

Put with 1989 Summary

KENT CONRAD

May 10, 1990

--I got an appointment for 5:00, waited till 6:15 and left at 7:00.

--It was a dizzying experience--for the first time in all my work (I think) I talked to "the other side" and saw things through the perspective of the person I was not following. If I had picked Conrad and begun with him, I'd have been certain that MA was an "arrogant," "horse's ass," "jerk," "son of a bitch," "full of himself" incumbent, ripe for the plucking and I would have been sure the good gallant young challenger won a great deserved, victory, etc., etc. He was confident, relaxed, informal, friendly, open, candid, appealing, determined. Almost right off the bat he said he'd be happy to have me come to ND and that he was sure that his wife would, too--that she was his campaign manager (not his wife then) and would help me to understand the campaign. We'll see whether that pans out. The interview also convinces me that these guys don't know each other--each caricatures the other.

--When I went in, he apologized for keeping me waiting. "That was the governor on the phone. We're trying to put together a farm bill. But it's tough, very tough. North Dakota is hurting bad, and it's going down not up. We've had three years of drought, high real interest rates, and the budget numbers aren't there for us to do what needs to be done. It's very sobering out there, awful sobering. All you can do is to keep fighting and pray for rain. I think we can do more good by getting the deficit down than we can with a farm bill."

--I explained to him how I got to him. "The most interesting thing about Mark Andrews turned out to be that you beat him." "Could you tell me how you did it?" "Sure." "How and why did you decide to run?"

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--"You would have to start when I was 14 years old. I came to Washington in 1962 when Kennedy was President and I visited the Senate. When I got home I said that I wanted to be a senator some day; and I figured out that the best years for me to run would be 1986 or 1988. Everything I did afterward pointed toward that goal. I wanted to be a senator. I decided to start with a statewide office to build up my name recognition, and then to run for the Senate. And I did. I know that sounds crazy, that no one could have that kind of confidence. But I always had the confidence. I believed it was my destiny. And I thought I could win. No one else did. I even remember some of my oldest supporters telling me they were going to support the incumbent. I always thought I would win whenever I ran. I lost some races. But I always believed I would win. I think you have to have that kind of confidence, especially when you were like I was. I had absolutely no money. and no one who thought I could win. It was a long uphill climb."

--"What would you have done if Dorgan ran for the Senate?" "I'd have run for the House, but only to get to the Senate."

--"You have no idea what it's like when nobody thinks you can win. You endure a thousand insults. I remember once I was in Boston. I had an airplane ticket to get home and that was all--no money. The first guy I had an appointment with stiffed me, and I had to walk to my next appointment--half way across town--in the pouring rain. I remember walking along in the rain and saying to myself "What in God's name are you doing this for?" ("It was the classic low point.") Yes, it was the classic low point. I had \$126 or \$176 I can't remember which--in the bank. And the incumbent had hundreds of thousands of dollars. No one but me thought I could win."

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--I said I thought MA would never be beaten (in 1980) and he agreed

"Everybody believed that."

--"What made you think you could win?" I knew what was happening in our state, that the economy was in terrible shape. Six years of Reaganomics had been an absolute disaster in North Dakota. Prices were low and interest rates were high. We are a commodity based economy and that kind of economy is hurt more than anyone else by high interest rates. I'm a numbers man, and I followed the numbers. There had been a big change since 1980. And, then, Mark Andrews being the kind of man he was, I knew I could win...(he ticked off the lawsuit and a couple of other things; I went back to "kind of man" "What do you mean?" "Not for publication--arrogant. He thought he was better than other people, that he knew more than everyone else did. I think there was a lot of insecurity there--that he compensated for his weaknesses by puffing himself up all the time "and acting like a jerk." (When he said "jerk", it jolted me. I never would have thought of MA that way.)

--"I remember once I was with a group of businessmen and they said "I guess you're wondering why we're supporting you." And I said yes, I was. They told me that they had gone to see Mark Andrews to help them with a problem and that he had said to them "That's not your problem; this is your problem." They said he had lectured to them for ten minutes on what he said was their problem and then got up and left. They said "That son of a bitch wouldn't listen to our problem, he told us what our problem was -- our problem!" I can't tell you how many stories I heard like that--all over North Dakota. That catches up with you after a while, and it caught up with Mark Andrews. He thought he knew more than anyone else and he stopped listening."

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--"And down here, too. I'll bet eight or more of my colleagues in the Senate have said to me "That Mark Andrews was the biggest horse's ass in the Senate. He was the most unpopular man here." People in his own party said to me, "We wanted his seat but we like you better than we liked him." They all said that with him, it was always take, never give. And the security guards, too. When I first got here, everyone thought I was a staffer. One day one of 'em checked my ID card and said "You're from North Dakota?" I said "yes." He said, "Are you the guy who beat Andrews?" I said "yes." He said "Let me shake your hand. That Andrews treated us like dirt."

--As I left he said "I couldn't have done it without the antipathy that *had built up* existed toward Mark Andrews in North Dakota. And it went deep. I had guys who were in college with him tell me that he was a horse's ass then--acting as if he was better than everyone else. They were still talking about his behavior in college! When it was over, I really felt sorry for the guy. I liked his wife. She is a nice person and a classy person."

--If there was one overwhelming impression I got, it was that the farm economy plus Mark's "arrogance" were the key factors, plus the good campaign--and the incredible determination.

--I commented on his good humor about it all--much laughing as he told stories. "It was not fun. You can look back now and laugh, but it was certainly not fun. It was a pressure-filled time. It was a long uphill climb."

--"I knew how to run a campaign against Mark because I knew what kind of person he was. If you went after him aggressively, he would react as if he knew what he was talking about, but he wouldn't pay attention to the facts. He would just assume he knew what the facts were because he had

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said what they were."

--He talked about the flow of the campaign.

(1) "I put all the money I had into television before the primary. I know people say you should save it till later, but I don't believe it. Our campaign needed credibility. And then we put a lot of money into a song \$5-6,000. I thought we needed that, too, something upbeat. A lot of people criticized that, but I think it was important to credibility and morale--the feeling that we could do it."

(2) "I chose well early on. I first had a guy come in from out of state. He wandered around for a few days and told me I should put \$50,000 of my own money into the campaign. I didn't have \$50,000; I had \$126 or \$176--I don't remember which. So I sent him packing. I asked Lucy to be my campaign manager and that was a critical decision." Same re Peter Hart and Greer (TV) "honorable people."

--Mark Andrews got so that he believed that everything he said was right, not because it was right but because he said it. I remember I was watching TV one night when he gave an interview in which he said that as a result of the farm bill, wheat prices had gone up. I couldn't believe he said that. They hadn't gone up, they had gone way down. When I heard that I said to myself (here, he snaps his fingers) "I've got him now." I went right down to the local people and we did a spot that showed enough of the interview to remind people what he had said and then I said that Mark Andrews was wrong, prices hadn't gone up but had gone way down. And I said that's not the kind of message we ought to be sending to Washington. I didn't tell my paid TV consultants about it because I didn't want to take the time to discuss it. I knew I had him. Besides, they were charging \$2500 a pop, and we did this ad for \$400! Andrews

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wanted to debate the thing. So I did a second ad locally. I had a chart made up showing wheat prices dropping over the past 90 days. In the middle of the big drop was a tiny little blip in the middle. I drew a big blue circle around it and said "This tiny little rise is what he's bragging about." People told me, disaffected members of his staff told me, that at some point he would do something like this--stop listening to the facts and believe something was true because he said it was and not because it was a fact. Those two ads boosted us 17 points in the polls! That was a major turning point in the campaign. It gave us credibility. It was such a big increase that it bothered me. I said we've got to slow this down. It's going too fast."

--He said debate was another turning point because it gave him confidence. He told a story with great hilarity about how Mark wanted to stand and he wanted to sit. "I'm long waisted; and when I sit I look tall. People think I'm 6'2". (He looks about 5'9" to me--shorter than I am.) His story is that they had agreement that they would sit, but Andrews and Jacqueline thought differently. "Andrews huffed and puffed and got all flustered and upset and walked around. Ten seconds before we were to go on the air, there I was sitting and there was Andrews standing. The producer pointed to him and said "Sit down." And he did. The debate gave me confidence. All I had to do was to hold my own and I won. It gave me confidence to see Andrews in action. I saw the guy up close and he didn't look impressive to me."

--"Bringing Reagan in was a mistake. Reagan's policies had been a disaster for our state. It made people wonder how independent this guy really is. That was another turning point, I think."

--Said Andrews "got very nasty" at the end, they said that he (KC) was

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soliciting money from a homosexual group. I couldn't get whether this was whispering or publication. But I think it was published somehow.

--Said Andrews made some comment about Burdick near end of campaign and "Quentin told the press that Senator Andrews must have been smoking something."

--Said "I believe in campaigning hard, on the issues, nothing personal. I stayed away from everything personal."

--I asked about the March '85 poll. "It was mostly Dorgan. He's the most popular politician in North Dakota. But it was other things too. The poll showed him clobbering me. But I looked at the numbers behind the numbers. I looked at his reelect numbers--38%--and I knew than that he was beatable, and that I could beat him. I was the only one who thought so.

--The brass plaque on his desk says Yes We Can! "It carries two messages --one that we can win and the other is that we can do something when we get here. It reminds me what I'm here for."

--Spoke of Jacqueline--in connection with the seating-standing controversy. Says how everyone hated her and what a mistake it was to have her around. Says people arranging the debate called her a "bitch". This was an out of touch guy, certainly, to bring in this "outsider".

--I put forward my ideas that MA thought he had gotten so much pork that he couldn't lose. He nodded as if to say yes he had gotten a lot of pork. "But he didn't put it in context. The policies of those six year were a disaster for North Dakota. I know he fought against some of them. But then he brought the President out to campaign for him. That made people wonder 'just how independent is this guy.'"

--He discussed his strongest supporters. "The Democratic party, the rural
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area, good government people who see me as an efficient administrator...."
^{He} I kind of tailed off, and I think he said "That's about it" after a while.
--Then I asked him about Andrews' strongest supporters. "The Republican
party--parties really mean something in our state--business, the
establishment." I said "except for the medical establishment in Fargo".
He smiled and said "The medical community of Fargo supported me heavily.
I carried Cass County--Andrews' home county. When it was over, I really
felt sorry for the guy." He said this last twice, once in context of
losing his home county, and, again, as we were standing up talking just
before I left. (I walked into the wall safe first!)