

James Corman

May 24, 1974

1. He said that he was a member of the Los Angeles City Council and he was, therefore, used to being in his constituency all the time and helping people with their problems. "So casework was not new to me. I had a great girl, Ethel Narvid, who worked for me when I was on the City Council. I left her in the Congressional district office with a secretary. She knew the importance of being an ombudsman. So we always had a district office with a lot of casework."

"In the early years, I didn't make many trips home. It was simply a matter of money. Mostly I went home when we had a week off--Lincoln Day recess, Easter recess. My wife and kids were here and they didn't go back with me. So I didn't go back much."

"I'm a great advocate of the newsletter and I started right in with a newsletter as soon as I got here. Through the 1964 campaign, I played the role of teacher and preacher, persuading people of what I thought was right. It was the tail end of the Democratic Club movement in California and I went to lots of club meetings. I almost lost the election in 1964, and I realized that this was not going to be a successful way of campaigning. I decided, then, to shake hands as much as I could. And we got better at casework, which I certainly believe is an important way that a Congressman can help people."

"I go home much more now and don't work as hard as I used to when I'm there. If I go home for a week and have five speeches, that's a lot for me now. I'm politically more secure; I'm older and tired--and I enjoy playing with my new wife."

2. "It's a very typical middle income suburb. Fifteen per cent are very poor but they are poor suburbs, not poor ghetto. My district has drifted around a lot. First I had the Hollywood-Sunset Strip area. Then I moved to the West San Fernando Valley. That was upper upper--not like Beverly Hills, but compared to anything else. It was filled with space engineers, people like that. Then I was moved back to the east end of the Valley where you have a lot more Lockheed workers, small business. And it's a lot more Democratic district. Of all the people in the United States, my constituents are the ones who would benefit the most from tax reform. They are trying to support their families on from \$10,000 to \$20,000 a year and they pay the bulk of the nation's tax bill. So tax reform is very consistent with my district's interests. There happens to be a coincidence of interests between us on this matter. It's a lot different from the old days of the civil rights battles."

Just a district in central valley

2B. "The Spanish-speaking people are harder to reach than the blacks--harder to empathize with and harder to understand. That's a shortcoming of mine--probably because of some political trouble I've had. They tend to have community leaders, and if you tie in with one all the others get mad. But I have good friends among the Spanish-speaking community."

24. "The peaks and the valleys are disappearing. I used to be especially comfortable with the Jewish community--six years ago that would have been true. Perhaps it was because of Ethel Narvid who was so active in the Jewish community. I was uncomfortable and antagonistic around the upper crust in the middle income suburbs. I was mistreated by them. For example, the publisher of the biggest newspaper wrote editorials which would "give me a fit". He treated me as if I wasn't quite as good as most folks. Now he comes to my house for dinner. So the longer you're here, the more the ones that disliked you like you and the more those that like you get less enthusiastic. It levels out some."

I have a group I call the "Corman Key Men" who have given a hundred dollars each to my campaign. I meet them at lunch about once a month and they, as I look at them, are a pretty good cross section of the community (what do they want from you?). They like to come to those meetings. They love to hear what's going on in Washington. Irene Slater says they can't wait; there's always a big turnout.

He then talked about George (?) Wyman. "He was always a very substantial contributor to my campaign--the most substantial contributor. He always gave the maximum allowable contribution under the law. But he has never asked me for a single thing--not one single thing." "There are some people I've known for a long time--the suede shoe boys--they come around and want something. But the people who get the most bitter are the ones who say 'I supported you ever since you ran and

now you won't do this for me.'

"To be frank, I've been supportive of Lockheed. What they wanted has been legitimate. But they're extremely important to the economy of the district. It would have a tough impact on the Valley if they folded. Both union and management at Lockheed support me. They come to my annual fundraiser--they're both there. It's not a quid pro quo--but if you support them, naturally they support you. It works that way."

"Even more important is the movie industry. I've been able to help them with some very special tax problems of theirs and they have been very appreciative. They come to my fund raiser."

"I never cracked the space industry guys--they are conservatives. I'm sure they spent a hell of a lot of dough trying to get rid of me--North American. That didn't mean I didn't support the space program. But the North American people were not supporters of mine." We don't have much space industry business anymore."

4H. "In the beginning my only way of communicating was the newsletter. The Van Nuys Green Sheet endorsed me for the first time in 1972. Before that they always opposed me, and if we sent them something they'd throw it in the basket." He said he took a little bit of time on station KGIL. "I get as much radio time as any congressman in Los Angeles. Several newspaper guys call me up once or twice a month. The Los Angeles Times has lousy Washington coverage. They used to cover civil rights, but they don't care about Ways and Means. I don't send out many press releases." He said he spotted a few columns here and there in the Green Sheet but not as a regular matter. He said they were

now a little more interested in getting material from him and he might try to do that.

4I. They are "bread and butter issues oriented". He noted that impeachment would be about fourth or fifth on their list of priorities, and that economic matters would be much higher. He said "I've got a lot of conservative Republican supporters and friends. They are for impeachment. The more affluent, college-educated are the ones interested in impeachment."

4J. He said "I think the area is going down slowly economically. The people are getting older, the young are moving out. My daughter teaches school in the district and she tells me that some of the classes are under-populated, that some teachers are being let go. My minister tells me that it's becoming a depressed area, with lots of old people living in poverty."

5. "It's a long way from Pacoima to North Ridge and North Hollywood. But there's still not what you'd call a radical difference. If you took 15 per cent of Pacoima and Sylmar and ten to 15 per cent of North Ridge away, the rest is pretty homogeneous."

"Some changes are going on. A lot of apartments are being built. The Valley originally was all private homes. I think the condominiums that are being built are replacements for homes. But the apartments-- I don't know for sure what people you are getting in there."

8E. "Very high--about 60% Democratic and about 40% for Corman. I haven't had any serious primary opposition. If you were elected just

because you were a Democrat, you'd begin to get primary opposition and the battle would be in the primary. That's the test. And I haven't had primary opposition. I've always had to get Republican votes."

9. I picked up the notion of the Jewish community and then asked him if there were any others, and he said, "Unions--union leadership in the district. Those guys really work hard for me--not in money but in hard work. If I were in trouble--if a real tough Republican opponent came along--they would reach down for their last dollar and be out there in the precincts. I'm sure of that. In 1960 I had the best organized union support of any congressman in Los Angeles. They formed what they called Val Pac and amalgamation of all the unions in the Valley, the Teamsters, the United Auto Workers, the AFL-CIO. They worked hard in that campaign--and they have held together and they still meet. I don't suppose they're as enthusiastic as they used to be. When you're in great trouble, your friends help you more. But when you don't need help, they say, we like old Jim but he doesn't need us. And they get more enthusiastic about some other candidate who is in trouble."

He noted about the Jewish community that they "represent 20 per cent of my district and 60 per cent of my money."

11. "Higher than average." Because of the Jewish population and because of a good public education system.

He told a very interesting story about his recent relations with the Jewish community back home. This had to do with the Jackson-Vanik bill which was the bill calling for the United States to refuse to give most favored nations status to the Russians ~~unless~~ they eased up on

emigration of Jews to the United States. Jim's point was that this bill seemed to be stuck, that nobody was giving one way or another. So one of the staff men, a man by the name of Solomon, cooked up a compromise of some sort and circulated it within the Ways and Means committee. "Gerry Pettis looked at it and said to me why don't we sponsor it and so we put it forward and it became known as the Corman-Pettis substitute. I did it because I respected the staff man who suggested it and because I wanted to get something through that was reasonable. Well, Charlie Vanik called people back home and told them that "Corman is selling out". And all hell broke loose. I started getting calls at two or three in the morning from my friends asking me what I was doing? So I went out to Los Angeles and discussed the issue with them. When I walked into the room, it made me feel sad and shocked to feel their hostility. They wanted me to know that they would clobber me if they thought I was selling out. Two hours later we walked out friends again. I dropped the Corman-Pettis substitute. That's the only little flare-up I've ever had with the Jewish community. But it reminded me of their sensitivity to anything that smacks of discrimination. After that, even Henry Jackson was zinging me on it--and Jackson never spoke to me or about me before in his life." "I've never had any difficulty with the black community. Of course they are not as organized or as assertive." What interests me about the story of the Jackson-Vanik bill was that Jim may have been getting a little bit out of touch with his very strong supporters. He was acting, in this case, like a legislator in

the committee environment, and forgot how intensely his hard core supporters felt about the issue.

13. Civil rights and taxes, and the emphasis has changed because his Committee assignments changed. But he let me read a speech he gave on the Floor just yesterday regarding the debt limit, in order to show me that he still was interested in civil rights. That speech mentioned the civil rights issue in some context which I can't recall.

13A. "A lot of people support me who disagree with me on one or another of the issues. The unions disagree with me on the matter of trade, the garment workers--who may not be quite as sophisticated as some of the others--can't understand why I oppose import quotas. Jimmy Quillan of the IAM, who would give me his last drop of blood and who was a good friend of mine can't figure out my position on import quotas. But they forgive me for that one thing." He noted also that the unions have a "vested" interest health insurance reform, which is another thing which he is very much interested in.

14. His answer was simply that he could not see anything that could defeat him--not any vote, certainly. "They need a very good candidate to give me any kind of trouble at all. Only if I had stolen money or if I had fooled around with my income tax would I be in any danger--not through issues. Issues almost defeated me in 1964, and I think I learned how to handle that. There's something very good about almost losing--you learn a lot. I think I know how to handle things now." Some issues will cause me a lot of anguish--the Right to Life issue is one. I have a great many Catholic friends and supporters

who won't like my position on that issue. But they knew when they took me in that I was a Methodist. And they'll forgive me that one transgression."

"A guy is lucky in politics. He's carried here by his friends and he is kept here by his friends. That gives you a nice feeling."

18A. "I think they think I'm honest. It's not that they see me walking down the street and say there's Jim Corman, he's an honest man. It's just that I've never been involved in any trouble." He said he relied on the Quayle Poll to make that particular statement. He then went on to say that he had 90% name recognition in the poll that had been taken for Jack McGrath. "I think I have a reputation as being a hard worker. Part of that comes from my service to the district and part of it because of the nature of my campaign. If you see a guy at 6 o'clock at a plant gate, you think to yourself "that son of a bitch works hard all the time." He also noted that the office was good at doing constituent work.

23A. "It would hurt me a little bit, but not as much as stopping my newsletters."

I asked him specifically about the newsletters, in fact, before I asked him 23A. He answered, "In time, it would cut down on my name recognition. But it would be a slow process. A few people would forget you. It would be compensated by the fact that I get more news coverage now. At the beginning, it was hard--especially where the two biggest newspapers in the district dislike you. I would try to get in the papers

more and on the radio. I would be more aggressive." But the emphasis on the newsletter which I picked up when I was travelling with him in Los Angeles is just as strong.

26A. "Success in the House is 10 per cent a matter of ability and 90 per cent a matter of luck--plus something else that I have none of, aggressiveness."

"I started with the lousiest committee assignment. Cecil King just didn't care about me. I wanted Judiciary. But I was nice and polite and I did what people wanted me to do. Next time I got Judiciary; and that was very lucky for me. I was at my best on the House Judiciary Committee. It was a case of where what professional ability I had was coupled with my deep feelings about what was wrong and right about America. I worked hard and effectively in those years. It was a hard choice when I went on the Ways and Means Committee. I was a little aggressive there." He said he talked to all the senior California Republicans, those senior to him making sure that each one of them did not want it.

"If I had the same decision to make over again, I would make the decision I made. You can be more effective in the House from Ways and Means--with the exception of impeachment. But I was talking to Barbara Jordan the other day. I said "I wonder if I made the right choice." She said, "It's exciting now, but three months from now, we'll be back to national holidays." "She's right. If you look at the problems of the nations over the next ten years, Judiciary is not where it's at. If Ways and Means keeps its jurisdiction, that's where it's at."

"I don't aspire to be in the leadership. Now, if the Speaker called me and asked me if I wanted to be Whip, I'd crawl over there on my hands and knees to get it. But it's not going to happen. I'm happy where I am."

"I asked him about running for the chairmanship of the DSG and he said he disliked losing anything. But originally he wanted to be the vice chairman not the chairman. He said he got in the race late, that once he got in he worked very hard but Burton worked a little harder and got into the race earlier. "Guys are funny around here. If something doesn't mean anything to them, they say yes to the first person who asks them. Who cares about the DSG leadership? Phil worked awfully hard for that. I didn't like losing but it hasn't changed anything for me." At one point he talked about getting into the DSG race and said he talked to Jim O'Hara and he added, "That was when I still liked Jim O'Hara." That showed a little more asperity than I thought Jim had. I guess it revolves around O'Hara and civil rights.

We ended talking about how Phil Burton had tried to be the leader here in Washington by running the redistricting in 1970 and how he gerrymandered everything so badly trying to make deals all over the place. He made it a mess and the Court threw it out. With respect to Jim's own district, he said "He couldn't affect me. My district was too logical." It must be that Jim sees his district as a kind of entity that you can't tamper much with.