

# Mr. Grassley *arrives in* Washington

"I can't take away my Midwestern twang. I can't take away being a farmer. But I keep plodding along and I think I have established some credibility."

After more than 25 years in public life, U.S. Senator Charles Grassley (B.A., '55, M.A. '56) has done more than establish his credibility. He has established himself in Washington as a curious, even dangerous, politician whose conservative tendencies are matched by a streak of stubborn independence.

Curious, that is, to those who don't know him, and dangerous to those who underestimate him.

Grassley's combination of conservatism and independence has served him well. He will seek re-election in 1986, and most polls indicate he has a high rating with about two thirds of the voters.

How did a self-effacing farmer from New Hartford become a national figure, as measured by press clippings and the ultimate "tribute": an appearance in the "Doonesbury" comic strip?

First of all, he found a cause. Grassley was an early, active critic of waste and fraud in military spending. He was the first to advocate an across-the-board federal budget freeze, one that would include military spending. Second, he was not afraid to challenge or criticize his party's leadership on these issues or on a topic of crucial concern to Iowans: the crisis in agriculture.

## Striving "to make a difference"

Speaking to the Des Moines Chamber of Commerce recently, Grassley said, "I'm independent, but I don't intend to be my own man at all. I'm, above all, your person in Washington." The image of Grassley the Loner standing up for the little people is authentic. It's also popular with rural voters and Iowans concerned about the federal budget deficit and a military Grassley sees as "out of control."

If Grassley has achieved notoriety and a certain amount of success during his freshman term in the Senate, it may in part be due to the fact that so little was expected of him. In a recent profile, the

*Washington Post* said of Grassley that "on first sighting he looks like the sort of Central Casting character who comes in from the sticks and gets his clock cleaned in the big city . . . the first person to whom a con man would try to sell the Washington Monument." Several writers have compared him to James Stewart's naive and idealistic character in the 1940s film "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington."

While perhaps not as handsome as Gary Hart nor as polished as George Bush, Grassley has emerged, in the *Post's* opinion, as "the sort of rube who winds up taking city slickers to the cleaners instead of the other way around. His act plays so well in Iowa that he has become the state's dominant political figure and is well on his way to becoming a folk hero."

But is it an act? Despite an unbroken string of election victories, Grassley remains a man driven more by moral urges than by the politician's usual addiction to power. He continues to find renewal in farming rather than in the social whirl of Washington. He returns to Iowa often, and has kept his campaign promise to visit each of the state's counties once a year.

In a 1981 *Alumnus* article, Grassley said "my goals are to strive to make a difference," that "my future plans are to be a good senator for at least 12 years . . . then I would like to return to a university to teach or go back to the farm." Four years in the Senate has changed neither his goals nor his plans, nor him.

## "He works and keeps his promises"

"If Chuck Grassley comes to Washington," he says, "and stays the same Chuck Grassley he was as a farmer and a state legislator, then I don't have anything to worry about with the folks back home." The editor of the *Des Moines Register*, describing the spectacle of a dressed-up Senator Grassley returning to Iowa last Christmas with plans to build a pig shed, observed, "In Iowa politics, beware the man in the pinstripe suit with the farmer's hands."

If Grassley succeeds in becoming Iowa's first two-term senator since 1966, it will be because he has done what his predecessors had trouble doing. In the Senate, according to an article in the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, he has "earned the respect of his colleagues because he works and keeps his promises." Just as important, he has been smart enough to keep a little dirt under his nails and a little twang in his voice. He has, in other words, stayed popular with the voters by remembering his own years as a farmer, student, and second-shift employee at Rath Packing.

Republican or Democrat, admirer or critic, alumni can respect Iowa's senior senator who, to paraphrase Kipling, has challenged the White House and the Pentagon on occasion nor lost "the common touch." □

Senator Grassley speaking at the dedication of an Iowa prairie preserve.

