

JOHN GLENN

May 14, 1981

The arrangement is for me to fly to Chicago and meet Jeri Monson (in charge of local arrangements) at the Conrad Hilton where JG is to speak to 5000 Democrats. Mary Jane Veno has arranged for me to be in the same room as John (there will be five rooms) and to fly back to Washington with him on the charter flight after the speech. He has already been to Missouri and Mississippi on these exploratory tours. I guess the main purpose is for me to see what these kinds of "early times" adventures look like.

Of special interest to me, if I can pull it off, is the relations with the press--what they think he's doing and what he thinks they think he is doing, etc. What, too, would be the desired effect among Chicago Democrats? What kind of an organization does he have, etc.

Well, it's Friday noon now and I'm writing this as I wait for the plane back to Rochester. I got one comment from JG, which I'll note later. But I did not get any time with him. I did get acquainted with some of the staff, however, and that will help in the long run.

I waited for the Glenn party to get to the Conrad Hilton. They arrived about 5:45--JG and Mrs. Glenn, Mary Jane Veno, Bill White, Dale Butland. Dan Rostenkowski came in with them. Kathy Prendergast (came day before). She's the Press Secretary. The Press entourage had already cornered the Glenn's in the lobby when I bumped into them. Doug Loewenstein, out of Washington, who covers Ohio for the Cox Newspapers--one of which is in Dayton. Joe Rice of the Cleveland Plain Dealer and also one guy from the Cleveland Press and one from Akron Beacon Journal.

Eventually, I had a nice talk with Doug. But I didn't get to talk with any of the others. And my talk with Doug concerned his teaching at Center

① damage control - will by no means
speech - idiotic as part of it.
② his room -

for Learning Alternatives, his suggestion that I get press credentials and his willingness to talk with me in D.C. So, I didn't get the press angle I wanted. Too much motion during the evening and too many people to get acquainted with. Not a situation into which I could move with any confidence.

The staff, however, did comment on the press attention. It was the most Ohio coverage they had for any of their extra-Ohio speeches. In the evening Mary Jane said "The Ohio press has made a very big thing out of this speech. They want to compare it to his 1976 keynote speech. Of course, and Ohio President would be very important to them. My fear is that they are making too much out of it."

Then, this morning, at the office I asked her if there was a consensus position in the office as to how it went. She returned to the theme of the Ohio press. "We all think it went pretty well--not very well, but better than some of us expected it might. There was a high level of anxiety here about the speech. And he didn't bomb. In fact, I think we should stop worrying about whether he gives a great speech or not. He gives a good speech; not a great speech but a good speech. He has his own style. When our staff called ahead to Chicago, they were told that the Senator probably wouldn't be heckled. When you face that kind of situation and you do as well as we did, it's quite an accomplishment."

Again, Mary Jane, "The Ohio Press has used this as a great boondoggle (sic). They have pushed and pushed and pushed this presidential thing. My fear is that they will push us faster than we should go. I think we should set our own pace and make them respect us for not letting them manipulate us. We shouldn't let them make us worry about who said this about each speech. I think the Senator is going to do just that--go slow and not be rushed into anything."

Dale Butland (speechwriter) offered a similar assessment in the morning--with another wrinkle re. the 1976 convention speech.

"I haven't talked with anyone this morning, but I thought it went well. That's a tough crowd. If you can give a speech, and people listen to some of it and you get some applause, that's all you can ask. The Ohio Press will compare it to the 1976 convention speech. And by that comparison, this one was much better--a big improvement."

While I was talking to Dale, an NBC television crew came through the office taking pictures. He inquired as to what was going on. It seems Tom Petit of NBC news is doing a spot on the Glenn "presidential thing" this evening, and since Glenn hadn't showed up, they were shooting in the office. "Guess I'll have to watch the news tonight. The Press is going overboard on this Glenn for President thing. It's only May--four months into the new administration. It must be a slow news day."

There is lots of ambivalence and smoke-and-mirrors about the time they are in. They know perfectly well what they are doing--testing the waters for a presidential race. Their moves reflect it--this Chicago speech was the first one Cathy Prendergast had gone to. And they talk about it. Dale and Annie Glenn talked about it on the plane. I could only overhear occasional snatches of conversation. Dale: "It's the next logical step after everything he's done....I know you have reservations about it." The press asks him whenever he turns around

Press "When you accepted this invitation to speak, did you think it was a good chance to test a Presidential candidacy?" Answer: "No, when I accepted this invitation, like other invitations, I saw it as a chance to help the Democratic party, to help raise money, to help rebuild our party's strength." And so on. The Chicago papers referred to him as "a possible presidential

candidate""in their stories. And the post-speech story in the Sun Times said that his selection as a speaker "avoided the problems that could have been created by a Kennedy or a Mondale invitation." So, it's on everybody's mind, but they can't come right out and say it.

Dale says JG had never had a speech writer till he (Dale) came aboard last year--about a year ago I think. He worked during the campaign--but I would guess it was a move made with this "testing" in mind.

When Cook County Democratic Chairman George Dunne was asked whether he chose JG as speaker "because you saw him as a possible presidential candidate." Dunne said "We invited him because he is attractive, intelligent, dedicated and understands the purpose of government"--the minuet.

Dan Rostenkowski introduced JG glowingly and in the context of the presidency. Some excerpts "in our tide of defeat, he survived, and by millions of votes... He put on the gloves and did what a freckled faced pilot had done, give us the true feeling of our country... It is one thing to have accomplished the sweet victory that his actions as an astronaut gave him. It's another thing to carry on with the dignity and the contribution as a citizen that John Glenn has... I sat beside him at the Democratic National Convention and I got the feeling then that at the right time, we are going to look to this man to take the leadership of the Democratic party and that his leadership of the party might become the leadership of the country at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue... We look to you for leadership... We know you will have a career that is going to continue to skyrocket..."

Dunne's comment to M.J. on the speech. "It was fine, just fine."

Bill fretted that JG got off on invetions, the future, etc. too much, that press table was so far in back that they couldn't hear, that Joe Rice was

was "upset" about something. I didn't get much sense of him. But he's been John since the 1974 campaign.

John's own assessment of the speech, which he delivered just as he drove away from the airport at 3:00 a.m. was: "With that large a crowd and under the circumstances--off the record--if you escape with your hide after talking to that group, you can talk anywhere, ~~without a worry~~. When the Pope has been shot, and when people won't even keep quiet while a priest prays for the Pope--that's a pretty tough crowd. When I heard the steady noise all the time that man tried to pray for the Pope--and in Chicago, too, a Catholic city--I thought to myself, 'This could be a very black evening.' But it wasn't. I thought it went very well."

All through the assessments of the various people ran the theme that 'it could have been worse,' that they escaped without going backward.

I asked Dale whether John watched the process of speech writing. "Yes, like a hawk." He says once invitation is accepted, he (Dale) calls people where they are going to pick up information, suggest topics, etc. Then he talks to John, who adds or subtracts emphases. Then he drafts and takes the draft back to John. Then some changes and then the final copy. He said that before he signed on, John winged his speeches and would tend to go on too long and not speak as precisely as he might otherwise speak. I noted that the press also "needs" a speech text, too. And he agreed. The more the press is interested, the greater the need for a text. Cathy (or M.J.?) had mentioned this to me, too, about the campaign. That the reporters wanted a text, even if the candidate didn't speak from it. Which he often didn't.

Dale worked for Chicago Council of Foreign Relations, then for an Asst Secretary of State and then (I think) for John.

Doug Loewenstein wrote a "lead" for the Glenn speech that everyone thought very funny. It went something like this "Senator John Glenn spoke for 27 minutes this evening without once mentioning the subjects of the Straits of Hormuz, nuclear proliferation, energy independence or the electric car." Then there was another sentence which said that so far as anyone could tell, he was not ill, but in good health, etc. In retrospect, the laughter was in same proportion to the tension relief, everyone was feeling at the time.

Bill White asked me--"What did you think candidly?" I said it was an "appropriate speech" and that his delivery could be improved, but that it was a tough audience. Dale seemed interested in some of my comments and I heard him repeating them to Annie on the plane.

I asked Dale if John was self critical in these matters. His answer was a kind of yes, but "He's willing to listen to critics." He has a strong enough ego to accept criticism...He doesn't want a staff of yes men. If he's anything, he's confident. Dale stressed confidence. But to me, John stressed an early lack of confidence on the job.