

constructed explanation

JOHN GLENN

*NH electrode 10/1/80
"Dem" Primaries Skipped By
Small Short Electrode
CQ 7/7/84*

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I had an hour with John. He is hurt "a trauma"; a little down but OK. In fact, the experience seems not to have changed him much at all. That surprised me. He believes he is "right" on the issues, that he was in it because he's "only interested in what's best for the country," and that to have "to give up" is hard. He sees himself not as beaten or defeated, but having to get out of the race because of the debt "a 3M debt and no votes." The debt was much on his mind.

It was about the only admission he made--one he could not fail to address. He sees himself as a man of issues and principle. He sees Mondale as less so. It was, as always, an unsatisfactory interview--no good quotes, very little introspection. No sense, for example, that he underestimated the magnitude of the whole enterprise. A lot of the answers I had heard before. I'll never learn with John. You ask him a question once and you'll always get the same answer the next time. No elaboration or enlargement. There's nothing else there. I was a bad interviewer today. Too much sympathy for him. Still I was walking on eggshells.

His "constructed explanation" will center around his emphasis on issues, the failure of moderates to vote, the serial effect of primaries, the media and their expectations.

I had a large set of questions I had prepared, and I thought I would pull them out and maybe even take notes. But I went in to John's office while he was on the floor and MJ went in and we talked. I could see she was nervous about my book and when it would come out. (I had already decided to tell that to John very early in the interview.) I

told her 1987, after John's reelection bid. She seemed relieved; she told John that as soon as he came in. That helped. As soon as we started chitchatting, I could see he was so preoccupied with the debt that I couldn't impose my questions. I could see that I could not use my notes. So I went, as usual, with the flow.

"A lot of water has gone over the dam since I last saw you." "Yes, and I have a 3M debt hanging over my head."

I began by asking him if he had done any post mortems and if he felt like doing any. "No, we haven't done any post mortems. Naturally, there are some things we would do differently if we had to do it over again. We didn't win. But it was my campaign. I'm not blaming anybody. As far as sitting down, though, and post morteming the whole thing, figuring out just what we would do differently, no, we haven't done that. We've got a 3M debt. That's what keeps me awake nights."

I think I then said I noticed he was going back to Ohio. He said yes and returned to the matter of the debt. That clearly is his major preoccupation. So I went with the debt.

I asked him "did you slip into the 3M debt without really knowing what was happening?"

"No, 2M of it was a bank loan. We knew what we were doing. Let me go back a little bit. When we came up to Iowa, I was in second place. Our polls showed that I was doing pretty well and that Mondale's vote was soft. I had been attacking Mondale, and it was having an effect. Mondale's polls, they told us later, showed the same thing. I was not attacking on a personal basis. I was being responsible about it--or, I thought I was. Then Gary came in second. The media expectations were that I should finish

second and when I didn't meet their expectations, they blew it all out of proportion to what it really meant. They set the expectations, and when you don't meet their expectations, that's their story. They make you fit their story. The difference was only about 6,000 votes between Gary who was in second place and me in 45th place or wherever it was I finished. Tell me why should 6,000 votes out of 100 million make so much difference? And why should there be this serial effect--especially in small states--where one result has such an overwhelming effect on the next one? New Hampshire was a little more serious. It was a primary state and a little larger than Iowa. And the results there showed that the Mondale juggernaut could be stopped. But Gary was the beneficiary because of what happened in Iowa. But the South was supposed to be our territory. It was our window of opportunity. And, after all we had done, it was very hard to drop out. When you are in it as I was for what you believe in, for principle and not just to add a line to a biography, you don't want to quit. So we took out a loan for 2.5 million--the last 500,000 contingent on how we did in the south. But Gary was on a roll. Needless to say we never took the option on the last 500,000. But 2M plus about 800,000 in other funds left us with about a 3M debt. If there had been any way to keep going I would have. I hated to drop out. But with a 3M debt and no votes we had no choice. Would I take out the loan again, if I had it to do over? Yes, I would."

Is it tough for a centrist candidate to get a message across? "You bet it is. The sensible center, the moderates don't come out to vote. If you arranged the voters across the spectrum, you'd have a bell shaped curve, with most of the people lumped in the center as moderates. But it's the extremes

who come out to vote. And then you've got labor, and the leaders stand there with their clipboards, checking to see who has gone to vote--you go, you go, you go. If it was a matter of shall we go to war or not go to war, yes the moderates will come out and vote. But if it's a matter of the economy, then it's marginal whether they'll come out to vote. Certainly they won't brave a snowstorm, as in N.H. to come out." (Schneiders' phrase was "we went looking for the sensible center and found the hole in the doughnut.")

"The caucuses are the worst, because people have to come out and sit for four hours. The extremes get excited enough to do that. And labor gets their clip boards out--you and you and you go. I don't know whether it's legal to outlaw caucuses but I'd like to do it. That's one of the problems this year--too many caucuses. That and the serial effect of one state on another are two problems I think we need to deal with. Why should two states with 100,000 voters have such an inordinate influence over all the rest of the states. We need something like regional primaries, or even a national primary. I would be in favor of a national primary. Let's just vote. Is there any other country that has serial primaries like we do. Let's discuss the issues and vote. I know some of the small states would argue against it because they would lose influence. Candidates would only appear in the large states where the large media markets are. Elections are a cottage industry in some states. But why shouldn't they? Why should N.H. have as much influence as New York?"

I tried to get him to talk about the difference between general election electorates and nomination electorates, but he never did (not in the whole interview) acknowledge any difference. I asked him if he knew what he was getting into in Iowa with its caucuses and its special electorates.

"We knw what we were getting into. But we thought we could get our

issues across. As it turned out, the media ran the race. And they never focused on the issues. It was always some joke Jackson told or who wore what color suit to distinguish himself from the others or looked tired, who sat erect and who slouched, or who wore what shoes that the media focussed on. Is that any way to elect a President and leader of the free world for goodness sakes? What about the issues? You never read about the issues. For the media, everything has to be visual. They want table pounding and hand waving. Issues aren't visual enough. Now, I'll defend the media too. There were eight of us in the race, and so it was hard for them to sort out our views. With three people in the race, they can do that much easier. The other day the Washington Post ran a full page comparing the three men on the issues. You could go right down the page, check across, compare the three on each issue and decide which one you agreed with the most. You couldn't do that with eight of us--or even six of us. But even when you try to make the issues visual, they won't report the issues. When I was down in Pine Bluff, Arkansas at the end of the campaign talking about defense, about ^{my} military experience compared to Hart's lack of military --that isn't all that counts, but it counts for something-- experience / there was a man who had an old P-17 fighter, in great shape. I took it up to fly it and when I did the media strated grinding away. There I was flying this plane on the evening news, but nothing about defense. The next day the same thing. I made a speech criticizing Gary Hart's ideas on defense. I said he would wreck our national defense, with those kooky ideas of his. I stood in front of a line of tanks to help make the issue visual. Then I drove one of the tanks. There I was in pictures all over the country

driving the tank, peeking out from under the helmet, and not one word about my views on defense. The media only wanted the visual stuff. I don't like it, but I suppose it will ever be thus."

"I've told the media people that all you want is a fight. If there is no fight, you will create one. Otherwise it's not news. The boy who gets up, gets on the bus and goes to school every day and gets on the bus and comes home every night is not news. It has ever been thus." He used the phrase "It has ever been thus" a number of times--a kind of resignation in the face of certain unwelcome, unhelpful political realities.

In all this, there was no sense that he sees some people as "his people" and some not--except the idea of the moderates. In other words, he didn't say 'we stayed out of Iowa because caucus goers are liberal and are not our types". No, we went into Iowa and we couldn't get our message across because we had the issues and the media wasn't interested.

I asked him who, in retrospect his strongest supporters were. As usual, it was a question he had trouble with. (It must be the third or fourth time I've tried!) "They were people who believed as I did on the issues--moderates. They were people who would say, we compared your position to Mondale's on such and such an issue and we agree with you." Here there was the issue component, added to the across the board idea. John sees his campaign as a campaign conducted on the issues. The people who shared his view on the issues didn't participate and the media (via momentum and concentration on visuals or fights) kept the issues from getting through. He struggled to get through on the issues and could not. Maybe he would agree that his issues, while right, may not have been exciting enough.

I asked him if he ever thought of getting out of Iowa entirely... "I questioned it, but I was usually a party of one. All of my advisers told me that we had to run in the early states if we were to be taken seriously. Several times I questioned whether we couldn't just start with the larger states, with a representative group of states. Why should we allow two small states to have such an influence, I asked. But I didn't push it. I had made the decision to run campaigns in all 50 states. We had more districts covered in Illinois than Mondale. We had every district ^{more} covered in Pennsylvania, than the others--every one except a very few. We were in this for the long haul. Gary took all his resources and put them into Iowa and N.H. He paid no attention to any other states. He could shoot crap, throw in his entire bundle. And if everything went his way he would win big. It worked for him. And I give him credit for that. But we had strength in all the states. We raised a lot more money than he did, ^{so that} we could stay in it till the end. But the serial effects of those little states made it impossible to stay in." In discussing this, he doesn't seem to see that the Hart strategy was rational. He sees it more as lucky. It's not like he sees alternative strategies and weighs them. It's almost like he didn't really understand the "serial effects" he now decries. Anyone could have told him that was a characteristic of nominations. But he seems to see it only afterwards. Neither the nature of primary electorates nor the nature of momentum seem to have been understood by him as building blocks for any viable strategy.

As I reconstruct the interview and think about answers I got in other interviews and answers I got in this one, I get the sense that John hasn't grown as a result of the experience. Ed said at lunch. "I don't think he's learned a thing." So I asked him whether he had learned anything from the

campaign that would make him a better senator or change his behavior in the Senate.

"I don't think it would have as much effect on me, because of my background, as it would on some of the other candidates. There's hardly any place in the country that I haven't been--well, there are places, of course, but I've lived in all sections of the country and I've travelled around a great deal. Some of the others have travelled from home to Washington and given a few speeches here and there. But I think I had a lot less to learn about the country than most of the others. If you mean did I learn more about the views of particular people, as a result of meeting the political people in various areas, the answer is yes, I did learn certain people's view in greater detail than before. On the matter of issues, too, my background gave me an advantage over the others. Ohio, as I've said before, contains just about every interest there is in our country. So I was pretty much up to speed on all the issues when I started. For a Congressman from Nebraska a steel mill or a coal mine would be quite a shock. But I'd been exposed to all the diversity our country has to offer. Ohio has everything but a sea port like Seattle and palm trees. Ohio Resources Commissioner has heard me say that so much, he says he's going to plant palm trees in southern Ohio. "Again, he did not learn much. And he expresses a general election--across the board--perspective.

I then took off from the microcosm idea to ask whether his Ohio campaign was a model for his national campaign. Again, nothing new. He started in and seemed to be having trouble with it and I said heard him use Ohio as an example in Iowa in regard to going after the rank and file and

and not leaders. "Yes, we had some of that in this race, with the leaders going one way and the rank and file another." But he seemed less than strongly convinced; and he could not broaden the analysis. Then I asked if he should have used more Ohio people. (It was a bad question. I meant John people who had helped him in Ohio. Ed said / wishes he had had Peter Hart again and maybe Connell.

"There are certainly some staff changes I would make. But not more people from Ohio. I think I would have trusted my own judgment more. It was my campaign. I made all the decisions. But I didn't inject myself into the process as much as I should have. Three or four times during the campaign, I said 'All right, I'm going to take myself off the road for 10 days, come back to Washington and go over and check out the whole organization. Each time, my advisers would say 'You can't do that. We've got 6 house parties in New Hampshire and 4 fund raisers in Iowa. They are going to raise so much money. They've worked so hard to put them together. You can't tell them you aren't coming.' So I went. I never did come back and take charge of the fund raising the way I should have." This was his most explicit admission of failure. Again, it highlighted the money side of things.

Off and on he talked about the convention. At one point I said I still thought he was the only candidate who could beat RR, but we'd never know. He said, "It may turn out to be a brokered convention. I've been watching the other-than-Mondale numbers. Hart plus Jackson plus uncommitted. If they got close to Mondale, you can't tell what might happen. Of course they wouldn't turn to candidates like me who have dropped out. It would be Mondale or Hart. I don't know what they would do for the second spot.

I'm not looking for second spot." (but he had thought about it.)

Later "I'm a delegate. I'll go and support the democratic ticket. There are things I disagree with Mondale about and there are things I disagree with Hart about. I don't believe in promise everything to everybody like Mondale and I don't believe in some of Hart's left wing ideas. So it's not a happy prospect. Especially with all the hoopla and posturing that goes on at the convention. It's funny. There were 28 delegate spots allotted to Senators; and they had trouble filling them. United States Senators, not interested in the convention. If I hadn't been involved the way I was, didn't have a 3M debt and weren't running for reelection, I wouldn't want to be a delegate and I wouldn't go."

His distaste for the convention came out later as he stood in the door saying goodbye. He said "If the convention is cut and dried, I'll go, do my duty and go home early. If it's not settled, then I'll stay." I said "You'll be expected to stand up on the platform and show party unity." He said "I'll stand up there and show party unity!" I said "The media will expect you to--to be visual." He said, "The media runs the convention. The convention is run for the media." Sort of a last shot at the media. He said more, but I can't recall. Anyway, he doesn't understand that the big show of unity comes at the end.

I asked him when he felt most optimistic and when he felt it might not work. "I felt most optimistic when we were having our best success fund raising--when people cared enough to put their money behind us. That's when I felt best--in the summer. I began to have doubts in the late fall and over the holidays. Things weren't coalescing the way I thought they would. I wasn't tasting defeat. But things weren't coming together as I had hoped--organization and fund raising. The money wasn't coming in the way I had expected."

I asked him if being a Senator hurt or helped him. "I think it's a help. You are involved. You have a staff here and sources of information that keep you up to speed on the issues. And if you don't have what you need, you can hire it real quick around here. And you are more likely to read CQ and National Journal. If you read them regularly you don't miss much. On the other hand when you are off campaigning and have to miss votes back here, that bothers you. I never / a vote where I was the key vote. And I flew back for several that I thought were important." Not much new insight there. (I didn't ask my Senate staff question--alas.) But his answer was all "issues".

I asked him whether he thought he should have started earlier. This question seemed to interest him, because he returned to it as we stood in his office before I went over to the door.

First answer: "I didn't decide to run right after Reagan's inauguration the way Walter Mondale did. I wanted to wait to see how Reagan's policies worked out. And if they worked out for the good of the country, I would not have run. But as things went along, I thought his policies were not what the country needed--cutting programs that helped the needy, butchering research. When I saw his policies were not helping the long run future of the country, I decided to run. But it took nearly two years to make that judgment. I don't see how you can judge policies fairly in much less than that. I know it sounds self serving, but I didn't get in it for the glamour and the glory. I got in it because I believe that my policies are in the best interest of the country and Reagan's were not. Mondale didn't wait to see whether Reagan's policies would work. He wanted

up - but not a real person.

the presidency no matter what. He started with the blocs all lined up and the lists of names from his White House days. I thought that we could put together a campaign in 14-15 months, and I still think we could have done it. But we didn't, so that's that."

We went on to other things. But as we stood up he came back, more strongly with the idea that his motives were purer than Mondale's. "I didn't get in the race for the glory. I got in because I believed in principles which I felt were for the greatest good of the country. Mondale got in so early that it seems to me crass or cynical or all of the above. He got in it for reasons of personal advancement. He didn't want to see what would happen to the country. He said "I'm going to run no matter what." I know this sounds self serving, but I waited because I wanted what was best for the country. Because I got in it for reasons of principle, I didn't want to get out. Getting out has been a trauma. And the 3M debt is an even bigger trauma."

I asked him if Baker or Cranston or others had talked to him about their common experience. He said yes. I asked "seriously or jokingly." He said "Just about our shared experience, that's all."

He talked at some length re his relationship with Joy Baker (they both like chocolate and they give each other candy bars--on Moscow trip--he to her in gallery, etc.) and how he thinks Howard isn't going to run for President; but that he thinks Howard wants people to think he will.

Said, somewhere in the 'starting too late' question that, Mondale started earlier than anyone except Carter. "If you have to start that early, it means the best people will not run for the Presidency." Again, the notion of the best people which he expressed earlier re. Congress not attracting them.

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I asked him about the media interpretation that he was more himself after Iowa, and more in command of his own destiny. (I asked him that after he said he should have intervened more.) He said no. "That was the media's view. But it was wrong. They thought that after Iowa I would be down in the dumps, and when I wasn't, when I showed that Iowa wasn't the end of the world they interpreted it as a change. Again, they set an expectation and they wrote the story to fit their expectation. I suppose they thought that if they had been in my shoes they would have been downhearted and when they saw me come in and take charge, they decided it must be the new John Glenn! But I was just the same John Glenn I'd always been."

We talked about Kennedy's withdrawal again, but nothing revealing. "The media has to put everything in a confrontational mode. So when Kennedy dropped out, I was elevated to second place. Then they started comparing my organization with Mondale's and saying 'Look how poorly Glenn's organization is compared to Mondale.'" Of course it was. I told them it was. I had just started organizing. He had been at it for 2 years. But the press has to have something to write about."

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I asked him when he very first thought seriously about running for President. He insisted it was after 1980 victory. "As far as public service and the Senate are concerned, I had been interested in that all my life. But I didn't think about the presidency till after the 1980 election. Germond and Witcover and some others began to write that it was a possibility. There had been talk before, but I never took it seriously. The first time I thought seriously about it enough so that I wouldn't make Shermanesque statements was after my victory in Ohio."

There may be some self serving self delusion in John. But there's no artifice or demagoguery in him. Ed talked about his refusal to exploit homosexual issue in the South. Asked to do so and given material by others to use (Nunn) but refused. Ed says he held to his position at great cost. It cost him NOW support. They wanted to endorse someone other than WM. All Glenn's positions were OK except that one.

Re media desire for news. "I got into an argument with Dan Rather during an interview in New Hampshire. He asked me if I was going to drop out of the race if I didn't finish second there. I said I'm not going to answer that question. Then he tried asking me the same question in about 3 different ways. Each time, I said 'I'm not going to answer that question. He was looking for a scoop that would put him ahead of all his competitors. Finally, he grinned and said 'I get paid to ask these questions'. I said 'I don't get paid to answer such dumb questions.' The last part was cut out of the interview when it was broadcast." (he smiled)

As compared with the last time I was in his office, he was "down", subdued, still in shock I think, but very decent. He never, though, articulated the scope of his defeat except in terms of the debt, which is so tangible that it is a nightmare to him. Yet he never related the debt to any comment about the magnitude of the defeat. He didn't say "We got walloped and won't do that again." No wry jokes (except "45th place") about how bad it was. He never admitted in any way that he might not have been a good candidate. I had wanted to ask him whether he thought maybe the time just wasn't right, that people weren't buying what he was selling. I didn't. But I can't imagine he would take that view. He thinks he had

the message. He has some ideas as to why it didn't get through--the nature of the moderates, the media, the serial nature of contests. But he hasn't really come to grips with why it didn't get through, insofar as it involves him. That's hard for anyone to do, but it may be harder for him to do than others--the patriot who offers himself for the sake of the country and is rejected.

Ed told a story that is relevant. John had a joke he used to lead into criticism of Reagan and the debt. A mailman approaches the porch of a New England house. There's a man and a dog on the porch. Mailman says 'Does your dog bite?' Man says 'no.' Mailman comes up to the step and the dog bites him. Mailman says 'I thought you said your dog didn't bite.' Man says 'But I didn't say this was my dog.' (Idea is Reagan says this isn't my debt.) Well, Greg Schneiders writes an op ed article for Washington Post which is a post mortem on the campaign. In it he uses the story of the mailman and the point he makes is that the message this mailman was carrying was fine, but he was prevented from delivering it. He takes it in to John to OK. Dale Butland, the speech writer sees it and gets angry. He says to John. 'Don't you see who's to blame in this story, It's the mailman. That's you.' John decides against publishing the article. Ed thinks Greg was very subtly putting the blame on John. John didn't see it. When Dale pointed out that it make John look bad, John did not want the story printed. He's not prepared to acknowledge his own failure, except in a vague "it was my campaign" sense and in specific "I should have gotten more involved in organizational matters" sense. Actually, the focus on organization does him a disservice, because it provides a convenient foil and prevents himself from looking at his own candidate weaknesses. Ed said that "There have been some very fair articles

in the Cleveland papers. But the Senator has gotten livid when he sees them. It's as if he doesn't want to see any criticism himself. One problem is that the Cleveland papers are not very good and have not been very good to him." Maybe, in time, he'll get things in perspective, and that perspective will include some criticism of himself as a candidate and he will take that into account in changing his behavior. But not yet. Ed said "The sad part is I don't think he's learned one single thing from the campaign."

At one point, I reminded him of what he had said about being poor at PR and asked him if he felt this hurt him in the campaign. He repeated that "I've never tooted my own horn enough around here." I suggested that he might have learned to toot it some more as a result of his campaign experience. He demurred, saying "I don't know about that." He didn't grasp it as a handle for talking about what he'd learned.

Ed called him "an unmanageable candidate"--and I think maybe it was "unteachable" candidate. I'm not sure if he got better as the campaign went along. Even at the point where the media said he was better, he insisted he was the same John Glenn.

This gets back to the question of whether he is a learner or not. We mentioned the Ohio experience where he did learn and touched base with the Ohio pols between 1974 and 1980. I think what he did there was neutralize them. He did not energize them. He did enough so that they would not be against him. But he never made them for him. Still, he learned.

Ed said "We never operated with a long range plan for his trips. We decided on a week to week basis where he should go. 'We're a few points down in N.H.; let's go there for a couple of days; we're slipping in Iowa; let's go to Iowa this week.'" "That's the way the schedule was made up."

"The Senator would never agree to a single theme." "What happened to 'Old Values New Horizons'?" "Hamilton told us it didn't go over with the focus groups. Old values reminded people too much of the pre-Roosevelt period, and new horizons was too vague. Also, the family didn't like it. Gary Hart had new ideas, which was just about the same as new horizons. Then we had "A future you can believe in," "Believe in the future again" and "Leadership for the future." But we never settled on one."

"Relationships between the Senate issues, staff and the campaign issues staff were never worked out. Bill's idea was that the Senate staff develops and the campaign staff markets. That's all right, but what happens when the need to make policy statements arises on the road? The campaign staff went through four separate policy directions^{ors}. Each one got moved somewhere else in the organization. That didn't help."