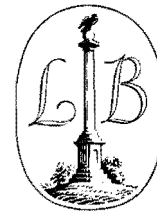


HOME STYLE:
HOUSE MEMBERS IN THEIR DISTRICTS

Richard F. Fenno, Jr.
University of Rochester



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APPENDIX

Notes on Method: Participant Observation

METHOD AND PROJECT

In a book that urges more scholarly attention to congressional activity outside of Washington, D.C., it might be helpful to say something about how this kind of research is done. This is a kind of research — the study of people in their natural setting — that is not much written about by political scientists. Described in the Introduction as "soaking and poking — or just hanging around," it is more formally known as field research, or qualitative research, or — our preference — participant observation.¹ This Appendix elaborates our earlier description. It is a largely autobiographical case study of participant observation, written less about how this kind of research is done than about how one particular research project was done. (However, because of the current dearth of understanding of these research methods — in this case a blend of observation, interviewing, and participation — even a case study can have broad benefits.

In the first place, students of Congress may find some instructive comparisons with Washington-based research. There, the typical researcher starts with a set of questions, obtains appointments with some set of legislators, goes to each legislator's office for a forty-five-minute interview, leaves, and moves on to the next interview. That is what my own experience had been. Many of the problems of research in the district are the same as those encountered on Capitol Hill because, after all, both take place in the milieu of the legislator. But in home district research, one typically watches, listens to, and talks to one congressman morning, noon, and night for several days. This degree of immersion in the natural setting is so great that it

is a qualitatively different experience from that on Capitol Hill — a research difference to match the behavioral differences reported in the book. Or so, at least, it seemed to me; and it is the primary reason for writing this Appendix.²

In the second place, political scientists with a general interest in method may find the following comments helpful in bringing participant observation more comfortably under the tent of political science methodology. As long as political scientists continue to study politicians, some of us certainly will want to collect data through repeated interaction with these politicians in their natural habitats. If that is so, we should be as self-conscious as we can be about this kind of political science activity and about the relationship between political scientists and politicians that it entails. And not just because people doing this kind of research can benefit; but also because, through their lack of understanding, political scientists who do not do this kind of research can unintentionally impede the work of those who do.

Furthermore, participant observation does have some method to it. It is difficult to standardize in canonical form — a difficulty which will become exasperatingly obvious in a moment. One can hardly be very pretentious about it. Still, a research project like this one does not just happen; it does not proceed without a degree of planning and care and methodological worry. It is these “worries,” perhaps, that are most revealing about any research project. I hope the particular worries of this one will be instructive to those political scientists who like to generalize about methodological worries.

Research based on participant observation is likely to have an exploratory emphasis. Someone doing this kind of research is quite likely to have no crystallized idea of what he or she is looking for or what questions to ask when he or she starts. Researchers typically become interested in some observable set of activities and decide to go have a firsthand look at them. They fully expect that an open-minded exposure to events in the milieu and to the perspectives of those with whom they interact will produce ideas that might never have occurred to them otherwise. Only after prolonged, unstructured soaking is the problem formulated. Indeed, the reformulation of a problem or a question may be the end product of the research. The idea of home style had never occurred to me until I had taken quite a few trips around the country. I had been interested in a very different set of questions when I began my travels — questions of

perception and questions relating these perceptions to behavior on Capitol Hill, especially roll call voting. I was not at all interested in the effect of perceptions on behavior in the district. In other words, participant observation seems less likely to be used to test an existing hypothesis than to formulate hypotheses for testing by others or to discover some relationship that strikes others as worth hypothesizing about and testing. It may be an appropriate method, however, at any stage of a research endeavor where there is a felt need for a fresh line of thought.

This particular project was undertaken for several reasons. Like any other political scientist interested in representative-constituent relations, I had been teaching the received wisdom on the subject. Part of that wisdom tells us that the representative's *perception* of his or her constituency is an important variable. But, in the absence of much empirical exposition of such perceptions and in the presence of politicians who seemed less than cognizant of all segments of their “constituency,” I had been telling students that the subject — like dozens of others every term — deserved “further research.” Someone, I kept saying, should address the perceptual question: What does a member of Congress see when he or she sees a constituency? The decision to be that someone was made, however, partly because the perceptual question seemed researchable by a method I had used before and with which I felt especially secure — the personal interview. The method was not the only method available; but it was appropriate to the question I wanted to answer. Had it not been for the appropriateness of a familiar method, the perceptual question would undoubtedly have been left for someone else.

I had no idea what kinds of answers I would get. I had no idea what questions to ask. I knew only that I wanted to get some number of House members to talk about their constituency perceptions — up and down and all around the subject. I knew that I had had some practice talking to legislators and that if I had developed any professional skills as a political scientist it was as an interviewer of, and a listener to, politicians. My hope was that I might be able to piece together their perceptions, categorize them in some way, and generalize about them. The decision to interview, to watch, and to listen *in the districts* was made simultaneously with the decision to do the research. I thought that if I could see what they saw in the district at the same time they saw it, I could better understand their

perceptual statements. I could not only listen, but I could listen in context. I could check what I heard *from* them with what I observed *with* them — something I could not do in a Capitol Hill office interview.

There were other reasons for doing this research in this particular way. First, all my previous research had been conducted in Washington, from a Washington perspective. I knew intellectually that activity in Washington reflects to some uncertain degree what people are saying, thinking, and doing out in the country; but I felt I did not know what went on “out there.” I wanted to acquire, at first hand, this extra-Washington perspective. Indeed, in the early months of the research, I spoke of myself primarily as a traveler, as a John Steinbeck without a camper or a “Charlie.” Thus, the research question appealed to me partly because the research site — the country — appealed to me.

As a sometime Congress-watcher, I also felt that interviews were becoming increasingly difficult to get in Washington, as more and more researchers descended on the Capitol and as senators and representatives felt beset by ever more burdensome job demands. I had then (and I have now) no doubt whatever that good interviews can be obtained on Capitol Hill. But a personal reaction I had had to the increasing difficulty was to wonder whether a better quality interview might not be had — irrespective of subject matter — if the legislator could be approached in some setting other than the Capitol Hill office. Because of my interest in perceptions, a constituency interview seemed particularly appealing. The member’s view of a constituency, I guessed, would take shape mainly *in the constituency* rather than in Washington. Furthermore, it would probably take shape within many different contexts within each constituency. So, the more contexts I could place the member in, the richer would be the perspectives he or she would communicate to me. The standard Capitol Hill interview captures the legislator at one point in time, in one mood, in one response set, in one interaction; a few days in the district, however, might yield a variety of such contextual factors. Besides, it seemed, the House member might just have more time to talk and be more relaxed in the home environment. All this seemed plausible — that interview *quality* might be better in the home setting. The opportunity to test this hunch gave the project added appeal.

Finally, once the idea seemed appealing enough to undertake

sometime,” it was clear that the time had to be soon. Not to start immediately might mean I would never do it. That is because I think field research on Congress is a young person’s game. It requires a degree of physical stamina and psychological adaptability that, taken together, are optimized in people of their twenties and thirties more than in their forties and fifties (even though people in their forties do have the advantage of being closer to the average age of House members). So I figured that I had better get going before I became too weary or too inflexible to tolerate the discomforts endemic to this type of data-grubbing operation.

THE “SAMPLE”

Once the decision was made to do the research, the question became: Whom should I observe? This is, somewhat elegantly, the sample problem. My answer at the beginning was I don’t know; my answer today is I’m not sure. Nothing better characterizes the open-ended, slowly emerging, participant observation research than this admission. If I had been certain about what types of representatives and what types of districts to sample, I would already have had answers to a lot of the questions raised in this book. My procedure was slowly to build up the size of the group being observed and constantly to monitor its composition to see what commonly recognized types of members or districts I might be neglecting. Then I would move to remedy any imagined deficiencies. I spent a lot of time trying to figure out a priori what types of members or districts might pose serious tests for, or exceptions to, whatever generalizations seemed to be emerging — with the intent of bringing such members or districts into the group. At one point, I noticed there were too many lawyers; the next two people I chose were nonlawyers. At another point, I had been traveling with a string of younger members; the next one I chose was a House veteran. My *Almanac of American Politics* is dog-eared from constant thumbing; and my note folders are still thick with tentative, revised, and re-revised lists of prospective traveling companions. Articles about congressional politics and congressional elections, census statistics, the *Congressional Record* were read with an eye to the adequacy of the current “sample.” Do I have one of these? Should I? What is the marginal value of one of these as opposed to one of those? In 1974 I pursued a target of opportunity, by loading up on Republicans whom I could watch ex-

plain their impeachment vote. By the time I reached their districts, however, the need to explain had evaporated; and I had to use two House members not in my group as examples in Chapter 5. As a result, the group remains unrepresentatively Republican (ten Democrats, eight Republicans).

Of course, in no technical sense do I have a sample. But I did not make a decision to travel with any member without first assessing or reassessing the characteristics he or she might add to the group and without comparing each addition with several other possibilities. Each person added to the list represented a heavy commitment of my time, energy, and money, so no decision was made lightly. And no decision was made quickly. In 1970, the group numbered four; in 1972 it jumped to twelve; in 1974 it went to sixteen; and in 1976 it stopped at eighteen. Decisions were made deliberately, but on the basis of limited information, by incremental, successive comparison. The decision to stop at eighteen was arbitrary, occasioned not by the thought that the "sample" was complete, but by the thought that it was about time to stop running around and to begin to communicate what I was finding.

I have tried to assemble what I thought would be a variety of House members and districts. I shall not add to the discussion of demographics in the Introduction — partly because I wish to help preserve anonymity, partly because I do not believe that any eighteen members could ever be definitely established as representative, and partly because the text provides a basis for some judgments as to what types have been included or excluded. I have tried to make it clear, however, that no claims are being made for the representativeness of the group — only for its adequacy in opening up the subject for scholarly inquiry.

One nonobvious criterion worth mentioning is "receptivity to academics." During my previous research on Congress, I formulated a heuristic proposition: there are only two classes of legislators in the world — "good interviews" and "bad interviews." There is a great temptation to apply this proposition to district research by saying, "I'll only travel with people I already know are articulate, responsive, and comfortable with academics." But if I do that, if I limit my group to "good interviews," won't that produce bias? The easy way out would be to avoid the pain of dealing with people who are suspicious of academics, difficult to reach, and difficult to interview. But at what price? Once, I wrote to a political science friend

asking him to recommend which of two House members from his district I should select. He recommended one on the grounds that he was well regarded by the local political scientists. He called the other "clunk . . . who has made no impression here." I decided to go with the "clunk," precisely because he had a style that seemed unappealing to academics. By recognizing a variation on the receptivity problem, I was able to offset it. And I was able to formulate a second heuristic proposition: Beware of political scientists bearing gifts of success. In the end, seven of the eighteen members were people who were used to and comfortable with academics, six were neither accustomed to nor comfortable with academics, and five were somewhere in between on this version of the at-homeness index.

It is an obvious characteristic of this project, and of participant observation research generally, that it deals with a small number of cases. It is the "small N" that makes this type of research unamenable to statistical analysis. At the point in the project when I had traveled with twelve members, I gave much thought to collaborating with another political scientist and interviewing a much larger, more reliable sample of House members, one that would give us the chance to do some statistical analysis. I finally decided that I did not yet feel confident that I knew what to ask in such a survey-type questionnaire and that I preferred, for the time being, to proceed with the study of a few cases. It was a deliberate decision to sacrifice analytical range for analytical depth. It was also a decision that placed severe limits on the number of members who could be studied — twenty, no more than twenty-five. The problem is one of span of control, the control of one mind. Each case must be known in depth. Regular contact with each member must be maintained. As a matter of fact, I never did keep in as close contact as I wished. But the desire not to fall too far out of touch set limits to the size of the group. So, too, did financial and professional constraints. This kind of research is both costly and hard to finance. And I could not get away from the classroom as often as would be necessary to travel personally with very many members.

Table A charts the thirty-six trips made to the various districts between 1970 and 1977. It also charts the spacing between visits to each of the eighteen members. As noted in the Introduction, the vast majority of the trips were made in election years; mostly in the fall. That was the easiest time to catch members at home, to parlay consecutive visits, and to observe in the greatest number of contexts.

Table A Timing and Spacing of District Visits

	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Totals	
													Trips	Days
1970						Aa-3b				B-3c A-2 C-3	D-4		5	15
1971					A-2 C-3								2	5
1972			E-3		F-2		G-2 H-3 I-3		D-4	J-5 K-4 L-3			9	29
1973													0	0
1974						F-3	G-2		M-4 I-4	N-3 O-3 J-2 H-4 B-3 A-4	P-2		11	34
1975					P-3	Q-4			C-3	M-3 R-3 D-3			0	0
1976			N-3		Q-3 O-2								7	22
1977													2	5
Totals														
Trips	0	1	0	2	6	2	4	0	4	15	1	1	36	
Days	0	3	0	6	16	6	10	0	15	48	4	2	110	

^a Representatives are given identifying letters (A, B, etc.) in the order in which I visited their districts. These letters bear no relation to the letters given to representatives in the text.

^b The number opposite the representative's identifying letter is the number of working days I spent in the district on that particular trip. It does not include traveling time except when I accompanied the member on an active schedule on the same day I traveled.

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may have distorted my view of home activity by giving it an intensity it might not have had during another part of the electoral cycle. In some cases, that was surely true. But the out-of-season visits displayed the same variations in intensity as the in-season ones, leading me to guess that generalization about seasonal effects would be hazardous. The chart clearly shows, however, that one watches certain people at certain times of their lives and their careers. If I had come earlier or returned later, each individual might have shown a different face, a different home style. If I had come at some period other than 1970 to 1977, member attacks on their institution might not have been so strong; or, the members might not have placed so much emphasis on access. I cannot know. The book's conclusions about individuals and the group are time-bound and cannot be cast in brass. They are only a best estimate — at the time.

ACCESS

made contact with my prospects in two ways — a personal contact of some sort or "cold turkey." The first four members I took on as an experiment in 1970 were all people with whom I had had some contact — two from my previous research, one whose administrative assistant I knew and one for whom an undergraduate student of mine was working as an intern. In ten of the next fifteen cases, I wrote a "cold turkey" letter. Here is that standard letter:

Dear Representative _____,

I am writing to ask if you might be willing to let me travel around with you when you are in your district for a three- or four-day period sometime this spring. I am a professor of political science at the University of Rochester and am writing a book on the relations between congressmen and their constituencies. I'm trying to learn about the subject by accompanying a dozen or so House members as they work in their districts.

About myself: I am forty-five years old and have been writing in the field of American politics for a number of years. Books I have written include *The President's Cabinet*, 1959, *National Politics and Federal Aid to Education*, 1962, *The Power of the Purse: Appropriations Politics in Congress*, 1966, and *Congressmen in Committees*, to be published in 1973.

Needless to say, I'd be tremendously pleased if you could see your way clear to letting me accompany you in _____.

Of course, all of this would be entirely at my own expense. I could even come to Washington should you wish to talk with me about it in person. I look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

To this letter, I sometimes added, as a personal reference, the name of one or two members I had already traveled with — members with whom the new prospect might have ties. Thus, I pyramided later trips on the foundation of earlier ones. I know of one case in which that personal reference was essential. But I have no idea of how many people took me purely on the face value of the request.

I had two outright refusals. One was from a powerful senior member whom I had met and who had reportedly lost touch with his district — a type I do not have in my group. He said he wasn't going to do any campaigning — that he had no opponent and that his wife was very ill. The second refusal came from a member who wrote,

I think you would find my kind of activity dull, boring, and completely unworthy of your time. I am sure you have a limited amount of time and I feel you ought to devote it to those areas wherein some of our more dramatic members do their work. Accordingly, while I deeply appreciate your interest, I must respectfully decline the opportunity to work with you on your project.

My best guess is that he is suspicious of academics. There is the possibility that my letter, in which I present myself as an academic, will trigger a strongly negative reaction in some cases.

Arranging a visit to the district is not always easy — mostly because the plans of House members are subject to sudden changes. I preferred to plan for and schedule certain blocks of time or specific dates well in advance. The members' tendency was to say "keep in touch and we'll work something out — maybe around the middle of September." So I would have to place an entire two- or three-week period "on hold" to accommodate a member. Rather than send out many letters at once — as one would do before heading for a two-week stay in Washington — I had to dribble them out in ones or twos. If distances and expenses were great, it was desirable to coordinate a couple of trips; then, the representatives' vagueness made planning doubly difficult. In California, I chose the Republican

member partly by asking the administrative assistant of my California Democrat which Republican assistants he got along with, so that they could negotiate across offices for a time for a single California visit.

In nearly half of the cases, I had some scheduling choice; someone on the member's staff would read me the itinerary for two or three trips home and ask me to choose. When that happened, I opted for the dates that promised to let me observe the greatest number of events, settings, and locales; and I avoided dates where events — like conventions or lengthy meetings or totally unscheduled days — promised to keep me separated from the congressman. Logistically, the research was always subject to uncertainty. One morning, I had my bag packed at home and was planning to leave for the airport in twenty minutes when the congressman's secretary called to say the deal was off; it was the congressman's birthday, and his wife did not want any outsider around during the festivities. On one occasion, when I had arranged to fly back to Washington with the congressman and had saved up some questions, I overslept and missed the plane entirely — an example of what experimentalists would call "instrument decay."

In this kind of research, which brings you into face-to-face working relationships with influential political people, there needs to be some mutual understanding about the relationships — its boundaries, its proprieties, its exchanges. Because you approach each other as strangers, this mutual understanding is worked out very gradually. It is useful to think of this relationship as a *bargain* between two professionals.

For my part, I began by presenting myself as a serious scholar, with a long-term professional interest in studying Congress. I came seeking information with which to write a book, information that I could not get anywhere else but from them. I presented as little as possible about the details of my project — only the few words necessary to justify a trip to the district, nothing more. My initial commitments were professional, and were unrelated to research content. If, in the letter, I gave the name of another member as a reference, the only quality I suggested they might wish to check on was my "personal integrity." Implicitly I agreed, as a professional scholar, not to write an exposé, not to kiss and tell, not to cause a member personal or political damage, not to quote a member when he or she wished not to be quoted. It was my hope that if I presented myself

as a professional, they would realize that I have high standards to uphold and that my career, *just as much as theirs*, would be placed in great jeopardy if I did not keep my end of the bargain.

As for what the projected book was all about, each member formed his own idea of that. Each wanted only to be able to explain to his constituents why I was accompanying him. "He's come to see how we do it here in Southern Illinois." "He's writing a book about how members of Congress campaign back home and has chosen this district to study. If we behave ourselves, we may become a footnote." "He's writing a book about how members of Congress deal with their constituents, and he's using me as a guinea pig. As I understand it, he'll write a book of 500 to 600 pages whose only buyer will be the Library of Congress — and his students. That's what professors do, you know, when they aren't grading papers." "He's collecting a lot of information. I don't know what he'll do with it. But he likes to watch these things. He doesn't bother the women and he doesn't talk too much." A detailed outline of what I was doing was not essential to our bargain. It was almost beside the point. Even when I answered their subsequent (but infrequent) probes by telling them that I was interested in the perceptual question, they continued to internalize and to describe my subject in behavioral terms (i.e., "campaigning," "how we do it," "dealing with constituents," etc.) rather than perceptual terms. This reaction encourages me to think that the perceptual question is, indeed, a political science question. It is not one politicians naturally think about or generalize about.

For their part, why would they enter into this bargain at all? Why would they agree to subject themselves to a presence and a scrutiny that was at best a nuisance and brought no very striking benefits? I was, after all, one of a horde of supplicants — people who wanted something from them. Probably their reasons were varied. For some, the visit may have been a welcome change in the routine, something different. They spend their lives reaching out to include different people within their orbit; and, if they do not normally associate with academics or writers, the opportunity for closer contact with such a person may interest them. For some, acceptance may have been a conditioned reflex. They are used to having journalists ask to interview them, and they view such requests as something that goes with the job. Some may have seen it as part of their civic duty to educate teachers of politics. Some may enjoy attention from whatever quar-

— the more so because, compared to senators, they attract so little outside interest. They live by publicity; and any chance to get some, however remote, may be deemed worth an inconvenience. For some, scholarly attention may be flattering, the more so when the scholar comes as a student who wants to learn from them rather than as a professor who wants to instruct them. For some, even, the prospect of an academic amanuensis may have stirred acceptance. Some House members would like to be immortalized between book covers; and political scientists are among the gatekeepers to book covers. For one or more, or none, of these reasons perhaps, they agreed to take me on.

Whatever their reasons, they were all completely confident of their ability to protect themselves. It was, of course, a part of the bargain — which I sometimes mentioned explicitly — that they could exclude me from any event they wished to. House members are, moreover, well practiced in talking for the record. They are, in short, professionals just as I am a professional. My confidence in my ability to get them to talk was matched by their confidence in their ability to say nothing they did not wish to say. If we were equally good at our businesses, then the result would not be a disaster for either of us. Thus, from their point of view, although there might be no big gain from my visit, there would be no big loss either.

When you talk with members of Congress and when you write up your research you are especially aware of acting as a representative of the scholarly community to a relatively small but very important group of people — people whose continued good will is a vital scholarly resource. There is only one United States Congress; and its members stay around for a long time. If you blunder in any way with any of these people, you do irreparable damage to every future congressional scholar and, hence, to the scholarly dialogue. It is not like finding another city in which to study community power or another classroom in which to study political socialization.

When I first went to Washington to study the Appropriations Committee in 1959, only one out of the fifty members refused to speak with me. Less than a month before I arrived, another political scientist had walked into that member's unguarded office late in the day and tried to pressure him into giving an interview. The congressman vowed he would never give an interview to a political scientist; to my knowledge, he never has; and he is now a senior member of the Appropriations Committee. Whether or not there was a cause

and effect relationship here, I never forgot the incident. It has underscored a kind of Burkean view of my responsibility to other political scientists. If I leave every relationship I have with a member of Congress in as good or better repair than when I started, then I will leave Congress more, rather than less, accessible to later generations of scholars. In the interview situation, this means: Always act in an interview as if another interview with that same person were to follow soon. Psychologically, if there is no such thing as "the last interview" with a legislator, the impulse to kiss and tell is reduced. This is one way interviewers and participant observers demonstrate a commitment to science. So long as legislators are there and will grant access to political scientists, our fellow scholars can go to them and test any propositions or generalizations we present. I do, therefore, everything I can to help others continue the scientific enterprise by doing all I can to enhance the prospects of future interviewers.

If, in the long run, I think of myself as maintaining access for all congressional scholars, in the shorter run, of course, what I am doing is maintaining access for myself. But that turns out, too, to be a long-term endeavor. When I present my scholarly credentials to a member of Congress, I want them to reflect as good a past record as possible — in the eyes of all types of members. A lot of my personal decisions in life have been made with access problems uppermost in mind. I have not registered in a party; I have not engaged in partisan activity; I sign no political petitions; I join no political organizations or interest groups; I engage in no radio, TV, or newspaper commentary. I do not allow my name to be used for political purposes. Only once have I agreed to testify before Congress, reluctantly, on the subject of committee reorganization, a situation in which I felt I would lose future access unless I paid back members I had interviewed on that very subject. In short, I deliberately keep a low public profile — in the face of countless opportunities to do otherwise.

I do this to maximize the likelihood that *all* senators and *all* representatives and *all* their staffs will accept my professionalism, and to minimize the likelihood that any of them will have heard anything at all of a non-professional nature about me. It is altogether a very conservative approach. The point is that maintaining across-the-board access is a sine qua non of this kind of research, and it is both a long-time and a full-time effort. I keep in touch with a number of

staff people as well as House members, by telephone or occasional trips to Washington. A lot of time that my fellow political scientists have to spend keeping up their statistical skills — to keep themselves in research readiness — I have to spend maintaining my access to Congress, likewise, to stay in research readiness. It is a large, yet hidden part of the research iceberg — a capital investment, an overhead cost. All this accumulated effort, for whatever it is worth, went into each travel request I made. Of course, I do not know how much, or whether, it mattered to the recipients. But it matters a lot to me: I worry about it all the time; and I consider it a necessary condition for everything else I do as a political scientist.

The preceding paragraphs have been overloaded with first-person pronouns. The purpose was to accent, for political scientists unfamiliar with the research methods reported here, the indispensability of across-the-board access. There was no intention to speak for, or preach to, other political scientists engaged in field research on Congress. On the main proposition, all will agree. Problems of access are constant topics of conversation, comparison, and debate among congressional scholars. But the solutions we have arrived at are personal ones, and they vary from the deepest involvement in congressional activity to the deepest disdain for it. The personal stance I have reported here is only one variant — not better, not worse than others, just more comfortable for me. It was reported only to illustrate the pervasiveness, the continuousness, and the seriousness of the access problem for people doing participant observation research. It is especially desirable that political scientists who have never encountered the access problem understand its fundamental importance, so that they will not act mindlessly to undermine the research of those colleagues who live by it.

RAPPORT

If access bespeaks a willingness to have me around, then *rapport* bespeaks an added willingness to be forthcoming and frank during our travels. Rapport refers to the state of the personal relationship — of compatibility, of understanding, of trust — between researcher and researched. It cannot be prescribed or taught. Sometimes it is a matter of luck. Always, it is a challenge and a preoccupation. Because you must constantly evaluate the quality of the data you are getting, you must, perforce, constantly evaluate the quality of your relation-

ship with the person who is giving it to you. Much of what you do out in the district is done to enhance your rapport with the people you find there. Mostly, of course, the way you establish good rapport is by being nice to people and trying to see the world as they see it. You need to be patient, come on slow, and feel your way along. Two handy hints: Go where you are driven; take what you are given; and, when in doubt, be quiet. Rapport is less a special talent than a special willingness to work hard — a special commitment. And one reason it is hard work is because of the many contexts and types of people you find yourself confronted with.

I arrived in each district with only the knowledge I had obtained from the *Almanac of American Politics* and *Congressional Quarterly*. I did not do preliminary research, because I wished to come to the scene without preconceptions — to see it as exclusively as possible through the eyes of the member. It was a useful caution. In a district that I had selected because of its exploding population and because I wanted to see how the congressman coped with such instability, I found that he did not see it as I had assumed he would. "There's been a great deal of population change here," he volunteered.

But beneath that surface change is a fairly stable layer of people who moved to the city between 1945 and 1955. These people have a very parochial feeling about the city. And they resented my opponent who had just moved from [a town twenty-five miles away]. He hadn't lived here before, and I think the old guard kind of resented it. . . . I came to the city, started my law practice and joined the Lion's Club and the Methodist Church. I think those groups were more important to my winning my city council race than the party . . . for volunteer workers and in getting endorsements. Endorsements are very important here if you are a newcomer in politics.

I had the same experience in a border area district, described by political demographers as Copperhead country. The congressman talked constantly about the prevailing weather patterns from the South, but not once during my two visits did he so much as hint at any southern influence on district politics.

Early in my travels, I flew with a congressman to his district. When we got off the plane, we were met by a man who had just

picked up several new suits and was delivering them to the congressman. They walked along together; and I immediately concluded that the man must be a district staffer, a person of importance with whom I would be spending a good deal of time. Somewhat later, I learned that he was only a local cheerleader of some sort; and I never saw or heard of him again. But I also later learned that the new wardrobe, which seemed insignificant at the time, provided an important clue to the congressman's home style. One month later, I flew with a second congressman to his district, whereupon we were again met at planeside by a man carrying several suits fresh from the cleaners. Recalling my earlier experience, I made a mental note that here was a typical local flunky, another spear carrier of no consequence to me. It turned out that the man was the congressman's oldest, closest, most trusted, most skilled, most knowledgeable friend.

I trust Frank more than anyone else in the world. He's the guts of my operation. He knows how I want to say things as well as I know myself. He has insight into political situations that I wouldn't have. . . . He knows one hundred times more about the district than I do.

The freshly cleaned suits carried no clues to the congressman's home style. These twin experiences early in the game helped me learn to feel my way, without preconceptions, into each set of personal relationships and each new context.

When you reach the district, everything is unfamiliar. You confront a strange House member, surrounded by a totally unknown collection of people, in a new political culture, at some unknown point in an unstoppable stream of political events. One member drove fifty miles to the airport to meet me, and took me to stay in his home — thus plunking me into the middle of an unfamiliar family situation. Another arranged to meet me at his campaign headquarters, came and chatted with a group of us for fifteen minutes, and announced, "I'm going to go play golf with my son." Then, as an afterthought to me, "You wanna play golf?" A third had his staff tell me he would meet me at an evening meeting, then canceled the meeting — leaving me riding around a strange city at night running up a huge taxi bill. The next day he kept me waiting in his district office most of the day; and when at last he met me he said, "You

should have been with us at my talk this morning. Sorry we didn't tell you about it."

Of these three situations, the most difficult is the last. In this research, getting to your respondent is the name of the game. The entire object of the trip to the district is to accompany and talk with the member — in as many contexts as possible. Yet it may not be easy. Interviewers on Capitol Hill are familiar with the secretary-gatekeeper who guards the member's office door and considers it a duty to protect the member from academic questioners. And we are familiar with the tactics — blandishment, persistence, outside intervention — for circumventing the office gatekeeper. In the district also there are gatekeepers, but they come in more complicated varieties; they may be members of the family, district staffers, campaign staffers, local politicians, and long-time personal friends. In fifteen years of interviewing on Capitol Hill, I never walked into a congressman's office and found his wife there. Yet in eight district visits, I spent a great deal of my time in the company of wives — most of whom were suspicious of my motives and the effect of my activities on their husbands' careers. Several district operations were strictly "mom and pop" enterprises. Wives, like other gatekeepers, can facilitate rapport or retard it. Gaining rapport with them and with the other people around the member can be nearly as important and just as challenging as achieving it with the member.

Almost always, you are thrown into a close and necessary interaction with district gatekeepers in a way that never happens in Washington. In Washington, you may choose to spend time with a staff member; in the district, it is not a matter of choice. I was able to ride around the district alone with only five of the eighteen members. And on only six of the thirty-six visits did I do so consistently. Nearly always, therefore, someone other than the congressman drives. Sometimes there is an entourage. The researcher rarely gets the undivided attention he gets in the congressman's Washington office. I once spent my entire three-day trip riding around attending events with a congressman, his wife, and a freshly hired district representative. The insecure district aide spent every spare minute trying to impress the congressman and ingratiate himself with the wife. He never stopped talking. I could hardly squeeze a question in edgewise. Obviously, his need for rapport was as great as mine and his claim on the congressman's time greater. I had no choice but to wait him out.

Waiting, I should note, usually paid off. The members came to that, as part of the bargain, they owed me something for my time and trouble. And I could count on a pang of conscience to give me what I came for. In this case, the congressman, his wife, and I went to dinner — minus the staffer — my last night in town. On the other hand, a secure and sympathetic staff member is the best insurance you can carry while in the district. In half the districts, staffers were of major importance to me, as informants, interpreters, precursors and friends. In two cases, the wives were extremely helpful. This is not lone ranger research. Relations with the district gatekeepers are inevitable, important, and hard to predict.

Obviously, one key to effective participant observation is to blend into each situation as unobtrusively as possible. Oftentimes, the easiest way to do this is to become an active participant. When the opportunity to participate presented itself, I snapped it up. It is an easy way to increase rapport with everyone concerned — gatekeepers as well as members. Once, for example, I arrived in a district in time to make a Friday night event, only to find the congressman had been unable to leave Washington. I called his campaign headquarters; a staffer came to pick me up and took me to headquarters to meet a collection of campaign managers and workers. They answered a few questions ("How's it going?" etc.) and then went back to their work. I sat down beside someone and started stamping and sealing a huge stack of envelopes. An hour or two later, someone asked me to help with a telephone poll, which I did. Most of the people there had no idea who I was; those who did didn't know what to do with me; and no one came to speak to me. I didn't know who they were or what each person's relationship to the congressman might be. That set of circumstances is very common. But I busied myself; and late in the evening I was shown the results of the confidential telephone poll. When I met the congressman in the morning, he greeted me with "Herr Professor, I dub thee Knight of the Telephone Poll. I hear you did yeoman service. We're going to have a campaign strategy meeting. Come on." During my ostensibly unproductive evening, I accumulated enough extra capital to be taken in as one of the group.

I have had the same results from handing out leaflets, pens, recipe books, pot holders, and shopping bags, from putting stickers on car bumpers and campaign cards under windshield wipers, and from riding around in a sound truck. Less political activities, too, proved

helpful — bouncing around with the congressman on a storefront water bed, winning \$19.00 from the congressman at bridge, fixing the congressman's flat tire on a mountain road, thumbing a ride when the congressman and I ran out of gas at midnight. Members can identify with you easier if you engage in some activity — any activity — with them than they can through just answering your questions. The shared experience provides a special bond for a long time thereafter. "We missed you on election night," they often said months later, not because they really missed me but because they had come to include me in a special category — a category I had not been in when I first arrived on the scene.

The more immersed one becomes in the member's district activities, the more the terms of the original bargain change and are fleshed out. Time almost always produces better rapport. Over time there are opportunities such as the participant activities just recounted, to demonstrate personal adaptability. My hope was that whereas, at the time of the initial bargain, I might have been viewed prospectively as a professorial pain in the ass, I would come to be recognized as someone who adjusts easily to the unpredictability of events, shows sensitivity to the moods of others, and needs no periodic psychological feedings. I hoped they might learn that college professors are not aloof or overbearing or self-important, that the political scientist in their midst could be ignored, patronized, laughed at, forgotten, and ordered about without being offended. In time, then, they might come to respect, if not like, a professional who would put up with all the incivilities of a political campaign to get what he wanted — one who took notes, not umbrage. Whenever working politicians can be convinced that they have found someone who wants to and does understand them and their life, they will, I believe, open up more than they would otherwise.

Rapport is increased, too, by the demonstration of loyalty. I took every opportunity, verbal or behavioral, to reassure them that I would not use my experience or my information to hurt them, that I was a person who could be trusted. My participation — materially trivial — was a symbolic tender of loyalty to them. I never asked people I met in the district what they thought of the member. Thus I eliminated the possibility of anyone telling the member or his associates that I was soliciting unfavorable opinions. When unfavorable evaluations of the member were offered to me, I would exit as

quickly as possible. When members asked me who else I had traveled with, I willingly told them. A few names — of members they would be likely to know — invariably satisfied their curiosity. When they asked what I had learned from the others, my standard reply was "All districts are different and each member has different problems." By not saying more, I hoped to signal them that I could be trusted with *their* information, too. I let them know that I was not interested in their opponent's campaign. I also told them that (except in California and New York) I was only interested in one member per state, so that local political or personal conflicts would not intrude. I told them, in other words, that within the scope of their political world, I recognized a single loyalty — to them.

I did not openly evaluate their performance — offering either praise or criticism — because my posture was one of learning not judging. Requests for evaluation that might be interpretable as tests of my political intelligence were answered — as vaguely as would suffice. After his television debate with his opponent, one member asked me directly, "How did I do? A little too namby-pamby?" Answer: "If you think you are ahead, you were right not to get into charge and countercharge with him. It would only give him the publicity he needs." It was a less common kind of exchange than one might imagine.

If members found it beneficial to display me before their constituents, I allowed myself to be exploited. One member introduced me at public functions as evidence that people in other parts of the country were interested in their locality. He even introduced me in church, whereupon the minister said, as I stood amid the congregation, "Now you write good things about our congressman." Another member asked me to stay an extra day to accompany him to a college speaking engagement where he wished, I assumed, to show that group that he was at home in academic company. I agreed — as a tender of loyalty, as an extension of the bargain, and as a guarantor of our future relationships.

Only one of my group was defeated. After my postelection interview with him, I decided to get in touch with the person who defeated him, my idea being that two perspectives on the same district would be instructive. But I faced a test of my devotion to a single loyalty. Should I tell the new member that I had already traveled in the district with his defeated opponent, during the bitter election campaign? If I told him, would it contaminate all his answers? If

I didn't, would I be uncomfortable acting deceitfully? I played out both possibilities at length in my mind, and finally decided that my end of the bargain required that I reveal my previous incarnation. The opportunity came before his press aide and I had left the airport. "Have you ever been here before?" "Yes, with your opponent two months ago." So far as I can tell, it did not matter. My flirtation with covert research ended.

Success in developing rapport varied. Half of them took me along when they were with their closest friends or advisors, their personal constituency. And there is not one whom I could not embarrass politically if I were to repeat remarks they made in confidence. Consider this running commentary by a member contemplating his annual appearance at a Veteran's Day observance—a member whose status as a veteran had once been essential in maintaining his reelection constituency:

One of the things I least like to do is to sit upon the platform with my veteran buddies. [But] I'll go and put on my long face. . . . Next year my wife will have to come to this instead of me. She doesn't believe in veterans, doesn't believe in cemeteries, and doesn't even believe in the Good Lord. . . . Maybe if I win by 65 percent, I won't come back here next year.

Or consider these thoughts by a member on his way to a Catholic church carnival in a district he sees as 30 percent Catholic:

You can get more votes for fetuses in Congress right now than you can for the pork barrel. Maybe I should change my campaign button from a star to a fetus. I'm up there tightrope along the high wire, defusing the issue whenever I can. . . . My secret here will be to keep moving through the crowd—to make an elusive target. It won't be a leisurely stay. The odds are prohibitive against someone asking me about abortion. I just hope it isn't the man with the loudest voice in the parish.

Or consider this appraisal by one member of his respected opponent in a very close race. "He's paranoid. He is a right wing crazy; and he attracts crazy opposition like shit draws flies. People come out just to boo him." Such comments, if attributed, would not be helpful politically.

Such comments remind us, too, that the research topic of this book is no ordinary one. It involves the most sensitive of political subjects for the House member—private opinions about public issues and public people, electoral problems and electoral strategies, career ambition and career survival. I am not so naive as to believe that House members would disclose their innermost thoughts on the subjects. But their willingness to discuss them and to put themselves in some jeopardy in so doing indicates that a measure of mutual trust had been established. In answer to the question, "Compared to what?" I cannot say. More trust, probably, than is required for an ordinary Capitol Hill interview; and enough trust, probably, to justify the expenditure of time and effort put into the enterprise.

Still, rapport varied. One member, for example, remained suspicious and uncomfortable with me even after two visits to his district and a couple to his office in Washington. On my second trip to the district he and his district aide dropped me off at the hotel on a Saturday afternoon and said they'd see me "sometime Monday." I thought the treatment excessively cavalier, and my notes on the episode reflect heat and frustration:

When they let me out at the hotel and said they'd see me Monday I was hopping mad. What the hell they thought I was going to do sitting in a hotel room from 4:00 Saturday till noon or so on Monday (don't you call us, we'll call you), I do not know. Fred is personally quite inconsiderate. . . . He never suggested I come over [to his place] or anything. In fact, I asked if I could go to his Sunday evening campaign meeting and he said, "They wouldn't want anyone from the outside." He also said he was going to some party on Sunday and said, "It will only be for friends." And when I got out of the car, he said "Don't get into trouble. But if you do, make sure you make it worthwhile. . . ." To say this to me as if I had anything else to do but wait for him to call next Monday was the height of insensitivity. He was treating me like some casual acquaintance he'd just met on the street someplace—not someone who had taken four days and spent several hundred dollars to come here and be with him as much as is humanly possible. Of course, he doesn't owe me one thing. But it was not what I would call friendly. I guess what really frustrates me is that I have not been able to get him to trust me. That may or may not be my fault, of course.

With regard to such an instance, however, it needs to be said that observation does not stop just because participation stops. His treatment of me provided a vantage point from which I could reflect on his behavior toward others. Does he present himself to others the way he presents himself to me? Why should he be less trusting toward me than other House members are? All behavior, in other words, is grist for the observer's mill. Even when he is denied the opportunity to observe, he observes.

If insufficient rapport is one problem, then too much rapport is another. Sometimes, that is, a professional relationship threatens to slide into a personal friendship. After all, when two people spend several days in constant personal contact — two people who share one major interest in common, politics — it is natural that a personal friendship could develop. I worried about it and tried to guard against it. I did not want them as friends — only respondents. It is impossible to be objective about one's friends. In some cases, however, it could not be stopped; if I had not acknowledged a friendship, I would have lost a respondent. If members insisted on inviting me to their homes, for example, I could not refuse. This led to occasions when I was told not too little but too much. On such occasions I deliberately pulled in my research antennae. I took no notes and tried to forget what I had heard and seen. I assumed the member was not turned on for research purposes when he or she told me about or allowed me to watch certain things — family relationships, for example. I felt it would be taking advantage of members to turn their personal revelations into data. Indeed, I felt that my refusal to get involved on such occasions was part of the bargain. I may have lost information; but I helped to keep, in my mind, some personal distance between us.

On one occasion, too much rapport became a nearly total impediment to research. A representative I had visited before was near the end of a difficult, bitter campaign when I arrived. And, from the moment his wife met me at the airport, I was treated as a trusted friend in a time of trouble, not as a political scientist who had come to learn about the member in his district. The member either could not or did not want to act as my teacher, as he had previously done. Again, a few excerpts from my nightly notes will indicate the frustrations — and the acceptance — of too much rapport:

I'm so inside this campaign, I'm out. I find myself saying to people that I'm a friend of Carl's and I'm out here to help him out — instead of saying that I'm writing a book. I can't ask Carl questions I'd like to because it's a little like standing around someone who may be dying and asking him where it hurts the most and how bad he feels. My questions have to be carefully phrased so that they are, at the least, sympathetic, and, at the most, innocent. I can't ask anything with a bite to it, anything hard, anything critical, etc. I'm treated as one of the family and I'm expected [by Carl] to act that way. As I say, I'm so far "in" that I can't be sufficiently "out" to probe. Maybe half in, half out is the best description.

I have got myself into a situation where almost no communication passes between us during the day — in contrast to my other visit when we rode all over and talked. But he is fighting for his life and he has drawn his family around him, and I'm just "there" as a kind of friend in the background. It's even out of place to ask a question. I tried one this morning as we got to Beaver Rapids. "What kind of town is Beaver Rapids, Carl?" "Well, here it is," was his only answer.

This trip has been strange. I have been accepted and welcomed this time as a friend and not an analyst. I have been placed in a role from which I cannot extricate myself — as emotional supporter and friend. I'm introduced everywhere as "our friend Dick Fenno, from Rochester, New York" — not as a political scientist, not as an author. . . . I have almost been anointed an *intimate* for this trip. When I asked Joanne [his daughter] on the way back to the house today if I shouldn't go back to the motel and leave Carl alone, she said, "No, you are good for him. He likes you and you strike just the right note with him. You are quiet when he doesn't want to talk, and you talk when he wants to. He wants people around now, and he needs people. You do it so well, you should be in public relations." She was telling me that I was needed — and I was. . . . [The family was busy and] he was alone, vulnerable, apprehensive, exhausted, and needed a friend. I was it. Not a political scientist. A friend.

The initial terms of our bargain were no longer recognizable. But I tried to keep my end of it as best I could, not only by acquiescing

in an intensified loyalty but by keeping a blocked ear, a closed eye, and a forgetful mind to much that I observed at the time.

THE OBSERVER AND THE OBSERVED

The problem of over-rapport is part of the larger problem of the relationship between the observer and the observed. It is particularly acute in participant observation research. At one level, the presence of the observer may contaminate the situation, causing the people being observed to behave differently than they otherwise might. When, for example, I allow myself to be introduced as someone writing a book about a member, those listening may view the member in a changed light. Or, if I am introduced at a strategy meeting with the comment that "He's writing a book," the participants may pull their punches so as not to place the member in an unfavorable light. My guess is that contamination effects in these cases are pretty minor.

I have wondered, too, whether my anticipated presence in the district might cause any alterations in the scheduling. On one occasion, a member insisted on taking me to a part of the district where he had never been (during which trip he had to stop and ask some schoolchildren where we were: "I'm the congressman from Wayne and I'm looking for my district"); this unscheduled trip caused him to be late for another engagement and left him extremely irritable for the rest of the day. Because they could, and did, exclude me from events if they wished, I concluded that their schedules were probably not altered much on my account. I have also questioned whether my observation of explanatory consistency (Chapter Five) might not have been an artifact of my presence. If, that is, members were conscious of my note taking, wouldn't they have been abnormally careful not to behave like explanatory chameleons? I have no way of knowing, although I believe that I would have picked up some inconsistency somewhere along the line if such were a major behavior pattern.

Finally, the possibility of observer intrusion inheres in the very way the interviewing is done — as part of a running conversation more than as a question-and-answer session. On Capitol Hill it may be possible to nod sympathetically while listening to an interview answer, but in the district you must talk, because you are often part of a group carrying on a conversation. It is possible to have a

one-sided Capitol Hill interview. It is not possible to have a one-sided three-day visit with someone. You must give as well as take; and in giving you may alter the situation you have come to observe. This is the subtlest kind of contamination. And I cannot think of a way to avoid it, except to be aware of it. Awareness will lead, usually, to saying less rather than more. It is not the object of this kind of research to gratify yourself or advance yourself personally by "making an impression" on the people you have come to observe.

On occasion, efforts to blend into the local landscape brought noteworthy success. One occurred when a very conservative member spent ten minutes of his twenty-five-minute press conference — before me and about eight newsmen — attacking the tax exempt status of foundations "who hire eastern egghead college professors to do social experimentation for left-wing causes." After that, the two of us went out to lunch where he talked openly about himself and his political life — to a Director of the Social Science Research Council, holding a Ford Foundation Fellowship. On another occasion, I was in a rural southern town with a congressman and the family of the local tax collector in their home. I sat quietly for an hour or so while the others gossiped. Eighty-year-old Uncle Aubrey also sat quietly, in the chair next to me. At the end of the evening Sue Ann Thorp, the tax collector, asked me if I had any children and how old they were. When I said one was in his mid-twenties, everyone expressed surprise, said I wasn't old enough, feigned disbelief, and asked how come I looked so young. After a short silence, Uncle Aubrey offered his sole comment of the evening. "He takes care of himself. He shoots and goes fishin'." His explanation settled the matter for everyone present. For a tennis player and a skier, it was the highlight of seven years of research.

The larger danger in the relationship of observer and observed is what anthropologists call "going native" — becoming so close to your respondents, so immersed in their world and so dependent on this close relationship that you lose all intellectual distance and scholarly objectivity. Thus does the observer of Congress, having lost any critical capacity, become an apologist for the members and the institution. This is a problem to which there is no completely satisfactory solution. I recognize it, I worry about it, and I have tried to cope with it — again, mainly by keeping relationships professional. The effort has had only partial success.

The primary bulwark of one's professionalism in these matters is

a natural one. Political scientists live within a scholarly community; and so long as they identify with that community, they will remain outsiders in the world they go to observe. After my earliest set of four district visits, university colleagues asked me how things had gone. And I can recall telling them that things had gone well, but it was "good to be home" — that only by going out of the intellectual community could one realize how much more at home he was there than in any of the districts. Everywhere I went I had been an outsider; and I had felt like an outsider. The four districts visited definitely ranked differently on my personal at-homeness index; but compared to the university, all ranked far behind. However comfortable I may have felt, I was uncomfortable compared to the way I felt within the scholarly community. It was a contrast that continued to the last. That contrast in feeling is, perhaps, the academic's surest barrier against going native.

I had gone to the district thinking, perhaps, that Robert Merton's classification of "local" and "cosmopolitan" (among others, of course) might help me differentiate among House members. I left the districts thinking that the distinction was useful, not for differentiating among members, but for differentiating between members as a group and the political scientists who study them, between the observed and the observer. Compared to academics, nearly all House members are locals. Compared to a university, most congressional districts are less cosmopolitan. Members tend to be rooted in the values and the institutional life of local communities. They belong; they know where they belong; and it is the very strength of our representative institution that they do. The academic, on the other hand, is likely to be less locally rooted, more mobile, more attached to free-floating intellectual communities, an outsider in any context beyond the scholarly one. And most so, perhaps, in a local space-and-place bounded context like a congressional district. In terms of going native, the marginality of the academic to almost all native contexts is a natural asset. In terms of understanding the working politician with local ties, however, it complicates the task of participant observation.

As a complement to this natural professional marginality, I have found it personally helpful to remain marginal to the congressman's world in Washington. I have never lived there. I have never spent more than three weeks at a stretch there. Between 1968 and 1977, with the exception of a single two-week stay, I never spent more

than three days in Washington at any time. When I am there I do not socialize with members or their families; nor do I become entangled in the alliances of the Washington community. It has been my habit to go there, collect data, and return to Rochester to puzzle over what I have found and to work out my conceptual and analytical structures within the scholarly community. Because other academics find it equally beneficial to spend much time — or live — in Washington, I suspect my hit-and-run relationship with Capitol Hill is a personal idiosyncrasy. (It is also a matter of what one has chosen to study in Washington.) I am sure, however, that the practice has raised the odds against going native in my particular case. And I mention it only in that respect.

Out in the districts, as noted earlier, some members became friends. But they remained business friends rather than personal friends, social friends, or family friends. It is the best measure of our personal relationship that not more than two of the eighteen know anything but the most superficial things about me personally. I never volunteered; most of them never asked; and that is the way I like it. (It was always reassuring to return to a district after two years and be introduced by a member with whom I had developed fairly good rapport as a professor from "Syracuse University" or from "Fordham.") A clear failure in my efforts to preserve a business relationship, however, is the fact that I could not bring myself to be indifferent to their electoral success. *I wanted them all to win.* Nothing I did, however, had the slightest effect on whether or not they did. In one bizarre set of circumstances, however, I became emotionally involved in the campaign of my oldest and closest congressional friend; I had no effect on the electoral outcome, but I became an intimate for the duration of the campaign; and in the process I abandoned all social science activity. Luckily, I had nearly completed my research in that district.

A final, less soluble part of the observer-observed, going native problem is that in doing the things that must be done to maintain desirable levels of access and rapport, the participant observer can slowly lose the ability and the willingness to criticize. Some loss of objectivity comes inevitably, as increased contact brings sympathy, and sympathy in its turn dulls the edge of criticism. Some blurring of intellectual distance is produced, too, by the pleasures of participant observation research. The problem is that across-the-board access and continued rapport require a sympathetic understanding

on the part of the observer. By the same token, they probably also require that highly opinionated and unflattering commentary be avoided. I have felt, for example, that my access might be adversely affected if I jumped heavily into the debates on congressional reform — which are, after all, debates among partisans within Congress. (If they are not, they are trivial and meaningless exercises, and it doesn't matter to anyone which side a political scientist might be on.) This conservative posture, taken in the interests of access, provokes scholarly criticism for being insufficiently sensitive to congressional change, too wedded to the status quo — in short, “a Congress lover.” I think the thrust of such criticism is correct. Political scientists who are less encumbered than I by a felt need to protect across-the-board access and rapport will have to produce the most thoroughgoing critical work on Congress.

I also think that the kind of work done in this book is necessary if others are to produce informed, relevant criticism. The book has not been uncritical. When all members engage in the same behavior — running against Congress, for example — serious criticism has been levied. But, of course, blanket criticism is not as likely to affect access as the criticism of individuals would. In that respect, the book is less biting and critical than it might have been. Still, I know that some of my judgments — however mild — will bother individual members, because their view of themselves is bound to be more flattering than mine. (This is largely, I think, because my judgments — that they are issue-oriented, or hard working, or personable, or creative, or whatever — are inevitably comparative and, hence, relative to their colleagues. Their self-estimates, on the other hand, cannot be made relative to what their colleagues do at home, since they have no opportunity to observe. Hence, they judge themselves more in comparison to other politicians in their home context — most of whom are less successful than they.) By protecting their anonymity, I have tried to shield them from any criticism from their colleagues and from people at home who might use attributed material against them.

If there were any way that I could have “named names” in the book, without destroying my access and without jeopardizing the access of future political scientists, I would have done so. It would have given the book's ideas a much wider national audience than they will ever get, attached as they now are, antiseptically, to Representatives A, B, C. But it could not be done. Political science friends

mine know the names of some of the House members with whom I have traveled. Doubtless, some will play games matching names to letters. But they cannot expect any helpful signals from this quarter.

DATA

When I am with each House member, I do a lot of what I call in the Introduction “hanging around.” That is, a lot of watching, listening, and talking, a lot of sitting, standing, and riding, some participation, and a lot of questioning — all for the purpose of collecting data. A three-day trip would produce twenty-five to thirty-five pages of notes, typed and double-spaced. How good, then, are the results? How reliable and valid are the data collected in this manner? In the end, each reader will have to make some judgments. I can only describe how it was done, what the problems were, and how I tried to hedge against them.

The data I use in the book are my notes; note taking is central to the work. I do not use a tape recorder. In the unresolved dispute among elite interviewers, I continue to stand with those who prefer not to use it. I am most comfortable interviewing politicians in a relaxing, conversational manner, without intrusion of mechanical devices that have to be started, reloaded, and stopped. To some degree, doubtless, this reflects the defense of an established style against the unknown — against the fear that whatever effect it might have on the interviewee, a tape recorder would cramp my style as an interviewer. To some degree, it reflects an unwillingness to risk the costs involved in a test that might confirm my fears and result in as much as a single bungled interview.

But, more than just taste or conservatism, my reservations about a tape recorder relate to its possible adverse effect on the interview — in light of the purpose and uses to which I put the interviews. In exploratory research, the emphasis is on discovering relationships and on generating ideas about them. And the interviews are most useful when the conversation is most frank and most spontaneous. I would gladly trade many a whole interview for one personal reflection that provides me with a new way of looking at things, for one insightful formulation that is rooted in personal experience, or for one particularly apt and pungent commentary. If insight and nuance and example and free association are to be encouraged, it is my belief

that one's chances of getting a "better" interview are increased when no tape recorder is used and person-to-person rapport is the only reliance.

To be sure, most House members will talk with a tape recorder present. And the fact that they will talk for the record is good enough for some research purposes. Where data collection is to be followed by quantification, where content analysis and coding will be necessary, the need for reportorial accuracy is probably the paramount consideration. In such cases, a tape recorder may be mandatory. Such is also the case where journalists seek comment for attribution. But where you want to maximize the likelihood of qualitatively interesting comments, the tape recorder can only be inhibitory.

Every congressman has a fairly stylized set of comments that he is willing to make for the record. Some will do so more willingly and volubly than others. But all of them — or so I believe, and this is probably the crucial assumption — have a second, qualitatively different level of off-the-record commentary they *could* engage in. That is the level I want to reach: the level of commentary for private consumption that lies between a level for public consumption and a level for no consumption. If there are members who give all they have to give on tape, they will do so without tape. For the others — and a key assumption is that there *are* many "others" — my belief is that the only chance to get a nonroutine, nonreflexive interview is to converse casually, pursuing targets of opportunity without the presence of a recording instrument other than myself. If worst comes to worst, they can always deny what they have said in person; on tape they leave themselves no room for escape. I believe they are not unaware of the difference.

Contrasting viewpoints on recording methods will be resolved only by the different tastes and assumptions of researchers and by the different purposes of their research. It is impossible to prove that an interview obtained in one way was not as "good" as the interview that would have resulted from the use of a different technique. I have simply made an educated guess for my kind of research. I would only add that whatever the interview technique, the proper attitude toward the results should be skepticism, leading to reevaluation and, wherever possible, cross-checking. We should not be beguiled by the mere fact that politicians will talk to us. They are professional talkers — professional "presenters" as we have said.

They have a big personal investment to protect, and they have learned how to protect it against all outsiders, whether we come carrying our tape recorders or not.

For home district research, the tape recorder issue is largely moot. Most of the time it would be impossible to use, because so much of the interviewing is conducted on the run, because it is utterly impossible to predict when or under what conditions the member will be responsive to questioning, and because the best results often come in isolated moments of informality and spontaneity. There is no one "best time" for this kind of interview; there are many such times, most of them brief and unexpected. The closest thing to a generalization might be that morning proved the least promising; the member was usually preoccupied with organizing and rehearsing the day's activities.

My technique was to carry a pocket-sized notebook and to record, as nearly as my powers of recall would permit, verbatim quotations. I recorded whenever I had a chance during the day. Sometimes I made brief jottings — of key phrases, for example — to remind me of things I did not want to forget; sometimes I recorded a few of the most salient comments completely and immediately. Just how much I could get into the notebook during the day was in the lap of the gods. During the first day or two when I was working hard at rapport, I often sacrificed data to rapport by not taking notes unless I was totally alone. I wanted to appear relaxed, to blend into the picture, and to encourage the members to relax by not giving them the feeling that I was recording everything they said. When I felt I had achieved decent rapport, I would very conspicuously take notes, to remind them of our professional relationship and to reassure them that I was really working on a book. I began to do this routinely because, once we got to know each other, some members would ask, "Aren't you going to take any notes? How do you remember all this?"

The answer to the "how do you remember" question is simply that you train yourself to do so. You learn to switch on and off as subjects of interest come and go and to spend the time when you are switched off rehearsing and imprinting the items you wish to remember. The most revealing comments are unforgettable. In any event, my technique was to take mental notes, transcribe them briefly when I got the chance during the day, and then to spend two, three, or four hours in the evening recording everything I

could remember about the day's activities and about the member's comments. I did this in the same notebook. Besides writing the data, I wrote down my reactions to what I had seen and heard, all the additional questions that had come to mind, all the analytical ideas that had occurred to me, illuminating comparisons between this member and other members — a running commentary on the data. I reread my notes whenever I got the chance to jog my memory and add items I had forgotten.

The major organizing principle of the notes was chronological. It aided me both in my recall and in my reflections if I recreated the day chronologically when debriefing myself at night. I found, too, that I could remember the context in which statements were made or actions taken if I thought about the day's activities in sequence. The minor organizing principle of the notes was a running speculation on "what makes this particular member tick." This involved an effort to find some consistency in his or her actions and comments. I would describe for myself a tentative pattern, then worry over behaviors that did not seem to fit the pattern and entertain tentative revisions that would accommodate the unexplained patterns. Much of this theorizing has been excluded from the book — for instance, my private speculations about "personality" characteristics. But I tried to understand "the whole member" in some depth as a precondition for any attempt to offer generalizations about all members. The more I satisfied myself that I understood one member's perceptual and behavioral patterns, the more confidently I could add one more case to my generalizing base. In some cases (see Chapter Four) the effort produced no consistent pattern and, hence, uncertainty on my part. But the effort always helped me to remember and organize what I had observed.

In trying to make sense out of each member's activity, I found it particularly helpful to compare him or her with other members. Practically, this meant comparing two members — occasionally three — with whom I traveled consecutively. While one experience was still very fresh, I would think about a given member's home style by comparing it in detail with that of the last member and vice versa. Table A illustrates the frequency with which such stimulative bunchings occurred. These "constant comparisons" helped to highlight what was special about each member while also building a tentative set of generalizations about their similarities. These comparisons were an additional aid to memory and to reflection. But in

my notes they always had a limited, two- or three-member scope and never of a comprehensive, eighteen-member scope.

This discussion of note taking illuminates a basic characteristic of participant observation research. Data collection and data analysis do not proceed in linear progression. They proceed simultaneously. Participant observation is not like survey research, in which you make up a permanent set of questions, put your questionnaire "into the field," wait for the data to come in, and then proceed to do "data analysis." In participant observation research, data analysis accompanies data collection, and the questionnaire that goes into the field may change in the course of the research. The differences should not be exaggerated; but the ones that exist stem from the different strengths of the two kinds of research — the one more confirmatory, the other more exploratory.

This bare-bones description of my data collection methods is sufficient to indicate numerous problems. But whatever problems inhere in the technique are compounded by the conditions under which this kind of research is done. First, it is physically tiring. When people ask me what I have learned, my first answer is that politicians have incredible stamina and that, surely, when we think of recruitment we should take this basic factor of sheer human energy into account. At its worst, it means getting up at 5:30 for the factory gates and going to bed after the last evening meeting at night. For them, there may be sleep; for the observer, there are two or three hours of note taking left — to bed at 2:00 A.M. and up again at 6:30. There is no time to leave the scene to pull yourself together; you just keep going. After three or four or five days of this, I was worn out — but they kept right on.

Worse than the physical fatigue, however, is the mental weariness that results from this kind of research. For the member, there is a lot of routine to what he or she does at home. Besides, there is a lot at stake. Even more, it is, for members, an ego trip and they are buoyed up by being on center stage. Standing in line for a drink at a realtor's open house, I said to a bone-weary member (who had to be dragged to the party), "A drink will pick you up." He smiled, "No, the people will. As soon as I get on stage, I'll begin to dance a little." All this makes it easier for him to keep up the mental as well as the physical pace. For the observer, however, nothing is routine or ego-gratifying. Everything is strange, yet everything must be accommodated to — new people, new culture, new challenges. The

sheer overload of information — faces, places, events, statistics, history, all different from those of the last district — is overwhelming. Yet they must be quickly assimilated, retained, and fed back to the people around you in familiar usages, at appropriate times.

Moreover, the benefits of all this are not so certain for the observer as they are for the member. How do I know whether I'll get anything useful? I am 2000 miles from home and \$600 poorer, and how do I know I'll have any decent rapport with these people? If I know the member is going someplace but no one has suggested that I go along, should I speak up and run the risk of seeming too pushy or sit back and run the risk of not being asked to go? Should I ask my question now or should I wait? I carried around a shotgun loaded with questions, but had to feel my way into a situation where it seemed propitious to squeeze the trigger. Once, when I held back on my questions for two days, the member got a cold and a sore throat on the third. Once, flying in a small Cessna, I had just begun to ask some questions when the pilot suddenly turned the controls over to the congressman. Sometimes, with a staffer driving the car, a trip across the district can be an ideal time for asking questions. But what do you do when you find that one member likes to sleep on such trips, another likes to listen to tapes, and another likes to play the harmonica? Do you try to get a conversation going or do you wait? I waited, realizing that they might be trying to defend themselves against my questions — to find a private, quiet time for themselves before plunging in again. But I couldn't relax. If the member awakened, turned off the tapes, or put down the harmonica, I had to have my questions lined up in order of priority and ready to fire.

The uncertainty and the anxiety associated with this kind of adventure are great. In a forty-five-minute interview on Capitol Hill you typically have the undivided attention of the congressman, and you keep firing questions until he (or you) terminates the interview. It is not a matter of discretion whether or not to ask a question. It is part of the bargain that, for the duration of the interview, you will ask and he will answer. But in the district, the bargain is that you are allowed to tag along and observe whatever they do and ask appropriate questions at appropriate times. Each time you ask a question, however, it is a matter of tact, of judgment. Frequently, you are asking the member to change the focus of his attention from something else to your questions. (I always carried a detailed map

of the district with me, and found that taking it out and asking "Where are we now?" was one fairly easy way to shift focus.) You must constantly assess the situation for its appropriateness, its ripeness. On Capitol Hill, you do not care about the congressman's state of readiness, how fatigued he is, where he has been, where he is going, what is worrying him, whether now will be "better" than later. You walk in at the appointed time, sit down, and ask your questions. In the district, you must worry both about whether to ask questions and, if so, which ones — hoping to fit questions most naturally into the flow of conversation and events.

These matters of discretion are anxiety producing. If I blow one interview on Capitol Hill, it's no big loss — on to the next office! Anyway, it probably wasn't my fault. But if I blow one in the district, it costs a lot and it probably *was* my fault. In sum, *my* behavior is a good deal more consequential in the less routinized, more complicated, and totally unpredictable district setting than it is on Capitol Hill.

There is a lot of time, too, to brood about such matters. Despite the frenzy of activity all around, the role of the observer is very solitary. You are marginal — deliberately so — to every group you are with. Rarely will anyone come up to make you feel at home — at a dinner, a cocktail party, a celebration, a meeting. They are playing their games. The House member is playing with them. The more the member is interacting person to person with others, the less can the participant observer either participate or observe. You must move away from the member as he goes about the business of handshaking, greeting, and talking with his constituents. Although no one in this gathering of total strangers is paying the slightest attention to you, you can give no indication of being anything less than completely comfortable, of not thoroughly enjoying yourself. It's a little bit like the basketball player's ability to "move without the ball." It is lonesome duty; and anyone who tends toward paranoia should not volunteer. This is not a complaint. Like the House members running for reelection, my first comment is "I must be crazy to do this," and my second comment is "I can't think of anything I'd rather do." But — given the physical and mental fatigue — I found I could not visit more than two districts in succession or last more than seven or eight days on the road, however much more economical and intellectually stimulating longer trips might have been.

These working conditions only exacerbate the problems of data

collection. What are these problems? One is that because so much of my note taking is done after the event, a subtle reconstruction of the event or comment can take place in the interim. Another is that I will have selectively perceived and simply have missed a lot that was said or happened. This danger is made worse by the oceans of talk that wash over the observer in such a visit, only a tiny fraction of which can conceivably be remembered. It is, at best, only a partial solution to try to record, as I did, as much as I could, whether or not it interested me or made sense to me at the time. Such words and events tend always to be "second thoughts," recorded after the apparent highlights. Another problem is that I will have failed to record the context in which a comment was made, thus endowing it with greater generality than it was intended to have. Finally, because I was not the same person when I began in 1970 as I was when I finished in 1977, changes in my own interests and abilities may have made generalizing across time hazardous. These defects in the human recording instrument are made more serious by physical and mental weariness. And I would never claim that my notes do not suffer from all these limitations.

Data so collected produce any number of worries. One is the matter of accuracy. Did I get what he said — the right words, the right order, the complete thought? Did I observe what he did correctly or fully? One is the matter of validity. Am I using each example of words or of actions to illustrate something appropriate to the meaning the member gave it? Another is the matter of reliability. Have I arrived at a fair, durable representation of each member's thoughts and acts in making my generalizations about his or her perceptions or behavior?

I have tried to cope with these problems and worries. Mainly, I have done so by making two trips to as many districts as possible (fourteen) and by supplementing these trips with an interview (eleven times) in Washington. My hope is that, by repeated as well as prolonged soakings in the district and by the kind of cross-checking that a Washington interview will provide, I will increase my chances of getting it right, using it right and portraying it right. I know that my own confidence in the data and in my use of it increases exponentially when I can add a second set of observations to the first.

The more you observe, the more practice you get in matters such as note taking and recall; and the more practice you get, the more

accurate you become. Oftentimes, the same thing will be said twice during a visit; and the second account is more nearly verbatim because you need only fill in the blanks. Sometimes, the same perception is articulated on both trips and cross-checking increases accuracy. During the Washington interviews, I took close to verbatim notes and tape recorded immediately thereafter, thus giving me another check. The hiatus between visits — usually at least a year — allowed me to accumulate a fresh list of questions, some repeats and some new ones. I could reformulate my earlier hunches, and puzzlements, as to home style patterns or as to "what makes this member tick." When you see or hear the same thing repeated more than once after a period of years, you feel more certain how to interpret what you see. If, for example, you visit a district and see the member do nothing except give speeches (or never give a speech) you wonder whether this represents stylistic preference or a contextual coincidence. When you return for a later stay and see the identical pattern, you feel more secure about making a stylistic generalization based on observation. Or, if you make very different observations on successive occasions, you may be able to interpret this in terms of a consistent developmental pattern or as some idiosyncratic activity related to a very specific context.

Generalizations made by working politicians tend to be based on recent events and are, on that account, always suspect. It is not a matter of deceit. It is just that politicians live pragmatically from immediate problem to immediate problem and have neither the time nor the incentive to generalize beyond what happened yesterday or last week or, maybe, last month. The observer needs methods, therefore, for determining whether a given comment — seemingly important — is to be interpreted as a considered generalization or as an artifact of a specific context. When you hear the same thing repeated on more than one occasion — especially on occasions widely separated in time — you can have more confidence that it is a usable generalization.

Conversely, if a comparison of the notes from two visits shows a marked change in emphasis, you may be able to see the relevance of context. For example, when I asked a congressman in a heavily Jewish district, in 1970, whether any single vote cast in Congress could defeat him, he answered with unusual confidence, "I can't think of any vote that would defeat me. Not a single one. Even if I voted against arms for Israel, I could prepare a defense and say that

there weren't *enough* arms for Israel." In 1976, when I returned to the district, he spontaneously volunteered the comment, "If I voted against aid to Israel . . . that would be it! If I did something absurd like that and voted counter to a massive opinion in my district, I would lose." The generalizations he made in the two cases were important. But they have to be seen as contextually produced — by the upbeat confidence resulting from the Six-Day War which prevailed during my first visit, and by the shaky uncertainty following the Yom Kippur War which prevailed during my second visit.

In short, two sets of observations are better than one — much better. It is not just that you can compare notes taken across time and contexts. It is also that rapport invariably is better during the second visit than the first and, hence, you learn more and learn better. Here, for example, is a congressman discussing his reelection and career goals. On the first trip, his only comment on the subject was:

Eighty or ninety percent of all members of Congress are always looking ahead to the next election. They pick each other's brains on the subject all the time. I don't care what they say, that's on their minds. Just like a business with a profit and loss statement, the politician looks at the next election as his test. There are some independent cusses down there. They know what's right for the world and they go ahead and do it. But most of them aren't like that.

On the second trip, we had not been together an hour before he launched into a soliloquy, part of which went:

I don't know what I'm doing in this business or why I ever got into it. The family situation is terrible. I just spent ten days in the district. Dottie and the kids were here for the first three days and then they drove back to Maryland to start school. I went back Wednesday, went to the office and then had to go to a dinner for the life underwriters group. A congressman from our state has to go. If you don't, they won't speak to you again. Then I got home late that night. The next day I had to go to a breakfast and another cocktail party to see some people from the district who were in town. So I got home late again. That was yesterday and here I am back in the district again for five days. I'm a yo-yo. . . . You work so hard to get it and when you get it you wonder what you did

it for. It's like joining a fraternity — I worried so much about it, but when I got to be president of the House, it didn't matter anymore. It's so competitive. I like that. And I like the excitement. But you spend so much time and effort — for what? I'll tell you — to get reelected. I'll be more frank with you than I would be with most people. We spend all our time running for reelection. . . . I guess I told you before, I'm not going to grow old in Washington. I may run for the Senate if things work out. If I win, OK; if I don't win, OK. I'll be happy to go back home. If I do win, I'll make a solemn promise to myself that it won't be for long. But I would love to have six years and not have to run all the time. I'd say, "I don't care what happens, I'm not going to spend all my time running for reelection."

During my first trip, this same member had kept me waiting in a parking lot while he went inside to talk strategy with some intimates. On the second trip, he took me to his strategy meeting.

One characteristic of the interview data is that it is nonstandardized and, hence, not quantifiable. Questions are tailored to particular individuals and are posed in dissimilar contexts — not to mention in scrambled orderings. Nonstandardization is, indeed, essential to getting and keeping rapport. And the result is that the material is not easily coded or described in terms of frequencies. It was never my intention to quantify this material; it was not collected with quantification in mind; and I do not think it would be methodologically sound to quantify it retrospectively. But I have, of course, supplemented my field work with two kinds of quantifiable data: first, data on numbers of trips home and allocation of staff resources, and, second, data taken from the appointment books of members. The first body of data, anyone can collect. But data from private appointment books could not be had by anyone lacking good rapport with the member. In addition, several members gave me precise rankings of the importance and the comfortableness of their various activities at the end of my visit. That, too, is not something that would be done for the casual observer. Thus, maybe this type of research, although not in itself quantitative, can open up avenues of research that are.

The book's data are, however, mostly nonquantifiable. That is the reason so much of it has been presented in the form of quotations. Some are lengthy and complicated. Altogether they may become

tedious. But they need to be struggled with, like any other kind of data. Data analysis, of course, will have to be done by making non-numerical assessments of meaning, appropriateness, consistency, context, and importance. Readers should not think of the quotations and anecdotes herein as any less worthy of serious examination than other kinds of data. They are, of course, primarily discovery data and should be viewed in this light. Because "data analysis" is often assumed to mean only the statistical manipulation of numerical data, it should be noted that participant observation is likely to produce data of a different sort and require different modes of data analysis. In the final accounting, we ought to ask the same serious question we would ask of any set of data: Have they served the purpose for which they were gathered?

One way to rephrase this question about the adequacy of the data is: Are your data any better than, or any different from, what you would have gotten by interviewing on Capitol Hill? The answer is, I think: For the particular purposes of the book "better," and in a more general sense "different." The data are better because there are some questions I would not have known enough to ask had I not put myself in the district — all the questions about home style, for example. Had I simply taken some perceptual questions to Capitol Hill, this book would have ended with Chapter One. Even then, it would not have been as informed a chapter. Questions about perceptions (of each group or area as we visited them, for instance) can be formulated and answered more knowledgeably at the point where the member is actually engaged in perceiving.

Passing a number of pickup trucks on the road, one congressman in a heterogeneous district commented, "This is Wallace country. You can tell a Wallacite because he has a pickup truck, a hound dog, and a gun. He'll give you his dog and his pickup truck, but he won't give up his gun." The next day, spotting several pickup trucks as we entered the parking lot of a VFW hall, he said, "I'd love to get the pickup truck vote, but I never do." A congressman trying to win support from lower-middle-class voters despite his strong civil rights record revealed a relevant view of these constituents as we drove along a city street: "We're a very artsy community here. A few years ago, they built a theatre in the round across the park there. And do you know what it turned into after two years? A wrestling hall. I guess that tells you something about the state of culture in the district." During the evening's rehash of another member's days

activities, someone mentioned the morning hour of handshaking, howdying, and hijinks with twenty people in a small country store. The congressman turned to me and said simply, "Dick, those are the people who elect me." In each case, the circumstances elicited spontaneous perceptual statements; and, because I had observed what the congressman was talking about, I understood better what he meant.

Through repeated and prolonged observation in the districts I also discovered patterns of behavior that I would not have known about otherwise — the lawlike tendency of House members to run for Congress by running against Congress, for example. In these several respects, I think the data are "better" than they might otherwise have been.

Equally, however, the data are simply different. I did not learn many things I did not know before. But I came to know through experience things I had known only intellectually; I got "a feel" for things. It is one thing to know that a district is "agricultural" and that "the farmers are worried about the drought"; it is another thing to find yourself unable to place campaign cards under car windshield wipers that have been glued to the windshield by inches of caked dust. It is one thing to know that a district is "inner city" and that "the people there feel powerless"; but it is another thing to scrape your car axle on cratered, unpaved streets in the heart of one of America's largest cities. It is one thing to consult a map and note that one of the two districts you are about to visit is "small" and that the other is "large"; it is another thing to sit in a strategy meeting in the first district where it is concluded that three billboards will capture all the traffic in the district, and then go to the second district to spend one whole day driving to a town of 2500 people.

When these things happen, you begin to *weight* factors differently in your thinking, giving more weight to things experienced than they otherwise might have. Because these experiences are selective, it may be dangerous to pay special attention to them. On the other hand, it may be possible to better understand the congressman's own weighting when you have experienced his concerns at first hand. And, no matter what else it accomplishes, a better "feel" for a district helps offset the natural disadvantages — discussed earlier — that university-oriented academics face in understanding locally oriented politicians.

Just as you gather different data about the districts, so do you come to form a different picture of politicians. Again, the point is

that you do not learn anything new so much as you place different emphasis on old knowledge. Intellectually, I knew that politicians required physical stamina; having flogged myself around eighteen districts with them, I now think physical attributes are more important to political success than I had previously believed. The second attribute of politicians that has been highlighted by these visits is their sheer competitiveness. It is not, at this stage, so much a matter of a driving ambition to be a congressman. They have achieved that ambition; and there are other things they can do to make a living. But they do not want to lose. They may have learned how to lose gracefully; but they *hate* to lose. We know they want to win; but they seem now to me more driven by a determination not to lose. They are, above all, tough competitors.

A third attribute that looms somewhat larger to me now is the politician's ability to keep from taking himself too seriously. It is something an outsider has less opportunity to observe on Capitol Hill, where each House member seems, at least, to be a king or queen in his or her empire — isolated from everyday life, fawned over by staff, pampered by Capitol Hill employees, sought after by all manner of supplicants. House members may, of course, be able to take a wry view of this existence. But it may be easier to do so in the district, where they are more likely to be reminded of their ordinariness. In any case, they display a marked ability to break the tension of competition at home by indulging in humor or whimsy, to keep some private perspective on their public selves.

Congressman: I dreamt last night that I was defeated. No fooling, I really did. And do you know what bothered me most? The House gym! My wife said to me, "You're a distinguished person; you'll get a job, don't worry." I said, "Yes, I know; but where will I find a gym like that?"

Wife: A man called and asked you to call him back no matter how late you get home tonight.

Daughter: Your opponent says you're only interested in big business, and not the little folks.

Congressman: Well, I'll find out who he is first. If he's big business, I'll talk to him. If he's little folk, I won't.

Staffer: What are you going to say at the next meeting?

Congressman: I'm going to ask somebody to give me a haircut. Or, I could walk in and hang from the chandelier. No, I guess I'll walk in, undress, and say, "Any questions?"

There may be no generalizations possible about politicians. But when people ask me what they are like, I now stress stamina, competitiveness, and a stabilizing perspective on themselves. I would not have stressed the same things after my Capitol Hill experience.

Because my research was undertaken partly to acquire the vantage point of "the country," one might wonder whether I developed any "feel for the country." Only this, that any claim by anybody to have a feel for the whole country would be preposterous. For ill or good, no one can comprehend the United States. Watching eighteen people will tell anyone that much. Perhaps, of course, looking at "the country" through the eyes of members of Congress is not the best way to comprehend it. But if House members, whose business it is to know only a small segment, express so much uncertain knowledge of their segment, it is not immediately clear who is better equipped to comprehend the whole. Only *institutionally*, not individually, can it be done. To travel outside Washington is to experience and, hence, to weight more heavily the diversity of the country. That weighting, in turn, emphasizes the enormity of the institutional task. One returns to Capitol Hill asking of our representative institution not, "How come you accomplish so little?" but, "How come you accomplish anything at all?"

EVALUATION

Despite what seems to be a monumentally uneconomical method of collecting data, I think the results *are* different from what I would have gotten in Washington. Whether the data are "different enough" or "better" depends on what you want them for. And so we return to the most serious question about data: Are they adequate for our purpose?

It is a final characteristic of participant observation research that this judgment must be made by two groups — political scientists *and* the people being observed. It matters little to the machinist's wife in Dayton what Scammon and Wattenberg's book says. It matters even less to Scammon and Wattenberg what she thinks about their book. But it matters enormously to me what House members (and the people around them) will think of my study. If they say, "That's how it is; that's the way we think," then I have captured something of their world. And I will have passed what I consider the first test. For if they cannot recognize their world in what I have written, I will have failed in the most elementary way.

I will have soaked and poked in their world and not been able to see what they see there. Not that they would or could *generalize* about it the way I have. That is my job. But I want them to recognize their perspectives and their perceptions in my observations.

Members of Congress do not normally "rush to judgment" on academic work — not in my experience. Many of them will not even acknowledge receipt of academic works, let alone read or comment on them. A few members, however, and more staff people do read what political scientists write and do pass judgment. Some journalists, too, perform a similar function. I have had no experience with the reactions of political people in the district — whose judgment will be important in this case. On Capitol Hill, although most people remain oblivious to what we do, nonetheless, the judgment of the few percolates around and provides an ultimate check on our scholarship. On the whole, the Capitol Hill community — again, I have no experience with people in the districts — is predisposed, if not eager, to demolish political science scholarship for its lack of contact with real world politics. Favorable judgments are all the more important, therefore, because they are hard to come by.

Among political scientists, community controls will operate to produce judgments on this research. For them, several questions will be raised. Does the description ring true, in accordance with whatever experience political scientists have had with the people and the activities covered in the book? Vast numbers of political scientists have had firsthand experience in the world about which I have written; their sense of my descriptive accuracy and relevance, therefore, will also be necessary to any favorable evaluation of the research. Political scientists will ask, further, whether the description sheds any light on problems they have been worrying about. Does the study say anything that other political scientists — whether or not they use participant observation — might think worth incorporating into their thinking? Will political scientists find questions posed here interesting enough to pick up and pursue — by participant observation or any other method?

In sum, political scientists will ask whether the work seems accurate and, if so, whether it is worth remembering. They will not answer yes to these questions unless they think the research has been conducted with some care and unless they think the data are adequate to the project's exploratory purpose. If the data are judged sufficiently "different" or "better" to produce some yes answers,

then the data are — for all their obvious problems — good enough for me. In the end, whatever research methods we use, we keep each other honest.

NOTES

1. Three political scientists who have written helpfully about the subject are: Lewis Anthony Dexter, *Elite and Specialized Interviewing* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970); Alexander Heard, "Interviewing Southern Politicians," *American Political Science Review* 44 (December 1950): 886–896; and James A. Robinson, "Participant Observation, Political Internships and Research" in *Political Science Annual, Volume 2*, ed. James Robinson (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1970), pp. 71–110. The other works I have found most useful are: *Issues in Participant Observation: A Text and a Reader*, eds. George McCall and J. L. Simmons (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969); Leonard Schatzman and Anselm Strauss, *Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973); Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967); William Foote Whyte, *Street Corner Society*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), appendix.
2. The experience of political scientists doing research while working as interns (for instance, as American Political Science Association Congressional Fellows) would fall somewhere between that of people who go to Capitol Hill for research purposes only and the experience reported here. An illuminating assessment of the APSA program is found in Ronald D. Hedlund, *Participant Observation in Studying Congress: The Congressional Fellowship Program* (Washington, D.C.: American Political Science Association, 1971).