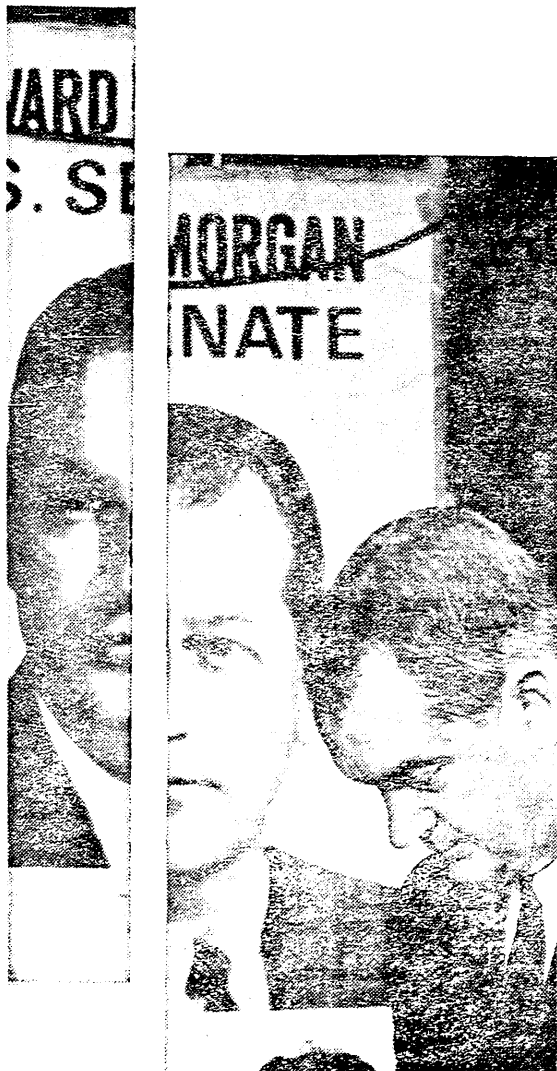


THE Moment Of Defeat

By Les AuCoin

Les AuCoin, a member of The Oregonian news copy desk and staff writer, spent election evening with Howard Morgan, defeated Democratic Senatorial candidate.



Reflecting

HIS NAME is Howard Morgan. He had stumped the far reaches of Oregon seeking the Democratic nomination to the United States Senate. He had shaken countless hands, visited scores of factories and addressed too many organizations to remember. He had spent close to \$45,000 on a hard-hitting campaign, battling a seasoned veteran of the political wars, Rep. Robert B. Duncan.

On election day, he was defeated. Decisively.

How did he take it? Publicly, as he conceded, he was poised. Everybody knows it hurts, but he admitted defeat gamely. But what of the PROCESS of losing? This is something else again. Here one has no chance to establish a veneer, to collect oneself. In the hubbub of the special election night motel headquarters, one dies perhaps a thousand deaths, awaiting the agonizingly slow precinct returns.

ONE'S EVERY MOVE is scrutinized—by campaign aides, by well-wishers, and by the dozens of newsmen who follow around the room, trying to get the candidate to tell them how he is faring.

This was the scene last Tuesday as Morgan watched the election returns. Three television sets were set up in the suite, each tuned to a different channel and blaring. A radio contributed to the din. TV cameras were aimed at a table where Morgan was to make a statement once the results had been learned. Wires and cables were tangled across the floor and the camera lights made the room almost intolerably hot.

THE NEWSMEN represented the national media because this campaign had far-reaching ramifications; it was the first serious test of the government's policies in the Viet Nam war. Morgan's campaign was outspokenly critical of that policy while Duncan supported it, point for point.

At first, Morgan remained apart from the crowd which jammed the room. Visitors came up, expressing good wishes and the former federal power commissioner smiled politely, chatted a moment and then strolled off to be by himself and his thoughts, always eyeing one of the TVs.

HIS DARK BLUE business suit was creaseless and a red and navy striped tie was knotted neatly under a starched collar. It was a calm, confident-looking Morgan the crowd saw. But it also was an intent Morgan. He strolled easily between the TV sets, then to the corner for a word with his wife, then back to the TVs.

At 8:15 p.m. the first results began to trickle in. Duncan: 609; Morgan 369. Morgan, the state Democratic chairman from 1952 to 1956, lit a cigarette as he watched the set. His opponent came on the air, via video tape, and stated his views on the war.

MORGAN LISTENED a moment, then moved to another set where the announcer was saying Duncan now had 3238 votes to Morgan's 1748. It was only 8:30 p.m. and with the bulk of the votes still to be reported, the candidate showed no great emotion. But he caught the crease of his jacket between his fingers and rubbed the

fabric nervously.

By 9 p.m. the crowd swelled so that one could barely move about without bumping others. The talk was loud as people tried to be heard over the TV. And as the crowd grew noisier, the television-watchers upped the volume and now the room reverberated with a steady drone.

A N O T H E R ANNOUNCEMENT came and people stopped talking and rushed to the sets. Duncan: 7770; Morgan: 3827. At this point the TV commentator, analyzing the race, said he thought Morgan had more "name familiarity" with the voters than Duncan, which brought a chuckle from Morgan. It was his first real laugh of the evening. Tom Morgan, 13, the candidate's youngest son, came up and grabbed his father's sleeve. He asked for the count and his dad told him. "We might still make it, Dad," Tom said. And Morgan smiled broadly and patted him on the shoulder.

Tom walked through the maze of cameras and cables to his mother across the room. He said the same thing to her and Mrs. Morgan laughed nervously while she tightly clutched a pack of cigarettes.

AS THE NIGHT wore on Duncan continued to lead. But Morgan, now sitting and sipping coffee, showed little strain. When a commentator predicted a "strong Duncan victory," however, Morgan pursed his lips and jumped up again. Beads of perspiration appeared beneath his close-cropped, greying hair.

... if you happen to lose, would you throw your support to Duncan?"

And, after avoiding newsmen's questions all evening, Morgan yielded to them now. With Duncan holding 72 per cent of reported vote, the reporters tried to lead him.

"If this trend continues," one asked, "who will you back in the November race?"

Morgan's eyes narrowed and his dark eyes darted over to his questioner. "This is entirely too early to tell anything," he said. "I remember in 1954, Dick Neuberger went to bed trailing by some 25,000 votes. He woke up the next morning the winner."

THE REPORTER SHOT back: "But if you should happen to lose, would you throw your support to Duncan?"

The TV men had been filming this exchange and the heat from the lights reddened Morgan's face. "Look," he said, "it's going to be a long night; will you wait awhile?"

The reporter hushed up. Wistfully, Morgan said he wished the election had been scheduled a month or two later. Because of the civil strife in Viet Nam, he said, "the tide of American opinion is changing. It hasn't run its course yet. It would have helped if I'd had time to let the sentiment grow."

HE SPOKE OPENLY now, raising his voice to be heard above the din. While he talked his fingers were fid-

getting again. The strain began to show.

Morgan praised the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on Viet Nam, saying they helped make the voters feel "qualified" to judge the administration's conduct of the war.

The newsmen fired more questions and Morgan fielded them. But his tie was looser now and the shirt wasn't quite as sharp. Now the TV men wanted him.

"HEY SENATOR," one shouted. "Could we get a shot of you by the set, watching the returns?"

Morgan agreed and smiled as he walked to the TV. But the smile seemed forced and the lines under his eyes looked deeper after almost three hours of jostling and talking.

Cameramen satisfied, he walked across the room where he was stopped by an elderly lady who had been sitting silently most of the night.

"GOD BLESS YOU, Howard," she said. "Don't give up yet. We still have a chance."

"It's been done before," Morgan said, and he patted her hand before walking on.

The crowd was thinning out now as Duncan's margin continued to hold up. Then suddenly:

"We're gaining! We're gaining!" It was Mrs. Morgan, who had stationed herself next to the radio. "Howard," she called, "we're moving up."

MORGAN'S HEAD JERKED around and he left a group he had been talking to. "What is it now?" he asked.

"We've got 35% (of the reported votes)," his wife announced. Everyone applauded loudly and the candidate grinned freely. It was the first happy news they had heard.

Soon another batch of TV men approached him. They were working for a national network, they said, and would the candidate and his wife mind mingling with the crowd?

The Morgans agreed and walked around the room, shaking hands and smiling under the hot lights.

Then with Duncan leading, with 70 of the vote, the news came that vote-counting computers had developed trouble and returns were delayed for nearly an hour. This dampened the party's spirits and at midnight, as results still trickled in, the well-wishers went home.

WITH THE SUITE virtually empty, coffee cups and soda bottles littering the tables and floor, remnants of a baked ham strewn about, Sen. Maurine Neuberger appeared on TV, in an Oregon Heart Fund public service commercial.

Morgan's daughter, Sarah, 16, watched the retiring legislator whose post her father was seeking. Then she looked up at Morgan who stood there with perspiration glistening on his brow.

"Daddy," she said jokingly, "there's the cause of it all!" She wore a necklace with an Army paratrooper's badge. Her boyfriend, a draftee, gave it to her just before he was sent to Viet Nam.

Morgan laughed, threw his arm around her and moments later retired for the night. Next morning he announced defeat.