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Interview of Rep. James Scheuer (D/NY, 21<sup>st</sup> District) in 1984 Nov/Dec.  
(Mr Breakfast at Waldorf)

- Well traveled and well connected in liberal circles, confident, issue-oriented, heavily immersed in reform movement, limps. ? gave him a ride in a wagon and he's going to use it. He's too involved to know what he should read--

(Warren) Mieller I said and he knew him.

- "I don't want to be a routineer." Very conscious of his position as an insurgent within the organization and his aspiration to be a different kind of congressman. Calls Buckley "one of the last of the old time machine." "I've always had the bug. I've always wanted to hold and elective office. I've hd a little experience in federal service and a lot of high level experience in dealing with housing problems and intergroup problems all over the world." (Washington, DC he talked about his project as changing the pattern of Washington housing.) "Many of my friends thought the job of a congressman was downgrading after what I had been doing. But I don't think so. I think it's an important career. If you are a good congressman, you might even get promoted to senator. But even if that promotion never comes, I'd be satisfied to make Congress my career, to accumulate seniority and become a committee chairman. That way, you can have a lot

Interview in 1984 of Rep. Scheuer (D/NY)-1

of influence in the areas you are interested in. I'm not looking for a judgeship or to run for DA. The only thing I'd be interested in would be senator. But even then, after you've accumulated some seniority, you wouldn't want to leave the House."

- Brown's job is to get him reelected.
- Here, Brown broke in and said, "The problem is to become a two-term congressman" and S&B talked about primary. "I know they are going to mount a primary against me next time. They'll push me hard to test me and see if I can stand the test. If I win, then they may let me alone. But Buckley isn't through yet. He gave the mayor his comeuppance yesterday."
- B called him a new type of urban congressman and shrewd issue ? and participant in work of congressmen. Not taking advice from outside and working for leadership side.
- "I don't want to be a routine. My predecessor was a nice amicable guy. He was a wonderful person to have a drink with. But he was a cipher. He didn't take any leadership role in the Congress. But no one minded that. They were the leaders

Interview in 1984 of Rep. Scheuer (D/NY)-2

and they could stand having some nice guy around. He was a Tuesday to Thursday man. He didn't join the Democratic study group and they didn't even know who he was."

- "The man before Healy was Izzy Dollinger. He retired to run for county DA. The man before him was Fine. He resigned to run for Supreme Court judge. They first played musical chairs with the congressman's seat. They'd stay down for a couple of years and then retire to the calm back water of a judgeship.
- Much controversy as to whether men should live at home or in Washington. He's going to live in Washington, a symbolic decision. ? would have no problem here, but city congressman worry about it. "I'm not going to be a Tuesday-Thursday congressman. I'll give Bill Ryan credit. He's not a Tuesday-Thursday man. He stays down there all week and comes home weekends and works here." S&B talked about Ryan--his ?, his wife's unhappiness with situation--she doesn't see him when he's in Washington, or when he comes home. And later Ryan as a loner. Lindsey just moving in Washington and being urban congressman. He helped S by talking to him about housing, schools, how to be an urban congressman.
- "How does a young congressman keep his integrity on the issues

Interview in 1984 of Rep. Scheuer (D/NY)-3

and still fit in with the power structure in the Congress? I didn't have all the answers. But I have a lot of questions."

- "You have to decide whether you want to be a follower and just vote the way the city bosses tell you to vote, whether or you want to be a lonely voice of dissent like Alan Follette or Wayne Morse. And in a pluralistic society such as ours, there is a place for people like that. But it doesn't lead to a position of leadership in the Congress. And you have to decide whether you want to run for the leadership." He sees himself as adopting third alt, and his discussion of Hubert Humphrey and Johnson came in here. Brown stressing "empathy, Scheuer stressing quality.

- "It's just like it is in business. You have to decide whether you want to make a fast buck or lay a foundation for a long-term investment. And this means you have to make some very hard choices. I'll give you an example. (Asked Brown if B thought he should talk about it.) It's the Mississippi thing. Some of the liberals are playing to try and deny the Mississippi congressmen their seats. They went to get them thrown out of the Congress. You remember the mock election they had in Mississippi. Well, they went to take three old leaders elected in that mock election and lead them onto the

Interview in 1984 of Rep. Scheuer (D/NY)-4

floor of the House. There may even be ? and a few bloody ? They called me up 48 hours ago and asked me to join. Well, I said give me some time. So I went to Washington and I talked with Clarence Mitchell of the NAACP. And I talked to Andy Bremiller, to Bill Phillips and to Joe Raul. All of them are against it. They say it's a fast buck operation, a grandstanding play. That it's got no legal basis at all. They are all civil rights, but they don't want ti gave anything to do with it. They want to expel the Mississippians from the Democratic caucus before they support candidate. That's legal and that's the way to do it. Just because they supported Goldstein is no reason to kick them out of Congress. But you can deny them seats in the Caucus and that's the way to deny John Bell Villies his committee assignments. They are very worried about Williem becoming Chairman of the IFC Committee which has power over the communication system in the county, the transportation system land, sea and air. One way is legal, the other isn't. These men are civil rights whites, but they all feel that their program will be hurt by a stunt like this. There may be violence in the well of the House. I know I'm going to be criticized for not joining them. A lot of the people in my district will want to know why I wasn't there leading one of these ladies by the hand with the TV camera grinding away. It will cost me a lot of credits in my

Interview in 1984 of Rep. Scheuer (D/NY)-5

district, I know. Lindsey, who has the most educated, most intelligent, most sophisticated district in the county. He could explain what I'm telling you in a newsletter. But I can't do that in my district. My people are very liberal, but they don't have that level of sophistication about such things. It would have been easy for me when they called on the telephone and said ? and let's show these Mississippians they can't deny anyone the ? it would have been easy for me to say yes. But you have to do your homework and you have to make some hard choices." Whole point was one in which he was faced with ? oriented action vs. House-oriented action.

- I asked if he was ? to DSG. "Oh, absolutely. They are doing a wonderful job. They're not a fast ? operation."
- His connections and names he dropped were a litany of liberals. Phillips "an old friend of mine." Bremiller, "a great person, ? of quality." Billing, Feldman.
- They stressed that since he beat ??????? that he went to Congress "with two strikes against him" was a US power struggle. Buckley is friend of others. Also he defeated a ? But Scheuer says he took Healy when he was strong as a bull and that regulars shouldn't forget that. "He's the Chairman

Interview in 1984 of Rep. Scheuer (D/NY)-6

of the Censor Committee as far as New York is concerned."

- Called on Keogh. "Even though I defeated a friend of his, he said that he would treat me as an equal with everyone else." He said there would be no punitive action and was very cordial and pleasant. Then he told me that the upcoming Congress would not go down in history as the Scheuer Congress.
- Sam McCormack on committee assignments. Boggs he met in London and talked. Saw Mary Celler. Re committee assignments, "You go with your hat in your hand." He wants E&L because of his subcommittee interests. But neither he nor Brown think he'll get it. Gov Ops or PO. Scheuer expresses an interest in GOP's "I'd be very happy with that." "I told him about Ryan and Appropriations--said he didn't know it was so. B suggested "a loner." He always wants things his own way. And that only he's never become a leader in the reform movement, even though he as the first congressman. The people who know him, love him. They worship him. But you go 20 blocks across town or even 10 blocks across town and they don't know who he is."
- B said problem is empathy in terms of getting along with power structure. Who knows how "interpersonal relationships" will

Interview in 1984 of Rep. Scheuer (D/NY)-7

work out. Don't know till you get there he said and the subject of Hubert Humphrey came up. I suggested empathy was summed up in whether leadership people said he's a nice guy. S demurred and said it wasn't that it was quality of people. LBJ saw quality in HH and "smoothed off his rough edges" and "changed his ways," but point was that underneath the brassy youth, LBJ saw quality. And Scheuer would like to think that his quality will help. They feel that ? term he'll get low committees. But after he's reelected then they will see he has a safe seat and is a competent worthy person and then he'll get something good.

- Emphasis is on staff from district. Re Brown, "I seduced him. He's been one of the leaders of the reform movement and I thought after 15 years in that turmoil and strife, he deserved a sabbatical.
- "I didn't live in the district when I first ran, so I've had to lean over backwards in taking my staff from the district. Dick has recruited his secretary from Washington. We veted one person who had some hill experience. I would have preferred to have had more people who had been in Washington and knew Washington, but I had to be very careful." Later, Brown said when I came to Washington, "You will see a

Interview in 1984 of Rep. Scheuer (D/NY)-8



congressional office with less hill experience than any other. One girl has had two years experience and that's all. You can see what it looked like when a congressional office starts from scratch."

- He's opening two or three offices in district--said he would in campaign. Healey never had a congressional office as such. Had a back room in Democratic club paid for by Congress and a lot of hacks hang around. Had two men in Washington. No one knew who they were (one was "a court jester," a man who knew everybody and was liked by everybody, but didn't do anything). "And all the rest were party hacks who were on the payroll and hung around the club back in the Bronx."
- His staff people are learning the ropes. One is going to a 17 week course on social work given by Citizen's Committee for Children, where they acquaint people with all welfare agencies. One went down to work for Phillips to learn the ropes. Others worked on his campaign. Dick B. has been talking to his ? down there regularly with Phillips, etc.
- Re Brown and his lack of experience: "He knows a lot about politics and a lot about the reform movement. He's a quick study and in 60 days, he'll know most of what these other

Interview in 1984 of Rep. Scheuer (D/NY)-9

groups there know. It'll take him a year or two to learn the rest. But I felt I'd be better off to have him than anyone else. Then the seduction process ?"

- Re job: I asked him if he knew what point of Congress was. "Certainly. I've just finished reading "The Congressman!" Thought he had learned a lot from it.
- "There are three parts of the job. In the first place, you're an aide ?? to 362,000 people in helping them to solve their personal problems. And you're a doll for them to stick pins into when you don't do what you went there to. And you have to take critics. They feel they hired you to help them with their problems and they did and you have to accept whatever they, in the sovereign majority, chose to do. In the second place, you are a catalytic agent in making certain that your district receives the governmental services they need and are entitled to. You have to face the ? of federal schools and municipal agencies in your district and its problems. And you have to tell the district what services are available to them. My district is a declining area and it needs help from all levels of government if it is to become ????? area where people can enjoy the amenities of life. We need housing, we need schools, we need playgrounds and parks. I consider this one

Interview in 1984 of Rep. Scheuer (D/NY)-10

of the most important parts of my job. If I can make a speech for the United Nations in Tokyo, telling south east Asian countries how they should plan their declining urban areas, then surely I can do it for my own district, benefitted and neglected by my predecessor. I want to see that my district is properly served in these areas. And then thirdly, there is the job of legislating in Washington, for the district and in the public interest. (??????) I have several things I'm especially interested in. I know there won't be any Wagner Act with my name on it during my first term. But if I can get these ideas in here on these, I'll be satisfied. I think this interests me the most, but serving the constituency, that's a noble effort, too."

- Brown, "He's the most issue-oriented guy you'll ever want to meet."
- "Since June 3<sup>rd</sup>, I've been the congressman. They don't put that I'm the congressman-elect. They think I'm the congressman. Not only do the major department heads in NYC treat me that way, but so do 360,000 people. Already, I've been getting complaints. People want to know what I'm doing down there. Why haven't I passed any bills."

Interview in 1984 of Rep. Scheuer (D/NY)-11

- "I've perpetuated a little fraud on the people and now I've been ? by my own ? During the primary, I told them that on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, they had their chance to select the next congressman. Everyone knew that whoever was nominated, would be the next congressman. I told them that it was D selection day--selection day--election day--there was a little conference there. My problem was to get the Democrats out for the primary. That's a big coordination job that Dick Brown worked on for 15 years in ? And we had to telescope it into three or four years. So I stressed June 3<sup>rd</sup> as the day that all Democrats had to get out to the polls. They did, nearly a 50% of this very ??? After I was nominated, they thought it was all over and I was the congressman. He got 87% in general election.
  
- Point is that right after June 3, he started acting like a congressman--held conferences with all city departments, he ticked them off, starting to get them going. "I didn't come in with any extravagant demands." Cited burned down school with rubble in the space where it was. The need for \$75,000-\$100,000 to get started on a park or play space, need for open areas and no excuse for neglect there. Cited schools with nothing but classrooms in the lavatory in basement.

Interview in 1984 of Rep. Scheuer (D/NY)-12

- Re ??? hand holding: "I consider any time spent with a constituent as time wasted that I could have spent on doing important things... Candidly, I'm hoping the staff can handle those problems. But some congressmen organize their whole office to do that. If you want to see a real operation, go look at Paul Fino's office. His constituents come in there and line up by the hundreds and they all get five minutes with him. I don't know what people think of Paul as a congressman down here, and I wouldn't want to pass judgment on that, but his constituents think he's great. And that makes him very hard to beat." Suggested I go up and look at his operation sometime.

- During discussion of Brooklyn Navy Yard, he said he was glad he wasn't a Brooklyn congressman. He couldn't fight hard for it and wouldn't be reelected. Thought it was not in national interest, would be a subsidy of worst sort "misguided, misdirected, difficult" to pour money into that yard--better to build schools, retraining, etc. Bob Brown said you would have to do it if you were from Brooklyn and trust the 434 others to keep you honest. Scheuer said he guessed Bob was right and that he could afford luxury of the position he was then taking since he wasn't from Brooklyn.

Interview in 1984 of Rep. Scheuer (D/NY)-13