

early lays in House

Early intent  
1994 campaign  
Post mortem

Phone Interview with Karen Thurman, December 19, 1994

- She began by thanking me for what I said in the interview with Jim Ross. It seemed to have helped. "Made an impression," she said. I said, "I just told him the truth."
- I started right in by saying I had read in Roll Call that she had been active in the caucus. She talked generally and then went into her "rule" at the end of the interview.
- On caucus: "Everybody was worried about who was going to be elected minority leader and minority whip. We said 'wait a minute.' There are a lot more important things than that. There are rules. And you can't talk about being inclusive unless you have rules. You don't have to follow any practice unless you have rules. There had been no preparation for the meeting by Steering and Policy--about committee appointments, who would get them, how they would be chosen. What they said was not bad; but we think they could have been more inclusive. Tim Roemer and I had been talking to CRS, looking to what might happen. We stayed up late Tuesday night waiting, but we got nothing. So the next day we said 'wait a minute,' slow down. What is going to happen when people get bumped off exclusive committees? Can they go to any other committee or just where there are vacancies? Do they have a chit to get back on these committees if we take control? If they go on a new committee, do they take all their seniority with them? How will you protect the junior people on committees or the new people?" She described result--as of the moment. Spoke of Cardess Collins case--if she takes a ranking place, should she give up Commerce seat? Have a chit? "
- About the rule (at end of interview): She said, "What happens when you go to Steering and Policy to talk about committee assignments on Ways and Means or some other exclusive committee? It's unwritten. No one knows what you are being scored on; but if you didn't vote the right way on their issues--on the issues they define--they would use it as a reason to keep you off exclusive committees or other plum appointments. We said 'wait a minute.' We felt that if the leadership had listened to us on the gun issue, we might not have lost control. And we felt that if the Democrats had won control this time, we would have been hurt by our vote on the gun issue. It all goes back to what happened to Sonny Montgomery. Leslie Byrne and Jolene Unsoeld wanted a rule that said people should be removed from their positions if they voted the wrong way on certain issues. They wanted a litmus test on people: How good a Democrat are they? We said 'wait a minute,' you ought not to run Congress this way. We have to vote the way we did. You should pick people who will be good members of the committee, not on their voting record. Some of us wouldn't have been back if we hadn't bucked the

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system. You know what I like? I like the idea that for the first time we have a rule that mentions the word "district," that mentions the people we represent. Imagine that! It's a rule that gives our people their vote back; it gives the vote back to our constituents. Our rule was voted in unanimously. The ending was much better than when we started. We have the words now. But, who knows what will happen behind closed doors."

- About her assignments: "Ag. and Gov Ops are OK. The question is about Gov Ops. Because the Republicans folded two old committees into it. How will they bring the new people over from the (former) committees? Will they bring with them their seniority from the other committees? Gov Ops is a minor committee. We are being allowed to expand from 5 to 7 subcommittees. If I keep my seniority on Gov Ops, I will be ranking member of a subcommittee. That would be great. They haven't finished with Gov Ops yet. I don't know what will happen." (As of December 19, they still hadn't decided Gov Ops membership--per CQ supplement.)

*see clip*

- On the election: She said she was surprised at the scope of the sweep. Would have predicted 30 Republican seat gain and control of the Senate. "It's the anger out there." "The telling moment was when Jill Long went down. She had not been on the radar screen at all."

"In October, I told the Speaker, I told the Majority Leader and I told the Majority Whip that you should take the assault weapon ban out of the crime bill and vote on it separately, and that if you don't, I'm not going to be able to call you Mr. Speaker, Majority Leader and Majority Whip anymore, because you will lose control of the House."

- On her election: "The numbers were great. The size of the win surprised me. It was the best I've had since 1986. The Republican party people have been mad. And they have done everything they can to make me miserable--questions about the election. So I'll just do what I have to do."

- Re counties: "I was pleased with my 65% in Alachua County. It was interesting because it has some very conservative elements--not in Gainesville proper, but outside. The Xian Coalition worked against me there. But we had some great people helping up there. In Levy County--they put on an ad with statements of support by sheriffs and county commissioners. They did it all on their own--in the weeklies and biweeklies. We got 60% there."

- "I would have liked to have been higher in Citrus County. That was where I was closest--53%. It was the one he had to have, the one where he worked the hardest. But it was where

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I spent an awful lot of my time, too."

- "Pasco did great--62-63%. He went after the veterans there, but the veterans came through."
- "We carried Hernando. We carried every county but Marion. We lost Marion... We haven't done any analysis. In fact, I have not looked at the returns."

- I asked her if campaign seemed "a long time ago." She laughed and said it did. "It seems like an interruption which didn't allow me to do what I wanted to do to help my constituents. It seemed like an unusually short campaign. I'm used to starting in the summer and campaigning right through till election day. This year I began in the middle of October. I'm not used to such a short period of time."

Your agenda? "I'll be at the mercy of what they want to do anyway." But she listed: Immigration, Medicaid formula, long-term care, "we're working on that now." "In the first year, we'll be very busy with the farm bill. There are significant issues for Florida--the definition of rural areas for block grants, keeping fruit and vegetables--American grown--in nutrition programs, keeping something for promotional programs which they want to cut." "And then I'll still be working on water and risk assessment. It should be a good time for risk assessment." "I'm not going to be bored!"

I asked about reaction to problem of media people knowing what she has accomplished. "I have not been shy about letting them know what I think about their coverage. I even went so far, after the election, as to spend 40 minutes talking with the Ocala Star Banner, giving them the opportunity to question me, making contact. It's a problem--sending material to editors and reporters at the same time and not making one or the other unhappy. We'll try to work out some balance."

- I told her I wanted to come back. She said, "Fine, you can come have a beer." I said, "I'll come get a hug." She said, "We like to give hugs here."

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