

Excerpt A from *Freshman Orientation* by Edward I. Sidlow

After his November [2004] victory . . . Joe Schwarz found himself one of thirty-nine—twenty-four Republicans, fifteen Democrats—newly elected members of the House of Representatives in the 109th Congress. The arrival of these newcomers on Capitol Hill, coupled with the departure of the members whose seats they had filled, set off the ritual, complicated game of “Room Draw”—or, more candidly, “grab that space.” Offices now vacated would first be made available to members who had served in the preceding Congress, some of whom would choose to move to a more spacious office, or to one with a better view, leaving their old offices for the freshman class to divvy up. Then, according to custom, a lottery would be held for new members, assigning numbers to indicate the order in which they could select an office from the spaces available. Among those taking office in 2005, the member drawing number 1 had the widest choice; the member with number 39 had the most limited selection. Since Joe Schwarz had drawn number 38, he and Matt Marsden [his chief of staff] were not hopeful about the office space they would get. “When you are that far down the list,” Matt noted, “it’s silly to have great expectations.”

To Matt’s surprise, however a first-floor office in the Cannon Building was still available when it was Joe’s turn to select his space. A first-floor location means no long waits for elevators on the way from the office to the floor of the House for votes and debate . . .

The Cannon Building, which was opened in 1908 and named for Joe Cannon, the powerful Speaker of the House from 1903 to 1911, is the oldest of three House office buildings. It is situated [southeast] of the Capitol Rotunda, on the other side of Independence Avenue. Across the street is the Library of Congress, and a block or so away is the U.S. Supreme Court.

Schwarz’s new office space, measuring about 1,000 square feet, was due to receive fresh paint and new carpeting before the congressman and his staff moved in. While the first-floor location could be seen as a plus, the space itself is a bit awkward, since the rooms are not entirely contiguous . . . While somewhat inconvenient, the divided configuration does allow the staff a sense of independence, and it affords the boss a fair amount of peace and quiet. Besides, freshmen members don’t have a lot of choice in these matters.

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Having taken on the title of chief of staff, Matt [Marsden's] . . . most immediate task was to hire someone to supervise the Washington-based staff—someone with Capitol Hill experience and a thorough understanding of the congressional systems and the policymaking process. Matt interviewed four people for the job, and then had Joe meet with each of them. Eventually, they chose Chuck Yessaian, who, in his mid-twenties, was the youngest of the job candidates . . .

Chuck had moved to D.C. in January 2001 without any solid job prospects. He . . . interviewed for an entry-level position on the staff of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee . . .

Chuck described his early position on the committee staff as “the lowest staff assistant imaginable . . . I was really a glorified furniture mover” . . . In late winter of 2003, he interviewed for a position as legislative assistant (LA) in the office of Fred Upton (R-Mich.) . . . After being on the Hill for just a little over three years, then, Chuck was ready in late 2004 to make the jump to legislative director in the Schwarz office—an impressive accomplishment . . .

In his new position, Yessaian inherited three newly appointed legislative assistants . . . Mark Ratner . . . had worked for Joe during his days in the Michigan state senate and then had served briefly as a substitute teacher before rejoining Schwarz on the campaign trail. Louis Meizlish was a recent graduate of the University of Michigan and a veteran of the campaign as well . . . Meghan Kolassa, a thirty-one-year-old attorney and a life-long friend of Joe's daughter Brennan, had worked for Schwarz when he was in the state senate . . .

A fourth hire was Rob Blackwell, who . . . had first met Dr. Joe Schwarz as a frightened youngster whose tonsils needed to be removed. Afterward, the two stayed

in touch, and after working on the congressional campaign, Rob was invited to join the staff in Washington. His job description included . . . “everything from helping out with the schedule, to being Joe's bodyman”^{*} . . .

Chuck Yessaian hired two additional legislative assistants to round out the Hill staff . . . For the more general LA position, [he hired] Jared Page . . . Then twenty-five years old, Jared had . . . earned a bachelors degree in political science and a masters in public policy, both from the University of Michigan. His first taste of politics had come during the summer of 2000, when . . . he worked for Joe Schwarz, who was then a state senator . . .

The second LA position . . . required someone [with] a detailed understanding of military matters and at least the potential for receiving the security clearance necessary for working with the classified information . . . Having received approximately fifty applications for this position, Chuck interviewed about six candidates. Finally, as Chuck put it, he “stepped outside the box a bit on Aaron's hire—a senior LA with no Hill experience is rather unconventional.” In his mid-thirties, Aaron Taliaferro had completed nearly ten years of active service in the air force . . . Aaron had worked directly with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and he had the highest security clearance one could get. Chuck also thought that Aaron would fit in well with the rest of the Schwarz office staff . . .

A little more than twelve weeks since the Swearing-In, Congressman Schwarz's office was up and running.

^{*}A *bodyman* is the person who shuttles the elected official from place to place; holds the coat, briefcase, or suitcase; and knows when to have a container of coffee, as opposed to bottled water or soda on hand.

Excerpt C from *Freshman Orientation* by Edward I. Sidlow

The committee system is absolutely central to the policy-making process. Congress handles roughly 10,000 bills in any given two-year cycle; this enormous workload must be divided in some manageable way. Standing committees . . . provide the structure for handling the volume of bills introduced, and they are essential to a House member's life on the Hill . . .

After the victory in the 2004 primary, Joe Schwarz and [his chief of staff] Matt Marsden began discussing the committee assignments that would be commensurate with Joe's interests and ability to benefit the Seventh District . . . They quickly agreed that an assignment to the Committee on Education and the Workforce would be great. Joe believed deeply in the importance of education and . . . because of his medical training, he had a particular appreciation for science education . . . Consequently, Joe and Matt determined that a seat on the Science Committee was also attractive . . .

Because farming is a major industry in Michigan's Seventh District, . . . a seat on Agriculture would be welcomed. The Transportation and Infrastructure Committee also seemed an attractive possibility, in part because Interstate 94, which runs east-to-west through the district, is badly in need of repair and widening in some places . . .

For a number of reasons, an assignment to the Armed Services Committee would be desirable. First, the Hart-Dole-Inouye Federal Center in Battle Creek is a huge Department of Defense operation that employs numerous constituents, and it had to be protected in a time of budget shortages and military reorganization. There is also a National Guard base in the Seventh District, and base relocations were looming in the near future. Joe's intelligence experience in the CIA and his service in Vietnam might appear . . . to have made him a natural for an appointment to Armed Services. His freshmen status, however, worked against him, since, typically, freshmen are not assigned to that powerful committee . . .

New Republican House members request their committee assignments by submitting a letter indicating their preferences to the party's Steering Committee . . . There is no guarantee that the new members' preferences will be honored . . . The reality is that freshmen are going to do what the leadership tells them to do when it comes to committee assignments . . .

On his visits to Washington between the election and the Swearing-In, [Joe] met with as many members of the Steering Committee as possible. More than simply courtesy calls, . . . these meetings actually gave Joe a chance to introduce himself and talk about his interests and abilities, and, ultimately, to reinforce in person the committee requests he had made in writing.

Meanwhile, experienced members of the new congressman's staff also spoke to their counterparts on the staffs of the Steering Committee members . . . Chuck Yessaian, Joe's legislative director, bluntly described the process: "Staff members lobby like crazy on behalf of their congressmen, and are sometimes relentless in doing so" . . .

Congressman Schwarz and his staff were pleased when Joe's committee assignments—Agriculture, Science, and Armed Services—were delivered by letter from the Office of the Speaker of the House.

Excerpt D from *Freshman Orientation* by Edward I. Sidlow

Caucuses, which are usually bipartisan and centered around specific public policy areas, are informal groupings of House members . . . There are numerous caucuses to choose from, allowing those who join to keep tabs on particular issues they care about and enabling interested parties outside of Congress to know which legislators are engaged in which policies . . .

Congressman Schwarz joined nearly three dozen caucuses covering a wide range of subjects. He became a member of the Northern Border Caucus, the Automotive Caucus, and the Passenger Rail Caucus—all directly related to the politics of Michigan. He also sat in six different health caucuses and nine caucuses focused in some way on foreign policy and international relations . . . For some congressmen and -women, membership in a caucus is little more than a statement of interest in a subject area, while others are more active in the meetings and discussions that a caucus may sponsor. For freshmen legislators, caucus memberships allow a quick and easy introduction to members of both parties who have similar policy interests and concerns.

Beyond these issue-specific caucuses, another of Joe's memberships played a significant role in his Hill life and in his ability to work with like-minded colleagues. The Tuesday Group, once referred to as a "casual caucus of pragmatic Republicans," . . . became more active in the 109th Congress than it had been in the past, meeting almost every week that Congress was in session—though, ironically, on Wednesday. The group originally intended to meet on the second day of the week, but the weekly congressional calendar now typically runs from Tuesday through Thursday, reserving Monday and Friday for travel. As a result, Wednesday became the second "work day" of most weeks, and, as Washington logic would have it, the Tuesday Group meets on Wednesday . . .

[One Tuesday Group discussion] centered on a bill before the House to allow oil drilling on the Arctic Continental Shelf . . . Like many of the moderates who make up the Tuesday Group, Representative Schwarz was a friend of the environment, and he described the group's resistance to the original proposal in positive terms:

The Tuesday Group thought the bill was so imperfect that we decided we would withhold our support unless changes were made. We really had an effect there . . . the thirty or so members of the group made it clear that we would withhold votes and the bill's sponsors and party leadership would not have enough support to pass the bill. Many of the changes we wanted were made overnight—enough so that twenty or so of us could support it.

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The issue of stem-cell research had inspired vigorous debate in recent years, fueled in part by the active support of prominent advocates such as Nancy Reagan, who spoke out on the promise of research efforts in the treatment of Alzheimer's, the devastating disease that afflicted former president Ronald Reagan . . . Although it was passionately opposed in the fundamentalist religious community . . . embryonic stem-cell research had broad support in the scientific community . . .

On February 15, 2005, [Republican] Congressman Michael Castle of Delaware . . . introduced H.R. 810 . . . The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2005 sought to provide funding for the use of cells derived from embryos that were going to be discarded by fertility clinics . . . The bill quickly garnered 200 cosponsors, representing an impressive display of bipartisan support.

Still, the proponents of H.R. 810 knew that they were fighting an uphill battle. President Bush had vowed publicly to veto any effort by Congress to increase the federal government's role in stem-cell research. Moreover, the right wing of the Republican Party in Congress . . . was vehemently opposed to any such legislation and hoped to prevent this bill . . . from coming to the House floor for a vote . . .

Supporters of the legislation firmly believed that if they failed to demonstrate how seriously invested in the bill they were, it would never get a floor vote. They therefore adopted a proactive strategy that essentially called for threatening the Speaker of the House. Representative Castle drafted a letter, signed by several members of the Tuesday Group [a moderate Republican caucus], to make it clear that if H.R. 810 were not given an up-or-down vote, they would not vote with the Republican leadership in support of President Bush's budget. When the Speaker learned of the existence of this letter, which had not yet been sent, he allowed a group of about ten moderates, including Congressman Schwarz, to meet with him to discuss bringing the bill to the floor . . .

In the meeting, Schwarz spoke last—and he spoke longer than anyone else.

If people are opposed to stem-cell research on some religious or moral basis, fine. I would not try to sway a person from the rock of their beliefs . . . [But] every expert in the finest universities . . . will tell you . . . that embryonic stem-cell research can provide powerful findings that will lead to treatments of some very tragic diseases . . . It's not my place or anyone else's to pass judgment on the religious beliefs of others. But don't argue the science with me. If you argue the science with me, you are dead wrong.

. . . The day after the meeting with [Speaker] Hastert, word got out that the Speaker would agree to bring H.R. 810 to the floor. Joe was approached by the House Republican Conference Chair, . . . who told him "The Speaker is giving you this vote because of your presentation, Joe" . . . H.R. 810 passed the House on May 24, 2005, by a vote of 238–194 . . . In July of 2006, the bill passed the Senate and was sent to the president.

Note: President Bush vetoed the bill on July 19, 2006. The House was unable to override the veto with the necessary two-thirds majority, and the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act died on the House floor the same day.

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Casework is the provision of favors and services that members of Congress can offer to their constituents . . . As the scope of the federal government has grown and bureaucratic red tape has increased, so too has the amount of time spent on casework. In fact, casework activity probably takes up as much time as lawmaking and pork-barreling combined . . .

The congressman regarded constituent casework as a major part of his job . . . “You spend a huge amount of time on it,” Schwarz explained. “The people in the district offices and in Washington are working on constituent things all the time—*all* the time—and they are remarkably good at it” . . .

The congressman himself got personally involved in some constituent matters.

Some of the ones I love involve World War II veterans . . . My high school biology teacher is a good example. He served with distinction in the China-Burma-India theater, in the army air force, and just had his 90th birthday. His medals had been misplaced somewhere along the line. I became personally involved in that. We did everything we could and we were able to get his medals replaced. You just love to help people in that way . . .

Congressman Schwarz saw constituent service for what it is—a fact of congressional life and a significant part of the job description. The ability to help constituents with their individual needs, moreover, is one of the essential advantages of incumbents when it comes time to stand for reelection. Challengers are simply not in a position to cut through the bureaucratic maze of Washington on behalf of people in the district, while members of Congress are uniformly willing to commit considerable staff time to servicing the district through casework. By word of mouth, news of favors provided by members of Congress gets around.

Some other constituent requests came on the heels of truly tragic circumstances . . . One situation that particularly touched Dawn [Saylor, one of Schwarz’s constituent relations representatives] involved a woman with an inoperable brain tumor who suffered numerous seizures on a daily basis. “One day,” Dawn recounted,

this woman’s husband took off and left her and three children. The next day she received a letter from the Social Security Administration, informing her that her claim for Social Security disability was denied . . . There were times when I was on the phone with her that I just couldn’t hold back the tears.

Dawn was able to help this woman by expediting the appeals process on the denial of disability. Ultimately, the appeal was resolved in the constituent’s favor, and the woman did get some financial relief. Being able to help a constituent in need brought Dawn a great deal of satisfaction.

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In late April [2005], the *Kalamazoo Gazette* published a short piece about the efforts of [Joe] Schwarz and his colleague Fred Upton to protect the military facilities located in Battle Creek. The Pentagon was awaiting a report from the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC), . . . which was to recommend a list of bases for closing . . .

Aaron Taliaferro joined the Schwarz staff about three weeks before the BRAC list was to be released. Brought in as a senior legislative assistant because of his military background, he was acutely aware that if any recommended closures or relocations included facilities in Michigan's Seventh Congressional District, his job was to launch an all-out effort to get the recommendation reversed . . .

When the BRAC recommendations were released, . . . [the Battle Creek] Air National Guard Base . . . was recommended for closure. Aaron noted that Congressman Schwarz . . . “rolled up his sleeves and simply said, ‘We’ve got to save that base’” . . .

Aaron approached the task of reversing the recommendation methodically.

I thought like a military analyst. First, identify the problem. OK, the problem is, we’re on the list. The way to get off the list is quite straightforward. Invalidate the findings that resulted on our being on the closure list . . .

According to Aaron, Lt. Col. Dave San Clemente, the operations officer on the base . . . “did a Herculean amount of data gathering and analysis for us . . . and was absolutely essential to our work.” San Clemente’s efforts made up a large portion of the presentation to be made before the BRAC commission at a June meeting in St. Louis.

That meeting was an opportunity for Congressman Schwarz to make a public appeal for the Battle Creek base . . . The chance to make their case to the commission, face-to-face, “was critical,” Aaron said . . .

The presentation was a success. Aaron took particular satisfaction from the comments made by one commissioner . . . who singled out Michigan at a press conference at the conclusion of the day’s hearings “for a very information-based, factual, logical, and coherent presentation” . . .

The final BRAC recommendation was expected in late August. In the time between the June meeting in St. Louis and the final decision, Aaron met personally with eight of the nine commissioners . . .

Aaron also used every contact he could to persuade [another] Commissioner . . . to make a site visit to the Battle Creek Air National Guard Base . . .

On Friday, August 26, 2005, the BRAC final report was released. To the delight of Congressman Schwarz and all who had worked with him on this issue, the initial recommendation to close the Air National Guard Base in Battle Creek was overturned . . .

Newspaper editorials applauded Schwarz and his efforts to keep the base open . . . Schwarz’s colleague Fred Upton was also effusive in his praise—the reversal of the decision to close the Battle Creek base, Upton claimed, was “a testament to the vigorous effort led by Joe Schwarz.”

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It is conventional wisdom that incumbent members of Congress have considerable advantages over challengers in an election campaign. Incumbents typically enjoy greater name recognition and easier access to the media. They also tend to have a wider network of contacts and donors . . . Moreover, incumbent[s] . . . have the opportunity to sponsor and support legislation that is beneficial to their districts . . .

In politics, however, there are no absolutes . . .

The Schwarz team learned in November 2005 that they would have a political struggle on their hands in the bid to win reelection to the House of Representatives. Tim Walberg—evangelical pastor, former state legislator, and recent unsuccessful congressional candidate—announced that he was going to challenge Congressman Schwarz in the Republican primary . . .

In April, an article in the *Lansing State Journal* carried the headline “Race for Schwarz’s Seat Begins in Earnest” . . .

Less than two weeks later, the race for the Republican nomination in the Seventh District was again a top story in the *Lansing State Journal*. This time the headline proclaimed, “Walberg Camp’s Cash Race Outpacing Schwarz,” and the accompanying article stated that in the first quarter of 2006, Walberg had raised \$179,361, while Schwarz reportedly had raised \$153,873 . . .

By May, the campaign strategies of both candidates had become very clear. Schwarz was running on his record, as the campaign slogan displayed on billboards along I-94 proclaimed: *Congressman Joe Schwarz—Real Representation, Real Results*. The Walberg strategy was to paint Joe Schwarz as a liberal whose values were not in step with those of voters in the district . . .

During the spring and summer, the congressman returned to the district as often as possible . . . The Schwarz staff scheduled Joe’s weekends around . . . the annual summer events in towns throughout the district, . . . [including] the Cereal Festival in Joe’s hometown, Battle Creek. At the Cereal Festival, which ran for three days in June, one of the major events was the annual staging of the world’s longest breakfast table, at which the local companies, Kellogg and Post, feed breakfast to as many people as show up. This is the kind of event that a hometown congressman certainly would not miss . . .

In July, a *Detroit News* story called the Schwarz-Walberg race the most contentious congressional primary election in Michigan. The article made mention of Schwarz’s impressive array of endorsements [including President Bush] but suggested that the race was the “ripest” in the state for an upset. The story noted that Walberg . . . “has flooded the airwaves with messages calling Schwarz ‘outrageously liberal.’” Schwarz’s reaction to the liberal label—“It’s pretty amusing because if one looks at my voting record, it’s pretty much pure vanilla Republican” . . . —was quoted . . .

As the election drew near, it was a rare day that residents in Michigan’s Seventh District did not receive several pieces of mail supporting one or another of the candidates . . . The barrage of mail from both campaigns was designed to keep the candidates’ names before the voters, and it made the race in Michigan’s Seventh District very expensive.