

Talk communities of broken
y m p & c i
Ben about
each of them.

Benjamin Rosenthal

Lunch with Dave Rohde - January 29, 1973

Talked mostly about the Holsfield thing. "I did it half on the merits and half on emotion. Holsfield had screwed me twice and I was mad as hell. I had been wronged. But since the merits were right, I decided to go ahead. I didn't think of the effect it would have on me politically. Outside the House, it has helped me. Inside, I don't know. Around the lunch table it will hurt some. People will take a few shots at me. But most of the people who are against me will be gone in 4 years. And most of those who are with me will be here. That's the way I thought about it. But I wanted to put the pressure on Holsfield and keep the pressure on. That's the way to put it. I'm going to keep at it inside the committee."

Was disappointed that he only got 46 votes vs. Holsfield. He expected 50-60. Concludes that system is "much more deeply embedded" than he had thought.

The whole thing is typical of Ben. He's a needler. He has the thought processes of a needler (moves from subject to subject, short attention span), and actions of a needler (scatters his shots). Dave says staff is same way. Dave and I talked about how hard it is to keep him on one subject. When he pauses in answering a question and you think he's reflecting, he comes up with a wholly new subject. His 1970 campaign literature portrayed him like that

Re campaign. "It was a lot like the last one. We waged a vigorous
✓ campaign--by our standards, not by Abner Mikva's standards. We spent

\$18,000; Mikva spent \$270,000. But we did a lot of supermarket campaigning; gave away 20,000 shopping bags. I spent most of my time working for McGovern. That hurt me and I knew it would. But I figured I had points to spare."

Did Forest Hills episode hurt? "I guess so, but I don't know how. I just don't know."

He didn't know what his vote total or margin was--not very interested in going over the campaign. Could see no primary opponent in sight but said "I'm doing all the things to make sure I don't have a primary--using the ^{Frank} ~~Favorite~~. I got a computer tape of all the residents and I'm pumping mail into the district."

Most interesting thing he said was about changes in the district. "I lost most of Forest Hills. That was the cream of my district--psychologically, sociologically, educationally, politically, any way you want to measure it. They were very unhappy to lose me as their congressman and I was very ^{un}happy to lose them. I picked up some other areas to the east, ^{new?} Fresh Meadows, Bell Gardens (others) that were good but not as good as Forest Hills. Then on the West, I picked up some incredibly bad areas--(he listed them) some of them from Delaney. They are conservative and Catholic and there's nothing I can do there. I don't know what to do, except to keep a pretty low profile. So I stayed away--did only a little campaigning there. My opponent campaigned a lot there, leaving a little card saying "Defeat Rosenthal" and then listing 5 church-related issues, abortion, school prayer and other jerked up issues. That ^{part of the district is} ~~is~~ hopeless."

*Midwest
District
again.*

"If you take the district altogether, I'd say the educational level is lower than the old one."

War. "Pressure came from Washington, his A-A and not district-- a little came from there later, he said. But it wasn't district pressure that turned him. He became associated early with Mark Raskin who sent him his first AA, Gorman, who kept pushing him. Ben said that first meeting of anti war congressmen was organized by him in 1964, he thinks, and Bernard Fall was the speaker. "He was no dove, he was a historian, a military historian. He had been in Viet Nam for ten years and he said 'it can't be done.' You can't win militarily in Viet Nam. It's impossible."

He said Nixon carried his district this time and that it hit him hard.

Dave says it's most publicity conscious office he's seen. Ben and staff both very ^{press} conscious, ~~office he's seen. Ben and staff both very~~ ~~conscious~~. Long Island Press is main source (Ben was throwing oysterettes at the Long Island Press ^{guy} group in the dining room.) Dave says Ben justified it by saying that since he doesn't get home as much as he used to, he needs to keep himself before the voters via publicity.

He said he would name 6 people in district I could talk to--he asked me what kind of people I wanted. I said "I'd like to sample the people you sample."

"The paddleball court is the only place in the House where seniority doesn't count. It's first come, first serve."

When I came back later in spring he commented on his vote in favor of expanding U.S. by
 saying "I won't give you my vote" and so I had to spend 45 minutes explaining it
 to him. He was persuaded by the debate and voted the Carl Albert
 position. ~~I was~~ ^{He was} surprised by the outcome. Quite understandable, Kasten never
 said anything about it.