

My Brush With The Chief Of Staff

It was early 2002. The now infamous Rod Blagojevich had been a Congressman from the 5th District in Illinois, but chose to leave that position to run for Governor of Illinois. Today, even people outside of Illinois have heard about “Blago.” If nothing else, they know from reading charges filed against him after his arrest on December 9 that the esteemed Governor, and his wife, have a penchant for foul language and a desire for high-paying jobs that don’t necessarily require talent or experience.

Foul language may run in the 5th Illinois district, as another master of profanity who lived there then decided it was time to move up to the world of elected office, high pay, generous pensions, short work weeks, and special privileges. His name is Rahm Emanuel and, although he had worked in the White House for Bill Clinton, pretty much no one in Chicago knew his name. So Emanuel was pressing the flesh, asking for support in the primary election in order to gain the House seat vacated by Blagojevich.

On a cold, rainy morning seven years ago I accompanied a friend to a pancake breakfast fundraiser in the basement of a church in Chicago. I expected to encounter only cold pancakes, but as I stabbed my plastic fork into the rubbery meal I observed Rahm Emanuel off to the side. Political junkie that I am, I had seen Emanuel on television more than a few times and wondered why he was hanging around a church basement. I found out as he approached me.

As I stood up and turned toward him, Emanuel introduced himself and asked for my support in the upcoming election. “I’m Rahm Emanuel, and I’m running for Congress. Can I count on your support?” I extended my hand and replied, “I’m sorry, but I live in the ...” He reached out to shake my hand but as soon as I completed my sentence with the words, “...10th District,” he withdrew his arm, abruptly made an about-face, and went to look for someone who could give him what I couldn’t.

Emanuel didn’t even allow me enough time to offer \$100,000 in exchange for an open Senate seat. He simply turned on his heels and moved on to the next potential voter. To be honest, at the moment of birth I already knew I was a conservative, so no Chicago Democrat could ever expect my vote. Still, I might have expected a bit more politeness from someone whose career depends on being liked by as many people as possible. Maybe he knew that he wouldn’t need my future votes, as Chief of Staff for Obama is not an elected position.

There are two kinds of politicians. Some, like Bill Clinton, want admiration from everyone. (It has been said that if Bill Clinton is in a room with 500 people and 499 love him, he will seek out the one who doesn’t and try to convert him.) Others, like Rahm Emanuel and Barack Obama, don’t want to waste time converting anyone. They just take out the folding table, display their snake oil, and sell it to whoever is gullible enough to buy it. When they run out of customers (they never run out of snake oil), they pack up and head to the next town.

That was my brush with fame, the moment I encountered the future Chief of Staff to President Barack Obama. Are you impressed?

Neither was I.

Don Fredrick

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