

PETE DOMENICI

March 26, 1982

As I was going in to see Pete, Steve Bell came out and was more cordial than ever. "I got a good recommendation on you from someone--I won't say who. They said, he's a good guy, you can trust him." I said thanks and went in to see PD.

He was chewing on antacids. "I stopped smoking last night... I feel lousy... I have this pain I get and I can't tell whether it's going to pop or not... I have a pill I take that is supposed to help. But I forgot it yesterday. I woke up at 4:00 this morning, feeling just awful... The acid in my stomach comes from smoking, alcohol and pressure... It eats a hole in the lining of your stomach if it goes all the way through, you die... The doctor told me this morning he didn't know if it would stop. My daughter is getting married next week. She's the first. I've got a lot more to educate so I guess I'd better stay around a while longer, don't you think.

He wanted to talk about how he felt, so I listened--telling him a couple of times to lay off smoking. I came to talk about the budget and he wanted to talk about dying. I felt like my questions weren't so important. But I had not had an interview since Christmas, so I plunged on.

When I went in, Angela said, typically, that they were behind. And when I went in he said "Hello Dick. You'll have to talk fast." I said I just wanted to check with him on how he felt and what he was thinking and planning going into markup. That's when he launched into his talk about his health. He looked like he was in pain.

"We're completely screwed up in the way things are going around here. I'm mad. The way things are going, I think we'll have a disaster. We might have a budget. The leaders of a lot of the committees are starting to come

out with their own plans for the budget--taking positions on this cut or this COLA. If the committees get out ahead of the budget process, if they get out front, we'll never produce a budget resolution. We're in a situation where nobody wants to go first. The leader is afraid that if we move on the budget, the House Democrats will screw us. I think he's wrong. I just got off the telephone with him.

"We could have a budget resolution by next Friday. I probably won't do it. But I think we should. We wouldn't have to bring it to the floor. We could just let it simmer. At least it might start a dialogue. We could let the Budget Committee take the brunt of the criticism over the Easter recess. That might help Baker with his problem if things started to move."

Would a budget so passed in Committee be bipartisan? "Yes, it would have to be; and it's better if it is."

Could the Republicans do it themselves if they had to. "I'm feeling better about the Republicans all the time. We had a good meeting yesterday. I think we can get a resolution out that takes a good chunk out of entitlements, a chunk out of defense, a freeze on discretionary spending and some, but not too much on taxes. We can get the budget to within 20B of being balanced by 1985. I think I can get the Republicans to vote for parts of it they don't like. I think Symms will vote for it because of the big COLA cuts. He'll scream about the tax increases and vote against them on the floor, but he'll vote for the resolution out because he gets so much of what he wants. Armstrong will do the same."

Have you talked to Democrats. "I've talked to Hollings and Chiles personally. I've talked a little bit to Exon and Bennett Johnston. We'll lose Chiles on social security and we'll lose one or two Republicans on big COLA cuts." He's going to have to piece it together.

Have you ever persuaded RR of anything? "No." Do you know how you persuade him? "No." "Reagan doesn't believe any numbers anymore. It's futile. It's a futile exercise."

I said the great problem now was the lack of an honest broker and I said that was the tragedy of the Stockman article. That he was the honest broker. Now he's lost all his credibility at the White House ends." I said yest, but the real problem lay at the White House end. He sat up in the chair and leaned forward. "You're absolutely right." He came back to the idea a couple of times, later in our talk. He's not the easiest interview, because he expects me to chat with him.

He said of Stockman. "He's my friend, but I don't know him. I don't know him as well as I know you. I think I know what you want to do. You know what I want to do--to be a Senator for the rest of this President's first term. I don't know him. But he's friend. He gives me things he won't give anyone else. But I didn't know what game Stockman is playing. He's very quiet. Is he waiting for them to fall overboard? Is he trying to get back into favor? I do know that he can't get from point A to point B like he used to. He used to be able to get from A to B in an instant. Now it takes him a long time to get a message to anyone. He can't move from A to B in a straight line anymore. And you can't be sure his message ever gets through."

I asked him how New Mexico received his pseech and the Presidents speech. He answered the first. "I've been getting a lot of mail, most of it favorable. After the speech, I got 15 letters from New Mexico, 14-1 in my favor. More of it came from around the country. So there is not a lot of pressure coming from New Mexico. Things are going well for me."

*He added here, "People don't seem to be against Republicans. They seem to
Would you have made Conference Board speech same if you had not been

Chairman? Does chairmanship restrain you? "It's a paradox. If I weren't

be against incumbents from the polls I've seen. That is a help for us."

the chairman, I wouldn't have the opportunity to give the speech in the first place. If I had not been chairman I would have given the same speech three weeks earlier. I wouldn't have waited for three weeks." So it's restraining; but it's liberating after you give it."

He started in again when Martha Buddeke came in. "When I gave my speech, things went pretty well for a while. It was liberating for me. I got my two bits in. At least people started talking about the deficits and they started coming around to our position. Now it's getting frustrating again. There's no dialogue. I don't know what the fuck Jim Baker is negotiating with the House. Excuse my vulgarity. Do you know? Do you know what numbers he's working from. He didn't ask me for any numbers Dole or Baker so far as I know. He's probably giving up the COLA for some diddly-assed program. There's no dialogue and no mechanism for the kind of dialogue we ought to be having. I'm out of it. Nobody's talking to me. Baker wants to delay the budget resolution to let it all pan out."

Martha moved in to talk to him. I moved out.