

report

Bill Cohen

March 13, 1979

8:00a	Breakfast with Maine Bankers Association (H-128)
10:00a	Governmental Affairs Mark-up 3302DSOB
12:30p	Wednesday Group luncheons S-243
1:30p	Jay Solomon
2-4:00p	Assistant Whip
4:30p	Maine County Commissioners Association

I went to Cohen's office to check with Jane Russell about tomorrow's schedule and she asked me if I wanted to go in and talk to Bill.

I congratulated him and he asked if I was going to be with him tomorrow. Talked a little about education department markup--which I'll sit in on. "It will be an interesting session. I've been a little pesty with Ribicoff." "I'm the only one on the committee opposed to the bill. I've written my minority report. Javits was opposed, too, but he's going with Ribicoff and Percy now. Last year they passed it unanimously. They try to act unanimously when they can. It's a tradition on the committee. I'm going to break with the tradition tomorrow, not intentionally, but just because I'm opposed to the bill."

I mentioned that during the campaign he was against it. "I never came out against it but I leaned strongly against it."

I mentioned that the Maine Teachers didn't support him and he smiled and agreed.

Later, Jane Russell came in to show him tomorrow's schedule and it showed

Nancy Hutchison of the Maine Teachers Association on his schedule. "Why is she on the schedule? Have her talk with Cindy. She should know that I'm unalterably opposed to the legislation. I have no intention whatsoever of supporting it. I'll talk to her for ten minutes, but I'm not going to go through all the reasons with her for my opposition."

Then he asked about other groups coming in.

Re Jay Solomon--coming in on a courtesy call since he's going to be confirmed by Government Affairs. "I'm getting sick of all these courtesy calls. All they do is grease the skids for these guys and take time away from my work."

Then he commented re Maine County officials. It's hypocrisy the way the public talks about balancing the budget and then all these local officials came in asking for money. The municipal officials were here last week--now the county officials are in."

He asked what I was doing. I told him about my grant; I posed the problem of "winning and governing."

"There's a natural tension between winning and governing. Yesterday I got a call from the editor of the Portland Press Herald asking me why I'm keeping such a low profile back in Maine. They are going to write a criticism of me for not appearing at every bean supper back home. I've been working very hard to get a reputation quickly as a substantive senator. I have been studying hard, doing my homework, showing up on time. During the campaign, I had to confront the show horse-work horse argument. I've been trying to be a work horse. I've been doing a lot of learning, some writing, some travelling. I went to China; then I went to NATO and said a few things they wanted to hear--the Germans and Britons. I set a certain standard of expectation

shepherding a guy who's

when I was in the House, going home every weekend. But I'm not going to do that now. One of the reasons I ran for the Senate was so I wouldn't have to go home every weekend. Kevin is 16 and just got his driver's license and I only have 2 more years with him. I want to do my work and stay at home. I've been down here for a month and a half without going home. The criticism is just starting. This call from the paper is the first. Well, the hell with it, I'll just weather the storm. Pretty soon, though I'll have to start going back. If you want to mold public opinion you have to do it back there. You can't mold public opinion from here. Right now I'm in the formulating stage. I need time to think. The people back home believe that you do your thinking during the week and then should get on the plane and come home for the weekend. But I can't think during the week. I'm scheduled from eight to eight. Already some groups are mad at me. The VFW was in town last week and wanted to know why I didn't go to their reception. But I had two other things to do--and the beat goes on. So there's a lot of difference between winning and governing."

He got a phone call from "Pete" (McCloskey I guess) whom he queried about a group in California he was asked to speak to. It was, partly anyway, a gay rights group. And after the conversation, he left the office saying 'I don't want a gay rights for Cohen group in California.' Said on phone he was going to give a speech in California anyway and would welcome chance to make some more money while he was there. But he was wary.

He talked about the "Wednesday Club" luncheon that he couldn't take me too because it was members only. He said membership was not public but said he'd tell me though he didn't know all of 'em and mentioned Lugar, Javits, Percy, Danforth.

Said it had a pretty good spectrum but more moderate than otherwise. Said they "just wander in" and talk about what's going on in their committees. Very informal--held by one member each week--had a joint meeting with the Republic Policy Committee last week. The people he mentioned are the same ones Tom Daffron mentioned to me earlier as either his natural allies or the good role models "Lugar, Stevens, Danforth." He must have had Wednesday group in mind from beginning.

I stopped in to see Dale Gerry in "The Maine Room"--we chatted about the weather. He said he was working on February 3rds business--having been set back by the snows--and so I left.

Just before Bill was interrupted by phone call he said that he was a member of Armed Services. "I had no intention of getting on that committee." He started to say that China thing had an effect on that when phone rang and that ended the entire idea.

I watched Bill interrogate the Joint Chiefs. Compared to other questioners, he was abrupt, scattershot, used documentation a lot, seemed a little hostile, interrupted Nunn at one point to say he had some figures relevant to Nunn's question's. Said he agreed with Stennis at one point somewhat gratuitously.

In short, he did not exactly behave the way I had heard he did as an interrogator--boring in on one point. He was all over the lot and seemed to be fishing for an opening of some sort. Definitely, he seemed less pro military than the others--trying to make sure they had tried everything to make volunteer army work.

O.E. meeting with Nancy Hutchinson of Maine Teachers. "I can assure you that the bill will pass despite my opposition. The skids have been greased."

"Once you federalize something you never get it back...(in here, he mentioned his experience with Labor Standards and children working in Maine.) With money comes controls. There's no argument about it...In a few years, not immediately--but in 5 or 6 years you will see minimum standards for teachers."

At breakfast with Bankers--Muskie, Bill and Snowe attended. Talk started with banking problems and ended with Muskie giving long talk--a seminar really--on the budget process and the problems associated with constitutional amendment. When we left, Bill said, "You've just seen an old pro at work." And that's just the way I felt too.

At one point Muskie said, "The only reason I ran last time was because of this budget process, because I had been given a role in it and because I wanted to make it work."

Bill and Muskie fell in together till we got to the subway. Bill asked EM how he was going to vote on the Rhodesia thing and they talked about that.

When we got on the subway, Bill asked if I had taken in the Armed Services hearing. "We had a marathon meeting of the Committee yesterday. It was a love-in. That's the nature of the committee. I got a little bit testy with them at the end. I just wanted to pin down the fact that if we went to a registration system, we would also be making plans to institute the draft. And one by one they agreed that that would be the case. I don't want us to deceive people into thinking that we can have registration without a draft. We've only had the draft for 30 out of 200 years and we ought not to go to it without a great deal of thought. I think they are right that it is coming. I went home last night and told Kevin about it, that he might well have to register and might even have to serve. He wasn't thrilled by the idea. I think we have a lot of selling to do if we are to build a national opinion behind this legislation."

I asked him whether the bankers were his supporters. "I suppose so." But he clearly did not think them special.

Do these meetings help you? "They are learning. They used to have dinners for the delegation and no one came. I went last year for the first time in 6 years, stayed for cocktails and left. So they had a breakfast this year. They are opinion leaders and they will go back to their communities and be a little bit more flexible on the matter of a constitutional amendment on the balanced budget. Or, ~~on~~ my question I raised about three sources of control over banking ^{may} cause them to think." The only point about that is that he, again, saw the meeting as one in which he (and Muskie) can educate-- not one in which he saw the bankers as telling him something.

Markup on Department of Education. Bill helped strenthen language that the bill should not increase authority of government over education and made a short statement of his opposition to the bill.

On the way up to an NRC hearing (a Maine plant was shut down yesterday) I asked him how he felt about his one No vote on reporting out Department of Education Bill. "I didn't mind. I might have said more than I did, but when you're up against those numbers. I think the difference between Javits and Nunn should be sharpened and not blurred. The real question is whether a new streamlined organization will help or hurt education. I'm amazed at the naivete of people who think you can sunset a department. Just wait till they get a big new building and all the employees. That wasn't a major vote for me. It wasn't a hard vote." He doesn't seem passionate about it.

NRC "What caused order yesterday?" (closing down Maine Yankee) - piping stress analysis done via computer code. Perhaps an error in code and piping may not be resistant to earthquakes.

Bill went to the NRC hearing without knowing what was going on, but knowing that plant shutdown would have serious economic consequences--especially in electric bill rates, since nuclear power will have to be replaced with oil - and oil is high price (5 pct. price) foreign oil.

On way out, John Day of Bangor Daily News stopped him to ask about it. Bill seemed to indicate to Tom Heyerdahl (Bud) that Day wanted some kind of inflammatory anti NRC comment and Bill said to Tom that we really didn't have any of the facts on the matter. Tom took strong position "You certainly don't want to say 'start the thing right up again.' The risks are just too great."

On the way down in the elevator "You can see the variety we have to deal with--all the way from banking to education to nuclear power. But I like it--listening to Senator Javits destroy witnesses--"(Javits got in elevator, Bill introduced us)...I said I thought of his ~~purge~~ ^{jumping around} antithetical to what I do and he said---

"I think of it like a fast draw and a shot from the hip. It's like what I did was when I was county attorney taking cases before the grand jury. I would have 70 cases a day and I didn't know anything about them. I'd take 70 files, go in before the grand jury and present each case. That was the best training I ever had for this job. Of course it doesn't always work out well." He kind of tailed off as we got into his office.

He talked with Tom Heyerdahl about the nuclear power business and about what would be going on on the floor this afternoon (To me--I'm going to be the Assistant whip on the floor this afternoon, so you can forget about me") Tom (Bud) told him that the key amendment today was a Kennedy amendment to put 32 million for nurses back in bill. Bill asked "What's Muskie going to do?" Bud: "I don't know"

Bill: "Find out."

On his committee ^{assignments} "I didn't do anything. I was very cavalier about it.

It was out of my hands anyway. Everything is strictly by seniority here. When an older person leaves, vacancies open up and you choose by seniority. And, due to early resignations I started losing seniority. I went from 83rd to 92nd. I didn't want to announce a set of choices, first, ~~because~~ knowing I ^{might} ~~may~~ not get them, I didn't want to start with a defeat. Secondly I didn't want to have to explain to the lobbyists who were urging me to go on Banking or go on Finance or whatever, why I chose one over the other. And third, I honestly didn't know what I wanted to do. Then I took the trip to China. I was very impressed with Sam Nunn, John Glenn and Gary Hart, so I said "why not." It was something completely different. I took Government Affairs first because it has such a broad oversight jurisdiction and control over regulation. Then a vacancy opened up on the second round on Armed Services and I took it. Baker put me on ^{aging} ~~agency~~ and then I was asked if I'd go on Indian Affairs. So I have four committees. I'm ranking on Indian Affairs, ranking on Arms Control with Henry Jackson and ranking on a new subcommittee on Government Operations. So, it was just happenstance. It's consistent with everything else that's happened to me in my life. I didn't do anything and opportunities just opened up."

"Ninety percent of my time has been taken up so far with Armed Services. I'm learning all the acronyms--studying a great deal. I enjoy it."

Said he got some bad national publicity when he went on Indian Affairs--probably because he was not known as supporter of indian causes--from his campaign.

When he started his questioning of the NRC he said "The state of Maine had the sound of Damocles hanging over its head this week concerning the closing of a major military base. Last week the CFTC stopped trading in potatoes for two months. Then yesterday the notice came that Maine Yankee power plant was to cease and desist operation. All I can say is that I hope the old saying "As Maine Goes so Goes the Nation" does not apply here."

Are you nostalgic for the House? "No, I'm not. I enjoy it here. I'm gradually gearing myself up to the pressure being the font of wisdom on all subjects. In the House, I had to be good on local matters but there was no pressure to know something about a broad range of things--armed forces, the middle east. When the President announced the recognition of China, the papers called right up to ask me what I thought. I'm getting used to that and I'm getting better at it all the time. There's the danger, of course, of getting too narcissistic about it all so that you are thrown out of the club the next time around. It's the problem of balance we talked about yesterday. I told you about the editor who asked why I had such a low profile. Well, I'm trying to be substantive and to get a reputation as a substantive Senator."

I then interjected that he had said yesterday that he wanted to get that reputation "quickly" and I asked him if he could. "People make judgments about you very quickly here. I have tried to start right in learning about armed services, ^hwhere I knew almost nothing. I could give you the names of any number of staff people on the committee. They know who is interested in and who is not. If you take an interest, they will pile material on you forever. They have been briefing me and giving me tons of things to read. You make a reputation with the staff and that's very important. They want to work for someone who has a substantive interest. If you have an interest they feed you information. The more information you have, the more your reputation grows. And that happens very quickly."

"It was especially important in my case to start quickly. I came over from the other House carrying a lot of baggage--not all of it favorable. I had gotten a lot of publicity.... (we went up elevator and he went on to the floor to say he'd be back and we went into the Senate anti-room.) People

thought I was cocky, arrogant, --and that may be true--a guy who throws rocks in the water, an anti-Republican, anti-Nixon. They didn't know me--and though I would say to myself 'they could not think badly of me'--they might very well have been very suspicious."

"You don't need to put this in your book, but there are little things that affect the way other people look at you. After all, they don't know you; and they make judgments in funny ways. For a long time my kids have been after me to grow a moustache. I had felt a little guilty about not doing it--about saying 'no' to them. I had never done anything in politics for them, always for myself. So I told them that after the election I would grow a moustache. Well, when Freshmen orientation came, it was looking its worst, and I talked to Tom about it. He said you're already carrying a lot of baggage coming over here. You and Bradley are probably the best known. They'll be looking you over, and it won't get you off on the right foot. Well, I didn't want people to think I was some kind of nut, with a fumanchu moustache--so I got very hung up about it. I took the kids aside and said 'I know I made a promise, but I'm going to have to break it.' So a little thing like that can assume tremendous importance around here."

Then he went on to say "People make judgments quickly. I'm already hearing things about my colleagues. If you shoot your mouth off on the floor on all subjects, pretty soon no one pays any attention to you. Or if you don't come to committee hearings or don't study your subject, people notice that. And it hurts your effectiveness. There were people in the House who were great at district affairs, but never did anything else in the House. That was noticed pretty quickly too."

I asked if he felt constrained at all in speaking out when he wanted to speak. "None at all. On the trip to China, Sam Nunn bent over backwards to let me have all the time I wanted. Baker sent me to the NATO conference. I have felt under no inhibitions at all. From Day One, I've had trouble with the Department of Education. Nobody sat on me for opposing it--even though I was the only one. So long as you do it without telling people what a dumb bill they have, so long as you oppose in a reasonable way, they have no objection. I had no problem in the committee. I didn't know until today that Javits wasn't with me."

He said he still went to the House, ^{gym} ~~going in~~ "It opens at 7:00 and the one over here doesn't open till ten. So if I have no early morning appointment, I'll stop over there and work out for an hour. It's a lot better gym. And on Saturday I take my kids to the House gym. ~~But~~ But if I have time in the afternoon, I'll use the Senate gym. It's a matter of convenience." "But it's important for me to go back over there. I had lunch with Jack Kemp yesterday. I think it's important to stay in touch."

That's ^{when} ~~what~~ I noted that Barber Conable had greeted him in the Capitol this morning with "Didn't you used to be Bill Cohen?" Bill said to me "He'd say that anyway." But I said there was still that little tweak there and he agreed.

But he said a couple of times "I'm enjoying myself. I'm right in line with my job."

I asked Bill, back in his office, why he checked with Muskie on the Kennedy measure this afternoon, he said "It's a political problem for me. Muskie is probably going to oppose it, trying to protect the budget process. I don't want to undercut Muskie. And I don't want to appear to be a bigger

spender than he is. Maybe the facts are on the side of the budget increase-- a lot of conservatives are for it. But it is the first vote and therefore it's more important to me. I'll get knocked all around Maine for being against the doctors and nurses. Muskie will too, but the difference is that he won't have to run again. There will be other votes where we differ. He'll vote for the new Department of Education, which will cost a lot more than this amendment. This one is hard for me because I'm going to vote to increase the defense budget. But I'll have to go back and explain my votes. If I can't I won't come back either. I always told you I never planned to make a career in politics.

Re the Pentagon, he said they had dossiers on all the new members and that the day the SAC commander testified, he came up afterwards and invited him to come to Omaha. "The Pentagon probably thought they were getting some left winger. Actually I feel as strongly about national defense as anyone on the committee--with the exception of the B-1, which I thought was a great waste of money. But I want the Pentagon to know that it won't be a love in. That's why I asked the questions I did yesterday. I'm going to ask questions and if I get answers, I'll be satisfied. I just want them to have to work for it."