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POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Election '84: Quiet in Congress

"House Campaigns Quiet As Few Seek To Run" by Phil Duncan, in *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* (Mar. 24, 1984), 1414 22nd St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037.

In the 1980 elections, Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives suffered a dramatic loss of 33 seats. Two years later it was the Republicans' turn to be ambushed: They lost 26 seats. Duncan, a *Congressional Quarterly* staff writer, predicts that 1984 will provide both parties a respite from all the excitement.

There are a number of reasons for the eerie calm on the House campaign trail. The 1984 presidential race promises to be a close one, says Duncan, and the absence of long presidential "coattails" usually means little partisan turnover in the House. Would-be challengers in both parties are "waiting 'til next time." They may be wise to wait: The past two elections have made congressional incumbents so wary of possible upsets that they are taking extra care to placate their constituents.

Republican party leaders are actually discouraging aspirants who might launch all-out campaigns against strong Democratic incumbents this year. The GOP's 1982 strategy of fielding solid contenders for every possible race backfired: Vigorous campaigns by suddenly aroused Democrats mobilized Democratic voters and cost Republicans at least one governorship (in Texas) and many seats in state and local legislatures.

Many potential candidates also cite personal reasons for not running. Former Rep. Jim Coyne (R.-Pa.) refuses to try now to regain the House seat that he narrowly lost in 1982. Recalling his harried life in Congress, he explains that, while there may be other chances to run for public office, "I won't have another chance to be close to my children when they're young." House salaries are insufficient compensation for such a sacrifice. Even at \$72,200 a year, the pay is considerably lower than what many Congressmen could earn as lawyers, doctors, or businessmen. Nor is the lure of Washington what it once was: Many potential candidates feel that individual House members have little influence on the course of events.

Whether such objections will remain compelling in 1986—when whoever wins the Presidency in 1984 will have built up a new record to challenge—is another question.