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E-mail story on how Ernie Bonner won I-5 vote

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Subject: Ernie's Party
Date: 95-05-03 09:23:20 EDT
From: 0006190004@mcimail.com (Fast Company)
To: lynnbonner@aol.com (Lynn Bonner)

First of all, Ernie can't retire. It's an unnatural act! How can Ernie retire when Roldo Barthalme (?) is still publishing his newsletter?

Anyway, here's my favorite Ernie Bonner story. It has to do with the real story--the story behind the story--of how the I-505 freeway vote was won.

The I-505 vote, as I'm sure you boys and girls remember, came after Mt. Hood was already over. The critical swing vote on I-505 belonged to Lloyd Anderson, and there was a general feeling that Lloyd wasn't going to support Neil on the I-505 vote for a number of reasons: maybe Lloyd wanted to run for mayor against Neil, maybe people were telling him that it was starting to look like Neil got everything his way, maybe it was just a question of voting against Mt. Hood made it easier to vote the other way on I-505. After all I-505 wasn't as big a deal as Mt. Hood, the anti-freeway forces weren't quite as rabid on it, the NW neighborhood was a little more complacent, the freeway was more out on the neighborhood's margin. So it was a chance for Lloyd to exercise a little independence and demonstrate his own style of leadership (well, that may overstate the case a little, but you get the idea.)

So the question became, how do you get Lloyd's vote on I-505? Here's where Ernie made the difference.

One day he brought into work a little plastic device, a kind of stand up demonstrator with a base that allowed it to rest on a desk, and then a clear plastic screen that sat in the base. Attached (oops, that's attached) at the bottom left-hand corner was a wooden stick that could move: it could pivot up and down so that it described a different angle, depending on where you set it. Ernie explained that this was his McGovern for President FundRaising weapon. He'd used it in Ohio to raise a bundle of dough for that can't-lose candidate, George McGovern and now he was going to use it to win Lloyd's vote on the freeway. The way it worked for McGovern was simple. Ernie would show his visual aid to a prospect and explain that this tool helped analyze how McGovern would carry Ohio. It was really a graph. The axis on the left hand was a % of vote that McGovern would get in Ohio; across the bottom was some other bogus variable, like what year it was. The trick was that the zero point on the graph, the place where the stick was attached, wasn't set at zero--it was set at 45% or something like that--because NO DEMOCRAT IN HISTORY HAD EVER GOTTEN LESS THAN 45%! So it stood to reason that George would get that much--and then look! After that, depending on where you set the stick, he could easily carry the state and get elected president! It was logical! It was mathematical! It was convincing!

It was how we'd get Lloyd's vote. Ernie rigged up an I-505 matrix. Down the left hand side, he invented--very creatively--a bunch of criteria designed to measure how each option for the freeway performed. Across the top he identified the different options.

Then he assigned very scientific numbers to each of the criteria: if an option moved cars very smoothly, it got 5 points, less smoothly, only 3 points, and so on. He made sure that there were plenty of criteria that Lloyd would accept as "engineeringly" valid. But he also made sure that there were enough other criteria--having to do with neighborhood issues, air quality, and so on--so that the vote was stacked. It didn't matter how many points the freeway racked up in its strong criteria, when you added in the votes from the other criteria, it was a foregone conclusion. So Ernie went through the very scientific exercise with Lloyd and his staff. The criteria seemed valid, the numerical evaluation appealed to the most objective observer, the whole thing was a-political and very engineer-like. And when the objective exercise was finished, the numbers clearly showed that Lloyd should vote against the I-505 freeway. It was logical! It was mathematical! It was convincing! McGovern Wins! Well, not that part. But the I-505 freeway lost, and Ernie did it. Congratulations, Ernie! We love ya!
Alan and Frances

----- Headers -----
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