

Leaders of the Senate

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Howard Henry Baker Jr.

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By RICHARD D. LYONS

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 4 — Minutes after being elected Senate minority leader today, Howard Henry Baker Jr. of Tennessee dropped wearily into a chair in his suite at the Dirksen Senate Office Building, unlaced one highly polished black shoe, scratched an itchy instep, then turned and smiled up at the large oil portrait that dominates the room.

The painting is of Senator Baker's father-in-law, the late Everett McKinley Dirksen, who had risen to national prominence in the position that Mr. Baker had just won in an upset victory.

"Today would have been his birthday," Mr. Baker said. Mr. Dirksen died eight years ago. Then the new minority leader shook his head as if to bring himself back to the reality and even the astonishment of the morning's events.

Mr. Baker, who twice before had sought the minority leadership and lost, had before today's secret ballot been given virtually no chance of defeating Senator Robert P. Griffin of Michigan for the post that had been vacated by the retirement of Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania.

"They'll probably call me 'landslide Howard,'" Mr. Baker said of the vote in which he received 19 ballots to 18 for Mr. Griffin. He added: "It could just as easily been the other way around."

Believed He Was 3 Votes Short

Mr. Baker said that throughout the last week he did not believe that he had enough votes to win, and that when he arrived at his office at 8 A.M. today he believed he was three votes shy of the necessary 19.

"I was ready to get out of this 10 times," he said of the previous week of glad handing and backslapping to cajole votes. Asked why he had not, Mr. Baker replied: "I thought that I didn't have enough votes to get elected, but there were too many votes to throw away."

When he was reminded that the extra salary would not hurt, Mr. Baker feigned the innocence of a man who has just received a \$4,900 a year raise. "What is my new salary?" he asked a room full of staff aides and reporters. None knew it was \$49,500, rather than that of a senator, \$44,600.

Turning to the immediate future, Mr. Baker said that he would consult with President Ford, Vice President Rockefeller and Ronald Reagan, head of the conservative wing of the Republican



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his image is just right

Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. after his election yesterday

Party, to chart a course of loyal opposition to the Carter administration.

"I wish the President [Mr. Carter] well. I hope he prospers and succeeds, but we must exercise our constitutional authority to agree or disagree," Mr. Baker said.

According to Mr. Baker and his opponents in the Republican leadership fight, there was one big difference between him and Mr. Griffin that swung the balance in his favor. Mr. Baker is generally regarded as more articulate. Considering the small number of Republicans in both chambers of Congress, the party believes it needs leaders who can act as effective spokesmen rather than as floor tacticians.

Mr. Baker fills the bill. He is polished, urbane, witty, easygoing, dapper and youthful looking for a man born 51 years ago on Nov. 14, 1925. Mr. Baker is just the type one would choose to be the keynote speaker at a national political convention, which he was in Kansas City last August.

Mr. Baker also has a reputation as being slick, of talking out of both sides of his mouth on some issues, such as the Watergate scandal. At various times he defended and opposed President Nixon and subsequently was cited

by some Nixon aides as having been one of the then President's staunchest supporters in the Senate investigation.

Mr. Baker waved aside the Watergate issue today, saying that the extensive Republican losses in the 1974 and 1976 elections had "wiped the slate clean," and that the party "is looking for a fresh start."

Mr. Baker has been around Congress and Washington since his father was sworn in as a Republican Representative from Tennessee in 1951. On the death of the elder Mr. Baker in 1964, his widow served out his unexpired term, thus making the new Senate minority leader one of the few men in American history whose father and mother served in Congress.

Born in Huntsville, Tenn., Mr. Baker attended private schools in that state, spent three years as a Navy lieutenant in World War II, serving on a PT boat in the South Pacific, then returned home to receive a law degree from the University of Tennessee in 1949.

Mr. Baker became a criminal lawyer in a Knoxville firm that had been founded by his grandfather, then ran for the Senate in 1963 and lost. He ran again in 1966 and won. In his decade in the Senate he has been liberal on some issues, such as breaking the highway trust fund to pay for mass transit, but conservative on most. He describes himself as a "moderate-conservative." He also is rated as an astute businessman and is financially well off.

He is married to the former Joy Dirksen. The couple has two daughters. Noting his relationship with Senator Dirksen today, Mr. Baker said his wife had attended a service at the National Cathedral at 7:30 A.M. honoring present and former members of Congress.