

ERNIE VIGIL

January 4, 1984

We went up to Santa Fe to talk with Ernie Vigil (Vihil).

When I asked him about casework figures and how they had jumped, he talked very interestingly about it. He said that they had kept figures early on when Dennis Howe was around. "I could probably get together some figures for you. We used to keep them for the first year or two. But--how do I want to say this--things get a little competitive between the offices. And some of the numbers got to be a little padded. So we stopped."

"We had two big increases in business in the office. The first was when Jack Schmitt defeated Joe Montoya. For the first time, New Mexico had no Democratic Senator; and there were a lot of people who had dealt with a Democratic Senator all their lives. They felt more comfortable with Pete than with Schmitt; and so they all came in here. They were very hesitant--many of them. Joe Montoya had checked people for their registration when he helped them. He was so political. They couldn't believe that we would help them. They'd say "I'm a Democrat, so I don't know if you can help." And they were amazed to find that we would help them just as much as we would anyone else. That's one thing Pete made clear from the beginning. He was going to be a Senator for the whole state, nothing political. So we picked up a lot of Joe Montoya's business. And the second big jump came when Pete became a national figure. Then we began to get more complex cases than ever before. People began to say 'If Pete can't do it nobody can. Let's give him a try.' I'd say we probably do 4 times as much business now as we did the first couple of years."

He did not buy the idea that casework would go up in linear fashion with time and influence. For one thing, there's a rush of "new accounts"

that had been "dorment" in the first year. For another thing, there is no big reservoir of clients out there waiting to go on welfare or food stamps. You just can't expand your business indefinitely." I thought both points were very nice.

"When you get elected for the first time, it's just like a new store opening up for business. A lot of people come in to sample your merchandise. Lots of them will have tried other stores before without any luck and they come in to open an account with the new people. We got lots of cases that previous senators had worked on and failed. They were old accounts that had been dormant. As soon as we opened our door, in they cmae. So we had a big rush at the beginning. We didn't start slowly and build up our clientele. And as far as building up is concerned, there is no great mass of clients out there just waiting to go on welfare or food stamps. You can't just go out and build up your business out of that mass of people waiting for you. There's a natural limit to the size of your business; and you just can't keep expanding it forever."

Also, he said, casework differs by region. "Darlene has tons of casework down South. People come to her with all kinds of personal problems. They look upon her as their advisor, and they practically live in the office."

He compared the three campaigns for me. He was Pete's campaign manager in 1972. He was an electrical contractor for 20 years, served 4 years on Santa Fe City Commission. "I've been with Pete since the year one--when he ran for governor and got beat. It was the best thing that ever happened to Pete."

Talked about the big barbeque at Espanola and how "15,000 people came and scared the Democrats so that they brought McGovern in and made

Jack Daniels endorse McGovern. The explanation there was in terms of Daniels' residence, background, philosophy and how Pete was known from his governors race.

On 1978, he pretty much agreed with my assessment. Kept calling Anaya "the little shit." Talked about his ability to get publicity, that a lot of people liked his underdog, pro-consumer race. And he mentioned in this connection that "there are a lot of new people in New Mexico" who saw him as the crusader. He agreed they underestimated Anaya. "We made two mistakes. We underestimated Anaya's appeal. And we were not aggressive enough in answering him. It was just about the time people's utility rates were going up, and Anaya tagged Pete with that--'utility Pete' he called him. We didn't answer that so the man in the street could understand that. Between you and me, some of his advisers had Pete scared of the little shit so that he wasn't as aggressive as he should have been." He noted that Anaya got away with tagging Pete as candidate of oil men, even though oil men were mad at Pete. Pete couldn't combat that, or didn't, and "Anaya had him caught both ways."

He also noted that In 1978 "Pete had done a good job but he wasn't very well known."

He said "Everybody said to Pete, 'You'll win. You don't have to worry.' But I could see Anaya gaining. I could see what was happening in this part of the state. And I told Pete that these people who tell you not to worry remind me of the cartoon strip where the boxer is sitting in his corner with face all bloody and his manager says to him, in the first caption, 'You're doing fine. He hasn't laid a glove on you.' And in the next caption, the boxer says, 'Well you'd better watch the

referee. Because somebody in there is beating the hell out of me."

He talked a lot about Anaya "He ran without the help of the Democratic political leaders. And he made a lot of hay out of that--'I'm my own man. I owe no favors. I can't be bought.' A lot of people are new to New Mexico and they liked that. He was the pro-consumer, for the little guy, will put the crooks in jail--talk, talk, talk. He was in the papers every day. If the Democratic party leaders had supported him, I think he would have won. But I think they didn't trust Anaya. And I think they liked Pete Domenici personally."

He dislikes Anaya intensely--calls him liar, chicken shit, out for himself, reads from paper when he talks, etc.

This time, of course, they have a national figure--and one who does his constituency work.

He talked of 3 things Pete has done for northern area. He got 450,000 for non-Indians to fight court battle against Indian water right claims. Ernie says lots of people are involved in that. "It's a monster. Thousands of people are involved." Second, Pete got 15 million (3 million this year) for program to repair the escuevial(?) system of irrigation ditches and dams in northern part. A centuries old, cultural hallmark of the area. He held hearings five years ago, and has been building the coalition of bureaucrats and citizens till "it's just like a family now. Everyone agrees in what should be done. Pete argued for the money in cultural grounds, not costs benefit grounds and he won. They will get 15 million, 3 million the first year. And the first small dam will be built next summer, just in time for Pete to go up there, plant his feet on the concrete and tell people how ha-py he is to be able to deliver. 'Domenici delivers.' No bullshit, just action. If that doesn't win us the votes

of people up there, then ^{to hell with them} from now on. I know who does what in that part of the state, and I'll keep a list. If they don't help and then they come to us, we'll tell them to go to hell. We're past the time when we need those people. Of course, I won't say any of that till after election."

Then he said the Raton municipal water supply was the third thing. "But the water rights and the escuevia(?) system are the two biggest things."

All this was to make the point that Pete tends the constituency--or, someone does.

Ernie spent a lot of time just talking about Pete's "naturalness" with people. "He hung around with the gang on Park and 14th, played baseball, basketball, the whole thing. It's natural for him to put his arm around a guy without it seeming to be forced. Como esta Jose, Como esta Pete. People call him Pete. They think of him as a Senator, but not someone with a big head. You know how he dressess--no fancy clothes. He'll keep the big shots waiting here in the office while he chases after the janitor to find out how he is. It's natural for him. When he became powerful in Washington, he did it naturally. He did not get a big head. And he never gave people the idea that he was any less interested in New Mexico. He made the two parts of the jobs compatible, because he did them both naturally."

"With Jack Schmitt, people wouldn't call him Jack. He was more focused up there somewhere. And when your thoughts are up there, it's hard to come down and put your arm around someone without it seeming forced."