

Barber Conable May 1-2, 1971

Saturday - May 1

2:00	Intern Interviews, University of Rochester
6:15	Cocktail Party at Brockport
7:30	Brockport Lions Club, 20th Anniversary Dinner
11:30	Retirement party for Mr. Slezak, Whistlestop Inn, Alden

Sunday - May 2

9:30	St. Paul Lutheran Church, Hilton
12:00	Ramada Inn Dedication, Gates
2:30	Hamlin Town Hall Dedication
4:00	Lyndonville Library Dedication

Re balancing your votes? "Because my district is so diverse I can find support somewhere for almost any position I take. That means I can start by deciding how I want to vote and not how I must vote. If I want to vote for an urban program, I can do it and the people in the rural area will say, 'He does have an urban constituency and he has to help them too.' And they will still vote for me so long as they think I'm a nice fella. But if I had no urban constituents--if I had all countryside--and I voted for an urban program, people in the rural areas would say, 'He must be running for governor. He's forgotten who his friends are.' And they would hold it against me. The same is true in the urban area. They know I'm a country boy and that I have a lot of rural area. So they say 'he gives us a vote once in a while; he's probably all right.'"

If you voted consistently for all urban programs, would rural area support you then? "No, probably not."

Are rural and urban areas ever diametrically opposed on an issue?

"Very, very seldom--almost never."

How about the suburban area? "Aside from Welfare, they don't care about much. They have a lot of diversity, right among themselves. Because they are better educated and are more accessible to the media, they know there's an inner city and they know there's the vast out beyond. Welfare is something they feel they can do without. And the rural area doesn't like it either. I can't make any nickels with welfare--just sing-along with Nixon that we can't let it go on the way it has. When Wilbur gets through sniffing the air politically, he'll bring out a bill the politicians can live with. And he'll bring it out so late in terms of the election that the politicians can say that something's been done but we just haven't had time to feel the effects yet. I'll drink to that."

Went to Alden to party for retiring town leader, Mr. Slezak - got there at 11:15.

Why stop at Whistlestop?

"I didn't win any votes, but I didn't lose some votes I might have lost. They were tremendously pleased that I came. All the leaders were there and we were buddy-buddy. Now I have the reputation that when I say I'll come, I'll come. So many politicians say they will attend these parties, but never show up. I wasn't one of the politicians that didn't show up."

"That personal touch means so much to these people. They feel bypassed. People like this don't get much recognition for their years of party service. Nobody turns out to honor a has-been. But I did and they were very grateful. I probably won't even have Alden in the next election. But I can't afford to assume I won't have them next time--especially since I do represent

them. I don't want to get heavily involved in Erie County. That's why I didn't send out a newsletter this time. The only reasons would be to get a mailing list in Erie County; but it seemed too expensive if it wasn't going to be a permanent mailing list."

I asked him what a typical voter in his district was like.

"I try not to think about it! People vote for me for all sorts of reasons. Some vote for me because they see my name in the papers. Some vote because I'm a Republican. Some vote for me because I have a reputation for being a conservative. Some vote for me because they saw me some place and I didn't have two heads. Some people vote for me because I go to their parties. I'd hate to think of the reasons why they vote for me. But none of them have anything to do with what I do in Washington or how I vote on the issues. I have a few dedicated supporters who create an atmosphere in which others come to support me. Mostly, I think, it's because they think of me as a nice guy who will come to the Whistlestop for a party, someone who will be jolly with people, someone they can be comfortable with. They want to be comfortable with you. People don't want a leader, they want a buddy. They want a man who will come and have his picture taken with his arm around the dumpy old Polish lady and not be patronizing about it. That's especially true in the rural areas. That's why I run so far ahead of Earl Brydges in Orleans County. He is much more important to the people of Orleans County than I am. He ran without opposition last time and I still ran up a bigger vote in the county than he did. It's because he says to hell with your parties; and they react by saying 'We'll just cut him down to size, he's too big for his britches.' In

the urban area, I'm a captive of the party. I go to rallies and stand up and make platitudinal pro-party, solidarity statements. I'm not allowed to be independent, to be myself. People in the rural areas wouldn't be satisfied with this. They expect whole relationships with people, not fragmentary relationships, like city people do. I like whole relationships, and that's why I do so much better in the rural area than in the urban area. I don't know if this is the right formula. All I know is that it seems to have worked so far."

After the dedication of the Hamlin Town Hall he said, "Those are great people--the salt of the earth. I have a strong sentimental attachment to the people of these small towns. I guess you can see that. Gosh, wouldn't it be wonderful if my whole constituency were made up of small towns like this one. Then it would be: 'Anything you say, Barber' instead of 'Conable, you bastard.'"

On way from Hamlin to Lyndonville, I asked him which of the events he most valued of those we had gone to so far. "The Lutheran Church--I made the most nickels there. The people in Hamlin are already deeply involved in the community. I see them again and again and again. But the people in the church are not so involved and my presence there was a happy intrusion into a new and different sphere of activity. I broke new ground instead of mending fences in old pastures. Brockport was similar; but I didn't get exposed to anywhere near as many people in Brockport as in church this morning." The point was not that the people at church were not his supporters--just

that he hadn't visited them before. On way out of the church, he said "This is strong Republican country." Point was that he got himself identified in their minds. He described Missouri Synod people as aloof and uncooperative in community matters and strongly individualistic.

Said re Greece. "I still haven't met Fred Eckert. That may sound unbelievable, but it's true. I stay as far away from that situation as I can--and that's why I run so well there. If I got involved, I could only lose. I send my Newsletter in there as tight as I can." Good on Conable as a "maintainer"--acting so as not to lose part of existing support.

Re his trips - a kind of summing up. "It gives me a feel for things. I'm not sure what it gives me a feel for, but I do it because I feel like doing it. It comes naturally to me. Much of it isn't political-- (in partisan sense, I interpolated, and he nodded.) It gives my constituents a chance to judge me, to size me up, to test me for comfortableness to see whether I'm the type of person they want to represent them. And it gives them the opportunity to size up and pass judgment on the system too. When they judge me they judge the government. I'm the only government official they have contact with and I have a tremendous responsibility to the system to make it seem right to them. They are naturally suspicious, and I don't blame them. So when they look at me they are asking whether the system is a matter of "us and them" or whether there are "some of us" in there, too. That's a terribly important part of the political process--representing the government to my constituents. Now, in a vacuum they may not have a choice in the election and they may

have to vote for me. But their judgment of me can have a great deal to do with a primary or with whether the Democrats are serious about running against me. If they think I'm popular, they may just say it's too expensive and not worthwhile to run seriously against Barber Conable. People talk to each other all the time--Republicans and Democrats--and word gets around about how I'm doing."

I asked if seeing leaders on these visits wasn't important, especially. And here he said yes and then went on to note that I analyze these things and he just does them. Both on this trip and on last one in June, he said near the end of the weekend something to the effect that he doesn't analyze himself, just does what seems to feel right--making the distinction between what I do and what he does and despairing himself of making rational sense of what he does--as he sees me trying to do.

"I'm amazed at the success I've had in the Congress. Every now and then I go through the 'gee whiz fellas, what am I doing here' routine."

Interesting comment about competitive elections and legitimacy. He was elected unanimously to the Research Committee leadership. "They gave it to me by acclamation, without a challenge. The ease with which I won it, tarnished the prize. I wondered what it was really worth if no one fought me for it. It was a funny feeling--just like my last two elections. I had no real competition. The process seemed almost illegitimate to me. And the illegitimacy of the process rubbed off on the legitimacy of the office. I asked myself, am I the legitimate representative of these people when I didn't have to fight hard for the job."

A great deal of self-analysis about his adequacy at this stage of

his career. When I first met him at the Faculty Club, he started right in on this theme. "I'm feeling low in my life. All Spring I've been feeling sorry for myself. I haven't been accomplishing much, and I've begun to worry about whether or not I want to stay in Congress--about what I want to do with my life. I have a position in Congress I wouldn't trade with anyone else. But I haven't been able to do much with it yet. I suppose I'll get over it."

We spent the entire lunch on Sunday--at Mr. Steak on the Ridge--on the same theme--that "No one has been treated better by the system than I have. No one has come so far so fast and been given such an opportunity to make a contribution. I wouldn't trade my position for that of anyone in Congress. I have so much freedom. But that's what frightens me. If I fail now, I have no one to blame but myself. And I may fail the test. There are a lot of people brighter than I am and I don't know why I've been given so much responsibility. Maybe I won't be able to accomplish anything--then how will I feel. My wife is a big help to me when I get this way. She says, "If you don't do it, Barber, who will." And I start ticking off the other possibilities--not this guy, not that guy. It's been this way all my life. I've never been the brightest person in the group, but they always seem to want to make me the leader. At Tellyride, I had one of the poorest averages, but I was elected President. I remember in the Marines, I was the Company Commander, and I looked at the IQ scores and found many of the people under me had higher IQ's than I did. Maybe the problem is that my family

always put too much stress on intellectual ability--I had a brother who was a genius--and so I've always worried about this too much."

We went back and forth in this vein throughout lunch. I said that he sounded to me like a very successful man engaging in the kind of self-analysis that comes to most men between 40 and 50 and he agreed. We talked about sense of limitation that comes to you at middle age, and the introspection it produces. I also said that his present discouragement was result of fact that he expected to do too much too quickly in the Research job and that he ought not to judge himself till he's been at the job a few years. We also agreed that once he got back to work that the mood would probably go away--when we left he said, "I apologize for boring you with my self-doubts."

He talked a good deal during the weekend about the Research job--mostly how the Committee is still illegitimate to a degree within the party. Every two years there's a fight over it. He is starting slow on task forces, making 2nd and 3rd term men chairmen and making sure every freshman has a task force. But he thinks the political things he does will secure the life of the Committee. He's sending around John Gardner quotes; other quotes; charts showing Nixon's record on draft, casualties, troop strength in Viet Nam, exchanging poll questions to standardize them and compare across districts. He's looking for ways to give individual members "political help". Sees this as way to insure existence of committee--to bring around the old conservatives. Barber's own lines are strongest to younger members. There are people he works with--the Steigers and Erlenborns, who managed his campaign for Research Committee. John Rhodes, Policy Committee Chairman, opposed the Research

Committee--B. C. thinks he's insecure, not personally opposed at all. "He's in SOS." Gerry Ford took strong position that he wanted the Research Committee and he wanted Chairman to be in the leadership. At various points in weekend, he described Gerry Ford as "plodding," "insecure," "not very bright," "highly respected", "honest," "loyal--he'd go down with the ship" and "likely to be leader for a long time, because of the respect people have for him as a person."

He described Orleans County as "a Democratic County--they have a Democratic board of supervisors, five to four." He couldn't explain why. But he said he did very well there--got big pluralities 4-5,000. Also when we were in village of Lyndonville in the town of Yates he noted that Yates had a Democratic supervisor but that "I got the biggest plurality in Yates of any town in Orleans County." He noted the key population centers (I laughingly called them SMA's) in Orleans were Albion, Medina and Holley. And he went into great detail about how some of these towns took in several towns in terms of their population spread.

Re his vote on the SST. "I got more mail congratulating me for that vote than on any issue since I can remember. It was interpreted by my constituents as a courageous vote. Actually I don't think it was that important a vote at all--it was a tempest in a tea pot. I had voted against the SST consistently from the beginning. So it wasn't a difficult vote for me. I was put under a lot of pressure from Gerry Ford, however. But I said to him, "Gerry, I've opposed it from the

beginning and I'll look pretty hypocritical if I vote for it now. Besides, I expect to have to vote to sustain a number of Nixon vetoes on fiscal matters later in the session--that's my responsibility as part of the leadership. Don't put me in the position of voting to spend money for the SST and against money for education, housing and other matters like that." It hurt Gerry that he couldn't get strong support among the leadership--five out of nine voted against the SST. I don't know why the President ever made such a big issue out of it. It must have been part of a deal with Scoop Jackson in return for Jackson's all out support of the President's Viet Nam policy. I think the Republicans blew it up way out of proportion. But I'm convinced my vote was the right vote." It's sort of interesting the kinds of arguments he gave Gerry Ford--arguments leaders would understand and not "I believe in it" argument.

Re his office expenses--some random items: 1. They get one free trip home for every month Congress is in session. That's air fare (or car mileage) plus trip from airport to your home. 2. He gets 1200 allowance to equip his district office--stationery, etc. 3. He gets x number of long distance units (1 unit = 1 minute) per session. 4. He gets a \$1500 allowance from Republican Campaign Committee out of which he pays for his Newsletter. But each Newsletter costs \$250, so he takes any extra campaign money (after asking contributions) and puts it toward Newsletter--\$1000 annually. And he still has to take out of our

pocket for that. TV expense comes out of that money too--his weekly TV broadcasts.

He talked about redistricting and his general theme was that he could be in trouble. He didn't seem panicky, but he was sure he'd be hurt and have a worse district than ever. The basic problem is that the Buffalo area districts are down in population. Dulski especially. So they will have to start making the western districts larger--and the only place they can take territory is eastward--and that's Barber's. So he'll lose his Erie County segment for sure. As Dulski is given Kemp's Democrats, Kemp will expand into Erie. Then Hastings will lose some probably and he'll have to make it up in Wyoming. If Henry Smith needs territory, he'll take Orleans. "Earl Brydges will protect Henry Smith. Henry's no threat to him, but I am." So Barber could lose both of them. If that happens, he could be moved into Livingston or Ontario--which is Terry's district. And he's trying to persuade Terry that Wayne is better for him than Livingston. But Senator Jim Emery doesn't want Barber in Livingston and Emery is on the Committee that does the redistricting. Barber runs better than Emery in Livingston and so that "embarrasses" Emery. Barber gets the regular Republican Emery vote and the dissident Republican anti-Emery vote--because Barber beat Emery in the Congressional primary and is known there as the man who came in and took on the organization. If Barber doesn't get more rural territory, he'll be expanded further into the City of Rochester. This is the prospect that really frightens him, because he also believes that State Senator Jimmy Powers' district will be so gutted in the redistricting

that Powers will have no place to go and "he'll decide to go for broke and try for Congress." Powers will do well in a more citified district. And he also thinks that the Monroe County Republicans will not care if Barber is redistricted into the City because this will give them the chance to reclaim the Congressional seat for a Monroe County Republican-- "one of their own" and end the "irritant" of a rural Congressman representing Monroe County. "They don't ask me to do anything for them anymore. I'm too independent for them." So the scenario he really fears is that he will be redistricted further into the city, Powers will run against him, Monroe Republicans won't help him, he'll lose, and Monroe Republicans will make a try with their own man in 1974. As he sees it, no one is looking out for him and his interests in all this." I need an ombudsman. Rockefeller seems to be very interested in helping me. I've been in contact with the Governor's office. But I can't trust him. You can be sure the whole process will be a very unsentimental one."

He asked me if I'd seen the National Journal article which named him as the third most influential man on W & M. "I got more pleasure from that than anything else that's happened to me since I came to Congress. When I read it, my first reaction was complete surprise. I still don't know what they mean by influence. I thought it meant getting things through the Committee. I can't point and say 'that was mine' or 'this was mine' in a bill. Maybe it was because of my work on the Trade Bill. A lot of members who opposed me said afterwards that I was right. Of course, they were correct in saying Mills and Byrnes are far ahead of anyone else. But to be picked third was the most important thing that's been

said about me." I thought it interesting that he should be so taken by that article--which he liked and to which he contributed some of the best quotes. I think it is indicative of his emergence as a member of "the Washington Community". He has begun to think about the written word and the media and to live part of his political life as a contributor to and a creature of the Washington media. As he extended his thoughts about the National Journal article, he talked about his burgeoning contacts with Washington correspondents--Evans and Nowak, Hugh Sidney, and three or four reporters. They call him a lot, he says, and use him for stories. He seems to want to be quoted "I'm flattered to see my name in a national magazine, just like everyone else." RE Life editorial coming up. This is the first time he talked this much about newspapermen, their ploys, confidences, etc. He mentioned a leak (to Jack Anderson) from leadership meetings at the White House and speculated that it must be someone on whom Anderson "has something" but didn't know who it was. Nixon can't go off the record because of it and it impairs the leadership meetings.

As we neared the end of the trip, he said that he usually didn't do so much flag presenting--that he more often went to meetings where people got up and made interminable speeches they didn't believe--party meetings I gathered, since he said the upcoming testimonial for Ken Barclay--where he went after I left him--was more typical. And he had parodying the speeches that would be given to honor Ken Barclay. When I left him at Logan's at 6:30 he left the car whooping a hello at someone else entering the restaurant and I left--bleary-eyed and worn out!

I noted that all the occasions at which he spoke were happy occasions and that the people at each ceremony were pleased and proud of themselves. I asked him if he went to many sad events--funerals--and he said no. He said he found days such as this reassuring to him--that the country was indeed, going to hold together--just as he spent time reassuring his constituents that the government in Washington was still working in the face of protests of this week. He said he had more people talk to him about the protest than any other subject this weekend--they're worried and they really are afraid the protestors will tie up Washington, D. C. Barber told them that he worked all day, was isolated from the protests and that the only way he found out what was happening in Washington was to ask his wife when he went home at night! And he had just written a newsletter telling his constituents that protest was only one--and one of the least successful--methods of communicating with your Congressman.

At the Travelodge, he worried a great deal about his financial situation. "I'm worth about _____ thousand dollars. It's an embarrassment to me and it has almost no affect on my standard of living at all. I get _____ in dividends. But Uncle Sam gets nearly half of it and the rest goes to pay large life insurance premiums. My wife can't even get a cleaning lady out of it. So all it does is drive a wedge between me and my constituents who think I'm rich--and that I'm not one of them. And I guess compared to most people I am. But the money just sits there and doesn't alter the way I live one bit. I suppose to most people, any one who makes \$42,500 a year is rich. Dave Broder

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just wrote an article on Ways and Means saying that we were more prosperous than most and therefore we couldn't understand the problems of people on welfare. I suppose there's a valid point there. If I hadn't had some extra money I might not have run for Congress. And I probably couldn't afford to limit my campaign contributions to \$50. Some of my colleagues have to worry about their money. I don't; and I'm not beholden to anyone."

He talked about how Tom Kleppe thought fact that he was worth 3 million hurt him in his Senate race in N. D. He wants campaign expenditure reform but says his colleagues are "goosey" about it. They don't believe he means it. He's afraid the Democrats will push through another pay raise--to \$50,000; and he feels Democrats typically do that without worrying and that Republicans are the ones who have to hold the line. He didn't like the \$42,500 raise or its timing.

He talked a good bit about the seniority reform--how he Gerry Ford by holding a news conference in his name, how he called his plan the Byrnes plan to make it respectable, how he organized each Task Force meeting in advance to have certain members propose, argue, etc., how he touched bases, how "nothing would have been done if I hadn't done it", How "I was wired in to all the young members," how one old man came up and said "Barber, how can you do this, the system has been so good to you? And I said, I know it has, that's just why I want to help save it." He said that all had been voted on in Conference. Corbett had largest number of votes against him - 24. All had some except Ancher Nelson and a couple of others.