

Karen Thurman (Washington, DC) March 15, 1995

- Re the group of southern Democrats organized by Tauzin, etc. "I started with them; but when it came right down to it, I decided I couldn't join. I'm a Democrat! And when I saw the way it was being perceived, I said 'I can't do it!' It was being described in a bad way. Some of the others who joined are having second thoughts. I may vote with them, but I'm not one of them."
- This was the last thing she said as we left the women's area where she took me after she (Lindy Boggs Room) had voted on a recission amendment.
- Our conversation began in her office. I had waited there for my appointment. She called and said, "I've got to stay here to watch over my veterans. ^{from the House floor} You know, that's one of my major interests." There was a recission amendment up, cutting Amercorps and restoring some veteran's programs. (See WP clipping 3/16.) I went to the floor to watch, left when I saw her leave, got back to her office after she had gotten back and was interviewing some fruits and vegetables representative.
- She came out after the interview and gave me a hug. I asked if she got the veterans' money restored. "Yes, but at the expense of the President's national service corps program. I tell you, Dick, the Republicans are ruining this country. The place is in turmoil. They haven't a clue, not a clue. They are hurting the people we shouldn't be hurting."
- She told me she told Louise Slaughter I was coming; and asked if I'd give Louise a call. She likes Louise a lot--as she told me again when we were looking at the women's photos in the Boggs Room.
- Then she asked me how my secretary, "Mary Rose" was! I told her fine and mentioned that "Rosemary had lost her husband. She talked at length about how her husband's mother had died that last weekend. And she went on about that at great length--the illness, the last days, the cemetery, what she thought the woman and her husband would be doing now, etc. It was most unusual for me, since I've mostly dealt with men and they don't open up at great length about such matters. She talked so much about it, I was afraid I'd never get to politics!
- We finally did. I asked her what she was spending her time doing.
- I should mention here that she never spontaneously mentioned anything about what was going on back home in the district--

KAREN THURMAN (WASHINGTON, DC) MARCH 15, 1995-1

she picks
up on this
"party pulling
in my
neat
way."

It's a
nice
constitution
presumably
part of
preserve
public
of what "party"
with the
means

It's the
story that
Keith
cries
wreck
over

Women's
concerns +

reading

and we never touched on it till we were in the women's room later.

- She started in with her committee work on Gov Ops--that they handled unfunded mandates and line item veto. "We were able to get two amendments in on the line item veto--one in the committee and one on the floor." The first was a provision for bringing the veto back to the entire House rather than to the Chairman (at some point in the procedure) and the second was a provision that 50 members could get an item pulled out from the veto and voted on separately.
- I said I had seen her on McNeil Lehrer and we agreed the program didn't hit the issue very clearly. It was discursive. She spoke again that "We were able to fix up a couple of things--like the 18-55 provision for food stamps if people were looking for a job."
- "I'm very interested in food stamps because I'm afraid we're going to take food away from people who need it. I think of the people in my district--Florida Power and Light laid off 350 people. They are people who had been able to buy a car, take out a home mortgage, feed their families--and now they have no job. What are they going to give up? They may lose their home. They can't lose their car. You know this great big district--there are no bus lines, no subways, no public transportation. If you don't have a car, you can't even look for a job. And now the Republicans were going to take away their eligibility for food stamps-- even if they are ~~not~~ engaged in a job search. I tell you, when you get down to things like this, you can tell who is a Democrat and who is a Republican. On a lot of issues you can't; but when it comes to taking food away from people, you can tell. Democrats have a heart. Charlie Stenholm is a deficit reducer at heart, but when it comes to food, he's not going to take it away from people. It's the children who will be hurt. I'm working with Nathan Deal now on a welfare bill that will not end up hurting the children."
- "The Agriculture Committee met every day for three weeks on food stamps. Two days a week we would meet from 9 in the morning till 5 at night. I sat there every minute--only three or four of us did. But I set aside everything else so I could be there. It's important to my district. I asked for membership on the committee. It's my job. Bill Emerson (Chair) did an excellent job with the witnesses, as good a job as anyone could do. There was an awful lot of information out there. I was able to pick up on a lot of things and make some points. But when it came to marking up the bill, the marching orders changed. Everything became completely partisan."
- She didn't finish the idea--which was that she got pretty much

KAREN THURMAN (WASHINGTON, DC) MARCH 15, 1995-2

shut out later--except for the 18-55 job searching provision, which she fears may not have the effect she intended.

- But the picture of her policy participation and interests and desires for information remained strong. She's a legislator; and it bothers her that she's not able to get the kind of public policy she wants.
- She thinks the cuts will hurt the needy, especially children. "I haven't been taking any pot shots. But I think I'm getting ready to. On the balanced budget amendment, I had some credibility because I had supported the A to Z effort. I got up and said I thought they should be open and tell us where they expect the spending cuts will come from and how they expect to get the money they need to make their tax cuts--those tax cuts to help the 2% of the wealthiest people."
- She mentioned several times that she had spoken up about this or that on the floor--but I don't recall them all.
- Over in the Capitol, she complained that on Gov Ops and some bill or other that no one has any idea what the provisions meant. She said the Republicans were going so fast. "They don't know what is in the bill and they can't answer questions about it. Clinger (committee chairman) admitted he didn't know what some of the provisions meant. But he wanted us to pass it anyway."
- "I know why I'm a Democrat. Democrats have a heart!"
- I asked her what she had heard from the district. She said she had been back in Pasco County to some kind of a parade and had been to a DAV meeting somewhere and that people were encouraging. "You're doing a good job." "Keep it going," etc.
- "Let me tell you a story. In Dixie County, one of my smallest counties, there are some fishing communities--mostly they fish for mullett. They are not well off, but they have been fishing for generations. They were very hard hit by the big winter storm a couple of years ago. I got in there and worked with FEMA so that they would be eligible for disaster aid. It meant upgrading their homes and raising them up off the ground. Now you know that costs money. Those folks didn't have much; and you know how hard it is to change anyhow. So it's one of those cases where you do something and you have no idea how you are going to be perceived. So I was up there a few weeks ago and I met two of the county commissioners. One of them told me that when he came to the area to campaign last fall, the fishermen said to him, "you're going to support Karen Thurman aren't you. Because if you aren't, we won't support you." When I looked like I didn't believe him, he

KAREN THURMAN (WASHINGTON, DC) MARCH 15, 1995-3

called the other fella over and the second one said it was all true. They are the kind of men who ordinarily would take the attitude that 'She's a woman, she can't get anything done.' That one conversation made my whole day."

- She went on to say that there were about 40,000 people all told in those little counties and that that kind of attitude toward her would ripple around.
- Re her ranking minority position on the subcommittee. All minority staff went to the ranking minority member of the full committee Cardiss Collins. The Chair of her subcommittee-- Bill Zeliff--offered to share his staff person with Karen; but then, somehow, partisanship took over and the sharing never took place.
- When she complained about the recklessness and speed of the Republican juggernaut, I said the Senate would slow it down. "Thank God for the Senate," she said, and raised her eyes to the heavens. She said she thinks risk assessment will go through the Senate ok.
- And when I mentioned that I'd seen her vote with the Republicans on risk assessment, she said "on the moratorium, too." And she went into a long spiel about an "ignorant idiot who runs the Fish and Wildlife Commission in Florida. They had a big conference of everybody involved and made some regulations on the preservation of the manatee. Then the commissioner changed the regulations, sent them to everyone on Friday for comments on Monday. The moratorium was up for a vote that week and she voted to impose it. Or at least that's the point I got. She kept saying "It's crazy. They are just crazy."
- The tomato growers, NAFTA, letter to Panetta and growers got an appointment with trade board. "We're in a lot of trouble over NAFTA. The Mexicans are dumping their tomatos on our markets and our tomato growers are hurting. They were in here the other day and told me the story. I was so mad I fired off a letter to Leon Panetta."

KAREN THURMAN (WASHINGTON, DC) MARCH 15, 1995-4