

Barber Conable

January 9, 1980 - plane ride to Washington

Re news conference. "They'll ask me if I'm going to run again and to tell you the honest truth I don't know. ("You've said that before, I know.") I try to keep myself in neutral on that matter until I absolutely have to decide. I'm in the winter of my discontent. I'm sour about my role. I know I'm never going to be the chairman of Ways and Means. And I'm not sure I can continue to grow, or appear to grow. I can't accomplish big things only little things--like the cost carry over basis. I worked for 3 years on that and we finally got it enacted this year. But who knows what cost carry over is and who cares. I can get a few things done here and there--things no one else is really interested in--like cost carry over--but no big accomplishments. I'm respected in the Congress and outside the Congress, too. I get to go around and talk a lot--last week I helped Milton Friedman inaugurate his first program on PBS. But I'm beginning to repeat myself on the same subjects. I don't want to get like Wright Patman who had 35 speeches and for 40 years gave speech a, b, or c. That's what happens to congressmen when they've around for too long. And I'm increasingly on the outs with my party. The freshmen are very conservative. Some I can talk to, but the Californians just sit there and act sullen. My stands on busing and abortion are too moderate for them--and they are moderate. I continue to take my puritanical position in favor of public financing, which splits me off from my friends, like Bill Frenzel. I'm very disappointed in the Democratic leadership. I thought they would be a strong leadership team. I thought Carter might be a great President. But Tip O'Neill is just not substantive. When he gets up to close debate, his arguments are so soft--

that we are all Democrats and we've all been through depressions before. He doesn't know what's in ~~this~~ bill and he can't understand why his troops are all over the place. It's no fun to be in the opposition when the majority is so weak. And he exaggerates the power of the Republicans in order to try to hold his ~~forces~~ in line--a pretty hard thing to do. You want to do battle with a worthy opponent. So it's disillusioning to be in Congress now. We're worse off than we were in 1970. I feel a lot of collective guilt when I go home. I try to explain to people what's happening but I hate to do it. There's nothing you can say that gives them much hope. Mark Twain said an optimist was a person who believed things couldn't get much worse. I guess that's what I've come down to."

Committee a shambles - goes through committee members.

Press Luncheon - 1/15/80

He was asked whether he might run for the Senate if Javits decided not to run. "No, if I'm going to serve in a legislative position, I'll stay in the one I have. I wouldn't rush with ^{joy} ~~going~~ to a constituency, 45% of which consisted of New York City, to a constituency of 20 million people instead of 500,000. I feel sorry for those Senators--well, not too sorry--they get 2,000 letters a day. I get 1200 a week. I like my constituency. I've lived here all my life. I understand my constituency. Why, Senators don't even know the members of their staff. All the members of my staff are my friends." (Throws arms out) (Tom Benton yells out--"That's what you think." and Barber says "All the members of my Washington staff are my friends." laughter)

Conable earlier - J. Edgar Hoover - May 1979

See April 7th 1979 notes