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Hemphill: How communication is changing politics

I am not certain what I enjoyed more, the failure of the Senate to pass the faulty "Immigration Reform Bill" or the reaction of the losing senators.

The Senate came late to the recognition that the people who elected them can rise in righteous wrath. Senators have reveled in the recognition that they have six years each to make decisions without much oversight and they long for the days when it took weeks for angry letters to reach them.

No longer. The 24-hour cable channels have plenty of time to do analysis, talk radio reaches people at home and at work, and the Internet can carry hundreds of millions of messages an hour without breaking a sweat.

More than half a century ago I had an enlightening experience. I had accepted a vice-presidential appointment to the Naval Academy at Annapolis but, in addition, I had several other appointments to West Point and Annapolis that I no longer needed, but I owed some people great big "thank yous."

One of those people was Senator Lister Hill of Alabama, whose appointment I appreciated. I met him in his Washington office to thank him, but I also asked him a question: "How do you decide how to vote?"

"I vote as I please. If the people support an issue that I was going to vote for anyway, I say I am voting for the people. If I intend to vote against something the people want, I say to myself that I was elected to lead, and lead I must because my staff and I have studied the issue and know more about the issue than my constituents do."

And that may well have been the truth. Then.

Now, the contents of all Bills appear on <http://www.Thomas.Gov> and everyone has the opportunity to read the details of a bill at about the same time as elected officials. In the case of the latest Immigration Reform Bill, neither the public nor the senators had even a week to digest hundreds of pages of information. Special interest groups have the electronic methodology to organize and disseminate information, pro or con, overnight.

Political positions cannot be "traded" in the dark of night, immune to examination. Politicians who say one thing before one group, and another thing before another group risk both positions exposed with audio/video the next day.

Politics are changing. Flip-flopping is more difficult.

The senators were going to vote the way they pleased – but something

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happened on the way to the vote. The people arose, as they have seldom spoken before. That was all the result of instant information transfer among an aroused public on what had been planned as a "slam dunk," arranged among just a few senators and the president.

While I would like to think that the pro-illegal immigration senators and president were chastened, I know better. They will attempt to bring pain to the nation to "teach us a lesson."

That will have to be addressed at the ballot box.

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