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Evan Thomas on
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Fannie Mae

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by Michelle Cottle



with other Wise Men, were summoned for a briefing by some military advisers at the White House. Acheson led a revolt of the elder statesman. When one general tried to explain that American forces were not trying to win a "classic military victory," Acheson cut in, "Then what in the name of God are five hundred thousand men out there doing? Chasing girls?" A few days later, LBJ announced that he was going to seek a negotiated settlement of the war.

In his book, Chace, a respected foreign-policy scholar, retails these and other Achesonian moments in a straightforward, unadorned narrative style. Still, the book will be a little disappointing to Acheson watchers and Cold War historians, who had been expecting Chace to deliver the definitive biography.

Chace is a cautious, careful scholar, which is all well and good, but the fact is that most of the raw material of Acheson's life has been pretty well picked over by now. Disclosures from Soviet archives will add to our knowledge of the Cold War, but that information is really only beginning to trickle out. What Acheson demands is a biographer who is willing to explore his subject's complicated psyche — something Chace did not even attempt to do. Still, Acheson is a such an inherently interesting figure that Chace's biography is rewarding to read. Acheson's contemporaries understood his power. "Voila un homme!" exclaimed Charles de Gaulle. It's doubtful anyone will say that about his modern successors, and not just because Madeleine Albright is a woman. ●

Women in the House

*Susan Molinari and Pat Schroeder on
being a woman in Congress*

By Clara Bingham

UNTIL RECENTLY, WHENEVER I tuned into CBS on Saturday to find Susan Molinari presiding over the pastel banality of the "Morning News" set, I couldn't resist thinking that her decision to quit Congress had been a cop-out. But that was before I read the memoir she has written with Elinor Burkett, *Representative Mom*. Now I know that taking the morning anchor job was her first real act of independence. Susan Molinari's grandfather, father, and husband were all politicians. Before she inherited her father's Staten Island congressional seat at the age of 32, Molinari had previously held just one job outside of politics, as a cocktail waitress one summer in college. For Molinari, entering politics was, as she puts it, the "path of least resistance." Television is her first

REPRESENTATIVE MOM:

**Balancing Budgets, Bill, and Baby
in the U.S. Congress**

*By Susan Molinari
with Elinor Burkett*

Doubleday, \$23.95

24 YEARS OF HOUSE WORK ... AND THE PLACE IS STILL A MESS:

My Life in Politics

By Pat Schroeder

Andrews McMeel, \$24.95

real breakout.

As for Pat Schroeder, I still do a double take when I see her quoted as president of the Association of American Publishers. Protecting intellectual property rights and encouraging parents to read to their children hardly seems the encore I had expected from feminism's most valuable player in Congress. But Schroeder's new memoir makes it clear that she chose to bail out for just the opposite reason Molinari did. While Molinari needed to rebel

against her upbringing, Schroeder needed to take a break from a long career of rebellion. At 55, she had grown tired of the fight.

The congresswomen from Staten Island and Denver left the Hill within six months of each other in 1997, and in less than a year have turned out books to tell their stories. Schroeder served in the House for 24 years; Molinari, seven. Schroeder, a liberal Democrat, is 18 years older than Molinari, a moderate Republican.

CLARA BINGHAM, is the author of *Women on the Hill: Challenging the Culture of Congress*.

Yet the two women have striking similarities. Although they belonged to different political parties, they both worked hard for many of the same women's issues: family leave, child care, violence against women, sexual harassment, and abortion rights. They were the most colorful, high profile, quotable women on the Hill in the 1990s. Both brought a refreshing amount of energy, humor, and irreverence to their jobs. In their absence, Congress is a noticeably blander place.

As masters of the sound bite, Schroeder and Molinari are good communicators. If they are deep thinkers, they aren't sharing their thoughts, only their complaints. As Molinari writes of being a blonde female politician: "We seem to get pigeonholed as lightweights. ... There I'd be, in a war zone in Bosnia, and some reporter — usually female — would comment on how I was dressed, then turn to my male colleague for answers to questions of substance." Yet these breezily written books are short on substance and analysis, long on self-congratulation and hubris. Schroeder, to her credit, seems to have written her book herself. Molinari enlisted Burkett, author of *The Right Women: A Journey Through the Heart of Conservative America*.

The truth is, Susan Molinari and Patricia Schroeder are both very, very goofy. Molinari makes a point of recording that at the after-party celebrating her first marriage she wore a pair of high-top sneakers decorated with white lace. The night she won her congressional seat, she danced on tabletops to "Love Shack." Then, trying to decide whether to run for governor, she found herself seconds away from a crucial meeting with a cheap plastic hairbrush tangled in her hair. "How," she wondered, "am I going to convince people that I'm qualified to be governor of New York with a brush sticking out of my hair?" Panicking, she took a pair of scissors and cut the brush — and a patch of hair — off the top of her head.

Schroeder wore an Easter bunny suit to China. She claims to have eaten 4,500 bean burritos and calls former President Bush and Vice President Quayle members of the "lucky sperm club." It just doesn't get much sillier than these two — at least in politics. But there is something to their goofiness. It's irreverent and nonconformist, and while Schroeder and Molinari aren't Thelma and Louise, both have free spirits.

Both tell tales of bucking the system. As a freshman member of the Armed Services Committee, Schroeder defied the powers that be by talking to *Redbook* magazine about the humiliations she suffered under the chairmanship of Edward Hebert, a sexist

bully. Schroeder says her colleagues permanently shunned her after she became the only member of Congress to support Shirley Davis in her sexual discrimination suit against Louisiana Democrat Otto Passman.

Early in her career, Molinari broke from her party and President Bush by arguing forcefully for the Family and Medical Leave Bill. Molinari's speech followed Republican Fred Grandy's, who had reminded his colleagues that it was Small Business Week. Molinari concluded with, "Don't forget that this isn't just Small Business Week. Sunday is Mother's Day." Fred Grandy didn't speak to her for a year.

Neither woman pulls her punches when it comes to the Speaker of the House. Molinari paints Gingrich as nothing short of an incompetent, delusional megalomaniac. Her behind-the-scenes description of last summer's failed coup attempt against the speaker reveals a world of ruthless backstabbing and deft double-crossing that would make Machiavelli proud. Molinari says Gingrich compared himself to Napoleon, FDR, Churchill, and Eisenhower and was overwhelmed by his own grandiosity. When Gingrich's four top henchmen, among them Molinari's husband, Bill Paxon, Republican congressman from Buffalo, N.Y., arranged an "intervention" to tell the speaker that he had to shape up, Gingrich dissolved into a rage. "People all over the world are listening to us, watching what we are doing. I'm at the center of a worldwide revolution," he huffed, turning to Paxon, adding, "You will never understand that, Bill." After the coup, Paxon was forced to resign from the Republican leadership and would later announce his plans to retire from Congress.

Schroeder, meanwhile, relates the story of leaving for a trip to Stockholm to attend a meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The day before departure, Gingrich announced to Henry Hyde, the chairman of the trip, that he had kicked Schroeder off the delegation because she had been "nasty" to him. True to form, Schroeder threatened to hold a press conference; Newt backed down. Interestingly, it is Schroeder, not Molinari, who tells us that Gingrich secured a special room close to the House floor where Molinari could breast feed her newborn baby, Susan Ruby.

Both women are pro-choice, but that is where their sisterhood ends. For Schroeder, choice is a fundamental moral issue, defining a woman's role in society. Schroeder, who managed almost every abortion bill on the pro-choice side in the past decade, admits that she became so emotional after some of the gru-

eling floor fights that she "would escape to the congresswomen's lounge with dry heaves."

For Molinari, abortion was just another roll call. Her loyalty came first to the Republican party. In 1994, she campaigned against incumbent pro-choice Democratic congressmen and women in favor of extremist anti-choice opponents. Her stumping helped secure the new Republican majority and her own position as number five in the Republican leadership — the highest rank a woman had ever held in Congress. "I admit that I was guilty of campaigning for anti-choice candidates. I refused to be a single-issue campaigner. Forgive me, but that's bad for America," Molinari explained unapologetically.

Pat Schroeder's conviction about abortion is both generational and personal. She was elected to Congress the year before *Roe v. Wade*, and as a young married student at Harvard Law School, she could not obtain contraceptives legally. After giving birth to her second child, Schroeder almost bled to death and was told that her life would be in danger if she ever got pregnant again.

Molinari graduated from college in 1980 and came of age in a post-feminist world. Molinari is a daddy's girl and her father happens to be pro-life. Susan may have broken personally with Dad on the abortion issue, but she didn't let her beliefs get in the way of proving to her father that she is a good Republican willing to put aside her principles for the gain of the party and her own career.

Schroeder, by contrast, is a true pioneer. In the class of 1964 at Harvard Law School, she was one of 15 women. When she first arrived in Congress in 1972, she joined 13 other female legislators. Like Molinari, Schroeder was also 32 years old as a freshman. The condescension and cruelty Schroeder suffered from senior lawmakers like Edward Hebert shaped her feminist beliefs and turned her into an outsider. In 24 years, she never grew to trust the system, and her refusal to cut deals ultimately hurt the legislative record that Schroeder leaves behind.

Schroeder's principles, however, fall short when it comes to Bill Clinton's sexual peccadilloes. By the time Schroeder finished writing her book, news of Monica Lewinsky had not surfaced, and we are given to understand that the president is "still married and working on it." Schroeder addresses Monicagate in a postscript, but admits only that she doesn't know what to think about the Lewinsky affair, and says: "I can wait until all the facts emerge so that I can digest what really happened and come to some conclusions about it." Coming from a woman as outspoken and unafraid

as Pat Schroeder, that is a truly pathetic statement.

Schroeder should have more to say about Clinton's behavior because, unlike her equivocating female colleagues on the Hill, Clinton isn't signing her bills anymore. Also, Schroeder's experience with Gary Hart should have given her some wisdom. As the Hart presidential campaign co-chair, Schroeder was on the road meeting with newspaper editorial boards that day in May when the "Monkey Business" story broke. Schroeder's first reaction was, "Do you mean I've been canceling my schedule, flying to these godforsaken places, eating pressed hamster or whatever that airplane food is, while he's on a pleasure boat in Florida?" Later Schroeder concluded that Hart had used her "because having a woman at the head of his campaign might deflect these issues." She gives us no such revelations on Clinton.

In one of the opening pages of her book, Schroeder lists 16 achievements. The last on the list is: "Number of Regrets: 0." This is an early warning signal to the reader that we aren't getting the whole story. For example, Schroeder's children were ages two and six when she first came to Washington, and in a glib chapter on her family life, she glosses over the feelings of guilt and anxiety she must have felt while she juggled job and motherhood. Molinari is much more honest about the conflict she faced as a mother and a member of Congress. She talks movingly about how motherhood transformed her, and she admits the pain and guilt she suffered when her job frequently separated her from her child.

The other part of the story that Schroeder fails to give us is the nitty-gritty political maneuvering that went on behind the passage of dozens of bills she sponsored. The Family and Medical Leave Act, for example, which Schroeder introduced in 1985, took eight years to pass. Schroeder shed blood over this and others pieces of legislation, like the Violence Against Women Act. Because Schroeder isn't willing to reveal her regrets, we only get a stilted, sunny-side-up version of her long, controversial legislative career.

These books won't be the last we'll hear from Schroeder and Molinari. Someday, Schroeder will be a good subject for biography. The truth behind her quarter-century in Congress lies in piles of file boxes and 12 trunks of mementos that she donated to the University of Colorado library. Molinari makes the claim that being on national television is good political exposure. She also admits that she has flirted with running for governor, for the U.S. Senate, and even, without offering dates or naming running mates, for president of the United States. ●