

Barber Conable

April 7, 1979

I drove Barber today, had intern interviews, went to Ontario County Farm Bureau dinner. I picked him up at air port - drove to Alexander → Genesee (Sullivan Expedition exhibit) → Castile → V of R → Castile → Geneva → Rochester air port.

"It amazes me that congressmen are such special personages in their own worlds when they are so unimportant in my (Washington) world. Congressmen are a dime a dozen in Washington. One thing I think is unusual about me is that I have never distinguished myself from my constituents. I have always been considered a reserved, aloof fella, but I've always felt as though I was a part of the group. Even if I can't clue in on people as well as I used to. When Frank Horton comes to a function, for example, he always comes in late so that he can make a special entrance. And he usually comes in with two or three staff people. If you're sitting in the room, you can feel everyone at your table stiffen--"Here he comes." You feel the excitement of the entrance. I have not tried to differentiate myself from the others. I felt a little of that tonight maybe, because I was late. People seemed relieved to see me come in, even though I didn't know who the hell they were. If Frank and I are at a Republican dinner, he will be down working the tables. I don't do that. I figure maybe people will work me instead of the other way. But I don't want to go out and stick my hand in someone's face while he is eating lunch. I don't feel as if I have any special status that has to be maintained. I think I still have good rapport. But it's just the same relationship, qualitatively, as it always has been, just the same as when I first started."

Re SOS "It's not a particularly important group at this stage of my career. No group is particularly important at this stage of my career. I'm

not charging my batteries; I'm drawing down my batteries. I'm on the downward slope and I don't give a damn what people think of me. I still find SOS a good source of information. But I don't need the forum anymore. I'm not forging alliances. The group doesn't seem to be as formidable as it once was. Maybe that's because I'm an old fud... I see my role now as an elder statesman. It's the downward slope. I'll say what I want to say and I don't give a damn who agrees with me."

Throughout, the sense of being more of a loner, at the same time he gets more important.

"On economic matters and fiscal matters, John Rhodes won't move without consulting me. He takes me to all his press conferences. I'm the Republican spokesman."

F.: "When you speak on economic matters, do you reflect the thinking of the majority of Republicans in the House?"

C.: "I never thought of it one way or another."

F.: "If you did think about it, do you think you reflect a majority view."

C.: "I think I represent a moderate view in the party."

He's very unsure of himself on these matters.

~~Moynihan and Senate.~~

Debt ceiling.

"I was a little more ^{argumentative} ~~a representative~~ than I expected I would be. I mean I gave longer answers... Do you think I've changed in my manner of speaking? I have always tried to educate people when I speak. It is a terrible feeling to have no-nothings dominate the environment. So, when people ask me a

question, I give them an explanation of the problem, not just an answer. They used to say of Justice Cardozo's decisions that not only were they good decisions, but that opinions he wrote supporting the decisions were educational opinions. You always learned something about the law by reading his reasoning. That's what I have always tried to do. Maybe it's a liability; people may only want the answer. Like the foreign acquisition of land question tonight. I wanted to show them that there were two sides to the question. Farmers are so land hungry that they believe anyone buying land is just driving up the price of land. But they own land, and their price may go up too. I assume that when people ask me a question, they want an answer. But what they get from me is an answer within an answer within an answer. I think that's the way I've always been."

Re campaign financing. "I'm in trouble with a lot of my friends on public financing. But I carry such a burden of corporate guilt. I worry about our institutions. And this method of raising money is scandalous. Besides, public financing is consistent with the way I have always run my own campaigns--with no more than \$50 for a contribution. I could raise a half a million dollars just like that, because of my position, my reputation and the myths about me. But I think that can be a terribly corrupting process. I hate to go to lobbyists cocktail parties. I only go because some of my friends on the committee ^{like Duncan and Arche} want to show me their friends and seem important to their friends. I walk in, grab a couple of hors d'oeuvres and walk out. ^{Besides public financing is consistent with the way I have always conducted my own campaigns}

"Pat Moynihan told me the other day that I should run for the Senate. I told him why I thought that was ridiculous and after he heard my reasons, he seemed to agree with me. I told him that I was much more influential where I am now. I also told him I didn't want to take on a constituency 45% of which was New York City. Then I asked him, "Pat, how many letters do you get a day?"

He said he didn't have any idea. I said I wouldn't want to take on any constituency where I didn't know how many letters I got a day."

Earlier in the fall he had said to me "I'd be foolish to run for the Senate. I'm too influential where I am. I'd have to start at the bottom again. Perhaps if ~~there~~ were a small state it would be different. But how in the world could I ever represent this state? I wouldn't know how to do it."

About Moynihan he said "We get along very well. I think he likes me. You remember how he showed up at my campaign dinner in Batavia and told everyone what a great fella I was. He just happened to be in the same motel. Well he called up the other day and asked if we could get together. I said 'I'll come over to your office.' But he said 'Oh no, I'll come over to your office.' So he came over carrying a bottle of Dewors Scotch--said he was afraid I wouldn't have anything to drink. We talked, quoted poetry to each other and had a great time for over an hour and a half. I don't know what we accomplished except that we agreed to cosponsor some bills. He's a very bright, attractive person with an elfish turn of mind. I think he's going to be an influential person in the Senate. He's most attractive when he's being an intellectual; he's at his worst when he's a politician. When he pushes the political button he becomes a party hack."

At the talk to the UR students Sunday, he said of the 94th Congress on Ways and Means, with the new members. "That year was a nightmare for Al Ullman because he didn't know what all those new members of his committee thought. I assigned each of the Republicans two of the new Democrats to get to know them and find out their thinking on things. They did; and sometimes we could position ourselves to take advantage of a situation because we knew something about the Democrats before Al did. It's a tough business."

He also said that the W & M Committee was getting to work more in sub-committees and explained lack of a tax subcommittee as a defense of the old consensus idea against the Democratic caucus - spoke of Wilbur's practice as "stretching the tent."

On the debt ceiling bill he commented at length - "Every year the Democrats come to the Republicans for help on the debt ceiling. They come and ask us to be responsible, so their young liberals can vote against raising the debt ceiling, thus proving to their constituents how helpful they are. It's pure politics and it's absolutely predictable. I'm willing to sell my vote on the debt ceiling for some procedural reforms in the budget process, but so far there aren't any takers. So I continue to vote against raising the limit. The Democrats have a 2-1 majority and it's their job to deal with the problem. The Republicans shouldn't be taking them off the hook."

- When we drove around, he was, as always, impressive in his local knowledge. I said that Jack Flynt was the only person who ever had the same local grasp, and Barber said "You mean, he's a 19th century man just like I am."
- The Alexander post office is a beauty - He gets mail there to please the post mistress. When he makes a long distance call from his Alexander home, he talks to the operator (Mrs Moska), he shows me his new Queen Anne chair bought from an aunt for 1200. Talked about it after. Went to feed birds - quos beds. Called reporter and got her out of bed.