

JOHN CULVER

November 19, 1980

I went to see John Culver and the interview was interrupted 2 or 3 times by votes, phone calls, interviews. Jack said he had given no press interviews and John was not eager to talk about things. He did; but he had not digested it all and said that when they had done an analysis, they'd send me the materials. He was a good deal less introspective than the first day I rode with him in September. It's just a very hard time to have a talk; and, as it turned out a full one-third of it had to do with him asking me about teaching, Harvard, etc. He doesn't know what to do--except that he won't lobby.

About the election, on the matter of ^{rhythm} ~~myths~~, he thought he was going to win--just about right up to the end.

"I thought we had it. From the time you left, the campaign continued upward (extended arm and hand upward) so that I thought we were going to win. The polls continued to be good, until the last weekend when the Des Moines ^{guter} ~~Reporter~~ poll dipped and had us 4 points down--which they said was too close to call. But then there was that last minute suction. Everybody we talked to during the last week said we were ahead. I talked to Berkely Bedell who said that according to his polls I was a little behind him, but I would carry his district. Not only did I not carry his district, I only carried one county in that whole north~~west~~ section. Tom Harkin told me that he took a poll of 40 people everyday to see if he was slipping, and that he had slipped a little but I had not. I lost his district and he carried it by 50,000 votes. Neal Smith told me I was going to carry Polk County by 25,000. I carried it by 18,000. I talked to Steve Sovern. He said I was leading 2-1 in his

district. I ^{got} ~~carried by~~ only 48 % of the vote. How do you explain it except for some last minute change by the undecideds? I was prepared to lose in the sense that I knew we were in a close race. But I didn't think we were ~~in a close race~~. But I didn't think we were going to lose. Grassley was very gloomy, and a week before the election a reporter told us, he wouldn't even talk to reporters on the plane. The incident that happened ~~in~~ ^{at} VNI worked well for us. Grassley said he would have turned the other cheek. Jim Flansburgh came to my defense and talked to the political science professor who was there. He was a Republican and he was completely laudatory about what I did. He said 'Culver was the only cool person in the room.' Those favorable stories were on the front page of the Register all the last week. Everything we could feel, felt good. The debate went well. The rallies went well. We had more people volunteering to help us than we could use. People would drive by, thumbs up, you're my guy, all that sort of thing. On the last weekend we were campaigning in Davenport and we got a leak that the last ^{Iowa} ~~Des Moines~~ ^{Register} poll, completed on Friday, had us 4 points ahead. I remember feeling disappointed, because I felt we were about 8 ahead. The next morning we learned that it was Grassley who was 4 points ahead. Even with that news of the dip, I thought we would win. I knew we had the organization to get out our vote. I thought if we had a nice day and could get everyone out to vote we would win. We got beat 54-46. Birch (Bayh) got beaten by the same amount. And Gaylord Nelson--two weeks before the election, he had been ahead by 57-33. What can you say? We didn't make any mistakes. He seemed to be stumbling around. That last minute change--the hostages, the Reagan thing turned it all around. That's about it. ^(x.p.4) Do you want to talk anymore?" (At that point, he has to go vote. I tell him I want to say talk a little more and he says fine, he'll come back.)

I asked him whether or not there may not have been something out of there that can't be picked up by polls and he says that they will do post election analysis and let me have the results and that he'll be glad to talk with me later. At that point, I think he wants to stop the discussion, but he ruminates some.

The first thing he says is that I should talk with Maxwell--who did Jepsen's and Grassley's campaign--"the guru of the right wing in Iowa." John's point is that they may have had something going that is more sophisticated than the Culver people knew.

"I never knew how much of an organization he had. It never appeared that he had any. We knew he had the right to life people, the gun control people and the Farm Bureau. We knew they could get their people out for him. But we didn't know if he had anything for himself. We knew he hired kids to do this or that. But we couldn't see any organization as such. We saw a lot of disarray in that campaign. But they may have been much more sophisticated than we knew, using the telephone to identify their voters, finding out what was irritating them, sending them direct mail, getting out their vote on election day. We had walking books, but they may have been much more sophisticated. In my gut I have the feeling they were but I can't prove it. I got *hints*. For one thing, even though ^{*Grassley said*} I had him scared to death right till the end--and he acted as if he were scared--Maxwell always seemed supremely confident. ^{*For*} For example, when the early voter turnout was heavy, he said that they knew their vote and that it was a good sign for them--contrary to all the conventional wisdom that a large turnout would help the Democrats. He was probably right. As far as we can tell, it was the sons of bitch ^{*in*} rural vote that turned out in force, and that is poison to me. You just look at those little towns--1000 votes, 2000 votes, 3000 votes--they killed me."

I reminded him that he had been worried in 1979 about his inability
 stamp his personality on the state and that he was starting late. ^{"I think by the time the campaign was over, the people had an image of me --"} With the
 media, especially paid media, ^{and} with my appearances, ^{They} had an image, ⁱⁿ
 spite of the fact that we did start a little late. But I don't know what
 kind of an image it was. Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if I
 never campaigned at all. Nobody seemed to be listening. In Dubuque, where
 I should be strong, I had the mayor, who is a nun, and other Catholic leaders
 taking out newspaper ads that urged people to take my entire record into
 account--not just abortion. I went in there--in my old district--and campaigned
 on that theme. Dick Clark stayed away from Dubuque and never had that kind
 of support. He carried it by 700 votes; I carried it by 2000 votes--in no
 way commensurate with the difference in our campaigns. In ~~Carell~~ County
 three of the top leaders in the community, Democratic leaders, worked for
 me from the first day of the campaign. They couldn't abide Dick Clark and
 never turned a finger for him. For me they swallowed hard on abortion and
 took the whole package. They worked very hard for me; and if you had asked
 anyone before the election how I was going to do, they would have said, I was
 going to win hands down. Dick Clark never got that kind of community help;
 yet he carried the county and I lost it. How do you explain it? / People
 would say, in answer to a poll that they would vote for Culver, but when
 they got into the booth, the desire to protest took over. If you want to
 vote against the leadership of the county, if you want to kick them all out,
 then vote against the President and the Senator. But by the time they got
 to the congressmen, the feeling is 'There's old Joe, he's not to blame.' So
 the congressmen all survive. If I had been a congressman I would have sur-
 vived, no doubt about it, no doubt about it. But if you're a Senator, you are
 up there in the leadership with your ass sticking up in the air waiting
 to catch the lightning."

To Mike Naylor

Brad Hummel agreed with me that John didn't go home all that much in early days and that he was running vs. someone who was around all the time. I don't think, personally, that John had enough of a "he's one of us image" to carry him over the rough spots.

JC said "When he got behind in the polls, Grassley put on a series of very effective negative spots. And we were off the air. We went down a little in the polls then. Later we went back on, became competitive with him and went up in the polls." Will negatives hurt a candidate who has none to start with?

Jack said that he went into election day "apprehensive" because he could sense things were turning against us. His evidence was that people came up to campaign workers and said "I hear this about Culver. Is it true?" Or people said to him, relative to the right to life pamphlets distributed last week ("the fetal needle") that "I had resolved my position on abortion and was going to vote for Culver, but when I saw those pamphlets Sunday, they made me so sick I went out and voted for Grassley." My point is that John had no cushion of support to tide him over. People wouldn't say "I know him and he's not like that." The Weaver and Foley stories wouldn't work there. ^{is} And this/a House Senate difference. It's not trust for Senator. It's different. Jack said that "when I scheduled Culver into the elderly areas places, they would say to me Grassley has been two or three ^{time} things already. Culver has not."

"I got the Anderson vote. You can lay my vote alongside the Anderson vote in counties and it runs the same. I got the Stoner vote we talked about, insofar as they carried through their opposition to Grassley. I carried some of the Republican precincts in Des Moines".

It turned out he had done some post election analysis--and his earlier demurrer reflected a reluctance to talk not an absence of anything to say.

At some point he said, "I'm sure the image of big spender was a factor."

We speculated as to whether 74 or 72 were not aberrations. He didn't pick upon 74; but he did re 72 or "1972 may have been an ^{aberration} ~~observation~~.

There was the walk, which differentiated the two men. Miller was vulnerable--very vulnerable, though we didn't know it at the time... Maybe Jim Larew's thesis will have to be changed. We may not have been as solid as he thought. On the other hand, the victories in 72 and 74 may show how far we've come."

He talked about the Lynn Cutler race as another confounding one--a woman, a Jewish woman running against a man who spent over 300,000, was smart and handsome ("I don't know what kind of candidate he was..") and losing by 6000 votes. Grassley pulled her opponent in, he thinks. Her husband died 10 days before the election and he didn't know how that affected the vote--could cut either way--sympathy or women's place is in the ome with kids.

It's a measure of John the man: "We took Lynn with us to McGregor, the day after election for a couple of days. I knew she needed some comforting after that double whammy." He had just been defeated, but he and Ann took Lynn Cutler back with them to their home. Nice whole guy.

The talk in Culver's office was all jobs. Therefore, says Jack, 40,000 people unemployed on the Hill as a result of the changeover in power.

Somewhere in the monologue JC said "Of course you have to remember that

Iowa has never reelected a Democratic Senator."

Brad Hummel "We never used any negative advertising because our poll showed the positive stuff was working so well."