

Ben Rosenthal

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Wed. AM - Ben talked again about his staff. "I think I've got as good an operation as anyone here. I got to 1/2 or 1/3 as many meetings ^{as} Joe Addebbo. He goes to 6 things Friday, Saturday and Sunday, walks in, smiles at everyone, leaves after five minutes. Everyone says, "wasn't it nice the congressman was here. It's great politics but it doesn't suit my personality. I don't like to go to those meetings and I don't have the skill to get out when I do. I'll stay for 2 hours. I want to save myself for meetings where I can make a speech on an issue. If there are 20 people meeting ~~in~~ a morning and I have a chance to play tennis, I'll play tennis. I'll accept the ~~penalty~~ and try to compensate for it another way. But if 400 people ask me to make a speech I'll come--or 150 people. I've tried to consciously draw the line. Charlie Vanik once told me he was invited to a big meeting and when he found out he wasn't going to speak, he left and went to a movie--that was his ironclad rule. I want to engage in substantive public relations, not horse ~~shit~~ public relations. For a long time, Addebo didn't want to get into controversies, he avoided them. Now he's doing good work on the military budget. But I never ducked controversies. I turned controversies into a political plus for me. So we all have different operations and each suits a particular personality. You do what you like. Another thing, Addebo's district has lots more civic clubs and veterans organizations than my district does. It would be harder for me to play the groups like he does--even if I wanted to--which I don't. I've changed my thinking about the congressman's involvement in constituency projects--partly for political

reasons and partly because the public wants us to be involved in their concerns--the problem of alienation, no one cares. In the anti-war period, I had a 5,000 to 25,000 floating constituency. I was a hero. Now that has cooled down and although these people still support me, there isn't the glue there used to be. There isn't the fervor: so partly to make up for the policies and partly because I think the problem has a legitimate ~~concern~~ ^{concern}, I've begun to emphasize ~~my~~ interest in community projects. I have added two full-time people working on community projects-- one in the district (lots of praise again of Rowan) who goes to community meetings and one in the office here (idea got from Fraser) who spends one week in four in the district getting the smell and the feel of the problems. Then she spends three weeks here working on them. My two legislative assistants are very good on national issues, consumer issues, but they don't know what you do about LaGuardia Airport. Well, they know ~~in~~ the district but they don't really know. Neither one of them comes from the district. So I've strengthened the staff to deal with community projects. At some point I may have to personally get involved in a project--but I can pick and choose. And the ~~operation~~ ^{operation} will run most of the time without me."

"My staff operation is so good now that it will run without me.

Maybe I should worry about that! My philosophy is that you should make your staff work for you. We have 16 people on the staff and a payroll of nearly \$200,000. They make my job incredibly easier and let me do what I want to do. We have as good a case work operation as anyone in

the business. As a result I'm probably in the bottom one-tenth of the Congress in the amount of time I have to spend on case work. I won't touch it unless it's something unusual or dramatic or a personal friend of mine. Braggi^b sits in his N.Y. office every Saturday and sees every constituent who has a problem--sometimes 100 a day. It's good politics; but I could never do that--I couldn't sit still that long. Lucien Nedzi^z has a clever idea. Every night he takes four or five of the letters going out to people and telephones them personally--"This is Congressman Nedzi and I'm calling to tell you your Social Security check is on the way." The next day, everyone on the block knows "the congressman called me last night." I couldn't do that either; but he's trained himself to do it. Everyone is different. And every operation suits the personality of the congressman."

He's very pleased with staff operation and convinced it has freed him to do more in Washington without sacrificing any effectiveness at home. That he does what he likes at home--emphasizes issues.

He ended with long, rambling discussion of how inefficient the congressional operation is--they don't even know which is best copying machine--no one tests this for them. Says he once brought an efficiency expert in to take look at his office to make things run better--"He stayed only a week, and that wasn't long enough. It never got off the ground." Guy couldn't understand work of the office and nature of political ✓ p. 7
But Ben believes there are principles that ought to be universal re filing, positioning of desks, etc. and says no one operates time to that. We agreed that the reason is that it's an individualistic, everyone's for himself kind of operation in Congress.