

Paul Tsongas

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I went to Boston the night before and ^{went} ~~went~~ to Paul's office in JFK Office Building, Government Center, for a 4:00, one hour interview. I guess I got about that, with a couple of interruptions.

His office is on the 20th floor - he greeted me with "nice to see you again" and a warm smile. But neither then nor ever did he call me by name.

The view from his office is spectacular--overlooks the harbor and there's a spotlight lighting up the steeple of the Old North Church, picking it out of the Boston night. I went into room before he did and was looking at the view. When he came in, I said, "That's a great view." He said "It is. Just think how long it's taken me to get to the 20th floor." (Not very!)

I then repeated what he had said about the best time being between election and the swearing in. He said "The honeymoon--after the election we took a poll. There's no way I'll ever be this popular again. There will be attrition between now and five years from now. That's just the way it is."

What kinds of things have you been doing since election? "It divides into categories. I've met with members of the Senate in connection with my committee assignments. I've been to Washington four or five times. Then I've spent time on the staff--interviewing the finalists that have been screened by Dennis and by others. I've spent a lot of time with old friends. New Year's Eve, I had dinner with three of my high school friends. The four of us were great friends--we've been in touch, but this was our first time together in

20 years. We've had parties for old friends, reestablishing ties we know will be there when we're out of politics. These ties have been neglected during my time in office."

At this point in the interview, two men from GSA came in to fix the alarm system under his desk. He had moved the desk and knocked it out. The purpose is to give him a button to push if some "crazy" comes into the office; the button rings downstairs and the security men come running. Paul busied himself with them for a while as they explained it. Then he turned to me and said, "See what you get when you're a Senator. I never had this in my office in Lowell. If you're a Senator, the government protects you from getting mugged. If you're a congressman and you get mugged, it's your own God damned business."

He went back to other subject. "We've been home for seven months now. I've spent a lot of time going back across the state. I've been to the western part of the state and I'm going back again tomorrow. I've been to Brockton, New Bedford, Fall River--driving. They don't expect to see me in this transition period. It's just like the campaign schedule. I've done lots of media interviews and spoken to some classes. I've met people from Boston I didn't know and from the black community. I've met with Mayor White, King, McGee. I've been taking all ~~the~~ loose ends and tying them together before we leave for Washington next week."

"We were going to leave for Washington 10 days after the election but we decided to stay and establish or reestablish ties before we left. We will have been home for 7 months when we leave next week." He mentioned the seven months at home twice and it seemed to be important to him. He also noted (in answer to a question) I threw in) that he had moved family to Washington immediately in 1974.

What's it like being a Senator--any different from being a Congressman?

"People treat me differently. There is a different level of respect and a self imposed aloofness--no, that's not right--distance. Old friends don't call because they think you're too busy. It's more intense. And (the forum--)

being a Senator from Massachusetts, which is such a respected state, adds to the forum available to you. We're going to meet with the staff next week to discuss the different standards of performance we will have to meet. We can't make mistakes. We have a lot more responsibility now. Another difference is that we will have more staff and it will be more specialized. I've hired an African specialist and an energy specialist. On the issues I'm into, we'll have a greater staff capacity. The question is: Will I grow in the job? I think I can. Right now I'm known as "the other Senator from Massachusetts."

"Whether I get known as anything else will depend on my capacity to respond to the opportunity. But it will be under my control. If I fail, it means, it's my fault."

Other difference from being Congressman. "I was on a talk show this morning and the first question phoned in was" Am I interested in running for the Presidency? Later on, I spoke to a fifth grade class and got the same question. I just saw US Magazine over there on the desk and they call me a 'presidential possibility'. That's three references in one day. That happens to me all the time. If I took it seriously, you'd see a change in personality. I don't. And I know there's nothing special about me. The same thing is happening to Bill Bradley, Max Baucus, Bill Cohen and others. But even if I discount it, which I do, with people our age, no one can ever be sure that it won't happen. That gives me leverage for the future. It will die down as people get used to it."

Do you think of yourself as a different political generation from Ted

✓ Kennedy? "Yes. The issues that I'm into reflect another generation. In terms of age we aren't--there's only 13 years difference. But he tends to be into human resources issues, great society issues. Mine are more technological, more future oriented--energy, environment, Africa, the restoration of cities. Those are different kinds of issues than health care, the criminal justice system or welfare would be."

I asked him to compare the 1974 interim with that of 1978. "Then, it all seemed so wonderful. We got brochures from real estate agents. It was the idea of getting to know people in Washington, the glamour of getting to know people you haven't known. I know the people now. The anticipation is more for the opportunity than for the life."

When I mentioned "class of 1974," and its sense of solidarity he said he found that out when he got there, but didn't know it till he got there. "That wasn't part of the transition."

✓ "I feel as close to the class of 1974 as anyone. There's no one that thinks more of that group than I. There's no Class of 1978 in the Senate. There is a class--but no brotherhood. The class of '74 shared age grouping, ideology and an activist role. To the extent that this group shares an ideology, I am one of the odd men out. And most of them are older. I've been to the Senate five or six times and it's a very different atmosphere. It's more fiefdom-like than fraternity-like."

When I interjected - "Is there a sense of isolation or of each person hoeing his own row?", he said "more the latter."

"It will be curious to see whether I ever use the House gym. Right now I feel the need to use it for emotional sustenance. If, in two years time, they never see me there, that will mean something. I have a lot of close friends in the House. Max and I are the first of our group to trend over to the Senate so it will be interesting to see whether we keep those friends."

I then said I was going to ask him whether he was nostalgic about the House and that I guessed he had answered that question, and he laughed.

Then I asked him what things he was sure he wouldn't miss about the House and he snapped back "The two year term!" and laughed. "I will have the time to do what I want to do well."

I then asked him if the idea of his reelection had entered his mind. "Have I thought about six years from now? Yes. But I have thought that if worst comes to worst and I'm defeated, I will have had 6 years. Add that to my four years as a congressman and that makes 10 years. My 5 years before that will make 15 years in public life. And I'll only be 43 years old." Idea was that he could hardly complain.

I asked if Massachusetts had a tradition of keeping its senators. "As I understand it, there have only been two cases where incumbents have been beaten--Kennedy's defeat of Lodge, and my defeat of Brooke--at least in recent history."

I asked about his committee choices and strategies. He said he wanted Energy, Foreign Relations and Banking in that order. "I'm pushing for Foreign Relations. I'm precluded from any real chance at Energy because of who has the inside track."

What argument are you using to get FR? "That I'm the best person for the job. That may sound silly. But the geography is against me. So the only argument I can make is that with the defeat of Dick Clark, there is no Africanist in the Senate. My chances are 50-50 at this point--which isn't bad considering the fact that only two freshman in history have been appointed to the Foreign Relations Committee. I'd be the third. Obviously, it's a long shot."

When I asked him whether the process had been different in the House, he

said, "Yes. In the House I had Tip O'Neill. You just told Tip what you wanted and he got it for you. Kennedy will be helpful but he's not as important relative to the institution as Tip O'Neill was."

I asked him about his relations and contact with Ted Kennedy since the primary. "We met after the primary in Washington. I asked for the meeting. The newspapers were reporting that he wasn't going to help me at all in that campaign. I asked him where ^{he} I stood. I told him it was not in my interest or his to play games. He asked me what I wanted. I told him, three things-- an appearance at a fund raiser, a street campaign and, most important, a TV ad endorsing me. He agreed to those and he did them. Since the election, I've spoken to him on the phone, but we've had virtually no contact. I've been doing my own thing. We're going to have a lot of interaction in the next six years. He's going to be very important to me, since he's on the Steering Committee that makes committee assignments."

I asked if relationship would be different than Brooke-Kennedy.

"Yes, it will be more a case of an older brother syndrome. He's been there 16 years. He campaigned for me. That sets a certain tone." He stopped and I sensed he had said all he wanted to say. He was, in view of what I had seen earlier, very correct during these comments. He did not gild the lilly, and he did not show any warmth, but he didn't give vent to the uncertainties and ambiguities he doubtless feels. Is TK going all out to get him a good committee assingment? Is FR "a minimum threat" committee to TK?

I turned, since he really seemed not to want to elaborate about TK, to the campaign. Did he think of primary and general as two campaigns or one. "The physical turmoil was the same. But there was an intensity about the primary that just wasn't there in the general. The people in the campaign felt jumped on by Paul Guzzi. There was never any animosity toward Brooke. There wasn't that kind of bitterness, that feeling that "he's the enemy"

✓ that there was in the primary. It made a difference in approach. When I met Brooke in debate, it was friendly. Then, there was a difference in the media. I wasn't the unknown anymore. I spent one half of my days with reporters in the car--local, state and national. There was that next level up of interest in the campaign. Winning the primary was more meaningful to me in terms of enjoyment. Winning the general has been an exercise in feeling the weight of what that all means."

I asked him in general about Guzzi. "We have talked many times. He campaigned for me. The relationship is back to where it was before the campaign. And we were very good friends."

✓
ask with approach
I then said I had asked him about that because of parking lot conversation. "It was after the Channel 5 debate 10 days before the election, we met outside the studio. I said to him "If you'll go to the beach, I'll go to the beach" and he laughed. Then we walked out to the parking lot and talked about the things we were both experiencing--the pressure from the staff, money problems, going into debt, the strain on our families, the pressure of the media--all the things we had in common, the things only we could understand, things no one else could know about. It was a burying of the hatchet. It was good. That was 10 days before the primary."

I asked him how much of his campaign was the same as his earlier campaigns (and he shook his head) or whether he had to start from scratch.

✓
ladder
"The organization was the same. The media was larger scale. It was everything we did before writ large. The media is much more sophisticated. I'm debating the most sophisticated politician who ever came down the pike. I'm covering an entire state, not one district. Instead of being covered only by the Lowell Sun and the Lawrence _____, I'm being covered by the Washington Post and the New York Times. It's all bigger league. But if we had not had

the experience of 4 years in Congress and the experience of running for Congress, we could never have hoped to put it together."

I said I thought it was the best run campaign I'd ever seen. He said "It was perfect. (Somebody) said he'd never seen a campaign like it. We didn't make one mistake. Oh maybe little things, that nobody would notice. But you couldn't point to one thing that people would know about and say, 'That was a mistake.' It was incredible."

I asked about his relations with the Democratic party during his career. "They have ranged from antagonism to indifference. When I ran for county commissioner, I ran against the party, against the establishment. I didn't get much help from the party until I was the nominee for Congress. Tip O'Neill and Ted Kennedy came and campaigned for me. But the traditional democratic sources were of no help to me. In the Senate campaign, speakers came--Kennedy, Carter. But in terms of the organization--sources like labor, the Jewish community--it just wasn't there."

I asked him about The Globe. "The Globe didn't take me seriously. In terms of their coverage, they were fair. But in terms of their editorials and what their editorial writers were saying, they assumed Guzzi would win. We really spent May, June, July and most of August--four of the six months--wandering in the wilderness. The Globe wasn't alone. It was the prevailing wisdom. I met with the Globe after the primary. They said they thought Brooke would win, but that they weren't discounting me anymore."

I asked about the rythm of the general election. "The turning point was the debates. We started even and were ahead all the way. Everybody agrees ^{that} the debates were the turning point. The staff was after me not to debate. They wanted to find ways to get out of it. Brooke was the best, most polished debater there is, and I'll ^{look} like like a kid. I think I was better prepared than

he was. Before both debates I went to a hotel room for a day to get ready, digest the material and psych myself up. I went in there with data and information and I used it. He had a clean desk. No one says he beat me in both debates. Mary McGrory says she thinks I beat him in the second debate. Others say vice versa. But it wasn't winning that counted so much as the avoidance of getting wiped out. Everyone expected me to lose; ^{and} there I was holding my own against a 12 year incumbent. Everyone agreed that because of accessibility and because of his troubles, people would ~~choose me so long as they would~~ choose me so long as they wouldn't have to pay a price. The debates eliminated that concern."

"Toward the end, we thought we had lost it to the 'Keep a black in the Senate' argument. Our last poll was discouraging--so discouraging that they didn't show all the results to the candidate."

I asked about a Boston establishment attitude toward Lowell. "A State Senator [from around Boston] said to me 'How did you do it? Coming from Lowell? Well, I'd been away for a while, gone to some good schools, been in Congress, so it wasn't as though I was a state representative from Lowell. But the attitude was, Massachusetts doesn't elect Senators from Lowell.' I'm very loyal to Lowell. As I'm fond of saying, 'I love Lowell better than anybody I know.' I take a fierce pride in that city. More than just loyalty, the fact that I live there is a great political asset. I wasn't talking down to them. Just look how well I did in the older cities like Brockton, Fall River, New Bedford, Holyoke. They identify with Lowell. It's not just that I feel a loyalty now, but when my political life is over, I'm going to live in Lowell, Massachusetts. And I'm going to enjoy it. People think I'm crazy. I spent New Year's Eve (he's repeating this for Jean's benefit--who has come into the room to hustle me out) with three of my high school friends."

As my last question, I asked about the Greek community and how I could get to know it. But it turned out that he doesn't feel great ethnic attachment, or at least not to point of it being crucial. But the Greek community was of great importance to his election.

"This was the first time the Greek community has been important to me politically. And did they come through! Whenever I wanted anything, there were two groups I could go to--the liberals and the Greeks. And they were mutually inconsistent. (laughed) I spent a lot of time with my roots. But I don't speak Greek. If two people are talking, I can understand most of what they are saying. But I don't speak it. So I'm not ethnic to that extent. I will raise my children Greek Orthodox. Greeks have not been so successful that being Greek doesn't matter. We're not there yet. During the primary I could go to the Greek community, but Guzzi could not go to the Italian community. That will change someday. We have elected a Governor, a Senator, a Congressman. The time will come when Greeks won't be able to go to Greeks."

"I'm not an ethnic. That's not what I'm into..."

Re his background, he said [^]The major formative influence of my life was the Peace Corps and all the Peace Corps stands for. That's where I'm coming from." It was that his ethnic heritage was not "where he was coming from" though he said he looked forward to representing or speaking for Greeks.

At one point, the interview was interrupted while the Israeli counsel went in ("Does he know he only has 15 minutes?"). Toby said Paul had had a meeting with Jewish group that did not go well ("Paul hates bitter enders") and they asked for another chance to express views. Toby says Paul thinks Begin's personality is a problem; and that Carter "harangued" Paul about Begin being difficult when Carter campaigned with Paul.

The interview was further interrupted when the Israeli left and Paul came out looking for people to help him move furniture around in his office.

Characteristically, he wants to move one wall in to make the room smaller and less grand--also wants to get rid of big USA and Mass. flags, which are about all Brooke left. He has taken over Brooke's old offices; and there isn't a trace of Brooke except a black receptionist who worked for him. I guess she'll stay. Anyway, she was explaining to the new, other receptionist such things as the frank, the FTS system, the alarm system, the intercom system, etc. Anyhow, I watched as Paul and aides moved furniture. "I've spent half of my life moving furniture every two months from one apartment to another."

The place was absolutely bare.

F. "Thanks for seeing me."

T. "I congratulate you for getting so much time out of Jean. Nobody else does."

R. "He had a hard time. We kept missing connections."

T. "I've got an obligation to you since you were so foolish as to come with me early."

R. "He said you were going to win."

F. "I didn't know whether you could beat Guzzi. But I knew you could beat Brooke and he couldn't. I wanted a Senator."

T. "Well, you've got one."

F. "I'm tickled."

He remembered that we had gone to Anderson Little in Fall River--good memory.

While I was watching furniture moving, a friend told story Paul had told. He went to man he always bought rug from in Lowell and guy gave it to him at cost. Got home and thought it was such a good buy he'd go back for more. Rug dealer is happy, tells Paul that he's so honored that the Senator is buying rug that he'll give rugs at cost like last one. Paul says no that

"I'm just Paul Tsongas," and don't want to be treated special. So guy sells him new rug at regular price.

When I talked about learning about Greek community, Jean suggested "your father" and Paul said, "Not in a political sense"--he mentioned Charlie Matliotis and a man from Lowell whose name begins with K.

It's a transition period, but they answer the phones "Senator Tsongas' office."

When a friend popped in during the furniture moving to say "Congratulations" and asked "Do we call you Senator or Paul?", Paul answered, "Your honor will be fine for you."

He was a little warmer this time, relaxed with his feet up and didn't seem to mind the interview. But he doesn't go on at length, is not spontaneous and waits for each question. He's very straightforward and will give more if you ask him something directly--like Guzzi conversation in the parking lot.

I have the feeling that if you ask a direct question, you'll get a direct answer. But you don't often trigger off a longer, more contemplative response with a question.

three looks
+
3 intakes!