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PAUL TSONGAS

August 27, 1984

I drove over to Chatham to Paul's new Cape house for a 'chin'--in response to his suggestion at the Democratic National Convention that I do so. By the time we connected our schedules were such that the only mutually convenient time was Monday. And, for him, the only time was 3-4 p.m. It didn't work out well. When I got there, he was shaving, and so I interviewed *Katina* for nearly ten minutes. Then the rest of the family came home from the beach. Then we got settled in law chairs and he decided to rearrange the law sprinkler. Then, at 3:45, he asked me if I would drive him to the Chatham Library for his author's panel. Then, in the 1/2 hour I had, he was not very responsive to my senatorial career type questions. He wanted to talk mostly about his El Salvador adventure in which he is "deeply involved" in trying to arrange a truce between the rebels and the army, and about his contentment with his decision to leave the ~~Senate~~. I learned, again, the lesson that these guys will talk about whatever they want to talk about. And what they usually want to talk about is whatever is going through their minds at the moment. Sitting out in the shade on a rolling green lawn, with ocean across the road, the flag flying in the breeze, on the best day of the summer, is not very conducive to serious talk about the Senate! So--there wasn't much! I, of course, had stayed up late last night and worked all day on my "questions". On the 45 minute drive home, I wondered, anew, why I did this kind of research. (At a party later I talked to a psychiatrist who noted that in her business, you want people to talk about whatever comes into their heads--without direction or responsiveness to questions! All depends on your trade.)

I told him about my thinking in terms of stages and seasons and asked if, looking backward over his Senate career and/or his political career it made sense.

"I've never thought of it that way. But at first, there is the sheer delight of being in the Senate--particular coming from the House. You discover how much more power and visibility you have. And, to the extent that you are in this business to have an effect on issues, you feel wonderful. That feeling lasts for a long time."

"It took me a while to become effective. The first year was difficult. I thought I didn't have to set priorities, that it would be just like the House. At the end of the first year, I decided what my issue priorities were. And then I think I made a difference."

"One term is a short time. It's hard to argue in terms of stages. But I got to the point where the toll being taken on me was very great. Mostly it was the absence from my family, but also the irritation at Jesse Helms' type techniques. A young family places you under a lot of stress. Most members never anticipate the juggling you have to do. The ideal situation is to come to the Senate after your children are grown. Most all the pressure I felt involved 'How much time do you spend at home with your family, how much time do you spend away from Washington, how much time do you spend in the office.' You get this tugging from all sides."

He then suggested that the minority party status made a difference. "When you are in the minority party you can't do as much. Of course, that enabled me to do my neo-liberalism routine. I wouldn't have had the opportunity otherwise. But you tire of being in the minority."

I then moved him to his campaigns and asked if he had a view of why he won the primary and whether it affected him at all subsequently. He smiled "I never understood why I won it. Paul Guzzi and I have become good friends again. There's a lot of quality there."

"That was my 6th campaign. The campaign I learned most from was my reelection to the city council. I almost lost because I took it for granted. My first House campaign was the first time I got involved in national issues. A lot of the things I learned from campaigns, I learned the first time around." "Idea was that he had learned two big lessons (over confidence, national issues) before he got to the primary for the Senate.

Re the general election. "That was an anti-climax. We were never behind Brooke until the very end when we were even."

"Running against Cronin and Durkin, you really had the sense of running against people. You could feel negative about. You couldn't feel that way about either Guzzi or Brooke. With Guzzi, we were angry that he got into it, but not on other grounds."

"I think I learned more in my first year on the Lowell City Council than any other thing that happened to me. The dynamics of politics are the same everywhere. They are no different in the Senate from the city council. I had a propensity to see things in black and white terms, to think that the people opposed to me were the bad guys and would always be the bad guys--that there were permanent good guys and bad guys. It took me a while to realize that on the next issue down the line, the coalitions would change and I would need the support of the "bad guys". ~~Only~~ I learned that you would burn your bridges with that kind of moralistic labeling. It took me a while to ^{learn} ~~get over~~ that."

I reminded him that early on - his 4 issues were "cities, energy, Africa, environment" and asked him how those had changed. He laughed. "Now my issues are hi tech, education, Central America and arms control. So much for my four issues." I asked if there was an in-between set of issues and he said no. "Those are the two sides of it."

"Africa is a classic example. I was the most learned person on Africa ever

to sit in the Senate. It never amounted to a damn. Events didn't require it."

Then he moved to the El Salvador story. He said he was "into" it "deeply" and "heavily" and Chris Chamberlain is involved, too. "We keep laughing to ourselves and asking 'Why us?' I'm in it because both sides trust me. And they trust me because I'm leaving. I have no agenda."

"The rebels have agreed and ^(Cardinal Obando) Barando is willing but Duarte is holding him back."

I tried to bring him back to the Senate by nothing that he was ^{after} an honest broker because he could see other people's point of view, and I mentioned Chrysler and Alaska Lands. He didn't bite, but went back to El Salvador story.

So then I tried another link, and I aksed him if this wasn't another example of being "out front" and I told him that in reading over my notes, the idea of getting "out front" seems very important to him. He responded with a vigorous nod. I asked about advantages and liabilities of that posture.

"Sure the advantage of being out front is that you catch the wave easily. Did you see the article in the paper the other day about cities that are coming back. Lowell had issued 1600 building permits last year. They were the first in the country in the increase of permits. They were 700% higher than the city in second place. And what did they point to as starting it all--the Lowell Plan. We were the first to have such a plan. In another ten years we'll have the best city in the country."

The idea of "the wave" was his entirely, I did not use the metaphor. So-- Rich's notion that he's a "pol surfer" fits.

He said that he had not gotten ahead of the wave on energy and he said "The Democrats are getting bombed by the baby boomers this year because they haven't caught the wave."

"If the wave is coming and you see it and you get out ahead of it, you can have a lot of impact. If you see it, you won't be the only one who sees it. Others will see it, too, and that means there's something there. And you get a chance to lead."

I asked him if ADA speech wasn't most "out front" he ever got and he said yes.

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I asked if I could divide his career into 'before the ADA speech' and 'after the ADA speech'. He said "That's fair. It's the most important thing I ever did and it's the thing I'm proudest of."

Later I asked about his most important "legislative accomplishment."
"The Alaska Lands was important. The work we did on star wars was important, although we didn't know it at the time. And Chrysler. But all of those pale before the book. That was the most important thing I've ever done."

I then asked him if he thought the Hart campaign was a fair test of the ideas in the book. "No, the ideas got all mixed up with the personality of Gary Hart. People didn't look at the ideas; they looked at Gary Hart. He talked about new ideas but he never articulated any. He didn't do a good job of spelling out neo-liberal ideas. I don't know why."

I asked him if he ever thought of the "Yuppies" as his audience, and he said he'd never thought of them that way. He said he thought Reagan would take the Hart constituency away from Mondale, that Mondale hadn't moved to consolidate the Hart constituency quickly.

As we walked to the library, he said "Another thing about the Senate. When you get there, you begin to think presidential. You are always thinking up. In the House, it's the Senate. When you get to the Senate, half the people around you are running for president. You see them and you think you are just as good as they are. It's almost like a dare. So you start to think about running yourself or having somebody pick you for Vice President."

I asked if he ever thought Glenn might pick him for V.P. He denied it strongly. He said he took himself out of the VP race when he announced his support of Glenn, because if he hadn't, the impact of his endorsement would be lessened. Then he said Glenn would pick someone "from another camp" anyway and not someone who had endorsed him. All that seemed very ^{un}ingenuous.

When I asked what happened to Glenn, he said "off the record or on the record"? I said "both". It was left ambiguous, but I had the feeling he pulled his punches.

"The saying Right Stuff, Wrong Staff captured it beautifully. His staff was awful. Bill White? Are you kidding? He was awful."

He explained how he had gotten together a group of arms control people, among them Nobel Prize winners who agreed to support Glenn because they trusted Paul. "We had a group of Nobel Prize winners and top people in the arms control field. They would agree to come out for Glenn and he would agree to let them be his kitchen cabinet on arms control. It was as fine a group as you could get, doing it mostly because they trusted my judgment. Then Glenn voted for nerve gas. It was all over. That vote, in my opinion, did more to kill his candidacy than any one thing. Here he was trying to court the left and he does that. Why didn't someone get very very tough with him? He doesn't have anyone on his staff who will tell him what he has to hear. They are awful. And at some point, you have to assume they are a reflection of the candidate. They never got tough with him."

Did you? "I feel very guilty that I never got tough enough with him. I was too deferential. I would say 'John, I think maybe you should do such and such.' I was too deferential. We did write him a long memo outlining what we thought he should do and not do. So far as I know he never paid any attention to it. Every one of the reasons he lost was mentioned in that fucking memo.

Ask Dennis to show it to you sometime...I like him a lot; I like what he stood for; and I knew him well...or, I thought I knew him."

The way this story goes, it's all of a piece of JG's reluctance to politick. Paul sees the nerve gas vote as a straight political ploy--move to the left. John sees it as "the right vote" and that's all there is to it. Paul would react to that, I think, by saying it shows Glenn didn't really want it badly enough. And, in the sense that he would have to "throw votes", he didn't want it that bad. Qu. Did John realize how badly those things would hurt him? Not that it would matter!