

that kind of defeat. The youngest of the group at age 35, he has used his ties with his housemates to help jump barriers in the House and gain visibility.

With Mr. Russo, a member of the Ways and Means Committee, he helped to write a minimum-tax proposal last year. With Reps. Panetta and Miller, he has a major interest in pending immigration legislation. And Mr. Rostenkowski's vote helped him onto the budget panel after only a term in the House.

Reps. Miller and Russo, friends from the "Watergate class" of 1974, are a second pairing. Mr. Miller, at 40, is soon to be the second most senior Democrat on the Interior Committee and is regarded by many of his colleagues as a potential member of the House leadership. His exposure to Mr. Russo, he says, has helped him overcome a reluctance to "whip," or ask members for their votes on issues; in turn, he has had a liberalizing influence on the more mainstream Illinois congressman.

#### A Change of Interests

Mr. Russo's early voting record marked him as a champion of special interests, such as hospitals fighting cost-control measures or funeral directors fighting the Federal Trade Commission. Now, however, the 42-year-old legislator advocates liberal stands on issues such as military spending and U.S. policy in Central America.

A master vote-counter, he recently outmaneuvered much of the leadership to help an ally win a seat on the powerful Appropriations Committee. In the manner of his mentor, Mr. Rostenkowski, he organized weekly dinners with his housemates and such regulars as Rep. Edgar Jenkins, a wily Georgia Democrat who provides a window to the South.

Mr. Russo is the chief conduit to Mr. Rostenkowski, but all the young congressmen share a personal as well as political relationship with him. "They keep me young," the 58-year-old chairman says. He in turn offers counsel and entree to higher levels of the House leadership, particularly his friend Speaker O'Neill. Rep. Brian Donnelly (D., Mass.) calls the foursome "Rosty's cabinet."

The label means more in terms of friendship than of power. With House Majority Leader Jim Wright seemingly solidifying his claim to be the next speaker, Mr. Rostenkowski's own chances are fading. The four housemates' association with Rep. Rostenkowski, in fact, could even increase their risk of becoming isolated and

shut out of positions of power in the next Congress.

Still, in the comradeship they have developed, there is a sense of having found something more permanent to build upon. "It's been the greatest graduate school," says Rep. Miller. "I only wish it had happened earlier."