

Bill Cohen

March 11, 1980

"I like the Senate. One year here has been equal to six in the House." He said this in the course of a long talk before his afternoon appointments came in--though I can't remember just which reasons he connected with it at the time.

He came in on the red-eye from California, where he had been inspecting the cruise missile and some other weapons systems. I guess he slept till 11:00 or so--anyway, I caught up with him at 11:30--as he took his first appointment--with Central Maine Power. When they left, he was looking over to where I was sitting in the chair in back of his office and said "I want to tell you something ver few people know about and I wouldn't want word to get out about it." (I assured him that whatever it was, it would be kept confidential.) "I've written a book about my first year in the Senate. It's not damaging to anyone. It's not a kiss and tell book. It's just about what it's like for me to be in the Senate. I hope there won't be any hostility--but we'll have to see."

I asked him a few questions about it. "Who is publishing it?" Simon Shuster. "Did you keep a diary?" Yes. Then I said that I thought it would be a good thing (which I doubt) and that if I could help him in any way (he had said it was too long--700 pages--and would have to be cut.) I'd be happy to read it or whatever. At first he had indicated that he didn't have any copies around, but after I agreed to help, he said that he did have one copy around and indicated that I might find it interesting. So he took me back to where Tom Bright's desk was and told Cindy to let me see it. I sat there reading it while he got ready for lunch.

Then we started over to the Policy Committee lunch and I immediately said "I take it back. I can't help you with the book." He asked why not and

I said "It's too personal." He said "yes, it's very personal. It's not like the texts--how a bill becomes a law. It's different."

I then said I thought he had captured the episodic nature of life in the Senate and he agreed. "Some of my best friends read it and said you start too much and never finish anything. There's too much on the front end and too little on the completion end. I told them that's what life in the Senate is like. I want people to see what the pace is like. That explains from this end why people are leaving this place."

Then, as we rode over in the trolley he talked about several of the incidents in the book--the story about the Senate votes and how ~~Thad~~ Cochran said he voted for Mikva and how he changed his vote. "If Thad Cochran, a conservative person could vote to confirm Abner Mikva, against the opposition of the NRA,--an act of real courage--then I could vote for

~~Senter~~ if Cochran vouched for him. Cochran had seen him and knew him and that was good enough for me. I changed my vote, not for ~~Stennis~~ but for Cochran. I had been against Senter because of John Stennis. Stennis had <sup>it</sup> stuck/to me so many times. He held up an ~~apartment~~ <sup>an ad in</sup> of mine just for spite and I had to push hard to get it through. And there was old John Stennis at 2:00 in the morning, trying to push through this friend of his. Paul Tsongas was right. This was no way to end the session. But I sorted it all out and voted with Cochran. It didn't mean anything to him; he had the votes anyway."

Then we got to the Policy Committee meeting in the Mike Mansfield room and after we sat down, he looked at the Senators all around and returned to the subject of this book. "It will be interesting to see what the reaction will be to my project among these people. If they read it all the way through, there's not one of them who will not be glad I wrote it. But will they read

it. Or will there just be a reaction to the idea of doing it--that you just aren't supposed to do such things. If there's real hostility, I'm finished."

When he said that, I asked him why he took the risk. "Because I felt like it. I wanted to write the book. I love to write. And I want people to see the Senate as I saw it. Besides, it kept me busy at times when I didn't have anything else to do."

I said that it would never finish him in Maine, and he said "If I was finished here, I wouldn't want to stay. Nothing is permanent in this world--certainly not my being here."

I added that Maine people thought of him as a "singer of songs", "a troubador" and then, I said better "a reflector and an interpreter" of political life. And he agreed. So it isn't Maine he cares about. It's the Senate.

His answer as to why he did it is the same one he gave me when I asked him about his poetry. "Because I want to." There is that same desire to live dangerously--to comment on how much he's risking and then going ahead and doing it. He tempts fate, I think. He want to keep his life private, and yet he publishes books about it. My reaction, of course, was largely one of concern that all the stuff he had told me--all the stuff I had laboriously pulled out of him was now going to appear in a book and that my comparative advantage would be nil. We'll see. Lots of the ms. covers what he told me. But my strength is long term persistence. He doesn't talk much about his campaigning.

On the way back from the policy luncheon, I don't recall all of what we talked about. Most of it was about policy committee as a chance to communicate--don't make decisions there.

When we got to Dirksen he talked about SALT (and he returned to it later in his office.) "The pace is not as hectic now as it was last session. Then, I was very active with SALT. I worked hard to become an expert on SALT. It was the socket into which I plugged to get energy. Now "I'm looking around to find something to take its place and I haven't found it."

When we got back, I reimbursed him for lunch and went back to reading and he went off to an AS executive session. When he got back, he wanted to know how far I had gotten and I told him and mentioned a couple of things I thought were well done--his bit on running against Muskie and his portrait of Muskie (he said he thought it was "too sanctimonious" and needed more of the political reasons why running vs. Muskie would have been touch) and also (something else.)

Anyhow, he returned to the book again--said how much fun he'd had writing it--mostly in the evening--and how "there are 99 other views of the Senate, all different; this is the way it seems through my eyes, my opaque eye." (or something like that.) The point was he was recognizing that it was his particular view and not any objective view.

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I asked him how he thought he was being perceived in Maine. "I have to be very careful. Everything I do is interpreted as due to my ambition. Whether it is true or not doesn't matter. When I supported Howard Baker for President people said I was looking for a vice-presidential nomination. I didn't have anything of the sort in mind. If I was going to back him I wanted him to do well--not get 2% of the vote. Otherwise it would have looked terrible, for me and for the Cohen organization. So I did what he didn't do--I tried to organize. But people thought it was all due to my personal ambition. So the whole Baker thing was a net negative for me. The people of Maine are funny. They want you to be ambitious but they don't want you to move too fast. If you're not ambitious, they are disappointed. If you're ambitious, they're suspicious. You have to strike a balance. I



✓ don't know if I can. They think I want to be president and they would like me to be president. Every state has that pride in the home state Senator. They expect me to be President. But they don't want me to try too hard for it. The truth is I don't want to be President. But nobody believes me so I don't bother to say it. When the press keeps asking me if I'm going to run for the Presidency, I'm coy about it or I just brush it aside. I'm walking a fine line." He said more than this, but this is the jist of it--damned if you do, damned if you don't re ambition.

Then he went into something similar to what he went into in my previous visit. "I haven't issued a lot of press releases. I've tried to stay away from this media and do my work. I think I've succeeded in being recognized as someone who does his work, attending meetings and is ready to ask questions.

I asked him how he knows he has succeeded in getting a good reputation inside the Senate. "When John Tower invites me to go to the \_\_\_\_ conference, when he invites me to all his press conferences on SALT with him, when he wont' go anywhere without me to talk about SALT. I knew more about SALT than anyone on the committee except maybe Culver and Hart. And I knew almost as much as they did. People can tell by the way you ask questions whether you know what you're talking about. And then staff gives you more and more to do, relies on you more. And the word filters back to you from the agencies. "You're doing a great job over there. Keep it up." "This place is vicious. Once they put the sampt on you, it lasts a long time." He talked about the moustache story agains--said, his sons still ask him about it and said, again, that he didn't want to start off on the wrong foot. Mentioned Tom Daffron's memo to him that he had handicaps to start with.

✓ He talked at length about difference between maverick and independent. "I'm independent. But I'm not a maverick. I do what I want to do, but I

don't do it in such a way as to aggrandize myself or hurt anyone else. It's a matter of going along and getting along. John Anderson, whom I adore, could never resist turning the knife in someone when he disagreed with them. I'm not that way."

He said a good deal more about this, too.

When he would call me in from reading he called, "Show time" meaning his appointments were coming in.

Between appointments he would say "I'm going to put on the face for the faces I'll meet, as the poet said."

At another point he said of the steady stream of interest groups. "Live fast, die young and be a beautiful corpse."

He commented also about the number of invitations, howed me his rejects again, said he got much more of those in the Senate than the House, pulled out some invitation--to Englad and said he'd never have been invited to them (one was on Africa and he said Paul Tsongas might have been invited when he was in the House but "I'd never have gottent this invitation in the House.")

"I made a speech in Germany and I got more applause than I've ever gotten at home. Then I have to go back to the Lions Club. I make the same speech--a little cut down--and no applause. I can think about going to England as I have been and put aside going home for another week." I think it was in here somewhere that he said one year in Senate was equal to six in the House.

I asked if Muskie overshadowed him. "No, not at all. He's not ambitious anymore. He's come home. He's in that period of his life when he's without ambition and can do some of his very best work." He interpreted my question as one of relative ambition and not a matter of working on legislation or anything else.

I asked him, when he was talking about he was making it inside the Senate, whether it helped in Dickey Lincoln fight. He didn't warm to that question

in terms of his reputation--only that he had to convince Westerners that he wasn't opposed to their water projects--only this one water project. He also said if you don't care about a vote, you'll give one to someone. But legislative combat seems not to engage him. That comes through in his book, too.

At the policy meeting, when Baker got up to start the meeting, Barry Goldwater spoke up. "I'm just one senator but I want to say welcome home to Senator Baker. I want to tell you that you have nothing to be ashamed of. You conducted a hard, fair campaign, and now you're back where you belong. They laughed and clapped and Baker said, "I'm glad to be back. When I announced I was leaving the race, a sense of relife swept over me that was so strong as to be sinful... I'll tell you a story. Last weekend I was down in Tennessee sitting by the tennis court where I play tennis. The phone rang and it was John Connally. What are you doing he said. I said I'm sitting here by the tennis court. I'm going to play some tennis and then have me a gin." "What are you doing?" I asked him. And he said, "I'm 45 minutes behind you." (laughter!)

Cohen contrasted self with Weiker. He revels in being a maverick."

In his book Bill describes himself as "a loner with a serious, rigid, academic approach to politics and people."

I returned on Friday to continue reading Bill's book--leaving only <sup>for</sup> 3 hours of beer and pizza and then a talk with Ray Scott. I read in the morning and finished about 4:45. Once before lunch I went in to give Bill a couple of suggestions. Then, after I got back Tom said Bill was waiting for me to come talk. So I went in again to talk about it. Then, when I finished, Bill happened to be in the office. He came over--sat beside me

and talked about the conclusion. And we talked about it some more, after he read me his conclusion. He seemed genuinely to want my advice and suggestions. But I couldn't say that much. When I left he smiled and said "I suppose you'll want to come up and see me this summer for lobster." I said, "Yes, I would-- the potato festival maybe." And he replied "Or lobster," and I left.

One discussion we had during the discussion of the book focused on his impatience with the place. "The way we call each other by our first names and then don't accomplish anything is ridiculous. But that's the way it's always been done here and always will be. It will be the same next year and next year and the next year. We won't get committee reorganization. Why the hell do we need a Select committee on Indian Affairs. Just for the staff. You wouldn't believe the size of that staff. It should be part of the National Resource Committee. The Select Committee on Aging isn't necessary. It could be folded into the Human Resources Committee. But it will never be done-- you'd be against the ageing. Or the Permanent Investigations Committee--that's got the largest staff of any committee here--the secret, hush hush types who bring in hooded witnesses. That staff could never be justified on a cost effective basis. But none of that will be changed. Everybody's protecting his own turn."

At another point I referred to a story in the book where he was questioning a witness and staff told him he wasn't getting anywhere. And I was the Senator. I blew my top. I overreacted."

I have a private <sup>opinion</sup> on the book in terms of what it does not say--anything about close ties with other Senators. He doesn't call the Senate lonely but the loneliness amidst the activity is all there.

Bill's office people are pretty friend now--Tom Daffron, Cindy Whiteman, Jane Russell, Kim Temple, Becky \_\_\_\_\_, Bud Hezerdahl. I think they are getting used to me. When I left one of em called out "We'll see you next year."

And Tom Daffron said that if I came down for a longer stretch I could be an AA.

But reading Bill Cohen's book gave me an idea--that if I do come down for a year, I should keep a <sup>10</sup>day and it should be a political scientist's diary--a la his diary. I, too, could be a camera. If my appendix was a success, maybe a book about my view of Washington would be a success too, since this would be more uninhibited. It would contain commentary as well as methodology. Bill is a better diarist than I am in that he becomes lyrical and poetic. But maybe I could probe the problem of the ambivalence political scientists feel about Congress. We love it and yet we find that in the large it doesn't always produce. In some ways, that could be my theme. There's a problem as to whether I could do this and still deliver for Russell Sage.