

David Pryor

March 13, 1981

Barbara Odell, Henry Woods

I caught up with David during a briefing in his office by the Corps of Engineers. After it was over, we went to lunch in the Dirksen Building. Bruce Lindsay joined us and so it was not the best of circumstances. But then, it never is.

He wanted to get out of the meeting with the Corps and go back to the Ethics Committee meeting to question a witness, but he missed that. The witness was the former inspector general of GSA "to whom we gave hundreds of employees to clean things up, but I think he may have made things worse." Some guy named Muhlenberg.

I asked him about the protests that attend the construction projects of the Corps, "Who will take care of the hunters and fisherman when they protest, you or Carmie?" "I'll take care of the fishermen. No, to tell you the truth those presentations by the Corps bore the hell out of me. But Carmie just loves maps and charts and dams and construction--all those things. I can't get interested in them and I never have. The Corps has been mad at me ever since I was governor. The Governor has a veto over corps projects. They wanted to dam up the Strawberry River and I vetoed it. If the truth be known, a lot of people had gone around and bought up property where the lake would be created. Some of my friends had. Can you imagine damming up anything with such a pretty name as the Strawberry River? That project had been authorized in 1938--a big year for authorizations. I remember after I vetoed it, some old geezer from way back up there came into my office and said to me 'In 1938, those gosh darn Corps of Engineers

fellows put a stake in the middle of my tomato patch. Is it all right for me to pull it out now? Can you imagine? He'd been sitting there looking at that thing for 25 years?" (That's a David Pryor way of looking at things-- it comes down often to a human scale.)

He asked me if I had been looking at his mail. I said no. He said it was still running in favor of Reagan. "I thought the CETA groups and the others would be here by now. I guess they're just starting."

I told him about the Arkansas Gazette and asked him what their problem was with him. "I'll tell you the story of my relations with the Arkansas Gazette. When Orville Faubus was the Governor and I was in the legislature, I was known as one of the young Turks. And I was the darling of the Arkansas Gazette. I could do no wrong; and I had no trouble with them. They supported me in 1972 against John McClellan. Next to him, I was a liberal. Next to him, Barry Goldwater would be a liberal. They supported me for governor, too. But when I submitted the Arkansas Plan to the state legislature, they turned against me. We came to a parting of the ways, and they have been after me ever since. Oh, once in a while they may bend a little and say that David Pryor lost his senses momentarily and did something right. I used to spend a lot of time worrying about it and trying to do something about it. But I've stopped. There's nothing I can do about it. The head of the editorial page is a man named J. O. Powell and he just doesn't like me. The editor used to be John Dolan(?). He came from Mountain View. But he left, and has won awards with the San Francisco Examiner. He and I got along well. I don't say this explains everything, but personally J. O. Powell and I have never gotten along. He's a country club type--I don't know how to say it--he sneers at people. But he loves Dale Bumpers. In fact, he hates the whole Arkansas delegation except Dale Bumpers. When Bumpers and I vote differently, they praise Bumpers. When we vote the same way and they would have to praise me or blame

Bumpers, they avoid the subject. The reason I don't worry about it anymore-- I haven't thought of J. O. Powell for months--is that he'll be gone before long. I'll outlive him and then I'll get more decent treatment. My mother got mad at him once and called him up and chewed him out for something. She's 80 years old. He was sniffy with her. He should have understood. I can't complain too much about their news stories. They treat me well. But I've heard that Tom Hamburger has had some of the nice things about me taken out of his articles. At one point he asked to be taken off the editorial page he was so upset about the interference. But I understand he's back now. The cartoonist Joe Fyler and I are good friends. Whenever he comes to town, we go out to dinner. But he's under the thumb of J. O. Powell. He's not a free agent."

I asked him how the 2 years had gone, adjustments, etc. And the first thing he mentioned was the turnover in party. "I was getting more comfortable as a member of the majority party. I had expected to be majority leader by this time. No--but the game has completely changed. It's like playing football one day and then having to play baseball the next day. They put us in the minority and took my little subcommittee away from me. We haven't adjusted and decided exactly what we are going to do."

I asked him what it meant to be more comfortable. "That's a hard question. It means getting to know your colleagues, getting familiar with how they are likely to vote, how they will position themselves and then getting to know what you will do. Then you get caught up in things like the consultants. I guess it's just getting to know the Senate. It's getting to know the Senate, getting more confidence in yourself and getting your staff better organized to do their job. All that helps you to feel more comfortable."

How much did your investigation of the consultants have to do with that feeling of being comfortable? "It helped a lot. It gives you credibility with your colleagues and with the people who run the Senate--with the Capitol Hill community. It was a case of stalking, searching out and capturing an issue. You become identified with something; and that is especially helpful for a Senator in his first couple of years. When you think of Henry Jackson you think of the military, when you think of _____, you think of _____. It's nice to be identified with something that soon. But my problem was not to make too much out of it. I didn't want to become a one issue Senator."

I asked if he had been planning to take on other issues (before the election change). "Nothing in particular. But government oversight issues interest me the most. Bricks and mortar issues, as I said earlier, do not interest me. We have been active in nerve gas, and we would have been and we will be again. It's coming up soon." Then he and Bruce and I talked about it and I chimed in that I had been with him during an earlier consideration of it. He said "Nerve gas doesn't kill soldiers. They will all have suits and masks. Nerve gas kills civilians." Then he also said that "We already have enough gas on hand to kill everyone 500 times."

Then I asked him which votes were the toughest. "Food stamps was a tough one. That was one where the Gazette said I was an ogre (here he held his hands up before his face clutching outward) trying to take the food out of the mouths of the hungry. We were just tightening it up. The windfall profits tax was another tough one. I was the only member of the delegation who voted against it. I voted against it because I thought they would pass it along to us and that's just what they are doing. Let me think what were the

other tough votes. Bruce can you think of any (I can name some, but I don't know whether they were tough for you. Bussing?) Yes, bussing, that was a tough vote."

Then it trailed off and he and Bruce got discussing the credit card vote coming up today. There is a proposal to allow merchants to add a surcharge for people using credit cards. They talked about it a lot and David said "I use a credit card because I'm poor. I want to string out payments into the future. It would discriminate against me, wouldn't it?" Bruce said "Yes." We'll see what he does. But he asked about all the interest groups and their positions. The merchants want it and the banks don't. "This is one of those sleeper votes that could cause you a lot of trouble back home."

I need to add here that the other day when I was in the waiting room, Ann, Carmie and the new Agriculture guy were all out there at one time greeting constituents. There were 2 groups of constituents and the two receptionists were also talking to them. Carmie and Ann had 3 of 'em. The Agriculture guy had 4 of them. Anna _____, one receptionist, kept chiming in. Can you imagine Paul T's office staff coming out to greet people like that!

He asked me how my other people were doing. "Domenici is a committee chairman now, a real power. Paul Tsongas is becoming a leader and an expert on everything. Bill Cohen wrote a book. They are all important and famous but one. I'm glad I never wrote a book when I see the reviews Bill Cohen's book is getting. I flipped through it in the airport, and it looked OK to me."

From Pryor clippings--Quoted re anti milk support vote - "I have no final words. I'm ready for the gallows."

He was on 60 Minutes on 11/30/80 re use of consultants.

Ray Scott was described by DP - when DP was governor as "one of the most people-oriented persons in state government."

Arkansas Gazette re Clinton's defeat "Many believed that Clinton's long range goal was to serve 6 years as governor and then take on Sen. David Pryor in 1984. We do not think he could have beaten Pryor from the Governor's office and we certainly don't think he can starting from the sidelines."

You get, from the packets, a sense of what is hot at the time. I.e., Sept. 1980 - Nerve gas, Titan missile, August - Fort Chaffee, July - Drought, June - Consultants.

The Hamburger Gazette editorials make a 1-2 punch on many controversial issues--all knocking DP. I have the papers.

DP office has 182,000 names on their computer.