \$100,000, that he had taken a "qualitative poll" (I don't know what that means exactly) and that he would be a good candidate.



But Charlie said "I should be alright." He didn't seem to be worried a whole lot about what he would do, but thought that the guy would put up a good respectable fight. Obviously, the poll has had a considerable effect on Charlie, for it shows Charlie with 62% of the vote and his opponent with 23% of the vote.

25. I asked this in a somewhat different way, since he would not identify any hard core supporters. I simply asked him what the quickest way would be of losing the support that he has in the district. "Any disclosure of scandal or dishonesty would rip a guy open in this society. That's the way it ought to be. It's corny, but public office is a public trust. There must be a much higher standard for public officials. Maybe Mo Udall is right--you ought to pay him like hell. Then have no closed meetings, no special interests. A man who is an incoming congressman ought to make peace with himself and say I can't make money out of this office. Yet it would be political suicide for me to vote a pay raise in my district. But we ought to be paid another \$20,000 or \$30,000 and bar absolutely everything else. We would all be better officials." We then had a long rambling discussion about morality and Watergate and impeachment in which we kept coming back to the point that young people are turned off and that we have to establish some new morality about public officials. He said that even good men were tempted and very often what one congressman saw as a special interest, another would see as the public interest. That being the case, he thought

that the best idea would be to establish it firmly in the public mind, and in the mind of every officeholder, that he could not make one single penny from the office ("no mickey mouse" as Charlie kept saying) and hold everybody responsible for that.

26B. "I do not plan to grow old in Washington. I will not stay here a long time. But I don't know how long that will be. I'm going to run hard this year. I hate to lose anything. When I go, it will be voluntary. I have thought about resigning from time to time--the normal frustrations of office. I had a fun law practice and I used to get up in the morning and look forward to getting down there. It gave me a zing. So I could go back to that--even though it might take me a time to build up my practice again." He then talked a little bit about whether or not it would take him much time to build up his law practice and he rambled along about that.

There was one another thing he said that was kind of interesting. He commented about Barber Conable. "Barber is getting much better. He used to be so brusque. But I can see him working at it. He'll come along and say, hi, Charlie. Why two years ago he didn't even know who I was. . . . He's the kind of public official I'm talking about. He gives you that impression that there would be no mickey mouse or no nickel and dime with him. He's a person I would trust with my wallet. I could be wrong but I don't think so. He's getting a lot more attention nationally. " It's kind of interesting that the other Republicans I go with comment on Barber and how he's doing in the Chamber.