

Floyd Spence

DC interview

June 3, 1974

1. "I had to learn. I took the advice of others, too. I kept the Orangeburg office. And I enlarged the Columbia office. I wanted to have the office do more work locally and have someone to spend time in the field. I didn't know how much casework would enter into it. Most people feel that voting is all there is, but I found out casework is one of the biggest parts of the job. Not just Social Security and individual cases, but the inter-workings of governments, local projects--that sort of thing. I kind of grew along with it. My family decided to stay here--the boys and the wife both. The kids were settled in school. So I anticipated all along commuting back and forth every weekend--and they have been pretty well filled up. People think you aren't around if they don't see you personally."

I asked him what would happen if he cut his visits back home in half. "It wouldn't hurt that much. The main reason I come back is to accept speaking engagements. I take all I can. It gives me a chance to keep in touch with people. That and a questionnaire we send out every couple of years are the best ways to let people know you are thinking of them."

2. "It is conservative from the standpoint of philosophy. Aside from that, it is unusual in that it's a conglomeration of districts

in general. I've got a capital city with government type people, more than most. I've got lots of university students and colleges-- more colleges than most districts--seven, not counting technical schools or trade schools. I've got a pretty big farming area jammed up against the city. I've got textile workers and high type manufacturing. A pretty good cross section and no one particular slice."

I asked him whether any congressmen had similar districts.

"No. Most places it doesn't take much of an area to get 500,000 people. In a congested area you have mostly residential or mostly inner core city or mostly farming. Bill Shomerle has mostly farming, that's all he has to think about. I can't have that limited a point of view. Even racially, it's a pretty mixed up area."

4C. The economic activities in the district. "Farming, a good bit of industrial--high type industry, GE, Westinghouse, Allied Chemical, government employees, and a few textile mills." He distinguishes throughout between what he calls high type industry and the textile industry. It is the textile industry that has unions and employs less skilled labor and that's the distinction I think he is making. Clearly, he does better among the high type industry people than he does with the textile workers.

4H. The media influence. "I can't compare. They have an impact. The local media have more effect than the national media, because people are distrustful or critical of the national media as too liberal."

4I. Philosophy. "Conservative. You have some of the more liberal people in the Columbia area. But it's conservative compared to other parts

of the country. Everything is relative." He kept comparing his district to other districts as I went through the demographic characteristics.

4J. Stability. "We're growing a lot. That doesn't mean we're unstable. People are moving from other parts of the state here. We are becoming more of a residential area in that people are moving into the rural areas and making bedrooms out of farming areas. They are pushing the farmers further out; and many farmers are going to work in the plants."

4L. The relative strength of the party. "They are changing. The poll we took some time ago showed something like 21% Democratic, 21% Republican and all the rest not inclined to either. That's a change. People don't want to consider themselves members of either party--they would rather stay loose. There was a time when more than 21% were Democrats. The poll was enlightening to me. It used to be that more than 50% would say they were Democrats. At least they thought they were Democrats, because they registered Democratic and they thought that made them Democrats. When I was a Democrat, I voted Republican nationally."

Is it a safe seat? "Everybody says it's safe--even when it was not Republican it was Conservative. Watson was a real Conservative. The district had been voting Republican for President long before that."

Here I asked him whether people didn't tell him that he was crazy for committing political suicide when he switched parties in 1962.

"Yes, some of my friends told me I'd ruin my legal practice and my family name because I'd be looked upon as a kook from then on. Only

Bill Workman had changed at that time. Now, in Lexington, all the members of the State House of Representatives, the County Sheriff and all members of the County Council except one are Republican. When I changed, I didn't think it was suicidal. But when I lost, I began to wonder. I could see changes coming. I thought most people thought like I did, that they were conservative. But they kept trying to rationalize to themselves that they were Dixiecrats or Souther Democrats, or Conservative Democrats and they could not bring themselves to vote Republican. I thought that people would change. I went to Thurmond for advice. . . . " Here, he repeated essentially the same story, with less detail, than he did earlier about it "being time".

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4M. The importance of organizations. "Increasingly, organizations like labor and the NAACP are getting real political. They see what I saw all along, that black people could have the balance of power. But they cannot have it as a bloc. If they hold themselves back and said, "Here we are, we are going to vote like people not like sheep" they could have bargaining power. But if everyone knows how they're going to vote, they will be taken for granted and can't have bargaining power. They are talking more like independent voters now."

"The veterans' groups do not endorse candidates, but they support conservative candidates."

"The teachers are getting real militant now. They are getting involved in political action groups and endorsing candidates. That's a real change. It will come next, like it is in the rest of the country."

"From the standpoint of putting in money, labor is the most active. Most other groups don't believe in getting involved in partisan politics. Doctors, for example, give to both sides and therefore are not partisan." (This is the way he sees doctor activity.)

5. Homogeneity. He said, "What do you mean homogeneous?" I didn't say anything and he started in to talk in racial terms. "Well, people inter-mingle here pretty much. There are no blocked off areas where you wouldn't go into much. . . . I guess it depends how you define homogeneous. But I wouldn't have used homogeneous to describe the district. I wouldn't have thought about it that way." He then kind of agreed that it was pretty diverse. But it is interesting that he saw it racially when he responded the first time.

Which people do you feel you understand the best? "Since I've worked in the city area, had a law practice there and belong to civic groups there, I understand them pretty well. I've lived in the midst of a farming area and I understand them too. My friends live in the rural area but work in the city. I understand people in the higher or in the more sophisticated industries like Allied Chemical or GE. I come in contact with them more than the textile industry. But I've had them all in my law practice. That's one of the benefits of being a lawyer. I've lived among black people all my life. You know them, how they act and react; but I don't know as you can say you understand them. And things have changed as to race. They are much different than they used to be."

8F. He put individual record and personal qualities first. And he put national issues second. By national issues he meant "I could do more, my background, I was a Republican." That didn't make too much sense. With regard to party loyalty he said, "That would have to be dismissed because I need Democratic votes." He summed it up by saying "I almost have to say personal, because we were philosophically the same."

I asked him whether the factors would be about the same this year. "I think so. Now you've got experience. I've served in three different Legislative bodies; I have seniority on my committee." He obviously intends to push experience as a big theme.

I went over to question 21 and asked which things ~~were~~ important about his own personal record. He listed personal reputation number 1 and record of personal service to constituents number 2. He said, "Your voting record is less important. People tend to look at your overall personality and general reputation. Your personal reputation includes voting, but it is much more than that." I then asked him straight out whether people didn't care more about what he did in his personal services than his voting record and he said a flat "Yes".

I then asked him 8H. in the following manner: Assuming for the moment that you're going to run against Perry, can you think of any votes that you didn't get in '70 which you may get this time? "Votes that are purely racial. People who base their vote on that will cut both ways. I wouldn't have a chance of getting any black votes. And

a few white people would think that that is important--Democrats mostly --would vote for me. Probably the two will cancel themselves out."

I then asked him where Matthew Perry would have his best hope of getting votes from whites. "From the very liberal area. I'd say beyond liberal--from the radical area--radical students. He would get some from people who want to be different, who think there's something to be said for having a black congressman in this area--the novelty of it I guess. That wouldn't amount to too much. I think most people who aren't locked in are going to base it more on experience in government--~~someone~~ with no experience against someone with experience." The gist of this answer is that he does not think Perry will get a huge number of white votes.

9. His rock-bottom supporters. "That depends on my opponent. Last time, my opponent and I split many groups. Many business people who would support me split up. If you have a liberal opponent, all the business community will support me. I'd rather have a liberal running against me more than anyone else. I'm going to get support from lower income groups (aside from race) business, farmers--and he'll get a smattering of Liberal and radical votes. Against a white Liberal, I would get some of the black vote."

10. Primary opposition. "My opposition would come from the strong Republicans who feel I take too kindly an attitude toward Democrats. I have more trouble with Republicans than with Democrats sometimes. The local Democrats support me; and some hard-nosed Republicans resent that. I'm not hard-nosed to that extent. You hear

some joking around, "You're too close to the Democrats." But whether it's serious or not I don't know. They got upset at Strom Thurmond when he appointed the son of Sol Blatt to a federal judgeship. Actually, if he hadn't appointed a Democrat, there would have been no extra judgeship--so it was a Democrat or nothing. But it was all talk--nobody did anything about it. Some Republicans don't even want anybody in office. They just want the patronage from a Republican administration. They resent it when elected officeholders get all the attention that would come to them if there were no Republicans in office."

11. How many people are interested? "It is hard to say. I wouldn't even guess. These recognition polls are the most ego shattering experience you can have. There's just no way of telling. People are bombarded, but whether they listen or retain it, I just don't know."

I asked him what they knew about his stand on issues. "Most of them know" but most of the gist of his answer was that "they have the opportunity to know" through mail, questionnaires, the votes listed in the paper, the speeches he makes, the visits he makes and so forth. It was not much of an answer. He also said they did characterize his voting record as conservative.

I asked him about what he was interested in, assuming that he was interested in national defense and whether his constituents were interested in that too. "A general cross section agree with me on it. You have to eliminate the more liberal people and the people real low on the economic scale and the lesser educated people. They think in

more simple terms--where am I going to get clothes and something to eat. The average person in this area is sophisticated and understands it. Liberal people think we're just going to love one another. If you lop off a few on both ends, the vast majority agree. The man who took our poll in 1970 said this district was more concerned with national defense than anywhere else in the country--anywhere in the South or the West. I don't know how to explain it. We don't have that much military--just one fort. The man said that when you take away the blacks, it was really amazing. Most of those who weren't concerned about national defense were blacks. People here are more patriotic. They have more faith in the flag, their country, and their historical values. They are more nationalistic. Wherever I've been in the country, there's no place where it's more true than here."

I then raised the question, as he had raised it in a speech, that some people felt he was too preoccupied with national defense. I asked him who were saying this. "The fellows who are running against me say it. It probably helps me. They say I should be more concerned with people eating out of garbage cans and living in pasteboard houses. Certainly, we have some poor, but percentage wise conditions here are better than anywhere else. I travel around. The big cities have more slums; the rural areas at least have gardens. My mail and the people I talk to say that we should cut back on our give-away programs and make people more productive. My opponents are hitting on the wrong time when they say that this area is sophisticated enough to realize it."

14. I asked about issues that could defeat him. He said there were no overriding issues of this sort. He said if they reinstituted the draft (and this is the first one he thought of) both sides would get the impact of it and he would be hit from two sides.

"Abortion is not strong enough to make or break people here."

End
"If I voted to impeach the President, I'd lose some strong supporters in the party--which you can't hardly afford to lose. Some of kooks might think I was a darling and vote for me on that account." This reply was very interesting because this is the way he sees it. He will never vote for impeachment, because he would never trade his "strong supporters" for "kooks".

He then concluded by saying "I can't visualize one right now." "I've never thought of it."

I then asked him about civil rights and he said that Hollings and Bryan Dorn had voted for busing and had survived. But he went on to say that Dorn was not getting the black vote in spite of what he did. He said Ravenal was getting more, though he hadn't done anything for blacks. He said the only thing an NAACP official, Isaac Williams, could say on behalf of Ravenal was that he helped get a black page in the Legislature. "Next time I see Isaac, I'm going to say, Isaac, I hear all you need to do to get the support of black voters is to appoint a black page in the Legislature. Is that true?"

I then asked him if he could vote just about the way he wished. "People are very broadminded. Most of them send you up there--so be it."

You are on the scene, you hear the arguments. Some people think they have all the wisdom in the world. You should see the letters I get from kooks--the only way to get right with the Lord is to listen to what I have to say."

19. Trust. "Mainly because they know me over a period of years. They know my father, my family's reputation. I'm a known quantity; I'm not an unknown quantity. And that's what people are afraid of--an unknown quantity. Even Isaac Williams, in talking about Ravenal, said "We know people who have been in office, we know them right or wrong. To trust Ravenal, we'd have to put an awful lot of trust in him. He's an unknown." I thought he put it very well. People know your general reputation, your family name, your kids--in athletics--people. People can put their finger on you. I don't suppose many people know how I vote either way. When you make speeches for twenty years before all kinds of groups--I used to lecture on communism. I added it up once and it went into the thousands--they get to know you that way and your thinking. Here's some fella who never ran and people worry about him. Even the ones who are thinking about changing are hesitant. They don't know what he might do. Except for those who would say anybody is better than what we've got. Someone once said "The fear of the unknown is the greatest fear. That's a paraphrase, but that's it, I think."

There is in all of this the constant theme of the suspicion of the unknown person, the outsider, the inexperienced person, that was so prominent a theme throughout the visit.

I asked him if he'd been at all surprised to hear the attitude that he had picked up during this trip concerning Watergate. "Not surprised by the people in general. A few individuals surprise me-- people who have gone kook over the last few years. One fellow got religion. He went off the deep end is now on the wrong side of all issues from his friends. I couldn't believe it. People now just brush him off. He got wealthy and religion at the same time. He feels that God has endowed him with wisdom on all these things."

This continued the same train of thought. "I think I keep up with the thinking of people. I don't look to see what they think and then vote, because our thinking goes along together. Some things have changed but I can't see that people have changed anymore than I have or I anymore than they have. The biggest change is that people are becoming more militant. All the teachers talk about is union and working man, collective bargaining, and all those catch phrases that unions talk about. Part of that is what is happening in the public school system. The teachers are getting more and more into keeping order in the public schools. People who want to teach won't do it. They won't carry a billy club in their hand and a gun on their hip in the classroom." This latter theme about unrulyness in the classroom is one that he discoursed on at some length when we went to Wyman King Academy and sat in the car before the ceremony. I think the whole business of keeping discipline in the classroom as now being the major thing teachers have to do--I think this is all a kind of code word for blacks and racial difficulty. I recall when I was eating lunch at the

Meeting of the Agriculture Employees, Sonny and the fellow across from him immediately fell to talking about the "situation in the schools" and "how terrible" it all was. And it became perfectly clear that what they were talking about was the problem of school integration. The point is that this is a subject very much on the minds of whites in that district. There doesn't seem to be any way of talking about the schools without immediately getting to this subject of blacks and whites.