ACCLAIM FOR SAN DIEGO CONFIDENTIAL

This book originally appeared as a four-part series in the San Diego Reader. These are excerpts from some of the many letters in response.

"...Peter Navarro's series was a masterpiece I would recommend to anyone who seeks to understand politics."

Mike Kennedy, University City

"I, for one, would like to congratulate Peter Navarro on his series of un-put-down-able articles...he had the guts to tell what he thought, the guts to tell what he saw (the piece about Al Gore and the chocolate cake will forever go down in memory!) and not spare anyone. Anyone, despite party affiliation, has to admire that..."

Alana Milton, North Park

"In this world, we are so surrounded and suffocated by the phony 'niceness,' 'objectivity,' and mealy-mouthed 'speak no evil' demanded by politics and daily intercourse. It is so refreshing and earth-shaking when somebody actually breaks ranks and tells you what is really on their mind, particularly a mind of the sharpness and insight of Peter Navarro's. This is one of the best pieces I've seen..."

Daria Doering, Mission Hills

"With Peter Navarro's articles we have, for the first time, an honest politician. I suggest possibly Mr. Navarro run for office again. It's refreshing."

Brian Keeling, Downtown

"Agree or disagree with Mr. Navarro, his articles certainly represent an enlightenment milestone in S.D. political writing. I can't remember anything as interesting, comprehensive, and provocative as the Navarro chronicles. The San Diego Reader performed a true public service by running the Navarro series."

John W. Cheney, Linda Vista

"Kudos for the excellent series by Peter Navarro! Rarely is the public allowed a peek into the brutal inner workings of our democratic process. I enjoyed every bit of Navarro's sharp, witty, and frank memoir..."

Timothy Kane, La Jolla

"...I found the Navarro series very enlightening."

Tom Stoup, Blue Door Bookstore

"...made me laugh to the tips of my toes. Navarro made lemonade out of lemons, managing just the right balance of self-deprecation, ridicule, and satire...I particularly appreciated his advice to 'mon candidate.' As one who once contemplated running for office to 'provide service to my community,' I have banished the thought forever. Navarro has successfully cured me of the deluded idealism that prompted those thoughts. This country is getting what it deserves."

Carol Hopkins, San Diego
“Congrats...on a fascinating series. Hopefully, San Diegans can look beyond their anger and see the game being played daily right in our own back yard.”

Benjamin Smith, San Diego

“This city should consider itself lucky to have such a believer. Lucky to have someone who is not afraid. Lucky to have someone so honest. Lucky to have just had a person like Peter Navarro. I feel lucky just because after all my 31 sunny summers here I have finally seen a light in politics. If this type of information was made available from candidates we might actually have the type of people in power that created this awesome country...”

Michael James, San Diego

“Excellent exposé! Very eye-opening!”

Riccardo Canneviallo, Solana Beach

“I am writing to congratulate you for publishing Peter Navarro’s series in the San Diego Reader. I think something should be written on his behalf. I reluctantly voted for him for Congress but if I had read this beforehand I may have enthusiastically campaigned for him.....”

Michael Kelly, Allied Gardens

“As a 35-year professional local-government manager, 15 of them in San Diego County, and as one who knows and has worked with all of Peter’s opponents over the course of time, the series was fascinating. It fosters hope that after their political careers are over...they would offer the same candid description and insights of the political process as did Peter. Perhaps over time, with multiple perspectives, the general public could truly gain an accurate insight into the county’s political process.”

John Goss, Rancho Penasquitos

“...thank you for showing us the election process for what it is, regardless of the personalities, winners, or losers...”

Donna Boyle, North Park

“I have not been in San Diego long and have not followed San Diego politics. Peter Navarro’s writing in your weekly is excellent and allows me to know, in its raw form, your town’s political players and San Diego’s policy process and history. In the future, I intend to follow San Diego politics more closely.”

Pancho Angel Cruz, North Park

“Having never run for public office, I found Navarro’s piece fascinating. I couldn’t put it down. Recommended it to my wife...I thought it was illuminating and ballsy.”

Dave Salina, North Park

“...My hat goes off to both Mr. Navarro and the Reader for provoking thought, even if it means a thorn in the side of the unexamined.”

Joe Walker, La Jolla
San Diego Confidential
A Candidate′s Odyssey

Peter Navarro

QT Press  San Diego, CA.
To the thousands of San Diegans who volunteered for my campaigns while never expecting anything other than keeping America's Finest City just that.
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INTRODUCTION:

Should You Read This Story?

Suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself.

MARK TWAIN

Should you read this story? Let me help you answer that question by giving you the following quiz. Suppose you are about to vote to elect your next congressperson. Which of the following candidates would you choose?

Candidate A is the Republican incumbent. He is a college dropout whose last job outside politics — over 20 years ago — was as a lifeguard. He supports white men's rights and he has referred to environmentalists as "zealots" and "extremists."

Candidate B is running as the Perot party candidate. She is a self-professed dominatrix who promises to beat Newt Gingrich in ways that have not yet been imagined. She has lips that would make Hugh Grant blush, she promises to be as tough on crime as she is on her clients, and she is an avid supporter of corporal punishment — so long as she gets to personally administer it.

Candidate C is the Democratic challenger. He is a professor of economics at one of the world's leading universities and the author of several widely acclaimed books on public policy. He has managed his own business and regularly provides consulting advice to both business and government. He is a conservative on fiscal matters and a progressive on issues such as a woman's right to choose and protecting the environment.

Now if after reading these descriptions your voting choice is Candidate A, I do not recommend this story. My suggestion is that you read the collected works of Rush Limbaugh followed by Oliver North's biography and G. Gordon Liddy's autobiography. Then devote your free time listening to and expressing your opinions on talk radio.

If your choice is Candidate B, I also do not recommend this story. My suggestion is the special Valentine's Day leather-bound edition of the complete works of the Marquis de Sade and a lifetime subscription to Hustler magazine. If you have any free time and money left, you may want to call Candidate B's hotline at 1-900-whipmenow for her daily inspirational message.

If your choice is Candidate C, you may find this story entertaining and interesting. You should know in advance, however, that Candidate A is going to whip Candidate C's butt pretty good and that Candidate C is going to (almost) wind up in jail. But therein lies the tale.
Part 1

San Diego
Confidential
The Difference Between God and Newt Gingrich

When I listen to Newt Gingrich, I agree with everything he says for the first ten minutes. After that, he scares the hell out of me.

Republican Party official, Buffalo, New York

On Election Day, November 8, 1994, a tidal wave of change crashed over the American political system. With the help of 73 unabashedly right-wing freshman congressmen, Newt Gingrich seized the gavel of Speaker of the House and the Republicans gained control of that august body for the first time in 40 years.

Within months of taking power, Newt Gingrich was one of the most reviled men in America not on death row, the Republican Congress had one of the highest unfavorability ratings ever recorded, and the Democratic Party — with two feet in the grave just months before — was absolutely giddy with the prospect of taking a Congress back that it had thought was lost forever. That's when I got the phone call. It was from former Congresswoman Lynn Schenk — one of the bloodiest casualties of the Gingrich revolution.

Lynn is a tough, intelligent, articulate, and stunning blonde who looks, acts, and sounds perfect for politics. She had been elected to Congress in 1992, the “Year of the Woman,” and, indeed, she had become San Diego’s first congresswoman in history. At that time, it looked as if she was on her way toward a long and distinguished career.

Unfortunately, Lynn lost her bid for reelection within a few months of taking office — although the votes weren’t to be counted for over a year. Her fatal mistake was to cast the deciding ballot in favor of President Bill Clinton’s deficit-reduction package.
Lynn's vote was not only an act of political courage, it was also sheer stupidity. This is because San Diegans hate to see their taxes raised; and, thanks to clever propaganda by the Republicans, that's how most everybody perceived the Clinton bill. Never mind that the legislation only raised taxes on the very, very rich — that's a subtlety that neither the president nor the Democratic leadership ever successfully communicated to the American people.

So from that fateful day forward — a day in which not a single Republican voted for the Clinton bill — Schenk was dead meat. She would not be alone, however. More than 30 other Democratic incumbents would fall on Clinton's tax-hike sword in the 1994 election, including Speaker of the House Tom Foley of Washington State, Intelligence Committee Chairman Dan Glickman of Kansas, and Judiciary Committee Chairman Jack Brooks of Texas. (Foley, by the way, was the first sitting Speaker of the House to be defeated in an election since 1862.)

There are two lessons to be learned from Lynn Schenk's unfortunate fate. The first is that any politician who is not in a safe seat, where one's reelection is assured, must sometimes tell the president to go choke on a Big Mac, especially when he lobbies for something politically suicidal. (Please tell him politely, however.)

The second lesson is that any president who forces members of his party to cast a vote that will cost them their reelection is a damn fool. Of course, Bill Clinton was a damn fool that year — something even he'd probably admit — but it was only one of a number of rookie mistakes made by our freshman president. This mistake, however, cost Bill Clinton control of the U.S. Congress by his own party.

But come to think of it, it may not have been so stupid after all for Clinton to lose the Congress. In hindsight, that loss undoubtedly saved what at the time was Bill Clinton's very sorry rear end because it gave Clinton somebody even less popular than he was to kick around, namely, Newt "let's shut down the government" Gingrich. This has turned out to be a popular sport with the American people, and justly so.

Anyway, my phone call from Lynn Schenk seemed to be nothing out of the ordinary. She was a friend, she wanted to have lunch with me to talk about the upcoming race for Congress in 1996, and I naturally assumed that she was running and wanted my help.

Instead, Lynn asked me to consider running. She had ruled out a race of her own for personal reasons, and she believed that I was one of the few people who could beat the incumbent Brian Bilbray.

Running for Congress was not something I wanted to contemplate, however. After all, I had lost three of the closest elections in San Diego history in just the last three years — for mayor in 1992, for city council in 1993, and for county supervisor in 1994. Despite the closeness of my losses, I was gaining a reputation as a perennial loser, and I had also publicly promised not to run again for anything (except maybe dogcatcher) if I lost that third race. More to the point, I was mentally and physically exhausted from the process, and, frankly, I was not looking forward to another beating.

So, instead, I urged Lynn to reconsider her decision not to run. In doing so, I told her everything she was trying to tell me. That Brian Bilbray could be easily beaten this time. That Bilbray was as much of an idiot as he was when he first ran against her in 1994, but this time he was an idiot with a record — a bad one.

Rabidly pro-Gingrich, anti-environment, anti-Medicare, anti-education, and anti-choice, Bilbray fit the 49th Congressional District about as well as the glove at the O.J. trial fit the Juice — which is to say, not at all. At the same time, county government was about to go belly up because some years earlier, in a bonehead move, Bilbray had successfully crusaded for a $150 million boondoggle trash plant that
was now threatening to bankrupt the county’s regional trash system.

Besides, I told Lynn, she was a prodigious fund-raiser, and it would
take a million dollars to beat the S.O.B., which was probably more
than I could raise. Plus, Lynn had great White House connections,
she had strong community support, 1996 was going to be a super
year for Democrats, and she could do the race a whole lot easier than
I could.

And that’s how we left it. She said she’d think about it, and I said
I wouldn’t. But the seed was planted in my mind — a mind, I might
add, that responds to the idea of running for office in much the same
way that a gambling addict responds to the call to “put your money down.”
(By the way, if you’ve read this far and are still wondering what
the title of this chapter means, the difference between God and Newt
Gingrich is that God knows he’s not Newt Gingrich.)

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Nothing Is Fatal in Politics

*Pick battles big enough to matter, small enough to win.*

**Jonas Kozel**

I LOST MY FIRST ELECTION IN 1992 BECAUSE OF
a cocaine deal gone bad. I wasn’t directly involved. It was more like
a drive-by shooting with me as the innocent victim. Sort of innocent,
that is, because I did see the limousine coming with its guns drawn
and blazing. I just didn’t have the good sense to dive out of the way.
Here’s what happened.

On April 7, 1989, San Diego financier Richard Silberman was ar-
ested in a San Diego motel room for attempting to launder what was
purported to be over a million dollars of Colombian cocaine money.
He had been caught flagrant delicto on videotape in an FBI sting
originally set up to ensnare the alleged mobster Chris Petti. My favor-
ite line uttered by Silberman during the sting was “This is not a vir-
gin here.” I love that line because being a virgin is probably the one
thing Dick Silberman had never been accused of.

The Silberman bust was big news in and of itself in San Diego
because Silberman was one of the town’s most prominent politicos.
He’d made a fortune cofounding the Jack In The Box hamburger chain
and, as rich people often do, he had parlayed his business success
into political clout. Indeed, Silberman had started right at the top
with several appointments to Governor Jerry Brown’s administration,
including Secretary of Business and Transportation and state finance
director.

However, what made the Silberman bust even bigger news was
that his wife, County Supervisor Susan Golding, was getting ready
to make her long-anticipated leap into state politics with a run for lieu-
tenant governor. Success in that endeavor would have reunited her
with her old mentor Governor Pete Wilson and put her in the line of succession for the governor's mansion once Wilson stepped down. Pete Wilson had, of course, gotten his start in politics as the mayor of San Diego back in 1971.

Golding's first big liaison up the political ladder had been with Wilson's chief strategist George Gorton. Out of that coupling came a plum appointment in 1981 to the San Diego City Council by Wilson.

Golding's second big liaison was with the aforementioned Richard Silberman. She used his fortune to bankroll her move up from the city council to the county board of supervisors. In that 1984 race, Golding ran against Lynn Schenk. What is most bizarre about this face-off is that Schenk had gotten into the race to begin with only at the urging of Richard T. Silberman, her former boss at the California Department of Business and Transportation.

In a now-famous meeting between Schenk and Silberman — with Golding as a fly on the wall in the room — Schenk laid out her entire campaign strategy to Silberman, thanked him for getting her into the race, and asked for his full support. Shortly thereafter, to the chagrin of Silberman and the outrage of Schenk, Golding decided she wanted the seat for herself, and that's where Sugar Daddy Dick's money came in.

At the time Golding threw her hat into the supervisor's race, she and Dick Silberman were boyfriend and girlfriend, not husband and wife. During the primary election campaign, Silberman had done what he could within the legal constraints of that relationship to help financially with Golding's campaign, but he was risking serious accusations of illegal campaign contributions if his help got any bigger.

This problem was solved as soon as Silberman and Golding got married just days after the primary election. After that, hubby Dick was free to throw as much money into Golding's general-election campaign as he wanted to. It wound up totaling a quarter of a million dollars, and Golding used Silberman's hefty bankroll to blow Schenk out of the water.

So what has all this got to do with me, you might ask? Quite a bit. Because it quickly became clear to Golding's political brain trust that her next envisioned step up the political ladder had died the day Silberman got busted. No Daddy Big Bucks, no lieutenant governorship. That's when Golding turned her attention to other, more realistic possibilities, and the biggest one looming on the horizon was the race for mayor of the sixth largest city in America, San Diego.

The Golding Rehabilitation

Now I know that at this point there is a question forming in your mind: How could the wife of a convicted drug-money launderer possibly be elected to San Diego's highest local office? It's a good question, and the answer confirms the campaign consultant's first maxim: Nothing is fatal in politics.

Indeed, by the time the mayor's race rolled around, the Golding Rehabilitation was well under way. She had stuck by her man during Silberman's trial and professed his innocence almost as much as her own. But when they put old Dick in the slammer, Golding quickly began to distance herself from him. The political spin was artfully simple: Golding was an innocent woman who had, like millions of other women, been deceived by her no-good, lying, cheating husband. This, as fortune would have it, was a perfect theme for what was shaping up as the Year of the Woman in politics.

Of course, to anyone who knew Golding well, it was more than a little bit of a stretch to believe she had no knowledge of her hubby's activities. After all, anyone who gets into bed with someone like Dick Silberman to begin with is certainly no Snow White. Indeed, over the years, Silberman had left in his large, slimy wake a long laundry list of evil deeds, including soliciting campaign donations from the Mafia, lying to the state legislature, allegedly swindling several business partners out of thousands of dollars, and, my favorite alleged Dick Silberman scam, selling off the leased equipment of one of his companies, Yuba Natural Resources.

[Image of Susan Golding and Dick Silberman outside U.S. courthouse in San Diego, 1989]
I Reach Beyond My Grasp

As soon as Susan Golding tossed her hat into the mayor’s race, I should have pulled mine out and run for the seat Golding was vacating on the county board of supervisors. That, at least, was what my key political advisors argued at the time. In hindsight, it was good advice — advice that gives meat to the opening quote of this chapter: “Pick battles big enough to matter, small enough to win.”

The county board of supervisors has jurisdiction over 2.5 million people and is responsible for the criminal justice system as well as the complex web of welfare and social services. It also oversees land-use planning and environmental protection for vast areas in the unincorporated parts of the county. It’s a big job, and had I run, I would easily have been elected.

The reason the supervisor’s race would have been a cakewalk is that by 1992 I had acquired the two most important assets any political candidate can have — a strong financial base of support and high name recognition, or “name ID,” as they say in the trade. I had come by these two assets working in the trenches of citizen activism as the leader of San Diego’s growth-management movement.

Now let me say right off the bat that I’m not what you would call a “tree hugger” or a “bushes and bunnies” environmentalist out to save the planet or the whales — although I do not denigrate that perspective either and I really like whales. Rather, my citizen activism is a direct outgrowth of a classical and fiscally conservative training in economics at Harvard. It is a perspective rooted in one of the most important concepts in economics — the need for government intervention in the presence of a market failure.

In the case of unmanaged growth, the market failure is pretty obvious. In a free market and in the absence of planning, developers will flatten every hillside, fill every canyon, obliterates every endangered species, and pave over every wetland they think they can make a buck on. In their wake, they will leave air pollution, overcrowded schools, underpoliced streets, sewer systems bursting at their seams, and traffic jams that can (and often do in California) make grown men cry.

To prevent such a market failure, my growth-management philosophy embraces two basic rules. First, a city should decide where it doesn’t want to develop and then put those lands aside forever. In San Diego, that means saving at least some of the canyons and hill-sides and wetlands from the bulldozer’s blade. It also means preserving some open spaces for both public enjoyment and the protection of endangered species. (My conservative readers, please take note here that this rule does not mean is taking anybody’s land without paying them fairly for it.)

My second rule of growth management is the one that really ticks the developers off. To wit, developers must pay for or provide all the parks, libraries, schools, and other public facilities and infrastructure that will be necessary to support their developments. They must also ensure that these facilities and infrastructure get built at the “time of need,” that is, at the same time as the houses — not five years later (or never) like most of these punks in pinstripes prefer.

It was this arguably quite reasonable banner of growth management that I carried into battle in several high-profile citizen-initiative campaigns in the four years preceding the mayor’s race. In the first battle in 1988, our side spent $200,000 and the developers spent a little over $2 million. Guess who won?

After that defeat, I formed a citizens’ group called PLAN — Prevent Los Angelization Now — and served as its chairperson. We went forward with several more initiatives but always with the same sorry result: a ten-to-one spending advantage for the developers and a stingy defeat for us. The funny thing, however, was that every time PLAN! got its butt kicked at the ballot box or in city council chambers or in the courts, my own reputation only got bigger.

By the time 1992 rolled around, my name recognition among voters was well over 50 percent, which is remarkably high for someone who is not a convicted serial killer or already in elected office. At the same time, during the course of the several initiative campaigns, I had developed one of the most important prerequisites of an aspiring
politician, a strong financial base. I had done so by personally calling thousands of people for contributions to support PLAN!'-s efforts and incorporating these loyal donors into a sophisticated fund-raising database. By 1992, with this high name ID and a donor list of over 5000 people, I was a force to be reckoned with.

The Art of Not Taking Good Advice

Had I run for and won that county supervisor's race, I would today be positioned to move up to higher office — to mayor, Congress, or the state legislature. That's a big reason why my political advisors wanted me to run for supervisor to begin with. And there is an important lesson here: Sometimes it's okay to work your way up the political ladder, so long as you don't stop at every step and wind up as a career politician. Of course, I ignored this sound advice and ran for mayor instead — and almost pulled it off.

I won the mayoral primary on June 2, 1992, and that was the greatest day in my political life. Even though the runoff election was some five months away, people were already hailing me as the next mayor. It was a done deal. Golding, who had barely eked out a second-place victory over a former executive from a failed savings and loan and an ex-strip mall developer turned city councilman, would be toast. Even I believed it.

By Labor Day, however, Golding had amassed a huge campaign war chest that augured at least a three-to-one spending advantage. Most of the money was contributed by panicked developers who saw me, even in my best moments, as the environmental Antichrist. Golding's consultants proceeded to use this developer money to do what Susan Golding has done to every hapless victim she has ever run against — first demonize and then destroy. She did a hell of a job — the only compliment I'll ever give her.

Golding's weapon of choice was a series of slick, hard-hitting TV commercials, each of which pushed the envelope of slander but always stopped at the brink of a lawsuit. The first TV hit featured the head of the cops' union accusing me of wanting to bring drug addicts to San Diego. The accusation was based on my public support for clean-needle-exchange programs to fight the spread of aids from intravenous drug users. (I'll fill you in on the details of how I got needlessly boxed in on that issue in another chapter.)

A second commercial claimed that my campaign was funded by pornographers. This was perhaps Golding's most outrageous accusation, and it brought my poor wife to tears and me to the brink of uncontrollable rage. I'll likewise explain more about how she could make such an accusation without being sued for slander in a later chapter on campaign dirty tricks, but suffice it to say, it was a hard hit and a low blow.

The coup de grâce was a classic "hit-hug" — 15 seconds of falsely accusing me of wanting to "raise taxes" and warning that my policies would "double unemployment" followed by 15 more seconds of a warm and fuzzy Golding in the role of "pro-business" messiah.

There was little I could do to defend myself from this propaganda onslaught, and at least part of my pathetic defenselessness was my own fault. In running my campaign, I had committed one of the most egregious — albeit highly predictable — sins of the neophyte candidate. I had squandered so much money early in the campaign paying staff and running a big office operation that I didn't have enough cash on hand to counterattack when the Scuds started coming in.

By two weeks before Election Day, my once-impregnable 30-point
advantage in the polls had evaporated, and the race was now a dead heat— with the momentum on Golding’s side. In desperation, I mortgaged my house— never do that, mon candidate— and used the cash to fight back with a single, and now infamous, TV commercial of my own.

“The Ad,” as it came to be known in political circles, hit Golding right between the eyes with a topic I had assiduously avoided the entire campaign: her no-good, money-laundering, and now ex-husband Dick Silberman. And The Ad worked like a charm. In the first few days it ran, Golding dropped like a stone. Then we did something really stupid. We kept running it and running it and running it and running it right up until Election Day when you are always supposed to finish on a positive note. This created a strong backlash among voters that was further fueled by a scathing editorial and companion editorial cartoon in the San Diego Union-Tribune attacking me for negative campaigning.

Never mind that Golding had skated on the thinnest edge of slander by falsely accusing me of wanting to bring drug addicts to San Diego, sell city hall to pornographers, and double the unemployment rate. In the final few days, when voters were paying attention, I was the person who came off as the mudslinger.

The Sunday before the election in a prime-time debate watched by half the city, Golding played her final trump card. In a scene that she and her consultants had rehearsed over and over, Golding burst into tears in her closing statement. As she slobbered and whimpered about the damage I had done to her family, the camera zeroed in on my smirk of disbelief. Another mini-lesson here, mon candidate: never smirk on TV! At that moment, every undecided female voter in San Diego who had ever been cheated on or lied to by a man moved into the Golding column, and Golding’s rehabilitation was finally complete—thanks to me.

And on Election Day, it was I who was toast. I narrowly lost by 52 to 48 percent. However, the worst part wasn’t losing. It was that I now had a reputation for being the cruelest and meanest son of a bitch that ever ran for office in San Diego. Little did I know then that this was going to make ever winning an election in San Diego very difficult indeed.

Choosing a PAC Fund-Raiser

If you want to know what people believe, don’t read what they write, don’t ask them what they believe, just observe what they do.

Ashley Montagu

In the summer of 1995, more than a year before the 1996 election, I traveled to Washington for a series of speeches on the deregulation and restructuring of the electric utility industry. In my life, I’m an expert on a few things. Losing close elections is one of them. Electric utility regulation is another. Neither is a barrel of laughs, but both have their moments.

Since I always believe in first things first, I set about using this trip to find a possible fund-raiser who would help me tap into the biggest source of money for a congressional candidate. This is the Washington PACs— the political action committees. They typically account for roughly half of the money a congressional candidate spends, with the other half coming from individual donations, mostly from within the district.

On the Democratic side, there is about $250,000 in PAC money that can be raised per election cycle. That means if you raise PAC money for both a primary and a general election— remember this, because it will be important later— you can get about $500,000 all told. This is about half of what I was going to need to win the race.

The Democratic money comes mostly from labor-union PACs, but there is also a smattering of others— from trial lawyers, nurses, and ophthalmologists to peace groups, women’s organizations, and the environmental community. On the Republican side, it’s mostly the business PACs.

Going to Washington, I knew that this would be the single most
important hire I would make in the campaign, and it was fraught with difficulties. A good fund-raiser is hard to find, and I have had more than my share of bad ones. One guy worked for me at my grassroots group plan, for almost a year and spent virtually all of his time writing a "strategic fund-raising document." He didn’t even raise enough money to pay his salary.

PAC fund-raisers in D.C. run the gamut from big, high-overhead money mills with zillions of clients to small boutique shops run out of homes. The benefit of the bigger operations is a proven track record and guaranteed access to all of the various PACs. After all, if the firm is representing a Dick Gephardt or a Henry Waxman, you know that it will have ready access to any PAC director. In raking in the big bucks for its name-brand incumbents, it just might also be able to scoop up a few crumbs for challengers like me.

The disadvantage of the big shops is that they charge you an arm and a leg. The other likely problem is that, as a lowly challenger, you’ll be lost in the political celebrity shuffle. That’s why it’s generally better for a challenger candidate to go the boutique route. These folks are hungrier, so there’s more room to negotiate fees. You’ll also likely get better service, but now hear this, mon candidate: One of the most important questions you must ask your fund-raiser (as well as your pollster, campaign consultant, and media consultant) is “How many clients do you have?” After they tell you, do the math. If they are overcommitted, I don’t care how good they are, cross them off your list.

I crossed four of the five fund-raisers I met in D.C. right off the list, but for a different reason. Four of them took me to lunch, waxed eloquent about their connections with the PAC community, and then stuck me with the tab. Only one did what I had asked all of them to do: set up a series of meetings with PAC directors to help me get a feel for how the process worked. Guess whom I hired?

It was a good hire. Steve Pederson and his wife run a boutique shop out of their home in D.C. and handle about five clients per cycle, most of them incumbents. Steve is one of the nicest people I’ve ever met — one of the best this country has to offer. He’s a veritable cliché of good, solid Midwestern values that places like North Dakota can produce. He’s just a funny, warm, gracious, and well-mannered individual — the kind of guy any politician should want around to keep things calm and in perspective.

On that first day Steve and I went out PAC hunting, the only meeting I remember was with the National Association of Letter Carriers. We went there to shake a few hands at their executive board meeting. I remember this because about an hour before the meeting, Suzanne Granville, the PAC’s assistant director, called Steve’s wife Ellen and said they had to cancel — no reason given. When Steve checked in with Ellen, she told him about Suzanne’s message, and he just turned to me and said, “Let’s go anyway. Suzanne’s always pulling this kind of garbage. We’ll just say we never got the message.” Now, that’s my kind of guy.

So we went and schmoozed with postal bigwigs for ten minutes, until Suzanne arrived, stared at us for about 30 seconds like we were ants at a picnic, and then impolitely threw us out. It would turn out that she and Marta David of the AFL-CIO would be the only really big jerks I would meet from the PAC community. Most PAC directors are nice people — which is fortunate because in a campaign, you spend about half your time begging for their help.

Of course, like the four other fund-raisers I had interviewed, Steve wanted me to sign up immediately and begin paying a monthly fee. He is, first and foremost, a good businessman. But I told him the honest truth: that there was only about a 40 percent chance that I would run and that I was tapped out from my previous political races,
so starting this early with a fee was impossible. What I did promise, however, is that if I ran, I would be honored to have him help me with the campaign and that I hoped he would keep me in mind. In most cases, that might have been the end of it, but we hit it off well and he said he would be willing to wait — and he did.

4

The Campaign Consultant

Better to have him inside the tent pissing out, than outside pissing in.

Lyndon B. Johnson
(on keeping J. Edgar Hoover as FBI director)

With the PAC fund-raiser in place, I began to think more about the rest of my campaign structure. This is not a simple thing to do. A campaign is a complex organism that requires expensive parts. Finding the right parts and meshing them together into a cohesive working unit is an art in and of itself.

The “brains” of the outfit include the research director, the pollster, the press secretary, the media consultant, the direct-mail consultant, the campaign manager, and the campaign consultant.

The research director’s first job is to dig up all the dirt on the campaign’s own candidate. This is so the campaign is prepared to blunt, parry, or counterattack when the opposition starts sling mud.

If the research director is really good, he or she will find even the dirt that the candidate refuses to tell his or her own advisors about. Candidates will try to hide stuff because either they are too embarrassed about it or they think that no one will ever find out about that.

But guess what, Sherlock? If you want to run for office, you must be prepared for every single skeleton you’ve got in that crowded closet of yours to pop up three weeks before the election. Make book on it.

Once the research director finishes digging up dirt on his own candidate, the next task is to (hopefully) dig up even more dirt on the opponent. This is because, as we all know, one of the first rules of politics is that “He with the least dirt wins.”

Typical dirt ranges from a bad voting record, lavish travel expenses, or poor attendance in a current or previous public office to divorce
and personal bankruptcy. Then, of course, there is the more exotic and really juicy stuff like polygamy, draft dodging, a mistress at the Jefferson Hotel, or, for anti-gay Republicans, being arrested after midnight for performing indecent acts in men's bathrooms.

This dirt acts as the primary input into the pollster's operation. The pollster's major tools for probing voter sentiments are public opinion surveys and focus groups. These tools are used to develop and test messages within the constraints of the often sorry-ass and pathetically unappealing candidate the pollster has to work with.

The press secretary's job is to listen carefully to the pollster and then take everything that happens in the campaign and spin it in the right (or, if you're in San Francisco, the left) direction.

For example, if the candidate is an uneducated illiterate who can't point to Bosnia on a map in the middle of a debate, the press secretary must portray him as a working-class hero who has had to fight all his life to overcome severe dyslexia. A good press secretary should be able to spin the heads of reporters so hard and so fast that pea soup spits out of their mouths like in *The Exorcist* (one of the great moments in American cinema, I might add).

The media consultant's job is to take 75 percent of the money it took the candidate over a year to raise and to blow all this dough in the last three short weeks before Election Day on image ads. A good media consultant can transform the candidate from Pee-Wee Herman or Roseanne into Robert Redford or Roseanne after the tummy tuck, face-lift, and personal trainer.

The job of the direct-mail consultant is to spend the other 25 percent of the campaign's funds on "education." Usually that means filling in the blanks left in the minds of voters by the media consultant's image ads. For example, suppose you run a TV commercial that says your opponent is a scumbag who forced his dying wife to sign a divorce agreement on her deathbed. All the media consultant has time to show in the 30-second commercial is the back of the head of a guy who looks suspiciously like your opponent, a pen signing your opponent's wife's name, and a close-up of tears on the face of the dying woman. (You may ask, if the media consultant and direct-mail consultant together spend 100 percent of campaign funds, where is the money for everything else? That's called "campaign debt," which you will have to pay off for the rest of your life if you lose.)

The direct-mail piece will provide voters with all the other gory details, such as the hospital where it happened, the years they were married, the number of children they had, and the type of cancer afflicting the wife. Such direct-mail reinforcement of the TV message lends credibility to the attack and usually works like a charm — unless, of course, your opponent is Newt Gingrich, who actually did this to his now ex-wife.

Finally, the job of the campaign manager is to translate the instructions of this campaign brain into prompt and seemingly effortless action by the body. In order to accomplish this, the campaign manager will need a bunch of "body parts" — at a minimum, a volunteer coordinator, an office manager, a computer expert, an endorsement coordinator, and a campaign treasurer.

The primary attributes of the volunteer coordinator are two: Infinite patience when volunteers don't show, which is more than half the time, and a big smile when volunteers do show. Volunteers are the heart and soul of a grassroots campaign. They are the worker bees who will cut their tongues licking envelopes, smash their thumbs pounding in yard signs, dial endlessly for votes and dollars, and eat whatever food happens to be lying around, no matter how old it is. (A good rule of thumb here, *mon* candidate, is that the more and fresher food you make available, the more volunteers you will have.)

The office manager should, ideally, be anal-compulsive and very punctual. (Did I just repeat myself?) The office manager's job is to make sure the campaign has enough copier toner and toilet paper (both are equally important) as well as various and other sundry items like Post-its, pens, and a dartboard with your opponent's face on it. Punctuality is a must because it is bad form to have volunteers show up to a closed office — particularly when several thousand letters have to be folded, stuffed, stamped, and delivered to the post office by yesterday.

The computer expert's job is to design and operate a computer system that contains the names of thousands of campaign contributors and tens of thousands of voters. The computer system should be accessible to, and easily understood by, any volunteer. It should also be able to detect and maim saboteurs sent over from the other side to plant a virus in the computer.

This computer expert should preferably be someone who regu-
larly showers, shaves, and brushes his or her teeth. A warning here: Finding such a person in this field can be a big problem because a high percentage of folks with the requisite skills are antisocial Internet junkies with breath that would make a camel wince.

Finally, the treasurer should be a professional accountant. The treasurer’s job is to follow the rules, process checks, and prepare campaign filings by the appropriate deadlines. The treasurer’s job is not, I repeat, not to make really silly and stupid mistakes.

Please do not skimp on paying a treasurer, mon candidate. I did when I ran for mayor and my “free” volunteer treasurer wound up costing me several major investigations, lots of bad press, thousands of dollars in fines, and a dangerous flirtation with a jail cell. In hindsight, it would have been cheaper to hire the entire West Coast division of Arthur Andersen & Co.

Now given this body and brain, there are a number of ways to mesh it into a well-functioning campaign organism. My preferred way is to put the campaign consultant in charge of hiring and managing all of the brains of the campaign, including the campaign manager, who reports directly to the consultant.

Where’s James Carville When You Need Him?

My campaign consultant was a guy named Larry Remer. I would not want to go through life with that last name. But given his approach to politics, the name is appropriate because Larry usually reams the crap out of the opposition.

Larry is a short, loud, balding, aging Jewish ex-radical with a little paunch, an infectious smile, and an absolutely charming and lovely wife whom everybody (most of all Larry) says he doesn’t deserve. In his raging youth, Larry roared into San Diego from the East Coast as the anti-Antichrist, worked at the underground paper *The Door*, and eventually started a semi-underground newspaper called *Newsline*. It regularly roasted many of the uptight, right-wing establishment burghers of what was then a little bourgeois coastal town, and Larry won almost as many journalism awards for doing it as he made enemies and got death threats.

However, sometime after he and Shari had their second child, Larry realized he would never have that big ocean mansion in La Jolla on a muckraker’s salary so he did what almost every ’60s radical eventu-

ally did who didn’t die from dope, and that was to sell out. And Larry did so by entering the world’s second oldest profession, political consulting.

Now I like Larry a whole lot (although many people don’t), but he certainly wasn’t my first choice for campaign consultant. I would have much preferred to hire someone like James Carville so I could actually have won and had a good laugh doing it. The other guy I would have hired in a heartbeat is Bob Squire. He’s not very funny, but he is good — one of the best in Washington.

I didn’t hire Carville or Squire (or Dick Morris, for that matter) because I didn’t have the big bucks to do it. Besides, at the time, they seemed pretty busy, what with working with the Prez and all. And there is a minilesson here: don’t even try to sign up a Cadillac consultant if you only have a Chevy budget.

And Larry is definitely a Chevy. The reason is this: He’s willing to work for only a couple of grand a month and bet on a big “win bonus” at the end. Such win bonuses work for me for two reasons. They
help stretch out the campaign’s funds, and they ensure that your people have a stake in your winning. In fact, I insist on using this compensation structure with everybody on a campaign. Short money up front, big money at the great big jackpot win at the back end. If somebody doesn’t want to bet on my winning, I don’t want to bet on them.

But Larry’s cheap price wasn’t the only reason I hired him. He’s also the best there is in San Diego — although that may be damning him with faint praise. The fact is there are only a few consultants in my little town, and most of them can’t tell the difference between chicken salad and cat litter.

Now here’s the real reason I hired Larry. I didn’t want him working against me again. He had played a minor role in beating me in my 1992 mayor’s race and a major, big-time role in my 1993 defeat for city council. So I felt about Larry the same way LBJ felt about keeping J. Edgar Hoover on at the FBI: “Better to have him inside the tent pissing out, than outside pissing in.”

In fact, this wasn’t the first time Larry worked for me. The first race was my 1994 run for county supervisor, and we were a good team. We were up against a guy who outspent us three to one and had every major endorsement on both sides of the political aisle, and we still lost by only a cat’s whisker. The reason was Larry’s creativity and clarity. There really was a reason he won all those journalism awards.

Nonetheless, Larry’s Achilles’ heel is that he is needlessly obnoxious. I can handle this, but most people can’t. You see, Larry’s approach to a problem is that he quickly forms a strong opinion about how to solve it and then tries to shove his opinion down your throat. Moreover, Larry’s idea of a dialogue is a monologue, so what you have to do is meet him head-on and argue like hell with him. (Here, I might point out that “Remer” rhymes with “screamer,” and that’s what a lot of people call Larry behind his back after they get tired of “slimeball,” “asshole,” and, for the literary set, “Rasputin.”)

Anyway, after you get used to Larry’s approach, it works pretty well. All sides of an argument eventually get shrieked out, and the right way to handle things usually becomes clear.

The Casady Gang

He’s playing checkers in a chess world. — Felix Zefferelli

The Casady Gang screwed me out of a quarter of a million dollars in campaign contributions. It was neither a pleasurable experience nor a pretty sight. To explain how this happened, we first need to talk about the most important subject in any political campaign: money, dinero, dough, loot, swag, filthy lucre.

Why are big bucks so important in congressional politics? The answer lies in this simple and sobering statistic: the candidate who spends the most money wins over 90 percent of the time.

So how much does it cost to buy a seat in Congress? In an urban district like mine in San Diego, the answer is at least a million dollars — although it is quite easy to spend more than twice that and still lose.

Now this, of course, seems like an obscene amount of money. However, once you tally up how it gets spent, you’ll see that a million bucks is more like chump change in a hotly contested congressional race. Let me show you what I mean by doing the numbers for my own campaign’s dream budget.

The biggest item in this budget is television: To get your message across, you must have a minimum of three TV commercials. Moreover, you must run each commercial enough times to rack up at least “1000 points of TV.”

What’s “1000 points of TV”? I could give you a technical definition, but suffice it to say that once you reach the 1000-point threshold, voters have seen your commercial so many times that your message haunts them day and night like a loud, persistent voice in the
mind of a demented Dean Koontz serial murderer.

In the San Diego media market, 1000 points of TV costs about $150,000, so for a bare-bones "three-ad flight," it's going to cost almost half a million dollars just for the airtime. But that's not all. You should also ideally budget for an additional 1000 points of "response ads." These counterattack ads are run with less frequency than your main-message ads and preferably as soon as your opponent accuses you of something like molesting children, condoning flag burning, or beating your wife. That's another hundred and fifty grand right there. Then you have to factor in at least $50,000 more for production costs and media-consultant fees, and pretty soon you're up to about $700,000 — just for five or so crummy commercials. Ouch!

The second major item in the budget is direct mail. While TV commercials primarily project "image," direct mail provides the corroborating information, and wees is the candidate who tries to do without reinforcing mail. Here's how much it costs:

There are about 500,000 people in the typical congressional district, clustered in about 300,000 households. That means that if you want to send just one letter to each household at 50 cents per finished piece, you're already talking $150,000 a pop. Of course, this is when voter apathy comes to the rescue: only about half of the people will be registered to vote and of those registered, only about half will actually vote. That gets the cost of one piece of mail to the target down to about $40,000 per mailer. However, you can do even better than that by more precise voter targeting.

For example, if you are a pro-choice Democrat running against a pro-life Republican, you might only mail to Republican women under 40 and Independent voters. You skip your Democratic base under the assumption that your base is secure (not always a good assumption). You skip Republicans in general because as a group, they will never vote for you no matter how big a jerk your opponent is. Nonetheless, you can mail your pro-choice pitch to younger Republican women in the hopes they haven't stopped having sex yet and might worry about a condom breaking at the wrong time.

Such targeting might shrink your universe to about 40,000 households, which gets your costs down to $20,000 per mailing. Assuming that you send out at least one piece of mail per major TV commercial to your target, as well as a closing piece, your mail budget is still about $80,000.

The third major item is office, phones, and staff. If you are really dumb and shortsighted as I was in my mayor's race, you'll blow almost 200 grand on this and not have any money left at the end to contact voters. A more reasonable budget is on the order of $50,000 to $75,000 for a good campaign manager, campaign consultant, press secretary, volunteer coordinator, field general, treasurer, and assorted drones. Add to that office rent and phone bills and you're up around the $100,000 mark.

The fourth major item is fund-raising. This includes the cost of mail solicitations, food and entertainment (the cheaper here, the better), and, of course, the fund-raiser fees, and this will run around $50,000.

Finally, there are all the campaign accoutrements — the yard signs, buttons, bumper stickers, and all the stuff that supporters go absolutely apeshit over for no apparent reason. Count on at least $25,000 here. (By the way, my favorite bauble for the 1996 campaign season was the "Brad Sherman comb." Brad is bald, and I like a guy who can turn a liability into a good laugh. He won his congressional race, if you are curious.)

Totaling all this up, we're at just about the million-dollar mark, and that's a whole lot of money to raise in less than a year. So how was I going to do that and, more importantly, how did the Casady Gang screw it all up?

My Central Campaign Premise

My whole fund-raising strategy was predicated on running in an uncontested Democratic primary, that is, with no other candidates in the race. As the presumptive nominee, I would thus be able to begin raising a significant amount of money from the various political action committees during the primary election cycle.

PACs, by law, can donate up to $5000 to a congressional campaign for a primary election and another $5000 for the general election. As I have indicated to you earlier, there is only about $250,000 that you can expect to raise as a Democratic challenger in the PAC community per election cycle. This money will come in donations of from $500 to $5000, from the 100 or so key labor, lawyer, environmental, and peace PACs.
San Diego Confidential

Since each congressional election has both a primary and a general cycle, that means that the total funding I could realistically expect to raise from the PAC community was a half million dollars. That would be perfect because I was reasonably confident I could raise the other half million I would need from my local donor base.

Now please note here that the big fly in this PAC ointment was that I had to be in an uncontested primary. If another candidate entered the race — particularly a credible challenger — most of the PACs would likely stay out of the intraparty squabble until after the primary. That’s the way these spineless weasels in the PAC community work.

Thus, the entry of another candidate into the race would not only cost me about a quarter of a million dollars in lost PAC funds. It would also make it unlikely that I would ultimately raise the total funds necessary to win the election. This is because once the primary is over, the PACs cannot retroactively give you money based on their primary limits.

So it was with the greatest of consternation that I greeted the surprise news that a woman named Nancy Casady was throwing her hat in the ring. And so it was with the greatest of clumsiness and lack of grace that I went about the business of trying to get her the hell out of the race.

A Pilgrimage to the Casady Cottage

As a congressional candidate, Nancy Casady had little hope of beating me, but she was not to be taken lightly either. She was an attractive and well-spoken woman who looked to be in her early 50s and who would appeal strongly to women voters in a district in which women make up an unusually high percentage of the electorate.

Casady also had extensive legislative experience as a pro-choice activist in Sacramento. She was the daughter of Sy Casady, who had once run for mayor against Pete Wilson, so the Casady name was at least somewhat known in politics. Finally, she and her husband Derek owned a chain of popular natural-food stores. This meant she might have some big bucks to toss into the race — my only real concern about her as a candidate.

On the other side of the Casady ledger, however, our polling indicated that she was a virtual unknown. Plus, there were persistent rumors about the involvement of the Casadys in some sexual activities that might open her to an easy attack.

With these conflicting and curious images in our minds, my campaign consultant Larry Remer, my campaign manager Dale Kelly Bankhead, and yours truly made the pilgrimage up to the Casady cottage in La Jolla to discuss the idea of Nancy dropping out of the race.

From the outset, the meeting was a disaster. It started off with Casady’s campaign consultant Nick Johnson informing us that under no circumstances would Nancy get out of the race and that the best thing for us to do would be to simply withdraw. This, on the face of it, was ludicrous, but Nick thought it was at least worth a try.

Nick Johnson, by the way, is one of the strangest creatures you will ever encounter in politics. Besides looking like the Pillsbury Dough Boy’s evil twin, Nick’s most disconcerting feature is that he has even fewer teeth than Wavy Gravy or half the hockey players in the NHL. And the worst part is that the few teeth he has left look like the “before” segment of a “before and after” training film from dental school.

In fact, Nick’s appearance in the Casady race had all the signs of possible double-agent activity. Just follow me here: Nick was a good friend of a guy named John Wainio. Wainio, in turn, worked for Tom Shepard, who was the consultant for my general-election opponent, Republican Brian Bilbray. In one of my previous races, Shepard had played a role in recruiting a “stalking horse” candidate to split my vote.

In this particular case, I had to assume that Shepard would understand just as well as I did how important it was for me to have access to PAC money in an uncontested primary. Therefore, I likewise had
to assume that there was a reasonable possibility that Nick was a double agent for Shepard and that Nick had seduced Casady into the race as a means of cutting off my PAC money and forcing me to spend money to beat her rather than banking it for my face-off with Bilbray.

This scenario took on even more chilling plausibility as we next listened to Nancy's husband Derek tell us just how easy it would be for Nancy to beat me. The frotest part was when he said that by defeating someone as well known as I, Nancy would immediately vault into big-time contention. At that point, I saw my head as a trophy on their wall, right between a stuffed sailfish and an elk.

The funny part of the whole thing was that Nancy barely spoke at all and only when Derek let her. When she did speak it was to opine how important it was to have more women in Congress and why women would vote for her, not me, presumably because of her different plumbing. The irony of this submissive wife running on a feminist platform was, of course, lost on everyone in the room — at least on their side of the room.

It was after Nancy's monologue that I should have smiled warmly, thanked the Casadys for their kind hospitality, left the house, and stayed the hell out of the congressional race. For it was abundantly clear that Nick would sprout new teeth before Nancy Casady would get out of the race.

Which brings me to the most important lesson of this chapter, namely, why campaigns are more like chess than checkers. In chess, good players will see the game unfold many, many moves ahead, and the best chess players know exactly when they have lost a game — even if it is going to take many more moves until checkmate. Good choss players concede defeat as soon as they know they have lost. They do not play out the bitter endgame for two reasons: it is a waste of time and it lacks class.

That's why I should have left the house right then and gotten out of the race. Casady's candidacy was about to destroy my whole premise for running — an uncontested primary, a double hit of PAC money, and enough funds to wage a winning campaign. I saw it then as clearly as you can see the sun set into the Pacific Ocean.

Ross Perot's Dominatrix

I believe in having the United States of America being a dominant country again as opposed to being submissive.

MISTRESS MADISON'S CAMPAIGN PLATFORM

NANCY CASADY WAS NOT THE ONLY candidate involved in the sexual arts to enter the congressional race. Another candidate, self-professed dominatrix Mistress Madison, also threw her whip in the ring to compete for Ross Perot's Reform Party nomination. As with the Casady candidacy, the 32-year-old Madison threatened to throw a monkey wrench into a key aspect of our overall campaign strategy.

I suppose I should explain at this point that California is the king of alternative political parties. In most states, it's chocolate and vanilla where bored voters only get to choose between Democrats and Republicans — which is probably why voter turnout is so low. However, in 52-flavor granola-land, there are at least five other parties that compete on the ballot.

The Green Party and the Peace and Freedom Party cover the ideological left flank, the Libertarians and Perot's Reform Party cover the right flank, and, my favorite, the Natural Law Party, has a lock on the intergalactic space vote. This party was founded by the devotees of the Maharishi Mahesh Yoga and is dedicated to the proposition that everything from gang violence, drug addiction, and prostitution to budget deficits and parking tickets can be solved through transcendental meditation. (I'm not making this stuff up.)

Anyway, back to Mistress Madison. Her real name used to be Janique Kilkeary Goff Madison, but she had it legally changed after she entered the dominatrix profession. If you went to Catholic school
or have handcuffs, whips, and/or an inordinate amount of leather undergarments in your bedroom, then you probably already know what dominatrices do. If, however, you want a short definition of a dominatrix, it's simply this: a sadist who caters to the masochistic fantasies of men or women who get turned on by their own submissive behavior. (C'mon, admit it. Didn't you always want to be tied up and toyed with just once?)

Now, knowing what we do about the American media, it should not surprise you that Mistress Madison became an overnight sensation. Talk-show hosts lined up to get her on the airwaves, her phone sex exploits popped up all over the pages of the San Diego Union-Tribune, and, at least for a metaphoric 15 minutes of fame, San Diego went totally gaga over this exotic woman with the body of Raquel Welch, circa One Million Years B.C., and lips that would make Hugh Grant blush.

Ordinarily, none of this press attention for a rival would have bothered me. Hey, I've gotten more than my share of the San Diego limelight. However, by boosting Mistress Madison's popularity and therefore her vote-getting potential, the press was threatening to topple one of the other key tenets of our campaign strategy. This was to use alternative parties to squeeze my opponent Brian Bilbray on the right wing. How do I explain to you this labyrinthine little byway in the world of campaign-strategy chess?

Let me start by saying that you may think since alternative parties never get more than a few percentage points of the vote that they are irrelevant. This is not so, particularly in congressional districts such as mine where the margin of victory—or defeat—is likely to be razor thin. Just ask former Congresswoman Lynn Schenk.

In her 1994 race, she lost by just 3000 votes. This was roughly the same number of votes that the left-wing Peace and Freedom Party got in that election, and it's pretty damn clear that if a Peace and Freedom Party candidate hadn't been in the race, Schenk would have gotten those votes and probably won.

My campaign consultant and I were well aware of this left-wing self-immolation in 1994, so our strategy was simple: make sure that no Green or Peace and Freedom Party candidates got into the race to squeeze us from the left. Then make sure that credible candidates from the Perot and Libertarian Parties got in to squeeze Bilbray from the right.

Mistress Madison threatened this strategy because she didn't fit the credible Perot party profile of the gun-toting, disaffected, anti-tax, alienated, right-wing recreational-vehicle owner. Quite the contrary, her base, such as it was likely to be, would be radical feminists, horny Democratic men, and perhaps the leather-and-butch lesbian segment of the gay community, all of which were part of what was supposed to be my Democratic base. Unfortunately, there was little we could do strategically about the Mistress Madison phenomenon other than to hope that her opponent in the primary, a hospital technician and Perot party regular named Kevin Hamsch, would be the beater rather than the beatee.

We could, however, be proactive about getting a Libertarian in the race and encouraging both the Greens and the Peace and Freedom Party candidates to stay out. For the left-wing side of this equation, all it took was a few short phone calls to the Green and Peace and Freedom Party leaders. Persuasion here was minimal: It involved pointing out that we certainly didn't want a repeat of 1994 when the Peace and Freedom Party unwittingly helped defeat Lynn Schenk by draining votes for the left.

For the right-wing Libertarian side, it turned out that no persuasion was needed. I simply called Dick Rider, the leader of the Libertarian Party in San Diego, and asked him what the party's intentions were. He assured me that there was no love lost among the Libertarians for Bilbray and that a Libertarian candidate, dentist Ernie Lippe, would definitely be running.

After all, it had been Bilbray, on the board of supervisors, who had pushed for the $150 million boondoggle trash plant now threatening
to bankrupt the county’s trash system — a mortal sin in the eyes of every red-blooded, anti-tax, minimal-government Libertarian. Moreover, as a county supervisor, Bilbray had had the temerity to sharply attack Rider and the Libertarians for suing the county to overturn an illegal sales tax they had pushed — a suit, by the way, that Rider gloriously won.

I might add here for your amusement that Rider tried to parlay this successful slaying of the illegal-sales-tax dragon into winning his own seat on the board of supervisors in the 1992 election — the same year I ran for mayor. In that race, he spent most of his small budget on “Dick Rider” street signs to boost his name identification. Unfortunately, these signs disappeared almost as fast as he put them up. Rider found out later that the thieves were not his dastardly opponents but rather a battalion of coeds from San Diego State University. These young ladies apparently found it fashionable to display the “Dick Rider” signs prominently in their dormitory boudoirs. (Rider’s wife now insists that everyone call him Richard.)

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Hubris Is As Hubris Does

Your opponent’s middle name should be Newt Gingrich.

CONGRESSMAN MARTIN FROST, CHAIRMAN,
DEMOCRATIC CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE

In November of 1995, one year before the congressional election and one month before the December filing deadline for candidacy, I made my second trip to Washington. By this point, I was committed to doing everything that would position me to win the race, but I was still not convinced I should run. The purpose of this Washington trip was to gather more information to help me in my final decision. And where better to gather information than at a school — a “congressional-candidate school” being held that month at the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee headquarters.

The “D-Triple-C,” as this committee is affectionately known, is one of a triad of committees that coordinate campaigns at the federal level for the Democratic Party. The Democratic National Committee, or DNC, handles the presidential race, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee covers the 100 seats of the Senate, and the D-Triple-C has responsibility for the 435 districts of the House.

You should know at the outside that while these committees allegedly cooperate amongst each other, there is actually fierce competition for the limited donor pool of funds in the Democratic Party. You should also know that the D-Triple-C is generally regarded as the runt of the litter even though it has the responsibility for overseeing four times as many races as the Senate committee and 434 more races than the 800-pound gorilla in the triad, the DNC. (This fact will come into play later in our story because during the 1996 elections, the presidential and the Senate committees hogged most of the campaign
funds and made it very, very difficult for the D-Triple-C to do its job, which was, of course, to take back the Congress from the Newt Man."

At any rate, on a mild Washington day in November, I found myself sitting in a classroom with a bunch of total losers. I’m speaking now from both a literal and a statistical point of view because 98 percent of the people in that room didn’t have a snowball’s chance in Florida of winning. The math is simple. There are 435 seats in Congress, with a little more than half of these held by Republicans. Of the 435 seats, about 350 of them are safe seats. That is, the incumbent is always going to win unless a really juicy sex scandal or federal indictment breaks just before the election.

These 350 congressional districts are safe seats for two reasons. First, it is rare for an incumbent to be credibly challenged by someone within his own party. This is particularly true on the Republican side, where party discipline is tight. Second, registration in these safe seats is so skewed in favor of the party of the incumbent — either Democrat or Republican — that receiving the party’s nomination in the primary election is tantamount to victory.

Despite this harsh reality, each year a fresh crop of sacrificial lambs invariably challenges the 350 or so incumbents in safe seats. Equally invariably, most of this political cannon fodder are clueless, witless idiots who run for no other reason than to get their names in the paper and their mugs on TV.

Such is not the case, however, for the 100 or so other seats that are in play every election cycle. Typically, these seats are in marginal districts where the registration is roughly even between Democrats and Republicans. It is from these 100 or so seats that the D-Triple-C will eventually target and prioritize 30 or so seats for their full fundraising assistance.

Because there is only enough money to fully fund these 30 or so seats, the competition is cold and Darwinian. My goal over the next ten months would be to convince the brain trust at the D-Triple-C that I had the right stuff, namely, that I was a good enough candidate and fund-raiser and that my race was competitive enough that I should receive whatever crumbs might be left from the fund-raising table after the president, the Senate candidates, and the House incumbents took their shares.

So in a very real sense, the purpose of the D-Triple-C’s candidate school was as much to check out the talent pool as it was to help teach this motley crew how to get elected. And what the D-Triple-C was looking for were attractive and articulate candidates with an ability to raise money. (If you can raise lots of money, forget about the attractive and articulate part.)

Wizards and Hubris
The best part of the D-Triple-C school was a presentation by pollster Mark Gersh, the D-Triple-C’s targeting czar. I love guys like Gersh because they are so into what they do that their enthusiasm sweeps you along with them. Almost wolflike in appearance as he paced the room, arms and flecks of spit flying everywhere, Gersh proceeded to detail the many and varied ways that the Republican Congress — particularly its freshman class — had become highly vulnerable. In doing so, he made me believe, for the first time, that my running would not be yet another quixotic quest ending in abject failure, but rather that I had a real possibility.

The most fun part of the D-Triple-C school was a surprise visit by retiring Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder. She recalled an incident at an official state dinner that she and Newt Gingrich had attended with some foreign diplomats. At the dinner, Gingrich had introduced her in an extremely gratuitous and sexist manner. Without batting a false eyelash, she had undiplomatically countered with “What do you call it when Newt Gingrich grabs you and throws you down on the floor and rips your clothes off?... A date.”

I thought that was almost as funny as some of the guerrilla-theater stunts that Schroeder told us about pulling in her first run for Congress over 20 years before. At that time, she was a nobody with no money and little chance of winning, but she had outwitted her male-chauvinist opponent with stunts such as dressing up a couple of her female friends in Victorian garb and sending them to her opponent’s rallies with signs like “Ladies against Women.” (Schroeder would later be quite helpful to me, and I wish her the best should she run for Senate from Colorado.)

While Schroeder was the fun part and Gersh was the best part, the worst part — and this, I admit, is in hindsight — was Martin Frost’s presentation. Frost is a veteran congressman from Texas. He’s also the chairman of the D-Triple-C.
The first time you look at Martin Frost you have to wonder how he could ever have been elected to anything. He simply is not a very attractive man.

Once Frost opens his mouth, however, you understand his appeal. This is not to say he is charismatic, because he emphatically is not. What he is, however, is articulate and genuine and intelligent as well as thoughtful and diligent. Which is why I cannot understand to this day why Frost and the D-Triple-C were so clumsy in their approach to taking the House back from bête noire Newt and the Republicans.

My major criticism is with the so very public way that Frost and the Democratic leadership telegraphed their election strategy. The strategy was simple and came right out of the mouth of Frost in his first words to us assembled students: “Make your opponent’s middle name ‘Newt Gingrich’ ” and run against the Gingrich agenda.

This was perhaps an obvious strategy given the plummeting poll numbers for Newt and his party. But what was stupid was that Frost explained this strategy not only to us candidates in a closed-door meeting but also in press conference after press conference after press conference, including one that very day. Mind you, this was more than a year before the election!

What Frost’s hubris did, of course, was give the Republicans more than ample time to make the appropriate midcourse correction and eventually outflank us. What Frost and the Democratic leadership should have done was what every good fisherman knows how to do: let the Gingrich fish take the hook and swallow it so deep that when it’s time to make the inevitable tug, that hook doesn’t grab the mouth but reaches deep into the fish’s vital organs. In other words, Frost should have kept his mouth shut and let Gingrich keep his flapping open.

Hamlet for Congress

Anyone who deliberately tries to get himself elected to a public office is permanently disqualified from holding one.

Sir Thomas More

New Hampshire is a pissant little state with a million people. California has 32 million people and is bigger than half the countries in the U.N. So guess which state has more influence over the choice of presidential candidates. The answer, of course, is the Live Free or Die state (imagine being in a New Hampshire prison and being forced to make license plates with that slogan).

New Hampshire reigns supreme because it holds the nation’s first major presidential primary, almost a year before the presidential election. California, on the other hand, doesn’t hold its presidential primary until the surf’s up in June. That’s usually long after the nominees from both parties have racked up enough delegates from the rest of the country to nail down the prize.

In 1996, no one knew this presidential math better than California Governor Pete Wilson, and he was damn well going to do something about it. Indeed, with presidential aspirations of his own, Wilson simply moved up the date of the presidential primary to March — and along with it, the date of the congressional primary election. For my incipient race, this was both a blessing and a curse.

The curse was that I would now have to make up my mind about running much sooner — by the new filing deadline in December rather than the one I had anticipated in April. This was almost a year before the actual election, and it was very unsettling. While Newt and his freshman extremist wackos were shooting themselves in their collective feet (usually through their right wingtips), there was no guaran-
and shame when the skeletons come tumbling inevitably out of your closet?

So the first thing you have to do when you think about running for office is to sit down with your spouse or significant other, and, if applicable, with your children as well, and talk about what is about to transpire. I didn’t do this with my wife when I first ran for mayor, and it was a big mistake.

My wife is an angel, but she is also a very private person. When I ran for office, I didn’t realize that moving into the limelight would drag her into it as well. This created tensions at home that spilled over into my stressed-out behavior on the campaign trail. What I lacked was the serenity of a supportive home life, and that is something you don’t want to do without, especially when the Scuds start coming in. Let me also say quite clearly here that all of this was my fault, not my wife’s. I did not treat her as an equal partner in either the decision or the venture. Please don’t make that mistake yourself — at least not if you want to both win your race and stay married. (I’m now divorced.)

The second important thing to consider in running, which likewise bears at least partly on the issue of family, is your job situation and financial condition. There are really two issues here: Can you afford to run and what will be the impact of your losing on your present career path?

For most people, winning a race for Congress is a step up the financial ladder. After all, these jobs pay almost $140,000 a year, and after just a term or two you get an obscene pension thrown in. However, if you’re considering another office such as city council, you may have to take a cut in pay. It’s not just your lifestyle that may be threatened here. It may well mean whether the kids can get braces or go to college or whether the family can still take that annual vacation or even regularly go to the movies. It’s your family’s burden, not just yours. Remember that.

By the way, low salaries on the lower rungs of the political ladder are probably the single greatest reason we get idiots elected to local government. Most smart people earning a decent wage can’t afford to go into politics, so we get a bunch of miscreants who can’t otherwise make a living.

Still a third major issue to consider is whether you have a strong enough stomach for it, because politics is not a very pretty sight. If
you don't believe me, ask the ghosts of two of the most reviled men of their times — Thomas Jefferson and Abe Lincoln. (What about that slave mistress of yours, Tom? You know, the one you shack up with on your bankrupt estate? And, Abe, what about that ugly face of yours and your demented wife? You see what I mean?)

In this regard, you have to decide whether you are prepared to throw mud at your opponent — or at least throw it back when you are attacked. Now I know you might say "no" now, but what happens when your pollster comes to you and says you're 20 points down, and there is no way you can win without going negative. In the same breath, your pollster also assures you that you can pick up all 20 of those points simply by attacking your opponent for declaring bankruptcy once or being divorced twice. Are you prepared to tell your pollster, "No thanks, I'd rather lose a clean campaign than win a dirty one"?

Well, maybe. But suppose the way your opponent got you 20 points down to begin with was by secretly arranging to have several contributions funneled into your campaign from adult-bookstore owners and then publicly attacking you for having a campaign "funded by pornographers." Are you ethically and morally prepared to fight back with a dirty trick of your own, knowing full well that if you don't you are going to lose?

Well, I am. Indeed, today, I have absolutely no moral qualms about throwing mud at an opponent — but only if they throw mud at me first. I still have some principles.

Finally, there will be the compromises you will have to make every day of your political life in order to be elected and then be re-elected. This is perhaps the slipperiest portion of the politician's slope. As I have woefully discovered, the more often you lose, the more willing you are to slide down that slope. In fact, no matter how much you tell yourself that you are getting into politics to serve the public good, it is the special interests that will largely determine your future in politics, and it will be the special interests that you will have to cater to.

**The Final Questions**

Once you consider all these factors, you must then ask the ultimate question: Can I win? In considering this question, please don't be the typical neophyte patsy who throws all his life savings into an obviously losing cause (like I once did).

Honestly evaluate your chances and don't be Don Quixote, particularly if it means mortgaging the house! To evaluate those chances, answer these final questions:

**Number one:** Can you raise the money to win? Put another way, do you know several thousand people to call up and harass for money over the next six months, and if you do, do you have the stamina and temperament to sit on the phone and beg for their money for eight hours a day? If you don't, get the hell out now. This ain't a glamorous job. Ninety percent of politics is just one step up from selling Amway or used cars.

**Number two:** Are you in a district where victory is even possible? If you're a Democrat in a district where Republican registration is 80 percent, Oliver North will remember all the details of the Iran-Contra affair before you will win. If you're pro-choice, pro-environment, and pro-education and your district is in the heart of the Bible Belt, Jesse Jackson will team with Billy Graham on a revival tour through Oklahoma before anyone will ever call you congressman.

As you can see from this chapter, this is a big checklist to mull over before you run for office. Suffice it to say that after going through this checklist myself, the answer to my question "To run or not to run" came up in the affirmative. So I filed my papers the day before Christmas and then flew off to Florida to do what I do every year during the holidays: play a round of very bad golf with my mom. I was in.
The Carpenters Saw Me in Half

Am I not destroying my enemies when I make friends of them?
ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Imagine now if Jesus Christ had stuck around after the Resurrection instead of beaming up to heaven and decided to run for the Roman Senate. Further imagine Judas Iscariot calling Jesus up, apologizing for any pain or inconvenience he may have caused, and then volunteering to help the Savior with his senatorial campaign. That's roughly the situation I found myself in — except for the part about me being Jesus — shortly after my return to San Diego from visiting my mom during the Christmas holidays.

The call I got offering campaign assistance was from John Kennedy of the Carpenter's Union. This, mind you, was the same dastardly Judas Jackal who had been the bane of my political existence during my mayoral and city council races.

Kennedy is a handsome and charismatic scoundrel — as people in the political trade often tend to be. He is tall and lanky with the broad, concave shoulders of a butterfly swimmer, and his personage is marred only by the start of a slight paunch and a receding hairline. The one thing I can tell you about Kennedy's personal life is that he is a Civil War buff, and if I had to bet, he's probably the kind of guy who still roots for the Confederacy.

At any rate, Kennedy is like a lot of today's younger leaders bubbling up to the top of the sadly declining labor heap. He combines the usual toughness you'd expect from someone who smashes things with a hammer for a living with just enough intelligence to know that if he doesn't get his butt out of the field and into a desk job, he's going to wind up with a bad back and crippled knees.

In my race for city council, Kennedy's union had acted as a money
funnel and front group for a motley coalition of developers and realtors obsessed with my defeat. The “cleansed funds” that went in to the carpenters’ pot were used to design and distribute a vicious little hit piece that they mailed out a few days before the election. It had an unflattering caricature of yours truly on the cover holding a baby rattle, and the accompanying text questioned both my maturity and sanity.

Objectively, now, I can say that it was a pretty effective piece. That’s probably why, rather than laugh at myself when the piece hit the voters’ mailboxes, I made the mistake supreme of holding a press conference to publicly denounce such mudslinging.

Drawing attention to your opponent’s literature, mon candidate, is usually a dumb move, and this case was no exception. My public whining and hand-wringing turned the hit piece into a front-page story that dutifully reported all the accusations verbatim and thereby gave the hit piece what the spin doctors in the campaign trade call additional “legs.” My overreacting probably cost me at least the 800 votes I lost that election by.

**Abe Lincoln Meets John Kennedy**

So it was that I approached my luncheon meeting with Kennedy with a modicum of disgust and distrust. Of course, I showed neither of these sentiments. Instead, I smiled, shook his hand, and entered into a dialogue with him in the same spirit as the Abe Lincoln quote that leads off this chapter — “Am I not destroying my enemies when I make friends of them?” For, mon candidate, the lesson must always be “don’t hold grudges” and co-opt whomever you can in a campaign lest they wind up on the other side kicking your sorry butt.

The meeting was at Kennedy’s favorite luncheon haunt — a fish restaurant in Mission Valley called the Rusty Pelican. My concern was that Kennedy might try to run a double-agent gambit on me, but my fears about this turned out to be unfounded. This is because Republican Brian Bilbray, my soon-to-be opponent, had committed one of the stupidest and most avoidable blunders for a politician, which is to needlessly and gratuitously tick somebody off. With the election approaching, Kennedy had gone to visit Bilbray for a get-acquainted session — all the while presuming that Bilbray knew of Kennedy’s pivotal role in my previous defeats.

However, Bilbray was oblivious to this. So instead of embracing Kennedy warmly as a potential ally, Bilbray simply lumped Kennedy in with the Big-Labor crowd, railed about how exorbitant union wages were destroying the American economy, and warned that the Gingrich revolution was about to break up the unions once and for all.

Kennedy, of course, was stunned and speechless (two words not usually associated with the man), but he didn’t get up and leave Bilbray’s office until Bilbray accused him of conspiring with “limousine liberals like Peter Navarro.” That did it (and using the cliché “the last straw” here would be like calling the Last Supper a small, intimate dinner). So Kennedy had stormed off Capitol Hill, steamed all the way home, and, by the time we sat down to break bread at ye olde Rusty Pelican, John Kennedy was ready to follow one of his presidential namesake’s favorite maxims: “Don’t get mad, get even.”

Once Kennedy offered me his olive branch, I told him that besides a $10,000 PAC check, the only thing I wanted from the Carpenter’s Union was for his guys to take down as many of Bilbray’s signs in this race as they had taken down of mine during the mayor’s race. He got a chuckle out of that. I was dead serious.

By the time our entrées arrived, we were already talking strategy. And where Kennedy could help me big time would be in a key area: raising PAC money. In particular, Kennedy could possibly help me rescue a key part of my original strategy. As we talked about in Chapter Five, this strategy was to get a double dose of PAC money, from both the primary and the general-election cycles. The way we figured we could salvage this strategy was to get some initial PAC money from a few key unions like the Carpenters and the Teamsters and then parlay this financial support into an exclusive endorsement of my candidacy by the local AFL-CIO. With that endorsement, I could go back to Washington as the presumptive nominee and begin to work the labor PACs hard — even with another Democrat in the race. Since the labor PACs account for about 75 percent of all the PAC money on the Democratic challenger side, it was the first and most important thing for my campaign to do.

Kennedy could help me do this because he had just played a key role in a major coup d’etat at the local AFL-CIO. As you probably know, the AFL-CIO is an umbrella group for unions ranging from large juggernauts like the Service Employees International Union and
United Auto Workers to smaller unions like the boilermakers and roofers.

The head of the local AFL-CIO chapter in San Diego was a guy named Joe Francis, and if Joe has a middle name, it's probably "Survivor." Joe had been the AFL-CIO head for more years than I care to remember, and he had beaten back numerous challengers (and had their balls in his pocket to prove it). That was until Kennedy and several of his cronies came along, and Joe's luck finally ran out.

What the Kennedy faction did was figure out that since voting rights in the AFL-CIO are proportional to the number of members in each union, all you had to do to elect a new president was stack the deck in your favor. Kennedy did this by persuading one of the largest blocs of dissident union members, the Teamsters, to rejoin the local chapter and then vote, in coalition with the carpenters and several other unions, to roll Joe Francis and put in their own guy.

From my perspective, this was actually a very good thing because Joe Francis had never been a big fan of mine. At least to me, the reason seemed simple: like too many labor leaders grown old in their jobs, Joe had forged some rather cozy relationships with the same local Republican power structure that hated my guts.

Such was not the case with Joe's replacement, Jerry Butkiewicz — a short guy with a big heart, a bigger smile, and a commitment to serving the people he represents.

In fact, over the course of the campaign, both Jerry and his top lieutenant, Donald Cohen, would be of enormous help. Such help was not, however, destined to come as easily as I needed it. The problem was that while Jerry Butkiewicz was the president-elect, Joe Francis still had a few months left in his term. As we shall see shortly, this window would give lame-duck Joe the opportunity to have one last laugh at Kennedy's and, as it would turn out, my own expense.

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No Date at the Endorsement Ball

The best laid schemes of mice and men often go astray.

Robert Burns

Over the month of January, my new best friend John Kennedy and I set about the business of trying to wire the AFL-CIO endorsement. There was an urgency to this because there were only a few months until the March primary election, and if I were to start raising any serious PAC money from the labor community, it would have to be soon. The primary vehicle for our efforts was a series of face-to-face meetings with key labor members of the E-Board — the executive board of the AFL-CIO. It was the E-Board — or so we thought at the time — that would determine whether my opponent, Nancy Casady, or I got the labor endorsement.

Casady, for her part, was not going to let me go unchallenged in the endorsement arena, and this frankly surprised me. I didn’t think she had the sophistication as a candidate to figure out all the endorsement ropes, but she went about the process with an unexpected ferocity and, indeed, a killer instinct. (Never underestimate your opponent, mon candidate.)

Casady’s approach was confrontational and negative — one highly derivative of her psychological training in the practice of EST. Her principal line of attack was to portray me as a three-time loser who didn’t have a prayer of beating Brian Bilbray, and then embellish that message with a secondary one tailored to whatever group she was wooing.

For example, with groups like the National Organization for Women, she shamelessly played the vagina card: We need more women in Congress, so vote for me. It was simple and, I’m sad to say, very effective.
Similarly, with the 100 or so key Democratic Party delegates who would soon be voting for the party's endorsed candidate at the upcoming convention, Casady attacked me for not being a "real" Democrat. This is because I had been previously registered both as a Republican and an Independent. Since my party switching would also become a key point of attack in Brian Bilbray's general-election campaign against me, it is probably worth commenting upon now.

The fact is, prior to my running for mayor in 1992, I had never had a strong identification with either party. For starters, there was no childhood indoctrination. To my knowledge, neither my mother nor father ever voted during my childhood, and politics was never a topic in our household.

Later on, in my wild and crazy hippie years, LBJ and the Vietnam War had alienated me just as much as Richard Nixon and Watergate would later, and so, for the first three and a half decades of my life, I hadn't seen a dime's worth of difference between the "Republicans." That's why when I first moved to San Diego in the early 1980s, I registered as an Independent. (Hey, at least I registered.)

Over my years in electoral politics, however, my political philosophy has steadily sharpened its focus. I am, it is fair to say now, quite clearly a Democrat. Yet, in the same breath, I must say that I do not come to my party easily.

My biggest problem is that the Democrats have had a terrible propensity to waste huge sums of money. Huge.

On the other hand, I consider myself a strong environmentalist and a progressive on social issues such as choice, gay rights, and religious freedom. I also believe we ought to progressively tax the rich to help everybody else, not because the rich are selfish sons of bitches, which many of them aren't, but because we're all in this together. This Panglossian idealism puts me at odds with the keepers of the Republican Party flame, who prefer the "every man for himself" approach.

Over the years, I have struggled mightily with this ideological dilemma. It is a dilemma that I believe I share with millions of Americans, including the little man with the big ears, Ross Perot. In 1994, I finally reconciled this dilemma by registering as a Democrat.

Bill Clinton and his New Democrat philosophy helped me in making the party switch because New Democrats like Clinton are at least willing to talk about making tough fiscal choices. The most important deciding factor in my party switch, however, was this fundamental realization: today's Republican Party does not represent either mainstream Republican values or true fiscal conservatism.

On the social agenda, Ralph Reed's insufferably bigoted, close-minded, and dangerously well-disciplined storm troopers on the religious right wield far too much influence at the ballot box.

On the economic agenda, the Republican leadership is more likely to cook up tax schemes to further enrich the rich — and use dupes like Jack Kemp to convince everybody that this is a good thing.

Finally, on the environmental front, I do not trust the Republican Party to do anything but trash the environment under the phony banner of economic progress. I've seen this scam firsthand at the local level with Republican developers intoning the mantra "no growth, no jobs" to defeat reasonable growth-management plans. And we've all witnessed this Republican hypocrisy at the federal level in the attempts by the Gingrich Congress to dismantle the Environmental Protection Agency, eliminate the Endangered Species Act, and make toxic waste a vegetable (just kidding about that last one).

So today I can say I'm firmly a Democrat. That's why it increasingly irritated me that Nancy Casady was publicly questioning my party credentials. The clear threat here was not that she could beat me. Rather, it was that she would bloody me enough in the primary to weaken a Democratic base that would have to be rock solid if I were to beat Republican Brian Bilbray.

Who Are Those Guys?

Sure, I expected Casady to get the National Organization for Women endorsement because she used to do advocacy work on pro-choice issues (and because the one and only thing I do agree with Rush Limbaugh on is that the NOW leadership is a bunch of men-hating feminazis who ought to know better than to engage in reverse discrimination but do it anyway). But then some other unexpected dominoes started to fall on top of me, and my concern began to grow.

First there was Casady's endorsement by the National Association of Social Workers — a bunch of neurotic, touchie-feelie twits if I've ever met any. Then it was the endorsement of the teachers and the National Education Association. Next, it was the gay-and-lesbian San
Casady and me. This was like kissing your cousin. It was effectively no endorsement because it meant that a PAC had to give to both of us or neither of us — and guess what they did. So, yes, the best laid plans of mice like me and Kennedy often do go astray.

It was at about this turbulent time in the campaign that several bags of what was purported to be Nancy Casady’s garbage were — quite literally — dropped into my lap by the only anonymous person in this story. This garbage was to quickly and dramatically put an end to Casady’s charge up my flattening hill, and a retelling of this garbage tale should underscore perhaps the most important lesson in this story for wanna-be politicos: never, ever leave your garbage out overnight for your opponent to pick up and pick over.

Diego Democratic Club — a particular slap in my face given the fact that I had stood up strongly for gay rights over the years and gotten nothing but hammered for it outside the gay community.

Around our campaign, Casady’s endorsement juggernaut got to be almost a joke — no date for Navarro at the endorsement ball. Casady and I would both show up for an endorsement interview and a week later, they’d announce that she’d gotten it. Then, we’d go on to the next one, and she would do it again. (One of my favorite lines in all of American cinema is from Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, and it’s one I found myself muttering during this period about the Casady gang: “Who are those guys?”)

Casady’s dancing on my face reached what I thought at the time must be the humiliating low point. It was on a sunny Saturday afternoon at Craftmen’s Hall, the base of operations for the Plumbers and Pipefitters Union. That day, however, the main hall was also the site of the local Democratic Party convention.

At that convention, most of the delegates shook my hand, but few would look me in the eye, and I knew right away that I had as much chance of getting the party’s nomination as Woody Allen has of remarrying Mia Farrow.

As it turned out, this wasn’t the low point. It got even worse on the night that John Kennedy and I went to get what we thought would be the sure-thing, can’t-possibly-miss, it’s-in-the-bag AFL-CIO endorsement. Surprise, surprise! Instead of walking into a small, intimate E-Board meeting where we had wired a majority of the votes, we walked into a snake pit. It was a packed open meeting where the E-Board members sat around a table, flanked by over a hundred angry rank-and-file dissidents.

This brilliant idea was, of course, that of Joe Francis. Old Joe was shrewd enough to know that if enough of the rank and file went after me in the open meeting, there was no way the E-Board would have the guts to give me the exclusive endorsement. The way Joe’s operatives ratcheted the anger level up was to have some guy from the teacher’s union attack me for an incident that had happened over four years before — an incident for which I had publicly apologized more times than Billy Graham has said amen.

It didn’t matter. Mud was slung, I got dirty, and we came away with a colorless, odorless, and totally useless co-endorsement for both
At perhaps the most fundamental level, there is little difference between the traditional science of archeology and the modern practice in American politics of "garbageology." Both of these exacting disciplines sift through the dirt and detritus of people's lives to gather clues, and both can be revealing. I was well aware of the importance of garbageology going into my congressional race because pirated garbage had already played a key role in two of my previous campaigns.

In the first instance, during the 1992 mayoral primary election, I was the unwitting beneficiary of a midnight raid on Susan Golding's campaign garbage cans. The raid was conducted by a shadowy political operative who was in the employ of one of the other candidates in the race.

What he found — and promptly leaked — was a particularly damaging confidential memo from Golding's pollster Dick Dresner. In it, Dresner urged Golding to introduce a measure on the board of supervisors to cut some poor hapless schmucks off welfare. The kicker here was that Dresner clearly acknowledged that the measure would be illegal, but he urged Golding to do it anyway to consolidate her right-wing political base. The icing on this rancid cake was that Golding had followed Dresner's Machiavellian advice.

The news story hit the mayor's race like a firestorm. For one thing, the memo conveyed the image of a coldly calculating and overly ambitious Golding. This seemed to shake up many voters still having a hard time believing that Sweet Little Susie didn't know that in her house, it had been her husband doing the (money) laundry.
But the best part was that rather than denying anything, Golding counter-attacked. She accused the Ron Roberts campaign of a Watergate-style theft of the memo. In response, Roberts flew so far off the handle that he made Captain Queeg look calm. This left me, the squeaky clean white knight in the race, as the main beneficiary of the sordid affair while both Golding and Roberts took a pretty good negative hit.

My next experience with garbageology, however, was not so pleasant. It happened two years later when I ran against Roberts for county supervisor. Someone managed to dig out of my trash a highly confidential subpoena from California’s Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC). It charged me with the failure to properly disclose the source of several personal loans I had made to my mayoral campaign.

The worst part was that I was unaware that my opponent Ron Roberts had obtained the document, and he used it to blindside me during one of the few highly visible debates of the supervisor’s race. The vehicle for attack was a Joe McCarthyesque question from an audience member asking me, “Are you now, or have you ever been, under investigation by the FPPC?”

In one of my rare deer-in-the-headlights moments — I’m usually very quick on my feet — I stumbled through an evasive answer, and the next day it was all front-page news. (This case, by the way, would not be settled for two more years, and Brian Bilbray would get the chance to sling the same mud at me as Ron Roberts did — with much

the same effect.)

The point of this long digression, mon candidate, is this: your garbage can get you into a heap of trouble, so be a lot more careful than I or, for that matter, Nancy Casady was.

Harvard of the West Coast — Not

The real find in Nancy Casady’s alleged garbage was a seemingly innocuous piece of correspondence between Casady and a place called More University. As soon as my press secretary-cum-opposition researcher Lisa Ross saw it, her eyes lit up brighter than a Roman candle in an outhouse. This was because it helped confirm one of the juiciest rumors we had heard about Casady — that she was a teacher at More.

More University is to Harvard and Yale as Sodom and Gomorrah were to Jesus’ Bethlehem. It is a way-over-the-top and way-out-on-the-fringe institution that was founded back in the free-love era of the 1960s up in the San Francisco Bay Area. Today, it continues to offer courses in the sexual arts.

Now let me say here that I originally had no intention of attacking Nancy Casady. This was for two reasons. Most nobly, I liked the Casadys, wacko though I thought they were, so I didn’t want to get down and dirty with them. More pragmatically, I also thought any such attacks might backfire if they could be traced to my campaign, particularly because of my reputation as a dirty campaigner.

In contrast, both Lisa Ross and my campaign consultant Larry Remer were more than ready to launch a surgical strike, and they assured me it could be done without leaving any fingerprints. In fact, these Ninja character assassins wanted to go right after Casady as soon as she started going after me; and it was about the time that Casady got the Democratic endorsement that Lisa started looking deeper into the bizarre rumors swirling around the Casadys.

That’s why the document in Casady’s garbage was so useful: It not only identified Casady as a teacher for More University. It also provided a phone number to call to confirm this. It was an easy step from there to anonymously disseminate the information to Ray Huard, the reporter covering the election beat. Within days, the Union-Tribune ran a big story about it (thankfully without any link to us), and Casady’s candidacy was quickly marginalized in the eyes of
the voters.

This wasn't the best part, however. The best part was blast faxing the news story to every organization that had endorsed Casady over me. These groups now had to deal with the embarrassment of their names being associated with a sex-education teacher. This fax put an end to any possible hope that these organizations would donate large sums of money or provide large cadres of volunteers to the Casady camp. So in one single story, as newspapers can sometimes do, Casady's campaign went right back into the garbage can from whence it came. Garbage in, garbage out.

Now at this point, you might think that I truly am the cruelest and meanest son of a bitch that ever ran for office in San Diego — as my unfortunate reputation from the mayoral race is. But let me say again in my defense that I never, ever had any intention of attacking Casady, and I never would have used any of that garbage if she hadn't tried to win the election by going after me personally first. But all is fair not just in love and war but also in politics, and, after Casady's gang threw the first, second, and third punches at my groin, I was more than inclined to let my Ninjas quickly knock her down and out.

The broader lesson here is one I've learned the hard way, and it is one that many neophyte candidates like Nancy Casady never fully understand. It relates to a simple law of Newtonian physics that applies equally to politics: Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. So, man candidate, while you are likely to be hit by your opponent regardless of how nice you are, you are far more likely to be hit harder and farther below the belt if you start hitting first. What goes around does indeed come back around.

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12

The Democrat That Makes Newt Wet His Pants

Bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote.
George Jean Nathan

Even as the Casady threat was receding, our campaign was gearing up to bring me home a big victory margin in the primary election. This was important: A backboard-breaking, over-my-shoulder, slam-dunk win in the primary would go a long way toward dispelling the perception that I was a perennial loser.

The task of engineering this resounding victory was left to my trusty campaign manager, Dale Kelly Bankhead — one of the sweetest, smartest, and most loyal people I know. Oddly enough, I would not become actively involved in the campaign Dale was about to wage. Instead, I would focus all of my time on fund-raising. And the reason I didn't have to be involved is that a partisan primary election is a very different animal than a general election. Let me do some quick math for you to explain why.

Of the millions of Americans of voting age, less than half bother to register. Of those registered, little more than half bother to vote. This contrasts sharply with voter-participation rates of well over 90 percent in countries like Japan and Somalia. It also provides a pathetic counterpoint to places like Haiti and Afghanistan where voters have to dodge bullets and duck incoming mortar rounds.

Given these statistics, suppose that I, as the candidate, were to go to a supermarket to hand out campaign literature and press the flesh. How effective would this be?

In an hour, I might shake 100 hands, but only about 40 of those hands would be of registered voters. Of those 40, only about half of those would actually vote in a low-turnout primary election. And of the 20 who vote, only about 8 would be registered Democrats eligible
to vote in the Democratic primary. The bottom line: 92 out of every
100 hands I would shake at that supermarket would be the hands of
people who couldn’t even vote for me. That’s long odds at any race-
track, and that’s why the name of the game in a primary election is
not buckshot retail politics but laser-beam targeting.

Buckshot and Laser Beams

The best way to find your voter target in a primary election is through
computerized voter lists, and the best way to hit your target is through
phone banks and direct mail. I don’t know much about how other
states work, but in California a candidate can buy a data file that tells
almost everything about a voter except whether he or she has
hemorrhoids.

Information on this “voter file” includes the obvious: age, sex, and
party, as well as a mailing address and, when available, a phone num-
ber. But the file also includes race and ethnicity, whether the person
owns a home or rents, is married or single, and how much money he
or she makes. In some cases, the voter file will even include data on
the probability the voter is gay or straight.

All this demographic data is important when you work with your
pollster to define and target your message — something I’ll talk more
about later. But for now, in thinking about primary-election target-
ing, the most important piece of data in the voter file is the so-called
voter history. This voter history tells you how often people have voted
in past elections; and what you are looking for are the high-propen-
sity voters who will likely go to the polls even in a low-turnout pri-
mary election.

For example, Jimmy Apathetic has been registered to vote since
1985, but the only time he ever casts his ballot is during presidential
general elections. In contrast, Cindy Conscientious has voted five times
out of the last five elections. In a low-turnout primary, you can save
lots of time and money by excluding the Jimmy Apathetics of this
world from your target list. For the primary, my consultant Larry
Remer chose a very narrow target — Democratic voters who had voted
in at least three out of the last five elections. This boiled down to less
than 30,000 voters in a district with over 500,000 people. It was Dale
Kelly Bankhead’s job to run the nightly phone banks to reach these
people with our campaign message.

The Democrat That Makes Newt Wet His Pants

Hello, Good-bye

In this early stage of our campaign, we couldn’t afford to pay a pollster
to help craft our message. But that message was fairly obvious — at
least if you accepted the wisdom of Martin Frost and the Democratic
Congressional Campaign Committee (as we discussed in Chapter
Seven). Take a look at this sample phone script, and you’ll see what I
mean.

“Hi, I’m Joe Volunteer calling on behalf of Democrats for
Navarro. As you may know, Peter Navarro is running to help
take back the Congress from Newt Gingrich, and we need to
defeat Republican Brian Bilbray to get rid of Gingrich.

“Peter is a business economist and San Diego’s growth-man-
agement leader. He is strongly pro-choice, pro-environment,
pro-education, and pro-Medicare. Peter Navarro is also the
Democrat that Newt Gingrich fears the most. Can Peter count
on your vote on March 5?”

The first sentence cites a phony organization, “Democrats for
Navarro.” This creates the useful illusion of external partisan sup-
port and strong party affiliation and counters Casady’s “weak Demo-
crat” attack. By the way, please don’t give me a hard time about this
phony front-group stuff. It’s standard operating procedure in the sleazy
world of politics.

The second sentence is more complex. It sets up the race as a
national rather than a local contest and makes Newt Gingrich the
villain. It also identifies Republican Brian Bilbray as my opponent
rather than Nancy Casady. This serves the twin purposes of ignoring
Casady and marginalizing her as any serious threat. Note also the
word “help” in the “take back” part to connote a team player. That’s
a nice little touch because a lot of people perceive me as a Lone Ranger.

The third sentence provides a shorthand label for me as “business
economist.” This appeals primarily to Democratic men. At the same
time, the “growth-management leader” label gently reminds voters
of my past environmental exploits on their behalf and has appeal
across gender lines.

The fourth sentence is a must. It articulates a platform that gives
voters a positive reason to support me. I’m basically promising to
protect a woman’s right to choose, preserve our environment, and
support education. These are promises I know I can keep. However,
I’m also promising to save Medicare, and while I’m not quite lying
through my teeth here, I am well aware that this will be a much more difficult proposition.

The fifth sentence highlights the campaign slogan — “The Democrat Newt Gingrich fears the most” — and, in some sense, it is the punch line of the script. The simple message is that a vote for Navarro is a vote against the reviled Gingrich. The more complex message involves some subtle jujitsu. The idea is to transform the fear that most Democrats have of Gingrich and his agenda into Gingrich’s own fear of losing power. The intellectual link to this emotional idea is that I’m the Democratic candidate with the best chance of beating Bilbray and therefore denying Gingrich his majority.

By the way, Dale and my campaign consultant Larry Remer, as well as my press secretary Lisa Ross, all toyed with a lot of other slogans before we settled on this one. Lisa’s favorite was “Navarro: The Democrat That Makes Newt Wet His Pants,” but the rest of us thought it was a little over the top. For his part, Larry liked the irony of “Navarro: The Newest New Democrat with the Newest Ideas,” while Dale’s favorite was “Navarro: Elect Him Before He Changes His Mind and Becomes a Republican Again.”

Dale’s goal was to get five phones working six nights a week between 6:00 and 9:00 p.m. — the sweet spot for reaching people when they’re home from work and still awake. (Never call any voter after 9:00 p.m., mon candidate, unless you want some cranky people voting for your opposition out of spite.) Dale’s broader goal was to reach all the voters in the target at least once and then do at least one follow-up call to the undecideds.

It was crystal clear from the very beginning of the phone banking that we were going to win — the only question was whether we’d get our landslide. Dale’s operation was reaching about 200 people a night, and the results were fairly consistent. We typically polled well over 50 percent of the vote, Nancy Casady got about 10 percent, and a third nonserious candidate who had entered the race late, Marcia Tremblay, got less than 5 percent. The rest were undecided, and if I got just half of them I’d be well over 60 percent on Election Day. No problem was indicated here.

That left the only other part of our strategy to deal with — direct mail. Like phone banking, this is a precise technique because you mail to only those in your target. Not only is direct mail useful as a
reinforcement to the phone bank, it is the only way to reach the voters in your target who have unlisted or wrong phone numbers, and those falling through these phone-bank cracks can reach as high as 30 percent of the target.

Larry Remer designed our one mail piece, and it served double duty. It was both a mailer and a brochure to hand out. Particularly for low-budget campaigns, this one-piece-fits-all approach is best. That way you don't have to spend extra on a campaign brochure, and you can take advantage of the lower printing costs per piece that you get with a higher volume.

Larry's piece had a smiling picture of me on the front identifying me as the "Democrat Gingrich fears most." On the back cover and inside, I was portrayed as a fighter for the people who never gives up. The subtle message here was that even though this guy is a three-time loser, he's not a quitter.

This mail piece was sent to all undecided voters identified by our phone banks, and it was always sent the day after the phone-bank contact. Such promptness creates excellent synergy between the phone call and the mail. A mass mailing was also sent to the whole target the Thursday before the election so it would arrive in mailboxes over the weekend that most of the undecideds finally make up their minds.

While the mail piece no doubt was helpful, I wish we had not sent it. Our phone banking clearly indicated that we were going to roll to victory regardless, and it was a needless $15,000 expense. But send the piece we did — and roll to victory we did.

Rolling to Victory

Watch KNSD's incessant slow-motion replays of the now-infamous shoving match at election central involving Peter Navarro and Susan Golding press aide Nikki Symington. Look closely at the grassy knoll in the background. See, the second elbow? Yes, the truth will eventually come out....

Los Angeles Times

I hate election nights! You bust your butt for a year or more, and it all boils down to one roll of the dice. The volcano bubbling in the pit of your stomach as you wait that night for the voters' verdict makes a million-dollar roll of the roulette wheel in Vegas seem like a romp through Disney World.

In San Diego, the voters' verdict is rendered at Golden Hall. This is where the election returns are publicly posted, and if you've never been to one of these election-central soirees, I heartily recommend it. It's good clean American fun, it won't cost you a dime, and it beats a good dinner and a bad movie anytime.

Golden Hall is a big ugly box on the city's civic concourse — the Mack truck of American architecture. There's not a single color in the whole joint unless you count brown as a color — which I don't. But on Election Night, this empty basketball gym of a place is transformed into a red, white, and blue cauldron of excitement, frenzy, and, for many candidates, abject terror.

At one end of Golden Hall is the tote board. This is where the election returns are posted and updated throughout the evening. The messengers of these bad and glad tidings typically are well-coifed Vanna White wanna-bes with short skirts and long clipboards. It's a real pageant up on that stage.

Around the inside perimeter of Golden Hall are the TV platforms
where each station creates its own portable set complete with logos, headsets, and hair spray. On these risers, the top anchors preen and pose and compete for who can ask the most banal question of the evening. My all-time favorite is "How does it feel to lose?" (They ask me that a lot.)

In the center of Golden Hall, the teeming masses gather shortly after the polls close to hoot and holler and cheer and wave signs for whichever horse they’re riding. Not to mix too many metaphors here, but Election Central is the closest thing to a snake pit I’ve ever been in. In fact, mon candidate, you have to be careful in this kind of volatile environment. There’s a lot of pent-up emotion that gets vented on such nights, and, if you’re unlucky or unprepared, some very bad things can happen.

I know because one of the worst things that has ever happened to me in politics is an incident involving Susan Golding’s press secretary on the night I won the mayoral primary election. Golding’s press secretary was a woman named Nikki Symington. If Nikki were a dog, she’d be a pit bull. If she were a fish, she’d be a barracuda. And if Nikki were an inanimate object, she’d be a brick wall.

Anyway, that election night, after running a media campaign that made the Keystone Kops look competent, Nikki’s rear end was on the line. She knew it as soon as the first returns came in and showed Golding eating my dust. That’s when Nikki completely, utterly, and foaming-at-the-mouth lost it.

What happened was one of the TV stations wanted to interview me, and as I was trying to work my way through the bedlam with my wife to get to their platform, Nikki got it in her twisted head that she was going to stop me.

Unbeknownst to Nikki and me, one of the local TV station’s roving cameras caught the whole gruesome exchange on videotape. The next thing I knew, they were playing the tape over and over again as if this were a big controversy.

Now, this should have been a public-relations bonanza for me — “Golding Aide Viciously Attacks Navarro.” But the problem was that from the videotape, it wasn’t exactly clear who was shoving whom, because I made the mistake of shoving her arm back. I’d like to say here that it was purely a reflex action, but I’d be lying to you. It was anger, and only a little bit, but that’s still an emotion that a candidate

never, ever should succumb to. You make mistakes when you do. And this was a big mistake because the video footage wound up looking like that Gnarled Granny—Fair Maiden drawing that they put in every college textbook in introductory psychology. You may know the one: When some people look at the drawing, they see the granny, while others see the maiden.

Unfortunately, at least half the people who watched the video footage thought that I was the gnrled-granny aggressor, not Nikki. Needless to say, having a guy beat up on the proverbial fair maiden was not the message we wanted to broadcast on this, my night of greatest triumph.

The worst part of this incident was that it took the bloom off what should have been the sweetest rose in my life — that mayoral primary victory. But there’s an interesting coda here too, because Golding fired Nikki shortly thereafter and hired some six-foot-five goon to replace her. This Wilt the Stilt made a point of trying to intimidate me every chance he got throughout the general-election campaign. Even more to the point, while he was incompetent as a press secretary, he was still several pegs up the scale from Nikki, so I was almost as sad as she was when she got fired.

By the way, the broader message here, mon candidate, is that you should always assume that the camera is on you whenever you are out in public. This is especially true when you are in a place where there is at least a hundred frigging cameras.

So now you know why I don’t like going down to election central. But go I must every time there is an election, and this was particularly true on this historic March 5 night of the congressional primary. I had to go because this night would be the best opportunity for many months to come to get my campaign message out to the electorate via the free media.

**Humphrey Bogart Falls on His Sword**

Unlike most nights I’ve experienced at Golden Hall, this one turned out to be fun, if not, conflict-free. Just after the polls closed, the first returns came in based on a count of the absentee ballots. I had close to 60 percent of the vote, Nancy Casady was trailing badly, and there was no way she would catch me.

The other good news on the tote board was that San Diego voters
had turned the tables on Ross Perot’s dominatrix, Mistress Madison. It was she who was being beaten, and badly, for the Perot party nomination by Kevin Hambach. Thus, we were now assured of our dream matchup: the Republican Brian Bilbray versus the Democrat Peter Navarro with very credible Libertarian and Perot candidates right there crowding Bilbray on his right wing.

Now on this particular night, my press secretary Lisa Ross had done her homework. She got us the first interview on San Diego’s highest-rated station and it was at the top of the hour. The best part was that Bilbray had been invited up to the platform thinking that he was going on solo, so when I slipped into the chair across from him and put on my headset, you could almost see his sphincter tighten.

The contrast between the two of us that night was striking. I looked calm, confident, and relaxed, and this was partly because I had learned from previous years that the best thing to do before a big night of TV interviews is to take the day off and do nothing but eat, sleep, and swim in the ocean. But my ease was also partly because I had hosted my own TV news program for more than a year, and I felt comfortable, indeed very much in command, in front of the cameras.

In contrast, Bilbray looked like most congressmen from California do who commute every week back and forth on the red-eye from Washington, D.C., which is to say he was pale and wan and more than a little wasted. He also had a Nixonian film of unflattering, shiny sweat on his face, whereas, TV veteran that I was, I had put on a little powder makeup to smooth out any sweaty and shiny edges.

I’ll give you a deeper profile of the Honorable Congressman Bilbray in an upcoming chapter, but for now, all you need to know is that sitting in that hot seat with the klieg lights glaring, Bilbray was totally unprepared for what was about to come. In fact, the only thing he had going for him was actually a pretty good trick that every candidate should be aware of. His supporters had ringed the TV platform and created a wall of Bilbray signs as a backdrop for this impromptu mini-debate, so that on the TV monitor I looked like I was surrounded by his troops.

At any rate, Channel 10’s anchor Stephen Clark — a self-professed conservative — started things off with a softball question to his ideological buddy Bilbray, and all Bilbray could do was hit a weak cliché to the shortstop. Then it was my turn, and, with a big smile, I took a home-run swing at him.

I should say here that it is of the utmost importance, mon candidate, that you know exactly what your message is whenever you go before a TV camera and that you stick to that message. That means no matter what question the anchor throws at you, you must either ignore the question and go right to your message or give a brief answer to the question and immediately bridge to your message.

My consultant Larry Remer and I had decided that our message that night would be right out of the playbook of Martin Frost and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. This was a time, mind you, when we still believed the D-Triple-C knew what the hell it was doing. The message was this: Newt Gingrich was Public Enemy Number One, Brian “Newt” Bilbray had voted with the Gingrich agenda over 90 percent of the time, and if San Diego wanted to be rid of Gingrich, we had to get rid of Bilbray. End of story.

Before Bilbray could respond to any of this, I challenged him to a series of debates throughout the district. What he should have said was “of course I’ll debate you” — regardless of whether he intended to or not. This is because if he wanted to back out later, there would always be plenty of excuses to do so — particularly for a busy incumbent congressman with pressing matters of state to attend to. But instead of accepting my debate challenge, Bilbray danced around it like cold water on a hot griddle, and he came off looking like a cowardly, temporizing fool.

Now I know you might be thinking that I’m being more than a little boastful about how easily I manhandled Bilbray that night, but please don’t jump to the conclusion that I’m an egomaniac. I’m telling you about my splendid performance now because the next time I would meet Bilbray in a debate — many months later — it would be Bilbray who would eat my lunch. Indeed, one of the reasons why he would later nail me was that on this night, I unwisely gave Bilbray and his campaign consultants a big wake-up call.

Before I explain what I mean, let me first confess that throughout the campaign, I had a mole working in the Bilbray camp, and please don’t give me a hard time about that either because it’s also a standard campaign practice. In fact, when C-Span broadcast a feature on our race, we saw at least five people in Bilbray’s headquarters who, at one time or another, had successfully infiltrated our volunteer net-
work on behalf of Bilbray.

At any rate, from time to time our mole — code name Sore Throat — funneled information to us. What Sore Throat told us about the aftermath of my shredding Bilbray was that it led to three important strategic decisions.

The first was that Bilbray would limit joint appearances with me as much as possible. There was nothing for him to gain, and, given my skills with the media and in debate, there was much for him to lose.

The second decision was that whenever we did debate, he would immediately attack to put me on the defensive. No more of this deer-in-the-headlights crap; he'd be Godzilla with an Uzi.

The third, and most damaging to our campaign, was from that day forward Bilbray would rapidly backpedal from the Gingrich Devil and reincarnate himself as San Diego's most "independent" congressman — a ridiculous assertion on his part given his pro-Newt voting record, I might add, except that he would have over a million bucks to back it up.

In hindsight, it's clear that I came on far too strong and far too early with Bilbray on this primary election night. It was still eight months before the general election, and I didn't just tip my hand, I showed him the whole deck of cards. It scared the wee wee out of him and his handlers, and it would have been better on that night to have played a little possum, done the "aw shucks, it's great to be here" Jimmy Stewart routine. But instead I had to be Humphrey Bogart.

This was my first mistake of the campaign, but it was a big one. For the next eight months, the only time Bilbray would venture into my space was when he was forced to by outside media pressure (this happened twice) or when he had total control over the debate format and could freely kick my butt. And, of course, he played the "independent congressman" tune like a virtuoso. You'll see what I mean about all this soon.

Part 2

The Triumph of Hope Over Experience
The Triumph of Hope Over Experience

I think Lerach and his ilk are a very low life form, somewhere below pond scum.

T.J. Rodgers, President and CEO, Cypress Semiconductor Inc.

For me, winning the primary election was not a checkered flag going down at the finish line. Rather, it was the crack of a starter's pistol exploding in my head. This congressional race was on, and over the next seven months before the November general election, I would think about only one thing: money. I had to raise a million bucks in less than 200 days. Just the thought of it turned my stomach into a Tums testing center.

My strategy for getting off to a fast start was clear: Raise a quick 50 grand from my local-donor base at our first major fund-raising event. Then, go to Washington with that seed money in the bank and use it to leverage PAC money. So the pressing task at hand was to schedule our first fund-raiser, and this task fell to Norma Nicolls, the latest addition to my campaign team.

Norma drives a little bug-eyed, phosphorescent lime green sports car and zips around San Diego like a renegade atom in a particle accelerator. She's a trip: earthy, wry, and more than a little raunchy. In fact, the first words I ever heard come out of her mouth were "Would you like to sit on my face?" She was not speaking to me but rather regaling a mutual friend with tales about her former boss, the once great and now late M. Larry Lawrence.

In his prime, Lawrence was the owner of the world-class Hotel del Coronado, a mega-donor to President Bill Clinton, and, at least according to Norma, a lecher of Rabelaisian proportions. I mention this
because I want to give you a flavor of just how corrupt and inbred my little town of San Diego is. Remember Richard Silberman from Chapter Two — the husband of Susan Golding who got busted for money laundering? Well, one of Silberman’s business partners in the corporation used by Silberman to launder money was Larry Lawrence. This fact alone may explain why, when President Clinton appointed Lawrence as an ambassador, the country Lawrence chose to go to was Switzerland — land of a million and one unnumbered bank accounts.

By the way, can I vent here for a minute about jerks like Lawrence in American politics: Here’s an irascible, mean, and cutthroat old fart who married and divorced young blondes with the regularity of an Ex-Lax junkie, who consorted with money launderers, and who was ruthless in his business dealings, and the son of a bitch winds up as an American ambassador just because he raised a million bucks for the Prez. Something is wrong with this picture.

Anyway, Norma Nicolls worked as Lawrence’s personal assistant for over ten years, until Larry the Lecher traded in his aging second blond wife Jeanne for his third blond wife, the fair and nubile Shelia. The difficult-to-confirm rumor about Shelia is that she is a former blackjack dealer out of Vegas, although if I had to guess her previous occupation I would pick bikini model or Bay Watch extra. (More about Shelia later.)

Unfortunately, Norma quickly ran afoul of the newest lady of Crown Manor (Lawrence’s estate mansion — a stunner on Coronado), and for all Norma’s past loyalty to Larry, he gave her her walking papers. Since that day, Norma has plied her new trade as a political fund-raiser, and she had seemed to do a good job for Lynn Schenk in both Lynn’s winning 1992 campaign and her 1994 loss to Brian Bilbray in the Year of the Newt.

Note the word “seemed” here because before I hired Norma, Lynn had warned me that Norma was more of an “event planner” than a pure fund-raiser. However, because Lynn is one of the toughest critics of people that I know, I discounted her assessment and hired Norma anyway. Big mistake.

PAC Versus Local-Donor Fund-Raising

Now it may occur to you to ask: Why did I need Norma as a second fund-raiser when I had already hired Steve Pederson in Washington?

Triumph of Hope Over Experience

It’s a good question, and the answer is that PAC fund-raising and local-donor fund-raising are as different as country and classical music.

With PAC fund-raising, you have a target list of several hundred PAC directors, virtually all headquartered in D.C. The object is to phone each of these guardians of the loot at least once every one to two weeks, and then, in between times, you bombard them with blast faxes — press releases, news articles, or new poll results that lie about how wonderful your campaign is doing.

Local-donor base fund-raising is a different animal, however, with a different order of magnitude. My fund-raising donor base has about 5000 donors in it, roughly split in thirds between large, medium, and small donors. To properly milk this donor base, you have to have a comprehensive plan that includes a series of mail and phone solicitations augmented by fund-raising events.

The job of the local fund-raiser is to design and coordinate this plan, organize the events, and, most importantly, make the follow-up calls to donors whom the candidate has already talked to and gotten pledges from. It’s more than a full-time job, and you need somebody with a wide range of attributes, not the least of which is a set of brass balls. This is because it is a lot harder to get people to commit money to a political cause than to the zoo, a museum, or a new cancer hospital.

In this regard, Norma had two flaws that would emerge only after several months of dysfunctional pain at our campaign headquarters. The first was that she was computer-phobic. This was a crying shame because fund-raising is one of the best applications of a computer ever discovered.

Norma’s other flaw was that she didn’t like to ask people for money. This is not the best phobia for a professional fund-raiser to have. It’s kind of like a butcher or doctor who hates the sight of blood or a used-car salesman with an unwavering commitment to the truth.

So when it became apparent that most of the money coming in to the campaign was due to my solicitations and not hers, she became expendable. What sealed the deal was a mistake made in scheduling our first major fund-raiser — a mistake not unlike listing Saddam Hussein as cohost at an event to raise money for the Friends of Kuwait. Here’s what happened.

The concept for the fund-raiser was to have former Congresswoman Lynn Schenk as the host. Lynn is a pretty good draw, her support
would help solidify my credentials with the traditional Democratic donor base, and she was more than happy to do it. The problem, however, was that Lynn never hosts anything at her home — a rule that I both grumble about and respect. So Norma and I had to find a venue, and after casting about, we settled on the law offices of Bill Lerach. Part of the reason was that we were hoping Bill would help us raise half of the $50,000 we had set as our goal for the event.

Now here's where we made the big mistake — the second major mistake of a campaign that had to be utterly flawless for us to win. In preparing the invitation, we listed not only Lynn Schenk as the host but Bill Lerach as a cohost.

**King of the Strike Suits**

According to Mother Jones magazine, William S. Lerach is not only one of the ten largest political donors in America, he is undisputedly the nation's most successful practitioner of the insider-trading class-action lawsuit. Indeed, Lerach's list of strike-suit targets reads like the Fortune 500, from Apple and Intel to U.S. Sprint and the Walt Disney Corporation.

Over the past 20 years, Lerach's law firm has been involved in over 400 securities class actions. They have won awards for their clients totaling more than the gross national product of Guatemala — over $4 billion. At a one-third contingency fee raked off the top of these awards, Lerach and his partners are, as his enemies would say, filthy rich. But that's not why I love Bill Lerach. I love him because he's a totally pure form.

Start with his looks: What you see first is a great big wide Cheshire cat grin framed by a huge and outrageous head of hair that would make Don King or Art Garfunkel green with envy. You gotta like this happy-looking guy on sight.

Then try his sense of humor: On the occasion of his third marriage, to a woman as exotic as her name implies, Star Soltan, he wryly quoted Samuel Johnson: "I stand before you today as the triumph of hope over experience." (By the way, I borrowed that line for my campaign speeches because it pokes good, clean fun at my willingness to run again and again for office despite my losses.)

Finally — and mostly — I love Bill Lerach because he knows how the money game is played. No phony foreplay or false promises. If he says he'll raise you 50 or 100 grand for your campaign, you can bank on it, and no reminders are necessary.

No doubt this is why most of the nation's Democratic politicians have, over the years, beaten a path to the exquisitely carved, fine oak door of Lerach's Rancho Santa Fe estate — a place that he once jokingly referred to as "hollowed ground" after Lloyd Bentsen, Chuck Robb, Diane Feinstein, Bill Clinton, and Al Gore all passed through in quick succession on fund-raising missions.

The first time I met Bill Lerach was a couple of days after a televised debate in my mayor's race in 1992. It had been during the primary election, and as I had waltzed my way around the issue floor, my opponents had spent their time ignoring me and sling mud at each other. Bill liked what he saw on the tube, and he kindly offered to help raise me some dough.

Since then, Bill's done a lot for me. He always invites me gratis to his big fund-raisers so I can meet the fat cats, and he never objects when I hit them up later for my own campaigns. These fund-raisers have also been the source of some of my best portraits with the nation's politicians, including a great shot of me with Bill Clinton doing an uncanny impression of a jet-lagged W.C. Fields — red bulbous nose, glazed eyes, and all. These portraits are more than just mementos for my golden years. They provide valuable photographic fodder for political mailers when it comes time to tout my solid Democratic credentials.
One Man’s Hero Is Another Man’s Pond Scum

Now take my love for Bill Lerach, multiply it by a hundred, put a big fat minus sign in front of the number, and you’ve got an idea of how much the business community in San Diego hates Bill Lerach. This is because Bill Lerach’s favorite targets to sue tend to be the high-tech and biotech companies that like to make San Diego their home.

In fact, in my little town, getting “Lerached” is an executive’s worst nightmare, and they see this legal demon that they have turned into a verb not as a white knight protector of the small investor, as Lerach claims to be, but as a vicious “greenmailer” who sues just for the sake of forcing big settlements.

So here’s the punch line: Of the several thousand invitations listing Lerach as a co-host that were sent out for my first fund-raiser, at least three to four hundred of these invitations went to executives in high-tech industries. The RSVPs we got from many of these people are quite unprintable here in this, a wholesome story for the whole family. Suffice it to say that these replies encouraged me to engage in unspeakable and unnatural acts, usually by myself but sometimes with Bill Lerach.

Even worse, the announcement to the world that Lerach was one of my major supporters quickly galvanized support for my opponent Brian Bilbray, particularly in the biotech community. This was despite the fact that at least some of these Ph.D. scientists regarded Bilbray as an uncultured and uneducated buffoon only a rung or two up the evolutionary ladder from the hapless baboons in their test labs.

The irony was that while I raised $50,000 at this first event just as I had planned, I probably raised twice that much for Bilbray from irate Lerach-haters who had received our ill-conceived invitation. But at least the 50 grand helped me make a good impression on my next trip to Washington.

What’s the Price of an Al Gore?

Someone to watch over me. From the song of the same name

I took my third trip to Washington, D.C., at the end of March, but I felt more like Santa Claus than the Easter Bunny: I was bringing the Democratic Party $100,000 in cold, hard cash in the hopes of closing a deal I had cut with the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (D-Trip-C) to rent Al Gore for an evening. This is not as sleazy as it sounds.

Shortly after I won the primary election, I went to visit two of my favorite people on the planet, Chuck and Darlyn Davenport. Over the years, Chuck and Darlyn have been among my strongest and most loyal supporters. Not only have these guardian angels always donated the maximum allowable under law to my campaigns, they have hosted several successful fund-raisers and solicited friends and family on my behalf. For any politician, the support of people like Chuck and Darlyn is invaluable — and all the more so because they are that rare breed of donor that gives to politics because of a sense of public purpose rather than self-interest.

Chuck and Darlyn live in a meticulously restored historic mansion in Point Loma. In this part of town, there are more conservative Republicans per square inch than there are germs on a dirty Kleenex. As a Democrat, Chuck once told me that he felt more surrounded by hostile forces than General Custer had at Little Big Horn.

On a fine and sunny chamber-of-commerce day, Chuck, Darlyn, and I sat in their spacious living room overlooking the sparkling harbor and Coronado, and even before our conversation began, I felt particularly blessed to live in my little town and have such fine friends.
Chuck started off the conversation by saying that he really wanted me to win this time and that he and Darlyn wanted to do something extra to make that happen. Besides, he thought that Gingrich and the Republicans were going way overboard in their attacks on the environment and education, and we needed to get rid of the S.O.B.s.

What Chuck had in mind was making what he called a "modest" donation to the Democratic Party on my behalf. His idea was to use that money to get some political star out to his house so that we could throw the mother of all fund-raisers for my campaign. I liked the sound of that, so I asked him what kind of donation he had in mind, and he said "up to $100,000." At that, my jaw dropped so far it almost fractured on his Spanish tile floor.

Until that moment, I didn't know that Chuck was so wealthy. He's not the type to flaunt his wealth. How Chuck made his money is an interesting story in and of itself. He was trained in accounting and was dutifully playing the role of the faceless midlevel executive at a nameless midsized company when the energy crisis hit in the 1970s. Out of that crisis emerged a whole slew of complicated subsidies for alternative energy sources. With his accounting background, Chuck figured out that you could make a bundle developing wind farms with virtually no financial risk.

Today, Chuck is the chief executive officer and major stockholder of the largest wind company in the world, SeaWest, and every time the wind blows, Chuck's cash register goes *ka-ching*. What's neat is that he's in an industry that provides a real contribution to society — clean energy.

Once Chuck laid his money card on the table, my task was to figure out how to play it. It's moments like this that separate the successful candidates from the unsuccessful ones because this is when you have to think fast on your feet. At least that day, I was lightning quick.

My brilliant idea was to not get Bill Clinton to come to the Davenport. Not only would the president be difficult to get, he's just not that popular in my little town.

No, the obvious choice was the vice president. Al Gore has all of the positive attributes of Bill Clinton but is saddled with none of his negatives. He's a great big teddy bear of a political figure — Teflon coated, road tested, and everyone's nice guy. Besides, Gore's strong environmentalism would dovetail nicely with my own campaign.
themes as well as with Chuck's interest in alternative energy. My job, then, was to figure out how to rent Al for the evening, and all I knew was that I had $100,000 to make it happen.

I should say here that the millisecond that the words “one hundred thousand dollars” popped out of Chuck’s mouth, I realized that my campaign had hit the lottery. This is because such a major gift would work on so many levels.

Sure, it would help me raise money: By bringing the Veep in as a headliner for a fund-raiser, I could easily pull in a six-figure sum. But the Davenport gift would also separate me from the pack of challengers jockeying to be one of the D-Triple-C’s targeted seats. Such targeting would, in turn, greatly enhance my chances for mega-PAC funding — the name of the game. So leaving Chuck and Darlyn’s home, I was about as excited as I ever am with my clothes on, and I couldn’t wait to get on the horn to my Washington fund-raiser, Steve Pederson, and ask him how to go about this process. When I talked to him, Steve got almost as excited as I was, and he pointed out a few more benefits of such a gift that I hadn’t even thought of.

First, the gift would give us immediate access to top Democratic congressional leaders — from Dick Gephardt, Vic Fazio, and Steny Hoyer to key players in the California delegation like Henry Waxman and Howard Berman. The reason is that these guys want direct access to the big donors for their own political purposes, and I could be the gatekeeper in the venture. This role would allow me, in turn, to ask them to make some calls on my behalf to the PACs — and when a Dick Gephardt or Vic Fazio calls, the PACs listen.

Second, Steve said that we would now almost certainly get the full $65,000 of financial support that the D-Triple-C is allowed to provide each candidate by law but only provides to a select targeted few. And the D-Triple-C is where Steve suggested we start trying to make the Gore event happen. The man to call was Matt Angle, executive director of the D-Triple-C, and I did so the first thing in the morning.

Wheeling and Dealing at the D-Triple-C

Matt is an early-40s good old boy from Texas with a brooding Hamlet countenance that is only rarely brightened by a big wide grin. Matt found himself running the D-Triple-C because he did such a great job as chief of staff to Congressman Martin Frost, the D-Triple-C’s chairman; and I can think of no better guy to work with than Matt Angle on anything. He “gets it,” and he gets it right away, and that’s the highest compliment I can give anybody at the tactical level of politics.

At first, Matt greeted my good news with more skepticism than excitement — no doubt a prudent reaction. After all, it’s not every day that an unknown challenger for a Democratic congressional seat calls him up with a $100,000 gift for his organization. However, as I filled Matt in on Chuck’s background, he warmed up to the venture.

As luck would have it, the White House had jobbed Vice President Gore out to help the D-Triple-C build up its campaign war chest, and the major criterion for landing Gore was the amount of money that could be raised. It was just like an auction. Whoever could promise the most money would get the vice president. Period.

So how much does an Al Gore cost? Matt said we had to hit at least $200,000. I said that would be a piece of cake because, in addition to the Davenport check, we could easily raise another $100,000 at the event itself.

So we met the most important criterion for getting Gore, but what also worked in our favor was that the Davenports were fresh donors who had never contributed to the Democratic Party. That meant that of the $100,000 they were offering, a full $40,000 was precious “hard money.”

The beauty of hard money is that it can be given directly by a political party to a candidate and be used for any purpose. But there is a strict $20,000-per-person contribution limit per election cycle. In contrast, soft money, which can be given in unlimited amounts, must be laundered through local- and state-party organizations to provide indirect — and less effective — help through mechanisms such as voter-registration drives and get-out-the-vote efforts.

The bottom line here is that new donors like Chuck and Darlyn and the hard money they can bring to the table are literally worth their weight in gold, so by the end of my first conversation with Matt Angle, he was as stoked about the Al Gore venture as I was.

I told him I would be in Washington, D.C., next week, and perhaps between now and then, he could work out some of the details with the White House. I also indicated that there were important things to negotiate to ensure that my campaign directly benefited financially.
from the Gore event at the same time that the D-Triple-C got its $200,000.

Matt said he'd be happy to hammer all this out in a week hence, but the one thing he had to do before then was check the *bona fides* on the Davenport's. The two big questions: Did they really have the money or were they just blowing smoke? And were the Davenport's the type of fine, upstanding citizens that the vice president and the White House wanted to be associated with?

I assured him that the Davenport's were as clean as Rocky Mountain rain and suggested a conference call between Matt, Chuck, and me where Matt could ask Chuck about his willingness to donate. It was probably one of the shortest phone calls in political history. The next day, as Chuck and I huddled around the speaker phone in his home office, Matt popped the $100,000 question. Chuck simply said "yes."

After a long pause at Matt's end — he expected Chuck to say more, but Chuck rarely does — Matt said he would need at least $50,000 of the gift up front as earnest money to make it all happen. Chuck said he would be happy to send it with me to Washington next week to seal the deal. Another long pause. Then Matt said, Great, it's done. I'll see you next week.

For my campaign, this was like striking oil, hitting a home run, and getting lucky on a lonely Saturday night all at the same time. I couldn't wait to get on that big bird to the land of cherry blossoms and broken promises.

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**PAC Attack**

*No snowflake in an avalanche ever feels responsible.*

*Stanislaw Jerzy Lec*

**WASHINGTON, D.C., IS A REMARKABLY**

beautiful city. Any damn fool who flies into the place on a clear and sparkling night as I did in late March can see that, and God bless the architect Pierre-Charles L'Enfant for the type of long-range planning and foresight that the political denizens of the Washington deep rarely exhibit.

On this, my third trip to the land of milk subsidies and honey price supports, there were two things to accomplish. One, of course, was to nail down the Al Gore event with Matt Angle at the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. The other was to continue my magical mystery tour of the several hundred PAC directors on my target list.

That's all you need with these PAC types: one face-to-face meeting. They take your measure, you take theirs, and the rest is follow-up phone calls. But without that face-to-face, you're a half step behind the competition, and in the PAC game, the competition is fierce.

During my first two trips to D.C., my PAC fund-raiser Steve Pederson and I had done a good job making the PAC rounds. Over a span of eight working days, Steve had introduced me to 40 of the major PACs.

My favorite PAC directors so far were Linda Canan of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees and Kenny Montoya of the Air Traffic Controllers.

Linda is bright, cheerful, and not yet jaded by the congressional candidates who descend on her every two years like a swarm of
locusts. Unlike 98 percent of the PAC directors, she returns phone calls, so that alone makes her a pearl among whines.

Kenny has a warm, infectious grin and a kind habit of telling you when and how much money his PAC can donate to your campaign before you even ask. It is a nice change of pace in a world where begging on both knees is the norm.

My least favorite PAC director was Marta David of the AFL-CIO. Imagine a drill sergeant with a cattle prod suffering from chronic paranoia and you get the idea of how unpleasant it was to spend time with this insufferable martinet.

I had met Marta on my second trip to D.C. months before. This was when the AFL-CIO was already beginning to unveil its $32 million attack ad campaign against a targeted list of vulnerable freshman Republicans. As with wooing the D-Triple-C, my job as a candidate was to make sure that the 49th Congressional District of San Diego was part of the AFL-CIO’s target, and it was up to Marta and her boss Steve Rosenthal to make that decision.

As it would turn out, the AFL-CIO would commit the same strategic mistake as Martin Frost and the D-Triple-C did by starting their anti-Gingrich propaganda far too early in the election season. AFL-CIO leaders like John Sweeney further compounded the problem by publicly bragging about the big bucks they were throwing about. This braggadocio generated lots of bad press, discontent in the rank and file, and an 11th-hour voter backlash against the very candidates the AFL-CIO was supposed to be helping.

The ultimate result of the AFL-CIO’s ham-handed approach was to give Republican strategists time to inoculate their candidates against the attacks of big labor, and I’m certainly not giving away any of the plot of this story if I tell you that of the numerous Republican freshman targeted by labor, only a handful lost.

The Daily Grind

On this third trip to D.C., my PAC fund-raiser Steve Pederson wanted to kick things up a notch, so our schedule was unusually brutal: From 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., there would be one PAC meeting per hour with no time budgeted for lunch. That’s ten PAC directors a day, so over the space of a four-day trip like this one you can knock off almost one-fourth of your PAC primary target list.

To pull off such a tight schedule, you have to budget no more than a half hour for each meeting and then hope you can slalom your way through the D.C. traffic in another half hour to be on time for your next appointment.

On this first day, Steve and I started out with the American Nurses Association. The ANA PAC leans Democratic, they’ve got a pretty big war chest, and Steve figured that this one should be bankable.

The ANA’s rep was a young woman named Jennifer Sassel. Imagine a Valley Girl with a thick Boston accent, and that’s Jennifer.

Now every PAC has its issue list, and for the nurses, the big issues are job security in a world of HMO downsizing and being allowed to encroach more and more on traditional physicians’ turf — writing prescriptions, diagnosing, and so on.

I told Jennifer that, as an economist, I thought the HMO trend was very unhealthy and that the central problem with HMOs is that they have a financial incentive to not treat people rather than to treat them. Jennifer loved to hear this, and the best part was that I was sincere in expressing views consistent with the ANA. In fact, for me, having these policy discussions was the fun of PAC-wooing. I am, after all, a policy wonk by profession, and by visiting the PACs, an academic such as I can learn a lot through a real-world lens — encrusted with political grease though it may be.

Unfortunately, over the next several months, romancing the ANA would be an unrequited love. In the end, they sold my carcass down the river and stayed out of the race. Jennifer’s reason was that my Republican opponent Brian Bilbray was on a key congressional committee, and the ANA didn’t want to risk alienating him.

This is a problem I would bump into again and again. Newt Gingrich is a shrewd man, and he knows that the best way to ensure the reelection of vulnerable troops like Bilbray is to put them on powerful committees like Commerce and Ways and Means. Being on these committees not only allows the members to raise larger sums of money than the poor stiffs stuck on lesser committees. It also helps cut off the money of any potential challengers, as it did for me with the ANA and numerous other PACs.

The bigger problem with the risk-averse political behavior exhibited by the ANA is that it reinforces the institution of incumbency at the same time as it dims the prospects that the Democrats will ever
win the House back. Of course, when Gingrich and the Republicans inevitably wind up screwing the ANA and the many other Democratic-leaning but weak-kneed PACs that refuse to back a Democratic challenger over a Republican incumbent, these cautious folks should look no farther than the mirror to understand how the hot poker wound up their butts. But as the saying goes, “No snowflake ever feels responsible for an avalanche,” and the ANA will never assume any responsibility for Newt Gingrich retaining his majority.

Of Cabotage and Kings
At our next stop, the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA), Steve and I learned about the mysteries of “cabotage.” This is the practice of allowing only American air carriers to fly domestic routes. In other words, with cabotage, you'll never be able to fly Lufthansa or Nippon Airlines from Detroit to New York. Keeping foreign carriers off American routes is essential to preserve the monopoly power of the pilots as well as the oligopoly power of the domestic airlines.

The main man at ALPA is Jerry Baker. He walks, talks, and acts like an airline pilot, but he isn't. What he is is a good navigator around the hostile skies above Capitol Hill. Jerry is a cautious man by nature, and he would take considerable wooing to extract a modest contribution.

Not so with the Teamsters. They do their PAC screening in a tag team. Bill Hamilton is an ex-radio jock with a golden voice and sardonic manner. His flat-line personality is nicely offset, however, by the enthusiasm of the younger, hipper, and more hyper Mike Mathis.

The Teamsters’ main issue is loyalty: vote the labor line and they’ll love you to death. Cross them and they’ll put you in the political equivalent of cement boots. I’ve got no problem with that because I strongly support labor issues, and I liked these guys.

In fact, in the initial stage of the campaign, the Teamsters would be a great help to me, and they would be the second PAC to deliver the maximum check to my campaign coffers. However, in the end, the Teamsters, too, would fail me, and in a big way. The problem was internal. There was an election looming for Teamster president between the incumbent Ron Carey, who had started to clean up the union, and the challenger James Hoffa Jr.

I would have the misfortune of living in a city in which the local Teamsters chose the insurgent Hoffa side. As part of their punish-

PAC Attack
ment, Carey refused to honor the local’s request for additional PAC assistance for me.

Unfortunately, the same thing would happen to me with the Communications Workers of America union. In that case, the local guy, Tim Sexton, backed the wrong man for state president, and I wound up the poorer for it.

I’d like to say these were isolated events and that most of the unions have their acts together, but such is not the case. Indeed, far too many unions let internal politics interfere with broader goals like winning back the Congress from anti-labor Republicans, and that is a good part of why union power is declining.

The D-Triple-C Negotiations
At day’s end, Steve and I wound up hungry and exhausted at a hole-in-the-wall restaurant a stone’s throw from Capitol Hill. Our day’s work was far from done, however. After a quick burger, we hiked the few blocks over to the headquarters of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee to meet executive director Matt Angle. We were doing this meeting after regular business hours so I could maximize my PAC contacts during the day; and Matt Angle liked the fact that I had requested an evening meeting. It was a subtle but nonetheless strong cue that I knew how the money game was played and that I had my priorities straight — raising PAC money.

The D-Triple-C building looks, perhaps appropriately, like a concrete bunker, and the building’s interiors are about as far from opulence as Oprah is from intellectualism. After introductions and a brief exchange of pleasantries, Matt and I got down to business.

He started off with the good news: the Davenport’s had passed the White House background check with flying colors, and the vice president’s office had tentatively signed on to the Davenport fund-raising event. I told him that was great but that I had three points to cover.

First, Chuck Davenport’s concern was to establish that the primary purpose of bringing Al Gore to San Diego was to raise money for my campaign — not just for the D-Triple-C. This brought up a delicate issue because, as Matt informed me, neither Bill Clinton nor Al Gore as a matter of policy raised money directly for candidates but rather only for the party organizations — the Democratic National Committee, the D-Triple-C, and the Democratic Senatorial Campaign
Committee.

The White House had adopted this policy as a defensive measure: If it raised money for some candidates, jealous others would demand the same favor and things would get out of control. So as far as the White House was concerned, Matt insisted, the purpose of Gore’s visit must be to raise money solely for the D-Triple-C.

Matt is nothing if not savvy, however, so he quickly offered a way for us to bend this rule. Specifically, if a donor were to contribute to my campaign, he or she would be allowed a “credit” toward the cost of the event.

The second negotiation point was to start extracting some of the $65,000 that the D-Triple-C could legally donate to my campaign. This, too, was a delicate matter because, by law, there can be no earmarking of funds. In other words, I, as a candidate, can’t go out and get a guy like Chuck Davenport to give the D-Triple-C money under the assumption that they will simply launder it and hand it over to me. However, there is at least a tacit understanding on both sides of the political aisle that any candidate who helps his party raise money is more likely to get some help in return.

My thinking was to start out small with Matt: What I asked for — all the while making it clear that it had nothing to do with the Davenport gift — was some help financing a public-opinion poll to see where we stood in the race.

This request, in fact, was a risk on my part. If the D-Triple-C paid for the poll, it would own the results, and if the poll came back highly negative, any chance of raising big bucks from the D-Triple-C, as well as from the PAC community, would go right down the chute. Nonetheless, I believed this was a gamble worth taking for several reasons.

For one thing, I didn’t want to spend the $15,000 that it would cost to do the poll. But I also thought the poll would be a more powerful fund-raising weapon if it were done independently by the D-Triple-C. That way, none of the PAC directors could accuse me of cooking the books — a common practice among candidates who do their own polls. Finally, by getting the D-Triple-C to pay for the poll, I could get the pollster I wanted, a fellow named Bob Meadow of Decision Research.

I’ll introduce you to Bob later, but for now, you should know that he had also done a poll for Bilbray years before when Bilbray ran for county supervisor. In this race, Bob wanted to work for me, and we had started down that path. However, when his association with my campaign became known, Bilbray’s political consultant Tom Shepard had put some screws to him, and he had backed away. We could solve that thorny problem by sticking a third party between us — the D-Triple-C — and that suited me fine.

Matt readily agreed to fund the poll for the simple reason that he, too, wanted to find out if I had a chance. It looked to Matt as if I were emerging as a strong candidate, he thought Bilbray was a lightweight, and, hey, Matt’s job was to get back the Congress from the Republicans, and this was one of the seats he’d have to get to do it.

The last part of the negotiation with Matt involved a local San Diego congressman named Bob Filner. As I shall explain in detail shortly, the Democrat Filner is a prickly personality who has a well-deserved reputation for horning in on other people’s fund-raising events.

In fact, Filner had managed to steal away a White House event from Lynn Schenk during her failed reelection bid, and in the process, he had cost her tens of thousands of dollars in campaign donations as well as a great media opportunity. Three years later, Lynn was still steaming from this, and in her ongoing mentoring of my candidacy, Lynn had urged me to put the “Filner problem” right on Matt’s table and get it dealt with.

My negotiating position was that this was my campaign event and that while Filner would be invited as a courtesy, he would not speak and he would not enjoy any of the financial spoils of the hunt. While Matt said that it was his job to serve all the Democratic members of Congress, he also promised that Filner would not be allowed to poach on our turf.

With that, Matt and I shook hands on the deal, I handed over Chuck’s $50,000 check, and Steve and I left the D-Triple-C flying above at least cloud eight. There were bogies in the sky, however, waiting to shoot us down, and one of them was piloted by none other than the treacherous Bob Filner.
My first of what would be three encounters with President Clinton came in early June. The president was in town to give Bob Dole a clinic on how to run for office. It was an impressive display of high campaign art in which Clinton played the elegant Matisse to Bob Dole’s bumbling housepainter.

For the life of me, I cannot figure out how a political party with so much money and so much intellectual horsepower could allow itself to be saddled with a presidential nominee as inchoate and incompetent as Bob Dole.

What brought the president to town was a vicious — and misplaced — attack by Dole on U.S. Attorney Alan Bersin. Bersin’s office has jurisdiction over more than 1000 miles of border, and he is the de facto immigration czar for the western United States. Unlike many political appointees, Bersin is up to his difficult job, which is another way of saying that Dole picked the wrong guy to mess with.

Nonetheless, in late May Dole blew into San Diego with Governor Pete Wilson in tow for the obligatory genuflection to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost of Southern California politics: crime, illegal immigration, and affirmative action. In Southern California, these three issues are so potent and so thoroughly dominate other issues such as education and the environment that any politician who is, quite literally, on the “right” side of them can not only lock up all the Republican support, he can chisel away at large chunks of the Democratic base, particularly frightened seniors and white-and-angry blue-collar men.
On this day, Dole was trying to hit two of the three points of the fear-mongering trinity by attacking Bersin for being lax on illegal-immigrant drug smugglers. To make his case, Dole held a press conference in City Heights. This, of course, was really dumb because City Heights is an overwhelmingly Democratic neighborhood. It was easy for Clinton's rapid-response team to pull a General Custer on Dole, that is, surround the hapless fool with shouting demonstrators.

Location wasn't Dole's biggest mistake, however. That mistake was attacking Alan Bersin. Going after Bersin is like riding a bicycle without a helmet really, really fast into the Rock of Gibraltar. This is San Diego's golden boy — a patrician tough guy cut in the mold of Teddy "walk softly but carry a big stick" Roosevelt.

Bersin was a star guard on the Harvard football team, a Rhodes scholar who roomed with Bill Clinton at Oxford, and he is a man who has earned praise from both sides of the political aisle for his aggressive approach to the impossible job of controlling the U.S. border.

Dole’s attack on Bersin was based on an article published several days before in the Los Angeles Times. The article reported that, rather than prosecuting drug smugglers from Mexico who had been caught with less than 125 pounds of marijuana, Bersin's office was slapping them on the wrist with a deportation.

On the surface, such a revelation looked like filet mignon to Dole's press lions, but the problem was that the Times had subsequently issued a nine-paragraph clarification that substantially exonerated Bersin from any criticism. That didn't stop Dole, however.

Clinton's response to Dole's attack on Bersin was swift and massive. In the political equivalent of laying down mortar rounds to soften up the lines before the president's invasion, the Clinton team first lined up third parties to lambaste Dole for lying about the Times article. In doing so, these spin doctors turned Bersin into a martyr wrongly nailed to the cross of presidential politics, and the spin was so good that the Clintonites even had the Republican San Diego Union-Tribune rushing to Bersin's defense.

With this foundation laid down, Clinton flew Air Force One into town for the final bombing and strafing of Dole's pathetic little village of campaign idiots. The weapon of choice was a presidential speech in which Clinton was surrounded by a galle of fawning Republican law-enforcement officials — all gathered at the strongest symbol of law and order in the city, the gleaming police headquarters.

My New-Found Status

It was during the preliminary scheduling of Clinton's event that I celebrated my new-found status as the Democratic nominee in the race for the 49th Congressional District. Before the primary election, Clinton had visited San Diego, but my campaign's attempts to cozy up to him had been rebuffed. This time, however, as the official nominee for a seat the president needed to get back his majority in Congress, we didn't even have to call. Instead, Ray Martinez of Clinton's advance team called us, and he assured my campaign manager that we would get all the help they could lend down the road.

The only bummer about this trip was that it was an official rather than a campaign visit; that meant there could be no joint press opportunities. Nonetheless, I was more than happy with my half loaf — a VIP seat in the front row at the event. This placement would allow me to strut my stuff in front of several thousand screaming Democrats and also legitimize my candidacy with the other Democratic VIPs who would be in attendance — from major campaign donors like Sol Price and Murray Galinson to Democratic politicians like city council members Valerie Stallings and Chris Kehoe.

As is his custom, the president was late for the event, and on this day, the wait was grueling. While Clinton was supposed to be there at 11:00 a.m., by high noon, he still hadn't showed, and the bright San Diego sun was bearing down on the sweltering crowd like a red-hot broiler at a Burger King.

Rather than sweat through my pinstripes in my seat, I used this waiting time to work the crowd. Retail politics happens to be one of
my best skills as a campaigner, and it's probably because, unlike many politicians, I like to go out and shake hands. During a campaign, the trick is to spend no more than 15 to 30 seconds with anyone and to keep moving so that you not only shake a few hundred hands but also have a thousand people see you doing it.

Such a maneuver is harder than it looks because most candidates will get into a crowd, and, within a few minutes, some motor-mouth will collar them and bend their ear for 15 minutes. The way around this, mon candidate, is to pretend you have a destination you are moving toward and can't be late for. That way, no one can ever call you rude.

A Lesson Learned
During my retail-politics reconnaissance of the crowd, one hand I didn't shake — because she refused to offer it — was that of Christine Kehoe, the only openly gay member of the San Diego City Council. Kehoe is one of the oldest fish that I've ever met in politics. Her coldness to me is, however, mostly my own fault.

Five years before, during a voter-initiative drive that my growth-management organization PLAN! was spearheading, I had had the poor judgment to read Ms. Kehoe the riot act. The situation was this: PLAN! had spent over $100,000 qualifying a ballot initiative to manage growth in San Diego, but a hostile Republican judge had thrown the initiative off the ballot because of a legal technicality. However, because PLAN! had gotten over 100,000 signatures to qualify the petition, the mayor of San Diego at the time, Maureen O'Connor, wanted to put the initiative back on the ballot sans the illegal section, and she was helping me try to line up five of the nine votes on the council to do it.

We had four solid votes at the time, but the fifth vote we had to get was that of Democratic City Councilman John Hartley. By all measures, Hartley should have been our strongest supporter since he had campaigned on the growth-management issue. However, Hartley had aspirations of running for mayor in 1992, and that left him vulnerable to lobbying by the powerful building-trades unions who opposed the initiative.

After realizing that Hartley was about to stick the knife squarely in my back, I wound up in his office in a shouting match. The person I was shouting at was not Hartley — he had gone into hiding before the big vote. Rather, it was his chief aide, Chris Kehoe. My mistake was to shoot the messenger — Kehoe — and to do it with a messy round of verbal buckshot.

Mon candidate, you can't do things like that in politics and not expect them to catch up to you. Several years later when Kehoe had replaced Hartley on the council, she would exact her revenge by supporting my Republican opponent, Ron Roberts, in our matchup for the county board of supervisors. Her opposition helped cost me that election because it whittled off about 10 percent of the gay vote.

I should say here that in that race, I think Kehoe would have sold me out even if I had never offended her. However, my bad-tempered behavior just made it that much easier for her.

The reason she probably would have sold me out is that to advance her own political agenda on the city council, Kehoe had thrown in her lot with Mayor Susan Golding and Ron Roberts. While these two Republicans had helped Kehoe get funding for her AIDS projects and thereby appease her gay constituencies, Kehoe had gone along with the Golding-Roberts Republican line, particularly on issues like growth and the environment. For all practical purposes, the Democrat Kehoe is a Republican except when it comes to gay politics.

Anyway, my conversation with Kehoe was as brief as it was unpleasant. Before I even opened my mouth, she said, "I don't care what you say to me now or ever, I'm not going to endorse you for Congress." When I asked her if we could at least talk about it, her reply was equally succinct: "We have nothing to say to each other."
This time, I just smiled. My days of throwing tantrums were long behind me, and it was Kehoe who was practicing bad politics. There was no need for her to gratuitously alienate me. A simple “no” to my entreaties would have sufficed so long as it was accompanied by a smile and a believable excuse about how she had to get along with my opponent Bilbray to get federal funds for the people in her district.

The Speech
As I disengaged from Kehoe with a bad case of frostbite, “Hail to the Chief” started to boom over the loudspeakers. Clinton had finally arrived, and, in short order, the day’s program began. It was a program of sheer political brilliance — one that I have never, ever seen the likes of.

What the Clinton team had done was to co-opt every major Republican law-enforcement official in the county, all of whom were now on the dais with him solemnly kissing his keister — from Police Chief Jerry Sanders and Sheriff Bill Kolender to District Attorney Paul Pfingst. Indeed, each of these top cops tried to outdo the last in praising Alan Bersin and the president for embracing the toughest anti-immigration policies of any administration in the last 20 years. Take that, Bob Dole!

In truth, all of these Republicans campaigning for Clinton should have done what Mayor Susan Golding did that day — found other pressing engagements. But the presidential seal is a powerful magnet and, I suppose, each of these guys wanted to see himself on the tube that night with the Prez.

Walking away from that masterpiece of campaigning, I was feeling good about my chances of beating Brian Bilbray. Not only was I now sure that Clinton was going to whip Bob Dole pretty good and give me some nice coattails to cling to, I also got the feeling that the White House would get behind my candidacy — a premonition that turned out to be correct.

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The Uncoordinated Campaign

One for all. All for one.

Motto of the Three Musketeers

If I were to win my congressional race, a lot of things would have to go right. One of them would be the successful execution of the Democratic Party’s “Triple Overlap Strategy.”

Within every one of the 40 state senate districts in California, there are two state assembly districts. Typically overlapping this senate and assembly turf is a single congressional district. Hence, for any given piece of political soil in California, there is a “triple overlap” of senate, assembly, and congressional seats.

The turf where my congressional race would be contested was not just any triple overlap, however. Rather, it was one of a small handful of such clusters statewide where the balance of power would be determined not only in Congress but also in the state senate and state assembly.

In the state senate race, the Democratic Party badly needed Assemblywoman Dede Alpert to move up to the senate seat being vacated by the retiring Lucy Killea. Otherwise, the senate might fall into Republican hands — as the state assembly had done in the last election.

To take back that state assembly, the Democratic Party had to help incumbent Susan Davis hang on to her assembly seat. It also had to help the relatively unknown Howard Wayne capture the open assembly seat being vacated by Alpert.

Given the overwhelming strategic importance of this triple overlap, it is hardly surprising that the California Democratic Party wanted to focus its entire San Diego campaign on the territory encompassing
my 49th Congressional District. What may be surprising, however, is that the party coordinated that campaign so poorly — unless you’re familiar with the Will Rogers bon mot: “I don’t belong to any organized party, I’m a Democrat.”

The Three Musketeers

The original plan was to have all four candidates — Dede Alpert, Susan Davis, Howard Wayne, and yours truly — pool resources to hire a Triple Overlap coordinator. This person would run the effort under the auspices of the Clinton-Gore coordinated campaign.

I was excited about the idea because the woman on tap to run the Triple Overlap was Gayle Jaskalainen. Not only was she a strong ally of mine and a good friend of my campaign manager’s, she was also one very good organizer.

More broadly, such campaign solidarity among the four candidates would mean an efficient and far less expensive canvassing and voter-contact effort. A coordinated ground operation would, in turn, save my campaign a lot of money and thereby liberate that money so it could be spent on more TV ads.

Unfortunately, just as the deal was about to be consummated, it crashed and burned. There were two reasons. The first is that the women of the Triple Overlap — Dede Alpert and Susan Davis — bailed on the men, Howard Wayne and yours truly. The second reason had to do with Congressman Bob Filner. Let’s start with my “women problem” first.

In her early 50s, the gray-blond Dede Alpert has a reputation for being one of the nicest, smartest, most congenial, and most effective legislators in Sacramento, and, after you get to know San Diego’s “Miss Manners,” it’s hard not to agree with that assessment. However, because of her popularity, Alpert looked to be a lock for winning the senate seat she was pursuing. That meant from her point of view, there was nothing to be gained from throwing her lot in with either me, who carried a lot of negative baggage, or the virtually unknown Howard Wayne, who would have trouble carrying his own financial weight in a coordinated campaign.

This same risk-averse attitude was shared by incumbent Susan Davis; and of the two assembly races — Howard Wayne’s and hers — Davis’s race was by far the easier. This was because while Davis had direct access to the cesspool that is Sacramento lobbying money, Howard Wayne didn’t have a financial pot to piss in. In fact, Howard had gone into considerable personal debt just to win his primary election, and he was flat broke.

So early on, the two Musketeers — Alpert and Davis — rowed off in their lifeboats, leaving Howard Wayne and me to sink or swim. At the same time, the third Musketeer, Congressman Bob Filner, effectively ran his selfish sword straight through the heart of the Triple Overlap. So much for “One for all, and all for one.”
Filner’s Coup D’etat

Bob Filner was opposed to the Triple Overlap Strategy, because it meant that all the resources of the Democratic Party’s efforts would be focused away from his congressional district. Never mind that Filner was going to win his race by 20 points, running as he was in a heavily Democratic district against a refugee from the lunatic fringe. Nope, better that Bob make really sure of his very sure thing.

Well, I don’t know just how Filner did what he allegedly did. What I heard is that he first called his buddy Shelia Lawrence — widow of the late Larry Lawrence — who, in turn, called her buddy John Emerson in the White House who, in turn, called Tom Umberg at the California Clinton-Gore office. But if and however Filner did it, one day my friend Gayle Jaskalainen was in as the director of the coordinated campaign and the next day she was out — replaced by Filner’s former chief of staff, Vince Hall.

With this coup d’état, the message was clear. Vince might look as if he would focus on the Triple Overlap, but you knew that Filner would get more than his share of resources. And that’s what happened. But I’ll save Vince Hall’s best work for a later chapter. For now, let’s do a day in the life of a candidate running for Congress.

Long Day’s Journey into Night

You like me. You really like me!  
SALLY FIELD AT THE OSCARS

If after reaching this point in my cautionary tale you still harbor illusions that being a candidate for Congress is either (a) glamorous or (b) a barrel of laughs, you may want to skip this chapter — at least if you want to maintain those illusions. Because by April, I had settled into a monotonous and tedious daily routine that involved two things: raising money and walking precincts. Here’s a day in the life.

Up at 5:00 a.m., a hot shower, a cold breakfast, then on the phone by 6:00 a.m. calling PAC directors in Washington, D.C., for money. It’s a great advantage to run for Congress from California when it comes to PAC fund-raising. This is because you can make all your calls to the East Coast during their prime time — 9:00 a.m. to noon — before the business day even begins in sunny Southern California.

As for which PACs I would call, I’d start with the first letter of the alphabet — AFL-CIO, AFSCME, and Air Line Pilots Association — and work my way to the end — United Transportation Workers, Voters for Choice, and Zond. It would take about a week to work through the several hundred PACs on my list, and then I’d start over again. Through the course of the campaign, I must have called every PAC in D.C. at least ten times begging for bucks, and if I’m known for anything back there, it is for being persistent.

At 9:00 a.m. — noon and power-lunch time in D.C. — I’d jog around the fish pond next to my condo. Thirty minutes later, I’d be back on the phones. At that point, I would cycle through all the state and local contacts for the PACs I had been talking with in D.C.

For example, if I had spoken with George Landers of the United
Food and Commercial Workers in D.C. that morning, I'd touch base with John Perez up in Buena Park and Norm Bell locally. Or if Chris Tully at the Amalgamated Transit Union told me he still hadn't heard from their local union requesting funds, I'd call and badger Ted Closter of the local bus drivers' union to send them the requisite memo.

Once these calls were through, I'd shift gears to my local-donor base fund-raising. I'd call people at work for whom I didn't have home phone numbers. For some reason, there was a high preponderance of lawyers on this list, and as a group, I can't think of any folks who are harder to get money from, except, of course, physicians, who are tighter than a Beverly Hills face-lift when it comes to political donations.

By lunchtime, after five hours on the phone, somebody from my staff would mercifully come over to my house to discuss the campaign. Most of the time it would be my local fund-raiser Kerry Martin.

Kerry was a dream hire, about as efficient as they get, and she did a heck of a job. My only problem with Kerry was making sure she didn't get discouraged at all the refusals we were getting when she asked for money. I tried to explain that this was typical, and if we had as high a success rate as even the 30 percent she was hitting, we were doing well. But I knew it was tough on her because she hadn't done it before.

Besides Kerry, Dale Kelly Bankhead, my campaign manager, might come over and update me on the latest campaign news. At other times, my field coordinator Tom Husted would brief me on our progress in the trenches.

Unfortunately, my meetings with Tom were always depressing because we were continually falling short of our voter-contact goals. This was partly because Tom couldn't get enough volunteers. However, it was mostly because we didn't have enough money to hire the five full-time walkers we had originally budgeted for.

Once 1:00 p.m. rolled around, whoever was visiting had to leave. It was time for me to get back on the fund-raising phone, and this I would do until 4:00 p.m., when I would go precinct walking. I'd knock on doors until dark, grab a quick dinner, then get back on the phone until 9:00 p.m. to call prospective donors for whom I had home phone numbers.

I should add that with every call I made beginning at 6:00 a.m. and ending at 9:00 p.m., I encoded the response in my computer.

Long Day's Journey Into Night

This was essential because promptly at 9:30 p.m., I would begin generating follow-up letters off my laser printer to everyone I had talked with that day. These personalized letters summarized our discussion and, if there had been a promise of funds, I would also include a remit envelope. At 10:30 p.m., Tom or Kerry would come by to pick up the letters and get them into the mailbox by midnight to ensure not only my prompt response but the fastest possible return of any promised donations.

My final act of the day was to take a long, hot shower and then settle onto my couch to watch an episode of Home Improvement that I had taped earlier. That show cracks me up, and the laughter it generated provided a nice transition from the rigors of campaigning to the deep recesses of a far too brief sleep. Because, like Bill Murray in the movie Groundhog Day, I would have to get up and do exactly the same thing the next day and the next and the next. Arrgh!

By the Rivers of Babylon

Of this process, precinct walking was the only time I halfway enjoyed myself, but in this campaign, even precinct walking was not as fun as it might have been. Before I tell you why, let me explain a little bit about the art and science of knocking on doors.

I got my start in precinct walking in 1991 on the campaign of City Councilman George Stevens. George is a pure form. Part Huey Newton, part George Jefferson, and all Baptist preacher, George gets away with stuff in San Diego that nobody else could.

I could use a thousand more words to describe George, but in his case, one cartoon does it best. You might have seen it, by J.D. Crowe — it's a caricature of Preacher George pointing down at

Reverend George Stevens
a big hole in the road with a caption something like “Lord, heal that pothole!” That pretty much summarizes the often bizarre fusion of church and state that epitomizes the Honorable Councilman Stevens.

Anyway, George is the only black on the city council, and he got there by defeating another black named Wes Pratt. How did I, a white guy fighting to keep the suburbs safe from traffic congestion, get involved in a political race about gang-bangers and urban blight? Simple. Pratt left his own neighborhood to come mess with mine.

What Pratt did was provide the swing vote on two major highway-construction projects for the widest freeway in the Western Hemisphere — a full 24 lanes. This monstrosity would not only be near some of the most sensitive environmental areas left in the city, it would also be less than two miles from my house. So right after the vote, I called up Brother George and said I wanted to help him, and here's what I did.

After surveying the district, I concluded that its swing voters were in the mostly white enclave of Oak Park. The way I figured it, the best thing for George to do would be to battle Wes for votes in black, brown, and Asian neighborhoods like Southeast and Webster and Paradise Hills and leave me, the white guy, to take care of Oak Park. And for once in his life, George took the advice of somebody other than the Great Almighty and let me do it.

It was a campaign within a campaign, run — or more precisely walked — by me and a guy who would later be field director for my mayor's race, Peter Andersen. In a four-month period, I walked and made calls to every precinct in Oak Park at least three times, and Peter Andersen walked about half of them at least once with his young daughter Kirsten in tow. Kids — now that's a nice touch.

And I just knew that George was going to kick Pratt's butt the Thursday before the election when ole Wes himself came out from behind his desk and his bag of cheeseburgers to stalk me one afternoon in Oak Park. He got right behind me on my walking schedule and, with sweat eating holes in the armpits of his fancy dress shirt, he went to every door I did to try and undo what his polling was now telling him was some very significant damage. I loved it because it was not only a compliment to my effort but it was stupid. Wes was not the kind of person that most of the white folk in Oak Park wanted to see banging on their front door — even if he was wearing a tie.

When the dust cleared, George had carried Oak Park by a solid two-to-one margin and by several hundred more votes than the 573 that he won the district by.

**Operation Soccer Mom**

My second foray into precinct walking was on my own behalf. It involved my 1993 run for the First District City Council seat. I knew going into the race that my opponent would be retired submarine commander and development-industry lobbyist Harry Mathis. His voter base would be University City, where he had been a permanent fixture on the area planning committee. My base would be the Carmel Valley—Del Mar area — a hotbed of environmentalism. That meant that if I were to win the race, I'd have to win and win big in the land of soccer moms and Little League, suburban Rancho Peñasquitos.

It was this sprawling turf that I set about precinct walking right after New Year's Day in 1993, just a few short months after my mayoral defeat. Between January and the September primary election, I managed to knock on almost every voter's door, and it was a brilliant strategy, if I do say so myself.

In fact, I would have won that council race if the opposition hadn't come up with an even more brilliant strategy. This was to enter a third, spoiler, candidate to sap my strength on my home turf and force me into a runoff. The hapless dupe that Susan Golding's political consultant Tom Shepard recruited at her frantic behest was Dee Rich, who lived a little more than a mile from me. You'd think that a woman with an IQ over 130 would have the good sense to know when she was being had, but dear, dumb Dee fell for the oldest trick in the political book — "You can win."
When I heard Dee was being recruited, I knew I would lose if she got into the race. So I went and explained to her why it was impossible for her to win: Both Mathis and I had strong constituency bases that would guarantee us at least 40 percent of the vote each, and that didn’t leave her with enough left over to even survive the primary. I also told her that the only impact she would have on the race would be to force me into a runoff with Mathis, that the runoff would allow him to raise several hundred thousand more dollars to beat me into submission, and in all likelihood I would lose. That, in turn, would mean that the precious environmental lands just to the east of our neighborhood would be turned into more condo farms.

Unfortunately, Dee Rich couldn’t see any of it. After all, it is a heady thing to have the mayor call you and tell you that she “needs you on the council.” And, of course, both Tom Shepard and Larry Remer came in and told her exactly how she, a woman, could triumph over one punk in pinstripes (Mathis) and one just plain punk (yours truly). The icing on this wooing cake was “The Call.” It came from Councilwoman Valerie Stallings, who gushed how wonderful it would be to have an environmentalist like Dee as a colleague.

Stallings’s involvement was the only one that really made me mad. After all, Golding was just protecting her turf, and Shepard and Remer were just doing what they always try to do, which is to make money. But a few months earlier, Stallings had asked me to run; and what made Stallings’s stab in the back even more galling was that I was one of a handful of people who were directly responsible for her own election victory. Here’s the story:

**Tom Hayden Meets “Ban the Bruce”**

About a week before the 1991 primary election, incumbent Bruce Henderson, whom Stallings was challenging, publicly called me the “Tom Hayden of San Diego” at a city council meeting. Well, screw Bruce Henderson, I thought. So the next day, I called up 50 of my loyal financial supporters and raised enough money to help send a mailer to over 10,000 households. The mailer was from a committee called “Ban the Bruce,” and it had been formed to beat Henderson. However, it had been having difficulty raising funds, and I hadn’t had time to help because I was walking precincts for George Stevens.

Thanks to Gary Rotto’s efforts, it was a very effective mailer. It went out the weekend before the election, and it helped turn what was Henderson’s almost certain victory into his eventual defeat. There are two lessons in that race — one for Henderson and one for me.

For Henderson, it was that if he had kept his mouth shut, he would still be on the council or in some higher office. For me, it was that no good deed goes unpunished. Stallings not only refused to publicly support me for mayor but also played the pivotal role in the seduction of Dee Rich.

When Stallings got Dee Rich into the race, I should have gotten out, and I remember just how agonizing my decision was. I had put in all that work canvassing Peñasquitos, and it would all go for nothing if I bailed.

I also remember discussing the thing with Mike McKinnon, the owner of KUSI, where I was working part-time as a television commentator. Mike gave some of the best advice I’ve ever gotten. He told me to stick with doing the KUSI commentaries, that I was doing great TV work, that it was softening the
rough edges around my hard-guy image, and that if I wanted to run again for something, I should do it in a couple more years after all the wounds had healed. It was great advice, and, if you're reading this, Mike, I want to apologize for not taking it, because Mike was absolutely right — as was my assessment of Dee Rich's candidacy. In the September primary election, both Mathis and I got about 40 percent of the vote while Dee Rich finished a distant third — $50,000 poorer after dumping a bundle of her own money into the race.

What was most interesting about this primary election was how effective my eight months of precinct walking in Rancho Peñasquitos had been. I carried that community by an almost two-to-one margin — proof that if you bust your hump knocking on doors, it can pay off.

Alas, my big win in Rancho Peñasquitos was not to hold up in the runoff. As I had predicted, Mathis raised another big bundle of money for the general election, and he used virtually all of it to run a slick mail campaign targeted almost entirely at Peñasquitos; and when the ballots were counted again in November, Mathis had beaten me back in that community to dead even. I lost that race by a heartbreaking 800 votes.

They Don't Like Me, They Really Don't Like Me

Now, three years later, I found myself once again beating on doors, this time in swinging — as in swing district — Clairemont. Like Oak Park and Peñasquitos before it, Clairemont would be where the race would be won or lost.

So how do I describe Clairemont? How about Ozzie and Harriet with an attitude? How about Middle America gone to seed? It was not always this way.

Clairemont's best days were in the 1950s when San Diego's first true suburb was built. In those days of Ike and Elvis, the typical head of a Clairemont household was a young redhead with a blue collar and a wife and 2.5 kids drawing a nice paycheck from the nearby, booming General Dynamics defense plant. The beer was cold, the weather was warm, and life was good.

However, when the Berlin Wall came crashing down, so, too, did General Dynamics. Ten thousand high-paying jobs are a lot for any city to lose, and that loss hit Clairemont particularly hard.

Today, the young bucks of the 1950s who once roamed free in the hangars of GenDyne have gone gray, and many sit sullenly at home doing a slow burn because they can't find good work. Still others who invested well or retired before the unemployment curtain came down count their blessings while they polish their RVs. But many of these more fortunate ones still find themselves saddled with the financial responsibility of their grown children who were likewise caught in the unemployment lines — blue-collar detritus in an increasingly white-collar world.

In short, this was a community seething with anger, raked by uncertainty, and steeped in alienation, and its hostile terrain would prove impenetrable to me and my brand of politics. My problem was that I was perceived as an upscale yuppie, aging hippie, strong environmentalist, and smart-guy college professor. Ozzie and Harriet with an attitude couldn't relate to me — even if I wanted to protect their Social Security and Medicare from the ravages of the Gingrich revolution. And I knew after knocking on just a few doors early in the campaign that the people of Clairemont didn't like me. They really didn't like me. As far as I could tell, the people of Clairemont didn't like anybody in politics very much — especially Bill Clinton.

I'm not sure why so many people in Clairemont hate Clinton. Maybe it's because he's an upscale yuppie, aging hippie, and smart guy, too. Or maybe it's because, in this community plastered with American flags and American Legion decals, Clinton dodged the draft. Or maybe it's because he married an uppty woman and everyone thinks he has six mistresses on the side. Who knows?

What I do know is that the almost visceral hatred of Clinton throughout Clairemont confronted me with a Hobson's choice when it came to campaign strategy. To win the election, I had to wrap myself around Clinton tighter than Gennifer Flowers thighs. But every time I did that, a little bit more of Clairemont drifted into the Bilbray camp.

In the end, while my precinct-walking efforts in Oak Park and Rancho Peñasquitos were spectacular successes, the months that I would spend banging on doors in Clairemont would be my most spectacular failure. On Election Day, I would lose Ozzie and Harriet Land by an Alf Landon margin.
Frank You, Frank Me, 
Frank That Voter Behind the Tree

_He knows nothing; he thinks he knows everything — that clearly points to a political career._

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

The franking privilege is one of the most powerful weapons that an incumbent congressman can wield against a challenger. This is because the frank is, in essence, free printing and postage paid for by taxpayers. It allows a congressman to mail a virtual blizzard of campaign propaganda to voters under the very thinnest guise of public information. This makes the frank public financing for congressional campaigns — but only for incumbents.

So it was that my opponent Brian Bilbray began to use the frank with increasing regularity after the March primary election. Week after week, month after month, in letter after letter, Bilbray’s consultants used the frank to lay down what would become the basic themes of his campaign.

The overarching theme was that Bilbray was the “independent congressman”: He was the guy who had stood up for San Diego to bring home the bacon. He was the guy who had stood up to the tax-and-spend profligacy of the Democrats and the Washington establishment. He was even the guy who would get in Newt’s face when Gingrich and Bilbray’s fellow Republicans went over the line.

This last claim was, of course, the finest grade of warm, moist bull dung, because during his first term in office, Bilbray had been about as independent as a Stepford wife. In fact, Bilbray had voted with the Gingrich agenda over 90 percent of the time, and the few times Bilbray would vote against Newt were typically when Newt winked and looked the other way.

Because of this unwavering loyalty, Bilbray was listed on the In-
nernet in the Top Ten list of “Newt Toadies.” Nonetheless, among the Mindless Minority — that cluster of poorly informed voters who ultimately determine elections — Bilbray's independence theme would strike a resonant cord.

Interwoven into this independence theme were the key hot-button issues of Southern California politics, from crime and drugs to illegal immigration and affirmative action. In his franked mail, Bilbray played these issues with all the intensity of a Bach fugue.

At the same time, Bilbray's consultants skillfully used the frank to inoculate Bilbray against what would be my inevitable attacks on him for his anti-environmentalist and anti-choice voting record. It was, in fact, a horrible voting record — shutting down the EPA, denying abortion rights to women in the military, destroying wetlands, and on and on. However, reading Bilbray's little franked epistles, you would have thought that he was a card-carrying member of the Sierra Club and NOW.

For my campaign team, these franked letters were mostly a source of amusement. My press secretary Lisa Ross, in particular, took great pleasure in finding and ridiculing the many errors of spelling and grammar in them.

However, for me, Bilbray's franking frenzy was like a Chinese water torture. Any one letter didn't do much damage. In fact, our polling showed that over the many months that these letters were sent out, Bilbray's reelect number — his overall measure of popularity — didn't move at all from an anemic 35 percent. Nonetheless, I felt that these franked letters would have a powerful cumulative effect that ultimately would be devastating. This is because through repetition — the most important principle of effective voter contact — these letters began to lay a firm foundation for what would eventually be a million-dollar rush of slick TV commercials and glossy mail.

Lucky Is As Lucky Does
So who is this guy I was running against, Brian Bilbray? Let me start by saying that, yes, there are many men and women of intelligence and integrity who are in Congress. On the Democratic side, they include Nancy Pelosi, Vic Fazio, Steny Hoyer, and Howard Berman, just to name a few.

However, it is clear that Brian Bilbray is not cut from that same fine cloth. Put simply, Bilbray is the kind of person who has no business being in Congress, and the reason is that the job demands more than a person who is an uneducated and often unintelligible self-professed “redneck” with a chronic case of demagoguery.

But Bilbray is, if nothing else, one of the luckiest of men. He's the day laborer who hit the Super Lotto jackpot and is now farting through silk, the horny teenager who caught Madonna on a lonely night and got the screw of his life, or the hack golfer who hits a hole in one on a monstrously long par three.

My guess is that if God were to spin the Wheel of Life a million times to determine the course of Bilbray's life, most of the time it would come up something like used-car salesman, repo man, drug smuggler, surf rat, Hell's Angel, or Hitler youth. Only once in that many times would the wheel stop at congressman, and right then and there, God would check to see if Lucifer had been messing with it.

But let me stop here for a minute and make something clear. I'm not trashing Bilbray because he beat me, although from this rant, that might be a reasonable conclusion to draw. Nope, I'm simply not that kind of vengeful guy, and let me prove it to you.

There are three other people who have beaten me: professional politician Susan Golding for mayor, retired Submarine Commander Harry Mathis for city council, and architect Ron Roberts for supervisor. Of my four opponents, Bilbray is the only one — and by a wide margin — who doesn't have the intellectual horsepower to do the job for which he was elected.

Mathis and Roberts are decent and intelligent men who simply have a different view of the world than I do. They were worthy opponents, and they are now doing the jobs that I had sought with at least some modicum of skill. Golding, too, is doing a tolerable, if uninspired, job as mayor, and the only thing that scares me about her is not a lack of intelligence but rather her seeming lack of any moral compass or ethics.

Of my four opponents, Bilbray is in a class by himself. He was truly one of the bumbling wackos of the 1994 Republican freshman class, right up there with Nearer to God Than Thee Andrea Seastrand and Ruby Ridge pinup girl Helen Chenoweth.

The funny thing is that Bilbray and I have a remarkable physical resemblance. We're about the same age (in our late 40s). We have
similar builds — he’s a little more wiry and I’m a little more muscular, but we both look more like athletes than accountants or politicians. We even have the same color hair — a blondish, sun-bleached, surferesque brown.

In fact, when I’d walk through neighborhoods knocking on doors during the campaign, people would often mistake me for Bilbray. This was really a drag because much of the benefit of walking precincts comes not from the actual contact with a voter at the door but rather from being seen by all the other people in the neighborhood as you do it. This type of door-to-door campaigning shows you care, but to the extent that people mistook me for Bilbray, I was basically campaigning on his behalf.

Of course, this physical resemblance cut both ways because people would also mistake him for me. Bilbray likes to tell a story about how some irate guy once chased him down the street shouting and waving a baseball bat yelling, “I’m going to get you, Navarro.” I think this actually happened because, although no such fate has ever befallen me out in the trenches, I do inspire that type of response in certain people — usually pot-bellied Republican men in soiled undershirts on the far side of 60 with a flatulence problem.

The Bilbray Bio

But let’s cut to the chase: Brian Bilbray was born in Coronado and raised in Imperial Beach. His father was a Navy man and his mother an Australian war bride — a small irony given Bilbray’s anti-immigration positions.

Imperial Beach, or I.B., was, during Bilbray’s formative years, so wild and woolly that the mere mention of its name conjured up images of bikers and dopers and drug smuggling. I mention this because one of the greatest frustrations of our campaign was the failure to verify some of the juiciest rumors that have ever been circulated about a politician.

My press secretary Lisa Ross and I talked to a number of people in I.B. who had known Bilbray in his youth. Unfortunately, none of our sources would go public, and it was impossible to verify any tantalizing tidbits. The closest anybody has gotten to using any such information was in Bilbray’s first campaign for Imperial Beach City Council when his detractors brought up Bilbray’s penchant for riding motor-cycles as a way of tarring him with the Hell’s Angels brush.

What we could confirm about Bilbray’s youth is that he had trouble in school because of a reading disability and that he dropped out of junior college to ride a motorcycle around Europe. Perhaps it was during one of his motorized meditations on the Autobahn that Bilbray had his political epiphany. He would become a politician — a perfect profession for someone who, to paraphrase George Bernard Shaw, “knows nothing but thinks he knows everything.”

And give Bilbray credit for getting out of the starting blocks with lightning speed. At the tender age of 25, after working a few years as a lifeguard, Bilbray was elected to the Imperial Beach City Council. A mere two years later, in 1978, he was elected as the youngest mayor of any of the almost 20 cities in San Diego’s sprawling county.

To understand what happened next in his career, you have to know a bit about Imperial Beach. I.B.’s claim to fame is that, for decades, it has been the unwilling toilet bowl for Tijuana. Because of the prevailing ocean currents, every time Tijuana has a major sewage spill — this happens about as often as cabbies in New York exhibit their middle finger — Mexico’s crap winds up on the shores of I.B. And every time this happens, I.B. has to close its beaches to surfing and swimming, enraging surfers like Bilbray.

So it was that in 1980 to vent his rage, Bilbray experienced the defining moment of his political career. After calling up all the TV stations to get their cameras down to the border, Bilbray “spontaneously” hopped up on a bulldozer and tried to seal off the Tijuana River and its fetid flow of Mexican sewage by bulldozing mud into the river’s mouth.

It was a great TV moment, and to the cheering people and surfers of San Diego — many of them literally sick from Mexico’s excrement — this singular act of defiance had about the same impact as that little tea party had had on the consciousness of Bostonians two hundred years before. Overnight, Bilbray was a celebrity, and within a few years, the fame and notoriety of this incident allowed him to leap up and over a well-funded but uncharismatic incumbent onto the next rung of the political ladder. That was the county board of supervisors — the highest local office in the county other than San Diego mayor.

On the board, Bilbray quietly bided his time, serving for over a decade. It was an undistinguished tenure, during which he mostly
kept his head down and assiduously courted San Diego’s inner circle of power brokers and big developers. For a guy known for making and riding waves, this seemed out of character, but what Bilbray was doing, quite consciously, was building up a financial base and name identification to capture the prize he had always aimed for and which one of his cousins had already won — a seat in Congress. (Ironically, Nevada Congressman and Democrat Jim Bilbray was swept out of Congress in 1994 by the same Gingrich tide that swept in Brian Bilbray.)

In 1994, Bilbray took the plunge, and it was perfect timing. Freshman Democrat Lynn Schenk had gotten on the wrong side of voters by voting for Bill Clinton’s 1993 tax package, and the patrician Schenk had exacerbated the situation in the plebeian, blue-collar swing areas of the district by brushing off her vote in a let-them-eat-cake manner.

Moreover, the street-fighter Bilbray was Schenk’s worst nightmare as an opponent because his campaign strength — grassroots politicking — perfectly mirrored Schenk’s greatest weakness. So while Schenk was pined down in Washington in legislative session and was reluctant to knock on doors even when she visited the district on weekends, Bilbray and a small army of supporters plastered every single neighborhood with yard signs and campaign literature.

At the same time, Bilbray’s peasant-with-a-pitchfork message was devastating in the Year of the Newt: while he portrayed Schenk as the consummate politician who had sold her soul to the reviled Clintonites and Washington establishment, Bilbray vamped as the citizen activist and independent outsider. This was all the more ironic because it was Bilbray who had been the career politician for almost 20 years while Schenk had been in elected office for a mere 24 months.

By the time Election Day rolled around, Schenk was history and Bilbray was off to Washington vowing to make some.

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Freedom of the Press
Belongs to the One Who Owns It

The most truthful part of a newspaper is the advertisements.
THOMAS JEFFERSON

It wasn’t just the franking privilege and taxpayer money that Brian Bilbray was using to press his advantage against me in the early stages of our campaign. He had in his corner two of the most powerful media outlets in town: the right-wing San Diego Union-Tribune and the ultra-right-wing Roger Hedgecock radio talk show.

Let’s start with the newsprint side of this media equation — we’ll get to talk radio in the next chapter. And let me start by saying that the next time you pick up your local newspaper, remember that you are holding in your ink-smudged hands the intellectual equivalent of an Uzi. Should you ever choose to run for office, that newspaper can, at the whim of its publisher, assassinate your character as quickly as a teenage rebel in Somalia can torch a village.

The enormous political power of often-arrogant newspaper publishers has always been a problem in American democracy — going back to the war-mongering mischief of William Randolph Hearst and the days of yellow journalism. Today we have reached a more subtle and arguably more troublesome point in our nation’s journalistic history. This is because of the sharp decline of competition and the collateral rise of the kingmaker monopoly newspaper in local newspaper markets.

The emergence of the Internet as an alternative method of disseminating news coupled with a steep rise in the cost of newsprint have surely contributed to the death of the multipaper town. However, the bigger force driving this trend is television: most Americans prefer getting their news in bite-size chunks from the little screen
than from large servings of the written word.
Of course, this might not be so bad for democracy if local TV stations actually covered local politics. However, many stations do not. This is because the consensus within the TV industry is that viewers would rather watch a test pattern or the Home Shopping Network than stories about local politics. As a result, local newspapers have become the primary vehicle for local political news, and that is where the problem begins.

In fact — as I have so painfully learned — there are a hundred different ways that a hostile newspaper can beat you in a political campaign. The obvious way is to inundate voters with puff pieces about your opponent and hit pieces on you. More subtle tactics include favored access to the op-ed page, the use of misleading headlines, and, my favorite, using flattering, airbrushed photos of the paper’s friends and using photos of the paper’s foes that look like they came off a driver’s license or out of a police lineup. Let me show you how this worked with the San Diego Union-Tribune in my congressional race.

A Junta’s Jackhammer Efficiency
The San Diego Union-Tribune is one of the largest local papers in America; and for all practical purposes, it is now the only major newspaper in San Diego. This is because in 1992, after years of losing money, its major competitor, the Los Angeles Times closed its San Diego County edition and beat a retreat back north up the freeway.

The U-T, as we call it here in America’s Finest, got its start as an avowedly Republican newspaper back in the early 1900s as part of the Copley News chain. In those good old days of yellow journalism, it was common practice for newspapers to pick a political party and then use their pages to advocate (dare I say “pimp”) for the party’s positions. At least with the U-T, not much has changed in lo these many years.

The paper is run by a junta of exiles from the deposed Nixon regime, most notably Nixon’s former aides Herb Klein and Gerald Warren (Warren is now retired). These gentlemen have run the paper under the same dark, sour cloud of Nixonian paranoia that once permeated the White House like sulfuryl fluoride under a termiting tent.

The paper is owned by the reclusive Helen Copley, a former secretary to Jim Copley, owner and publisher of the paper. When Jim’s wife died, Helen wound up marrying the boss. Then, when Jim himself wound up on the obituary page, Helen inherited the whole shebang.

Under Jim Copley, the U-T was staunchly conservative and rabidly Republican, and since Jim’s death over a decade ago, Helen, with the help of Klein and Warren, has carried on that tradition with jackhammer efficiency. It is an eclectic opinion that combines an ultraconservative ideology with small-town boosterism and financial self-interest.

On the ideological front, the paper is yellow-doggedly Republican in its political endorsements. No candidate seems too right wing to get the paper’s blessing, and the only Democrats likely to get endorsed are unbeatable incumbents who publicly recant their liberalism.

On the boosterism front, the paper will regularly violate its putatively fiscally conservative principles to support all manner of ludicrous pork-barrel projects — a $214 million convention-center expansion, a $500 million bay-to-bay link, a $245.7 million trolley extension, a $154.8 million downtown basketball arena, a $78 million stadium expansion, and on and on.

Note, however, that the construction of these lavish baubles invariably comes at the expense of the more mundane but essential functions of local government, such as filling the lunar-crater-size potholes that pockmark city streets, fixing the city’s dilapidated sewer system that regularly spews raw sewage into Mission Bay, or putting more cops on graffiti-lined streets that have the lowest ratio of cops to people of any major city in the country.

If there is one incident for me that best summarizes the closed-minded, tight sphinctered attitude at the U-T, it is this one: When I
was running for mayor in 1992, I went to visit the editorial board for its obligatory endorsement meeting. Even though Colonel Qaddafi will win the Nobel Peace Prize before I will ever get the U-T’s endorsement, I, like Nixon, believe in going to China — or, in this case, the U-T — if for no other reason than to maybe help thaw things out a bit.

Anyway, the aforementioned Gerald Warren was presiding at this meeting, and after several of his lieutenants threw a few hardballs at my head just to see how fast I could duck — abortion, guns, gays — Warren asked me my position on his pet issue. This was NAFTA, the North America Free Trade Agreement. I told him that, as an economist, I strongly supported free trade but reluctantly opposed NAFTA and began to explain my concern over low wages and environmental pollution. At that point, Warren appeared to turn down his hearing aid and then he left the room.

Ink by the Barrel

Now from the tone of this chapter, you might have guessed that the U-T is not my favorite paper and, perhaps even more to the point, that I am not their favorite political candidate. In this regard, the U-T’s antipathy toward me began back in my days of growth-management activism, and at least originally, it was nothing personal — just a bottom-line decision for the paper.

You see, the U-T earns even more money in advertising revenues from the development industry than it does from what I find to be the only truly revealing part of the paper — the lingerie ads. So my philosophy of slowing down the growth machine did not endear me to Helen Copley or the paper’s ruling free marketers.

In this regard, it’s probably useful to add that the U-T’s subscrip-

Freedom of the Press Belongs to the One Who Owns It

tion level has been basically stagnant for almost a decade. This, mind you, is in a county that has seen its population increase by more than 500,000 in the same period. Over the years, my suggestion to Helen Copley to solve this problem has been to improve the quality of her product, not add another million people to an already overcongested and heavily polluted land mass. Her suggestion to me, as least as it has been communicated through her paper, has been to mind my own business and stay out of politics. But lest I digress too much, let me show you how a kingmaker monopoly paper like the U-T goes about electing its friends and burying its foes.

For starters, the paper will shamelessly use its editorial page to cheerlead for Republicans and bludgeon Democrats. Of course, from an ethical point of view, the paper is well within its bounds to do so. After all, Helen Copley owns the paper, and she’s free to use its editorial pages to promote or bash anyone she wants.

Second, however — and here’s where the ethical problem begins — the U-T does not confine its editorial position to its editorial page. Rather, it lets that dark, dank opinion spill over onto its coverage of the straight news like black coffee seeping into a bone white carpet.

The U-T’s Drumbeat

So it was that as my congressional campaign began to pick up steam, the U-T began to provide Brian Bilbray with a steady drumbeat of favorable editorials, puff-piece feature articles, and twisted “straight” news articles reinforcing Bilbray’s campaign themes and messages.

One indignant and self-righteous editorial defended Bilbray against an alleged smear campaign by big labor. This editorial was clearly done preemptively and in all likelihood at the urging of Bilbray’s consultant. Its purpose was to help inoculate Bilbray against any future attacks by the AFL-CIO, which was known to be gearing up for its $32 million independent expenditure campaign.

As for the puff pieces, most of them were written by Stephen Green, a Washington-based correspondent for the Copley Press, and they read exactly as if they were written by Bilbray’s campaign consultants. These pieces again echoed many of the themes set forth in Bilbray’s franked mail and the paper’s editorials. In addition, Bilbray had ready access for his own ghostwritten articles to the paper’s op-ed page and he was frequently cited favorably in news stories.
This favorable blanket coverage by the *U-T* was an effective tactic because the paper's articles and editorials provided Bilbray with a citable source for, and third-party verification of, his campaign themes. Bilbray, in turn, would reproduce the articles and editorials and incorporate them into his campaign literature. And here's the broader point:

If you costed out all of the *U-T*'s propaganda on Bilbray's behalf over the course of the campaign, it was worth at least a couple hundred thousand dollars in free advertising. Put another way, Helen Copley was, in effect, providing Bilbray with an indirect, in-kind donation from the paper far in excess of the maximum direct contribution of $4000 that she and her son donated to Bilbray's campaign several days after I got into the race. Freedom of the press does indeed belong to the one who owns it.

**Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up to Me**

Now contrast this with the treatment my own campaign got from the paper. In a later chapter, I will tell you about how the *U-T* totally ignored the fact that the vice president of the most powerful nation in our galaxy came to San Diego specifically to help me fund-raise. Here's a smaller example, which, in some sense, makes the point even better than the Gore incident, because it shows you how, even at the smallest level of detail, the paper will try to screw its enemies.

The incident involved the most important swing community in my district, the neighborhood of Clairemont. Every year, this blue-collar bastion of family values and recreational vehicles has a street fair, and every election year politicians line up like chorus girls at Radio City to strut their stuff. This I dutifully did for about five hours in the broiling sun one Saturday while my opponent Brian Bilbray probably went surfing. In the *U-T* the next day, however, an article reported that Bilbray, along with a number of other candidates for state assembly and state senate, had booths at the festival, but our campaign — and the huge bannered booth that our volunteers had staffed — went unmentioned.

Which leads me to the cheapest trick the paper has ever pulled on me: it concerns the photo and accompanying caption the paper used to publicize my alleged failure to pay my student loan (more about that later). Under my picture, the caption read, "Hard-core defaulter" — no question mark, just a statement of fact.

Now here's one last trick I want to share with you about how a paper can manipulate an election, and that has to do with the letters-to-the-editor section. For those of you who still believe in the Easter Bunny and that the letters that appear in your local newspaper come from concerned citizens who really care, I've got troubling news.

At least in politics, most of the letters that get published on the letters-to-the-editor page originate in the campaign headquarters of the candidates. The campaign consultant usually writes them and the campaign manager gets some volunteer to sign the letter and off it goes in the mail. How the *U-T* screwed me here is that they would rarely, if ever, publish any of our letters.

**The Punch Line**

The broader point is that in many American cities, local political coverage is dominated by a monopoly newspaper that often does not share the same ideology or viewpoint of the majority of the readers and voters that it serves. Using its considerable power of the press, such a paper can unduly influence elections. This is all the more true if the newspaper and its editors are willing to so thoroughly blur the line between news and opinion that the two are indistinguishable.

In my view, this is one of the most untalked-about problems in American politics today. It is important, however, because the vast majority of our federal legislators bubble up from the muck of local politics, so if the selection process is biased against true representative government, it's going to yield a perverse result. If you don't believe me, look no farther than San Diego, which has some of the dumbest, knee-jerk, and far-right-wing congressmen in the nation —
from Duncan Hunter and Duke Cunningham to Ron Packard and, yes, Brian Bilbray.

The worst part is that I'm not sure that there is anything that can be done about this problem in the way of legal reforms within the constraints of the First Amendment. However, I am sure that there is much that can be done at the legislative level in another area of media abuse, that of talk radio — a subject to which we now turn. (By the way, if this were talk radio, you'd have to sit for the next three minutes through a barrage of commercials extolling the virtues of hemorrhoid medicines, gold investments, and penile enlargement before getting to the next chapter — so be grateful that you are reading a story.)

I Love Hate Radio

Bucket of wings, right wings only.  

**O**kay. A small confession here. Every time I tried to write this chapter, I got nauseous. It's got something to do with talk radio. I can't quite put my finger on it. Anyway, rather than keep throwing up on my computer (it makes the keys sticky), I've decided to take the easy way out. I'll just let you peruse a transcript of a typical *Roger Hedgecock Show*. First, however, a little background:

Like his right-wing radio peers G. Gordon Liddy and Oliver North, Hedgecock got his start in an ugly political scandal. After the briefest of reigns as mayor of San Diego, Hedgecock was forced to resign on charges relating to alleged campaign money laundering. Soon thereafter, he hooked up with KSBO, one of the local talk-radio stations, and thus began his early days of radio rage.

This was the 1980s, and at KSBO, Hedgecock did what he had done very well as an iconoclastic politician: rattle the Establishment's cage. To many San Diegans, these were Hedgecock's best years — years in which he performed an important public service in San Diego as the de facto outlet for alternative opinion.

However, all that changed with the coming of Rush Limbaugh. Hedgecock saw in Rush something he desperately yearned for — a national market for his show — and he quickly adopted Rush's antigovernment, liberal-thrashing, anti-feminist, environmental-wacko-bashing, gay-baiting rhetoric.

The irony of Hedgecock's conservative conversion was that in his political days, Hedgecock was a moderate Republican who supported the causes he now began bitterly and often all too bluntly lambasting—
from protecting the environment and affirmative action to promoting gay rights and the rights of immigrants.

Anyway, here's the transcript I promised. This transcript should give you at least a little taste of the reactionary crapola I had to put up with through most of my congressional race from the esteemed Mr. Hedgecock.

KSDO Transcript #KDV-343-13

ANNOUNCER
And now here's the Radio Mayor of San Diego, ROGERRRRRRR HEDGECOCKKKKKKK!

ROGER
Good afternoon, San Diego, and welcome to The Roger Hedgecock Show. Although this show is named after me, this is really your show, San Diego, so let's light up the phones. I want to hear what's on your mind, so just dial 1-900-ROGERISRIGHT. That's 1-900-ROGERISRIGHT.

And speaking of lighting things up, we've got a busy weekend planned for all you right-thinking people. On Friday night, we'll be doing our one-year anniversary "Light Up the Border" demonstration and guess what: the national news media is finally going to pay some attention to the drug dealers and car thieves crossing our border in the dead of night. That's right. CNN is going to be covering this one and it's going to be big.

But the fun won't stop there. On Saturday afternoon, we'll be crashing the Gay Pride Parade in Hillcrest with our Normal People's brigade. And crash that parade we must because, GET THIS! yesterday afternoon, some liberal, homo-loving judge slapped a restraining order on us. Says we can't march in Alice's parade. Well, I say so WHAT! We'll have our own damn parade a few streets over. So all you Normal People out there in Hedgecock land, bring your flags and Bibles and dysfunctional families, and we'll have a thumping good time! (pause) Now let's take our first call. It's Shirley in Rancho Bernardo.

SHIRLEY
Oh, Roger, I just want to thank you so much for your show. We here at the rest home wouldn't know what to do with our afternoons if it weren't for you.

ROGER
Thanks so much, Shirley.

SHIRLEY
And, Roger, I don't care what they say. I'm glad you were forced to resign as mayor. You know why, Roger?

ROGER
Why, Shirley?

SHIRLEY
Because you have more power now than you ever did as mayor. Those wimpy politicians downtown, Roger. You say "jump," they all shout "how high?"

ROGER
Uh, thanks Shir...

SHIRLEY
And I don't even care that you laundered that money...

ROGER
Thanks, Shirley! Let's go to Bob in Del Cerro.

BOB
Hey, Roge. I just wanted to get some directions to your "Light Up the Border" sortie this Friday night.

ROGER
Well, Bob, basically you get on the I-5 and head south. Then you stop where you see a large group of white people on one side of the border waving placards and an even larger group of brown people on the other side of the border carrying knapsacks and drugs.

BOB
Do I need to bring one of my guns? I can bring my M-16. Or my semi-automatic assault rifle with armor-piercing bullets. Or I've got a really neat German Luger from World War II.

ROGER
Bob...

BOB
And speaking of guns...

ROGER
BOB! Slow down. No guns, okay? We're peaceful demonstrators. We just stay in our Cadillacs and recreational vehicles and point our lights at the brown people. They'll get the point and CNN will get a good sound bite.

BOB
Well, how about if I just bring a little handgun...

ROGER
Thanks, Bob. Let's go to Laverne in La Jolla.

LAVERNE
Roger, I'm just appalled that some liberal judge won't let us Normal People march in the Gay Pride Parade. It's so damn un-American. And that Hillcrest is just a Sodom and Gomorrah.

ROGER
Laverne, don't you worry. We're going to have our Normal People's Parade anyway, and no one in Fagtown is going to stop us from celebrating our heterosexuality and the primacy of the American nuclear family.

LAVERNE
Oh good, Roger. What should I wear?

ROGER
Mink, Shirley. Wear your mink. That way we can piss off the
animal-rights activists at the same
time as the faggots. Now let’s go
to David in Hillcrest.

**DAVID**

Roger, you may remember me. I
was one of your strongest
supporters when you ran for mayor.

**ROGER**

Well, thanks, David...

**DAVID**

But it was the biggest mistake of
my life. You’re nothing but a
hypocrite. When you ran for
mayor, you came to our
community and said you
supported gay rights, but now you
want to destroy our parade. Don’t
you have any conscience?

**ROGER**

David, dear David. That was then —
I needed your votes. This is now — I’m
making a zillion dollars ridiculing you
and your miscreant friends. So blow me!
Dalton in Rancho Peñasquitos,
you’re on the air.

**DALTON**

You know, Roger, I used to go out
and play golf in the afternoons
before the prostate surgery. And
my wife and I had a lot of fun
traveling before she ran off with
my accountant and half my
pension. Then they repossessed
my RV because I couldn’t meet
the payments. So I’ve got no place
to go and nothing to do but listen
to you, Roger. (sound of man
breaking into tears) Oh, thanks so
much for being there.

**ROGER**

Thank you too, Dalton. I feel your
pain. Now, we’ll be right back
after some crass commercial
messages.

**FOUR-MINUTE
COMMERCIAL BREAK**

Hemorrhoid commercial. Hair
replacement commercial. Flat-tax
commercial paid for by the
Committee to Deify Steve Forbes.
Penile-enlargement commercial.

**BACK TO THE SHOW**

**ANNOUNCER**

And now, here’s the biggest dick
in San Diego, Roger Hedgecock.

**ROGER**

Welcome back, my acolytes. I’m
truly honored to tap into your
anger and resentments and
exploit them shamelessly. Now
let’s see who’s on Line 2. None
other than our esteemed mayor,
Susan Golding. Hello, Susan,
you’re on KSDO.

**SUSAN**

Roger, I just wanted to thank you
so very much for withdrawing
your opposition to the stadium
expansion when it really
mattered. You and I both know
how important that project is to
the economy of San Diego. And
even if the taxpayers are going to
have to cough up a few hundred
thousand dollars per game to
subsidize the Chargers ownership,
we know it’s worth it because it
means that the San Diego
Chargers will stay in our town.

**ROGER**

Thanks so much Susan. You
know I’m a fiscal conservative,
but when it comes to subsidizing
sports teams, I’m just an old-
 fashioned liberal. Let’s spend
whatever it takes to keep that
mediocre football team right here.

**SUSAN**

Amen, Roger.

**ROGER**

And I just want to make one thing
very clear: that libelous story in
that hippie rag was completely
false. Sure, the owners of this
radio station called me into their
office and told me that the
stadium was a really important
project and, yes, they made it very
clear that they didn’t want anyone
opposing it. But that had nothing
to do with my decision to
completely change my position
and support it.

**SUSAN**

Of course not, Roger. No one
could ever pressure you. You’re
the Radio Mayor of San Diego.
Bye, now.

**ROGER**

Oh, she’s such a wonderful mayor.
Now let’s go to Line 5 with the
director of Common Cause.

**COMMON CAUSE
DIRECTOR**

Mr. Hedgecock, our organization
has been monitoring your show,
and yesterday on this show, you
publicly endorsed Republican
Brian Bilbray for Congress. That’s
the 25th Republican candidate
you’ve endorsed this year.

**ROGER**

So what? This is my show!

**COMMON CAUSE
DIRECTOR**

So you know you’re not supposed
to use the public airwaves to give
hundreds of thousands of dollars
of free radio advertising to
partisan candidates. It’s against
the letter and spirit of the Fairness
Doctrine passed by Congress.

**ROGER**

Hey. Haven’t you noticed? The
Fairness Doctrine is dead.
Expired. Terminated. Ka-PUT! So
I can say whatever the hell I want
and Congress — especially THIS
Republican Congress — isn’t
gonna say boo.

**COMMON CAUSE
DIRECTOR**

But, Roger, don’t you think it’s
unfair for a radio station to use
the public airwaves to so blatantly
promote a political agenda.

**ROGER**

Boy, you liberals really grab my
gonads. Just what do you think
blow-dried commies like Dan Rather and Jim Lehrer have been doing for decades on TV if not spreading left-wing propaganda.

Huh?...HUH?

COMMON CAUSE DIRECTOR
That's highly inacc...

ROGER
So now we grab control of the radio airwaves and all you hypocrites can do is bitch, bitch, bitch. Well, up yours. You're outta here. Let's go to Thorne in Coronado.

THORNE
Dittos to King Roger from the little island with the big nuclear missiles.

ROGER
Muchos gracias, Thorne. What's up?

THORNE
Union tyranny is what's up.

ROGER
Tell me.

THORNE
Well, I'm in the plumbers' union and, sure, I make about 50 bucks an hour and get great medical and retirement benefits and a month a year in paid vacations, but do you know what my union has done to me lately?

ROGER
What has it done to you, Thorne?

THORNE
It and that damn AFL-CIO want to use my dues money to support DEMOCRATS in Congress. EXCUSE ME! All that party ever does is try to take my guns away and tax me to death to pay for black welfare mothers with no husbands and too many kids. I'm so sick of this shit — uh, sorry, can I say "shit" on the radio, Roger?

ROGER
On my show you can. Especially when it's used in the same sentence as unions and black welfare mothers. But now I've got to interrupt you because we've got a special guest that just phoned in. Let's go to Republican Congressman Brian Bilbray on Line 1. Welcome, Brian.

BRIAN BILBRAY
Roger, it's so great to be on your show. If it weren't for this show, I don't know how right-thinking San Diegans would ever get their news.

ROGER
Thanks for kissing my ass yet again, Brian. I love the way you do that. Now can you update us on the bill you are sponsoring in Congress to deny U.S. citizenship to pregnant Mexican women who illegally cross our border?

BRIAN BILBRAY
Of course, Roger. I think the bill just might pass this year, but right now I'm taking just a little heat from the liberal media.

ROGER
What's the problem?

BRIAN BILBRAY
Nothing really. Except you know that my mother was an Australian citizen who married a Navy guy, and she rushed over to America so I could be born a U.S. citizen just like those Mexican women are doing now.

ROGER
So?

BRIAN BILBRAY
So people are calling me a hypocrite every time I try to talk about the bill. I think my liberal opponent Peter Navarro is behind this.

ROGER
You mean the Tom Hayden of San Diego politics, that no-good carpetbagging limousine liberal? The guy who cheated on his student loans and made Susan Golding cry? The idiot who wants to let drug addicts have clean needles so they won't get AIDS?

BRIAN BILBRAY
That's the one, Roger—Peter "Hayden" Navarro.

ROGER
Well, Brian, I've said this before and I'll say it again. AIDS is just God's way of getting rid of the misfits in our society. It should be a warning to every homo in Hillcrest and every dope fiend shoving heroin up their veins.

BRIAN BILBRAY
Bless you, Roger. And thanks so much for blessing me yesterday with your endorsement.

ROGER
My pleasure. Just make sure you win so I don't look bad.

Okay. Another small confession. That wasn't a real transcript from the Hedgecock show. It was also a little over the top. But, hey, I don't feel nauseous anymore. And with my apologies to Jonathan Swift, maybe you get the picture.
Part 3

Al Gore's Love Handles and Other Tales from the Political Crypt
Al Gore’s Love Handles

If a tree falls in the woods and nobody hears it, does it still make a sound?

Zen koan

On July 2, Vice President Al Gore came to San Diego for my fund-raiser, I raised over $100,000, and I got to ride in a vice presidential motorcade. I also got to watch Al Gore inhale a chocolate cake. All in all, it was a grand day and evening, but, like many things in life, it did not come easy.

In fact, the Gore event almost didn't come off at all, because at one point my gracious host Chuck Davenport nearly pulled the plug. If you guessed that the problem was with Congressman Bob Filner — the Grand Canyon of assholes — you win a free, one-way trip with Bob to the Aleutian Islands.

As you may recall from an earlier chapter, in my initial negotiations with the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (D-Triple-C) I had warned the executive director Matt Angle and the chairman Congressman Martin Frost that Filner would try to crash my party and raise money I would otherwise get. And I had gotten Angle and Frost to promise as part of our deal that they wouldn't let it happen.

Well, so much for a Washington, D.C. promise. When Filner heard about the event, he threatened to storm to the Democratic caucus and publicly accuse Frost and the D-Triple-C of playing favorites with challengers over sitting members of Congress. It took all of about 15 seconds for Frost and Angle to cave in to Hemorrhoid Bob.

When Chuck Davenport found out that Filner was muscling in, he got so mad that he threatened to pull the plug on the deal. Note that this would have cost the Democratic Party over a hundred thousand
dollars in good, clean, Buddhist Temple-free donations. It would also have prevented me from raising another hundred thousand dollars myself. Crisis? What crisis?

Fortunately, after Chuck and I calmed down, we decided that to cancel an event with the vice president would be to shoot ourselves in the foot as well as to play into Filner's destructive little hands. So the show went on.

What's the Price of an Al Gore, Redux

Besides Hemorrhoid Bob, the only other unpleasant thing about the Davenport event was that the White House opted to do their fund-raising press event at Qualcomm Inc. rather than at Children's Hospital. Whenever the White House does an evening fund-raiser, they always schedule a press event during the day. This allows part of the bill for the travel to be charged to official business. It's also good politics because it gets a front-page story that provides additional spin for the campaign's issue du jour.

For months, I had lobbied the D-Triple-C and the White House to make that press event a visit by Gore to christen the new Healing Garden at Children's Hospital. I wanted to make this happen because Darlyn Davenport was president of the Children's Hospital Auxiliary. She had played a key role raising funds to build it, and it would have meant a lot to this fine woman who is one of the sweetest and kindest people I know.

In making the case for Children's Hospital, I told the White House schedulers that it would be great PR. It not only tapped into the theme of resentment against Gingrich for cutting funds to worthy places like Children's. It also fit in with the personal tragedy that Gore had experienced when his son was hit by a car and spent months in a hospital recovering.

Despite my entreaties, the White House nixed the Children's Hospital venue and instead chose a visit to the high-tech digital-phone manufacturer Qualcomm. Qualcomm is one of the most successful, most profitable, and fastest-growing companies in the country, and Gore's visit would fit in nicely with the Clinton-Gore campaign theme of hurtling down the information superhighway. Nonetheless, I believe in my gut the real reason Gore's staff chose Qualcomm over Children's Hospital was because of Qualcomm CEO Irwin Jacobs and his $20,000 check.

In soliciting a donation from Jacobs—one of San Diego's most well-heeled Democratic fat cats — the D-Triple-C's representative Noah Mamet had gotten subtle but nonetheless strong signals that if Jacobs were to lay down 20 grand to sit at the head table with Gore, it might be a good idea if the Veep dropped by his company for a visit. And don't get me wrong here. Irwin Jacobs is a class act with a great company and he, along with his trusty lieutenant Alan Viterbi, have been very kind to me in my political career.

But the entrepreneurial Jacobs also has a reputation for coming in at the eleventh hour and buying things up at bargain prices, and this is what I think he might have done with the Gore visit. And of course this irritated me to no end because here Chuck and Darlyn Davenport had ponied up five times what Jacobs was giving, but because the White House already had their money in the bank, Jacobs wound up with the press event.

Al Gore's Code Name

So it was that I began my Day of the Gore at Qualcomm's headquarters watching Al give a speech that got laughs and applause. This is because Gore has not only developed a fine sense of comic timing, he has acquired a stable of good Hollywood comedy writers. Some Gore gems that day: "If you use a strobe light, it looks like Al Gore is moving." "Al Gore is so boring his code name is Al Gore." "How can you tell Al Gore from his Secret Service agents? Al Gore is the stiff one."

When it was over, I went outside and met my press secretary Lisa Ross in front of Gore's stretch limo. Little Lisa had spent days insuring that I would ride to the Davenports' with the Veep — one of my perquisites for setting up the event — and it was supposed to be a done deal. Nobody told the Secret Service agents, however, and the
closest I got to the limo was a rough hand on my chest and some directions toward a waiting phalanx of vehicles. The next thing I knew I was being ushered into some cheesy Ford Aerostar minivan that would wind up playing the caboose in the motorcade.

I remember two things about the ride. The first was how badly I wanted to find the sadist with the twisted sense of humor who decided to put me in the same vehicle as Bob Filner. (At least Bob didn’t get to ride in the limo either.)

The second thing I remember was the same strange feeling in the pit of my stomach I had gotten reading the post-nuclear-war novel *On the Beach*. Riding in a vice presidential motorcade is one of the closest things to a post-apocalyptic experience you can have. This is because the Secret Service and local cops clear out every potential gun-toting human or bomb-carrying vehicle within miles of the route.

So riding down Interstate 5 in the motorcade, there were no cars or people in sight, and it was such an eerie feeling. I didn’t even have time to feel bad for the thousands of rush-hour commuters cooling their heels in gridlock so one politician could go raise money for another politician.

Circus Maximus

Arriving at the Davenport house, we found the mood festive. In fact, the place looked like a circus, right up to and including the circus tent. The tent was necessary because as big as the Davenport house is, it wasn’t configured in a way that any one room could accommodate a hundred guests at a sit-down dinner. Noah Mamen’s not-so-elegant solution to the problem had been to pitch a large tent over the driveway. It would be under this tent that dinner and a big speech would be served to the fat cats. Later in the evening, a second group of smaller, $250 donors would be joined by the Veep inside the house for a little speech.

But first things first, because the most important part of the evening was the photo line with the Veep. An eight-by-ten glossy with the president or vice president is one of the reasons big donors shell out big bucks to go to political events. So my wife and I dutifully stood in a long line snaking around the building to participate in the photo op. And when it was our turn, my wife and I got to feel Al Gore’s love handles.

It was an innocent occurrence. Nothing kinky at all. We stood on either side of him, Al Gore graciously put his arms gently on our shoulders, and my wife and I each gently put an arm around his waist. That’s when I discovered why Gore wears box-cut suits almost as wide as the circus tent we were about to have dinner in.

How big are Al Gore’s love handles? Big enough to lift the Queen Mary. Boy, was it easy for my wife and me to smile for the camera; we both almost burst out laughing after copping a feel of that gelatinous White House girth. We got a great picture of the three of us too, but the only way I’m going to vote in the year 2000 for Al instead of slim, trim Dick Gephardt is if Al hits the StairMaster, and hard.

Pass the Chocolate Cake

With the photo opportunity out of the way, it was time to trundle into the tent for some political bread and circus. The first rule of campaigning, *mon* candidate, is to never sit down at a fund-raising dinner. Your job is to go to every table and shake every hand and let these people know just how glad you are to see them. At this event, I not only dutifully did this but also had one of the camera guys follow me around to take cameos with people who had come at my personal invitation. This is so I could send the pictures to these smiling folks later when I tried to hit them up for more dough.

Perhaps the most surprising occurrence of the evening was the warm and funny speech that Bob Filner gave on my behalf. He started it with a pretty good joke that went something like this: “You know, Peter Navarro and I have a lot in common. He’s a professor and I’m a professor. He went to an Ivy League school, Harvard, and I went to an Ivy League school, Cornell. And, as you all know, we’re both humble, shy, and unassuming individuals.” *Mon* candidate, there is nothing better than self-deprecat-
ing humor to win an audience, and the fact that the joke brought down the house underscored that those people in the tent had gotten both our personalities right.

After this joke, Filner played another one, this time on me. With the sincerity of Mother Teresa ladling soup to a leper, he proceeded to talk about what a great congressman I would make and how “we” needed me to take back Congress from the evil Newt. Of course, the only reason Bob made this speech was that he wanted to show Gore that he was a team player. More importantly, he knew that not one comma in the speech would get beyond that tent, because the press — including my own press secretary — was not allowed inside.

After Gore’s speech, Gore and I slipped out of the tent and went over to the house to greet the small donors. Along the way, we passed through the kitchen where a long row of chocolate cakes sat deliciously, ready to be cut for the dessert course. As I continued on toward the living room where the throng was waiting, I somehow lost the Veep. That’s when, doubling back to the kitchen to find him, I watched, my mouth agape, as an aide handed him a whole cake on a plate. (Isn’t that what aides are for?)

The Veep grabbed the entire gooey mass in his bare hands and simply inhaled it. He didn’t quite get it all into his mouth, however, and crumbs and frosting oozed from his lips. I cracked up. It was about the funniest thing I’d ever seen. (It also put his love handles in clearer focus.) But so as not to embarrass him or myself, I took my shorties into the hall and let him have his moment of pleasure.

Al Gore’s Zen Koan
A few minutes later, I was looking out into the faces of about 100 smiling people crammed like sardines into Chuck and Darlyn’s living room, and I earnestly introduced the Veep. It was a nice moment in my political life even if I had to hear Gore give the same speech yet a third time in the last few hours. (The jokes were still funny.) There are only two other things to tell you about that fine night.

First, as I escorted the Veep away, my buddy Mike Portantino came up to me and begged for a photo with me and Gore for the cover of his magazine. This put me in a dilemma because Mike is the publisher of the Gay and Lesbian Times, and while I had no qualms about associating with Mike, I wasn’t sure if the White House did gay photo ops. But after looking into Mike’s pleading eyes, I said to myself “screw this,” grabbed the Veep by the elbow, and made it happen. Glad that I did too, because if politicians like Clinton and Gore are going to talk the gay-support talk, they should walk the walk.

Second, there is the matter of Al Gore’s Zen koan. It is this: “If a major political event happens in San Diego and the major newspaper in town doesn’t report it, do the voters know it really happened?”

Let me put this inscrutable koan more directly by way of making the point once again that the San Diego Union-Tribune can find more ways to screw you than Madonna. Here we have the vice president of the greatest nation in the world come to town to do a fund-raiser for congressional candidate Peter Navarro, and the paper of record in town does not report that fact in its coverage of the visit.

Oops. That’s not exactly correct. In fact, the precise truth is worse. The U-T did report that fact in the article on Gore’s visit in the North County edition of the paper. But in the city edition, which just happens to cover the turf within the 49th Congressional District, that little item in the article was excised. I’m sure the paper wasn’t trying to screw me. In fact, the paper’s ombudsman Gina Lubrano assured me and Lisa Ross that the omission was done purely for “space constraints.” Right.
Henry Waxman Smokes a Hookah

Money talks. Bullshit walks.

(Pope John
(Just kidding)

Two weeks after the Al Gore fund-raiser, I boarded a plane for Washington, D.C. I was taking off with over $100,000 in my campaign coffers and high hopes that the great success of the Gore event would open fund-raising doors for me on Capitol Hill. But before we get into that, let me first observe that the Democrats in Congress have no one to blame but themselves for their loss of the House to Newt Gingrich and the Republicans in 1994 and their failure to win it back. Here’s why.

The Republicans will always hold the fund-raising edge in congressional races — it’s getting close to two to one now. This is because the Republican Party is the party of the rich and big business, and its pockets are simply deeper. Nonetheless, the Democratic leadership in Congress could level this playing field, at least for the 30 or so candidates competing for key, targeted seats. The leadership could do this by mobilizing its members to act in a coordinated fashion. Just do the math with me.

Suppose every Democratic congressperson promised to contribute or raise $5000 for each candidate in the top 30 targeted seats — an easy pledge given their ready access to campaign dollars. Since there are over 200 Democratic congressmembers, this handful of people could thus ensure that every candidate had over a million dollars to get his or her message across.

Now add to this another half million in PAC money and whatever the candidate can scrounge up locally, and you wind up with each of the 30 candidates having between $1.5 and $2 million to run the
race. In most cases, this would be enough to win any close race, because while the Republicans always have the money advantage, they usually get mowed down by the Democrats at the grassroots.

Well, so much for the ideal. The ugly "real" is that trying to get every Democratic congressman to pitch into the collective pot is like trying to herd cats or get Major League Baseball owners to act in the best interests of the game. This is despite the fact that every single Democrat on Capitol Hill has a huge incentive to help poor schmucks like me get elected. Being in the Democratic majority means bigger offices, prestigious committee chairmanships, less difficulty raising funds from the PAC community, even more people smooching your keister, and a host of other perquisites of power. So what's the problem? Let me show you through the microcosm of my little campaign.

Money Talks

After a fitful night's sleep, my fund-raiser Steve Pederson scraped my jet-lagged body off the curb, and we joined the morning gridlock oozing its way down to Capitol Hill. While we would be visiting PACs on this visit, Steve had a much grander plan for the trip — storming Capitol Hill.

Indeed, it would be on this trip that Steve Pederson's considerable fund-raising expertise would really kick in. For it was Steve who knew that the Democratic congressional leadership would soon be urging its fellow members of Congress to donate funds to a list of select candidates — so we had to get on that list. And it was Steve who knew that getting key congressional leaders to sponsor our D.C. fund-raisers would ensure their success.

Our first visit was to the former Speaker of the House and now Democratic Minority Leader, the Honorable Richard A. Gephardt (D-Missouri), and I found him to be nothing less than a warm, sincere, intelligent, and extremely helpful individual. More importantly, he also had the eye of the tiger — the eye of a man who wanted to wrest back the Speaker of the House's gavel from Newt Gingrich and feel it once again in his own hands. That meant he was ready to go to the mat for candidates like me because he knew we held the keys back to power. And all the better if the candidate (me) had just brought a new major donor into the Democratic Party and helped raise several hundred thousand dollars for the cause. (Absolutely no question about it: Money talks and bullshit walks.)

So when Steve Pederson asked, Gephardt readily agreed to the "ten-call promise." This is a typical favor on Capitol Hill, and it would involve Gephardt making fund-raising calls on my behalf to ten key political-action-committee directors — calls that would be good as gold in terms of bringing in PAC dollars.

Next on Steve's list were two key members of California's delegation, Vic Fazio and Nancy Pelosi. Vic Fazio is the answer to the jeopardy question: What key Democratic leader in Congress first won his seat in 1978 by replacing an incumbent congressman convicted of bigamy? Vic Fazio is also one of the highest-ranking members of the Democratic congressional leadership as well as the lead dog in California congressional politics. If you're going to get support from the California caucus and get on the leadership's targeted list, it's got to be Vic Fazio who gives you the nod.

What amazed me was how helpful Vic was, even though he was in the dogfight of his life for his own seat. In 1994, Fazio had narrowly squeaked by Republican Tim LeFever during the Gingrich revolution, and now this same right-wing pit bull was gnawing uncomfortably close to Vic's heels (and higher) again.

What Steve and I wanted out of Vic, besides getting on the leadership's list, was some help with fund-raising in the state, particularly in Sacramento. We also needed Vic's blessing if we were to bring in donations from the other 20-plus members of the California delegation.

Vic's advice in this regard was to find someone in the California delegation who would help champion me in the state. While we both noted that the logical person would be my fellow San Diegan Bob Filner, Vic seemed to understand better than I that this was not in Filner's nature. So Vic's suggestion was for me to contact Los Angeles Howard Berman and ask him to play the role of mentor and advocate, and Steve indicated to Vic that Howard was at the top of our list of people to see that week.

Coincidentally, as Steve and I were leaving Vic, we bumped into Congresswoman Jane Harman. I say "coincidentally" because on that day Harman provided a sharp counterpoint to the effusive Fazio.

Harman is a hypertensive, 50ish woman going on 90 who looks like stress warmed over and who should be having more fun than she
seems to be having. After all, she represents the Southern California coastal district where the Beach Boys used to surf, where skateboarding got its start, and where there is an annual beer-drinking and vomitfest every Fourth of July. But faced with a race every bit as tough as Vic Fazio's, Jane was in no mood to help anyone but herself. So she limply shook my hand, wished me well, and then went on her frenetic way — never to be seen or heard from again, at least by my campaign.

Our next stop was to see Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi. Pelosi is the mother of five, the daughter of a former congressman, and the sister of the former mayor of Baltimore. Her district covers four-fifths of San Francisco, and she is as classy as the Tony Bennett song celebrating that city by the bay.

Nancy also has one of the safest seats on Capitol Hill; every year, her reelection is a slam dunk. This means that she has a free reign in helping others like me get elected, and she takes that responsibility seriously. Steve's goal with Pelosi was to have her help organize a San Diego fund-raiser that featured all of the women of the California delegation — from Lynn Woolsey, Anna Eshoo, and Zoe Lofgren up north to Maxine Waters and Lucille Roybal-Allard in the south. In 1994, Lynn Schenk had been able to do this, and it had been an astonishing success.

Nancy readily agreed to help put this event together and even suggested a date. Her idea was to piggyback the event with a big Clinton fund-raiser in Los Angeles. That way, all of the women of the delegation would be in the area, and they could caravan down to San Diego in the morning, do a fund-raising lunch for my campaign, and be back in L.A. that evening for the Clinton soiree. Best of all, Nancy volunteered to send out letters to her colleagues asking them to attend the event, and she was even willing to make follow-up calls. My candidate, it truly is wonderful when you don't have to ask for everything in the political world — when street-smart, savvy folks like Nancy Pelosi already have it figured out.

Now in the Gephardt/Fazio/Pelosi helping-hand mold, one other member of Congress who went out of his way for me should be mentioned (although there were many others). That was Cal Dooley.

Dooley is a fourth-generation farmer from California's fertile Central Valley, and he looks more like Sheriff Matt Dillon than some wimp with a last name like Dooley. He's also a conservative "Blue Dog" Democrat who is often at odds with the more liberal Democratic leadership — a strategic necessity in a congressional district with strong Republican and Independent constituencies.

Steve wanted us to visit Dooley because we were trying to put together a fund-raiser with the agriculture lobby, and getting the influential Dooley as a sponsor on the invitation would be essential if we were to raise any significant agricultural cash. Dooley, of course, wouldn't actually attend the event, but that wasn't the point. The lobbyists who would come to contribute to my campaign already saw enough of guys like Dooley in the hallways of Capitol Hill. No, what Dooley's name would do is send the appropriate signals to the money folks that I was okay.

What I really liked about Cal Dooley was not that he welcomed us right into his office without an appointment or that he immediately agreed to co-host our agricultural event — which he did. Nope. What was even better is that Dooley remembered that Brian Bilbray had voted against one of the most important subsidy programs for California farmers. And it was Dooley's feeling — which would be borne out later by fact — that this vote alone would allow us to leverage considerable PAC dollars from agricultural interests.

From Good Luck to Bad Karma

The other D.C. fund-raiser Steve and I were planning was with the free-market wing of the electric utility industry. That's how we ran afoul of our first real congressional jerk, Ed Markey of Massachusetts. The first sign that Markey would be a problem was that he wouldn't meet with us directly. Instead, he pawned off Steve and me on one of the most pompous aides on Capitol Hill I've ever met, although I am told that pompous aides on Capitol Hill are as ubiquitous as roaches in a New York apartment.

I had met Markey almost 20 years before when I was a research associate at Harvard's Energy and Environmental Policy Center. At the time, Markey was a big opponent of nuclear power, and I had gone to talk with him about the issue. In the process, I had committed one of the biggest faux pas of my young political life.

What Markey and I had in common then was that we were both in our 30s, but with our boyish countenances we looked like kids. So
when this kid came out and started talking to me without introduction, I assumed he was one of the congressman’s aides — not the real deal himself. You can imagine my embarrassment when after 15 minutes with the guy I found out my mistake. That happened when I asked when I would see the congressman, he said I already had, and off he went on his merry way.

My bad karma was to continue with the Honorable Ed Markey, because, as it would turn out, Markey was on the other side of the utility issue that I was trying to leverage in my fund-raising campaign. Let me explain by first introducing my all-time favorite lobbyist on the planet, Mark Irion of the Dutko Group.

**Lobbyists Are Us**

The Dutko Group is one of the most influential lobbying firms in Washington, D.C., and it is famous or notorious — take your pick — for hosting lavish fund-raisers for both Democrats and Republicans in its spacious headquarters. Well, Steve Pederson thought that maybe the Dutko Group would do me just such a favor, so we had called upon one of Steve’s contacts there, Pat Mitchell. He helped handle the Democratic side of the firm’s business.

Much as Pat wanted to help us, he let us know that with the Republicans in power, Gingrich and company were making it very uncomfortable for the folks at Dutko to host events for anybody but the highest-ranking Democratic incumbents — so challengers like me were nonstarters. Nonetheless, Pat was sympathetic to my plight, so when the topic of utility deregulation came up, he had an idea.

Dutko had a number of utility clients who wanted to push a radical deregulation bill through Congress. Since I happened to be one of the leading academic advocates of such radical deregulation, these clients might find it in their self-interest to get financially behind my campaign. So Pat introduced me to Mark Irion, a vice president at Dutko who headed the utility section.

Fortunately, Mark took an immediate liking to me, as I did to him, and he jumped into my campaign with both feet. The grand plan that he and Steve developed was to put together several fund-raisers with the “white hat” utilities that favored radical deregulation. One of these events would be in Washington with lower-ranking energy lobbyists. However, Mark also wanted to corral a group of chief executive offic-

ers in the Dutko box at the Democratic National Convention for the same purpose. After he had cranked the numbers, he figured we might be able to raise as much as $50,000 in PAC money if we played our cards right. That’s one of the many reasons I like Mark — he thinks big.

Unfortunately, it was also Mark’s idea to send me over to Ed Markey’s to see if Markey would cosponsor the D.C. event. This is because Ed Markey is one of the leading energy gurus in Congress. I regret to inform you this was not the best idea Mark Irion has ever had.

In fact, Mark himself had been a little leery of it and cautioned me at the outset that it was a gamble. The problem was that Markey represents a state served by Boston Edison, and Markey had also developed a close relationship with Southern California Edison. Both of these “black hat” utilities were fighting hard against rapid utility deregulation, and I was the Antichrist to them. So it may not surprise you that Markey absolutely refused to help sponsor my energy fund-raiser. Still and all, Ed Markey was not my biggest disappointment on Capitol Hill. That would have to be Henry Waxman. Hands down.

**Peter in Wonderland**

Waxman is a short, bald, earnest man who smiles about as frequently as it snows in Los Angeles. But in the upscale, tony neighborhoods of West Hollywood and Brentwood and Bel Air that he represents, Waxman is as close to a political god as you can get.

Steve and I went to Waxman for a specific purpose. We wanted him to host a fund-raiser in San Diego targeting the Jewish community. In that community, *Waxman is an icon*, and his hosting of such an event was a guarantee of at least $20,000, and probably a lot more. More importantly, Waxman’s blessing would once and for all remove the cloud of anti-Semitism that had hung over my head since the mayor’s race, in at least a segment of San Diego’s Jewish community.

I’ve been accused of a lot of things in my life, and at least some of the time there has been a grain of truth in the accusations, but the anti-Semite label that Susan Golding helped pin on me in that campaign was even more outrageous than her pornographer ploy. Here’s what happened.

At one point in a speech, I had openly criticized scam artists like
Charles Keating and Michael Milken for ruining the American economy. A would-be ally of Golding’s was Don Harrison, editor of the newspaper Jewish Heritage, and Harrison used that criticism to wave the bloody shirt of anti-Semitism at me because Milken is Jewish.

This was about the cheapest shot anybody has ever taken at me in politics, and all the more so because it came from some pious hypocrite hiding behind the shield of religion. It also astounded me, because, for starters, I didn’t associate Milken with being Jewish. More importantly, I was surprised that anyone would even try to defend the king of junk bonds on the flimsy basis of religious persecution.

Unfortunately, the charge stuck, particularly with some of San Diego’s Jewish Democrats who perhaps needed a good excuse to back the Jewish Republican Golding. Henry Waxman could have helped me heal this long-festering wound. However, I could tell about 30 seconds into the meeting that it was not going to be. But at least I got a good laugh out of the visit.

Walking into Waxman’s office, there was little Henry sitting in a big chair at an even bigger desk, a gigantic picture window behind him with a stunning view of the Capitol. For some reason, he looked to me like the blue caterpillar in Alice in Wonderland, and the only thing missing was Henry puffing on a hookah.

Talking to him that day, I thought Henry maybe could have used a hookah, because he’s one of the tightest people I’ve ever met. While Dick Gephardt, Vic Fazio, Nancy Pelosi, and Cal Dooley had all been outgoing and friendly, Waxman hardly said a word. He just stared at Steve and me as we spoke — only occasionally nodding his head.

Finally, I popped the question: “Can you come down to San Diego and do an event for us in the Jewish community? It would really mean a lot for my campaign.” He said he’d think about it, and maybe he did, but the thought never got out of his mind — despite repeated follow-up requests by Steve and me. And while Waxman did send me a check very late in the game, I can’t help but think that it is the Henry Waxmans and Ed Markeys and Jane Harman’s and Bob Filners of the Democratic Party who are ultimately responsible for its fall from power.

My Handicap with the Handicappers

The newsletter is primarily used by lobbyists to make money decisions.

Charlie Cook on the use for his Cook Political Report

While Steve Pederson and I were barnstorming Capitol Hill, my press secretary Lisa Ross was busy trying to spin the Washington press corps. Lisa’s spin was that I was competing in one of the top 20 races that would determine who controlled Congress and that with a vice presidential fund-raiser now on the horizon, I had become one of the hottest candidates in the country.

It was pretty good spin, and if people in the national press started writing it, it would help my fund-raising enormously. The problem, however, is that the two most important people in the media weren’t buying it. These guys were the “bookies” of Washington politics — Charlie Cook and Stu Rothenberg. Through their subscription newsletter “racing forms,” they handicap the congressional races for the PAC community and the broader Washington establishment.

These two newsletters have a minuscule circulation. However, the few hundred PAC directors and corporate lobbyists that compose the bulk of their readership also happen to be the most important political people in D.C., at least when it comes to raising money.

Now here’s the difference between a horse-race handicapper and a congressional-race handicapper. At the racetrack, how a handicapper rates a horse has no impact on how the horse runs. The handicap only influences how the bets are spread across the board.

In contrast, when a political handicapper like Charlie Cook says you can’t win your race, he’s just saddled you with an extra hundred pounds of weight to carry around the track. Indeed, when Cook rates
swings too far the other way, and he winds up giving some Republicans — like my opponent Brian Bilbray — an unwarranted edge.

**Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely**

My press secretary Lisa Ross had set up a meeting between Cook and Rothenberg and me to try to get them to reevaluate the “leans Republican” rating both had given to the 49th Congressional District. Lisa thought that rating was ridiculous for a lot of reasons, and she was right.

First, in our polling Bilbray had a very low reelect number. It was under 40 percent consistently, and anything less than 50 percent means an incumbent is in trouble.

Second, Bilbray had a voting record incongruent with the majority in the district — he was anti-environment, anti-Medicare, anti-abortion, and anti-gay.

Third, this was a presidential election year, and that meant a high voter turnout. As turnout increases, the percentage of Democrats voting relative to Republicans increases significantly. Indeed, while in a low-turnout race my 49th District might lean Republican, in a high-turnout race it leans Democratic.

Finally, yes, I was a candidate with considerable baggage. However, I also had 90 percent name recognition, a strong core constituency, and proven campaign and fund-raising skills.

Of course, sitting around a big conference table with Cook and Rothenberg, this all fell on deaf ears. Because while all Lisa and I wanted to talk about were the reasons I was going to win, all Charlie and Stu wanted to talk about were the reasons I was going to lose.

Now here’s what I find most interesting: Cook would eventually change his evaluation of my race to “toss-up” based on many of the same reasons that Lisa and I had offered to him. However, Cook would only make this change a few weeks before the election, and by then, it was too late to have any impact on my PAC fund-raising.

In my view, this was nothing short of a screw job because Cook’s holding back the “toss-up” label cost me tens of thousands of dollars in PAC money and really hurt my chances of winning. Indeed, this is the broader problem I see with congressional handicappers. They have too much influence over the balance of power in Washington.

Consider this: Of the 535 senatorial and congressional races that
Cook and Rothenberg handicap each political cycle, over 400 of these races are slam dunks that any damn fool could accurately predict. All you have to do is look at party registration and campaign cash on hand and presto! you pick a winner.

This means that where Cook's and Rothenberg's expertise really matter are in the handful of swing races like mine. And given that a thumbs down can all but doom a candidate, it follows that the PAC community has given Cook and Rothenberg far too much power.

My bottom line? If the Democrats want to get the Congress back from the Republicans, they should stop listening to people like Charlie Cook and Stu Rothenberg and start thinking for themselves.

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I Play the Straight Man at the Gay Pride Parade

_I have noticed that nothing I never said ever did me any harm._

_Calvin Coolidge_

On July 27, I marched in the Gay Pride Parade in Hillcrest, arm in arm with members of the San Diego Democratic Club. On the face of it, this was about as plausible as Norman Mailer walking down the aisle to remarry one of his battered ex-wives. I'm not talking about walking in the parade per se, but just that I was doing it under the banner of the San Diego Democratic Club—a gay-and-lesbian organization that had declared political war on me just two years earlier during my race for county supervisor.

I am of the school that believes, for the most part, that gays are born and not made. That is, I believe — and there appears to be significant scientific evidence to back me up — that there is a genetic predisposition to be gay. This is an important distinction because it means that any attempts to convert gays to heterosexuality and thereby "cure" a psychologically rooted "illness" makes about as much sense as trying to turn a duck into a chicken or Rush Limbaugh into a tender and humane, gay-tolerant individual.

More importantly, this distinction clearly suggests that the sexual practices of gays and lesbians are not "perverse" — at least not from any biological standpoint. Accordingly, gays should not be condemned for their sexual orientation but rather treated as other individuals in our society are, which is to say, fairly and equally.

Having expressed my tolerance on gay issues, I nonetheless wish I had never taken a position on gay rights. This is because my strong pro-gay positions and subsequent descent into the labyrinthian hell of gay politics played a major role in my losing both my mayor's race and my county supervisor's race.
So Much for Tolerance

My falling on the sword of gay politics began innocently enough in 1992 at a mayoral debate in Hillcrest sponsored by the aforementioned San Diego Democratic Club. Let me say at this point that the San Diego Democratic Club is one of the biggest charades in San Diego politics. This is because many unsuspecting voters believe that an endorsement by this club is equivalent to an endorsement by the official local Democratic Party.

Not so. In fact, if there were truth in political advertising, the club would have to call itself something like “A Small Handful of Gay and Lesbian Activists Who Happen to Be Democrats but Frequently Screw Their Party and Their Fellow Gays to Promote Their Own Political Agenda.”

Anyway, as part of appearing at the debate, I had to fill out a questionnaire stating my positions on a panoply of gay issues, the key ones being domestic partnership and needle exchange. At that time in my political career, I was too naive to realize that you don’t have to take a position on everything. Nor did I realize that the best political strategy is often to take no position at all — particularly on issues as controversial as gay rights. Instead, being the policy wonk I am, I carefully looked at the domestic-partner and needle-exchange issues and wound up strongly supporting both.

Domestic-partnership laws allow both homosexual and unmarried heterosexual couples to share in the same job benefits as married couples. For example, if Jack is living with Jim or Jill, and Jack has health benefits at his job, domestic-partnership policies make it possible to put Jim or Jill on the policy. Such laws make sense because they allow unmarried couples to gain financial security in a world where things like health care and pension benefits are becoming more and more elusive.

On the surface, needle-exchange might seem like a disgusting and even wacky policy, and you’ve heard the simplistic patter on talk radio: “Give needles to drug addicts so they can safely shoot up? Get real! Let these disgusting degenerates kill themselves with dirty needles and we’ll be rid of the vermin.”

Nice try, but the fact is: The biggest victims of dirty needles are not the dopers themselves but the non-drug-addicted, sexually active women between 16 and 35 who have the poor judgment to sleep with the dopers. It is these women — and their children — who wind up doing the long, slow death dance of aids. And if you don’t believe me, just ask the National Institutes of Health, Yale University, or the American Medical Association, which supports such programs. Or, better yet, check out the successful needle-exchange programs in Hartford and Baltimore and San Francisco, which have saved thousands of lives.

In light of the overwhelming scientific evidence in support of these programs, let me now get as close to hyperbole as I will ever get in this tale. Here goes: Demagogues like Susan Golding and her mentor Governor Pete Wilson who oppose needle-exchange programs just to win elections may as well be the brutal murderers of innocent women and children. They are no better than the gangsters they are always threatening to put behind bars, and, in fact, Golding and Wilson are much worse than the gangsters because they are smart enough to know better.

Smart enough to know a hot issue when she sees one, too, is Susan Golding. Because Golding took that needle-exchange issue and rammed it so deep into my carotid artery that I saw red for the rest of the election. The worst of this demagoguery was a commercial featuring Harry Eastus, head of the cops’ union, intoning that if elected, I would bring drug addicts to San Diego. I regret to say that this commercial played particularly well in conservative hotbeds like Rancho Bernardo and La Jolla, where these rich, smart people, too, should know a whole lot better.

The “Navarro Loves Drug Addicts” commercial wasn’t the most devastating one the Golding sleaze machine ran against me, however. That had to be the one about me selling city hall to pornographers. The story behind this bears reporting not only because it has its roots in gay politics, but because it provides one of the most tantalizing unsolved mysteries in San Diego.

The Case of the Devious Drag Queen

Let me set the scene for you: It’s late summer, a few months before the general election, and my mayoral campaign is foundering on the shoals of financial insolvency, while Susan Golding has amassed close to a half million dollars of developer money to crush me. Looking for a quick infusion of cash, I schedule a gay fund-raise against the strong
advice of my advisor Richard Carson, who warns me, "Any money that you raise in the gay community now will cost you even more money later to undo the damage." Pighead that I was, however, I pushed ahead, and spearheading the effort was Michael Portantino, publisher of the leading gay newspaper in town, the Gay and Lesbian Times.

Mike's a great guy, and if there has been any benefit from my support for gay issues, it has been getting to know him and a close friend of his, Mark Morgan. Like me, Mike Portantino is too outspoken for his own good, but he's probably done more to help me in politics than any other individual in San Diego.

Mike cast out his gay fund-raising net far and wide, and on the anointed evening, he delivered almost $30,000 in campaign contributions. But my elation that night from receiving those funds was wiped out by a phone call the next day from a San Diego Union-Tribune reporter asking for comment about a campaign contribution I had received from an alleged pornographer. The events that were to follow would culminate in an ugly and decisive turning point in my campaign, so first let me give you the facts and then let me tell you what I believe really happened.

The facts are: I received a campaign contribution from Robert Smith on the evening of the fund-raiser. The check was delivered to Mike Portantino with the help of a transvestite drag queen named Nicole Ramirez Murray. On that same evening, Smith was arrested on the charge of "conspiracy to distribute obscene material." The next afternoon I was called by the Union-Tribune reporter.

Since at that point, I had not reported this contribution on my campaign filings — indeed, as far as I know, only Mike, Nicole, and Bob Smith knew that I had it — I inquired of that reporter how he found out about the check. His answer was that he had gotten an anonymous tip.

The next day a big story appeared in the Union-Tribune with allegations that my campaign was funded by pornographers. During this same time, Susan Golding's campaign conducted a poll with a set of questions comparing public attitudes toward candidates who are funded by developers (like her) versus candidates funded by pornographers (like now, supposedly, me). Shortly thereafter, Susan Golding began running a TV ad accusing me of selling city hall to the pornography industry.

I Play the Straight Man at the Gay Pride Parade

This TV ad was an absolute killer, and I got about as angry as I ever got about anything when I saw it. Big mistake! Because at this point, one of my aides, John Wainio, began advocating that I should publicly attack Golding at our next TV debate for having a prostitute on her campaign committee. The prostitute in question turned out to be the transvestite drag queen Nicole Ramirez Murray, and she had, in fact, previously been busted for sex crimes. The problem, however — and what Wainio didn't tell me — was that Nicole's arrests had been years before, and Nicole had done much to rehabilitate herself, including becoming one of the city's leading AIDS fund-raisers.

This was an important piece of information that Wainio withheld from me because without it, I walked into what I believe was a carefully laid trap. I took Wainio's advice and, on TV, let Golding have it with both barrels. The next day Nicole held a press conference and showed a picture of me side-by-side with her when she was in drag.

The picture, of course, was meant to convey my hypocrisy. After displaying it to reporters, she burst into tears on TV, cried about how vicious I was, and, while admitting her past wrongs, talked about how hard she had worked to rehabilitate herself. It was a remarkable performance straight out of Tennessee Williams, and my "martyring" of Nicole hurt me more than even Golding's original pornography ad because it made me look mean and nasty, two of the worst attributes a candidate can evince.

So the mystery that has lingered unsolved in my mind is whether Golding just got lucky with the way this episode fell out or whether it was all an elaborate trap into which I ingloriously fell. Based on the circumstantial evidence that I have collected, here's what I believe may have happened.

First, Nicole got a picture snapped of the two of us at an AIDS fund-raiser. (Mon candidate, don't ever allow yourself to be photo-
graphed with a transvestite.) Second, Golding's brain trust — probably Tom Shepard — thought about how her campaign could counter my potent charge that Golding was funded by developers — and what better way to do that than to allege funding by pornographers. Third, Nicole, who already supported Golding, was enlisted to solicit a check from Bob Smith for one of my fund-raisers. Fourth, and if this is true it is truly outrageous, the cops, who had endorsed Golding, were enlisted to bust Smith. (The evidence in support of this supposition is that the bust happened on the very same night I got Smith's check and, perhaps more importantly, the charges were dropped after the election.) Fifth, Nicole or one of her emissaries leaked the fact that I had received the tainted check to the Union-Tribune. Finally, Wainio promptly went to work for Tom Shepard after my defeat. That makes me wonder whether he had been working for Shepard all along while on my campaign. It also makes me wonder whether he urged me to attack Nicole knowing it would be a public relations disaster.

Well, I say this to Nicole and Wainio and Shepard and Harry Eastus of the cops' union and Golding: If, in fact, you all really planned this drag-queen caper as I believe you did, then hats off to you, because it was one of the most well executed and brilliant political traps in San Diego history. But I'll probably never know.

What I do know is that this was not the only bit of treachery inflicted upon me by gay politics. Indeed, if The Case of the Devious Drag Queen was the most treacherous, then The Cabaret Caper had to be the funniest — although I still haven't been able to laugh at it, and I'm still not sure whether it was intentional treachery or sheer stupidity by the gay hairdresser who pulled it off.

This caper happened two days before the mayoral general election on a prime-time Sunday night live TV debate hosted by KNSD, the local NBC affiliate. Earlier that day, my campaign manager Beckie Mann had gotten a call from a gay hairdresser who volunteered to do my TV makeup for that important night. Well, why not?

Here's why not: The makeup, including gobs and gobs of mascara and eyeliner, was applied in such a fashion that when I sat down in my chair across from Golding for the big debate — a debate to be viewed by several hundred thousand voters — I looked more like a cabaret queen than the city's next mayor. I'm sure it cost me thousands of votes, and it might have even cost me the election.

I Play the Straight Man at the Gay Pride Parade

The Vichy Gays

So gay politics have not served me very well in my career, and the biggest insult added to my various mayoral injuries was the vocal opposition of the San Diego Democratic Club to my candidacy for the board of supervisors in 1994. In that race, this "Democratic" club endorsed Republican Ron Roberts for the only Democratic seat on the board, and the person I hold most responsible for this treason is Rand Conley.

In that race, Conley led the charge against my endorsement by the Democratic Club, arguing that City Councilman Ron Roberts deserved the endorsement because he had just gotten taxpayers to foot almost half of the bill for a new $2 million, 27,000-square-foot building for the AIDS Foundation. Appropriating this money in the middle of a campaign was pretty shrewd on Roberts' part. However, I also thought it was pretty dumb for the members of the San Diego Democratic Club not to see through this obvious political opportunism. And what I found doubly galling was that, more than any other politician in the city, I had stood up for gay issues and never wavered.

Equally outraged was Mike Portantino, who had always regarded most of the leaders of the Democratic Club to be "Vichy Gays" — far too willing to collaborate with the enemy than fight for the good of the community. And to Portantino, Roberts clearly was the enemy — as councilman he had never fought for gay issues and as supervisor he never would.

Unfortunately, neither Mike nor I had the juice to stop the Roberts endorsement. With the help of key players like Craig Roberts, Rick Moore, and Doug Case, Rand Conley carried the day for Roberts, and the San Diego Democratic Club's endorsement dealt me what turned out to be the death blow to my supervisor's race. While I still carried the gay precincts handily with upwards of 60 percent of the vote, the Democratic Club's endorsement managed to shave off what should have been a 75 percent margin, and I wound up narrowly losing that race.

What Goes Around Comes Around

Predictably, Ron Roberts has been a big disappointment to the gay community on the board of supervisors. Ironically, too, Roberts's "bribe" to the San Diego Democratic Club for its support — taxpayer subsidies for a bigger building for the AIDS Foundation — turned out
to be the foundation’s financial undoing. Unable to raise enough operating funds to keep its new Titanic afloat, the foundation abruptly closed its doors two years after it had opened them — nearly a million dollars in debt and leaving its 2600 clients to go elsewhere for help.

Perhaps the failure of Ron Roberts was why one of the first calls I got after declaring for Congress was from my old nemesis Rand Conley. While he never apologized for supporting Roberts, he made it clear that this time he would do everything he could to make sure I got the full support of both the San Diego Democratic Club and the broader gay community. And that was how on July 27, I found myself Marching arm-in-arm with the Vichy Gays.

More Baggage Than Samsonite

“Initially, I was motivated by the sense that I could play a part in changing the political system and making it more equitable. The sense that you can make a difference and make government better is still a factor, but other motivations drive me now...”

Tom Shepard, political consultant

In an ideal political world, the campaign pollster plays Edgar Bergen to the candidate’s Charlie McCarthy. For it is the role of the campaign pollster to put the winning message in the candidate’s mouth. For this reason, the campaign pollster is arguably the most important member of the campaign team.

The pollster I wanted to do my race was Bob Meadow. I wanted Meadow because he knew more about me — in fact, had done more to me — than any other pollster on the planet. He helped orchestrate Susan Golding’s devastating negative campaign against me for mayor. He sliced and diced me as the pollster for Harry Mathis in our city council race. On top of all that, he once worked for Brian Bilbray, so he had a pretty good read on my current opponent as well.

Bob had actually called me shortly after I had declared for Congress to express a strong interest in doing my race. On the face of it, that might sound strange given our past history, but Bob was at a stage in his career when he was trying to complete the leap out of nonpartisan local politics into the Big Pond — the national partisan stage. That meant finding Democratic congressional clients.

I had been delighted to get Bob’s call and welcomed him right onboard. What happened next, however, was pretty ugly and illustrates just how hard it is to beat the power structure in my
little town: As soon as word got out that Meadow was taking my race, Tom Shepard called Meadow and put the hammer down.

**Darth Vader with a Mustache**

Tom Shepard is San Diego's Darth Vader of political consultants. When the power brokers want to blast a reforming Luke Skywalker out of the galaxy, Tom is the guy most likely to get the nod. Strange. Because Tom Shepard had started out in politics on the other side of the fence, as a 1960s-style radical out to reform San Diego's political system.

It had been Tom Shepard who had first gotten Bob Meadow out of academia and into politics to fight that battle. That was in the early 1980s. Shepard had just started his consulting firm, and he had recruited Meadow from the political science department at UCSD to do polling for Roger Hedgecock's mayoral race.

At the time, Meadow, Shepard, and Hedgecock all considered themselves to be white-knight crusaders fighting on the side of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. But a funny thing happened on the way to Utopia. During that race, Hedgecock went head to head with two very wealthy opponents, and, at least according to the indictments issued by the district attorney, Hedgecock got around that financial disadvantage by using Shepard's consulting firm to launder money from a major contributor — almost $400,000.

Shortly after Hedgecock took office, he and Shepard were indicted.

**More Baggage Than Samsonite**

Bob Meadow was named as an unindicted co-conspirator and granted immunity from prosecution so he could testify against Hedgecock. The rest is history: Hedgecock resigned from office in disgrace, Shepard cut a plea bargain deal that strengthened the D.A.'s case against Hedgecock, and Shepard and Meadow wandered for a long time in the political wilderness.

To their credit, Shepard and Meadow have made remarkable recoveries. Although it took them almost ten years to return to the pinnacle of their professions, they did so as part of the team that helped win another defining mayor's race in San Diego's history. This time, however, these much more cynical Old Turks were on the side of establishment-candidate Susan Golding fighting the new reformer — yours truly.

For Tom Shepard, the mutation from radical visionary to guardian of the status quo has been most grotesque. Having once been indicted for one of the worst crimes in politics, he's chosen to practice his profession out of the same muck from which he was resurrected. Indeed, “Tom Shepard-type tactics” are now part of the local lexicon of San Diego politics.

For Bob Meadow, the mutation is perhaps more benign. In his own mind, he seems to have adopted the ethics of a lawyer, meaning that any client he works for has a right to the best polling possible. If that entails smear tactics and mudslinging, then so be it. That's simply part of winning — and it's nothing personal with the opponent, as it so often is with Shepard.

I should say at this point that the most chilling conversation I've ever had in politics was with Bob Meadow. In an unguarded moment, I asked him whether he had felt any qualms about attacking me in the mayor's race for my alleged ties to pornographers. His answer surprised me because in giving it, his eyes lit up and he got very animated. "Hell, no" was his answer. He thought it was brilliant. That mon candidate, is what you are up against when you brandish the cudgel of reform.

Anyway, when Tom Shepard heard that Bob Meadow was working for me, he called Meadow and told him not to — at least if he wanted to get any more polling business from Shepard. Since Shepard was a big part of Bob's meal ticket, Bob called me to back off from my race.
End of story? Not quite. Because I could tell from our conversation that Meadow was quietly seething inside from having to buckle under to Shepard's blackmail. So several months later when I got the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee to cough up $20,000 for my polling, I came up with a possible way around the Shepard veto and called Bob to discuss it. I told him that since it was the D-Triple-C that would pay for the polling, it would be the D-Triple-C that would be Meadow's client—not me. That gave Meadow the excuse he needed—so back onboard he came.

Getting Focused

There are two basic instruments used by campaign pollsters to probe voter psyches: the focus group and the opinion survey. A focus group is like a choreographed bull session. You put 8 to 12 voters in a room, guide them through a series of questions about your candidate and his opponent, give them great latitude in responding, videotape their responses through a one-way mirror (with their knowledge, of course), and then analyze the results.

Unlike with an opinion survey, the group you select is usually not a random sample of the entire electorate. Rather, you typically put together a group of swing voters from a particular demographic group. In my case, preliminary polling indicated I was running up against an attitudinal brick wall with: (1) older Democratic and Independent men who should be voting for me out of partisan loyalty but weren't, and (2) moderate Republican women whom we might move to our side because of Bilbray's anti-choice extremism. It was these two groups that Bob Meadow wanted to test, and that's what we did the last week of July.

The result was a videotape that, at least for me, was even scarier than the first Alien movie—scary because these focus groups revealed to me a frightening part of my personality that I had been denying even existed. It's that evil twin part of me that always comes out at the absolute wrong political moment. Like a demon possessing my soul, it exhibits itself as an arrogance or disdain or obnoxiousness or meanness or anger or pettiness—all traits that are lethal in politics.

It therefore was a humbling experience to watch these men and women talk about this phenomenon because I realized that these folks—a solid slice of the San Diego electorate—had seen right through me. One woman who had watched several of my debates said, "It's like everything is a war with him." All too true—I'm wound pretty tight.

Another, recalling the day the city council had refused to put the PLAN! Initiative on the ballot: "He's always throwing temper tantrums," while still another who objected to my treatment of Susan Golding during the mayor's race said, "He comes off as very harsh." Perhaps the most sage observation came from the only supporter at the table: "He should stick to ideas rather than resorting to personal attacks." Indeed.

Of course, watching the video for the first time, my psyche tried to fight back: "Didn't these bozos understand just how many times I had been beaten down and battered by the power brokers in this town? My anger was justified! And why shouldn't I have kicked the crap out of Susan Golding after she called me a pornographer who wanted to bring drug addicts to San Diego. She deserved it!" And as for having that so-called temper tantrum the day the city council refused to put the PLAN! Initiative on the ballot—defying the will of 100,000 San Diegans who had signed our petition: "Damn straight, I shouted at those idiots for ignoring the public interest—anybody would have."

But by the tenth viewing of these focus groups, I realized my excuses were just so much temporizing garbage. I also realized—with the sharp and sudden pain of an angina attack—just how much I had blown it politically. It never was because of my positions or policies that people refused to vote for me. In fact, most people agreed with my policy agenda.

Rather, the problem was my personality. The fact is, mon candidate, that most folks would rather vote for a nice person they sometimes disagree with than for an asshole who perfectly represents their views. And with that insight came the fear that in my race for Congress, I would have more baggage than Samsonite. That fear was confirmed in spades when Bob Meadow handed me his report from the more comprehensive public-opinion survey that we conducted the week after the focus groups.
Ask Not for Whom the Poll Tolls

With a typical full-benchmark opinion poll, you call a random sample of three to four hundred respondents, with each call taking about 20 to 30 minutes to complete. Such a poll can cost anywhere from $10,000 to $30,000 depending on the pollster and the sample, but it can give you an accurate snapshot of voter attitudes as well as a critical road map for campaign strategy and message.

Such a poll usually starts out with a broad question about whether the respondent thinks the country is “on the right track.” This is a way of segmenting the sample into happy and unhappy campers — with unhappy campers being more likely to vote against an incumbent like Bilbray.

Next, respondents are asked whether they have a favorable or unfavorable view of a list of organizations and public figures. In that list, you always include both your own candidate and the opponent, and it was this question that was the source of some of my worst news in the poll. It showed that both Brian Bilbray and I had name identification of about 90 percent — astonishingly high for someone like me who’s never held public office. But it also showed that I had equally astonishingly high negatives, meaning that while 26 percent viewed me favorably, an even larger number, 33 percent, had an unfavorable opinion of me. In contrast, Bilbray’s ratio was a healthy 41 to 19 percent, favorable to unfavorable.

Ordinarily for someone with negatives as high as mine, the game would be over. There would be no hope of overcoming that. But with an extraordinary and brilliant pollster like Bob Meadow, the game wasn’t over at all. So let’s keep going.

The next poll ingredient is the reelect question, followed by the first trial heat. Meaning that you start by asking, If the election were held today, would you vote for Brian Bilbray or someone else? This reelect question showed Bilbray down in the 35 percent dumps — meaning that a nobody would beat his somebody. However, in the trial heat with me, Bilbray rose to 50 percent as compared to only 27 percent for me. Big ouch.

But it ain’t over till it’s over. Because once the first trial heat is complete, what ensues is a long list of questions about the negative and positive attributes of each of the two candidates. The idea is to better educate the voters about each candidate’s pluses and minuses and then do the all-important “push question.” That is, at the end, you redo the trial heat to see how many voters have been pushed to your side by the information that you have given them.

Typically, the candidate’s positives and negatives have been developed with the help of the opposition researcher, and the goal of the poll is to winnow the long list into a few salient items that will constitute your basic message. Of the items, several will be positive messages why voters should vote for you and several will be negative messages about your opponent.

With me, we didn’t have to waste valuable polling time to test my negatives. We already knew what they were. As for Bilbray, we tested his votes against the environment, children and seniors, Medicare and Social Security — truly a Gingrichian horror show.

We also tested specific items such as Bilbray’s widely publicized statement that he favored white men’s rights. What was most interesting and most disconcerting, however, is that none of these issues yielded a wooden stake to drive through his vampire heart.

Nonetheless, that stake eventually did emerge toward the end of the poll. What Meadow had figured out from the focus groups was that my problem was personality based rather than issue based. So the logical thing to do was to test whether an apology for my past behavior might lead voters to forgive me.

Good thinking, Bob, and The Apology had an enormous impact on my favorable-unfavorable ratio. In fact, after the “Apology” question in the poll, my favorables rose higher than Bilbray’s, to 49 percent as compared to only 36 percent for my negatives — a huge swing.

Next, Meadow tested the Vote of Your Life — yet another way to get me and my personality out of the equation. The idea here was to make the race not about me and Bilbray but about whether Gingrich would remain in control of the Congress. The incredible news here was that once the race was characterized as one of the 20 most important in the country that would determine whether Gingrich stayed in office, my favorable rating jumped to 57 percent. In the final push question, I moved from losing the race by 50 to 27 percent to winning it by 49 to 43 percent.

Wow, were we stoked at that result! This poll not only seemed to offer strong proof to the winnability of the race, it also cemented our
relationship with the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee as a campaign it would go to the mat for — both financially and logistically.

The Campaign Message
From the poll came our three-pronged campaign message. First, there must be The Apology: I would apologize for negative campaigning in the past and do so in a way that I would be perceived as being a better person for it.

Second, the vote must be characterized as the Vote of Your Life. As Meadow wrote in his polling report, "If you want Gingrich — and all that entails in terms of cuts in Social Security, Medicare, education, environmental cuts and threats to a woman's right to choose — then Bilbray is your choice. If you want to protect us from cuts in Social Security and Medicare, student loans, a loosening of environmental laws and to protect a woman's right to choose, then vote for Navarro."

Third, we had to make sure that voters understood the extremist record of Brian Bilbray — because the poll indicated that they didn't.

It was this three-pronged message that we would take to the voters through our TV commercials. In the original plan, the only ad I would appear in would be The Apology, which we hoped to excerpt live from my upcoming speech at the Democratic National Convention. After that, credible third parties — Ed Asner and President Clinton, as it would turn out — would communicate the Vote of Your Life message. Finally, and importantly, because of our severe budget constraints, we had to hope that the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee would take care of exposing Bilbray's extremism record through some kind of independent expenditure effort. (This was a hope, I regret to say, that was only half and halfheartedly realized.)

A Cautionary Coda
The only other thing I should tell you about campaign polling is this: It can lose you an election just as easily as it can win you one if you don't recognize that times — and voter attitudes — can change in a heartbeat.

For example, in my mayor's race, the poll question that got the highest response had to do with bashing developers. It became the major message of my primary election campaign and no doubt it helped propel me to victory.

However, in the general election, I flat-out wanted to drop the "Don't Yield to Developers" theme and move on a "Jobs and Economy" message. I figured that I had milked all the votes I was going to get with the developer message and that I wouldn't lose those votes to a developer pawn like Golding. Therefore, to broaden my base, I had to broaden my message.

Good thinking, Peter. But my campaign consultants wouldn't have any of it. They wanted to keep going with what the poll was telling them, i.e., bash developers. This led to at least two shouting matches between me and them, and to this day I'm still angry at Eric Jaye and Michael Terris for being so dogmatic and poll driven about that campaign. Because, in the end, I didn't trust my logic and instincts, I caved in to their pressure, and it was just one more reason why I lost that election. Indeed, my campaign consultants didn't anticipate how a steadily deepening recession during the campaign would make me vulnerable to an attack by Golding that my no-growth policies were
destroying the economy.

I'm telling you this now because I would suffer the same kind of shifting-sands fate in my congressional race. While the anti-Gingrich, Vote of Your Life message was highly salient in our July poll, four months later the Republicans would have successfully inoculated themselves against that message with the counter-theme of the need for a divided government. To wit: since Bill Clinton was probably going to be reelected, the country needed a conservative Congress to hold a liberal president in check.

We'll talk more about all that in a later chapter. For now, let's move on to the unveiling of The Apology.

More Skeletons Than the Smithsonian

The great curse of public life is that you are not allowed to say all the things that you think.

Woodrow Wilson

Brian Bilbray and I had the first televised debate of the campaign during the first week of August. It was a smashing victory. Who won, however, depended on to whom you talked. Let me explain.

This first debate was held at University of California at San Diego (UCSD) as part of a monthlong summer session on Politics and the Media for several hundred high school students. As would be the pattern throughout the campaign, Bilbray tried hard to duck this debate. After our first impromptu meeting on the tube the night of the primary election, his handlers had decided that avoiding me—particularly on TV—was their optimal strategy. But try as he might, Bilbray couldn’t duck this one, and that was because the woman organizing it, Shannon Bradley, wouldn’t let him.

The trump card in such a situation is for the debate sponsor to state that the debate will go on without the reluctant participant. Few things strike more fear into an incumbent than the threat of an empty chair with his or her name on it during a televised debate, with an explanation from the moderator that “despite repeated invitations, Congressman So-and-So refused to participate.” So Bilbray came. But as it turned out, I wished I had ducked.

This was because it would be at this debate that my brain trust would unveil the new me— the kinder, gentler Navarro. Not only would I launch The Apology for negative campaigning, I would also have to turn the other cheek every time Bilbray bashed me with his
brass-knuckles tongue.

Mr. Rogers is not a persona that I’m familiar or comfortable with. I debate like I used to play basketball — aggressive, tough, and, yes, with the occasional foul. But if there is one thing I have learned from a decade in politics, mon candidate, it is this: It is all too possible to win a debate but wind up losing votes.

This seeming paradox is easily resolved by recognizing that what most people do when they watch a TV debate is watch — not listen. Thus, even if you destroy your opponent with your rapier wit, and powerful intellect, you’re still going to lose votes if you look like a jerk doing it. Unfortunately, I do that a lot.

In Search of a Level Playing Field

Now you might think that campaign debates sponsored by organizations like the League of Women Voters or, in this case, by a leading university would be fair and impartial. But, in truth, political debates rarely are. There are always ways to manipulate them.

For example, with the League of Women Voter-sponsored events, the League always relies on written questions submitted by the audience. So all you have to do is have your supporters stuff the question box with questions designed to reinforce your campaign message.

In this case, however, with the University of California, I thought the process would be immune to such treachery. But I have to hand it to the Bilbray campaign: Where there’s a will, there’s a way. Because somehow their campaign managed to infiltrate the student conference and manipulate the debate agenda.

I found out by serendipity. One of my corporate supporters in Orange County called me out of the blue and said one of their interns was attending the conference. The intern said I was walking into an ambush, and after reviewing the secret debate questions this young lady had kindly smuggled out for us, I saw what she meant: Of the questions we would be asked, most were much more consistent with the campaign message of Bilbray than with mine, and at least one of them would be a loaded gun to my head.

The worst of these Bilbray-message questions had to do with illegal immigration and affirmative action. Bilbray is vociferously anti-immigrant and anti-affirmative action, he was running hard on these two themes, and any discussion of them would play well in the area that the debate would be broadcast.

On this point, I should explain that the UCSD campus is located in the northern part of the 49th Congressional District. That meant the broadcast would reach voters in key Republican neighborhoods like La Jolla and swing-voting Clairemont. In both areas, Bilbray’s anti-immigrant and anti-affirmative-action messages would resonate well.

As for the loaded gun Bilbray would put to my head, this had to do with a debate question on student loans, a topic that had provided me endless embarrassment going back as far as my 1992 mayoral campaign. In that race, the San Diego Union-Tribune had dispatched a reporter to Boston to research my background. While that reporter missed a lot of really good stuff — I’ve got more skeletons in my closet than the Smithsonian — the reporter did dig up an old legal judgment against me for nonpayment of a $1650 student loan.

In my own defense, I had paid the loan off in full. However, I had done so only after receiving a notice of default. It was an incident born not of any intention to evade payments but rather of carelessness in providing the bank with my forwarding address. It turned out to be a careless moment, however, that would help define an entire political campaign.

To this day, I still get people who razz me about the loan; and if there is any advice I can give here — particularly to the younger folks with political aspirations reading this — please remember that your whole life is what you bring to the table when you run for office. Accordingly, be ethical and honest as you live your life, and especially don’t be careless about legal matters.

Bilbray’s Blunder

Having the debate questions in advance was a great gift because it allowed our campaign team to prepare a counter-strategy. Since we knew Bilbray would throw mud at me right after expressing his strong support for the student-loan program, my response would be in three stages. I would first point out that Mr. Bilbray and Newt Gingrich had voted to cut such loans by tens of millions of dollars. I would then express my strong disappointment in Mr. Bilbray for engaging in negative campaigning. From there, I would launch The Apology.

So when the time came, that’s exactly what I did — but it sure wasn’t easy. What I wanted to say when Bilbray upbraided me for
being a scofflaw was this: “Of course, Brian Bilbray never had any problems with paying his student loans. That’s because this ignorant bozo never went to college.” (You see how mean and nasty I can get.)

Interestingly, my performance that night got a mixed response. My pollster Bob Meadow was pleased, as were my campaign consultant Larry Remer and my campaign manager Dale Kelly Bankhead. On the other hand, we got negative calls from my hard-core supporters — people who had stood by me for years precisely because I was the kind of tough guy who didn’t take any crap.

More evidence of this mixed response came the next day as I was walking precincts in Clairemont. Several older and crusty Democratic men insisted I had gotten my ass kicked and told me they were going to vote for Bilbray. In contrast, several Republican women said they were going to vote for me because I had “stuck to ideas” rather than “gotten personal,” as Mr. Bilbray had.

In hindsight, I suppose you’d have to call the debate a draw — except for one thing that I believe sharply tipped the scales in my favor: That debate wound up saving my campaign $50,000 in television commercials.

How? Well, clearly Bilbray’s consultant Tom Shepard had no clue that my apology that night had been planned and would become the linchpin of our campaign message. Because if he had figured that out, he surely would not have run the TV ad that he soon did.

From our point of view, the Bilbray campaign’s anti-Navarro ad was perfect. At the beginning and end of the ad was some bad footage that everyone would ignore, followed by some clear, excellent footage of my apology during the UCSD debate. Unquestionably, The Apology would be the only thing people watching the ad would remember.

“My God, Bilbray’s campaign is doing The Apology for us! How stupid can these people be?” That’s what Larry Remer shouted at me over the phone 20 seconds after he saw the Bilbray ad. I could almost see him jumping up and down as he said it. Bob Meadow had an almost identical reaction — along with a big laugh.

That Bilbray’s campaign did the TV apology for us was fortuitous for another reason. As you will see in the next chapter, our plan to get great TV footage from my speech at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago was a total flop.
Buried in Chicago

When I die, I want to be buried in Chicago — so I can stay politically active.

CONGRESSMAN CHARLES RANGEL (D-NY)

On August 26, 1996, I took off in a big silver bird for the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. As the plane did a long, lazy circle over that magnificent metropolis, I thought back more than 20 years to the last time I had visited the City of Broad Shoulders.

No, I hadn’t gone to make war on the Establishment and get my head bashed in by Mayor Daley’s finest at the last Democratic National Convention held in that city — although friends had made that journey in the summer of 1968. My visit was a few years later, and it had been in the name of peace. The Peace Corps, to be precise.

I don’t know what bureaucrat came up with this brilliant idea: Send a group of new recruits headed for the hot, humid jungles of Thailand to train in Chicago in the dead of winter, but on that frigid visit in 1973, I was outside my hotel exactly twice in a week — once to arrive and once to depart. So I didn’t know that I had missed what is arguably the most beautiful city in America — at least from an architectural point of view.

Frankly, I hadn’t intended to come to the Democratic convention at all. It seemed like a luxury I couldn’t afford, either financially or timewise. The journey would cost about $2000, I didn’t feel right about taking that out of my campaign funds, and if I paid for it myself, it would stretch my personal finances. Even more important, it would cost me almost a week of fund-raising and precinct walking at a time when I was already counting the days to the election. But several things happened to turn that thinking around.
First, while my lobbyist buddy Mark Irion at the Dutko Group had grown pessimistic about putting together key electric-utility honchos for a big fund-raiser for me at the convention, he was certain he could get me on the Dutko “supercruise.” This would put me in handshake (and therefore supplicant) range of the top 100 Democratic donors in America — a captive audience for two hours on Lake Michigan. This had great appeal since my fund-raising lists were now near exhaustion and I desperately needed new leads.

Second, with Mark Irion’s help, I had managed to get myself on the convention speaking program. This meant that I would be allowed to speak on national television with a select group of 20 other congressional candidates. I can’t tell you how very big a deal this was. It would be great exposure for my campaign, and it would send the strongest of signals to the PAC community that my race was on the Democratic Party’s A-list, and that would help my fund-raising.

Finally, my pollsters and campaign consultant strongly advised me to go. They figured that my nationally televised speech would launch “The Apology” message like a rocket, and we could also use a videotape excerpt from the speech for The Apology TV commercial, thus saving as much as $5000 in production costs.

For these reasons, I decided to go, and I’m glad I did — although it would turn out to be not only one of the most exhilarating experiences of the campaign, but also the most depressing. I’ll get into that in a minute, but for now, mon candidate, let me give you a small piece of advice. When you go to a political convention, the best place to spend time is at the numerous parties put on by lobbyists. And you don’t go for food. You go to beg for money.

That’s what I found myself doing after checking into my hotel and swinging by the headquarters of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee to get my floor credentials for the convention. By then it was 5:00 p.m. — prime time for lobbyist parties. I had the whole night ahead to cruise and a long list of parties to crash.

Buddy, Can You Spare Me Ten Grand

The first party was a dry hole — although it did give me my best laugh of the convention. Great historic house. Great food. Great hosts. But it was one of those parties where politicians outnumber financial donors ten to one. Not exactly a target-rich opportunity.

Anyway, here’s the joke I heard there: Congressman Charlie Rangel of New York gets up to the podium and with the same beautiful timing comedian Redd Foxx had, Rangel lets loose with “When I die, I want to be buried in Chicago — so I can stay politically active.”

Hey, you can get elected with a sense of humor like that and you don’t even need other talents. And speaking of Redd Foxx, I once saw him onstage, when I was 17 years old. It was at the predominantly black Howard Theatre in Washington, D.C., and he leaned over to this foxy woman and said, “Honey, I may not be as good as I once was... But I’m as good once as I ever was.” Took me 20 years to get that joke.

Anyway, if Party One was a dry hole (and Parties Two through Seven, for that matter), Party Eight was a gusher. This was an open house sponsored by the Italian-American Foundation. The head of this organization is a great guy named Jim Rosapepe, and I had first come into contact with him through the good offices of Joseph Cerrell.

Cerrell was one of the first and most famous of the modern political consultants, and he still practices his trade today with as much gusto as acumen. Joe is aggressive at promoting Italian-American interests, and when he found out that I was half-Italian, he immediately began to help me out. One of the first things he did was put me in touch with Jim Rosapepe.

At this Italian-American love-fest, Rosapepe was kind enough to help me work the room, and bingo! the first guy he introduced me to was Arthur Coia. Coia is the president of the Laborers Union, which represents almost a million construction workers. He’s also one of the guys the Wall Street Journal editorial page loves to lambaste for his alleged twin ties to Bill Clinton and the Mafia.

Well, I’d never seen a mafioso up close, and I’m not sure I did that night, but Coia did prove to be a godfather of sorts. You see, for months I’d been trying to get a PAC donation from the Laborers Union, but there was political turmoil at the local union, and I was unable to get the crucial support of that local union filtered up the chain of command.

Arthur Coia broke that logjam for me in exactly 43 seconds. That’s how long it took for Jim Rosapepe to introduce me to Coia, say I was a good guy, and, most relevant, say I was an Italian running for Congress. For my part, shy fellow that I am, all I said was “nice to meet you,” and, by the way, “I’m having just a little trouble getting some
money from your PAC." Coia turned to one of his lieutenants and said, "Take care of my paesano." And he did. Five grand in cold, hard, PAC cash, just like that.

If It Weren't for Bad Luck, I Wouldn't Have None At All

The next morning I woke up with an excitement usually reserved for five-year-olds on Christmas. I was due at the convention site by 9:00 a.m. to do a rehearsal for my next day's speech. After that, it would be the fat-cat Dutko supercruise, and then another stellar night on the town. So much for high hopes.

It all started to go sour as soon as I got to the convention site — the United Center Arena, which is home to the Chicago Bulls. The bull I got initially was from the guy who had been assigned to shepherd me through the rehearsal. Seems that there was some kind of delay. Wasn't quite sure if we could get this done today. Blah, blah, blah.

I usually know B.S. when I see it, so I pushed this guy until he admitted that I had been cut from the convention program. He didn't even know why, but his instructions had been to delay and humor me.

Upon hearing these words, I felt like an asthmatic on top of Mount Everest. I was not only speechless — in more than one way — I was also quite literally breathless and had to sit down and hyperventilate. That lasted about 90 seconds. Then I got angry. Really, really, Jack Nicholson angry. What ensued is what I guess they call power politics.

My first call was to Matt Angle, who had promised that I would get to speak. He didn't even know that I had been bumped — and he's the frigging head of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. He was almost as mad about the situation as I was because his promise was on the line, and he told me frankly that the problem was that the convention was ultimately a White House operation, over which he had no control. But he promised to get on the horn and see what he could do.

My next call was to Mark Irion. Mark had worked hard to help get me on the program, and he was stunned to learn that I had been bumped. But he had an ace to play as well. He promised to call Dan Dutko, his boss, who happened to be one of the three main guys running the convention and the Clinton-Gore campaign's biggest fund-raiser.

The last call I made was to my guardian angel Chuck Davenport.

This was the only call I didn't want to make. Chuck had been so helpful that I just wanted him and his wife to enjoy the convention hoopla without having to pull in any chits for me. But, I also knew that a few calls from Chuck expressing his displeasure at this turn of events would not only put the screws to everybody, it would also give Matt Angle a good argument with the White House not to bump me, namely, "don't tick off a guy who just gave $100,000 to the Democratic Party."

Now here's the topping on this dung-covered cake: it took me so long to get everybody on the phone, I missed the boat. Literally. Yup. The frigging supercruise. I got to the dock breathless after a harrowing ride through Chicago traffic just as the money boat was leaving the dock. I almost jumped in the water and swam after it. Instead, I slumped down on a bench and watched it go — visions of drowning dollar bills dancing on my brain.

The Exorcist

That night, I was in a deep funk. I had done everything I could to get back on the program, but I wouldn't hear until morning from Matt Angle as to whether that would happen. While the temptation was to take a hot shower, order room service, and sink into a depressive sleep, I realized that that would be stupid. In a campaign, every minute counts, so I took a cold shower as shock therapy and took off to cruise parties. That's when I met the vivacious Loretta Sanchez — and got even more depressed.

Loretta Sanchez will rightfully go down in history as the woman who exorcised the Bob Dornan demon from Congress. Dornan, of course, is the tightly wound ex-congressman from Orange County whose major claim to any legitimate fame is that he almost singlehandedly saved the B-1 bomber program from budgetary extinction.

In this election cycle, however, B-1 Bob would get distracted by a quixotic run for president, forget to raise enough money for his congressional campaign, and lose by a few hundred votes. This would turn out to be a good thing because Bob Dornan is to Congress as HIV is to blood.

On the politically correct front, he has called his opponent Loretta Sanchez "another Catholic for abortion and sodomy" and whined about how "lesbian spear-chuckers" were out to get him, then later
explained he only meant to say spear “carriers.”

On the compassion front, he once said this about the paraplegic and pacifistic Vietnam War veteran Ron Kovic, “If Kovic hadn’t been shot, he’d have been strutting about his two tours of Vietnam.”

And in the telling-it-like-it-is category, Dornan has called Oliver Stone a “Bolshevik enemy,” referred to a fellow Republican as a “pathetic, old, senile man,” and described Phil Donahue as “a boot-licking wimp” (although I’d probably agree with that last one).

Nonetheless, on occasion, Dornan can be funny. As the nephew of Jack Haley — the Tinman in The Wizard of Oz — Dornan no doubt drew inspiration from his roots for this Clinton riposte: “Gore is searching for a brain. Hillary is searching for a heart. And Clinton is searching for Dorothy.”

Anyway, at this point in the game, nobody gave Loretta Sanchez a prayer of beating Bob Dornan, wacky though he was. However, the Chicago convention would be the turning point in Sanchez’s ultimately winning campaign. The reason: At the convention, Bill and Hillary Clinton adopted Loretta Sanchez as their pet candidate, and they did so out of a white-hot hatred of B-1 Bob.

Some people say that Bill Clinton hates Bob Dornan because Dornan called him a “womanizer, a liar, a triple draft dodger, a drug abuser, and someone who gave aid and comfort to the enemy.” But I don’t think that’s the real reason. I think what pushed Bill Clinton over the edge was when Dornan called him a “wimp” who jogged in “girlie-girlie” shorts exposing “white doughboy thighs.” Talk about a last straw.

At any rate, Bill and Hillary would get behind Sanchez at the convention and pull her all the way to victory. Unfortunately, the first uplift Loretta Sanchez got from the White House apparently came at my expense. Here’s how it went down.

When I met Sanchez, she was working the crowd at the same event that I was, and the first thing she told me was that she had just gotten word from “Hillary’s people” that she had been put on the convention program to speak the next day. Given that the number of candidates and the time allotted for the speeches was fixed, that meant that in all likelihood I was staring into the eyes of the very person who had bumped me off the top-20 list.

After some very small talk, I wished her well and went to call Matt Angle on his cell phone to let him know what I had just learned. It was the first time I couldn’t get a straight answer out of him, so I figured that Sanchez probably was at the root of my problem — but Matt reiterated his promise to try and work it out.

Three Minutes of Fame

The next morning I woke up bright and early and did what I often do at times of greatest stress: go running. It was a gorgeous day, so I headed out from the hotel and walked down to water’s edge and then jogged around the faux beach that rings the Chicago waterfront. I got back to my hotel on an endorphin high just in time for an urgent message to get my butt out to the United Center Arena that afternoon. Matt had gotten me back on the program!

I suppose I should have been ecstatic at this point. But I wasn’t. Instead, the episode left me with an acrid taste in my mouth. I thought, Why do I have to fight so hard for everything in this campaign — particularly with members of my own party? They should be laying down a red carpet for me at every step of the way instead of claymore mines. But I couldn’t dwell on that. It was going to be a busy afternoon and evening.

I’ve had some pressure-packed moments in my life, but few can compare to standing on the presidential podium that day talking to the nation. The best part was that the microphones were the best damn microphones I have ever babbled into. My small and on occasion squeaky voice went into that precision technology, and out boomed Charlton Heston. I wanted to do the Ten Commandments right on the spot. And I could have done what Bill Clinton often does when he makes speeches, which is to go on for hours just to hear myself talk. Instead, what I did was The Apology. What I said was this:

“I have in the past participated in negative campaigning, and I regret it deeply. I let my supporters down, and I apologize, for we must stress the positive ideas for which we are fighting, and we must believe that America’s best days are before us and that those of us who earn the privilege to serve must give the very best that is within us. So I say let’s win one for hope, for the man from Hope, Bill Clinton.”

Pretty good stuff, if I do say so myself. And that portion of the speech hit the national media — dovetailing as it did with the Clinton-Dole sparring over negative campaigning.
By the way, if you still aren’t convinced that the San Diego Union-Tribune is a shameless propaganda rag run by a bunch of syphilitic pricks masquerading as journalists, then maybe this will convince you. The lead paragraph of the U-T’s story about my speech said, “Peter Navarro had his three minutes of fame yesterday.” Cheaper shot.

The story went on to describe yours truly as follows: “A former Republican and a former independent, Navarro is also a former unsuccessful candidate for mayor of San Diego, the San Diego City Council, and the San Diego County Board of Supervisors.” Cheaper shot.

Nonetheless — and here’s the good news — the speech was great for morale back at campaign headquarters. My campaign manager Dale Kelly Bankhead loved it so much she almost wore out the VCR playing the video for anyone who would sit still for three minutes to watch it.

The bad news about the speech is that it was a total flop in terms of fodder for TV commercials. The problem was that the TV cameras were as good as the microphones, and because they were so good, they made me look like Richard Nixon rather than Robert Redford. Meaning that I had this ugly five o’clock shadow even though I had shaved just three hours before shoot time. This was bizarre because I don’t have a thick beard. In fact, when I do my regular TV gigs, I’m one of the few people they don’t have to put much makeup on.

Satori in Chicago

That night was the night of Vice President Gore’s speech, and the Democratic Party had broken with tradition by giving Gore a night all his own. It was Bill Clinton’s way of giving his buddy and running mate a leg up on his presidential campaign in the year 2000.

Sitting in the Dutko box with Mark Irion and his pregnant wife, just yards from Vice President Gore as he delivered his speech, was a satori for me — one of the most peaceful nights of the entire campaign. Gore gave a beautiful and rousing performance, one that repeatedly brought the crowd to its feet.

Gore also gave me material for what would be one of my best jokes of the campaign — a joke I would tell two months later warming up the crowd at Balboa Park for a speech by President Clinton. Gore’s joke was “Want to see me do the Macarena?” Then, as the crowd chanted Yes! Yes! Yes! Gore just stood there. I’ve seen sphinxes move more than Gore did in those ten seconds. Then he brought the house down with “Want to see me do it again?”

I went back to the hotel that night a happy man, slept like a baby, and checked out early the next morning to head home. It would be Bill Clinton’s night to accept the nomination, and while I could have stayed, there was work to be done on the home front. I’d done my job and I’d done it well.

However, as I sat down in a plastic chair in the departure lounge, I looked up to see the Dick Morris scandal unfolding on CNN. If I felt sick to my stomach, you can imagine what this must have done to the insides of Bill Clinton on this, one of the biggest and what was supposed to be one of the best nights of his political life.

Morris, you no doubt recall, is the Republican political consultant who came into the White House about midway through Clinton’s first term and arguably saved the Clinton presidency. What Morris got caught doing while he was serving the president was having some hooker service him at one of Washington’s most exclusive hotels.

When I saw this story break, I thought it would be disastrous. In fact, there were only two points during the campaign when I thought Clinton might lose the race. Right at that Morris Moment and two weeks before when Bob Dole had surprised everybody by nominating one of his mortal enemies, Jack Kemp, to be his running mate.

That just goes to show you what I know. Because Bad Boy Morris wound up causing as big a blip on the Gallup poll radar screen as the Boy Scout Kemp did — which is to say none at all. But I didn’t know that at the time, and it was a long, depressing flight home.
A Radical, Pinko Commie to the Rescue

So far, Ed Asner’s actions have spurred a recall petition, several death threats, the defacing of the Screen Actors Guild’s Hollywood headquarters with posters labeling him “a Communist swine,” calls for a sponsor boycott of his CBS-TV series, Lou Grant, and the formation of a watchdog committee to monitor his future actions.

On September 23, I flew to Portland, Oregon, for the campaign’s TV-commercial shoot. It is not standard operating procedure for a candidate to leave his home district so close to the election to spend a day in a far-off city. In this case, however, my excursion would save the campaign about $15,000 in TV production costs. The reason: Ed Asner was in Portland on a project, and that’s where we were going to shoot his “Vote of Your Life” spot. Since we had to rent a studio for the day to do it, it made sense for me to fly up and shoot my commercial as well.

That the Vote of Your Life message was a linchpin of our campaign strategy. The goal of the ad was to frame my congressional race not as a choice between Navarro and Bilbray but as a referendum on keeping the Republicans in the majority and Newt Gingrich as Speaker of the House. For this purpose, we needed a strong third party to make the most credible pitch possible.

Let me confess that Ed Asner was not my first choice to do the Vote of Your Life commercial. The person I really wanted for this third-party validation was former San Diego Mayor Maureen O’Connor—one of the most beloved, respected, and trusted women in my little town. But try as I might to woo her, this would be the second time she would let me down in a political race.
The first time had really hurt. In my 1992 mayor's race, the then-Mayor O'Connor had come within a cat's whisker of endorsing me several weeks before the general election. But when word got out that Maureen might take the Navarro plunge, the whole damn out-house hit the turboprop.

I don't know if it was a call from Union-Tribune publisher and Maureen-best-friend Helen Copley, or whether it was a sober recommendation against the endorsement from confidante and developer-lobbyist Paul Peterson. Or maybe it was the raking over the coals she took from talk-show host Roger Hedgecock. But in the end she backed off, which was a real pity. Because given her status as Beloved Icon, her endorsement would have all but guaranteed me a victory.

It was a pity, too, that upon her election Susan Golding dismantled practically all of O'Connor's favorite programs — including Maureen’s annual Christmas-homeless-shelter project. This destruction of the O'Connor legacy came, by the way, just as I had told Maureen it would if Golding won, but Maureen wouldn’t listen to me.

In my congressional race, Maureen didn’t even want to talk to me. The only thing that the reclusive ex-mayor would do in this campaign was mail me a campaign donation and then go blow ten grand at the Jackie O auction.

So instead of Maureen O'Connor, I wound up with Ed Asner. It all started with a trip to Los Angeles to introduce myself to the Hollywood Women’s Political Committee. Ostensibly, my visit had been to solicit PAC funds, but I also hoped that they might help me lasso a celebrity to do the Vote of Your Life ad.

The celebrity I had in mind was the redoubtable Angela Lansbury. I thought she'd be great at getting through to the older Democratic and Independent men as well as to the Republican women who were still proving to be my Achilles’ heel. But I was told that Angela had become gun-shy — indeed, had gotten shot up pretty good — after doing a TV commercial opposing term limits in California. The ad not only turned out to be grossly inaccurate, it also was bad for the ratings of Murder, She Wrote, and the word was out that Ms. Lansbury wouldn’t be doing any more of that kind of thing.

As an alternative, Lisa Presta at the Hollywood Women’s Political Committee suggested that Jack Lemmon and Ed Asner were politically involved and might help if I asked. So, with the blessing and support of the committee, I sent letters to both, and Ed Asner was the one who promptly responded.

Ben Hur Kicks Lou Grant’s Butt

I love Ed Asner and I’m grateful for him for his help. I also greatly respect him for his political activism. However, I must live with the haunting possibility that the Asner TV ad did at least as much harm as it did good.

The problem was that, like me, Asner carries political baggage from an earlier era of firebrand activism. In his heyday as president of the Screen Actors Guild, he had taken a hard-line union position and led a strike against the movie producers. He also had raised funds to pay for medical supplies for the leftist rebels of El Salvador while he was president of the guild.

This act of defiance against American foreign policy drew the opprobrium of President Ronald Reagan (himself a former president of the guild). It also drew the wrath of Asner’s predecessor at the guild, Charlton “Ben Hur” Heston and earned Asner the sobriquet of “the Jane Fonda of Latin America.” The upshot of this uproar was that Asner’s Lou Grant Show was canceled — so much for free speech in America — and Asner was forever branded a radical pinko commie by many of the same forces in Hollywood that had once participated in the McCarthy-era Hollywood blacklisting.

(By the way, when Ronald Reagan was president of the Screen Actors Guild in the 1950s and actress Gale Sondergaard asked the guild to protect her from the House Un-American Activities Committee, the response of the Reagan board was that “all participants in the international Communist Party conspiracy against our nation should be exposed for what they are — enemies of our country and of our form of government.” Just thought you should know.)

Now, ignoramus that I am, I had no idea of Asner’s radical baggage. I just thought he was the salt of the earth — a guy whom every American could trust, which is to say, Lou Grant. More importantly, I did not realize that many San Diegans — particularly the older demographic groups that I desperately needed to win — would most remember Asner as the Bolshevik who had given the beloved Ronald Reagan the (figurative) finger. At least that was the rhetoric that hit the talk-radio rounds as soon as the Asner ad hit in October.
Usually, it’s a good sign when people start talking about your ad. It means that its message is getting through. But the relentless barrage of red-baiting that Asner was peppered with presaged a strong voter backlash. More about that later.

For now, let me tell you that at first glance in that Portland filming studio, the seasoned-citizen version of Ed Asner seemed a pale shadow of his former Lou Grant self. Today, he is almost as round as he is tall. He moves with a painful slowness — as if, in fact, he might be in great pain — knees, back, hips, or whatever gets so many of us in old age.

But when Ed Asner sat down in that studio chair to do the Vote of Your Life ad, the transformation was mesmerizing. On that throne, he became the Force, the Buddha, the Voice of Authority, and Everybody’s Lovable Teddy Bear of a Grandfather all rolled into one magnificent and weighty presence. You would just have to love and trust this guy and do whatever he recommended — or so I thought.

And what I most loved about Ed Asner that day was his supreme professionalism. After he did the first take, which was fine and which would have been fine for 99 percent of the actors on the planet, he insisted on doing 27 more takes until he got it right. Twenty-seven takes! Here’s the script of the ad:

“Brian Bilbray’s very first vote was for Newt Gingrich as Speaker. That’s why all eyes are on San Diego today. If Bilbray wins, Gingrich stays in power. If he loses, Gingrich is out. Bill Clinton wants Peter Navarro on his team to protect Medicare, the environment, and education. The race is really bigger than Navarro or Bilbray. It’s about whether Newt Gingrich stays in power. It’s the vote of your life. Make it Peter Navarro.”

The ad was powerful and perfect — except for the messenger. Furthermore, we compounded the error by running the ad too soon, too long, and too often — giving the other side a chance to mount an effective counterattack.

In hindsight, the one thing I wish my campaign had done that it didn’t was to test that ad in several focus groups before airing it. It would have been easy to gauge the extent to which Asner’s radical image undercut his credibility with San Diego voters. And the lesson here, mon candidate, is this: Always test your message before broadcasting. As your mama no doubt used to tell you, it’s better to be safe than sorry.

**On the night I flew back from Portland and the Ed Asner shoot, I turned on the 11:00 p.m. news to see myself being sliced and diced for not showing up for a debate with Brian Bilbray. Let the record reflect that this was the only debate in my political life that I ever purposely ducked. The reason: It wasn’t really a debate at all but an ambush.**

Some campaign strategy here, mon candidate: One of the dirtiest, not to mention rudest, tricks in campaigning is to stuff a debate audience with your supporters and have them loudly cheer you and even more loudly boo your opponent. If you are really good at this dirty trick, you’ll also manipulate the questions being asked. And if you are absolutely great at this dirty trick, you’ll even make sure that the “neutral” debate moderator is one of your staunchest supporters. At least for this one debate, Brian Bilbray was great.

The ambush was held in the epicenter of Brian Bilbray’s voting base, Point Loma — home of San Diego’s old Republican money. My problem wasn’t with the place, mind you. I like venturing into the lion’s den on occasion. Rather, the problem was with the young punk in pinstripes who had muscled his way into the role of debate moderator. This was John Seymour Jr. — Republican consultant, Bilbray fanatical, and former aide to my ongoing nemesis Susan Golding.

Junior is the scion of one of the biggest political flops in California history, one-time Senator John Seymour. The senior Seymour had been appointed to the Senate by Pete Wilson in 1990 to replace
Wilson after he had been elected governor of California. However, the hapless Seymour turned out to be as bad at campaigning as he was at senatorial politics, and he got trounced by Diane Feinstein in a special election some months later.

Now young Seymour seemed to be following in Daddy’s footsteps. Indeed, he had just lost a race for the San Diego City Council that political insiders had figured impossible for him to lose. But Junior got caught in the ugly glare of a political money-laundering scandal — his boss allegedly tried to funnel money into his campaign via a daughter in Idaho — and Seymour got trounced just as his papa had.

Now you might think it odd that a loyal partisan like Seymour would be allowed the role of “neutral” moderator in a congressional debate. Hey, it was odd, and my campaign sent a letter of protest to the debate organizers. However, Seymour was chairperson of one of the planning groups sponsoring the debate, wearing that hat made the moderator role his to play, and nobody on the planning group appeared to share our sense of outrage.

Stonewalled as we were by the debate sponsors, my consultant Larry Remer and pollster Bob Meadow put their feet down. No way would I appear if young punk Seymour was the moderator — particularly since in the last election, Bilbray had loaded that Point Loma audience with an assortment of gun nuts, anarchists, and wackos who had lacerated Billbray’s opponent, then-Congresswoman Lynn Schenk.

Actually, this episode really stuck in my craw because, as I said earlier, I don’t mind going into hostile audiences. It’s always a challenge, usually fun, and never boring. But in this case I had to agree with Larry and Bob: There wasn’t any upside to my appearing, and since we didn’t think the media would cover it, there appeared to be little downside risk.

“Appeared,” I say, because my absence from the event wound up extracting its little pound of my campaign flesh. The gouge came in the form of a hard-hitting “empty-chair debate” news segment on the TV station that loves to hate me, KNSD (more about that station later). So sometimes in a campaign, you just can’t win for losing, and if I have any advice for you here, mon candidate, it is that you should go wherever you are invited to debate, stay cool, and stay on your campaign message. Because anything is better than the Empty Chair.

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We Lose the Election but Don’t Know It

The House late Saturday easily passed a budget accord reached with the White House that President Clinton hailed as bipartisan progress towards a balanced budget.... The new fiscal year starts Tuesday, Oct. 1, and without passage of this bill, federal agencies would be forced to close. A middle-of-night compromise on legislation to impose strict controls on immigration and crack down on illegal aliens cleared the way for agreement on the massive spending bill which funds the largest agencies in the government.

REUTERS NORTH AMERICAN WIRE

The failure of the Democrats to win back Congress didn’t happen on Election Day but rather one month earlier, on September 28 — the last day of the 104th Congress. On that day, Bill Clinton’s presidency and Newt Gingrich’s Congress ended a bitter gridlock that had been shutting down the government and showed America beyond any reasonable doubt that these two halves of a “divided government” could work together on balancing the budget and passing legislation.

Up until that critical point, public perception of the Gingrich regime was that it was a careening ship of loose cannons incapable of compromise — a vile vessel hell-bent on sinking the government in the profane name of a narrow and brittle ideology. With one flourish of the presidential pen, however, Bill Clinton changed everything. Absolutely and irrevocably everything.

From the perspective of my own campaign, the Clinton-Gingrich deal contained two pieces of legislation that strengthened and amplified my opponent’s campaign message. This legislation would throw many Americans off welfare and keep many Mexicans and other ille-
gal aliens out of the country. If the staff at Merriam-Webster were to search for examples of a “salient issue,” they could do no better than to cite the strong appeal that welfare reform and immigration reform have to most San Diegans. Indeed, for Brian Bilbray, these issues would play as sweet as Yo-Yo Ma at the Met.

From a national perspective, the worst part of the Clinton-Gingrich deal was that it showed that a divided government — one with a Democratic presidency and a Republican Congress — could not only work, it could work very well at hammering out critical, middle-of-the-road legislation.

From that point on, the Republicans deftly used this divided-government theme to neutralize and ultimately overpower the anti-Gingrich “Take Back the House” message. For over a year, this message had been the only pillar of the Democratic Party’s campaign house. But with one callous, cynical handshake between Gingrich and Clinton, that pillar came crashing down, taking the prospects for a Democratic House down with it. The destruction was all the more devastating because Bill Clinton went out of his way to praise Gingrich and the Republican Congress for their flexibility.

Not surprisingly, within a few weeks a New York Times/CBS News poll showed that Republican congressional candidates outdistanced Democratic candidates by 48 to 41 percent when voters were asked if it would “be better to elect a Democratic Congress to increase the power of President Clinton” or to elect a Republican Congress to “limit the power of President Clinton.” This was a dramatic reversal from the eight- to ten-digit lead Democrats had held over Republicans since Gingrich had shut down the government during the Christmas holidays — and the Republican lead would hold firmly as their campaign strategists continued to beat the divided-government drum.

The Clinton Sellout

There are two explanations why Bill Clinton let the Republicans off the Gingrich hook at this eleventh hour. The charitable view is that the president put the interests of his country ahead of the interests of his political party: The budget gridlock had to stop, and this was the best way to do it.

I do not subscribe to this view. Before telling you why, let me make it clear once again that I like Bill Clinton, I owe Bill Clinton a lot (as you will see as you continue reading), and I believe he’s been a good president. But the truth is the truth and that is what I’ve tried to tell in this story. So in the name of Truth, I have to say that I have a far less charitable view of Clinton’s actions, one that I no doubt share with Democrats like Dick Gephardt and Tom Daschle. That view is this:

The Clinton sellout to Gingrich and the Republicans was the most selfish and shortsighted deal that William Jefferson Clinton has ever cut. It was selfish because its primary purpose was to guarantee Clinton a victory over a hapless, helpless opponent whom Clinton was going to destroy anyway. The deal did so not only by positioning Clinton further to the right with its tough approach to welfare and immigration, it also did so by taking away any criticism by Bob Dole that Clinton couldn’t work with a Republican Congress.

But the Clinton sellout was also shortsighted because it virtually guaranteed that Clinton would be a lame duck president thwarted by a Republican Congress for the rest of his tenure in office. Indeed, as history has already shown us, the Clinton-Gingrich compromise was not an example of good things to come under a working divided government — as it was so lavishly advertised at the time. Rather, it was simply an aberrant compromise struck in the heat of a campaign a month before an election by two men — one desperate (Newt) and one selfish (Bill) — who saw that deal in their own self-interest.

Viewed from this perspective, it is clear that Newt Gingrich got the best of the deal because it allowed him to consolidate his hold on Congress — even if it appeared that Gingrich had to eat a little crow at the time. Equally clear is that Bill Clinton’s victory was a Pyrrhic one at best — an ill-conceived insurance policy that the president didn’t even need and one that has, and will continue to, cost him dearly.

The only other thing I can tell you about the Clinton sellout is that if the shoe had been on the other foot with a Republican president and a Democratic Congress, the Republicans never would have been as selfish or shortsighted. If there is one good thing I can say about the Republicans, it is that they are generally better than Democrats at putting the interests of their party above the interests of any one of its members. And if that had been Dick Gephardt rather than Newt Gingrich twisting in the wind, the Republicans would have had him still spinning like a top.
Having gotten this off my chest, let me turn now to the other thing that Bill Clinton did to virtually insure that the Democrats would not take back Congress from the Republicans. That was to suck in every available Democratic fund-raising dollar — leaving nothing but crumbs for many critical House and Senate races.

We’re seven weeks from Election Day, and the Democrats need hard, federal dollars fast. Ed McMahon, the prize patrol, and the Wizard of Oz all rolled into one couldn’t make up for so much lost time. . . . [Bill Clinton] should have started this a year ago.

DAN MCLAGANON

My second encounter with Bill Clinton happened at a Hollywood fund-raiser. I regret to say it was not the one where Barbra Streisand serenaded him under the stars, Maya Angelou read him poetry, and Tom Hanks, Don Henley, and the Neville Brothers otherwise entertained him. That event, which raised $4 million, would have been really cool to attend. But no such luck.

At the fund-raiser I did go to, I met a Beverly Hills pawnbroker, a pornography hotline czar, and a flamboyant record mogul. I also met more than a few deadbeats who, like me, had managed to get through several layers of the Secret Service to shake Clinton’s hand without donating a dime for the privilege.

I went to this fund-raiser at the suggestion of Noah Mamet, the wunderkind from the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee who had done such a great job organizing my Al Gore fund-raiser. After that event, Noah had put me on the guest list of any event where he thought I might be able to raise money; and Noah believed this party would be a great one to attend because there would be a lot of people there ripe for the plucking. And pluck I did.

Besides soliciting checks for close to $10,000 that night, I met a young entrepreneur from the Indian community who would later help raise another $10,000. I’ll tell you more about that later, but let me observe now how easy it is for money-hungry political candidates to fall into the trap of making commitments to political issues they might
otherwise avoid.

In this case, a big concern of the Indian community is American aid to India's archenemy Pakistan. As with Korean, Israeli, and many other foreign interests, campaign contributions have become an effective way of influencing such aspects of American foreign policy. While I am grateful for the money I received from my Indian friends, such activity should present yet another warning flag that the current system of campaign finance is broken.

That Giant Sucking Sound

But that's not what this chapter is about. What I want to discuss is the real "giant sucking sound" that Ross Perot should have warned us about: the sound of the Clinton-Gore fund-raising machine. During the course of the campaign, that mother of all Oreck vacuum cleaners would raise over $100 million and, in the process, drain just about every major Democratic donor dry. The result was that it left many critical Senate and House races grossly underfunded.

Now here's the worst part: Bill Clinton did so damn little or damn late to rectify the situation. Oh, sure, the White House eventually agreed in late September to raise a measly $10 million dollars to help take back the Congress. (Yes, that's the same Congress that Clinton would need to effectively govern.) But it was too little, and it certainly was too late.

Just look at my race. I wound up being outspent by more than two to one by my opponent. The impact of my money constraint was that I could not compete on an equal footing with Brian Bilbray in the critical TV market. As I'll talk about in a separate chapter, Bilbray got up on the air earlier than I did, he successfully inoculated himself against my message, and, over the course of the campaign, he ran at least twice as many commercials as I did. Everything else being equal, a candidate in my position typically will lose in that situation.

The bottom line: Bill Clinton could have helped me and the 20 or so other candidates in critical House races a whole lot more. All it would have taken was for him to earmark an extra $10 million from his own pot of gold and transfer it to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. Trust me, the money never would have been missed, and the only result would have been a smaller landslide — which is an oxymoron if I've ever written one.

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Paddling Upstream Against the Mainstream Media

The word media is plural for mediocre.

RENE SAGUISAG

THE SECOND, AND LAST, MAJOR TELEvised debate of my congressional campaign aired on September 29. It was a prime-time simulcast carried on television and radio by the local public-broadcasting affiliate as part of the PBS national special The Future Congress.

The Bilbray-Navarro bout was actually the undercard on a night when heavyweights Newt Gingrich and Trent Lott from the Republican congressional leadership would duke it out with their Democratic counterparts, Dick Gephardt and Tom Daschle. Across the country, local PBS stations carried hot congressional races as the prelude to this national debate; and all I could think of when I first heard about the idea was how much better the electoral process would be if there were more opportunities like this for candidates to get their messages across on local television.

Unfortunately, in my little town, as in most cities in America, an event like the PBS broadcast is the exception that proves the more general rule that television stations pay little attention to local politics. Let me get on my soapbox for a minute and tell you how damaging this is.

In order for voters to decide which candidate to choose, they must be well informed about the candidates' messages. If local television and newspapers won't carry those messages, the only way candidates can get their messages across is by spending money on direct mail or TV commercials. This dearth of free media, in turn, heavily tips the balance in favor of the candidate with the most money, virtually guaranteeing that local offices will go to the highest bidder. The result is
special-interest control over the outcome of local elections.

Why doesn’t local TV news provide better coverage of local politics? There are at least two answers — one obvious and one perhaps more subtle. The obvious reason is that most TV news directors believe that the average television viewer doesn’t give a rat’s ass about local politics. Rape, murder, carjackings, and natural disasters are far better bets in the ratings game.

I’d like to say these bean counters are wrong, but I’m not sure about that. What I am sure about is that the second and more subtle reason for the lack of TV coverage is that covering local politics can be bad for business, particularly if you take the wrong candidate’s side. Let me show you what I mean with a Tale of Two TV Executives: Ed Quinn and Neil Derrough.

The Business of San Diego Is Business

During my 1992 mayor’s race, Ed Quinn ran KGTV — the ABC affiliate in San Diego. At the time, KGTV was the number-one-ranked station in the city, and Quinn felt a genuine commitment to increasing coverage of local politics. To that end, he not only scheduled a live, prime-time mayoral debate the Monday night before the election, he also gave Susan Golding and me free advertising time to get our messages across.

While Quinn likely did this out of a sense of public duty, the gambit turned out to be a stroke of public-relations genius because it allowed KGTV to better position itself as the community-oriented station in town. What was most interesting, however, is that once KGTV threw its local-politics gauntlet down, the other major TV stations followed suit.

For starters, Neil Derrough’s NBC affiliate, KNSD, sponsored a prime-time debate on the Sunday before the election — a debate, as I shall explain shortly, that allowed Derrough to give me one of the biggest screw jobs I’ve ever gotten in politics. At the same time, the CBS affiliate, KFMB — shut out by its competitors on the prime-time evening coverage — scheduled a set of weekly minidebates on the five o’clock news in the months preceding the election.

It was great coverage, and I’d like to report that it started a new trend toward covering local politics in San Diego — but such was not the case. What happened was that Ed Quinn and the KGTV editorial board took one step over the establishment line by endorsing me over Susan Golding.

Retribution was swift and sure. One of the major car dealers in town canceled thousands of dollars in advertising to protest KGTV’s sacrilege, and if you’re curious which dealer it was, I don’t know because Quinn wouldn’t tell me. My best guess, however, is that it was Steve Cushman because Cushman, according to Quinn, had used such pressure before to protest negative news coverage of his industry by KGTV.

Despite this pressure, Quinn held his ground with the endorsement — there was really no face-saving way out. But the sponsor’s boycott still had several undesirable effects on my campaign.

First, throughout the rest of my campaign, KGTV did absolutely nothing more for me when, in fact, it could have done a great deal. All it would have taken was one or two editorials from the highly respected Quinn decrying the mudslinging tactics of Susan Golding early in the game, and the rest of the race would have been fought fairly and on the issues — not in the gutter to which it devolved. Even more importantly, Quinn’s actions seemingly escalated an already fierce competition between him and Neil Derrough at rival KNSD for the hearts and minds of San Diego’s television viewers — and the megabucks of the establishment’s advertisers.

Neil Derrough is as different from Ed Quinn as Don Ho is from Don Henley. Quinn is hip, handsome, articulate, and athletic. Derrough is a bespectacled nerd with tortured syntax who was running a TV station sinking ever deeper into the ratings muck. Comparing himself to Quinn, Derrough must have felt like Twiggy standing next to Dolly Parton at a wet T-shirt contest.

Nonetheless, there was one edge Derrough had. While the progressive Quinn was aloof and independent and uncomfortable with breaking

Neal Derrough — a flagrant foul.
bread and rubbing elbows with the power brokers of San Diego’s establishment, the conservative Derrough had quickly, quietly, and thoroughly ingratiated himself right into the middle of that influential mélange. Indeed, together with his Business Roundtable colleague Steve Cushman, Derrough was working his way up the hierarchy of the Chamber of Commerce in the hope of one day being named its chairman. What better way to kick Ed Quinn’s butt — and steal his advertisers — than by kicking mine?

So while Quinn and KGTV were backing off from my campaign, Derrough and KNSD were pouring it on. It would be KNSD that would replay my alleged “shoving match” with Golding’s press secretary so many times that the station would be ridiculed by the Los Angeles Times. It would be KNSD that would prominently air the devastating “Drag Queen in tears” interview with Nicole Ramirez Murray after I had publicly attacked Murray in a mayoral debate with Susan Golding. Most treacherously, it would be Neil Derrough himself who would drive a stake so deep into my heart the Sunday night before the election that I still feel a sharp pain when I think about it.

What Derrough did was this: Right at the end of my debate with Susan Golding, he ran an editorial endorsing Golding. However, he ran the editorial without running our campaign’s rebuttal. Moreover, he did so despite the strong protest of his own editorial director Tim Chelling. (Later, in a conversation with Ed Quinn, Quinn would describe this as one of the most flagrant fouls he’d ever seen in television broadcasting.)

Which brings me back to Ed Quinn and KGTV. Because the long-run impact of his foray into my race is that KGTV has withdrawn completely from any involvement in candidate politics. Instead, what KGTV does is what most every other TV station in America does — rapes and murders and consumer tips interspersed with sensational sweeps-week stunts like “Barbie Meets the Nutty Professor.”

In that particular stunt, the station put their bleached-blond Barbie anchorette Kimberly Hunt into a “fat suit” just like Eddie Murphy wore in The Nutty Professor. Then they turned this grotesque, quivering mass of fake flesh loose on the Mission Beach Boardwalk with a hidden camera and microphone to see how many testosterone-crazed teenagers would call the beloved Kimberly a fat pig.

Of course, the hypocrisy lost in this hand-wringing, politically

correct venture was that if Kimberly had been even half that fat, she never would have been allowed inside the station — much less behind the anchor desk. I also think that the story would have gotten higher ratings if they had simply put Kimmie on the Boardwalk in Rollerblades and a butt-floss bikini.

Float Like a Butterfly, Sting Like a Bee

So now, and sadly, the role of covering local politics falls mostly to the more sparsely viewed public broadcasting affiliate, KPBS; and that’s how I found myself sitting on a presidential-looking set going toe-to-toe with Brian Bilbray before a live TV audience.

It was really fun, mostly because, unlike in our first debate, KPBS allowed a third-party candidate into the act, the Libertarian dentist Ernie Lippe. Lippe is a crack-up, and his best line of the night came at my and Bilbray’s expense when Lippe described himself as the “rose between two thorns.”

Plus, I was glad that Lippe was there because I was able to use him as a shield while I pretty much had my way with a seemingly confused Mr. Bilbray. How Lippe helped was that every time I wanted to hit Bilbray hard on a point, I did it when it would be Lippe’s turn to respond next. By the time it was Bilbray’s turn, any rejoinder directly to me would not only seem odd to the audience but also overly defensive.

So throughout this glorious night, I felt like Cassius Clay taking on Sonny Liston as I peppered Bilbray with my campaign message — floating like a butterfly, stinging like a bee. My only problem with the debate is that few people saw it, and for the few who did, I was mostly singing to my own choir. Meaning that most of the people who regularly watch PBS would be my constituency anyway — predominantly middle- and upper-class, higher-educated Democrats who feel guilty watching TV unless it’s Masterpiece Theatre or The News Hour with Jim Lehrer.

Still and all, it was a very good TV night on the campaign trail. I just wish there had been more of them.
I also want to say a special word of appreciation to Peter Navarro, who is running for Congress, and I want you to help him get elected.

President Bill Clinton

In September, the Commission on Presidential Debates announced that the second and final debate would be held on October 16 in San Diego. At my campaign headquarters, this news was met with elation because it opened the door to three great presidential gifts.

First, the debate would bring celebrity pundits like Cokie Roberts and George Will and David Broder swarming into my little town, and if they were worth their salt, they'd do sidebars on my race. This would further boost my campaign's profile down the home stretch and give a turbocharge to my fund-raising and vote-getting efforts.

Second, where there would be a Clinton-Dole debate there would also be a Clinton rally; and that meant a great opportunity to be onstage with the president. What my campaign consultants were really hoping for was a chance to "script" Clinton during this rally so his remarks could be used for our final "Clinton hug" TV commercial.

Last but not least, we wanted the president to host a quick "grip and grin" fund-raiser to bring in a badly needed $50,000 to help pay for our "Bulldoze Bilbray" direct-mail piece. This piece was about to be sacrificed on the altar of budget constraints, but it was critical to our message.

Well, a quarter of a loaf is better than none. Because what we wound up getting was not the whole national press corps but rather a "microwave" visit by David Broder — 90 seconds and he was gone. More importantly, we did get the Clinton-hug TV commercial — but not
quite the way we expected. And that mountain of $50,000 in cash turned into a molehill of only ten grand.

Doing the Macarena
The Clinton rally was held at the Organ Pavilion in Balboa Park — the perfect venue for 5000 cheering Democrats. It’s outdoors, it’s beautiful, and it was all paid for by taxpayers.

The concept for the rally was equally perfect: Prior to the Clinton-Dole debate, which was being held a few miles away, a number of politicians, including yours truly, would provide the crowd with speeches and pep talks. Immediately after the debate, the president and first lady would take a limo to the rally, hopefully with Bob Dole’s head on a presidential platter.

Logistically, there were two critical things that had to be done to make the rally a success for our campaign. The first was for me to deliver a speech. The second was to somehow get the president a copy of the text we wanted him to read for the TV commercial.

The first task proved to be easy, and while I may not have given my best speech of the campaign — that would come later with Hillary — I did manage to tell my very best joke. It went like this:

“I really want to thank the White House for all the help it has given me in this important campaign. Perhaps the most valuable lesson is the one Al Gore gave me several months ago at the Democratic National Convention. After his wonderful speech, he invited me up to his suite with him and Tipper and he taught me how to do the Macarena. You want me to show you? [Big yell from the crowd YES! and a long pause in which I stand as stiff as Al Gore.] Want me to show you again? [Big laugh].”

Boy, did I have fun doing that! But Clinton’s speech at the rally didn’t go as well — at least not for my purposes. While I managed to slip him an index card with our Clinton-hug script written on it, the card got lost in the shuffle. As a result, there was no full-blown “Clinton hug” but merely the weak kiss-your-mother-in-law-on-the-cheek quote that leads this chapter.

Now, that was a disappointment — but, as it would soon turn out, only a temporary one. Because after the rally, I managed to crash the post-debate party hosted by Larry Lawrence’s widow and mega-Democratic donor, Shelia Davis Lawrence. My fund-raiser Kerry Martin had spent several weeks trying unsuccessfully to get me into that big Democratic bash — the hottest ticket in town.

Well, so what if I wasn’t on the guest list. I went anyway. All I had to do was get through the ring of Secret Service agents surrounding Shelia’s Crown Manor, and that was easy. I just found one of the guys who had seen me onstage with the president and, voilà, I was in. That’s where I met George Stephanopoulos and solved one big problem. I also met Chris Dodd and almost solved another.

In Rome the Night Before Its Fall
Senator Chris Dodd (D-Connecticut) is an elegant, ebullient personality, just the kind of Gentlemen’s Quarterly sophisticate you would expect to represent a state crammed with suave corporate titans and fabulously rich suburban Wall Street commuters. And the savvy Dodd knows how the political game is played, so our conversation was short and sweet.

Dodd asked me how my campaign was doing, I told him I needed to raise another quick $100,000 to win, he said he would help me do it, and he instructed an aide to make sure it happened. I think it actually would have happened — if several days later the John Huang fund-raising scandal hadn’t blown up in Dodd’s face.

The scandal involved the alleged illegal soliciting of millions of dollars in campaign contributions by Huang from foreign interests. At the time, Huang was a vice chairman of the Democratic National Committee (DNC), and while that was bad, the worst part of the affair was that the DNC tried to hide Huang’s shenanigans by refusing to file an incriminating financial report with the Federal Election Commission just a few weeks before the election. Of course, the guy who had to explain all this totally inexplicable chicanery was Chris Dodd, the co-chairman of the DNC.

Talk about a public-relations disaster! While Dodd backpedaled and sidestepped and ultimately twisted in the wind for several weeks on Face the Nation and CNN and the evening news, Clinton began a free fall that would continue all the way to Election Day — a free fall, by the way, that would wipe out any coattails that the president might have for candidates like me.

To say this affair was mishandled by Dodd and the DNC is to say that the captain of the Exxon Valdez had a small oil spill. But when I
met Dodd on that calm night there was nothing to suggest that the helping hand he was generously offering me was about to be brutally chopped off at the armpit.

Fortunately for me, the same fate did not befall the Tom Cruise of the Clinton administration, the charismatic and charming George Stephanopoulos. When I told Stephanopoulos just how disappointed I had been at the rally that evening because we hadn't gotten any decent video footage for our Clinton-hug ad, Stephanopoulos kindly offered to intercede with the president on my behalf. Within the week, the president was scheduled to tape commercials for a few candidates around the country, and Stephanopoulos promised he would try to get the president to do an ad for us. This was a promise I am happy to report that Stephanopoulos kept.

For the remainder of the evening, I drank Sheila Lawrence's fine wine and ate her magnificent food. I left Crown Manor a happy man — all the more elated because in the morning the president himself would be hosting a fund-raiser for my campaign at the nearby Hotel del Coronado.

Desperately Sikhing Dollars

I got to the Hotel Del bright and early the next morning, still wired by the excitement of the night before. It's times like this that make campaigning addictive. Never mind that I had been holed up for the better part of the last five months driving myself bananas begging people for money. This was going to be fun!

The format for the fund-raiser was a quick "Ten for Ten" photo line. Because of time constraints, this format had been decreed by the White House in lieu of a more elaborate "coffee" at somebody's home. The difference would be that rather than raise $50,000 as I could have with a more extended visit, I would only raise $10,000 — a thousand per head, or Ten for Ten.

Each of the ten donors allowed to attend would literally stand in a line extending from the door of the hotel to the presidential limousine. The president would walk and talk and photo op his way down that line — and it would all be over and done with in ten minutes.

Most of the donors for this event were from the Indian community. They had been recruited by Ashok Batte, the fellow whom I had met at a previous Clinton fund-raiser in Hollywood; but all would not go smoothly. The first sign of trouble came when one of Ashok's donors arrived without his checkbook. This did not come as a surprise to me because Noah Mamet, who had perused my guest list, had warned me about this fellow. Seems that this Gentleman had tried to crash an earlier presidential party with the same excuse.

A little East-West diplomacy ensued. My campaign manager, Dale Kelly Bankhead, informed the Gentleman that regrettably he could not attend the event without paying, he insisted that he was good for the money, and she held firm until another guest showed up and offered to front the money for the Gentleman.

As Dale and I stood haggling with the Gentleman like merchants in a rug bazaar, the rest of the group was whisked away to the secret meeting area by the Secret Service. When Dale and I turned around, everyone was gone. It was a Three Stooges moment as the three of us — Dale, me, and the Gentleman — ran around frantically trying to find the group. This was no small task in the cavernous Hotel Del.

However, there was even more trouble after we found everybody. What happened was the Gentleman's wife pulled out a camera from her purse as everyone was forming the photo-op line. This was a serious breach of etiquette and security, and it really ticked Dale off. Indeed, Dale had given everyone explicit instructions: No personal cameras. You just don't point stuff like that at the president. Only the presidential photographer has that right.

Well, it took another ten minutes of haggling until Mrs. Gentleman agreed to put the camera away, but sure enough, as soon as the president approached the line, out it came again. I'll tell you in a minute why I got the last laugh on the Gentleman family, but first there is this:

One of the things I love about President Clinton is his uncanny ability to enter your space and create for you a perfectly timeless moment. This is what he did for two of my favorite people on the campaign trail, Doctors Sam Bozette and Carla Stayboldt. This married couple had been very helpful to me throughout the campaign, and Carla had been particularly persistent in persuading the College of American Pathologists to send me a generous PAC donation.

What Clinton did is to engage them in a sincere dialogue about medical-industry reform — one of Carla's passions. Moreover, Clinton did so while a limousine and a helicopter sat idling and a few thou-
sand people stood waiting a hundred miles away at his next stop.

The best part of the moment — indeed, the comic part — was about halfway through this impromptu policy discussion when a frazzled Leon Panetta, pointing frantically at his watch, tried to catch Clinton's eye. When that failed, the desperate Panetta moved in close and tugged on the presidential sleeve — like an impatient child trying to get Daddy's attention. It was great theater and all the more so because it put into much better perspective why the president is chronically late. It's not because he's lazy or a screwup but that he stops to smell the roses. In my book, that's okay, and, hey, if the president can't do that, well, who can?

When the discussion finally ended, I walked with the president to the limo, thanked him profusely, waved at Chris Dodd in the back seat, who once again assured me that he would help, and then off everybody went on their campaign way. It had been a great day, and it wasn't even 9:00 a.m.

The postscript to this is that nobody ever got any pictures from the event. I don't know why, but I do know this: After the election, the investigation into the illegal fund-raising practices of the White House escalated significantly. The press published a number of embarrassing photos. These photos showed Clinton or Gore shaking hands with everyone from convicted Chinese arms dealers to Cuban cocaine smugglers.

My guess is that after several of these expletive-deleted photos got printed, the White House clamped down on the release of any more photos. So when the Gentleman called me repeatedly to demand his photos, all I could say was that I was very, very sorry. Right.

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Spock...I've found that evil usually triumphs — unless good is very, very careful.

Dr. Leonard McCoy, Star Trek

Three days after the final Clinton-Dole debate and less than three weeks before Election Day, my campaign commercials finally hit the airwaves. Waiting for this media blitz was one of the longest waits of my life. This was because my opponent, Brian Bilbray, had gotten his TV commercials up and running over a month earlier — stark testimony to the superior size of his campaign war chest.

Despite my excruciating wait, it had been a conscious decision by my strategic brain trust to "hold our powder dry" until the last few weeks. The basic rule in campaign TV, mon candidate, is that once you go up on the air, you must stay up. By and large, this is a good rule because the half-life of political commercials in the voters' minds is just a few days; and the corollary to this "go up, stay up" rule is that there must be critical mass for your ad campaign. That is, your ads have to appear with enough frequency to break through to the voters' consciousness — no mean feat when voters are being bombarded by a blizzard of ads from other candidates. Thus, for my given budget, I was far better off packing my ads into three weeks rather than running longer but thinner over a five- or six-week period — or so my campaign strategists believed...

Lou Grant Versus Jeopardy

In the TV battle for the hearts and minds of San Diego voters, Bilbray's message was straightforward — as all campaign messages should be. He was the homeboy who had grown up in the district, the
"independent" who would stand up to Newt, and the guy who had brought home the bacon to his district. In contrast, I was the mean and nasty carpetbagger whom you could not trust.

Bilbray’s brain trust delivered these messages in a simple fashion. The first ad flashed images of him in surfer clothes (including a loud shirt that no San Diegan would be caught dead wearing east of Maui). In addition, there was footage of Bilbray in a suit doing this and Bilbray in a suit doing that. It was pedestrian stuff as campaign commercials go but effective at conveying the “Homeboy Fighting for Us in Washington” image.

To kneecap me, Bilbray used a more creative and visually clever Jeopardy Rip-off ad. It showed yours truly being flipped around faster than the pages in the Kama Sutra against a Jeopardy background, while a narrator recited the times I had moved and changed political parties over the last few years. (I regret to say that there were so many times, he could barely get it all in in 30 seconds.)

The first time I saw the Jeopardy ad it made me chuckle — which should have been a warning sign that it was going to be effective. As Victor Borge once observed, “Humor is the fastest distance between two people.” However, my second, more serious thought was that San Diegans really aren’t dumb enough to fall for the carpetbagger, party-switcher critique. What matters are public-policy issues such as Medicare, education, and the right to choose, right? (Sometimes, I am astonished at my own naiveté.)

The final ad in the Bilbray oeuvre was the obligatory “Hell Hath No Fury Susan Golding Cries Again” ad. While tears didn’t actually flow this time from the most famous tear ducts in San Diego’s political history — Nixon gets the national award — Golding’s eyes did glisten with just enough moisture to remind everyone that I had been mean and nasty to her in the mayor’s race.

Free Fall in Crimson

Our response to this solid if not brilliant ad campaign was an equally solid if not brilliant ad campaign — one, however, that rested much more uneasily upon, and ultimately sank into, the quicksand of changing public attitudes.

We led with Lou Grant. In this ad, Ed Asner’s mission was to frame the Bilbray-Navarro race as a referendum on Newt Gingrich. Asner did it with power and brilliance. It was the right message, but it came at the wrong time. By that point in the campaign, the Republicans’ theme of divided government was already beginning to woo back many of the anti-Gingrichites.

Our second ad featured yours truly. At the beginning of the ad, I reaffirmed The Apology, and then I went on to portray myself as a member of the Clinton team who would fight to protect Medicare and the environment. By airtime, however, this, too, would be the wrong message because Bill Clinton, caught as he was in the middle of all fund-raising scandals, had begun his free fall.

Unfortunately, our third ad further reinforced my attachment to Clinton at the precise time that a lot of people started to turn up their noses at him. This was the ad that George Stephanopoulos helped us get. It starred the president himself appealing to the people of San Diego to elect Peter Navarro. Boy, did that ad switch off televisions in Clairemont.

The Missing Link

I had spent the better part of six months raising the $300,000 or so that we eventually spent on the television budget. While this may seem like a lot of money, it really is a paltry sum in a large market like San Diego, where one 30-second ad on 60 Minutes can cost close to $8000.

The practical result of my budget constraint was that while we were able to deliver our positive messages, we didn’t have the funds to go negative. This, however, was necessary to complete the strategy dictated by our polling. Indeed, what was missing from our ad campaign was the shining of that bright light on Brian Bilbray’s extremist record. Ultimately, this is where Bilbray’s two-to-one funding advantage came in because while he spent a significant portion of his TV budget attacking me, our campaign was unable to lay a hand on him.

What I had hoped for from the start was that either the AFL-CIO or the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (D-Triple-C) would run a barrage of negative ads on Bilbray. But Big Labor sat on the sidelines throughout the race, and the ads that the D-Triple-C eventually ran were largely ineffective. This is because both the creative aspects and the production quality of the ads were poor. Indeed, using these weak ads to attack Bilbray was like trying to drive
a nail into a two-by-four with a plastic spoon.

In this bitter endgame, our last hope of getting the “Bilbray Is an Extremist” message across got sucked into the same vortex that brought down Senator Chris Dodd. Dodd is the one fellow who could have quickly helped me raise the extra money for our “Bilbray Bulldozes San Diego” booklet.

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**The Bitter Endgame**

I rate the bulldozer cartoon booklet as one of my campaign consultant’s masterpieces. This is because Larry Remer so cleverly jujitsu-sued Bilbray’s oft-repeated story about how the courageous Bilbray defied the federal government, got on a bulldozer, and closed the mouth of the Tijuana River to stop raw sewage from coming into his hometown.

The “Bilbray on a Bulldozer” image is as famous in San Diego as the Coca-Cola logo is in the Third World, and Remer’s booklet used that image to show Bilbray, page by page, bulldozing the environment, bulldozing education, bulldozing the right to choose, and bulldozing Medicare. I loved the artwork for this last page. The cartoon showed a demonic Bilbray running down frightened, screaming senior citizens with his careening bulldozer, while the caption addressed his anti-Medicare votes.

If we had had another hundred thousand dollars, as I had hoped to raise at the beginning of the campaign, we could have spun that cartoon booklet into a devastating TV ad as well — one that would have strongly reinforced the message of the several hundred thousand booklets we wanted to mail out. But as it was, all we could do was send out a few thousand of the booklets — a small drop in a large bucket.

**20/20 Hindsight**

In retrospect, I don’t think there was any message that could have won my race. By the last three weeks of the campaign, the foundation of the Democratic “Take Back the Congress” campaign had crumbled; and over those three weeks, Clinton’s coattails would not only shrink to nothing, but “hugging” Clinton would actually be a liability in the swing areas of my district like Clairemont. Nonetheless, if I had it to do over again, there are two fundamental things I would have changed in my TV campaign that might have made a difference.

First, I would have spent every penny of my TV budget laying out the voting record of Brian Bilbray in as much gory detail as indeed there was. This is called going “pure negative” in the trade, and in this campaign, I believe it was appropriate.

The problem in San Diego is that few voters know much about Bilbray other than that he’s an amiable surfer type capable of getting up on a bulldozer and fighting for the people. In this case, what they don’t know is certainly hurting them because Brian Bilbray not only
does not represent the majority positions of the district, but given his meager education, he has about as much business writing complex federal legislation as Brooke Shields has doing comedy.

Second, and more importantly, I would not have waited until the final three weeks of the campaign to air my commercials. Instead, I would have begun running ads six weeks before the election and blown every penny running the commercials for three weeks. While that would have left me naked for the final three weeks of the campaign, it might also have driven Bilbray down far enough in the polls to persuade the cavalries of the AFL-CIO and the Democratic Party to come riding in to my rescue with big bucks.

In fact, such an early-strike strategy has been used effectively in many other campaigns, but it's a heck of a gamble. In my race, however, I believe it would have been warranted. The reason: by not responding to the Bilbray ads early, we allowed him to build too strong a foundation for his message — one we could never even crack, much less crumble.

The Republican Rope-A-Dope Strategy

While we were holding our powder dry, so too were the Republicans. While Republican National Committee Chairman Haley Barbour was highly criticized for doing so, his "rope-a-dope strategy" turned out to be as brilliant as when Muhammad Ali first used it to whip George Foreman.

In that strategy, Barbour let big labor and the Democratic Party pummel many of the Republican Party's most vulnerable members right up until the last few weeks of the election. However, when Barbour finally unleashed the superior resources of his party, it was like the hot knife of Norman Schwarzkopf's blitzkrieg cutting through the butter of the Iraqi Army. In a blizzard of TV commercials and direct mail, Barbour and the RNC crushed any last vestige of hope that the Democrats had in the vast majority of the contested congressional races.

Nor would I go unscathed in this attack as the RNC pumped tens of thousands of dollars into the final days of the Bilbray campaign. It was like an injection of embalming fluid right into my veins, even though for all practical purposes, my coffin was already sealed, and my campaign was long dead and buried.

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Me and Hillary

If you vote for yourself and you vote for your future, you will vote to send Peter Navarro to Congress and to reelect President Clinton for the next four years.

HILARY RODHAM CLINTON

On the Saturday before the election, Hillary Clinton came to town to host a "Navarro for Congress" love-in before 3000 screaming fans. On the Monday before the election, right-wing radio talk-show host Roger Hedgecock moderated a Bilbray-Navarro slugfest before 300 flaming assholes. If you guessed I had more fun with Hillary, you're right.

The Hillary event was pure serendipity — sweet manna from heaven. For once in my congressional campaign, something good came from the Democratic Party that I didn't have to beg for. At least, I think it was good, because, as you will soon see, my campaign consultant would strongly disagree with that.

My campaign manager Dale Kelly Bankhead, who happens to be a charter member of the Hillary Fanatics Club, got the call of her life from the White House. Seems that Bill, Al, and Hillary were scouring the country for congressional candidates to help in the final days of the campaign, and since Bill and Al had already been in town for me, it was Hillary's turn. Would we like her to come for a rally and fund-raiser?

Upon hearing this news, Dale broke into a grin wide enough to split lips. Soon thereafter, she went about the business of organizing the event, and she did it with all the frenzy of a tornado bearing down on a trailer park. The biggest part of her task was to help fill the auditorium to overflowing — it would be a disaster to play to empty seats — and we had only a few days to make it happen.
San Diego Confidential

It happened. And then some. And it helped that the Hillary gig was held in friendly, densely populated Democratic terrain, namely the University of California at San Diego campus. So it was that on that Saturday afternoon, the doors to the RIMAC Arena opened, and rabid Hillary partisans marched in faster than ants into a picnic basket.

I’m happy to report that I walked the aisles and shook just about every hand in that very full house. It was a good thing I did too, because two of the hands that I didn’t shake belonged to two Bilbray supporters who had come to heckle me. As hecklers go, these guys were pretty dumb. When I tried to shake hands with them, they blew their cover by offering me a duet of sneers and snide remarks. That’s when Ralph Santora, my bodyguard and otherwise guy Friday, took over.

Guys like Ralphie are great to have on a campaign because they are as smart as they are fearless. Ralphie had been jobbed out to me as a contribution in kind by Independent Action, a Washington-based PAC dedicated solely to helping elect Democrats to first terms in Congress. And Ralphie had brought a vast wealth of experience to my campaign. This seasoned veteran also brought calm and order to my mostly rookie staff.

So here’s how Ralph, at 5’8”, handled these two 6’3” football-player cheeseheads. He walked up to them like Clint Eastwood and gave ’em Dirty Harry: “You gentlemen have a right to be here, but the first time you raise your voices in this auditorium, you’ll be out of here on your asses…. Make my day.” Ralphie then got two Secret Service agents to shadow them, and true to his word, when these gentlemen started heckling me at the beginning of my speech, they were out on their rear ends within seconds. Good job, Ralphie.

Another Ten for Ten

After working the crowd, I left the main arena and went back to the room where the first lady was doing a Ten for Ten fund-raiser similar to the one the president had done for me a few weeks before at the Hotel Del. The drill was the same: I had invited ten donors at a thousand dollars a pop to rub elbows and get their pictures taken with Hillary.

The room where this photo shoot was being held was an institutional gray box with all the ambiance of the mess hall at Folsom prison.

Me and Hillary

The only things in the place that lent it any class at all were a set of flags and a black velvet background for the photo shoot.

I came in in the middle of the flashbulbs going off and just lay back and let Hillary do her thing with my donors. Meanwhile, ex-Congresswoman Lynn Schenk and Hollywood celebrity Christine Lahti warmed up the crowd in the auditorium. This warm-up was happening, mind you, while the usually biggest ham of any political moment, Hemorrhoid Bob Filner, sat slumped in a chair onstage virtually speechless. He was right where he could do me no harm — on crutches, in excruciating back pain, and too zoned out on painkillers to try to steal the spotlight.

After the Ten for Ten and before Hillary and I walked from the fund-raising room down the long corridor out to the stage, we had a fine few minutes together. I don’t know why so many people in America hate Hillary Clinton; I found her to be one of the most gracious, intelligent, perceptive, and, yes, classy women I have ever met.

Okay, so she doesn’t like to bake cookies and she screwed up healthcare reform, and this “uppity woman” has made it all too clear to Middle America that she’d rather be an activist first lady than rearrange White House furniture like Jackie O or stand in the shadows like Barbara Bush. But so what? This is the dawn of the 21st Century. Isn’t it?

In the few minutes that Hillary and I spent together we talked about our races. She asked me candidly how “we” — meaning she and Bill — were doing, and I answered just as candidly that Bill had been in a free fall in Southern California since coming here three weeks before for the presidential debate.

The biggest problem, which I didn’t tell her about, was the monumentally stupid remark her hubby Bill had made on MTV about experimenting with marijuana. The Republicans had turned that intemperate utterance into a devastating TV commercial. It not only reinforced Clinton’s freewheeling, draft-dodging hippie roots, but it made him look (yet again, I’m sad to say) like an opportunist who would say whatever an audience might want to hear. Put him on MTV in front of a group of teenagers and he’d say smoking dope was okay, just as quickly as he would condemn drug use among teens at a cop convention or extramarital sex at a Baptist revival.

But I spared Hillary that trenchant observation and instead remarked that while I saw Bill’s coattails growing shorter by the day, I
had no doubt the Clinton-Gore team would win — even if I had great doubt that I would. At least for the next hour onstage, it was a doubt that was erased.

Walking up to the podium before that cheering crowd, I felt like the Pope in Buenos Aires, Larry Bird in the Boston Garden, and Billy Graham in Oklahoma all rolled into one. What a thrill it is to give a speech to a crowd that roars with approval at your every utterance!

However, as with the Ed Asner ad, I’m still uncertain whether the Hillary rally increased or decreased my vote total on Election Day. What makes me uncertain is that my archenemy, the San Diego Union-Tribune, published a great story about the rally, and it printed one of the nicest pictures I’ve ever had taken of me. The darn thing was right on the front page of the local section in living color for all of their readers to see. In that picture, Hillary and I stand together applauding the crowd, exuding an almost cherubic warmth that, frankly, tends to elude us both — tough analytical types that we are.

Dale was so excited about the U-T photo and the Union-Tribune’s favorable coverage that she called me up at dawn the next morning and chirped, “You just gotta see this!” And looking at the story, I thought for once, just one time, the Union-Tribune had done me a favor by reporting the story fairly — as the event happened and with the appropriate emphasis that a visit by the first lady should have.

That pleasant thought lasted all of about five minutes, until I got my next call, and it caused me to second guess the Hillary venture. That call was from my campaign consultant Larry Remer, who was not grateful for the newspaper’s generosity, but rather in awe of its treachery and deviousness.

As Larry saw it: Of course, the Union-Tribune wouldn’t write a story about Vice President Al Gore’s visit in July to raise money for Peter Navarro. Everybody loves lovable Al. But feminist won’t-bake-me-any-cookies Hillary — the first lady everybody loves to hate? That’s a different story — literally.

Yep. Larry could just see the U-T editors gleefully pasting the picture of me and Hillary onto their front page and thinking, “Wow, the only thing better than this would have been a shot of Navarro arm-in-arm with Jesse Jackson or Fidel Castro.”

I Love Hate Radio, Part Deux

While the Hillary rally was a heavenly experience, my debate with Brian Bilbray on The Roger Hedgecock Show came about as close to a fistfighting, brawling hell as you can get. The near nuclear meltdown had its origins in the debate setting: Rather than have Bilbray and me go toe-to-toe alone with him in his cramped studio, the “radio mayor” held the live-broadcast debate in a large bar in the Gaslamp Quarter.

Unfortunately, Bilbray’s people got there by 9:00 a.m. to occupy every table and chair in the place for the noon debate. But this was not to say that I was without troops. Because my once-again savior Ralphie put together a swat team to handle the unruly and ill-mannered crowd. This team consisted of Ralphie, my field coordinator Tom Husted, my fund-raiser Kerry Martin, and Norm Lamphear, one of my most trusted field operatives.

Believing that the best defense is a good offense, Ralphie had everybody wear referee shirts and whistles so that the minute Bilbray attacked me on the air, they would all blow their whistles and call a “personal foul” on Bilbray. This stunt dovetailed nicely with a “Bilbray Foul’s Navarro” ad that we had started running in response to Bilbray’s attack ads. We hoped that if there were any coverage of the debate, the press would reinforce the message of that ad. More importantly, Ralphie also believed — as it would turn out, correctly — that this stunt would not only throw Bilbray off his stride but also silence his attacks completely after the first foul was called.
As I had done at the Hillary event, I got to the debate early and worked the room, introducing myself to and shaking hands with everybody. I like to do that even when — indeed, especially when — everyone in the room is hostile, as they certainly were that day. I figure that if I have that personal contact even with my enemies, when push comes to shove — as it, in fact, literally did — at least some of the folks might be just a little less inclined to go ballistic.

As for the debate, what can I say? Hedgecock was as sweet to me off the air as he was a prick to me on the air, while Bilbray did his usual right-wing rant. The defining moment of the mélange came early, the first time Bilbray attacked me. That’s when Ralphie and the gang blew their whistles and shouted, “Personal foul! Personal foul! Personal foul!”

Hedgecock totally freaked, Bilbray was totally baffled, and all hell broke loose in the room as Bilbray’s people figured out what we were doing. At that point, several of Bilbray’s storm troopers confronted our crew, but all Ralphie did was blow his whistle, jump up and down, and call Personal foul! on them.

It was a tense and hilarious moment, and the only thing missing was Geraldo jumping in to break it up and get his nose broken again. But Ralphie wouldn’t back down from Bilbray’s goons and neither would Tom Husted, who is as close in size to an NFL fullback as a nice boy from Maine can be.

Faced with these immovable objects, the Bilbray brigade first blinked and then turned into pussycats as Hedgecock shouted for everybody to calm down and sit down. After that, the rest was anti-climactic. Ralphie had de-neutered both Bilbray and the crowd and put Hedgecock on notice that we wouldn’t put up with any of his crap, and I got out of there with minimal damage. Way to go, Ralphie!

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**Judgment Day**

*Politics are almost as exciting as war, and quite as dangerous. In war, you can only be killed once, but in politics many times.*

**Winston Churchill**

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**Happy election days are all alike. You win, and you feel great doing it. This, however, was not going to be one of those happy days. I could feel it like a bitter bile in my throat from the moment I woke up. But just like Sisyphus and Adlai Stevenson, I got out of bed anyway to go push one more boulder up the electoral hill.**

The first task of that day was to greet the troops gathering at campaign headquarters. Our headquarters had been chosen by the Clinton-Gore coordinated campaign as one of the staging areas from which to send volunteers out into the field.

On Election Day, the name of the game is “GO-TV”—get out the vote. The GO-TV strategy starts with compiling a list of targeted supporters that the GO-TV operation will try to get to the polls that day. The voter contact involves sending one set of volunteers into the precincts to knock on doors, another set to concentrate on phone banking, and a third set of poll watchers to monitor who has and hasn’t voted.

Poll watchers accomplish this last critical task by comparing the campaign’s target list to the list of who has already voted, which is posted on an hourly basis at each polling station. A good poll-watching operation is the heart and soul of an effective GO-TV operation because it steadily whittles down the target list to call as the day progresses. This saves unnecessary phone calls to people who have already cast their ballots and allows the ground operation to focus like a laser beam on those who haven’t yet voted.
The biggest obstacle facing our GO-TV operation that day would be the impending Clinton victory. The fear was that as soon as a TV station projected Bill to be the winner, the flood of Democrats to the polls would drop to a trickle. Since my race could only be won with a high Democratic turnout — Democrats vote in a higher proportion as voter turnout rises — this “Projected Winner Effect” would be disastrous to my chances of winning, particularly if the projection of victory came early in the California afternoon.

In fact, that’s exactly what happened. For on this day, voter turnout would be almost 15 percent lower than it had been four years before when Bill Clinton and Lynn Schenk had rolled to victory. In my case, this falloff in Democrats voting would be enough to turn what might have been just another close but honorable defeat into an embarrassing butt-kicking.

But as I drove into the headquarters parking lot, I still harbored the illusion that when I lost, it wouldn’t be by much, and, in fact, I was heartened by the volunteer turnout because the place was jammed. Hundreds of folks were milling about waiting for marching orders, and amid the greasy donuts and cheap coffee, the mood was festive.

The Uncoordinated Campaign

The guy in charge of spitting out voter-contact lists on the computer was Vince Hall. Vince had previously worked for many years as Bob Filner’s chief of staff, and he had only gotten the job working for the Clinton-Gore coordinated campaign after Congressman Bob Filner had heavily lobbied for him. My obvious concern — shared by my campaign manager — was that Vince would quietly divert resources away from the Triple Overlap and into Filner’s safe congressional district.

As I have detailed in an earlier chapter, the Triple Overlap was the key to both my victory and the broader strategy of the Democratic Party. This Triple Overlap was the geographical area where my race, Dede Alpert’s state senate race, and the two assembly seats pursued by Susan Davis and Howard Wayne would be hotly contested. It is where the balance of power in the Congress and the California State Legislature might well be determined, and it also was the key to ensuring a Clinton victory in San Diego County.

Despite the strategic importance of the Triple Overlap, I can’t say

I was really surprised when I found out that Vince Hall and Bob Filner had apparently played one last trick on us. What Vince did — although he would later blame it on a computer error — was to include in the phone-bank lists lots of Democrats outside the Triple Overlap — Democrats who just happened to be from Filner’s district.

It was my field coordinator Tom Husted who first discovered this perfidy because Tom was familiar with Filner’s turf, having worked it in an earlier campaign. He about went through the roof when he found out, and it’s easy to understand why because it was a really stupid or selfish thing for Vince to do. Stupid if it was an honest computer mistake. Selfish if Vince did it on purpose. Diverting even one single vote from the critical Triple Overlap area to pad Filner’s landslide served nobody’s purpose but the Republicans.

Love Those Photo Ops

Typically, on Election Day, the TV news crews like to meet a candidate at his or her polling booth to get the day’s photo opportunity. However, I thought it would be far better for TV viewers to catch their last glimpse of me that day knee-deep in grassroots politics, so we invited the press to this GO-TV kickoff. It turned out to be a great photo op and a rousing success as I sent off hundreds of volunteers to do battle with the Gingrich monster.

Once the volunteers were dispersed, my job was to touch base with as many of the remote phone-bank locations as possible. The goal was to pat the volunteers on the back, make some phone calls myself to further boost morale, and then move on to the next base of operation.

It was a frenetic day, and the only part I didn’t like was the downtime I had in the car moving from one point to another, listening to the radio drumbeat of the impending Clinton victory. Because I knew that every time that victory got mentioned on the radio, another 1000 Democrats would stay home and not vote.

By the way, my fellow Americans, wouldn’t it be a whole lot better if we adopted the Canadian model for Election Day and put a muzzle on Dan Rather and Peter Jennings and Tom Brokaw until the polls are closed everywhere in the country. I mean, it’s bad enough that Californians have to put up with the presidential candidates being chosen in places like New Hampshire and North Carolina. But
just because the polls close three hours later on the West Coast doesn't mean we should be told who is going to win our elections before we even have a chance to vote. And screw you civil libertarians who disagree with me on this and want to protect Dan Rather's right to declare Bill Clinton the winner whenever he damn well pleases. This is not a good thing for democracy. Glad I got that off my chest.

At any rate, by 7:30 that night, I finally made my way back to campaign headquarters. I made my last call of the evening at 7:45 hoping to get one last laggard to the polls before 8:00, and at 8:00, I looked up at everyone in the headquarters and made a toast to victory. Then I went home for a quick nap, hoping I wouldn't wake up to a nightmare.

Republican Nation

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Then quit. No use being a damn fool about it.

W.C. Fields

Forty-five minutes after the polls had closed, I knew that I was going to get blown out. That's when the first absentee ballot results were posted, and I was already behind by 20 or so points. While people who vote absentee in California are disproportionately older and conservative and therefore tend to vote in greater numbers for Republicans, there was still no way I would be able to overcome such a huge disadvantage from the more Democrat-friendly electorate that shows up on Election Day.

Looking at those results on the boob tube, it was one year of very hard work compressed into five seconds of heart-wrenching, gut-churning, ego-smashing pain. Not the loss, mind you. I'm used to that. No. The real shock was how badly I was going to be beaten. This had never happened to me before in my previous three races. These had been narrow, hold-your-head-up-high losses — not a 53 to 42 percent pants-down spanking.

Of course, I can blame a lot of things for this embarrassing rout: a low Democratic voter turnout; Clinton's free fall in San Diego, which significantly shortened his coattails; my two-to-one funding disadvantage; the failure of the AFL-CIO's $32 million ad campaign to target my opponent; the clever "divided government" strategy of the Republicans, which overshadowed the Democrats' "Take Back the House from Gingrich" theme; the biased coverage of the San Diego Union-Tribune; and even the treachery of Hemorrhoid Bob Filner.

Ultimately, however, I have to look in the mirror and be honest with myself: I lost the race because I had run too many times and
offended too many people in the process. As a result, I was never able to do the only thing I have ever wanted to do in politics—fight for issues that really matter: a sound economy, a clean environment, a solid education system, and fundamental fairness in our courts, our workplaces, and our neighborhoods.

But rather than a great debate over Great Ideas, the race came down to personalities. And after three previous losing races, it was easy for Bilbray’s brain trust to successfully reinforce the negative knocks already on me: the “carpetbagger,” the “opportunist,” and, perhaps worst of all, the “perennial loser.” I say “worst of all” because at one point I came within a few percentage points of being on top of San Diego’s political world—and it’s been a long, tough slide down ever since.

The Triumph of Incumbency

My self-flagellation notwithstanding, statistically I didn’t have much of a chance of winning anyway. The rising tide of disgust that was supposed to wash Newt Gingrich and his zealots away peaked and began to recede months before the election.

More broadly, this election outcome has proved to me beyond any shadow of a doubt that our political process is broken beyond repair. The overriding problem is obvious: Statistically, the candidate with the most money—or usually the incumbent—will win a seat for Congress over 95 percent of the time. Since, on average, Republicans have a 60 percent funding advantage over their Democratic challengers and since Republicans are now firmly in control of Congress, these statistics are a recipe for the status quo, which is to say, a very Republican nation. Let’s look at the facts.

Of the 73 Republican freshman elected in 1994, only 12 were defeated in the 1996 cycle. Of those 12, 5 freshman Republicans beat themselves, while a sixth never really had a prayer of hanging onto his seat.

The prayerless one was Michael Patrick Flanagan who, in a fluke, had beaten Dan Rostenkowski after Rosti got indicted. But the Chicago district that Flanagan represented was heavily Democratic, and he inevitably got hammered 64 to 36 percent when a guy in pinstripes rather than prison stripes showed up to challenge him.

As for the five who beat themselves, three were total wackos. The Wacko Supreme had to be Andrea Seastrand of Santa Barbara who, among other foot-in-the-mouthers, insinuated that God was punishing California with earthquakes because the people of the Golden State had sinned. She was knocked off 48 to 44 percent by a guy with at least one foot on the ground, (the now deceased) Walter Capps.

Then there was the Grand Dragon of Wackos, Steve Stockman of Texas, who ranted at Attorney General Janet Reno about her harassment of right-wing militia, while third place in the Wacko Sweepstakes belonged to Fred Heineman of North Carolina. Heineman groused publicly that his $133,600 congressional salary and $50,000 police pension made him “lower middle class” and described the true middle class as people “making anywhere from $300,000 to $750,000 a year.” “Earth to Fred” was the tag line of one ad that the ultimate winner, David Price, used to box Heineman’s ears 54 to 44 percent.

As for the two other freshman Republicans who beat themselves, blame their losses on an old congressional standby, moral turpitude. One guy — David Funderburk of North Carolina — ran a car off the road in an accident that injured three people, drove around the block, and then came back with his wife at the wheel, or so witnesses say. The other guy, Jim Bunn of Oregon, divorced his wife and married his 31-year-old chief of staff, whom he was paying close to $100,000 a year. For some reason, voters don’t like stuff like that.

That leaves only 6 out of 73 Republican freshman — a mere 8 percent — that the combined forces of the Democratic Party, the AFL-CIO, and the Sierra Club were able to knock off. But even with those six races, there is little to suggest that such successes will be easily repeated.

For example, when Carolyn McCarthy beat Dan Frisa in Long Island, New York, it was largely because McCarthy had risen to the ranks of media superstar as a result of the terrible tragedy she had suffered. She had been a Republican and a nurse when her husband had been gunned down in the Long Island Massacre. Disgusted with Frisa’s refusal to vote for an assault-weapons ban, McCarthy angrily switched parties and proceeded to kick Frisa’s butt. But how many candidates can bring that story to the table?

Similarly, when Democrat Adam Smith of Washington knocked off Randy Tate, it was in large part because Smith poured so much of his own money into the race. If, however, it comes down to the battle
of the wealthy candidates, the Republicans are always going to have more troops.

My point is that despite a lot of anti-Gingrich rhetoric and a huge national effort to defeat his loyalists, that defeat never happened. Instead, I became one of 61 lambs led to the Gingrich slaughter — an 84 percent failure rate for the Democratic Party machine against the 73 freshman.

Today, this deteriorating situation for the Democrats is further compounded by the ongoing exodus of senior Democrats from the House and Senate — many of whom are leaving because they know they will never chair another committee or otherwise enjoy the power they once had. While these Democratic incumbents would have a lock on reelection, exposing their seats to challenge will give Republicans a great opportunity.

A case in point is Vic Fazio. In the wake of Walter Capps’s untimely death, Fazio announced his retirement to “go smell the roses.” His seat will almost certainly fall into Republican hands. The same may well be true of the House seats of retiring Lee Hamilton of Indiana and Oregon’s Elizabeth Furse as well as the soon-to-be-open Senate seats of Ohio’s John Glenn, Arkansas’s Dale Bumpers, and Kentucky’s Wendell Ford.

The bottom line is that in 1998, the Republicans will likely pick up another 10 seats in the House, further pad their lead in the Senate, and put control of the Congress by the Democratic Party out of reach until at least the year 2020. Thus, for at least the next couple of decades, we are going to have to live in a Republican nation that obeys not the dictates of wise and thoughtful men such as Adam Smith, John Adams, and Edmund Burke but rather of buffoons, sociopaths, and zealots like Rush Limbaugh, Newt Gingrich, and Ralph Reed.

Divided We Stand (Pat)

All this might not be so bad if the Democrats were to hold on to the White House during this Republican period. While such a divided government is prone to gridlock and partisan confrontation, a Democratic presidential veto should be able to hold the dogs of Newt Gingrich at bay. The day, however, that the Republicans seize the White House will be the day that the Gingrich agenda finally works its way into law. This is not a day most Americans should look forward to.

Republican Nation

Take the flat tax, for example. It is one of the most elementary insights in economics that if you replace our currently progressive income tax with a flat tax and try to raise the same amount of tax revenues, rich people will pay a lot less in taxes and the poor and middle class will pay a lot more. Why does this idea appeal to the 70 percent or more of the populace that would simply get the Steve Forbes screw?

And what about the environment? I get nauseated listening to demagogues like Rush Limbaugh and Roger Hedgecock who think that global warming is just a liberal ruse to shut down industry. This is the frigging planet we’re talking about, guys. And while we’re discussing the planet, do we really have to keep killing off species at the rate of thousands per year? Do we really have to chop down every old-growth forest and bulldoze every wetland and turn hundreds of thousands of acres of our prime farmland into subdivisions? Where’s Teddy Roosevelt when you need him?

As for Medicare and Social Security, forget it. The Republicans will let the old people eat cake and the young people set up private retirement accounts, and whoever falls through the cracks deserves it.

As for a woman’s right to choose, forget that too. We’ll go right back to the days of coat hangers and back-alley abortions.

On top of all this, as labor unions fall further and further into decline, as more of our manufacturing base is exported to low-wage countries like China and Mexico, and as more and more mergers create more and more monopolies, corporate America will continue to suppress wages and reduce benefits while turning record profits. What could be more Republican than that?

If you’re wondering if this rant is leading up to an impassioned plea for campaign finance reform, forget that too. I won’t waste my breath. Because pigs will fly before either a Republican or a Democratic Congress will change the rules such that entrenched incumbents would lose power. As one of my mentors at Harvard said, “If I tell you how things are, I’ve told you why things can’t change.”
As I write these final words more than a year now from the election, my healing process is almost complete. But there's been a lot to get over — all the way back to my first run for political office.

On that bright, sunny day in 1992 when I declared my candidacy for mayor, I had a fine reputation, a solid marriage, a spacious home, a new car, and a net worth of almost a million dollars. Today, after losing four political races, at least half the people in San Diego think I'm a jerk, a carpetbagger, a criminal, or worse. I'm divorced and living in a place the size of a postage stamp. I owe various people and credit card companies well over $100,000. And I drive an old beat-up Volvo with almost 200,000 miles on its odometer.

The best part about driving the Volvo is that I don't have to worry about anyone scratching the finish; there isn't any finish left. The worst part about driving the Volvo is not the broken air conditioning, the slipping transmission, the cracked windshield, the right back window that won't open, or the sunroof that won't close. Nope. The worst part is that only the AM band of the radio works.

Given my aversion to right-wing hate radio — which is about all you can get now on the AM dial — this is perhaps the cruelest post-election joke on me. Nonetheless, I've adapted. I listen to sports talk. My favorite athletic supporter is Lee "Hacksaw" Hamilton, who could make a badminton match sound exciting, and when I want to hear sports in a totally foreign language I tune into Jim Rome's The Jungle.

Despite the U-turn in my fortune, I'm mostly happy. I'm involved
in a very nice relationship with a woman who has two fluffy cats who love to eat cantaloupe and sit on my computer keyboard. She’s raising a young son, and it has been interesting to experience some of the pleasures and pain of parenting. Fortunately, the lad is a good boy, and if I could only get him to eat his peas and put his toys away, life would be great.

I’m also having fun with my latest TV gig. I appear regularly in The Economist's Corner on the PBS TV affiliate in Los Angeles. It’s a class operation with quality people, and the station provides the kind of in-depth regional and local TV news lacking in most of the cities around the country.

I’m likewise blessed to be working on an innovative “long distance learning” project for McGraw-Hill, which is the largest publisher of economic textbooks in the world. My job is to transform their introductory economics textbooks into multimedia presentations so that students can learn economics not in the classroom but on their computers and at their own pace. It’s good stuff, and I hope my efforts will in some small way make the “dismal science” more accessible and entertaining to the next generation of students.

The One That Got Away

Despite all these blessings, I’d be lying to you if I didn’t admit that I still have some bad days — days when, as the Paul Simon song laments, I “think of things that might have been.” Oh, not about winning the congressional race. That would have been nice, and I know I would have been a better congressman than Brian Bilbray (although that is perhaps damning myself with faint praise). But the fact is, as this tale has documented, I never really had much chance to win that race.

No. The race I still think about was my first — the 1992 mayor’s race. Whether riding a wave in Ocean Beach or hitting a 5-iron off the fairway at Torrey Pines or just lying quietly in bed, I can’t help sometimes but think about what might have been had I won — not just for my own future but for my little town that I love. Because that election was one of the rare opportunities San Diego has had for someone from outside our all too parochial political establishment to take its governing helm. And if I had won, I assure you that our city would look — and feel — different than it does today.

For starters, our stadium would never have been butchered into a baseball-unfriendly behemoth to accommodate eight Sundays of bad Chargers football a year at the sacrifice of 100 days of only slightly less mediocre Padres baseball. The stadium would still be named after sports writer Jack Murphy and not some big corporation. Most importantly, taxpayers wouldn’t be forking over almost a million dollars a year to Chargers owner Alex Spanos for empty seats.

Sure, with me as mayor, the Spanos Chargers might have taken a hike up the pike to L.A. when their lease expired in 2002, but who the bleep cares. San Diego is bigger than Junior Seau and Bobby Beathard, and most of us have better things to do on Sundays than watch bad football anyway.

So what else? Well, the convention center expansion would have been completed by now but at a much lower cost than the current project. This is because I would have chosen the Chevy design at $140 million rather than the ridiculous $250 million Cadillac that Susie Golding and those “fiscal conservatives” on the Union-Tribune’s editorial board have insisted upon.

Then there’s the proposed new central library — still waiting for taxpayers to approve a bond issue. That delay wouldn’t have happened to my Decentral Cyber Library. It would have already been built too — housed not in an expensive downtown building but rather in cyberspace, and it would already be linked to all our satellite library branches as well as to the Internet. (By the way, I would have funded it with a half-cent tax on sales of the Union-Tribune.)

As mayor, I would have focused on fixing potholes and the national embarrassment San Diego calls its sewer system. I would have better protected our environment, built more bike lanes, increased the number of cops on the street, and expanded economic opportunity, particularly for our communities in the southern part of the city, which are racked by crime and urban blight.

But the biggest impact I think I would have had on San Diego would have been to make city government more accessible to our people. In 1992, I ran on a platform of holding regular nighttime city council meetings out in each of the city council districts so that working people might have the chance to participate in the process, and I would have kept that promise. Even today, I think this would be the single most important innovation for local government, one that would
San Diego Confidential

make our government far more open than it now is. But our "City Council Inc." likes it just the way it is — a day job with minimal interruption from the public and maximum access to the 100 or so lobbyists and lawyers who lurk around city hall calling the shots.

As for patronage, you certainly wouldn’t have found me appointing a bunch of fat cats like Brian Seltzer and Bill Evans and Matt Peterson to plums like the stadium authority. Nor would Mike McDade have been appointed to the Port Commission. And I never would have spit in the face of city employees by appointing right-wing, anti-labor zealots like Daniel Eaton and Bob Ollitie to the Civil Service Commission.

Nor would I have committed the perhaps most subtle outrage of the Golding regime — the elimination of the city planning director’s position and the subsequent castration of that department. In a city plagued by overdevelopment, traffic congestion, and air pollution, it’s remarkable that this was allowed to happen, and I blame drones on the council like Chris Kehoe and Valerie Stallings, who should and do know better, for allowing this abomination to happen.

But maybe I’m fooling myself. Maybe, I, too, would have sold out like Susan Golding to the same sirens at city hall who pump your ego and primp you for higher office. More likely, I would have been indicted like Roger Hedgecock was when he was mayor and forced out of office. Or, if the city attorney couldn’t come up with a real or imagined felony to pin on me, I most certainly would have been the target of a recall election orchestrated by the Union-Tribune long before I could have done any lasting damage to the city’s power brokers.

Don’t Call Me, I’ll Call You

But the beauty of this speculation is that none of us will ever know what I could have done as mayor. What I do know is that on the day after losing my race for Congress, my phone did what it always does after one of my losses — it went silent. In fact, on that bleak day, the only call I got was not from the Suicide Hot Line but from Vice President Al Gore.

Al Gore is a decent man, his love handles notwithstanding, and this is the kind of call people in politics — particularly in the White House — don’t have to make. But he made it, and he thanked me for my service to the country, and for that I’m grateful.

Zen and the Art of Running for Congress

Be Nice, Be Charming, and Smile

In closing, let me say that, I’ve tried to take to heart the advice of one of my favorite quotations: "The difficulties of life are intended to make us better, not bitter." I hope I’m a better man for the difficulties in politics that I’ve gone through. I also hope that you’ve had as much fun reading this story as I’ve had writing it.

And so, I’d like to leave you with my last, and perhaps most important lesson. If I’ve learned anything from a life in politics, it is this: There is an appropriate way to comport oneself in any political situation — whether it’s congressional politics, office politics, or the politics that play out daily among friends and co-workers, and within every American family. That way is this:

- Walk through life as if you are a public figure recognizable to everyone, and behave accordingly.
- Be nice, be charming, and smile as often as possible (except at funerals and Rotary Club meetings).
- Treat every person you meet as a potential voter, listen to them, and learn from them.
- Never show anger (although it’s okay to get even).
- Never, ever cheat, especially yourself, even if you are absolutely positively sure that you can get away with it.
- Most importantly, enjoy yourself.

Politics is, after all, as much a process as an end product. It truly is the steps along the way that matter, and the roses that you smell taking those steps. If you take each of those steps carefully and ethically, with as much grace and lightness as you can muster, the journey will wind up being good — whether you win or lose. I know it has been for me.
Afterword

Ever since this book was first published in the San Diego Reader, it has generated considerable controversy. If you would like to express your own opinion on San Diego Confidential—or sample the opinions of others—you may visit the book's web site at:

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