

This is an interview with Congressman Charles Rose, from Fayetteville, North Carolina, conducted on January 30, 1974 in Washington, D.C. by Walter De Vries and Jack Bass.

W.D.V.: ...freshman Democrats from the South, younger members and so on, tends to become more populist or, in a sense, more economically liberal than the older Democrats from the South who have served here for a number of terms or years, and that basically the reason for that is that race no longer is a real principal issue in Southern campaigns, or campaigns in North Carolina.

Rose: Yes, I think that... You're talking while we're walking, huh? I mean. Yeah, I think that's basically right. I had rather tell you some of the things that we are doing that I don't think my former colleagues ever felt it necessary to do...

W.D.V.: All right.

Rose: ...in an effort to reach the people and let you reach your own conclusions about whether we're being populist or not.

W.D.V.: Why don't you do that.

Rose: I think that trend is definitely there. I feel a great need to communicate with congressmen from all over the country, on both sides of the aisle, in order to, you know, make the process work and have lines of communication open to get things done. In other words, I don't feel like I could sit with a comfortable group of Southerners and say that we're going to do this or we're going to do that, because it just doesn't work that way. We've got to have other areas supporting us. (Interruption in tape.) Most of the young members that I'm acquainted with, and especially those from the South... We spend a lot of time communicating with our constituents, talking through newsletters, through public appearances at home, asking them their opinions on various questions. Probably a good deal more than the older

members do. I don't believe that race is the issue that it was ten, fifteen years ago, although it does underline many of the considerations that we hear about. I think we are anxious to work with members from other parts of the country. The votes have been very close this year on important issues. Clem McSpadden of Oklahoma and I got together and decided that we ought to put together a caucus of members that have large rural areas in their district, and so we formed the Rural Caucus. We've got 25 members. We have an executive director that we have on the payroll, and we communicate through his office on issues that are coming up before the Congress. Now, we are spread out all over the country. It's not just a Southern coalition. I think the day that the Southern Democrats could wield the block force that they once did, those days don't seem to be here any more. The Southerners do stick together on a great many things, but most of the young Southerners seem to be willing - most of the freshman Southerners, let me say - seem to be willing to spread out a little bit more than some of the older Southerners do in terms of cooperating and working with more moderate members from all other parts of the country. I don't know, you know. Ask me another question. Hit at me another way.

W.D.V.: Are you saying that the younger members are generally more responsible to the people in their district and spend more time back there and focus more attention on it than some of the older ones do?

Rose: Well,...

W.D.V.: Is that true in your own case, would you say?

Rose: Yes. I think if you took a poll of all of the freshmen congressmen from the South, you would find that they do a great deal more in the area of staying in touch with their constituents and communicating with them than older members do. There's Congressman ~~Beau~~ ^{Bo} Ginn of Georgia, right there. I don't know whether you talked to him or not. He's a Democrat from... He's

had Savannah and part of the coast of Georgia in his district. And we spend a lot of time on television programs what we send home, newsletters that we send home. We've emphasized district offices. We feel... I feel, and I think many of the younger Southerners feel, that the people want a way to be heard. They want to participate in their Congress. They want to let their members know how they feel. And they want direct help. And this has all grown out of the increasing frustration that people seem to have about government and about the federal government. They want some way to respond, and we're trying to provide them with that way to respond.

J.B.: It's also, studies show that the large majority of these newly elected Southern Democratic congressmen are voting the majority of the time with the majority of the Democratic party, as opposed to the past, the very recent past, of voting the majority of the time with the majority of the Republican party. So that the change in voting patterns....

Rose: Yes, I think that's right.

J.B.: Does this reflect a broadened constituency that's, in effect, asking for more federal attention to solve existing social problems?

Rose: I think it does, yes. My A.D.A. rating for the first session of Congress was 44, and I was the third highest in my delegation. And the older Democrats were way below me. I think there was a gap from 44 way down to something like 24. So, I...

J.B.: ... organized labor is in your district?

Rose: Well, several thousand members of unions. How organized it is, you know, might be another discussion. The organized labor people in North Carolina are not too happy with me, I understand. They endorsed me for Congress and my opponent made a big issue out of the fact that I was endorsed by organized labor, which... and raised a lot of money that way... which, I think, rather clearly indicates that the South, especially our part of the

South, industrial people can get very emotional about organized labor because the absence of it is one of the best things we have to offer to industry and to capital to come into our part of the country. But I wound up voting 50% with Vipack (?) and 40% with labor. They said I voted right with them 4 times and wrong with them 6 times. That's what the AFL-CIO said. So I'm very happy with this charting of a moderate course in my voting.

J.B.: Charley, your A.D.A. rating, ~~was~~ ten years ago in that district, wouldn't that have been a disaster for you? Wouldn't it have seemed to be a disaster for you, whether or not it was, while your colleagues in the Congress would have North Carolina?

Rose: If my col... let me... yeah. You're probably right. To answer it another way, if my predecessor had had a 44% A.D.A. rating, he would have been very, very worried about it. That he was way too liberal. I think my predecessor probably had anywhere from 0 to 10 as his A.D.A. rating. And of course, I got most of my rating for voting to override the President's veto. I have voted to override every presidential veto that there's been before the present Congress.

J.B.: Wouldn't there have been a lot more pressure on you from your colleagues and your peers to vote against the A.D.A. or a liberal stance two years ago than there is now?

Rose: Yeah, I think that's probably true. But I think... You need to ask every congressman how does, you know, who does he represent. Well, of course, hopefully, I represent all 450,000 people in my district. But I was strong in the rural communities in my district. I was strong in the Indian and the black communities in my district, and in the agricultural areas where the farmers were concerned with specific problems. And what I have tried to do since my last election is to pick up strength among the industrial people and the business community.

J.B.: Looking at North Carolina politics, what do you see as... Do you get involved... I understand you actually got involved in politics as a result of the original Sanford campaign?

Rose: No, the original Sanford campaign didn't really have anything to do with me getting into politics. I was looking for a job when I got out of law school, and some of Sanford's people were willing to give me one. And I decided that I wanted to get involved in politics rather than trying to be a part of somebody else's operation. I think Sanford marks a change in state politics in North Carolina, where more young people were getting involved in the state political arena. And I more or less looked at his involvement in the state arena and said, well, young people haven't been getting involved in the federal arena in North Carolina, in the Congress. So I'm the youngest member of the North Carolina delegation, and probably when I was elected, the youngest Democrat that served in Congress for quite some time. I haven't even bothered to try and find out just how young. But in the past ten or fifteen years, there has been a new awareness, a new interest on the part of young people in politics in North Carolina. But they've concentrated on the state offices. And I was attracted to the federal office because of what I considered an even greater challenge.

W.D.V.: The Rural Caucus, Democratic Study Group, this Democratic research organization... let's see, what's the moderate group called?

Rose: The United Democrats of Congress, the U.D.C.

W.D.V.: Are you a member of most of those?

Rose: I'm a member of all three, all four of those groups.

W.D.V.: Why?

Rose: Well, because I want the information that all four of these groups put out on all subjects. The D.S.G. is a very good research organization.

The Democratic Research Organization is also a good research organization, with a more conservative slant, on issues before the Congress. The United Democrats of Congress have not come with any particular research piece at this point, and it remains to be seen how they're going to develop. And of course, ^{what} we're mainly interested in for the Rural Caucus is a whip organization rather than a research organization. We want to ... we want to copy the discipline of some other organizations in getting members of like mind at the right place at the right time for votes.

W.D.V.: In other words, instead of an ideological affiliation, it's simply an activist thing...

Rose: An activist thing to promote the interests of rural America. But I think the very fact that all of these organizations exist is evidence of some frustrations that...

W.D.V.: Yeah, but what did the Congress...

Rose: ...exist in the Congress

W.D.V.: To say that the Congress is divided four ways on an ideological and philosophical basis would be a little bit absurd.

Rose: It would be completely absurd.

W.D.V.: We're interviewed two people already who've belonged to all four organizations.

Rose: Right. Right.

J.B.: We also hear a theory that the Southern influence in the Congress is waning. That the number of committee chairmanships is less now than it was five, ten, fifteen, twenty years ago.

Rose: Right.

J.B.: The committee chairmanships now are held, many of them, at least, are held by older members whose days are going to be numbered, one way or another. Well, in many cases, at least. Not all, but in many cases, the people behind

them are non-Southerners.

Rose: Well, I think it's... I think it's time for a new wave for the South.

Because what you... Everything you have said is true, but the reason that

Edward ~~A. Barr~~ ^{Hebert} is chairman of the Armed Services Committee, the reason that

George Mahan is chairman of the Appropriations Committee, the reason that

Wilbur Mills is chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, and that ~~Brian Dorn~~ ^{Bryan Dorn}

is chairman of the Veterans Affairs Committee is because these people came to Congress at a young age, and the South gave them time to build seniority in Congress, and that paid off. And the reason the South has always had power in Congress disproportionate to its size is because of the seniority of its members. You're right.

J.B.: Well do you see,... do you see....

Rose: I see more new young members from the South coming to Congress, to start again the process.

J.B.: Do you think they will remain in Congress? Continue to be re-elected?

I mean, the people you mentioned, the established committee chairman, many of them spent 30 - anywhere from 25 to 40 years with either no or token opposition over most of that period of time. Now most of the younger members of Congress, I believe I'm correct, are finding opposition regularly almost every two years. Is that right?

Rose: Well, I think that's... certainly that's right. But... In our largely rural type districts, the people are slow to get to know and accept a person as their congressman. And they are fairly reluctant to turn them out, unless there's some overriding reasons why.

J.B.: You think these younger congressmen, then, will continue to get re-elected, and attain that level of seniority 20 years from now.

Rose: Well, I can only... you know, speak to that after all the current elections are over, but I don't... My personal ambition is to stay here as

I can and work up within the power structure of the Congress. You know, I don't want to go back home and run for governor. I don't want to go back home and run for the Senate. I want to stay here and keep going back to my district and ask them to send me to Congress and work my way up in the seniority process here.

J.B.: Isn't there a sense of change, though, Charley? Take Mendel Rivers' district. He's opposed, what, once in 30 years? But now Mendel Davis expects opposition, and tough opposition, every year that he runs because the party... The South has become two-party and it's become competitive. Isn't this particularly true in the younger member's districts, where you'd have more competition than, say, in some of the others. Now, your district is competitive....

Rose: Well, I think what it... put it this way. You can look at it any way you want to. I have worked just as hard since I came to Congress as I did every month before I got elected. In other words, I haven't changed the level of my activity one bit. If you want to call that you've kept on campaigning at the same level, you can look at it that way, you know. You can call giving your wife grocery money a whole number of things, too.

W.D.V.: There would be fundamental differences between the way you see this thing and the way the typical Southern Democratic congressman saw it.

Rose: All right. Probably so. The way I see it is that with the people's opinion of government in such turmoil, whoever comes to this seat, if they're going to hold on to it, has got to hit the ground running and keep on running, working just as hard as they can, to represent the people. Become populist, or more moderate. Stay in touch with the people. That's... you know, I'm 34 years old, and that agrees with me. I think it agrees with me too much, you know. You know, I like that pace. But if you're asking me are the Southern Democratic seats going to be harder to hold on to than they were

ten or fifteen years ago when people like Mendell Rivers could come along and get elected without never having much opposition, I think the answer's definitely yes. I got this seat by beating on an incumbent who had had token opposition for 16 or 17 years. And the things I did to get elected,

form of communication, I have continued and plan to keep on.

I've just got them built into my whole way of doing things now, and don't plan to stop. And I realized when I started that, you know, once you commit yourself in this business to a certain level of activity and a certain level of communication, you can't back off from it.

J.B.: You're on the Agriculture Committee?

Rose: Yes.

J.B.: What type of agriculture programs would you say are being needed at the federal level, to meet the real problems in the rural South?

Rose: Well, I think, to give you a simple answer to that problem... The American farmer has been called on in recent years to save the American dollar, by opening up the export markets that our government is going around the world to encourage. We have created a tremendous export demand for agriculture. Last year we probably had roughly a ten billion dollar balance of payment favor because of our agricultural exports. So the role that American agriculture has in our total economy has changed for the better for our farmers. It has been a matter of escalation. And I think what we on the Agriculture Committee are sensitive about is that since we are asking the American farmer to take an even greater risk than they have taken in the past, with regard to expectations of price and of market availability, fertilizer availability, and so forth. The government should be willing to underwrite their risk to a reasonable extent. And therefore, we came up this year with the target price theory, which is the same thing as subsidies, but approached a little bit differently. We're not paying people to not

grow things, but we're saying if the price falls below a certain level, the government will pay you so much for what you have grown, within certain limits. So I think economic protection for the farmers as we ask them to take greater risks is what we need.

J.B.: Do you see any sort of programs coming out dealing with the problems raised by farm mechanization, displaced farm workers, older people, many of them black, who are sort of left without skills and nothing really to do if they don't own land? These kind of problems?

Rose: Well, we're going to have an increased mechanization all over the South, in agriculture. All over the country. All over the world. And that's one of the reasons that I've been glad to see industry come into the district. Much of our farm labor is seasonal, and we can have industry in the South that can work and share that labor force. Industry that doesn't have to run twelve months out of the year, seven days a week, night and day. That can share the existing labor force. We need more technical institutes to give the skills to people, to work in these companies, and to find other jobs that they can do. My biggest..., well, one of my biggest counties is Roberson County, that's one third black, one third white, and one third Indian. But we have a... I have been working on a protein deficiency program with a group of nutritionists in that county, because we've been able to find that there's such a significant amount of malnutrition among expectant mothers in that county that the birth defect rate, and the malnourished child, stillborn child rate has been very, very high as a result of this very basic poverty program. So, not only do we have to worry about the category that you were talking about, we've got some basic poverty problems that have got to be solved. I would support an extension of the Economic Opportunity Act. I supported the continuation of the E.D.A., because the E.D.A. has brought jobs to the people in our area.

J.B.: How did you feel about this Administration's in effect dismantling the Coastal Plains Development Commission ?

Rose: Well, I think it was very short-sighted. I think the Administration had a politically expedient gimmick called Revenue Sharing in mind several years ago, and they decided that was going to be the panacea for a great many ills, and a smoke screen under which they would dismantle and remove a lot of the people-assistance programs that they thought were too expensive. And that they could save money by cutting out. I was sorry to see the Coastal Plains Commission go and several others like it.

J.B.: How do you define the Southern strategy of the Nixon Administration? What do you think has been its effect?

Rose: Well, I may be a little too young at this to say that I have a clear glimpse of what the Nixon Southern strategy has been, or how effective it's been. He has certainly attracted a lot of Southern Democrats, mainly the older ones, to be very, very loyal to everything he does and everything he wants to do. And while I have told my people that if I had to vote today on impeachment, I would vote against it, I've also told them that if the Judiciary Committee gives us the evidence of an impeachable offense, then I'll vote for impeachment.

J.B.: I think it's generally been demonstrated, by the polls and otherwise, that the support of the President is very good over the impeachment issue and Watergate related matters, in the South and elsewhere in the country. And every other issue. To what do you attribute that?

Rose: Well, I think the South obviously was... voted very strong for Richard Nixon. Not so much because they felt total empathy for everything he wanted to accomplish, but because they were scared of George McGovern. They voted for him, they accepted him as their president, and they are reluctant to turn him out or ask that he be turned out until they have

been confronted with more overriding evidence than they have now.

J.B.: Do you think the underlying reason for all of this is race?

Rose: No, I do not.

J.B.: Do you think in 1964 if you'd had a situation, factual situation, similar if Lyndon Johnson were president, that there'd be anything resembling this sort of support in the South of the president?

Rose: Yes, but because Lyndon Johnson was more vocal on civil rights issues and rankled some of the Southern voters because of it. There probably would be less support. This would be a reason for... greater reason for them to jump on Johnson while it is a reason not to jump on Nixon. But I, you know, I don't see that personally as a very strong reason for the support. On the negative side, yes. If he were more of a civil rights president, this would be better reason to oppose him.

J.B.: You think, then, it's a factor, but only in a complex sort of way?

Rose: Yes.

J.B.: Is there anything else that we hadn't covered?

W.D.V.: There's a lot we hadn't covered.

J.B.: But that you would just like to comment on?

Rose: About what? In what area?

J.B.: Southern politics, North Carolina politics, changes in Southern and North Carolina politics in the last decade or two decades. In the direction you think things are going. In fact, if you would comment on the direction you think things are going.

Rose: Well, I think the direction that things are going is that politicians are going to have to rely more on their own direct contact with the people than they probably had to ten to twenty years to go. The day once was when you could have a few ward healers or a few political operatives in some sections that could do just about everything that needed to be done to get

you elected. I think those days are gone. There's more Southern candidates use television and direct mail and other direct methods of communicating with their constituency. We've got more in the mainstream of American politics by using the communicative methods that other congressmen or other elected officials have used much longer than we used them.

J.B.: In Tennessee, it's the only Southern state in which it appears that Republicans may now be the dominant party. And North Carolina's followed that same pattern up to a point. The last election elected one U. S. senator, elected a governor, a Republican governor, a Republican U. S. senator. Do you see Republican gains continuing in North Carolina, and, if not, what will the Democrats have to do to recapture control?

Rose: Well, I think the... I think 1974 will be a good year for the Democratic party in North Carolina. I think 1972 was a combination of events, led by the popularity of Richard Nixon that shook up North Carolina and shook the whole nation. But if the Democratic party will continue to make room for young people, make room for minority views, make room for women, be the general melting pot of all ideas, the Wallace people as well as the black point of view, it can continue to represent a majority of the people in North Carolina.

J.B.: Where do you see the politics of the East going in North Carolina? It's always considered the last Democratic stronghold in the state, and then it sort of, more or less, basically went Republican for the first time in '72.

Rose: Well...

J.B.: Would you see that basically as just an anti-McGovern situation. And Helms being personally popular. Or was it more significant and deeply rooted than that?

Rose: Well, I see it staying in the Democratic column as long as we have common sense Democratic candidates running, who are open and honest with the people. Who represent the views of the people in eastern North Carolina.

And they're very conservative. But they're also very compassionate people. Farmers basically will pay fair wages to those that work for them, if they are receiving fair profits for the things that they are producing. And this has always been a traditional problem in agricultural areas, that when farm prices are down, the farmer's not making any many. He's going to cuss everything that he thinks might be affecting his income, and one of the closest things to him to cuss is the black man. But when the farmer's making a good profit and can pay fair wages, he's going to be happy for the man down the street and the black tenant and the Indian tenant and the white tenant to make their fair share too. So I think the things that have made eastern North Carolina more conservative have been the poor agricultural return that that section of the country has had traditionally over the years. But I'm hoping... you know, I hope the current increase in farm prices and the current increase in farm income is going to moderate some of this feeling, that may have been born out of economic necessity in eastern North Carolina.

J.B.: Do you see the Wallace voters basically going to be becoming Democratic voters?

Rose: Yes. I think the Wallace vote, at least in North Carolina, always has been a Democratic vote.

J.B.: Except for Helms.

Rose: Yes. I think that was in, you know, another unusual situation, where Nick Galifianakis was not the typical eastern North Carolina Democratic candidate. But there were things in his voting record, and then the very fact that he was Greek, and had been a law professor, and had done other things that could stick him with liberal labels, that made him unpopular. The bedrock principle that, you know, I want to run my career up here on, is to look after the people who put me in office. And agricultural people

put me in office. There are 15,000 tobacco allotments in my district. Now that means that there's probably 45,000 adult people connected with those 15,000 tobacco allotments. And I have a mailing list of every one of those 15,000 people. And I have written them four times this year to ask them to do certain things in response to actions by the Department of Agriculture. And if I will look after their economic interests in agriculture - if I look after the problems they're having with the Department of Agriculture - I think they're going to be less concerned about a moderate A.D.A. rating than they are about the help I give them with agriculture.