

Charles Weltner: November 2, 1991

- 404/656-3475
- I had not intended to call Weltner, even though Laura had given me his number, because I had met him on the August trip and I knew his health wasn't good. When Wyche and I finished the interview, he asked me if I had seen Weltner, I said no. WF was insistent that I see him "while he's up." WF and Donna had gone out to dinner the night before with CW and Anne. He told me that the cancer had come back, it had been cut out again, had not spread and that the doctors will meet next week. He wanted me to talk to Charles, I think, because he felt no one could be sure whether Charles would be up to it whenever the "next time" might be. So he said he'd call Weltner and tell him I was here and see if he wanted to see me. WF called my room to tell me that Laura had called to tell CW that I would be in town and that CW said, "I'd be upset if he didn't come to see me." So we got in the car and Wyche drove me over. CW greeted me with, "Hi Dick," introduced me to Anne, who offered me some Halloween candy (Mr. Goodbars) which I took and which we joked about for the rest of the day and evening.
- After I had talked to Charles and we were standing in his driveway while CW let the dog go on the leash, she said to me, "Are you going to say that Wyche Fowler is a good man?" I said that, "Well, I'm going to write an objective book; but I'm sure that will be part of it." (She had asked me earlier if I was "political" and I had said not in a partisan sense. I explained that to her again in the evening at the party. She isn't political. The Baxters said CW never brings her to any functions. (She's his third wife.) Anyway, to go back to the driveway, she came up to me and said, "When Charles was diagnosed as having cancer, he just about gave up. That house there was black for three days. Then Wyche called from Washington and asked how he was and I told him that Charles had given up. The next day Wyche drove in the driveway and took Charles out for a long two-hour ride. When they came back, Charles was a changed man. He fought it and beat the odds. Wyche Fowler saved Charles' life—didn't he dear? (Yes, he did.) Wyche Fowler is a good and caring man, a wonderful man."
- The relationship between the two is remarkable. Both times I've been to Georgia, CW has figured prominently. When WF got up to speak at the fundraiser, he said he wanted to introduce three people to the crowd—"my mother and father" (who stood up) and then, "my friend and mentor Charles Longstreet Weltner," who stood up. I think its a measure of Fowler's rather large trust in me that he wanted me to talk with CW on this trip.
- I asked CW to go back to the beginning and he started in 1963 after he had been in Congress for about "eight months". He said that the day after the Birmingham Church bombing occurred, WF called him and said he'd like to be a volunteer in CW's office. WF was in the Army at the time, stationed at the Pentagon, and he came during time off. "He was my first intern; he came in after work, and we put him to work on the robotyper. It became quite apparent that he was a bright, smart young person."
- During CW's 1964 reelection campaign, his administrative assistant left

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and he offered WF the job. "He ran my office during my second term." But CW was quite firm that Wyche did not go back to Georgia to get visibility there during this period. "I was very strict that his job was to stay in Washington."

- "'66 came along, the Maddox year. We had a long agonizing meeting on a Sunday night. The question was what I was going to say about the (Democratic loyalty) oath. There is a picture somewhere of me after that meeting with my young aide standing in the background." I had asked him if he recalled what WF's advice was at that time, but he didn't answer.
- CW's decision not to take the loyalty oath and not to run in 1966 put WF out of a job, and he went to London School of Economics.
- But Weltner was appointed Deputy Chairman of the Democratic National Committee. "It was disastrous for me, because I was trying to establish a law practice."
- "I asked Wyche to come back from England and be my assistant, which he did for six months--before going to law school. He organized a school for politicians, to teach newcomers how to get elected. He did other interesting things. He had a spark, a creativity that made him stand-out in any crowd. He still does. In any group--like the Senate--Wyche moves to the center of attention. He has competencies; he has things to say; and he has the ability to look at a situation and see opportunities other people don't see."
- Re "Night Mayor" (best story I've uncovered.) "The night mayor idea was his, and he talked Mayor Ivan Allen into it. It was the ombudsman idea. Allen was a political ally of mine. But why any mayor would agree to let some college kid become night mayor with all that publicity, I don't know (laughter). When he ran his first race for Alderman (in Atlanta's fifth ward) his slogan was "The Night Mayor runs for Alderman." In that race, he took the seat from a man who had been in office for 30 years--Muggsy Lewis. Actually, he talked Muggsy out of running. It was altogether a very improbable victory for a young man who was still in law school."

He was night mayor in the evening after law school. It was the same pattern that got him to CW's office in the beginning after work at the Pentagon. (When he drove me to CW's house, he pointed out the store where "I bagged groceries after school.") He's obviously a hard worker and looks for opportunities to get ahead. He gives new meaning to Plunkett's "I seen my opportunities and I took 'em." For GWP it was money; for WF it is a political opening.

- CW told a story about Wyche's youthfulness, that when he was on the Atlanta City Council, he had a sticker on his car that said city council on it and a policeman looked in and said, "Is your father on the city council?" Wyche said, "No, it's me."
- When they reorganized city government and made the vice-mayor into the President of the City Council, Wyche ran for that city-wide post.

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- "It was another improbable campaign. His opponent was Wade Mitchell, an All-American football player at the University of Georgia, Vice President of the Trust Company, supported by the Atlanta business community with lots of money and in league with (majority candidate) Maynard Jackson on a black-white team. Theoretically, the business leadership and the black leadership was against him. But he out-campaigned them all."
- His campaign slogan, "Fowler for President."
- City Council Presidency "a nebbish job that sounded important." But WF "did some things with it." He adopted some rules and some structures. He established some ethical conduct requirements--which have been ignored, but are still on the books."
- During his later years on the City Council (1973-1977 says CW) "He was feeling mighty low. He didn't think he could put up with city council politics any more. Carter improbably won the Presidency; he improbably nominates Andy Young to the UN job; and Young improbably leaves Congress. In the run-off against John Lewis, Wyche improbably carried a large proportion of the black vote. It was a race without rancor." It's all quite improbable, but it works for WF.
- In the period leading up to his last House campaign (1984), "Wyche worried that Lewis might run against him, and that such a race would be diverse and that it would hurt him if he ran later for the Senate." (L11314)
- This means, of course, that WF was thinking about the Senate race at least in the 1982-84 period.
- CW says that Wyche's black opposition, during his time in Congress, was never serious. He always had some opposition, I guess, (I'll check) but only the original Lewis fight was serious.
- After 1984, he had \$200,000 left-over to put toward his Senate race. He probably raised the money for exactly that reason. All through to this point in my research, I don't know when he first thought of running for the Senate.
- In 1986, "We had a big scare that Vince Dooley might run. He said he was getting a lot of pressure to run. As the University of Georgia football coach, he would have been a napalm bomb in name recognition. Wyche had no name recognition. Wyche met one of Dooley's men on the airplane during that time and told him that the press wouldn't care about Dooley's policies, that all they would say is 'let us see your 1040's'. Wyche said the guy turned white. But for awhile, Dooley was a big fright."
- Ham Jordan used his Carter connection to raise money. CW told a story that "Jordan had in-roads into a lawyer who had gotten Wyche to help him on a matter that brought huge economic benefit to his client. But because of Carter, this lawyer said he had to support Jordan." An example of the pull of Carter's resources.
- CW noted that Russell was the third candidate and that there had been no



run-off.

- Re the campaign, "The low point came when Mattingly poured \$3 million dollars into 'Fowler, Absent for Georgia' TV. All Wyche's friends were spooked and said, 'We've got to get on TV.' It was like Kipling said, 'If you can keep your head while all about you are losing theirs...' (CW kept quoting it.). Wyche Fowler stayed steady in the boat while everyone else was spooked. Wyche just went on campaigning with great availability. Mattingly played tennis in Georgetown. Finally, the over-saturation of Mattingly's TV campaign showed up in the polls, and he went down."
- I asked re other campaigns of WF. "All the campaigns against him have been ad hominem campaigns--that 'he's too liberal for Georgia.' None of them was fought on issues. Jordan and Mattingly both said, 'He's too liberal for Georgia.'
- Re Gulf vote, "It cut real bad at first. The drums rolled, the bands played, CNN and Peter Arnett followed the troops, Schwartzkopf was on the tube. All anyone talked about was the great war. The weak-kneed, lily-livered people were assailed. Now, nobody says anything about it. The prevailing news is 'I'm not sure what it was all about.' Why is Hussein still there, where are his nuclear weapons, why are the Iraqi babies starving?"
- "Thomas will merge into a gray pastiche of anonymity because there are too many factors involved. WF has, however, incurred a little loss of enthusiasm from his natural supporters."
- He says, too, that the main problem is George Bush's popularity.
- "The older blacks love him because he knows all the hymns and can preach and can talk the talk. The church element is the core of his black support. They find him attractive, charming and they know that he has always been their ally."
- "Now that the Civil Rights Act will pass and George Bush has declared it not to be a quota bill, Wyche has dodged that civil rights bullet." He repeated several times, laughingly, that George Bush had simply made 'a quota bill into a non-quota bill' by declaring it to be so. Chuck Bullock also said that WF would have had a tough time with that bill, having already said he would vote for it. Republicans could have gone after him on the quota issue--tough in the south."
- "The most striking thing he did was to buck the Speaker of the House to make himself the sixth member of a five-member slate to run for position on the Ways and Means Committee. The Speaker had already picked the slate. There was already one Georgian on the Committee. So what chance did he have? He looked around and discovered that the whole area between Baltimore, Maryland and El Paso, Texas had only one member of the Committee. 'There are eleven states,' he said, 'they have only one representative on the Committee. And that ain't right.' He called all the people for the eleven states. He just lengthened the tent ropes. And he came in first, not fifth." They said, 'you can't buck the Speaker,'

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but he did.

- Re George Mitchell, "He was the only southerner who wasn't going with Bennett Johnston--who was an oil man, who was always an oil man. And who needs another oil man."
- "Mitchell created a fictitious function, 'Assistant Floor Leader.' Mitchell changed the leadership to make Wyche a part of it."
- I asked CW what Wyche's issue passions were. "The environment is the heart of his interest. It is a quiet, persistent thing, which doesn't lend itself to the dramatic. But it is his real interest. He loves to walk into the woods, stay in the woods and walk out again. It doesn't get media attention. 'If it bleeds, it leads' is their rule." Said how he didn't find it interesting--poisons, pesticides, etc.
- He spoke of Nunn's endorsement as providing cover for Wyche in 1986. Says Nunn "came out strong for Wyche and toured with him. When people said to him, 'I like you Wyche, but you're too liberal for Georgia,' he would say to them, 'If you want to know about my record, ask Sam Nunn'."
- On the way back to the hotel we talked about the job of judge--how he spent \$35,000 on his first race because he thought he had to. "It didn't do a lot of good. If you are the incumbent you win." (He had been appointed and was on the ballot as the incumbent.)