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Jack Flynt

May 4, 1974

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1. When Congress was in session for 7 or 8 months, contact with the district was no problem--for most members, it was no problem. The Appropriations Committee work is such that I can't pay proper attention to my congressional duties and be home at the same time. I have to neglect one or the other." Since 1963, I've neglected both. If I neglect my district--or I should say if I totally neglect my district, I wouldn't be back. If I totally neglect my Appropriations Committee work, I wouldn't be doing my congressional work. I'm neglecting both; but I'm trying to give such time as I can to each of them." He returned to this theme a couple of times, that he could not win because either way he was neglecting one segment of his responsibility. He now sees himself as having important legislative responsibilities.

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and he adds - if I neglect the district

I asked him whether he had thought of having a fairly high paid staff man in the district to do certain work for him there and to appear at places when he couldn't go. "It wouldn't work. People want to see the Congressman," *12* Last night, at the high school commencement exercises, I could have sent the most scholarly person I could find to make a more erudite, comprehensive and scholarly exposition than I made. Even if it was, the people there wouldn't have enjoyed one bit of anything he said. And they would have taken it out on me for not being there."

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I then asked ques. 23A., and he said: "Politically, yes. More people get reelected to Congress based on talking to civics clubs and PTA's and similar groups than they do by trying to study and, hopefully solve, issues and problems confronting Congress. More people are interested in getting reelected than in doing what's required of them in Congress. I might add, I'm not."

I then asked him whether he had ever thought of running for other offices and he said "Only casually. Any other job would be less of an intellectual and physical burden than this one."

Get more for them?
I then asked him if he had ever thought of retiring or resigning, and he said: "Frequently, at least two and maybe four times. Except that I recognized that as far as representing the district is concerned, I can do it better today than I could before. And so I have an unwritten and unsigned contract to stay as long as the people of the district want me."

Let me go off the record with you. Last year I decided that I would resign from Congress at the end of this term. I told only one person of my decision--my wife. She said, anything you want to do is alright by me. I did not communicate that decision directly or indirectly to any member of my staff. But I told Patty that I would think it over for a few days. During the time that I was thinking it over, another man announced that he would run for my seat. If I were to have announced my retirement after that, it would have looked as though he pushed me out of the race. I couldn't have it that way. ~~If I~~ ^I announce my retirement,

myself and I am not going to be pushed out by anybody. I want to go out in my own way and at a time of my own choosing. Nobody is going to force me out. And just between you and me, also off the record, I am going to beat the living hell out of this guy." I'm not sure I have caught the full flavor of Jack's language. But he was very stubborn and spoke very forcefully to the point, that he would not appear to look weak when he retired. He puts great stock in looking strong.

2. "I can give you a very small thumbnail sketch. Four years ago, I represented a district which my constituents and I had total mutual confidence, respect and trust--95 per cent, nearly 100 per cent. Today I have a substantially new district. It is not more than 50 per cent new, but I lost 250,000 people of the old district and gained 200,000 in the new district. They don't know me. And 15 to 20 per cent of them feel hostility toward me because I am new to them. There is a tremendous difference in my ability to represent and in the pleasure I have in representing the two districts. The district has changed that much."

"The newness, I don't mind; the difference, I don't mind; but I run into the situation where individuals and groups whose philosophies coincide with mine but who are actively against me because they belong to one political party and I belong to another. I've never had to contend with that before. People, it seems, don't vote philosophy--they vote party."

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He reflected on this situation and referred back to the situation in 1966. "I whipped that ^{shit} once before--in Macon. I carried a county that went Republican. This thing now may blow over, and I may be reading it wrong. You try to have a thick skin, but I have a tendency to be sensitive. I don't fault people when they are against me, but I do fault them when they are against me for the wrong reasons."

"I did it by neglecting my Congressional duties in 1966. I was anxious to prove myself to the new district. This time, I thought the new part I had would have followed me for what I stood for. And they may. Yet my most vocal opponents, or my most vocal opposition comes from people I would expect to be my strongest supporters."

He then addressed himself to the question of whether he could not do today what he had done in Macon. "It's not as easy as it used to be. I knew nearly everybody in every county in the district--because I had the time to do it or I made the time to do it. Today, I don't have the time and I'm not going to neglect my duties. If I neglected my duties, a certain group of people would be even more vocal in opposition to me because I would have missed votes. If I stay, the same group will criticize me for not coming back to the district. Do you see the problem I'm talking about?" I said, yes, that he would be damned if he did and damned if he didn't with the new group in his district.

I tried to get Jack to talk in demographic terms about the new district. Were the people in the new district any different in ways other than party? Were they a different class; did they work in different industries? To all these questions, I drew a blank. When I finally said, what makes them Republicans, he replied, "There were a lot of Republicans in the old district too" and went on to say that Macon was an example,

and how he beat the Republican's mayor of Macon¹. I think the point is that Jack sees the new district in just about the same terms as he saw Macon when it was given to him in the earlier redistricting. The only problem now is that he doesn't have the time to do it, that is to do the job of working the district.

4K. "There are not many safe districts anymore. There's an uncertainty that pervades the whole atmosphere. Your friends will accept anything you do. Your enemies and opponents expect you to perform two functions, which cannot be simultaneously performed." There is no doubt but what he is feeling his seniority, as the next quotation indicates.

"As a member of the Appropriations Committee, I am in a position, because of my life expectancy, such that I could become the chairman of the Appropriations Committee. Appropriations is traditionally the hardest working committee in the House of Representatives. If I do what is necessary to get reelected and thus become chairman of the Appropriations Committee, I will lose the respect and the confidence of my fellow committee members because of being absent from the hearings and occasionally from the votes."

Are there any Congressional districts like yours in Georgia?

"No district in Georgia has changed as much as mine has."

6. "Not at sixty years of age. It's hard to lose 280,000 and pick up 200,000. I lost counties where I had gotten 90% and 94% of the vote. Ninety-four per cent was the best I ever did. I had run in parts

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of this new district before. But the counties I picked up were counties where I had gotten between 80% and 80% before. I could get 85 to 90% in these new counties if I had the time. I could go into every one--and South Fulton too--and get 90%. I went to Macon and ran against the strongest man they had and beat him."

8F. "It was much more me than the party. " The way that he demonstrates this or proves this is that he ran ahead of the party. For example, he said, "In the county where Calloway was born, Troup County, I pulled a bigger vote than he did." I asked

I then asked him whether he thought the same relative ^{merit} waiting would be true for 1974 and he said "Yes, I'll run ahead of my party."

I then asked him if he thought if he were to retire whether the Republicans would take the seat, and he said, "Very likely. Had I retired in 1966 the Republicans would unquestionably have taken the seat. In 1972, they also would have unquestionably taken the seat."

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Then, appropo of his earlier theme he talked about his position on the war. "In 1966, I broke with the Viet Nam policy privately. In 1970, I publicly broke with it. Between 1966 and 1972, I played a part and perhaps a major part in ending the war in Southeast Asia. If I had had to have been fighting for my political life back home, I could not have played the part--the major part--that I did. During that time, I used every chip I had and called in every I.O.U. I had to get support in order to accomplish what I did in ending the Viet Nam War.

If Congress had not ended the war, we would still be fighting in my opinion." And he showed me a thesis by a person at Harvard who said Jack was responsible for anti-Viet Nam votes in the Georgia delegation. He was also a bridge between the liberal anti-war group and the pro-National Defense anti-Viet Nam War group of which Jack was a part.

9. "I will give you an oversimplified answer--my strongest supporters are the people who know me and whom I know and with whom we have communicated over the years."

At this point in the interview, the telephone rang and Jack was told by Joe Akin that one of his best friends, his campaign manager, and the President of the Griffin National Bank, T. C. Parker, had just shot and killed himself in Griffin. The interview ended and I spent the rest of the evening, until about 9:30 with Jack as he tried to deal with this great tragedy. That, of course, is not a matter for this record. But I do want to tell one story

But I do want to tell one story, a story which Jack told one afternoon in his office. "When I was out campaigning, I would stop for lunch in a country store. I would buy some cheese and some canned salmon or sardines and some crackers. And I would share what I had with whoever was there--and buy some more if need be. Do you know that a man who eats salmon and crackers with you will vote for you. And if a man takes a bite of your chewing tobacco--or better still, if he gives you a bite of his chewing tobacco--he'll not only vote for you, he'll fight for you."

Interview on May 10, 1974

9. again, since it had been the one we were talking about at the time the first interview was interrupted. Who are your strongest supporters? "That is the hardest question anybody has to answer. I'll try. My strongest supporters generally fall in the category of people who have known me over a considerable period of time...in my old counties, 30 to 40 years, in my new counties it could be 5 to 10 years. My strong supporters in the new part are people who have known me or of me prior to the time I was placed in this district. Also, people with whom I have been able to spend as much as four hours with--even though they hadn't known me. If I can talk to an intelligent person, I can explain what Congress is all about and my position in the Congress--including my number two position in the Georgia delegation, my tremendous sub-committees on what many people consider the most important committee in Congress. Any professional, educator or businessman with whom I can talk and explain those things will in turn become one of my strongest supporters." He and Mary Lou mentioned some meeting that he had been to up in the new part of the district where there were about thirty independent businessmen and airline people--and they both said that he had spent two hours with the group and that they would probably become strong supporters.

I asked him about trust. Why do people trust you? "They trust me and they believe in me because I disarm them with frankness and with

my ability to convince them of my sincerity without appearing to try to. You don't ever go around talking about how honest you are, because when a man says how honest he is you had better put your hand on your pocket. When I disagree with people, I tell them. I don't tell lies to some and the truth to others, so I have to figure out who I lied to. This helps me with people who don't ordinarily agree with me--school people, labor people, to mention two. I'd rather have a man fall out with me because we disagree on the issues than because he thought I lied to him."

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I asked him if there were any disagreements between his own personal preferences and those of his strong supporters. "Oftentimes. I will give you the two most striking examples. One was my vote to uphold a public works veto of President Eisenhower. Some of my friends had something in it they thought were for them. Another was the time when I did not go along with President Kennedy and Speaker Rayburn on the Rules Committee packing of 1961. A third--he ranked the rank and file of the American Legion have been 100% John Flynt supporters. I thought they would get mad at me for publicly breaking with the President's policy over Viet Nam. But I haven't lost a one. It turned out that I was saying what they were thinking and didn't know how to say it. We got less than 1 in 50 or 1 in 100 letters against my position. Actually I tried it on for size before an American Legion group, prior to the time I made my speech on the floor of the House.

10. I asked him what would be his most difficult primary contest. "That is hard to answer. If I answer it, it reveals my weak point. I hope if I answer it I will not be quoted as the Congressman from the

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6th District in Georgia! The worst primary opponent I could envision would be a reasonably articulate, unscrupulous man in his early thirties, who was almost consumed with personal political ambition. I wouldn't be as concerned about a man from the new part of the district as from the old. A man from the new part would assume he'd beat the living daylights out of him in the old part of the district. He would campaign mostly in the new part of the district. Assuming neither he nor I were well known in that part of the district, I believe the people would value experience and would prefer me to him on those grounds." Mary Lou, during this discussion, thought about an office holder of some sort from the new part of the district as a threat. She mentioned a man named Coggins from Clayton County. I asked Jack if he thought the man would run a media campaign or a hand shake campaign and he said both.

11. What percentage of people keep up with issues? "Sixty per cent think they do and 40 per cent could care less. Of the 60% less than three-quarters know anything about what they think they know about."

12. His voting record. "At least one-half do not. Of those who do, they place quite different interpretations on it. A friend of mine who knows a lot about politics, says that unless you went completely wild on the issues, it doesn't matter how you vote. Personal contact is more important. I wouldn't go quite that far. I think it takes both."

13. What are you interested in? "Economics, fiscal policy of government, international politics, by that I mean foreign policy, or the lack of it--support of the private enterprise system, that's really number one. I have a total aversion to waste in government. The development and conservation of natural resources, defense."

13A. Do your constituents agree with your position on these matters? "Yes. In the past I have influenced their thinking instead of being like Robespierre who was in bed with his mistress when a crowd went by outside. He ran to the window and said, I must follow them, I am their leader."

17. What votes will give you trouble in the election this year? "My failure to be there to break a tie vote on the extension of the debt limit." Mary Lou said they had used this against him before. If this is the only issue they are going to use against him, it isn't going to be much of an issue-oriented campaign!

"The biggest issue ever created on one of my votes was a 1963 or 1964 vote on the wheat sale to Russia. Actually none of the wheat went to Russia. The same people who are now supporting Nixon and approve his wheat sale to Russia are the ones that criticized me for my vote on the earlier wheat sale."

20. If you were to retire, would a Republican win? He said first that he did think that would be the case. Then Mary Lou said she didn't. Then Jack said, "A strong Republican candidate could ~~receive~~ ^{defeat} a weak Democratic candidate. If they were equal, the Democrat would win."

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20A. He thought a long time about this one, shaking his head and said, "It's such a negative thing, I can't conceive of it." He then proceeded to list the Georgia Democrats who had been beaten and the reasons for them being beaten. Judge Davis - "He voted his district but he was unwilling to flex on anything." James McKay - "Jamie Mackie did not vote his district." Russell Tuten - "He was a case of total ineptness and running against a man for whom money was no object." (Stuckey) Hagan - "A combination of illness and inaccessibility. He would go home but he didn't know what to do when he got there." Preston - "Illness and not going home." Weltner - "He wasn't beaten; he quite!" But he never said anything more except to imply that none of these things would happen with him.

On the way home to Jack's house for dinner, we talked a little bit about impeachment. He said, "There are three things wrong with Nixon. He's stupid; he chose men who did him a great disservice; and he's a shit ass. I don't know, however, whether any of those are impeachable offenses." He said he would not vote for impeachment on the grounds of contempt of Congress, because he thought some of the lawyers on the Judiciary Committee had been quite contemptuous of the President and he did not see why the President could not be contemptuous of them in return. He did say, however, that if Nixon's actions were to keep people like Haldeman and Erlichman from going to court and get them off the hook, "That would be a horse of a different color--for to my mind they are as guilty as sin." His present public position is

that he is waiting to hear the evidence and make up his mind at the time. He is not committing himself.

(When I go over this transcript, I should go back to the original questionnaire and include the places where I have it circled.)