

Rep. Chaka Fattah (D/PA) in Philadelphia (April 20, 2001)

- "No travel seminar, not correct"*
- This was the trip that ^{Rebecca} Rachel organized for me so that I could see the northwest part of the district--40% of it by his count. It was a typical Fattah visit: short, jam-packed and abruptly ended--10 a.m. to 2 p.m. This time, it ended when the Philly DA--whom he has just decided to oppose in her reelection bid (per story in morning Daily News)--came to call on him. (He never even said good-bye. I just got ushered out by Rebecca and that was that.)
 - I don't think I learned much about the "NW territory," except that it did trigger some talk about it. He let me ask questions, but he never once pointed out anything to me as we drove along. He was absorbed in the interview. We could have been anywhere in the district. So the benefit was not disquisition on NW Philly, but a disquisition on what he likes to talk about--his legislative agenda past, present and future.
 - I did catch up on that subject and did broach others--so it was a beneficial trip. Some questions will have to go unanswered. But his cool efficiency was underlined. And his lack of interest in the details of the district was repeated. Either he knows it all so well (he certainly wheels himself around the district with ease) that he doesn't think to act as tour guide, and it doesn't mean much in his hierarchy of interests or (which I think is correct) doesn't think I'm interested, or doesn't know anything. Rebecca said at breakfast that "we'll drive around" after his two stops. But we didn't. The scheduler was laid out for me and my purposes; and I guess he knew that, and was putting up with it without enthusiasm. But he certainly gave me attention back in the office, bought me lunch and gave me an hour. (His new wife called twice during that hour and once he put me on the speaker phone to talk with her.)
 - When we met, I congratulated him and asked him, "Do I now have to divide my study into two parts, before marriage and after marriage?" He said, "Yes, I'm a lot happier now. My aim in life is to stay happier."
 - *His picture with his wife was in the morning Daily News, even though the story had nothing to do with her or the wedding. (He told her that over the phone.) At both our stops today,

All can be on hand

Chaka Fattah (D/PA) April 2001-1

people congratulated him on his marriage. She, of course, has greater public recognition than he. She anchors the 4, 6 and 11 news on Channel 6, with the largest audience in Philly. They live in East Falls.

- We started in on his Appropriations' fight. He agreed that he wouldn't have tried again. "Your seniority starts from the time you get on the committee. I would have had to give up too much seniority on another major committee--Education--to get lower seniority on another major committee." He call Education "a major committee" and Appropriations "the most powerful committee in the Congress."
- "After last year, everyone ~~Y~~expected and agreed that I was in first place of next time if another position became available. But there were several important circumstances." 1. Kennedy and Clyburn had reserved slots; 2. Others wanted to get in line. Forbes lost primary, Dixon died. That opened up their two slots. Negotiating with Republicans gave Democrats one more seat. Fattah expects it's his, but Menendez intervenes and pushes hard for NJ guy, Rothman. "He is a member of the leadership and he put great pressure with leadership meeting." "I was still in the lead, but I had to worry. I had to worry, too, that people might think Pennsylvania was getting too much. Doyle wanted to go on Commerce, and we thought that people might think two major positions for Pennsylvania was excessive, that Pennsylvania too greedy." But Republicans responded to Gephardt's pressure and CF and Rothman went on.
- In talking about it, the most interesting part of the story came from inside the PA delegation--and the help he got from Murtha and Borski. I asked him which two or three people were most helpful to him re Appropriations: 1. Murtha, 2. Borski, 3. Gephardt.
- "1. Re Murtha as delegation head, PA had three people on top committees: Rules, Ways and Means and Appropriations, and all came from the western part of the state. People from the east argued that we deserved any Appropriations seat that came up. Murtha, who came from the west, was put in a ^{top} spot because westerners expected him to support their candidate--Doyle and not me. In fact, Doyle thought he had it and he told everyone he had it--but he didn't--not until Murtha decided. Even though two people from Philadelphia--Foglietta and Gray--had held the PA seat before, Doyle told people that the seat was

Chaka Fattah (D/PA) April 2001-2

his. It was a very unpleasant position for Murtha. But he supported me. It was a gut wrenching fight inside the delegation. And I won by one vote. That was the crucial vote. And Murtha's support was the most crucial decision. If I had not won the nod in the delegation, my bid would have been stopped cold right there. One reason Murtha was so upset when I lost it the first time was because he had gone through so much personal agony to go out on a limb for me. To be subjected to such shenanigans in the steering committee made him angry. But the fact that we lost the first time became a big asset the second time. There was a lot of uneasiness about what had happened the first time. That's what put me on first base."

- 2. Right after Murtha in terms of who helped him, he put Borski. "He got up in the delegation meeting, said that he would not run for it, yielded to me and then led my campaign in the delegation. Where he really helped me, however, was with Gephardt. He works closely with Gephardt. He managed Gephardt's campaign for majority leader. Gephardt can't get everyone he wants for the best committees, but Gephardt can stop anyone from getting one that he does not want. Borski's campaign helped me with the leadership. And without that help, I would not have gotten the position." Later he talked about how this taught him about the delegation as a key unit.
- He also mentioned other people that helped him. Maxine Waters, "she bowed out of the race and supported me." Nancy Pelosi and B.
- I noted that CBC had nothing to do with his story. He admitted that was so, but he said that they supported him. But there was no vote on it. He explained. "During the preliminary leadership meeting to arrange the Steering Committee meeting, Gephardt asked Murtha to call the Chairman of the CBC and the Vice Chairman to make it very clear that I had CBC support, called Eddie Bernice Johnson and Elijah Cummings to ask if they supported me. Each one said yes, and that settled it. There was no caucus vote on it."
- Re last fight, "I talked to Chet Edwards, who is very active in the committee assignment business. He said to me, 'You have two choices. You can fight it and lose. Or you can let it go around. It will be better for your future if you let it go around.'"

Chaka Fattah (D/PA) April 2001-3

- I learned some facts about early races for state representatives.
- State representative district: 60,000 people, it was 58% black. He ran vs. a white incumbent in a three person race--two blacks. He won by 58 votes out of 10,000. He was the first black representative of that district. It was on West Philly.
- State Senate race: 250,000 people. He won primary unopposed. He induced a 20-year black state senator to retire, a funeral director and march responded. That district had a small proportion (2 wards) in Germantown and it was majority (DR %) black.
- "He had a shrewd strategy. Each year he hesitated to say whether he would run or not, and people would wait to see. When it was too late for anyone to get organized, he would announce. That was his strategy in 19 , while he delayed, I started running."
- "The best part was that we rented the old civic center and packed it with my supporters. We announced on the radio a big opening campaign celebration. It was not quite show biz--but we had 15 speakers. I announced my candidacy. We had raised \$12,000 and we spent all of it in the first week, creating this big splash. Then on the first day petitions could be circulated, we held a breakfast for all the volunteers. The Mayor came and a lot of other public officials."
- "He did not react publicly to any of this. He was shrewd. But a few weeks later, he announced that he would not run. I called it a preemptive strike."
- Umoja (Oomowja) is 20 houses for delinquent boys who are sent by court for judicial or family problems. "Sometimes its hard to tell the difference."
- Father's early youth program he can't spell it, sounds like "Heartran." Rebecca will find out.
- Mt. Airy. "It is thought to be one of the most successful models of racial integration in the country. It is a very active part of my constituency--filled with civic groups of

Chaka Fattah (D/PA) April 2001-4

all sorts. It has the highest income of any place in my district, except for Center City. Those two are the high income parts of the district."

- put with context*
- And when I asked him later where in the NW part he was strongest, he said "Mt. Airy." "They vote independently and progressively. And they are very comfortable with a congressman like me." He does well in integrated places. He tells, again, the story of the 1994 election in which some so called experts saw his great strength in NW (which is 65% black) because of white liberal support and because of his "policy work" persona (his word for himself) and that because of who he was, he would not run well in West Philly. And that Blackwell would win. Election night, KYW was on the air saying that Lucien Blackwell had won--that I had carried the northwest and he had carried West Philadelphia. I heard it on the radio as I was driving to my victory party! I won every ward in the district--even Blackwell's own ward. That tells you how wrong people's perceptions were. The point is, I do well everywhere."
 - Germantown: lower middle class, working class, not as integrated as Mt. Airy.
 - East Falls: closest to the city without being the city. Where he lives.
 - ✓ - Roxborough: 85% white, middle class people "lots of cops" who have to live in the city, but want to get as far away as they can. Rox. is furthest from the city. In fact, he talks about these towns in terms of proximity to the city. "If you take Lincoln Highway out of the city, your first turn off is East Falls, the next four are Germantown...".
 - Whole NW area is 65% black. "It would be a matter for debate where I am strongest in the NW. I would guess Mt. Airy--eastern and central Mt. Airy."
 - Roxborough is the least congenial area for him, yet he still won there in 1994. "I feel connected, even in Roxborough. It's a white, ethnic town, working class, typical of the Rizzo base in the city. When I ran, there was this columnist on local politics for the old Roxborough News. He wrote a column saying 'How could anyone with the name Chaka Fattah get elected from Roxborough?' I read it as a challenge. So I

Chaka Fattah (D/PA) April 2001-5

went to a Polish American club in the Polish area of the town. I rolled up my sleeves, walked in and ordered a round of beer. Then I played a favorite game--I forgot the name of it--over in the corner. I bought a few rounds and played a few games. That was the beginning. I carried Roxborough. You can win anywhere. You need to present yourself in that place."

- "Ninety nine percent of my votes are easy. I feel quite capable of representing the people of my district. I was born in Philadelphia. I was educated in Philadelphia. I went to public school in Philadelphia. My kids went to public school in Philadelphia. My family runs a community program. I went to community college. I've served on boards of trustees at local colleges. There aren't many institutions I haven't been at one, two, five times. Henry Middle School, where we just went--I have been three at least three times in the last five years--to the tree planting ceremony, to the opening night of their musical and today. And that's one out of hundreds of schools."
- Lots of confidence here. And it overrides any nuance.
- He says that he gets lots of questions about issues and votes, but not in questioning way. It's just that he's got interested people. People are concerned; but they do not challenge him.
- Re China, "I got a lot of questions. There's a rule about voting that you should take your position early and stick to them. You don't get as many questions that way. On China, I equivocated all over the place until the very last minute. As a result, I got a lot of questions. Some were 'How come it took you so long to make up your mind?' I believe in trade; and I would have voted most favored nation annually. Labor did not like my annual vote; but they liked the China vote. Cigna, which broke with the party to support me to the maximum in 1994; they liked my annual vote, but not the China vote. It was my hardest vote." (All this may not be exactly right, but he could correct it if I thought it crucial.)
- "My goal is that when I leave Congress, I will have passed ten or fifteen major pieces of legislation--just as Adam Clayton Powell did." ("Well, he did it because of his power as chairman of the committee.") "I know that. I will do it through the power of my ideas. Ideas are my power."

Chaka Fattah (D/PA) April 2001-6

*for HPS leading
in 1994!*

- Re learning from state legislature to Congress, "Some big pieces of the job I was very comfortable with. I was very comfortable as a legislator. I knew how to draft legislation, conduct a hearing and get a bill passed into law. One of the beauties of being in Congress is that you can take that kind of experience and become a leading person in a field, even though you have had no experience in that field. You learn the substance of the issue as you go along. On my Government Affairs subcommittee, I became a leading person on the postal service. People would come and ask me questions about the postal service, about which I knew absolutely nothing when I came to Congress. I knew how to pass legislation and I could do it for the postal service. On my major committee, Education, I had plenty of experience. In the state House of Representatives, I was a member of the Education Committee. In the Senate, I was Chairman of the Senate Education Committee. I sat on the Board of Trustees of two colleges. I was a representative on the State Board of Education. I traveled around to every hick town in Pennsylvania, talking about education. I did not have a lot to learn when it came to passing education legislation."
- "The media side of Congress was new to me. You could be in Harrisburg forever and no one would even know you were there. You get a lot more attention here. And I got more than my share because in 1994, I was one of a very few newly elected House members on our side, one of fifty people in Time Magazine, a comer. Timing had a big impact on attention that came to me. Then I went stumbling forward onto the Government Reform Committee which was always in the headlines because they are always chasing scandals. Then I got a lot of prominence because I was one of the few on the committee who was capable and willing to offer a defense of the President against attack on the pardons. So I just stumbled onto a committee that put me in the limelight."
- "In the state legislature, my policy with the media was 'be completely accessible.' But in Congress, I have to triage it. I could go on Fox Cable Network, but it doesn't play in Philadelphia. Should I or should I not learn what's important to a reporter--with two hours of my time--whether or not what he writes will never be heard by anyone. Your office gets a lot of media scrutiny, too. People want to compare your office to other offices and measure you this way and that."

Chaka Fattah (D/PA) April 2001-7

None of their interest in comparing offices is in my interest. I don't spend time on it. It's a very different role for me than I had in Harrisburg."

- "I also had to learn the politics of the institution. Take the importance of the Pennsylvania delegation. In Harrisburg, no one ever talked about the Philadelphia delegation. It didn't mean anything. We were individuals. In the House, it's not like that. Right after I was elected, Bill Gray spent two or three hours with me, bringing it home to me how important the Pennsylvania delegation was to my future in the House. I had not understood any of it. But when John Murtha from western Pennsylvania asked me if I would go speak to the Johnstown NAACP in his district, I went. He said I'll send you by plane and pay your hotel. I said forget the plane and the hotel, and I drove myself out there to do it. There may not have been ten people in the Johnstown NAACP, but that wasn't the point. He asked me to do it and if he asked me, I wanted to do it. I never understood before I got to Congress how important that was. I wouldn't have gotten on the Appropriations Committee if Pennsylvania ~~legislator~~ John Murtha hadn't supported me." *Congressman*
- I asked him what he thought of Time Magazine touting him as head of CBC. "Off the record, how ridiculous can you be. I would never run for chairman of the CBC. It's just not my interest. I know that people write that I have high expectations. But no one could describe my expectations no matter how high they put them and make them anywhere near as high as the expectations I set them for myself. But I'm as likely to become Speaker of the House as I am to become Chairman of the CBC." I decided not to call the Time article "racial profiling," which I thought it was--as if the head of the CBC was the pinnacle for a black congressman.
- "There are several career ladders in the House. Mine is the legislative leader ladder. It is possible that by climbing that ladder, I might become another kind of leader. But that is not my plan or my interest."
- I asked him about the black clergy group that other accounts mentioned as being important to his race. "The group was crucial in the election of Bill Gray because they were his natural constituency. Later Wilson Goode (Mayor) tapped into them. And they supported me, too."

Chaka Fattah (D/PA) April 2001-8

- That was about it; but my question led to another description of the early races. There was a state law to the effect that if an incumbent resigned after a certain date, prior to the next election there would be no special election before the next scheduled election. Gray delayed his resignation so that the law kicked in. But the Democratic Party, with Blackwell as their chosen candidate to succeed Gray, petitioned the state court to allow an immediate interim.
- "Blackwell was expected to win the off-year race because the Mayor, the president of the city council and most of the ward leaders were behind him. And we had the one big lever in the voting machine. With one throw of the lever, you could vote the whole Democratic ticket. And there were only two races on the ballot. For most people, it would be foolish not to throw the one big lever." Re his pledge not to run against Blackwell next time, "It was a foolish thing to do."
- "Everybody's expectation that no matter who won the off-year primary, that the loser would run again in the regular primary. And everybody expected John White would come in second, run in the regular election and win. He was the protege of Bill Gray. He was a city commissioner and had an independent profile like mine. I was the stepchild in the race. John and I made a deal--that whoever came in second to Blackwell in the first race would be the non-party candidate against Blackwell after his first full term. To everyone's surprise, I finished second; and White dropped out of politics."
- "My advantage ^{hnt} against White and then about Blackwell was that I knew every inch of the second congressional district, because as a state senator, I drew the lines. I could walk my way through every ward and precinct map and see where White's strength and Blackwell's strength had been and I could take out their better areas. I could keep all my best areas from my state senate district. The irony was that when I had finished drawing the lines, Blackwell had a much better chance of winning in the First District than he did in the Second District."
- He talked about constituent services in terms of his person responsiveness to individual instances via his network of friends. It was triggered when he leaned across his desk

remember
 of 1968 primary
 for SAs
 & 1972 -
 primary
 for
 B.J.

Chaka Fattah (D/PA) April 2001-9

(while we were eating lunch) and showed me a constituency newsletter from Blondell Brown, one of his former aides, now a city councillor. "Most of what people think about and talk to me about has nothing to do with the federal government. They come to you with a problem; and for them, that is the most important problem in the world. That is all they care about and all they know about you is what you did about their problem. It's the Al D'Amato thing--potholes. Most of the help I give people comes because of the network of people I have met and worked with during my career. That woman today, at the middle school with the dangerous building. I could help because my former chief of staff is on the city school board. I'll call Sondra and ask her to go to the school and help them. With a problem of state licensing, I contact Vincent Hughes who took my senate seat. (Hughes called during lunch.) The man who is the small business person for the Mayor was my first campaign manager. One of my district aides is now on the city council. I helped a woman's son get into a special post high school program the other day because I'm on the Board of Trustees at the school and I play golf with the director of the program. She thinks I did it because I'm a member of Congress. In the end, most people support you for reasons that have nothing to do with anything you put in your job description. The only question is the degree to which you will expand resources doing the kind of work in the constituency."

- His network produces services, well beyond what the people in the office do. His office has eight people in it. Rebecca said at one point, "He's not a constituent-service person." When I was picking around with Gray's 11 people and three offices. But I got no good answer as to the why of the one office. She called it a pretty tight office in which she had to earn her spurs. She also noted that among staffers, very few ever got the ear and trust of the member.
- As part of the politics of the institution he said, "I had to learn the importance of the staff. In the state legislature it didn't matter how well you got along with staff. Here it does. The higher you go in the party leadership, the more important staff become. When the leadership meets to prepare for the Steering Committee, staffers will say, 'people don't like that person; we can't have him in that job,' and the leaders listen. I had to learn."

Chaka Fattah (D/PA) April 2001-10

- His big legislation issue now is fiscal equity. He talked a lot about how he is now credited, by people on substantive committees, with expertise on education and that he consults with them, Boehner and Miller he mentioned a couple of times. They went to California to talk to congressional (?) staffers and to Aspen Institute to talk about education. "I was the first person in to testify before the committee on fiscal equity. And I was the first person to testify on the higher education bill. I think people credit me with expertise on education--and not because I can talk about it, but because I did it. I passed an important piece of legislation. Even though I am no longer on the education committee, the members come to me to ask questions, they credit my knowledge and experience and so I had no trouble staying involved. I even considered asking for a waiver so I could stay on Education and Appropriations, but I decided against it. On Appropriations, I can do things for my district. I don't see that position as limiting my work to improve the law. My priority is still my legislative agenda. My goal is to get on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Education. I mentioned that to Patrick Kennedy and he said that he wanted to get on that subcommittee. He has seniority. So I said 'go right ahead.' Easy does it is my motto. You can't get too self-important around here."
- Re Appropriations, he said he had a "major committee" and was moving up on Education, so it couldn't hurt too much. "The only downside was that I would have taken a hit back here. People would say, 'Chaka Fattah wanted it, but he couldn't get it.' I would take a hit on my reputation back home. I can take that hit. That's not a problem. But if people said he wants to pass legislation--but he can't get any passed, that's a hit I could not take. My goal is not to be on Appropriations. My goal is to be a legislator." But at Henry School, he called Appropriations, "the most powerful committee in the Congress." And the school principal and the board chair knew about his "promotion" to a powerful committee.
- Summary re continuing efforts re education, "People on the committee think I know something and I have good relations with both sides." Idea is that he'll continue to be active there. Has not left his old committee behind!
- His policy passion now is "school equity. He thinks that his ideas and his relationships will keep him in the game.

Chaka Fattah (D/PA) April 2001-11

"School equity is the most important thing I will ever do. No one else is trying to move it forward. It's my issue and it's currency is growing. If I pass it, it will be the most important piece of legislation passed by anybody at any time. The stakes in terms of my career are quite high."

- "It would be a profound educational reform. We already got 183 votes. I can build bridges with the Republicans to move it along. John Spratt, a very conservative Democrat, said to me, 'I can't be with you now, but if you got 217 votes, I'll be number 218.'"
- He wants to work with Bush at this point to get him to correlate per pupil expenditures with his accountability testing. No one, he says, has ever collected the data correlating family income levels with performance. His idea is that if he can get the measure incorporated into testing/accountability legislation, it will then be available for the main push--to equalize per pupil expenditures across entire states. Pretty ingenious, I think, both for his incrementalism and his eye on the final result.
- He always had that view, as a minority member, that you do what you can to build toward your ultimate objective. It's not just a matter of taking what you can get. It's the idea that you do not give up the final objective, and the idea that, in his words, "you push it forward" in whatever way you can--toward the goal.
- He is interested, now, in protecting Gear Up--to make sure it is funded and implemented. To that end, he lobbied Clinton in his last days--when they were on a trip together in Africa!
- "I negotiated with Clinton over dinner in Africa and I got him committed to set up a commission that will protect Gear Up by monitoring its implementation and performance."
- Re his learning curve, it's important to recognize tht all the things that were new to him and his reaction to them are pegged to his experience in Harrisburg. He learns relative to his experience in the state legislature, i.e., more media, different internal politics such as delegation importance and staff importance. Other members will have different learning experience. STJ's learning curve is relative to his experience as a prosecutor.

Chaka Fattah (D/PA) April 2001-12