

PETE DOMENICI

March 13, 1979

Twenty-five people in office - 9 more on ageing subcommittee in building next door - Odelia is receptionist.

Had a coke in the cafeteria with Pete Wellish--he complained about the job. "It's a terrible job. I'm working 18 hours a day. There's more pressure in this job than there was when I worked for the media. Pretty soon I'll need a shrink. I'm determined that the average Senate employee stays for about 2 1/2 years. I was back home a couple of weeks ago with some of my friends from the media having a few beers. They said "You're so lucky having one of those cushy Washington jobs! But I like what I'm doing--really I do. It's very interesting."

Most interesting thing he said was that in the middle of the rambling talk about the job. "There's incredible pressure in the job--especially since press is the number one concern in the office. The Senator says that; the guy who had the job before me told me. Everybody says that and said it from the very day I was hired. Of course, the Senator would never say that publicly. The other day we sent a memo to our staff in the field discussing their duties and so forth. In it we said, "The number one concern of this office is press." When he saw it he said "That's right; but some disgruntled employee might show it to someone on the outside so we'd better take it out."

"He's paranoid about the press--especially the Albuquerque Journal. If something doesn't get in the Albuquerque Journal, it just didn't happen as far as he's concerned. And he thinks everything he does deserves a story in the Albuquerque Journal. Everyday we get the clipped stories from the

Journal here in the office. For him, that is reality. I think we ought to keep those clippings from him. Today, he thought he should have four separate articles in the paper. I had to say to him 'Boss, put yourself in the position of a newspaper editor. How many of these stories would you print?' We need to develop some thrust, not just lots of stories. If you have Potomac fever, and he has a bad case, you think everything that happens in the Senate is of importance for the entire world. We have bad relations with the Washington bureau chief of the Albuquerque Journal (Ron Weeks?) He doesn't like Domenici. That makes everything worse. I don't know what to do about him. Everytime I call him to tell him something, he thinks I'm trying to hype him. He's suspicious of anything we do."

He talked about their successes. They send out 2 or 3 radio messages to 45 (out of 80) radio stations each week "the most effective media on a day to day basis." They also do some local spots with radio stations on local problems. A statewide spot gets used by 40 of 45 stations.

They do a column "Sense and Nonsense" that runs in weekly papers and gets used.

Tribune treats them well.

He talked about difficulty of getting TV back to N.M. Would have to get it on plane here in early afternoon to get it on 10:00 p.m. news. They did it once and got media coverage in 2 stations.

Also, there was one conference call, which he termed very successful, with about 8 or so editors when he introduced the home health care bill and got lots of coverage in media.

Peter often uses idea of "thrust" to describe what they are trying to do to develop some direction to Domenici's efforts. Finding same things to keep him interested. Peter thinks inland waterways bill would have sold during election but Steve Bell didn't.

Peter said PD is "great guy to work for" despite fact that job is tough.

Said he was very "despondent" after the election but was over that now.

I waited in the office for nearly two hours before I got a chance to get in and talk with Domenici. Then, when I did, he was on the phone part of the time and totally wrapped up in two issues--what was going on in New Mexico and the Budget Committee. So, all in all I got three or four questions out. On the other hand, he poured me another drink and let me listen to some very intimate kind of conversation. I was privy in a way I would never have been had I not known him from New Mexico. So the net effect was very strange. I did not get to ask my questions (I had spent two hours getting them lined up!) but I was treated differently than I ever would have been coming in off the street. Maybe, also, I gained a little credibility with Steve Bell, whom I shall want to see if I stay with PD over a period of time.

When I walked in he came over and greeted me warmly saying first "It's good to be with you"--his standard campaign greeting. Then he clapped me on the shoulder and said "We should have beaten the hell out of them, but we nearly got our ass racked."

Then he walked in area to pour me a drink (bourbon and diet pepsi) and he said "My political people" tell me that if it hadn't been for a lot of hard work and a good record I might have been another one of the incumbents who got beat this year."

I said something like "Is that the way you see it now? And he said "What it shows me is that the demagogues can win nowadays if they can just find the right things to demagogue on. You can't predict any election these days." He returned to the theme later.

I asked him how he felt election eve about the election--what he would have said to me then. "I've been through this with several people, and to tell

you the truth I wasn't particularly happy about it. For one thing I didn't think it would be that close. For another thing I think subconsciously certain things work on you. I knew how much work I had done back here, and how much had gone into my six years. I knew what I was coming back to, how much there was to do. I wasn't overjoyed. My family wasn't overjoyed. It was a very mild reaction that I had."

I asked him if he had expected a bigger margin than he got, that he had been 25 points ahead when I left. "I knew there was no way I was going to win by 25 points. In my gut, I knew that. A year and a half earlier, we had taken a poll and were ahead by four or five points. Then we did certain things and we shot way ahead. My political experts told me that it was because of what we did, but I never believed it. I knew from the beginning, it would<sup>^</sup> be 25 points. I don't think he gained all that much at the end. I think we miscalculated from the beginning."

I sort of struck the idea of "miscalculation" in and he then said that "Two things hurt us. First, we miscalculated his strength, the appeal he had as knight on a white horse. Secondly in areas where we are normally strong, the turnout was very low--in the heights area. We could have won 8 or 10 thousand more votes if the turnout had been greater."

I asked him if he thought anything he could have done during the six years would have helped any--whether it was the last part of the campaign or the 6 year campaign that hurt. "On all the things that we tried to emphasize, we were on the right side--honesty, interest in, sympathy with. So I don't think it was something we did or didn't do. People are just depressed. And they blame any incumbent for their condition. Domenici is up there in Washington and he hasn't done anything to make me better off. If you pick someone who has no record in the area he's running for and let him run

against an incumbent, that incumbent will be in trouble. And with polls, they can do it. On Panama, the Democrats did that. They found candidates who opposed Panama to run against Senators who voted for it. You know that's just bullshit, that if Democrat had been in the Senate, you know he'd have followed his leadership and voted for the Panama Canal Treaty. Any incumbent is vulnerable to an opponent with no record in the office. That trend may continue in 1980 and 1982."

"Here's something that would interest you from your professional viewpoint. All the political leaders in the state on both sides, thought my opponent was in a hopeless race. They believed the polls. The Democratic leaders believed that so much they gave up on him. They didn't dig down and help him. That may have hurt him more than anything else. I've never said that to anyone before, but I believe it is true."

At one point when he was talking about how the polls missed what was going on, he said "We even took a poll after the election and showed us winning by 25 points. People still wouldn't tell, and were still hiding their votes." He concluded they were hiding their votes and that is, now, very difficult to poll the electorate. He did not conclude that Tarrance did a poor job of polling (neither would Wellish put much blame on Tarrance.)

I asked him whether he could or would pit his own hunches as to what was happening against the polls--or whether he was a prisoner of the polls. He was very emphatic.

"You've got to rely on yourself and not just the polls. I've been through several elections, and I'm able to pick up the vibes. In one area where I felt the vibes were best, we clobbered him. In another area where the vibes were not so good, we didn't do well at all and in a third area, it was mixed. On

the east side, no one ever mentioned my opponent. He had no appeal. They didn't think he had what it takes to be a United States Senator. I knew we'd do well and we beat the hell out of him there. In the North, I never felt any enthusiasm for me, not at any rallies or anywhere I went. I knew we were going to lose and we did. In the heights area the vibes were mixed. People said they were for me, but they wanted to meet my opponent. I could tell they admired him as a fighter against the big interests. So I didn't think we'd do as well as our polls said we would. I was right. Then in my home town in the valley, the patrons were all for me, but we got our ass racked. I was hoping that the patrons could deliver, but they couldn't. We got our ass kicked. There was nothing we could have done about that. But if there is one lesson I learned from this election it is: don't ever get so far out of touch that you can't feel those vibes. Sometimes that happens after you've been here. It could happen to me now."

When I first sat down with my drink it was obvious he didn't really want to talk about the campaign. It didn't fit with his mood. He said to me (before I switched the subject back to the campaign "We have some big challenges ahead, in the budget committee. In two years, I'll be taking over the Republican side of the Committee."

The Budget Committee was very much on his mind and he and Steve Bell talked excitedly for half the time I was in the office. Apparently today they had come up with a package which they were going to try to sell to other Republicans on the Budget Committee as the Republican position. They want to go for a tax cut and appear as the tax cutters and apply the tax cut to some part of the economy that will help capital formation, investment, or something other than a tax expenditure to an interest group that will not help productivity or capital growth or whatever.

They were excited because if they could pull it off, it would be a first in the history of the budget committee. Bellman has always gone along with Muskie. Domenici is trying to push Bellman to take a partisan stand now. Whether he can or not is unclear at this point. Whether he can control the rest of his committee is also not clear---even if he gets Bellman. Hatch and Armstrong are very conservative and he and Steve figure they'll want a much bigger tax cut.

"We've got to get all the Republicans together in one room and get them to agree on a Republican package. If they won't do that, then the hell with them. Everyone can go off and play his own game. If we don't do this, the Democrats will get all the credit for being the cutters. If we can get a Republican package, that cuts deeper than the democrats and then directs the tax cuts to help with capital formation, or investment or productivity, we'll get the credit. We'll get the press." At several points he asked Steve "If we do it will we have something substantial? Will we get the credit? Will we get the press?" And Steven would say "Yes Boss, I guarantee it" and Pete would say "I'm with you."

It wasn't clear who was leading whom. And I think staffers do lead in the Senate. Steve said he was going to talk to Bellman and tell him that now that the budget act was working it could take a few blows of partisanship and survive. When PD left the room, Steve discoursed on how Senate has changed and how Domenici is already 51st in seniority at 47 years old and was more aggressive than Bellman (who is respected but "stolid" and is not good with the press. Yet, he said later, Bellman had good personal reputation with the media. I chimed in at this point with brief discussion of Bellman and media reputation being build on

bipartisanship and how Steven would be asking Bellman to spend his capital. Point was, they were thinking of using Bellman's standing with press to push their partisanship when in fact Bellman had made that reputation by behaving in a pro-institutional non partisan manner. When I said that PD pointed to me and said "He's put his finger right on it." And so it went round and round.

But PD is excited because he's trying to engineer a departure and it will give him credit and press and a Republican image. I don't know what is that's pushing him so fast--after all, he'll be in charge in 1980--it could be desire for publicity, fueled by Bell, or it could have a Republican purpose--Vice President?

At one point he said "When I become ranking member of the Budget Committee I'm going to look into the basic budget law, not just to look into it but because it isn't working. The big problem is that we don't declare tax policy two, three and four years on out. We just declare it for one year; then the Finance Committee comes along and changes it. And it passes laws that affect taxes two, three and four years down the line. Then the budget committee is stuck with them. That's no way to make tax policy."

He's itching to get his hands on some levers.

He talked about going to defend Schlesinger tomorrow when Metzenbaum, McGovern, Durkin and Tsongas call for his resignation. He discussed what he was going to say - he calls it "bullshit" when people say Schlesinger is the problem.

Oh press - "We did a good job with Schlesinger yesterday but we got upstaged in the press when Durkin called for his resignation. Schlesinger's not the problem. He's a terrible manager; but the energy problem isn't going to go away if he does. People are looking for a scapegoat, that's all.



Schlesinger is the scapegoat. The problem is in the law. You know, we are the chicken-shittiest of the three parts of the Constitution. We've got the people so tangled up in regulation they can't move. The laws on the books; that's the problem. You can put NOAA in the Department of the Interior but that can't change the fact that the oil companies have to fill out 18 forms before they can make their bids. That's because Congress--not this Senator--doesn't want them to bid."

His other preoccupation while I was in the office was with a pro-nuclear power bill of some sort in the N.M. State Legislature which he is lobbying for. His brother-in-law (Tim \_\_\_\_\_) called and he and Pete talked strategy. He also talked about the ruling that shut down 5 nuclear power plants recently. "I don't know how many more blows the nuclear industry can stand and still survive. All that money is invested by someone. Who's going to invest in it? The industry is in terrible shape." He's strongly pro-nuclear.

Steve talked about makeup of N.M. legislature--how Democrats voted with Republicans and organized the lower Chamber. Steve cheered Domenici on in this endeavor too. Said that if the N.M. legislature did what they wanted (which was not clear) that he'd get lots of good press.

Also - PD called UPI and AP in N.M. and gave 'em a statement on Carter's middle east trip.

I cannot recall all the details of the conversation about (1) Budget Committee (2) Schlesinger (3) nuclear power in N.M.--but it was desultory and kept me from my questions completely. I thought I would get them in when he poured me a second drink and poured himself his 3rd or 4th drink. But, before I could finish mine or he his, Steve Bell said "We've got to go now boss. We've got a busy week ahead." First, PD said he was going to finish his drink. Then, he got up and we left abruptly. We walked downstairs and out the door.

He said "We never did finish, did we." I said I'd be back, asked him if I could travel again with him and visit him in May. He said sure. I noticed when he got to the door of the building, one of his staff guys was waiting for him. Pete said "I'll go home with Bob and leave my car here." And he did. It seemed to me possible that they were protecting him some and that maybe he was drinking too much. Steve seemed to be controlling the interview more than Pete. Pete got more rambling in his discourse. "Bob" was at the front door to drive him home. I was hustled out and not allowed to finish my interview. In fact, Steve Bell filibustered me a little. And PD did have quite a few drinks. I hope he was just excited this evening. But he has stopped smoking since the first of the year. And he may be compensating. I hope not.

At one point Steve was saying how PD did not come up through the "politician" route. I should ask PD whether he thinks of himself as a politician.

On Wednesday, I went through the line in the Senate cafeteria right behind Steve Bell and a friend of his and he did not suggest that I sit with them for lunch. In fact he scooted off. So I don't know now what I accomplished as far as that contact was concerned. I made some lame remark in the line about expanding my study to include the budget process--if he "didn't object". And he quipped that it was dangerous to study the budget process.

Peter Wellish, during our talk, emphasized the uselessness of press releases. He doesn't think much of them. Later I heard someone say in the office "Now that we aren't sending out as many press releases..." That's a conscious change of policy and I should ask about it. Ask Pete about relative effectiveness of types of PR.