

Shoup, Baucus: A clash of style

MAR 10 1974

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If the Western District congressional race this fall boils down to a confrontation between a pair of Missoulians, voters will get a chance to see two markedly different political styles.

Dick Shoup, the incumbent Republican, in the past has operated in a homey, common-man style.

And, state Rep. Max Baucus, 32, the only Democratic challenger so far, has shown a smoothness and flair unusual for a young Montana politician.

Baucus' chances of course hinge on a Democratic primary that political observers are predicting will be a real dogfight, but he has built a strong political base



Dick Shoup

in Shoup's hometown and appears to have the financial backing to make a good run at Shoup.

Four years in Washington have polished Shoup from an unpracticed man who was a bit of a bumpkin to a man who practices being a bit of a bumpkin.

He's now a genial hand-squeezer who's comfortable at greeting any number of people, introducing himself as Dick Shoup and asking what their problems are.

He's liable to preface a problem that Washington is causing a Montanan with a "damn," which seems not so much a curse as a way of telling the Montanan that Rep. Shoup speaks the language of the West.

THE CONGRESSMAN dresses stylishly, but conservatively, almost always clinging to white shirts, and often donning western suits.

Much of his popularity is based in his canny ability to pull the right strings for his constituents at the right time and to remember to tell them what he has done.

His Washington and Montana staffs make a point of answering letters from home, and also make a point of letting everyone know they answer letters.

This ability to stay in touch is often cited as his best feature, perhaps because former Rep. Arnold Olsen, who once held the Western District seat, was so ineffectual at the same.

Consequently, while Shoup campaigns using shortcomings he has polished into an asset, if Baucus gets the nod to oppose the incumbent, the younger Missoulian will campaign with assets that some voters may reject.

"Baucus has all the composition of a successful candidate," an editorial in the Missoula newspaper said recently. "He comes across as a smart and decent fellow, and he is. He works terribly hard at campaigning. He has money. And, he has the handsome, rather distinguished visage of what many people think a statesman should look like."

Other evaluations of Baucus read similarly. He is a man with everything a politician could want, except for a seat in the nation's Congress, which voters may be reluctant to give him.

There's a natural inclination to ask why someone with so much wants to be in Washington.

"One reason—I'm running is to try in whatever way I can to help restore confidence (in government) and to make the system work," Baucus said recently.

"PEOPLE DON'T TRUST politicians," he added. Politicians generally haven't performed and earned public trust. One way to begin is to be open, honest and candid—too often people who run for office hedge.

"I think that to run for and hold public office is a noble goal," Baucus concluded.

Although that statement may seem to have an element of naivete to voters so recently weaned on Watergate, it fits with the Baucus style.

For he's a partisan, the son of a wealthy Helena family with most of the right connections. Traditionally, that has meant one enters politics to serve, not for personal gain.

The achievements he's most proud of in his legislative career show he is no exception to the rule in this sense. His bill to assure that buyers of subdivision

lots get health and sanitary protection is one example.

Baucus also has worked hard to promote probate reform, public kindergartens and orderly development of Montana coal; all measures that are, for the most part, in the general public interest.

His mode of dress and general appearance further enhance his image as a politician in the patrician sense. He wears suits that might be best labeled subdued, modified and slightly rumpled ivy league—not unlike the Kennedy clan of the 1960s. His medium length hair also is normally just a bit more than slightly unkempt.

And, consciously or unconsciously, he has made statements that indicate he does see himself in this



Max Baucus

role. When asked whether he thought his age might be a detriment to his appeal to the voters, he noted younger men have gone to Washington.

Those he cited were Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, Sen. Frank Church of Idaho and Thomas Jefferson. All patricians in the mold of, or who portray themselves in the mold of, politicians whose main purpose is serving the electorate.

Consequently, if Baucus does get to oppose Shoup in the fall, the best part of the election may not be the issues.

Instead, watching the contrasting personalities of slick country boy Shoup and would-be statesman Baucus may turn out to be the most interesting aspect of the campaign.