

8-664

"WHAT MAKES A GOOD CONGRESSMAN?"
(Statement of Carl Albert, M.C.)

What makes a good Congressman? First, I would like to define "good" as meaning "effective" and limit my comments in this instance to the Members of the House of Representatives.

If a firm set of qualifications were drawn, and representatives elected accordingly, we might yet discover that we have not necessarily or in every case, elected an effective Congressman. The basic qualities of intelligence, character, ability, are necessary to success, of course, but the total effectiveness of a Congressman turns most likely on the combination of talents and appropriateness of response made by each individual to each situation. Judgment - possibly more than any other personal trait - presages success in the legislative body as it does elsewhere.

This must be coupled with keen interest in public service and a desire to make important contributions to the public welfare. The harassments and frustrations of elective legislative service are such that unless a person has the necessary judgment, he is certain to fall by the wayside and unless he has the necessary desire he will surely abandon the call.

If in addition he has an amiable nature, the balance to avoid extravagant positions and emotional tides, the courage to stand up under the conflicts between the interests of his District, his Party, the country as a whole, the persuasions of other members and powerful lobbies, his service in the House should be outstanding.

Judged from the standpoint of the tremendous strengths and versatilities required, it is amazing how many men and women are elected who have these qualities and deserve the appellation "a good congressman". I have served, and am serving with scores of them every day.

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Those qualities and abilities which make for distinction in the House, are not very different from those which succeed in any other undertaking which involves human beings and human problems. Many members of Congress, in fact, have already had successful careers in business, in the professions, in other legislative bodies.

Any definitive remarks about the characteristics of a good congressman must be made in the context of the environment in which he must function. The House of Representatives is an aggregation of strong and vigorous forces, having different goals, antagonistic ideas, selfish purposes, centered about fluctuating and occasionally uncertain party policies, and propelled by personal, political, and sometimes patriotic motives.

The House is first of all a collective body in which the individual is not the lodestone -- it is "the House", its history, its importance, its enormous responsibilities, that commands the imagination and to a large *influences*

extent the action and reaction of its members. It is constantly changing -- in its composition, its tenor and mood, in its deliberations which run the gamut of business from the sublime to the ridiculous. It has members both mediocre and stellar, men of power and conviction, men nondescript and ineffectual. A successful congressman must be able to handle himself in the tumult of a body sometimes compassionate and chivalrous, sometimes cruel and ruthless. A body having a large membership, in excess of 400 members, calls for a different sort of man and manner than, for example, the smaller, more deliberative United States Senate. When a member of the House rises to address his colleagues, he must be intelligent and informed enough to command attention to his argument, poised enough to hold his own in debate, cool enough to be aggressive without being angry, a good enough parliamentarian not to be taken unawares.

To some extent he must make his way on the reputation that he brings with him, together with the plus or minus of his performance in the House. Common sense, restraint, a sense of fitness, tact, energy and industry, sound principles and integrity, all of these are desirable traits in a congressman as they are in any other professional or business man. If in addition, he has an amiable nature, the balance to avoid extravagant positions and emotional tides, the courage to stand up under the inevitable conflicts between the interests of his District, his Party, the country as a whole, the persuasions of other members and powerful lobbies, he should be not only an outstanding congressman, but a paragon.

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