

ANTENNAS ON THE ROOF

Interview #7

October 4, 1993

RITCHIE: We last talked about the time when you took over as staff director of the Republican Conference.

VASTINE: Yes.

RITCHIE: But we hadn't really focused on the media aspects of all that. Could you tell me why it was that you decided to change the media focus of the Republican Conference?

VASTINE: Change? Yes, well, because the focus had been on print press. And, very curiously, the focus—and some amount of staff time—had been devoted to influencing foreign press. Did I tell you this?

RITCHIE: Just a bit.

VASTINE: The idea was that, if you could get the *Times* of London to run a story in support of the MX, that valued international opinion would influence American opinion. The idea was also that by liaising regularly with members—the press officers of the embassies—you could influence their opinion. And there was a lot of staff time devoted to that. There were two people on the staff who did nothing but sort of liaise with the foreign press representatives. Tell me how that helps get a United States senator elected?

So my criterion was what will be most useful to a Republican United States senator in his reelection, frankly. We got rid of the programs having to do with foreign press as that didn't seem to have any conceivable relationship to that goal. In fact they were part of the game plan—the structure—of Margot Carlisle and the Steering Committee. That was her interest: defense and strategic policy. Somehow she felt she could make gains for those interests in those ways through those uses of the Republican Conference staff. That just

didn't have any relevance to me, to my objectives—or Senator Chafee's objectives—for the Conference.

We also analyzed the impact of the work of the six writers who did the monthly columns—family issues forum, for example—and found that nobody used those columns. It just became clear that the staff needed to be reoriented, and the really promising direction seemed to me electronic communications. It came as a great—a very great—surprise to me that installing for our use satellite technology, in the Hart Building on the fourth floor, was affordable. Indeed, it was quite affordable, especially because I negotiated a clever—cleverly negotiated, I thought—a sort of installment payment plan with a satellite communications company who wanted our business. They installed equipment on the Hart Building roof with the help the Engineering Department.

You see, the electronics people in the Senate, completely apolitical, had always envisaged that the Hart Building roof would be used for satellite communications. They were all too pleased to put our microwave antenna up there. This thing is only about a foot and a half or two feet in diameter. It wasn't big by any means, you can't see it. But it was the first one there, and the Democrats didn't like that at all.

There was somebody on [Wendell] Ford's staff, John Chambers, who objected. He was then Ford's press secretary. I can't remember the form of the objection, but I knew we had a problem with him. There was this very powerful feeling in the Senate, especially entrenched in the Rules Committee, that print press was okay. The print press is all right, but electronic media were too powerful! It was going too far. A step too far to let senators' offices communicate with Senate funds and Senate facilities to the electronic media directly. A press release would be okay, in print, and mailed. But an electronic press release would not be okay. It was somehow too big, too much.

I found—I mean, I came to this with *no* background in the press at all. So this was a process of continual discovery for me. But I found that, in the Senate, there were two kinds of press secretaries. This is a rule that still

applies, I believe. There were those who were comfortable with the print media, and there were those who were comfortable with the electronic media. Senators would usually, very regrettably, fall into the first group—unless they had background in electronic media—or unless they had a press secretary who was electronic-media based or oriented. If they didn't have that bent or that staff predilection—that staff background—senators tend to be captive of the print media. Because their press secretaries and their office staffs are all too eager to make clippings of all the print press that they get from the weeklies and—in the big state—from all the papers. And this gets photocopied, and this ends up on the senator's desk. So the senator says, "Ah, I got mentioned in the *New York Times*," or the *Los Angeles Times*, or the *Des Moines Register*, whatever it may be. Somehow this *tangible* evidence that he's being heard—you know, "if it's in print it exists." But if it's on the airways, it's ephemeral and doesn't.

So there is this powerful, self-reinforcing bias toward print media. Well, obviously, any number of polls show that Americans get their most direct and vivid impressions of politicians from television, and secondarily from radio. The radio talk shows can be tremendously potent. Well, I've gone far afield, but I was constantly in my time here in the Conference fighting that fight. Trying to get print-oriented press secretaries, and senators oriented toward print media, like Senator Packwood was, to understand the value and the power of video. And then to use our services. And then at the same time to try to convince the Rules Committee folks that it was really okay.

I think finally the Ethics Committee had to make a judgment. The Ethics Committee was asked by [Charles] Grassley whether it was all right to use electronic broadcast services of the Republican Conference during the moratorium periods for elections when senators were prohibited from using the electronic services of the Recording Studio! And the Ethics Committee found that it was all right. So we stayed in business up until senators' elections where the Recording Studio—the official Senate Recording Studio—had to get out of the business. It was on some interpretation, which of course I agreed with. I can't believe they did it. I've forgotten the niceties of that. But, anyway, we—I'm rambling, I realize—but we were able to stay in business.

RITCHIE: What type of services did you actually offer to senators?

VASTINE: Well, we started out with *a* camera crew and we would go and tape senators in a hearing or at a speech—mainly at a hearing or a stand-up press conference, and take that tape and crudely edit it. At first we didn't have our own editing facility. Crudely edit it. First we took it to a remote site which was down here at 400 North Capitol Street, to the Bonneville Company, and they ran a video uplink service out of 400 North Capitol Street where they also had a television studio.

We would take it down there and edit it and then feed it. “Feeding” is the word for feeding it to satellite, or send it to satellite. Then the press secretary would call up the local television stations and say, “At precisely 3:45 on satellite ABC, transponder BDF you can get Senator Garn.” That's a bad example because the Utah senators never used it. “Senator Packwood talking about tax release” or something.

Then we graduated from that to where we had our own television studio, and three camera crews, our own daily satellite feed which we fed directly from the Hart Building, and then, finally, a two-way satellite capability whereby we could have live, interactive video, that is a two-way video. You have the senator here in the studio who could be interviewed by somebody in Oregon. The senator could see the interviewer, and the interviewer could see the senator. So, it's live two-way. And then, finally, we added on also fiber optic link to the so-called swamp, which is the remote site in the trees right opposite the Senate parking lot, opposite the Senate stairs, on the plaza. So we were able to do, we are able, were able, to do press, live video interactions from there so that we could bring a senator to that remote site and have him hooked up with his TV stations and have them ask questions on the air. For him to answer, with him live, with the Capitol as a backdrop.

Then we also built a radio station, a little radio facility. [First we specialized in “actualities,” or short sound bites, or quotes by senators on newsworthy topics. These were then relayed by phones manned by teams of

interns, to call radio station.] Then we concentrated on bringing senators in to do talk show kind of interactions with their local radio stations. We brought them in to do press conferences with groups of reporters. Reporters would then be able to take clips out of those five- or ten-minute interview sessions and use them throughout the weekend. We preferred doing them on Friday. Senator Chafee was a regular Friday-morning user of that service.

We also got senators to call in newsworthy comment. They could call in on our hot line from anywhere in the world and leave a message. Senator [Arlen] Specter, when he was campaigning for senator, in, I guess, 1987, used to call in from Pennsylvania from his car phone and record an actuality which we would then turn around and phone out via phone to the radio stations in the part of Pennsylvania that he was traveling in. So he could have an event at noon, realized that people cared about, you know, food safety or something and call in a food safety actuality. And then hear it on the radio as he drove down the highway to his next meeting.

That's the kind of thing. In addition, we had the first desktop publishing capability in the Senate, which we got because Senator Heinz, particularly, was interested in being much more creative in his print communications with his constituents. The Senate Service Department then only offered a few fonts, and he wanted lots and lots of fonts, and lots of format innovations. He was a marketing executive. He was very familiar with this kind of thing, and he had on his staff an extremely able guy named Pat [Kenny], and this guy understood computers beautifully, and he understood direct mail *perfectly*. He developed the most sophisticated, direct-mail system in the United States Senate for Senator Heinz. It first of all depended on getting very good lists of Pennsylvanians. He did that by taking the names of people who wrote in on specific issues, like nurses, great list of nurses, great list of doctors, etc., and he would develop relationships with these. Out would go a mailing from Senator Heinz to these nurses saying, "I'm so concerned about nursing issues. Tell me what you think." They would write back. He would write back to them. So there was this kind of dialogue going on all the time that Heinz had developed. And they had actually done polling—well, anyway, they felt they had done

sufficient polling to know that, in areas where they had concentrated direct mail, they had a much better name recognition. It was quite a sophisticated operation.

So I glombed onto that and developed a number of seminars on direct mail, direct-mail techniques for Republican Senate offices. I even tried to hire Pat to come as a consultant to us and advise senators. In fact, he ended up going to work for the Senatorial Committee. He did that for the Senatorial Committee.

But, anyway, back to the graphics department. We ended up with a graphics department of three professionals, very skilled. One of them was hired by the *National Journal* to be in charge of graphics design. Two other people I hired are still there, and they just do all manner of work. We bought them the best machines. What this meant was that these services permitted Republicans to leap-frog the whole Service Department bureaucracy that took ten days or so, and go directly to printing. So you just leap over all the composition people in the Service Department, who were dull and slow, and just send camera-ready copy directly from our office to be printed down there, and mailed. Our people became very sophisticated as well in all the rules governing mailings and direct mail and, you know, limitations thereon. All the fine points having to do with the Rules Committee oversight of senators' mailing—paper allotments and all that kind of thing.

We became sort of consultants in the process as well as actually doing the graphics and the design and the logos and the letterheads and all the sorts of things. I mean, just imagine senators' communications needs and all the ways we could help, including drawing illustrations. Cartoons that would illustrate the newsletters, and charts—charts for days. Charts on the Senate floor. We started the chart mania because we had the equipment. We had charts that were the right size for cameras. On the Senate floor as well as great big ones. Anyway, that's a long answer.

RITCHIE: How receptive were papers and stations to the type of stuff you were putting out?

VASTINE: Well, it was obviously worth doing because senators continued to do it. The more receptive stations for our television work tended not to be the major market stations—the great, big stations—too proud to take a feed that was politically paid for. By the way, before each one of our feeds we would label—our afternoon feed, I think, at 4:15 for half an hour. And then we would buy more time as we needed it. But we always put a little disclaimer saying: “This is the Senate Republican Conference daily newsfeed paid for with something or other.” There was an FCC ruling which we adhered to. So stations knew that they weren’t paying for any of the satellite time or any of this stuff. And some of them resented that. I mean, the bigger ones that could afford their own satellite services more easily than the small stations disdained use, for awhile. But we found, for example—always brings to mind Senator [John] Danforth’s people in Missouri, developed because their very skilled press secretaries developed a relationship with the St. Louis stations. So Steve Hilton, Danforth’s press secretary, would call up and say, “Hey, do you want to talk to Senator Danforth this morning? We can arrange that.”

In other words, to be able to get to the state’s very popular and very effective senator through the Republican Conference became more acceptable as time went on, and sometimes it became the only way to get to him. Or a very easy way to get to them. We would go to senators’ offices and hook them up. We had a phone hook-up system so that we would have the reporter speaking on the speaker phone to the senator in his office on our camera. Then we would send back via satellite the tape of the interview with the senator voiced and miked so that all of his sound was very good quality, and the reporter could hear his or her questions. And then dub over their questions on the other end if they decided to use that footage. Very effective stuff!

RITCHIE: Was it the same pattern with the print media in the sense that smaller papers might be more likely to take what goes on, then say, the large urban dailies? Or did it make no difference who tapped into that?

VASTINE: I can't answer that because we scrapped all the paper work. There was no point. I think, I've seen, for example, in the lower Delaware newspapers which are biweekly. One is weekly. They made a lot of use of Senator [William] Roth's columns. So I can imagine weeklies that are starved for copy that are really basic advertising vehicles, would take a lot of this canned print stuff.

But we got out of the business because it was too hard to write. I mean, the great and abiding fallacy of this process that was set up by my predecessors is that it's very, very hard to convince a senator's personal staff that they ought to accept copy written for their senator expressing *his* views on *their* subjects by some "foreign" staff in the Republican Conference. They just viewed us as interlopers. I remember being on Senator Chafee's staff, and our press secretary saying, "Hey, won't you please let Senator Chafee sign this editorial that was written by some guy in the Republican Conference?" I said, "What are you talking about? Who are they? What do they do? Why should I care? This isn't going to Rhode Island, it's going to Arizona! Why to I care about Arizona? Tell me why we should do this?" It didn't work. It wasn't good. It wasn't a good concept.

RITCHIE: Well, that raises the question: How receptive were the senators and their staff to news service?

VASTINE: It took a lot of convincing. Took a lot of convincing. But every Tuesday I had Senator Chafee loaded with an announcement to make to his colleagues at the Republican Policy lunch. And he would get up and dutifully read out the message about the newest offering, you know. Come on, you guys. I remember once he said, "I kind of feel as though I'm dropping pearls." [imitates] He didn't say before whom. But you know that wonderful Yankee accent..."pewrrrl." I can't quite get it. "Dropping pearls." Everybody laughed.

Senator Chafee, one of his most endearing qualities is his humor. His colleagues love his sense of humor, and they get a kick out of his Yankee drawl or twang.

RITCHIE: But were there some senators who were much more receptive than others?

VASTINE: Oh, yes. For example, Senator [Don] Nickles, Senator [Dan] Quayle were among our first avid users. The younger ones had more electronic awareness. They came very quickly. Danforth was a good, early user because his press secretaries were so—it was partly determined by press secretaries. If Senator Wilson, Otto Bos was his press secretary. He was a very early convert and a very dedicated user, and to this day is grateful. When I see him, he remembers very clearly that we helped him out a lot.

So I think mainly the determinant was the sophistication of the press secretary.

RITCHIE: Were there some who just never used the service?

VASTINE: Yes, there were some who were very difficult to convince. And some who just didn't need us. The two Utah senators, for example. All their stations were in Salt Lake City, and they had excellent relationships with them. They frankly just did not need us. They used us occasionally if, for example, they had three or four television stations, the three affiliates and another television station in Salt Lake and one was ignoring them, they would get the other two to use material that we produced in order to kind of create some jealousy on the part of the other. That was just that little bit of game playing going on. But for the most part the Utah senators didn't need us. But they liked us! And we got along fine with them, and we provided them very valuable print services. Especially Senator Hatch, we had a very good relationship with his staff, and with him. Very nice man.

So in the process I got to know *all* Republicans. All the Republican senators. I made it my practice to sort of be around the studio when they came in, or would even go out to shoots just to stand around and just to demonstrate Senator Chafee was really there, and he knew all about it. It was literally a process of letting—part of my job was to let people know that they should be thankful to Senator Chafee for his initiative in providing these services. And Senator Chafee was very proud of it, and very possessive. Very aware of what we'd done.

At first he didn't believe. I remember Senator Nickles, quite gratuitously came to him after my third or second week in my job and said something I'd been doing was great! And Chafee said, "What was so great about that? What did you do for him that was great?" And I explained. He said, "Well, why couldn't *he* have done that from his office?" And I said, "He didn't do it from his office. *We* did it for him, and he's grateful to us." He said, "Oh." And from that day on he began to accept that what we were doing was really different and unique and his colleagues really appreciated it. But soon it was very clear that we were way out in front, and then we began to get articles about how far advanced we were.

Hedrick Smith came and interviewed me, I guess I told you, for the *Power Game*. And other people began to give us attention. So by the end of the second year it was very clear that we were well regarded and well noted, a noted change and a noted contribution. Of course, the senators for whom we worked hardest were defeated. Senator [Paula] Hawkins, for example [and Jim Abdnor].

RITCHIE: Now, did you do something extra for Hawkins? You said you worked hardest for her.

VASTINE: Well, she had a very aggressive press staff, and we just did a lot of work. We videoed a lot of events, and press staff put all this stuff on the bird, on the satellite, for television stations. There was just a lot of, just a lot of activity because the press staff realized she needed all of the help she could get!

We were there to be used, and they wanted to do everything they could to make her win, help her win.

RITCHIE: Did you have to in a sense run training for these people? Tell them how to use the services that you had?

VASTINE: Oh, yes, absolutely. Because a lot of the press secretaries didn't know how. They didn't know, they didn't have the faintest idea. It was very strange stuff to them.

The senators had to be brought along. But, you know, they could be brought along by their staff. Sometimes if I ran into interference from the press secretary, I would go directly to the AA. In the case of Senator Specter I felt that the press secretary just wasn't on the ball, and I needed to go to the AA, whom I liked. Paul Michel, who is now a Federal Appeals Court judge, and run through all the panoply of services that we could offer and get them to use it more frequently. My goal was, actually, to lock up the votes, senator by senator. I wanted to make sure that even senators who were ideologically uncomfortable with Senator Chafee knew full well—and used—what we provided and used it. So I would go after them to get that done.

RITCHIE: Did setting this up involve working with the press galleries as well? Did you have any contact with the Radio-TV gallery?

VASTINE: No. We tried to stay as far away from them as we could. Because we were competitors. We encountered some measure of hostility from the established radio-tv people because we were invading their market in a sense. One way of advertising our work—our facility—was to say: “This is a way you can leapfrog the Washington media and deal direct with the newsrooms and television stations at home, and radio stations at home, with free feeds.” So nobody paid. And the stringers in Washington just didn't like that at all because that meant they were getting as these sort of video news releases—or VNR's, as they're called—or public relations feeds became popular. It meant, in general, it meant less business for stringers. You know what stringers are?

RITCHIE: Umhmm. [Freelance journalists, paid by the story, who report for a variety of newspapers and networks.]

VASTINE: They didn't like it at all. There was some undercurrent of opposition. But it never really jelled politically. We never got that back from the Rules Committee per se.

RITCHIE: It seems like you were leapfrogging a lot of traditional institutions: the Service Department, the Recording Studio, the Radio & TV Gallery.

VASTINE: We ran *circles* around the Recording Studio. Senators preferred to come to our facility. Do you know why? Because I drilled into them that we were senator-responsive. When a senator walked in, it was "Yes, senator!" And whatever he wanted. And the Recording Studio, those old farts down there would laugh if a senator made a mistake! This was not a good operation. They regularly made press secretaries angry by not being available. By being slow to respond. By being difficult while you were there. By being bureaucratic!

I had a wholly different approach. I'd say, we are at the service of Republican senators. We will stay all night. Nine or ten at night. We did! We stayed until the Senate went home. We were always available and had hot lines and beepers and ways for people to reach us at odd hours. So we advertised responsiveness, and congeniality.

RITCHIE: Even though the Republicans at that stage were in the majority, they had traditionally been in the minority for a generation before that. Do you think it was perhaps their minority status that made them more receptive to doing something entirely different? That is, the Democrats are more likely to use the services like the traditional services rather than. They weren't the innovators in this field. The Republicans were the innovators. Is there some logic to that?

VASTINE: Well, a shred of logic would be that we in the early eighties had the edge in fund-raising, and a lot of people thought we had the edge in campaign strategy, campaign tactics. We beat the Democrats blind on direct-mail fund-raising, that sort of thing. Why shouldn't we? It was kind of a natural part of that that we would be innovators and leaders in communications technology, the use of incumbencies. An incumbents use of media for communications purposes.

But that's about it. I mean, the link wasn't—it wasn't some notion that we were newly in the majority and, therefore, could—after all, Senator [James] McClure was elected when we were in the majority, in '80. And he could have brought the same. Margot and he could have brought the same innovative quality that Senator Chafee and I brought, but didn't.

RITCHIE: Your first two years were while the Republicans were in the majority.

VASTINE: Yes.

RITCHIE: Then in '86 the Republicans lost the majority. Did that have any impact on. . .

VASTINE: The first thing that happened was on January 10th in the afternoon after the Inauguration—was it the Inauguration?

RITCHIE: No.

VASTINE: After the Senate was installed?

RITCHIE: Yes, the new Senate.

VASTINE: Rick Brandon, my friend in the electronics division, called and said, "Bob, this is the letter, I'm afraid I'm calling to bring you the news you

probably expected. That is, I have a letter here from Senator Ford telling me to dismantle your antenna immediately.”

RITCHIE: So what did you do?

VASTINE: Well! That began a frantic press and senatorial counteroffensive. I reached Senator Danforth somewhere in his car. Senator Chafee was in a plane. I got Senator [Rudy] Boschwitz involved. I got Senator Quayle involved. It was a very difficult time because they weren't a lot of senators around. It was late in the afternoon. I used Senator [Mitch] McConnell's of Kentucky's AA, who was valuable in advising me on the press. So I called a reporter named Brown who worked for the Louisville *Courier Journal*, who had previously written a story about us, about the Republican Conference at one point, a sympathetic story. I told him what was going on, so he wrote a nasty story about how Senator Ford was trying to turn back the clock.

But the best thing I did was get the secretary of the Senate involved—the new secretary of the Senate, Joe Stewart. And Senator Byrd. Because I knew that the Democrats wanted to do what we were doing. There was a woman, I can't think of her name, who was my counterpart for the Democrats. She wanted to do exactly what I was doing, but she couldn't get support from her caucus, from her leaders. But she realized that when they got in the majority they were going to have to. And so it was Joe, and Byrd, and this woman who convinced Wendell Ford that this was not in the interest of the Democrats, because this was the wave the future. You had to do this kind of thing, and Democrats wanted to do it, too! So, please, Wendell, lay off the Republicans. Apparently, Chafee and Wendell had a conversation. Chafee called in from Rhode Island, in what I understand was an extremely heated conversation. Chafee's secretary told me that she could hear it all through the walls.

I guess Wendell realized that he was going to bite off a little more than he wanted to chew. And he was put up to it by John Chambers, of course, no question about that! John Chambers was a print reporter and had been,

without realizing the world had changed. So had Democrats, and Democratic senators would like to use electronic media, too, to communicate. It was a combination of factors.

Finally, they had a Rules Committee hearing in which Senator Chafee was requested to testify. Chafee lined it up in advance with [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan. I think he called up Moynihan and Pell to ask for a little help. And maybe somebody else on the Democratic side. And, of course, he had Warner, his good buddy John Warner, and [Mark] Hatfield and others on the Republican side. [Ted] Stevens' Alaska ties depended heavily on what we did. We did a lot of work for him! So we had it wired in the Rules Committee.

I remember we took Senator Chafee up on the roof and took a picture of him in front of the antenna and passed it to senators at the hearings. And we did that advisedly. That could have backfired. But I wanted them to see that there was a senator identified with this. This wasn't just a piece of electronic equipment up there. It was a United States senator who "owned" this thing, I mean psychologically he was invested in keeping that thing there. And he represented a lot of others. And he was a member of the leadership of his party. We thought long and hard about taking that picture, but I finally decided it was the right thing to do. It was a funny picture. Senator Chafee handed it to one of the other members, to one of the committee members in the Rules Committee, and I remember each one of them passing it around. And each one of them sort of smiling about it. "There's Chafee in front of his antenna."

Then the committee ordered a study. Meanwhile we could keep operating. So Rick Brandon did a study, and they decided because there was this one antenna up there, everybody would want one. That was one of the reasons for taking it down. Permit one antenna, then there were be hundreds, and that would be impossible. That would be an eyesore. Can't have any eyesores, even though you couldn't see them. It's too far back into the center of the building, away from the street.

So they did a study, and they said there was room for forty antennas, thank you. So applications would be accepted. And, indeed they found out—and they called for comment—that a lot of news organizations had an interest. So it was clear they weren't going to turn this faucet off very easily. Finally, we did win in a sense that we stayed, and it was never challenged again. Then the Democrats followed suit.

One day, I remember, when we were still on the majority and we had gained some notoriety, Joe Stewart, who was then Washington representative for Sonat but very close to George Mitchell, asked me if I wouldn't, please, come have lunch with George Mitchell, just very casual lunch. Tell him what was going on. Tell him what I was doing. He'd be very interested in knowing. I got very antsy about this luncheon. I finally went to Senator Chafee, and said, "Senator, I have this invitation to go to lunch with George Mitchell."

He said, "You *do*." [imitates]

And I said, "Yes. And I don't think I should go."

And he said, "I don't think you should either." He said, "You tell 'em, I said, 'Does Macy's tell Gimbles?' You tell 'em I said that. I want 'em to know that I said that." [chuckles]

So I did not go to lunch with George Mitchell. You were saying, one thing that happened being in the minority was that, first, they tried to dismantle us. The next thing after that was to emulate. I just checked the other day to find out. They never went as far as we did. They found a small room in the Capitol, very small room where they have one camera. They do have a satellite uplink. They do have a swamp fibre optic feed, like I've just described—only 10,000 words ago! But they don't have radio services. They don't have graphic services. They don't *begin* to have the sophistication of service we have. And since I've gone, the Republican Conference has elaborated, the studio's been expanded, and they've developed some very nice looking radio studios, very professional. And the staff is good.

One of the things that we developed were cable TV shows. We worked with the head of a state's cable system association. All these states have associations of cable owners. So we'd call, for example, and say, "Hey, let's have a show with Senator Specter. And all your cable stations throughout the state can take the show. It's got to be on prime time; and it's got to be a call-in show."

We have this 800 number, and we develop this—it's one of the most technically complicated things you can possibly do. And at first we did it, and we just barely made it successful. And then we were dragging along, and I said, "Look if we're going to do this, we're going to do it perfectly. So I brought in a television station manager from Florida as our consultant. One of the most wonderful teachers you would ever meet, terrifically competent professional guy. I just made it very clear we were not going to be amateurs. We were going to do this completely professional and make senators feel absolutely rock solid when they walked into our studios they weren't going to lose the sound. It was going to be perfect, technically perfect. It took about a year of kind of working hard with the staff, insisting on *excellence*.

But by the end of that we had about fourteen senators who regularly—once a month—used our facility to do what we called cable-call-in shows. And as time went on, elaborated the format and did cut-ins and charts and graphs and all kinds of fancy stuff. It worked very well, in the end, after a lot of work.

I'm very pleased with that because it was innovative and technically difficult, and it required me to manage the place so that I got in the end what I wanted. And it was hard. It was hard to get it done.

RITCHIE: I can appreciate that. The only time I've ever been on a call-in show, the host got so excited when the first person called in he cut me off the telephone line. When he finally got me back on, he cut the caller off! [Laughs]

VASTINE: [whistles]. Oh, boy! [laughs] Some show.

RITCHIE: In a sense, you were really teaching yourself how the media worked.

VASTINE: Oh, yes.

RITCHIE: You had to plunge into a whole, new area of technology.

VASTINE: Well, as I was fond of telling people, I didn't need to know how the stuff worked, I only needed to know what it did. It didn't interest me at all for a second how a machine worked. It was really just that machine lets you talk to a satellite, and thus to millions of constituents. That's all I cared about, all I needed to know. Somebody else could figure out how it worked and make it work. That made it easier, my understanding that my role was to direct outcomes, not worry about means.

It was quite a coup for our party, really, to get that antenna up on the roof.

End of Interview #7