



AT OUR INVITATION, FOUR ALUMNI CONGRESSMEN
GATHER FOR DINNER AND SOME SURPRISINGLY
CANDID CONVERSATION.

ON THE DOCKET: PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS,
PARTISAN BICKERING, AND WHY IN THE WORLD
THEY PUT UP WITH THE MADNESS OF CAPITOL HILL.

ON THE MENU: LOTS OF CALAMARI.

THE DARTMOUTH CAUCUS

BY JAKE TAPPER '91

THE SCENE IS THE MONACLE, A PRICEY, SENATE-SIDE HILL EATERY adorned with photos of politicians. Hanover's own congressman, Rep. **CHARLIE BASS '74**, is the first to arrive. He is short, balding and talkative. He orders a glass of red wine and a calamari appetizer. A moderate Republican first elected in 1994, he comes from a family of politicians. His father, Perkins, was a '34 and preceded him as the representative from New Hampshire's 2nd District. His grandfather was once governor of New Hampshire.

Rep. **ROB PORTMAN '78** arrives next. An Ohio Republican, Portman's congressional seat is one of the safest in the country—he won his 1998 election with 76 percent of the vote. Trim and earnest, Portman is the kind of guy you might rap with over a beer at one of the older fraternities on campus. As a House leader in the fight against drug abuse, he's particularly sensitive to the alcohol issues that dictate so much of the current campus student life brouhaha. He orders a salad, tuna and one—and only one—Sam Adams.

The lone Democrat in our caucus, **MICHAEL CAPUANO '73**, soon ambles in. He also orders the calamari, and a beer. Stocky and feisty, Capuano felled former Boston mayor Ray Flynn and eight others in an expensive 1998 primary battle for the district formerly served by Tip O'Neill and John F. Kennedy. A former mayor of Somerville, Massachusetts, Capuano has been frustrated and annoyed with D.C. partisanship. Still, he's a political animal—with the eyes of an akita—and he clearly relishes the fight.

Last to arrive is Capuano's fellow congressional freshman, Rep. **DON SHERWOOD '63**, a Republican from Pennsylvania. Silver-haired and bespectacled, a gruff soldier's bark just beneath his business polish, "Landslide" Sherwood won his 1998 election by only 515 votes. Sherwood's seat has been targeted by the Democrats this year, though the car dealer and horse breeder doesn't seem too concerned. He never planned on a career in office, but now that he's here he's having one hell of a time. He asks for crab cakes and a glass of red wine.

Four men, four distinct paths to the Capitol, four disparate ways of looking at politics, life and the world. They have little in common but Dartmouth, which is where the conversation soon led.

DAM: You mentioned that the Dartmouth Plan allowed you to get involved in politics. How?

PORTMAN: I was a five-year grad and took all these wonderful opportunities to take time off. When I was a sophomore I left to work for my congressman, Bill Gradison, who I replaced some 20 years later. Gradison ended up endorsing me. Between the time when I was a sophomore at Dartmouth and when I

Dartmouth's Capitol Hill gang includes (from left) Representatives Sherwood, Capuano, Bass and Portman (far right), photographed with host Jake Tapper on November 9, 1999, in Washington, D.C. Republican Senators Slade Gorton '49 (Washington) and Peter Fitzgerald '82 (Illinois) declined to attend.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PILAR VERGARA

ILLUSTRATION BY PETER HOEY



actually ran—I was not like Bill Clinton thinking I wanted to be a congressman, much less a president—I did a lot of other things. But working for Gradison did convince me that this could be a satisfying career. Two other things were formative. When I was at Dartmouth, there wasn't a student association. There was a freshman council and interdorm council, and I was on both. It certainly wasn't like being in Congress, but it was influential. The other thing was I spent a lot of time at Ledyard. I led two canoe trips to the sea, and I did a six-month kayaking trip on the Rio Grande. I came straight from the House gym tonight, where I kayak in the pool. And that's only because I was introduced to kayaking at Dartmouth by former Olympic coach Jay Evans. I was just in my kayak in the House pool, practicing my rolls. I've even tried to get a couple other congressmen interested.

DAM: Any luck?

PORTMAN: Uhh...no. But we've had some fun capsizing.

DAM: Were you a gov't major?

PORTMAN: I was, and after about a year I decided that the government department at Dartmouth was not really with it. [Laughs] It seems to me they were not really conversant with what was going on in Washington or politics generally. It was more

CAPUANO: What about me?

DAM: Dartmouth?

CAPUANO: I recall some of it. [Laughs] I didn't do any politics when I was there. Didn't take a single government course, didn't take a poly sci course, none of it.

BASS: What was your major?

CAPUANO: Psychology, because it had the least number of requirements. It gave me the freedom to do whatever I wanted to do—which I did.

BASS: Did you live on campus all four years?

CAPUANO: Mass Hall, the whole time. I kept my dorm room all the time. I had a good place, right in the middle of campus.

DAM: Were you in a fraternity?

CAPUANO: No, I never joined a frat.

BASS: That's typical of our time; I didn't either.

PORTMAN: I didn't, either.

CAPUANO: You're kidding, right?

BASS: I was invited to join Psi U, and I never did. It just wasn't the thing to do.

DAM (to Capuano): You represent, arguably, the most liberal district in the most liberal state. Were your politics the same in college?

"THIS IS THE BEST JOB I'VE EVER HAD AND THE WORST JOB I'VE EVER HAD. IT'S LIKE A ROLLER COASTER. THE BEST PART IS THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE, TO GET THINGS DONE." —ROB PORTMAN '78

CAPUANO: After college, I went to law school for a few weeks and decided it wasn't for me. I left, got a job and enough money to get myself down to Atlanta, which is where all my college buddies had gone. Stayed there for about six months. Realized that my dad wasn't sending me a check. It was fun, but it wasn't going anywhere. So I went back to Boston College Law School. One thing led to another, and I ended up running for office from Somerville. And got elected. That got me going.

PORTMAN: Did you keep practicing law?

CAPUANO: Within a few months of getting elected, a job opened up in the statehouse with a guy I'd worked with when I was in law school. I had done some work-study, some volunteering, and I took an independent study economic course, all on taxes. And the guy who was legal counsel on the taxation committee decided to go on and do bigger and better things. So I got his job. And I worked there for like seven years. And I got the political bug and it just never left.

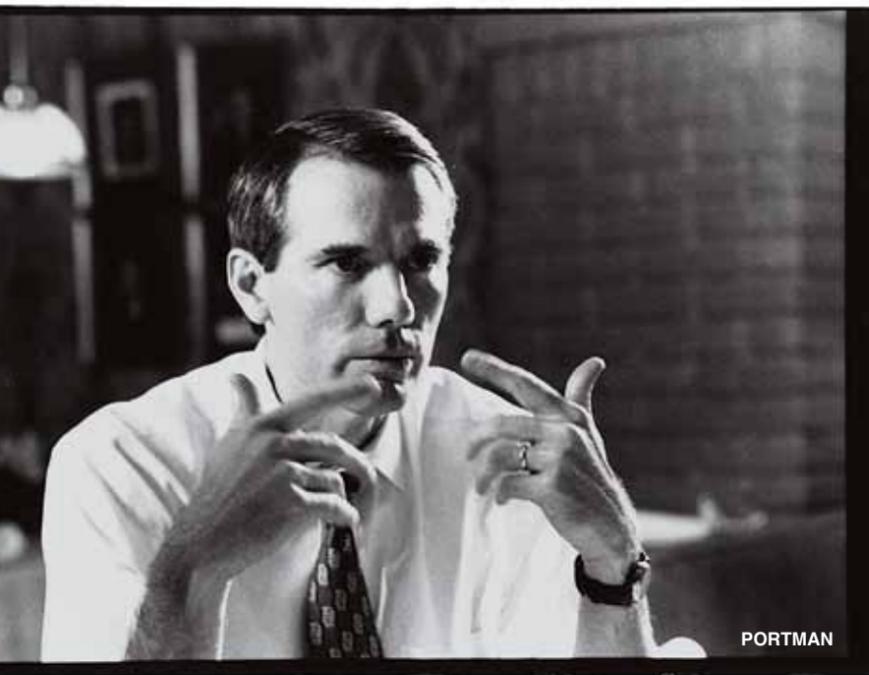
PORTMAN: We should get you on Ways & Means.

PORTMAN: Didn't your grandfather...?

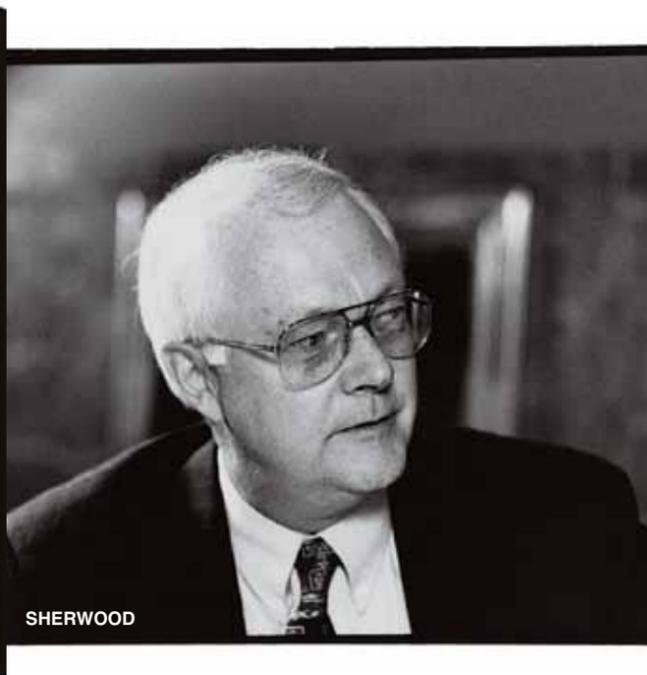
BASS: My grandfather went to Harvard. We don't talk about that. But his papers are at Dartmouth. When I applied for admission, I had these essays that, if you read them today, they'd just make your stomach turn. I went through this long interview with Chamberlain and finally he said, for the last question of the interview, "Do you have any questions that you want to ask me?" I'd rehearsed before, and I said, "Yes, Mr. Chamberlain. What characteristic of a student do you think is most critical to get into Dartmouth?" And he said, "The picture." [Laughs] Anyway, I got in, and I majored in French.

DAM: Did you have French professor John Rassias?

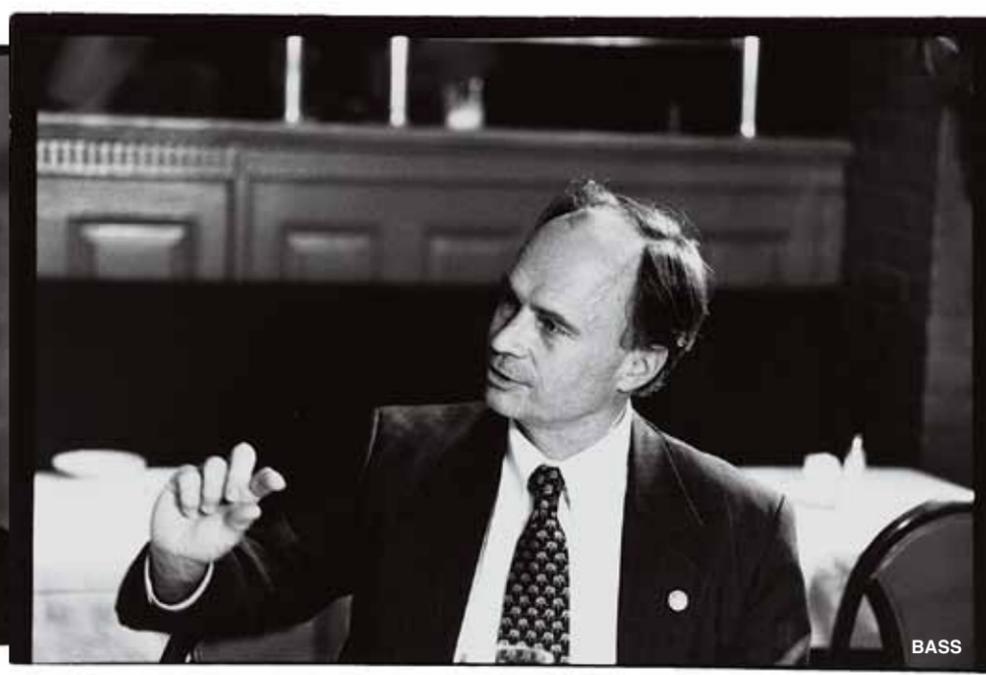
BASS: No. I had some French teacher with a heavy, heavy German accent. You could hardly understand her English, let alone her French.... At the beginning of my junior year, I decided that French was just not going to get me anywhere, so I decided to major in government, which meant that I had to take three government classes each term. It was strenuous, to say the least. So



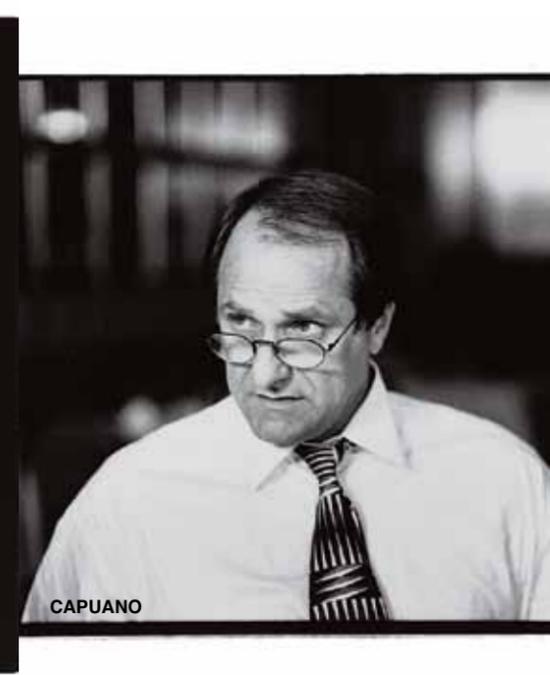
PORTMAN



SHERWOOD



BASS



CAPUANO

of a theoretical approach. If I were there today, I think the Rockefeller Center would be great. But at that time it was more history and theory than politics. So I became a history major. That was too narrow for me, so I became a study-of-mankind major. Just kept getting broader and broader.

BASS: And you wound up in "Steam Engines." And, what was the other [class] they used to have?

PORTMAN: "Rocks II."

CAPUANO: And "Cowboys and Indians." Jim Wright's class.

DAM (to Capuano): What about you, Congressman?

CAPUANO: I didn't have any politics in Hanover. My freshman year was the year of the Cambodian invasion. And I was particularly happy that they cancelled classes in the third semester.

BASS: You were there with [former College president] John Sloan Dickey when they took over Parkhurst!

CAPUANO: That was the year before I came. I got there in the fall of '69. They had done that in the spring. In the spring of '70, Nixon invaded Cambodia and half the colleges in the country closed down, to my great happiness.

DAM: So how did you end up as the mayor of Somerville?

CAPUANO: You wouldn't like me on Ways & Means. [Laughs] I believe in progressive taxation, sorry to tell you.

PORTMAN: That's what we've got right now.

DAM (to Bass): And you? With Dartmouth?

BASS: I got into Dartmouth early decision. My brother was at Dartmouth and my other brother had graduated in 1963. My father went to Dartmouth and my great-grandfather went to Dartmouth, class of, like, 1852. The story is that Eddie Chamberlain, who was the director of admissions, was in the same class as my father.

I graduated in 1974, and went straight to the gallows, to [then-Republican Congressman] Bill Cohen's campaign in Maine, his second campaign. As a field rep, which is another word for driver. Right after Watergate. God, it was awful.

DAM (to Sherwood): If there's any way that Dartmouth changed your life and made you want to enter politics, sharing that is smiled upon.

BASS: Can I just make one observation? When I arrived at Dartmouth, it was almost like arriving after a volcano had occurred and the dust had all settled but the rocks were stirred up there. John Sloan Dickey...



SHERWOOD: God bless him.

BASS: ...had retired. He had failed to deal with the takeover at Parkhurst Hall effectively. He was ignominiously carried out and dumped on the street, and it just sort of broke him. It was a very unsettled campus. Everybody wanted to demonstrate for everything. Everybody thought the United States was on the way out. Seriously. It almost felt like anarchy was about to take hold. It was very unsettling. And you never joined a fraternity.

SHERWOOD: Me either.

PORTMAN: No kidding!

DAM (to Bass): *So you were there during the battle over coeducation?*

BASS: I sat in the Bema the day before graduation, and the first woman student was graduating with my class.

CAPUANO: No, no. Not true.

BASS: You had a transfer in your class.

CAPUANO: Yeah, but she was the first woman to graduate from Dartmouth.

BASS: Yeah, but we had a real student graduate, not a transfer.

CAPUANO: There was no choice but to be a transfer.

BASS: Anyway, she made a speech, and you, know, there was grumbling going on, and she said, "You know, the next time we see each other it will be at our 25th reunion in 1999." And everybody laughed.

DAM (to Sherwood): *Your turn. What was your major?*

SHERWOOD: Economics. I might have majored in geology but

PORTMAN: The reason I didn't go to the White House for that particular occasion was that I had nothing positive to say about what was being announced, which was the implementation of the Drug-Free Workplace Act, which I had written. They were maybe a year late in implementing it. And there were community coalitions around the country that were dying for help and not getting it because the administration was dragging its feet and didn't do what they had to do to implement it. So it was a little hard for me to get up the energy to go down to the White House—impeachment or not—and be a potted plant. One of the papers said I also felt uncomfortable going because it was in the middle of the impeachment process, but that really wasn't the reason. During the impeachment proceedings, I worked with the administration. I'm very comfortable working with Democrats. I do it a lot—even though my district is very Republican—because I want to get stuff done. [During the impeachment] I got a lot of very strong views from my constituents. And it was overwhelming that people were not just disappointed in the president, but they felt that there ought to be consequences for it. I ended up voting against [the fourth article of] impeachment. I thought it went too far. But I did vote for the other articles. I didn't do so happily. It was a very tough time. [To Capuano] This is before you got here, I guess.

CAPUANO: Thank God!

DAM: *Why do you say that?*

CAPUANO: It was clearly a partisan vote. [To Portman] You guys knew he wasn't going to get impeached. You dragged it out too long. You made a big mistake, politically. For me, it was just

boring. For most of the country it was boring.

PORTMAN: Politically, you're probably right... A lot of things should have been different. The White House should have been more forthcoming on documents they eventually had to give up. [independent counsel Ken] Starr should have expedited it.

BASS: You know, impeachment has just passed out of my life. There hasn't been a question about impeachment since the day the vote was taken, and there was a lot of emotion involved. Quite frankly, if I may disagree with Mike here, I think the easier vote was the vote for impeachment.

CAPUANO: I just think the timing was horrendous, not the vote.

BASS: Well, the problem with the timing was that we had to get the vote out of the way before the new Congress took over.

CAPUANO: There was no reason to drag it out from September.

BASS: Part of the reason was that your party was holding things up...

CAPUANO: Why do you think they were doing that? [Laughter]

BASS: I don't want to get into an argument, but for me there were a couple issues between the office of the president and the issue of perjury. I don't hold one's personal life against one, but I thought it was an important decision to make over the long term. And we all recognized—Portman, all of us—that the po-

litical consequences of voting yes or no on impeachment were going to be negative either way. So it came down to how you would live with yourself for 10, 15, 20 years afterwards. What the presidency meant to you. It was the most partisan debate I think I've ever witnessed. There have been some pretty close to it.

CAPUANO: Every day since. It's still going on. You don't drop a boulder in the water and not have ripples. Just about every single vote this year has been based on whether you like the president or you don't like the president.

BASS: Oh, Mike, I don't agree.

CAPUANO: I believe that with all my heart.

SHERWOOD: Because of...

CAPUANO: I'm not saying it's just your side, it's my side as well. And I find it ridiculous. I don't know when it's going to stop.

PORTMAN: Give me an example. Because I don't feel that way.

CAPUANO: Just about every vote we have. I'm not kidding.

PORTMAN: I don't feel that way.

CAPUANO: We had a vote just last week on the [balanced budget agreement] amendment. And the whole argument was Republicans are sticking it to New York because Hillary Clinton's

ing the partisanship. It is a very naturally partisan year because of the election. We have both the House and the Senate in play, and the presidency.

BASS: But I'll tell you something. It doesn't hold a candle to the period with Newt Gingrich in charge.

SHERWOOD: All the time that I was running, they were always sticking a mike in front of me and wanting me to comment about the impeachment process. And I was not in on it, so I wouldn't comment. But they were always telling me how partisan it would be when I got here. And I don't feel that way.

DAM: *You don't?*

SHERWOOD: No. We have some partisan votes, but the press would lead you to believe that Republicans hate Democrats and vice versa. I don't find that. I mean, there are always bomb throwers on either side.

BASS: You know, we have these bipartisan retreats. We had a second one this year, and then we had one two years before. After the first bipartisan retreat, I made a pledge to myself never to do one of these outrageous one-minutes. And I haven't.

[Note: "One-minutes" are the speeches members of Congress can deliver on the floor before and after a legislative session. The speeches, a

"PART OF ME WANTS YOU [REPUBLICANS] TO TAKE THE WHITE HOUSE, BECAUSE IT GUARANTEES THE DEMOCRATS THE HOUSE THREE YEARS FROM NOW.

I'D RATHER HAVE THAT THAN THE TEENY MAJORITY YOU HAVE NOW." —MICHAEL CAPUANO '73

the professors told me that there were no jobs. So I took some history and some political science.

DAM: *Did you ever think that you were going to run for Congress?*

SHERWOOD: Never thought about it. Although I was a sort of politically active Young Republican in college.

PORTMAN: Really?

SHERWOOD: Think of the year.

PORTMAN: Nineteen sixty-three.

SHERWOOD: Goldwater!

BASS: But was it hard to support Goldwater in 1963?

SHERWOOD: Of course it was.

BASS: Goldwater was not popular on campus.

SHERWOOD: No, but he was there. I remember meeting him.

BASS: Really? Did he come to Dartmouth?

SHERWOOD: Yes. And Nelson Rockefeller, class of '30. They were the two big politicians who came when I was there.

DAM: *Let's move on from Hanover to Washington. Congressman Portman, during the impeachment hearings you were invited to a radio address at the White House and you didn't attend because you thought it was inappropriate.*



running for Senate. I'm not arguing...right or wrong. But I'm telling you, it was around the floor, it was around the place like nobody's business.

BASS: Well look, I didn't even know that. [To waiter] I'll have a cup of regular coffee.

SHERWOOD: Me, too.

CAPUANO: I'll have a Budweiser.

PORTMAN: I'll have some strawberries.

SHERWOOD: Instead of the coffee, bring me another red wine. [To Capuano] I don't want you to drink alone.

PORTMAN: I read an article recently about Al Gore bemoan-

product of the cable channel C-SPAN, are frequently harsh, partisan and strictly for the benefit of the cameras.]

CAPUANO: There are guys who do it, though, regularly.

BASS: You got yours on your side, and we got ours on our side. And they throw the bombs back and forth. But I would say for the most part the Congress is pretty professional. I don't think there's a Democrat that I can't say hello to or respect as much as I do any Republican.

DAM (to Sherwood): *You feel that way?*

SHERWOOD: I've got a few people on both sides that I'm not too fond of. But generally...

BASS: Hopefully nobody at this table. [Laughter]



SHERWOOD: There are a lot of friendships across the aisle, but I think you'd have more bipartisan votes on issues if it wasn't that each side was trying to prove who was in charge.

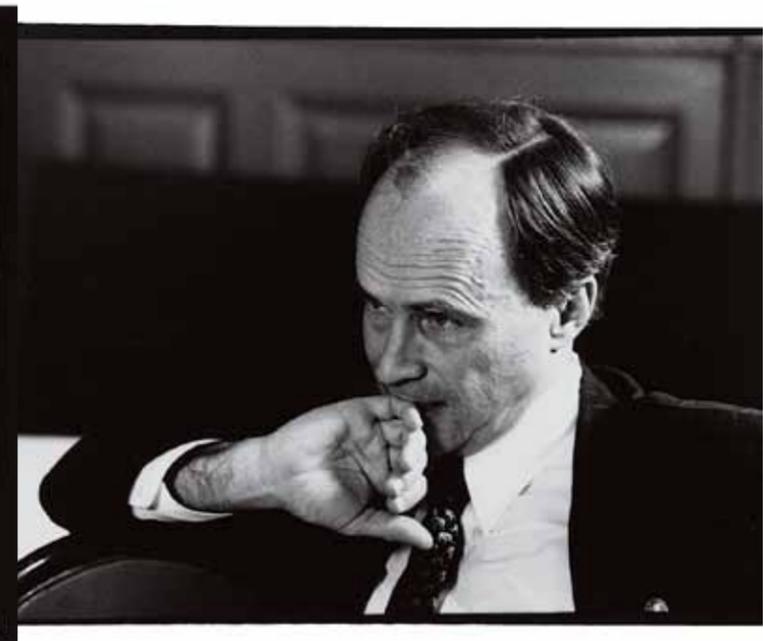
BASS: But the problem being in Congress, as opposed to the Senate, is that's the way the system has to work. It's set up constitutionally that way.

CAPUANO: I gotta tell ya, it's awfully hard—from my end of the world, and again I'm just a lowly little freshman—I've only gotten one call, one single call, all year long, from a Republican to ask me for a vote. And that was from him. [*Points to Sherwood*]

SHERWOOD: And you didn't give it to me!

PORTMAN: There is a tremendous opportunity to do stuff across party lines because there's so little of it. You'll find it, as you're here longer, if you want to get stuff done. You know, first you have to believe and make sure it's the right policy, but you can reach out. And most people don't. In each of the four things I've gotten done here, I started working with Democrats from the ground level. And literally built it up.

[*Note: Portman was behind the Tropical Forest Conservation Act, the Unfunded Mandates Reform bill, a bill calling for IRS reform and the Drug-Free Communities Act.*]



SHERWOOD (to Capuano): The first time I met your guy, [Minority Leader Dick] Gephardt, he gave me a hard look and didn't speak to me for the rest of the evening.

CAPUANO: And that's wrong!

DAM: *With all the partisanship, and being away from family so much, why do you do it? Why are you here?*

BASS: That's actually a very easy answer.

CAPUANO: That's a trick question. I have wasted more time in the last 10 months than I have wasted in my entire adult life combined. Just sitting around waiting.

DAM: *Well, you're proving the quest...*

CAPUANO: I do it because somebody's gotta do it. And if people like me don't do it, who the hell does it? That's part of the problem: Too many regular guys—and I consider myself a regular guy—get home and say, "I'm not doing that." It's not just for Congress, it's for school committees, and city council, and state rep and state senate. They say, "I'm not doing that."

BASS: When you serve in Congress, you're debating and deliberating on the great issues of the day. There's no job in the world where you get a different issue every 15 minutes. You get to participate in the process and you watch the wheel of government just creaking and cranking along. And it's the way the system's been for the past 220 years. I'm not frustrated at all.... So it's a very rewarding job for me, and exciting, it really is. And I think, fundamentally, you have to like people. I'm a beekeeper—I haven't done it recently—but when you think about

"MY GRANDFATHER WENT TO HARVARD. WE DON'T TALK ABOUT THAT. BUT HIS PAPERS ARE AT DARTMOUTH."—CHARLIE BASS '74

bees, if you think "sting," you're in trouble, but if you think "honey," you can keep bees.

CAPUANO: That's why I'm frustrated with the schedule. I do like people—a lot. Nothing against you guys, but I like my people at home better than I like you guys. And I don't get enough of a chance to get home and see them because I am sitting here on Monday nights wasting my time voting on post offices in Ohio.

PORTMAN: Post offices in Ohio? [*Laughter*]

CAPUANO: I should have said Iowa.

BASS: Once you get past Pennsylvania, they're all the same.

SHERWOOD: I've been a small-town businessman all my life. I've been here less than a year. I've had the chance to question the Joint Chiefs of Staff on military policy, I was in Bosnia just before the bombing, then I went to Vienna to talk with the Russians and get them involved as a way out of the mess in the Balkans. Then I had a morning with a one-on-one with [Federal Reserve chairman] Alan Greenspan and Lou Gerstner, who was in my class at Dartmouth and now runs IBM—that was probably one of the best mornings I've had here. You're very involved in what's going on in the world.

DAM: *And you love it. Your face is lighting up.*

SHERWOOD: Sure. I hate the frustration, too. And the schedule—it's awfully hard to have a life. It would have been hard for me to have this job 20 years ago when I had little kids at home. That'd be pretty tough.

BASS: I have a 6-year-old and an 8-year-old.

SHERWOOD: God bless you.

CAPUANO: It's tough when they get older, too.

SHERWOOD: But you're really involved in the issues of the day. If you give it your all, you're really doing things that are different from being a small-town attorney or a businessman or an educator.

BASS: I serve on the House Intelligence Committee. There is no committee in Congress where you get a better thread of knowledge and understanding about the problems around the world. Dynamics and crises, how complex situations are. We're briefed almost every week on some difficult problem, some hard target around the world.

DAM: *You should pass those briefing papers on to the presidential candidate you've endorsed.*

[*Note: This conversation took place a few days after GOP presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush of Texas failed to identify the leaders of Chechnya, India and Pakistan in an interview.*]

BASS: No comment. [*Laughter*] Be advised that I couldn't have named any of those people.

DAM (to Capuano): *What about you?*

CAPUANO: I wouldn't even have bothered to try. But I can tell you every local elected official in my district.

BASS: That's a great answer.

CAPUANO: Where they live, who their wives are.

BASS: That's what being a congressman is about.

PORTMAN: In some ways, this is the best job I've ever had and the worst job I've ever had. It's like a roller coaster. It's got real highs and real lows. The best part is the opportunity to make a difference, to get things done. I served for 18 months in the minority, and that was frustrating. We got some things done, because I did some stuff on a bipartisan basis, but frankly most of the stuff I wanted to get done got blocked. For me it's a question of what is worth leaving those three kids and my wife [at home in Ohio], and it's got to be making a difference, because otherwise it's not worth it. Because the troughs are the sacrifices you make to your family and friendships. Like Don says, you don't have a life. What my wife and I find is, we have a life, but it's politics and family.

BASS: That's right.

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ROLL CALL

REP. CHARLES BASS-R

Republican from New Hampshire's 2nd Congressional District
Budget Committee, Transportation & Infrastructure Committee,
Select Committee on Intelligence

PERSONAL: 48 years old, married to Lisa, two children

PROFESSIONAL: Field worker for Rep. William Cohen, R-Maine, '74; chief of staff for Rep. David Emery, R-Maine, '75-'79; N.H. businessman, Columbia Architectural Products and High Standards Inc., '80-'93; N.H. House of Representatives, '82-'88; N.H. Senate, '88-'92

CONTACT: (202) 225-5206; www.house.gov/bass

REP. MICHAEL CAPUANO-D

Democrat from Massachusetts's 8th Congressional District
Banking & Financial Services Committee, Science Committee

PERSONAL: 48 years old, married to Barbara, two children

PROFESSIONAL: Somerville, Mass., alderman '77-'79; chief legal counsel, Mass. Legislature Taxation Committee, '78-'84; attorney, '84-'90; alderman-at-large, '85-'89; mayor, Somerville, '89-'98

CONTACT: (202) 225-5111; www.house.gov/capuano

REP. ROB PORTMAN-R

Republican from Ohio's 2nd Congressional District
Ways & Means Committee, Standards of Official Conduct

PERSONAL: 45 years old, married to Jane, three children

PROFESSIONAL: Lawyer-lobbyist, '84-'88; associate counsel at the White House, '89; deputy assistant and White House legislative affairs director, '90-'91; alternate, U.S. Representative to United Nations Human Rights Committee, '92

CONTACT: (202) 225-3164; www.house.gov/portman

REP. DON SHERWOOD-R

Republican from Pennsylvania's 10th Congressional District
Armed Services Committee, Resources Committee, Transportation & Infrastructure Committee

PERSONAL: 59 years old, married to Carol, three children

PROFESSIONAL: U.S. Army, '64-'66; Chevrolet dealer, '67-present; business interests expanded into Horiacher-Sherwood Forestry Equipment, Sun Buick/Pontiac/GMC and Belgian horse breeding; appointed, then elected, to Tunkhannock Area School Board, '75-'98, president, '92-'98

CONTACT: (202) 225-3731; www.house.gov/sherwood

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33]

PORTMAN: Your circle of friends consists of your political circle, and your family.

BASS: My biggest regret is the fact that I'm missing my children's childhood. I've been gone since Monday—what's today? Oh, that's just yesterday. Well, you lose track of the days

"AFTER ABOUT A YEAR AT DARTMOUTH, I DECIDED THAT THE GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT WAS NOT REALLY WITH IT. IT SEEMS TO ME THEY WERE NOT REALLY CONVERSANT WITH WHAT WAS GOING ON IN WASHINGTON." —ROB PORTMAN

of the week, by the way. But when you're gone five days a week you talk to your children once a day on the phone. You ask them how school was, what they had for dinner, what's exciting and so on, but you're not really there, and you're not really communicating, and they're growing up.

PORTMAN: Now to balance that, and be fair, we all have friends back home, men and women, who travel a lot with their jobs. And they don't get two and a half months back home like we do.

SHERWOOD: If you're a sales rep, you're gone.

CAPUANO: A lot of my frustration is because I was a mayor of a city. I got to run my schedule, I got to decide when things got done, and I was no more than a mile away from my home. I watched my kids every single day.

BASS: You don't get that in Congress.

CAPUANO: I understand that. Knowing what I know now I would never do it...

BASS: *[Looks at watch]* I've got to go before the subway shuts down at 11...

DAM: *Let's get the check. Time for one last question.*

BASS: ...and because I'm getting sleepy. *[Laughter]*

DAM: *Why have you three Republicans endorsed Bush so early? This kind of congressional support is unprecedented.*

PORTMAN: It is. I'm doing it because I worked for his dad. I probably wouldn't be here in elected office if I hadn't worked at the White House [as legislative affairs director]. His dad gave me the opportunity. And I've known George W. for 15 years through working with the Bush campaign. So for me, it's a matter of personal loyalty. But also because I think he's a superior candidate to the others running and, frankly, to other Republican candidates we've had recently. I think he's a better candidate than Bob Dole.

SHERWOOD: My reasons are a little different. I have no personal loyalty. I looked over the field—and I very strongly want to have a Republican president because I can see what we could accomplish in the House and the Senate if we had a Republican president.

BASS: Look at Mike shudder.

CAPUANO: Darn right.

SHERWOOD: I'm very impressed with him. He's a modern Republican. He combines traditional conservative values with a compassion and an interest in people. And he has the ability to put forth his ideas in a way that doesn't make any socio-economic group shudder. He has Republican ideals but he understands the people who don't normally think Republican. I think that's pretty important.

DAM (to Capuano): *You haven't endorsed anyone?*

CAPUANO: No.

DAM: *You have no preference? Gore or Bradley?*

CAPUANO: I didn't say that, did I? I have no idea whether the House will be taken back by Democrats...

DAM: *So, between Gore and Bradley, it doesn't matter?*

CAPUANO: I didn't say it didn't matter.

PORTMAN: Have you been pressured to endorse? By both camps?

CAPUANO: Pressured? No. Requested. Pressuring is never the way to do things.

DAM: *By the time this article goes to press, the nomination may already be decided.*

CAPUANO: And I will support the Democratic nominee and he will carry Massachusetts.

BASS: Don really has very well articulated the qualities of George W. Bush. He combines the courage and intelligence of his father with, believe it or not, the courage of his mother. He's articulate, and he has focus and direction. He's a joy to work for. The Democrats will come home to Al Gore in the end, recognizing that he's their guy. After he wins the nomination, you have to get behind him unless you want to lose it. The same will occur with Bush because we don't have the White House, and the electability issue is crucial. And Bush has been able to hold that position in the center, more or less.

DAM: *By running against you guys!*

[Note: Just weeks before, Bush had bashed the GOP House for trying to "balance the budget on the backs of the poor."]

CAPUANO: Yeah!

BASS: Hardly. Compare him with the other Republicans.

PORTMAN: [Pat] Buchanan and [Steve] Forbes and these guys, [Gary] Bauer, they trash us every day...

CAPUANO: Part of me wants you guys to take the White House, because it guarantees [the Democrats] the House three years from now. That's the way I look at it. *[Laughs]* If you guys get all three branches—I'm not kidding—three years from now there's no question we take the House back big-time. And I'd rather have that than have the teeny majority you have now.

BASS: If the Republicans hold all three branches, the challenge for Republicans will be to create an agenda that won't guarantee that we lose it, the way the Democrats did in 1994.

CAPUANO: *[Laughs]* You can't do it. There's no way. ■

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