

AN INTERVIEW ON WHAT THE CONGRESSIONAL CLASS OF 1974 CAN TEACH US ABOUT POLITICAL CHANGE

HON. RICHARD M. NOLAN

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 12, 2018

Mr. NOLAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today at the request of Mr. John Lawrence. Before this most recent election, Mr. Lawrence wrote a book about what the Congressional Class of 1974 can teach the incoming Congressional Class. As a member of that class myself, I'm sure others will find this interview and the book it's about as interesting as I did.

THE WATERGATE BABIES

(Claire Potter and John Lawrence)

It is less than ninety days until Election Day in the United States, when Democrats hope to achieve one of the biggest sweeps of Congressional seats in recent American history. Many of these Democratic hopefuls are veterans. As longtime political strategist Joe Trippi put it back in March, these are candidates who are new to the electoral arena, people who "served the country without worrying about who's a Democrat and who's a Republican" and just want to "get the damn thing done." And a record-breaking 40% of the Democratic House candidates this primary season are women, some of them veterans as well.

If the Democrats' hopes are fulfilled, will this be unprecedented? Not really. On July 24 2018, we published an excerpt from a book written by historian John Lawrence, former chief of staff for Speaker Nancy Pelosi. In *The Class of '74: Congress after Watergate and the Roots of Partisanship* (Johns Hopkins, 2018), Lawrence tracks this earlier revolution, its achievements, and its flaws.

John sat down to talk to us about the book this week, and its implications for our current political situation.

Claire Potter: John, thanks for joining us at Public Seminar. You were trained as a professional historian, and then went into politics, a career path that, as you noted in this essay, mystified your advisors at Berkeley. First, I want to ask you: how did a Ph.D. in history prepare you for a career that eventually led you to becoming Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's chief of staff?

John Lawrence: Many of the people working on Capitol Hill in key policy and management roles have legal training or campaign experience. Both are valuable, but don't train people to contextualize current issues into a broader narrative. Training in history provided that skill, particularly research methodology and, perhaps most significantly, writing skills. Politics is often a very presentist business. While attorneys certainly are aware of judicial and legal precedents, historians have the ability to view contemporary debates through a unique prism that helps explain the evolution and nature of complex issues.

CP: OK, now I want to turn that question around. How did your work in politics support the writing of *The Class of '74*? What did you bring to writing this book that a scholar who has not spent 38 years working in the House of Representatives would not have?

JL: Politics is an intensely personal business. Working in Congress for nearly four decades enabled me to develop close relationships with dozens of members, staff, reporters and others whose decisions shape the making of public policy and the design of political strategies and campaigns. These connections enabled me to gather material for

The Class of '74 that, I have no doubt, would have been impossible for a researcher without my experience.

Many who write about Congress without this personal connection often miss the nuances of why legislators make certain decisions because motivations can be tied to personal relationships and other factors that are difficult to quantify. I think this is why political scientists, in particular, who frequently eschew the narrative in favor of data analysis of voting patterns, often miss much of what really explains how Congress, and politics more broadly, works.

CP: Thanks. Now let's get to the book prior to 1974, the mood in Congress was changing, and not just because of Watergate. Reflecting some of the disdain for authority that was moving politics in the street, younger Representatives were pushing back against the way the institution ran. What were the issues?

JL: Certainly, the most significant stimulus to the changing mood in Congress was Vietnam. The war was important on many levels: the reassertion of congressional prerogatives against the Imperial Presidency that developed and promoted the war; the rise in the use of oversight to challenge official accounts of the status of the war; the resistance to the draft; the emergence of an investigative, aggressive journalism that often worked collaboratively with dissidents in Congress.

There were other issues that raised passionate concerns among newer members of Congress too: civil rights, women's equality, the environment, energy policy, consumer protection, among them. Within Congress, reformers also resented the structure of the institution. Power was lodged largely in autonomous chairmen who did not need to be responsive to the views of the broader membership because their chairmanships were virtually guaranteed by the seniority system—instituted after the 1910 revolt against Speaker Joseph Cannon. Increasingly in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it became evident to the younger reformers that it was essential to challenge the awarding of chairmanships on the basis of duration of service alone. If chairmen did not have to be responsive to the broader membership, then the issues that the younger, more progressive, cohort wished to elevate could be (and often were) suppressed by more conservative chairs.

CP: In 1974, in a far bigger sweep than was anticipated, 76 Democrats were elected to the House, 49 replacing Republican incumbents. What set the stage for this colossal shift in power?

JL: Longstanding disapproval of the Vietnam policy played a significant role in encouraging reformers to run and in their winning. So, too, did the recent oil embargo which had elevated public anxiety and accentuated the need for a national energy policy. By 1974, Watergate, with all of its turmoil within the Executive Branch and Congress, as well, helped create a demand for reform of what was viewed as a corrupt White House. Certainly, the revelation of the Nixon tapes and Nixon's subsequent resignation complicated the re-election of many loyalists who had stood by the President as the crisis deepened.

President Ford's pardon of Nixon, coming just weeks before the election, further cemented the idea that corruption was rampant in Washington and a housecleaning was in order. Lastly, the continuing poor economy, and the ineffectual response of the Ford Administration—the Whip Inflation Now campaign—created a toxic political environment for many Republicans: corruption, recession, energy disruptions and price hikes. The climate was perfect for new, opti-

mistic, earnest young candidates like the Class of '74.

CP: Sounds like a perfect political storm. Vietnam was obviously huge, as was inflation that would soon push the American economy into a real crisis. What were the other concerns these "Watergate babies" had in common—and what policy problems divided them?

JL: The issues around which the Class of '74 were most united were the internal reforms that disseminated power in Congress. The changes they made, effectuated in December, 1974, gave heightened power to the Caucus and strengthened the role of subcommittees on which freshmen and other reformers enjoyed disproportionate strength, enabling them to raise and promote issues. These changes benefitted all new members by increasing their participatory rights, regardless of their ideology or view on specific issues.

When the freshmen were faced with policy questions where their constituents had particular interests, or where constituents had strongly held views—issues like abortion, school busing, labor law and energy—the unanimity within the freshmen caucus proved somewhat more difficult to maintain. However, it should be noted that overall, the freshmen not only voted with significant consistency but they were also among the most loyal to the Democratic leadership's positions.

CP: 1974 was also, in some ways, the twilight of Republican liberalism: you point out in the book that while many Republicans shared the majority's "goal of democratizing House procedures," their "objectives were quite different." Can you describe these differences?

JL: Newer members in both parties stood to gain from changes that extended greater participation to those with less seniority. And Republicans in general were supportive of reforms that not only benefitted the minority (for example, the ability to hire more staff on committees) but members in general. Whereas Democratic freshmen used expanded rights to raise issues and offer amendments in committee and on the floor to promote more progressive ideas, Republicans increasingly became skilled at exploiting the more open rules to force less secure Democrats into casting controversial votes that could render them vulnerable to political challenge.

Similarly, Republicans very successfully learned to utilize the coverage of committee and floor proceedings by television cameras to send messages to supporters and to raise issues that favored GOP policies. When Democrats rescinded some reforms that constrained the ability of Republicans to exploit divisive issues, strategists like Newt Gingrich were able to make a case against the majority for being heavy-handed and unfair, which they cited as justifying a change in control of the House.

CP: By the late 1970s, the political terrain in the United States was quite different: what changed in the 1970s, and how did that set the stage for the polarized politics of the 21st century?

JL: The signs of a more polarized politics were developing quite markedly in the mid-to-late 1970s, although many date the emergence of a revitalized conservatism to the 1980 and the Reagan Era. Many of the key changes were driven by demographics, especially the movement of many conservative white voters from the Northeast and Midwest to the border and southern states in search of jobs. Reaction to the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam and student protests and the whole litany of "sex, drugs and rock-and-roll" cultural divisions all

helped fuel a revitalization of the long-dormant Republican Party in the South, especially after the George Wallace campaign of 1968 convinced many conservatives to bolt from the Democratic Party.

The renewal of southern Republicans was also aided by a highly politicized evangelicism, and cultural issues proved crucial to the success of this strategy. Changes in federal laws made it easier for a significant expansion of independent campaign fundraising and grassroots mobilization based around single issues rather than being subject to party leaders. The election of many conservative Republicans in the South in the late 1970s and early 1980s deprived Democrats of the security of an invincible majority, and the heightened competition for majority control drove money, activism and legislative strategy into increasingly partisan directions.

While the reforms of 1974 did not “cause” partisanship, the availability to raise and promote divisive issues that was permitted by a more open and participatory Congress inadvertently provided Republican with greater opportunities than they would have enjoyed under a more closed system.

CP: Finally, John, we have an election in less than three months, one in which the House seems to be, once again, up for grabs. A key theme driving this reversal is the Trump presidency. Some commenters see a possible Democratic House as a check on the Trump policies that Congressional Republicans have mostly supported; others talk about the possibility of the new majority moving forward on impeachment.

Are we back in 1974?

JL: The idea of a Democratic House as a check on the Trump agenda seems to me to have the most salience. Even though the President would retain significant authority through the use of executive orders and other presidential powers, a Democratic House would check legislative attacks on key Democratic policies like the Affordable Care Act, the Clean Air Act and the Endangered Species Act.

Of course, a Republican Senate would still enable Trump to appoint people of his choosing to the federal courts and executive agencies, but a Democratic House would have the power of oversight and subpoenas to investigate possible misuses of power that today go unexamined. I suspect there would be strong resistance in a Democratic majority to moving ahead with impeachment: here are no prospects for success in the Senate. More importantly, there would be a clear perception in this new freshman class that the American people had voted for Democrats in order to pursue other policies in the area of economics, children, the environment, energy and corruption in government.

However, should Special Prosecutor Mueller ultimately recommend that Congress look into presidential abuses of authority, it would be very difficult to dampen the demands for an impeachment inquiry.

CP: What advice would the Class of 1974 have for today's Democratic party?

JL: If you asked those in the Class who were most successful during their careers, I think they would likely advise newcomers to learn how the institution works, develop close relations with colleagues, find areas of policy on which they would like to focus (rather than be a gadfly with something to say on every issue.) Newcomers will want to pay attention to building and strengthening your networks with constituents, without whom you have no power to accomplish your goals.

As I say in my book, “before you save the world, you have to save your seat.” I also think that, at least some would advise the freshmen of 2019 not to spend a lot of time

looking over their shoulders trying to avoid controversial positions that some voters might dislike. Many in the Class of '74 were surprised to have won in the first place, and they were determined to make their impact as swiftly and decisively as possible because they did not expect to remain in Congress very long.

So, I think the message would be, “Don't spend a lot of time trying to figure out if an issue or a vote plays positively or negatively. Do what you think is right, explain your position frankly to your constituents, and you'll be surprised how often they support your decision.”

HONORING JIM KITTLE

HON. LUKE MESSER

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 12, 2018

Mr. MESSER. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize a longtime friend and colleague, Jim Kittle, for his service to our state.

Jim is an institution in Indiana and is widely regarded as one of the state's top political minds. Jim was the “founding father” of the political movement that first elected Mitch Daniels and revolutionized our state. He's also an extraordinarily successfully businessman and has grown Kittle's Furniture into one of the largest furniture companies in the country. There's no doubt that I wouldn't be where I am today without Jim's counsel and help every step of the way.

I've known Jim for more than two decades. During that time, he has become one of my closest and most trusted friends in politics and life. He calls me his brother, and I think of him as a father.

I want to thank Jim for his friendship and loyalty to me over all these years. I wish him continued success in all that God has planned for his family.

CABEZA DE VACA: EXPLORER OF THE LONE STAR STATE

HON. TED POE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 12, 2018

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, in November of 1528, Conquistador Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and his crew of 90 Spaniards crashed on Galveston Island. He was the first European to set foot on the land that would become the Lone Star State and is considered to have undertaken one of the most remarkable journeys in the history of American exploration.

From 1528 to 1532, the crew steadily died off from illness, accidents, and attacks until only Cabeza de Vaca and three others remained. During those four years, Cabeza de Vaca became a merchant, and traded sea shells and “beads of sea” (though now called pearls) for bison skins and red ochre. He also gained a reputation as a healer, which gave him freedom to travel between different tribes.

The Karankawa Indians, a group of Coahuiltecan known to be cannibals, enslaved these men until, in September of 1534, the four men snuck away from the Karankawas and fled south towards the Rio

Grande River. The following spring, they finally crossed the Rio Grande and made it to Mexico. To avoid hostile tribes, the men turned west towards the Pacific and crossed northern Mexico.

Cabeza de Vaca and his companions eventually arrived in Mexico City in 1536.

They had traveled nearly 2400 miles over eight years in Texas and the Mexican borderlands.

Cabeza de Vaca spent years interacting with Native Americans and learning their language. This allowed him to write and publish in 1542 the first book about Texas, the *Relación*, which contained information about the region's geography, landscape, and Coahuiltecan tribes. This account of his journey inspired other conquistadors and Spaniards to cotne and explore Texas.

And that's just the way it is.

HONORING EARL A. POWELL III, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

HON. RODNEY P. FRELINGHUYSEN

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 12, 2018

Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Earl “Rusty” Powell III, on the occasion of his retirement, after 26 years as director of the National Gallery of Art, located in Washington, D.C.

Rusty is a graduate of Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts. After graduating with degrees in art history and European history, Rusty served three years of active duty as an officer with the United States Navy, including a tour in Vietnam before joining the reserves. After his service, Rusty continued his education at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts earning both his masters and doctorate degrees in art history. Prior to his directorship at the National Gallery, Rusty served as a professor of art history at the University of Texas and was director of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

In 1992, Rusty was named director of the National Gallery of Art. During his tenure, the Gallery has undergone major renovations including the creation of the Sculpture Garden and the expansion and complete renovation of the East Wing. In addition to the growth of the physical structure, the National Gallery's collection has continued to grow while increasing recognition for underrepresented and living artists. Rusty focused on utilizing the permanent collection in new ways rather than large loan exhibits.

In addition to his work at the National Gallery, Rusty serves as the chairman of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and a trustee of the American Federation of the Arts, the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Norton Simon Museum, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the White House Historical Association. He is a member of numerous arts organizations, including the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Academy Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences, the American Philosophical Society, and the Committee for the Preservation of the White House, among others. Rusty's awards include the Chevalier