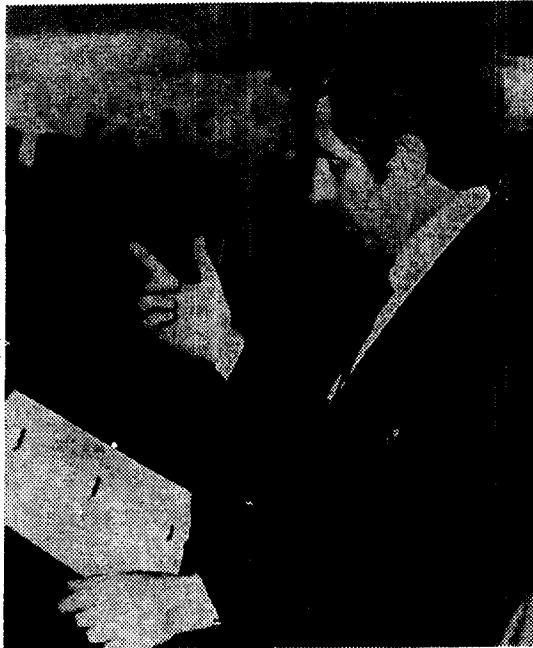


Impetuous Senator

Maurice Robert Gravel



Associated Press

A bundle of contradictions
(Senator Gravel reading from Pentagon papers Tuesday night)

By WARREN WEAVER Jr.
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 1 — The latest indoor sport on Capitol Hill is to try to guess what impelled Maurice Robert Gravel, a 41-year-old Alaskan real-estate developer, to attempt to read a part of the Pentagon papers into the public record, and ultimately to burst into uncontrollable tears.

Man "Mike Gravel is a Taurus," a long-time friend said of the Democratic Senator.

News "That tells you everything about him." A man born under the sign of the bull, astrology books report, is tenacious, persevering and very stubborn; one born on May 13, 1930, is inclined to extremes and to impulsive actions.

The energetic junior Sena-

tor from Alaska has proved to be such a bundle of contradictions in his short political career that the planets may provide as accurate an explanation of his motivations as the puzzled guesses of his friends and enemies.

Senator Gravel—the name is pronounced "gra-VEL"—is an intensely political man, but he appears to have made critical political errors. He votes with the liberals but against their leadership candidates and against their efforts to curb the filibuster. He loves the Senate but offends its elders. He is highly image-conscious but behaves in ways that mar his own reputation.

The only consistent thread that runs through the career of the darkly handsome Senator is his compelling political ambition. But his success in fulfilling it has been er-

atic.

Moved to Alaska at 26

Fresh out of Columbia University after an Army stint as an intelligence officer in Europe, Mr. Gravel moved from his native Massachusetts to Alaska at the age of 26 because political prospects looked better in that vast northern land of the 19-year-old voter.

He began running for local office almost immediately but not successfully. In 1960, four years after his arrival, he tried for the state's House of Representatives, but lost. However, with new support from wealthy patrons, he made it to the House in 1962, won re-election in 1964 and astonished political observers by winning the speakership in 1965.

But Speaker Gravel antagonized fellow Democrats by enforcing his will on committees, and he further split the party by challenging a four-term incumbent, Representative Ralph Rivers, in the 1966 primary for the state's lone seat in the House of Representatives in Washington. He lost by 1,300 votes.

Undaunted, Mr. Gravel went back to the real estate

business in Anchorage for two years to plan an audacious challenge to an Alaskan institution, Senator Ernest Gruening, in the 1960 primary. His only real issue was that he was then 38 years old and Senator Gruening was 81.

TV Film Sways Voters

The younger Democrat hired Joseph Napolitan as political consultant late in 1966, and Mr. Napolitan spent 20 months planning a nine day primary campaign heavily focused on a half-hour film biography of Mr. Gravel, which was shown on television and screened by home projectors in hundreds of Eskimo villages.

Mr. Napolitan recalls it as an unusual but highly successful campaign. The day after saturation showings began, the poll figures shifted from 2-to-1 for Senator Gruening to 55-45 for Mr. Gravel, who went on to win the election by a narrow margin.

In the Senate, Mr. Gravel has been relatively inconspicuous until recently, when he threatened to filibuster against the draft extension bill and, on Tuesday night, held his highly emotional readings from the Pentagon papers in a committee room after failure of the Sen-

ate to muster a quorum had denied him a forum in the chamber.

Mr. Gravel has voted twice with the South to keep the filibuster rule intact and supported Senators Russell Long of Louisiana and Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia in their leadership battles with Senator Edward M. Kennedy. Mr. Kennedy was replaced by Mr. Byrd as the majority whip this year.

Older Senators Antagonized

Even before this week's events, the Alaskan ruffled the composure of Senate elders by displays that they regarded as arrogant, on one occasion debating against a standing colleague while sitting on a Senate desk, his legs dangling over the edge.

Mr. Gravel married the former Rita Martin in 1959, and they have two children, Martin, aged 11, and Lynne, 9. His hobbies are tennis and gardening.

Senator Gravel confessed to a reporter a few days ago that he was "too abrasive" to become an effective force in the Senate by lobbying his colleagues in the cloakroom. To make an impression, he said, he must undertake an attention-getting move like a one-man filibuster.

A long-time associate was surprised, however, at how overwrought the Alaskan became during his three-and-a-half-hour reading from the Pentagon papers.

"I'd never seen him in that condition before," the friend said. Then he paused and added: "He has very, very high moments, and he does these incredible things."