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Capital Notebook

Whistling Press Aide To Sound Off for Himself

By Guy Gugliotta
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A congressional press secretary's basic job is to mention the boss as often as possible. This is not hard if you happen to work for House Budget Committee Chairman JOHN R. KASICH (R-Ohio), Capitol Hill's Energizer bunny.

What a press secretary is not supposed to do (this is probably inscribed on a tablet somewhere in the Rotunda) is become famous in his own right. Up to now, Chris Ullman has maintained a scrupulously low profile as JOHN R. KASICH's tireless promoter, but very soon he will once again risk all.

Ullman is a former National Whistling Champion, and this weekend in Louisburg, N.C., he will forsake JOHN R. KASICH and Capitol Hill in an attempt to reclaim the title so rudely denied him in the tournament last year.

JOHN R. KASICH has promised to give him time off, and has even volunteered to call the judges in hopes of swaying them with a few hours of chitchat about the balanced budget or the Cleveland Indians—their choice.

Ullman, a tall, dapper bachelor with a Republican haircut and an affinity for bow ties, learned to whistle in Massapequa Park, N.Y., when he was 5, long before he knew JOHN R. KASICH. He was coached by his father, a specialist in Gilbert & Sullivan, which in Massapequa Park was thought to be a department store in Jersey. Ullman liked Strauss waltzes.

At the State University of New York (Binghamton) in the 1980s, Ullman competed in a talent contest by whistling the William Tell Overture—fast, and with all the notes. "That's when I knew I was good," he said. At that time JOHN R. KASICH was a freshman congressman, and showing great promise.

Ullman embarked on a mar-

keting career, but also impressed his friends (who at that time did not include JOHN R. KASICH) with his whistling virtuosity. "Somewhere I heard there was a whistling contest," he said. "A friend found it for me."

In 1993, while JOHN R. KASICH tried nobly to promote a balanced budget among mostly hostile Democrats, Ullman went to Louisburg, site of the annual National Whistlers' Convention, and took second place in the pop division with Glenn Miller's "In the Mood." His first love is still improvisational blues or jazz.

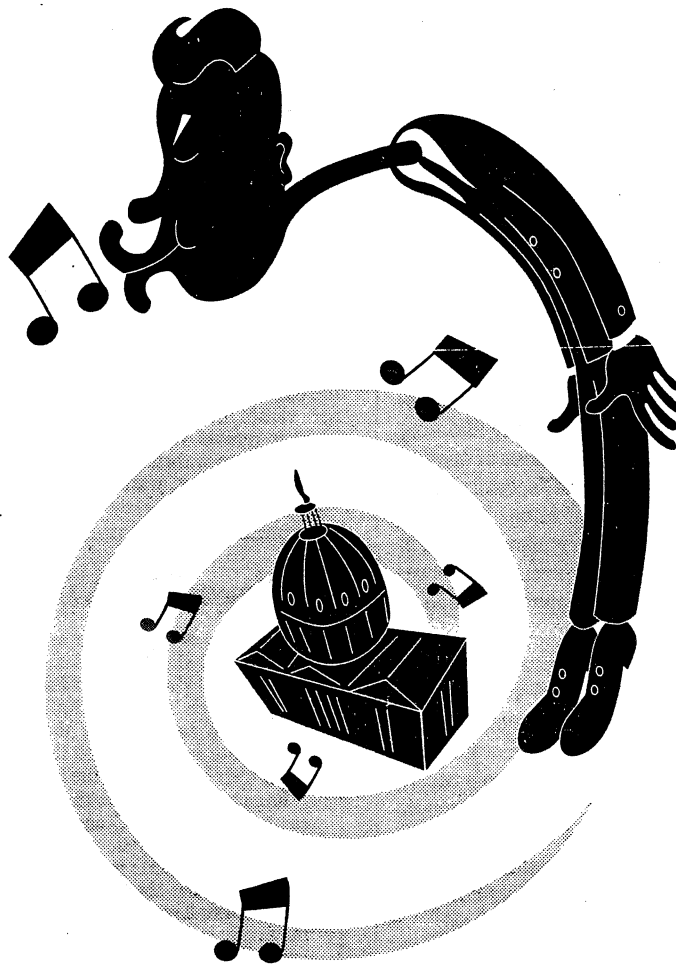
But practice makes perfect. Ullman, like JOHN R. KASICH, is gifted with a large mouth, and can cover 2½ octaves when he's in shape. He works out by running stairs in the House office buildings and whistling for an hour a day in the corridors during votes.

"Older whistlers warble more," Ullman says, "but we younger guys are more interested in very fast, technically difficult pieces." Tough choices, no gimmicks, just like a JOHN R. KASICH budget.

In 1994, while working for then-Rep. Rod Grams (R-Minn.), a former colleague of JOHN R. KASICH, Ullman went back to Louisburg, won the pop division with Clint Black's "This Nightlife," finished second in classical with Handel's "The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba" and took the overall title in a whistle-off.

Things were never the same. People magazine wrote him up, and he jammed on the "Today" and "Tonight" shows, a double-whammy never achieved by either Grams or JOHN R. KASICH. In October he whistled Mozart's Oboe Concerto in C Major with the McLean Symphony Orchestra.

A month later, a near-perfect year culminated in the GOP's capture of Congress. Grams won election to the Senate, but left



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Ullman behind. Fortunately, Budget Committee Chairman-to-be JOHN R. KASICH was staffing up, and chose a whistler for a mouthpiece.

In 1995, Ullman had to defend his title and JOHN R. KASICH's budget resolution virtually at the same time. He finished second in Louisburg, missing out on the \$500 first prize, but helped make Kasich famous—and the pay was better.

Now he is trying to battle back, working on Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 2 to go with an as yet unchosen pop selection. The budget panel staff is giving him pep talks, and has pledged to get him an early morning gig on

"Regis & Kathie Lee," so JOHN R. KASICH can watch him during breakfast.

Late last year, basking in JOHN R. KASICH's reflected glory, Ullman appeared on "Equal Time," where he whistled the William Tell Overture and "In the Mood," wowing Dee Dee Myers and Mary Matalin, who remarked that "this may be the coolest show of all time."

Whoa!

"It's good to set goals; it's good to aim high," Ullman quickly advised Matalin and Myers, describing his 23 minutes in front of the McLean audience. "Look at JOHN KASICH. Look where he ended up."