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Interview with Bob Carolla (1) by Brien Williams

Robert 'Bob' J. Carolla

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George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Robert J. Carolla
(Interviewer: *Brien Williams*)

GMOH# 075
March 25, 2009

(Significant revisions throughout; transcription edited without changes indicated; transcript and original recording restricted during Senator Mitchell's lifetime)

Brien Williams: This is an oral history interview with Robert J. Carolla for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College in Maine. We are in the Washington, D.C. offices of the National Alliance on Mental Illness [NAMI], where Bob serves as director of Media Relations.

Robert Carolla: Hmm-hmm.

BW: Today is Wednesday, March 25, 2009, and I'm Brien Williams. Bob, please let's start with you giving me your full name and the spelling of your last name?

RC: It's Robert James Carolla, C-A-R-O-L-L-A.

BW: And the date and place of your birth?

RC: January 22, 1956, Suffern, New York, that's S-U-F-F-E-R-N.

BW: And the name of your parents?

RC: Anthony Carolla, Mary Pugliese Carolla, that's P-U-G-L-I-E-S-E.

BW: Great, thank you. Let's start with a little bit of your background, where you grew up and schooling and so forth.

RC: Originally up until about age eight we lived in Pearl River, New York, and then moved upstate to a small town, Canastota, C-A-N-A-S-T-O-T-A, between Syracuse and Utica, New York. That area is my parents' home area, and my father at that point was, in his career, was becoming principal of the Canastota High School, and that's where I grew up until I graduated and went off to college.

BW: And where did you go to college?

RC: Middlebury College, in Vermont, and I was a history major and editor of the college paper.

BW: And then from there, from Middlebury?

RC: Well actually, while I was at Middlebury I did a Washington semester here in Washington, through American University, and that would have been the fall of 1976. And as part of that program I did an internship with Americans for Democratic Action, working in support of the Carter-Mondale campaign, but also helping write a report about the Senate candidates that year.

I returned to Middlebury, that internship turned into my first job out of college, as their press secretary and political director of a project called The Democratic Conference. And I did that for a year, then went to law school at Boston University, graduated in 1982, and took a job as an associate in a law firm in Portland, Maine.

BW: And did you see yourself at that point as being a Portland lawyer for a career, or not?

RC: I was very unsure about what I really wanted to do, and I think there was a little bit of wanting to be a philosopher-king practicing law in a small city in Maine, being involved in politics, which had always been a long term interest of mine. Maine specifically, because one summer we took a trip up to Maine, and I remember vividly sort of sitting at age twelve, sitting at Pemaquid Point thinking, "This would be a great place to live." And that was essentially my reason for going to Maine, a sense that there was sort of an exciting frontier there, as opposed to coming back to Washington or staying in Boston, which I had options to do also.

BW: Did you at that point see Washington as a potential in your future, or not?

RC: Actually, at that point I think I was running from it. I grew up as a small town kid, and the idea of Washington sort of national politics was a little bit intimidating to me. But I think that that was part of my long term instinct and vision.

BW: And what about your family's political leanings, or discussions or whatnot, was there much there?

RC: Well, my dad had been a history teacher before being a high school principal. Current events were always a part of the discussion. I think later, in my college years, I became aware that my dad had actually been a Democrat, or at least registered as a Democrat, in a town that was heavily Republican, but at the same time it was a town that was heavily Italian American. And my dad was actually born in Italy, emigrated at age seven with his family. My mother also was Italian American born in this country, and she was an English teacher. So yes, there was an interest in politics, as much from history as from current events.

For me, the formative moment of interest was in 1964 when I was eight. We had just moved to Canastota, and it was probably a year after John F. Kennedy's assassination, and Bobby Kennedy was running for the Senate in New York and did a motorcade between Utica and

Syracuse, stopping at every small town in the main intersection, which included Canastota. So I have a very vivid memory of, by the time he reached Canastota it was maybe nine o'clock at night, at the intersection in the center of town, the entire town turned out to see him and to hear him speak. And I was actually pressed up against his car, and the whole time he was talking I was literally pulling at his coattails, of his suit coat, and I think I was saying "Bobby, Bobby, Bobby," caught up in the excitement. I don't really think I had much awareness of the politics behind him, but it was a very dramatic moment, and one, as I started following his career and being interested, it probably had a very big influence even then with the idea that eventually I'd go to law school. Even though, frankly, a lot of my instincts were in journalism and writing more than law school. I hated law school, like many people did.

BW: But what about the practice of law, when you got started in Portland?

RC: I hated law school, and once I started settling into practice I realized that I hated practicing law, at least in a law firm setting. And I was sort of trying to find my sense of direction at that point; I was maybe about twenty-six. It was a super law firm, one of the partners that I was closest to, Tom Allen, ended up running for Congress years later, and this past year was just defeated in a run for Senate against Senator Collins.

But, so I was trying to get involved in a lot of things. Before I even studied for the bar, one of the partners in the firm asked me if I would help out with a congressional primary race, and I was sent to Waterville to manage some of the field operations. After that ended, I took the bar, and then as I was starting in at the firm, I started volunteering two or three nights at the headquarters of what was then the joint Brennan-Mitchell campaign in 1982, which of course was the one where the Senator came, having been appointed to the Muskie seat, came from behind and won handily.

And I was doing that as much to meet people as I was to sort of satisfy my interest in politics. M. C. Toker was one of the other volunteers, who at the time I didn't realize was Governor Brennan's niece, and we got to be friends during that period as well. And there was a feeling that, I don't know, that there was something different happening. I mean partly it was the second year of the Reagan administration, the economy was bad, and so there was sort of a backlash, for all of Reagan's popularity, there was a sense of that. But there was a sense of sort of a coming together of different generational strains.

The candidate I had worked with in the primary was John O'Leary, who had been a partner in one of the other larger law firms, and John had grown up in a large Irish American family on Munjoy Hill, but also had gone to Yale Law School, and clearly had a long term political interest of his own. In the primary he was in many ways the Portland "yuppie" candidate. There was a state senator, John Kerry, who was from York County, who was more the traditional, working class, Catholic candidate, a lot of support from the pro-life movement. And then there was another lawyer, Phil Merrill, who had also been a state senator. Mary McAleney, who ended up being Mitchell's chief of staff, at least for the Maine office, had been a key player in his campaign.

And so here we were, hammering it out at a Democratic local level, different strains of, you know, what was becoming some generational changes in the national Democratic Party. And John O’Leary lost, John Kerry got the nomination and lost to Jock McKernan, who later became governor, Mitchell and Brennan won, and about two to three years later I end up in Washington, end up being hired for the Senate staff. M. C. Toker was already there working as a legislative correspondent, and Mary McAleney was hired to come in. For me, having been recent to Maine, it was like, “Oh, all these strands are coming together.” And there was a lot of camaraderie, and it was partly because we were all relatively young, late twenties going into our thirties.

BW: During that ‘82 campaign you probably had your first direct contact with George Mitchell, would that be right?

RC: The first direct contact was attending a baked bean fund raiser in one of the local churches, and I remember the Senator making a comment about people eating baked beans in a holy place and to be careful about the after-effects. And it was sort of my first glimpse of his sense of humor, which sometimes edged on the earthy, but just on the borderline of being polite.

But that wasn’t an actual introduction. What happened was, after the election he appointed a task force on campaign finance reform. I think at the time the Senate race had been the first one in Maine to break the million dollar at that point, the million dollar mark, in terms of spending. And so he did form a task force, and I approached Larry Benoit, maybe at the same time Harold Pachios, saying, “Can I get involved, can I help out?” And they were welcoming but I don’t think they really knew what to do with me. So I attended some of the task force meetings, I wrote sort of a summary of, and sent it in to Harold and Larry.

And later that year there was a fund raiser to help retire John O’Leary’s debt, and Mitchell came by for that, and Larry Benoit introduced me to him and said, “Bob’s been helping with the task force.” That was my first introduction of him directly. And our paths crossed a couple other places. During the Democratic Convention in ’84, at that point I had left law practice, come back to Washington and was working for ADA again—my first employer from when I had graduated from college. I remember running into the Senator at the baggage claim in San Francisco, and someplace I have a picture of him on the floor of the convention. I took his picture, along with M. C. Toker’s and a couple other friends from Maine.

But my only other encounter was actually after the ’84 campaign, and I interviewed with Rich Arenberg for a legislative slot, and was hired, and then after I was hired I was standing in the front office and the Senator came out and they introduced me again, and he looked at me and he goes, “Well I’ve been hearing a lot of good things about you, I hope they’re true.” And so that was my other sort of formative encounter with him.

BW: So you went from ADA to the Senator’s office.

RC: That’s right.

BW: And Rich Arenberg engineered that, or was M. C. Toker your -?

RC: Well, I was scrambling. ADA at that point was going through a change of executive directors, and my position was going to be eliminated. And my coming back had been with the understanding that it was only for six months, and I took the job as much to get back into Washington and back into politics. And so I was scrambling, looking to land a more permanent job. And I had made the decision right after the Democratic Convention that my next step, I really wanted to work on Capitol Hill. I'd gotten some encouragement from a couple friends. Otherwise I'm not sure whether I would have. Capitol Hill, working on a congressional staff, it's pretty intimidating if you're from Canastota, New York.

I had talked to some people, had had a couple of interviews, one or two didn't pan out. And then my at-that-point boss at ADA said, "Bob, I just got a call from ..."—someone who had worked on the Udall campaign with her. When I had come to ADA as an intern in 1976, I had been doing volunteer work up in Vermont for Udall, so it was like, you know, "I just heard from Wally that there's an opening in Senator Mitchell's office." And it was like, "*Ding.*" And I immediately got on the phone. I had written a letter to Mitchell, but it probably had never been seen – in fact, I later found it in Mike Hastings' files. But I got on the phone, I mean I just cold-called it, managed to get through to Rich, and in thirty seconds, you know, between telling him that I had been from Maine, I'd practiced law, I'd working on the O'Leary campaign, worked with the Senator, and he goes, "Stop," he says, "you've convinced me." He says, "Come in and talk with me."

So then I came in and talked with him, that was in December. I landed the job in March, so I was really scrambling and hoping until then. I know exactly what day I started, April 2, and the reason I picked that deliberately was because it was the day after April Fools Day, and I got superstitious because April 1st had been the date that I had accepted the offer for the law firm in Maine, which had, it was a great law firm but I had been miserable in law practice. And so it was like, "Oh, I don't want to set this up the wrong way."

So basically it was from ADA, through a referral of someone who had come out of the Udall campaign, that a lot of us young Democrats in that era had come out of, that I got through to Rich. And my understanding is he had interviewed a number of people, and then had asked the Senator whether he wanted to meet with two or three of them and I think it's a case that the Senator knew enough about me. Plus I was lobbying for it. Every contact I had in Maine, I was pulling out the stops, asking them to put in a good word for me, so I think that tipped it.

BW: So that was April 2, 1985.

RC: Nineteen eighty-five, yup.

BW: Right, so tell me what roles you played over those ten years in his office, before we go to specific -

RC: Well, I was legislative assistant; the title stayed the same over the time period I was there. Originally I was hired to handle foreign policy and defense. I had some background; I had lived in Bolivia as an exchange student when I was in high school. Defense issues I was certainly weak on. I'd had a year of ROTC when I was in college. My brother worked for the Defense Intelligence Agency. In fact, the Sunday before what I thought was going to be a interview with the Senator but which actually ended up being another meeting with Rich, when he offered me the job, I was so nervous about what I saw as my weakness on defense issues, that my brother took me to Andrews Air Force Base – and we were going around and he was explaining to me which kinds of aircraft were what, and then also talking about nuclear arms control, what “throw weights” meant and things of that sort. Foreign policy and defense was the base of what I was going to be doing.

The portfolio ended up also including the fishing industry, because many of the issues really had to do with U.S.-Canadian relationships, in terms of fisheries management. The region was still adjusting to what had been the extension to the 200-mile limit back in, I think that was '76, and there had been a World Court decision that had gone against the United States that meant a loss of some fishing grounds for the New England industry. So that was sort of as an afterthought added to the foreign relations part of it.

Then as a second afterthought, because fisheries was in the Commerce Committee, I inherited the Commerce Committee from Chris Williams. Chris had been moving, very deliberately, into wanting to work in the health care area, so her piece of the Commerce Committee I inherited. And the foreign and defense part of it was something that, essentially I was replacing Mike Hastings.

The first year there was a railroad strike in Maine, which came under transportation in the Commerce Committee, so I handled it. And it ended up requiring a presidential emergency board order to try to freeze action – freeze the strike and then get some dispute resolution. That expired, there was still no resolution to it, and when I researched the precedents, actually the pattern was that if the president's emergency board didn't work, then there often was a congressionally enacted mediation board that would lead to an imposed solution. I ended up having to research the precedents for that, and then to manage the legislation. And of course this is a major economic issue – initially for Maine and Massachusetts, and then it was threatening to go national. It even ended up being a Supreme Court decision over the issue of secondary picketing, where the union picketed Conrail as opposed to just the Maine Central Railroad, turning it into a national strike.

Well, I did a good job on that one, and as a result started evolving more into the guy who worked on labor and commerce, and from the point of view of the Armed Services Committee, the defense industry, economic issues for Maine, as well as fisheries. So ultimately I was the labor and commerce guy, with some other parts thrown in. I think that was a fairly typical evolution in a Senate office. What was different was that, Mitchell's elected in his own right in '82 in the campaign I volunteered on, I joined the staff in the Washington office in '85, during that cycle

he's chairman of the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee, and we regain the Senate in 1986. His power is growing, which means that we start getting more involved in other areas, which you might call "national," or at least we have more clout to get involved. And then in '88 he's elected the majority leader, and at least for the first year or so, he really relied on the personal staff out of the Mitchell office as his primary legislative team. And I think part of it is because he was comfortable with us, he knew how far he could trust us, and that's important when you're going through some major transition.

I remember the staff meeting after he became majority leader, where we, the legislative staff sat down with him, our request, to talk about: well, what's this all mean for us? And I asked the question, "Senator, where does a Maine issue end and a national issue begin?" and he sort of stopped and paused and he goes, "Well, you know, I'm not sure." Which some of us reacted to like, "Oh, no." Because that was both exciting, but at the same time it meant more work coming.

I kept a journal during the first year of his being majority leader, and as I was reviewing it, partly in preparation for this session. I realized that I had done an estimate whereby we were having, each LA, about two times as many meetings to cover, in part because we had been used to having thirty-minute meetings with people who would come into the personal office. It might have been twenty to thirty minutes, but as majority leader, his scheduled meetings were half as long, sometimes as quarter long, but we were still staffing them, primarily those of us in the personal office.

The mail flow in the Washington office doubled, and that probably was just from Maine. For the first time, we had a policy of then answering out-of-state mail, so that increased. For field offices in the state, there were greater expectations, it was, suddenly your senator's the Senate majority leader, so there's this expectation of power and results, some of which were real, some of which really was just perception. And so the demand for help increased. I know the field offices felt that more people were coming in asking for case work help. They too were trying to figure out: "Where does case work end and legislative work begin?"

So there was that uncertainty, sometimes tension, and there were a couple vacuums that occurred, because Martha Pope, who had been the legislative director and the chief of staff, was then down on the Senate floor with the Senator. That's where she was based, and she still de facto played the role of legislative director, but she wasn't, she had more demands on her, she wasn't immediately accessible, as she had been before, when we could simply walk across the hall in the Russell Building. So our roles were definitely changing.

Besides interacting with people in Maine and key committee chairs, we were actually becoming the liaison to the committee chairs for legislation that was moving on the floor. It was a much larger dimension. But at the same time, we were incorporating all of Maine's interests, and I think that's where the Senator didn't want to create an artificial separation. The other dynamic was that the Democratic Policy Committee, under Senator Byrd, really had been an adjunct to his personal staff and primarily functioned to staff him, but that wasn't the case for Mitchell.

Mitchell, as, in running for majority leader, apparently had made promises to other Democratic senators – I think Senator Tom Daschle particularly. Daschle at that point was sort of the spokesperson or leader of a lot of the younger senators elected in 1986. There was a desire to have the Policy Committee be more of a service oriented committee for the entire caucus, which was I think, for the DPC staff, a very wrenching change, because suddenly the Mitchell staff from the personal office are handling all these issues that many of them had previously handled. However, some of our personal staff did end up at the DPC for the foreign and military focus, that remained the base for that operation.

But I remember Sarah Sewall telling me at one point that a lot of the members of the DPC staff were – not literally, but almost – “cursing the Mitchell staff,” because we were taking over an issue. And then a lot of them were coming in late and going home early, so they were having an adjustment – which if it had been me, I probably would have been demoralized by. And at the same time, we’re trying to get up to speed handling a much greater work load, and also learning how to communicate through different channels and coordinate, and that at times could be rocky.

Looking back, there were probably a couple cases where things broke down, where there were near misses in terms of, not so much missed opportunities, but sort of dropping the ball. Nothing that ever made the front page of the *Washington Post*, but internally sometimes, at the staff level, we used to be going, “Oh, no, I mean it’s only a matter of time, please don’t let it happen.” There was improvisation as we made the transition into what would then grow into becoming “the well-oiled Mitchell machine.”

BW: How long did it take for that to occur, and there must have been an influx of new people at some point, to resolve this staffing issue.

RC: I’m not sure it ever resolved itself. He was leader for six years, it may have needed another six before it really got streamlined and smooth. Perhaps only two. Some of it may have been deliberate, because there was certainly, there was a lot of energy in competition, healthy competition going on as part of that process, and I think that Mitchell to some degree liked having that, or he wanted to stay focused on the bigger issues so he wasn’t as worried about the other ones.

In the personal office we started bringing in more staff. I think initially we were trying to get in one or two more legislative correspondents, because they served as really research assistants and support the legislative assistants; that was sort of the structure.

Then at one point, I think in, like around ‘91, we brought in some additional people from Maine to staff some very specific areas, and that helped also. We were feeling our way, Mitchell was getting comfortable, and he certainly had inherited a terrific floor staff, so there was a bonding going on among all of us. I started working more closely with people like Abby Saffold who ran parts of the leadership dimension.

There were people at the Democratic Policy Committee who, whatever their roles it ended up

meshing well with us, in terms of a sort of a camaraderie and a team focus, so that settled in a little bit. But with us, if you had had to sit down and draw out a structure tree, I don't think it by itself would have really been an indication of where the power centers were, or who was handling things with more authority than others, because sometimes that depended on the relationships, if not with the Senator, then with Martha Pope or Mary McAleney. And then at one point Martha moved up to be sergeant at arms and John Hilley came in as chief of staff over all. So there was constant shifting.

BW: During that whole period, did you remain physically located in the office building, or did you move over to the leader's?

RC: I stayed in the Russell Building. Most of us did. I think at one point Bobby Rosen moved close to the Senate floor. But I was based in Russell, partly because the interaction with Mary McAleney, because so much of what I was focused on involved major economic interests grounded in the state. I would still be running down to the floor any time the minimum wage bill was coming up, at one stage of proceeding or another, or if there was a meeting that the Senator had in the majority leader's office on one of my issues. I would go down to meet the needs of the schedule.

The interesting times would be when something unexpected would happen. You know, a meeting quickly scheduled and suddenly Pat Sarcone would buzz me and say, "You need to get down here," and I'd be like running down these marble halls and then underground to get to the floor.

BW: You mentioned the floor staff.

RC: Hmm-hmm.

BW: They were part of the Majority Leader's Office, is that, am I accurate?

RC: You know, I don't know exactly. You had different tiers of who was from which office. You really look at who came from which budget. I just never knew that. We had a floor staff, we had Abby who was secretary to the majority, you had a parliamentarian who was neutral between the two leaders. I certainly knew people and I knew who I needed to go and talk with for certain kinds of questions, but I'm not, I don't know that I ever really knew which office they belonged to.

And from our perspective, we were all part of a team. I mean really it was a morphing of the Mitchell, the original Mitchell team, with the Democratic leadership team. On some issues I worked very closely with Daschle's staff, usually involving labor issues because he was – not from a committee perspective, from the caucus perspective – he was the liaison with the labor unions. So you felt like you were all part of one team.

I remember Mary McAleney making a good point about how – this goes back to the perspective

that in some ways Mitchell was comfortable with us, and that was where his primary of reliance on us flowed from. That had another effect which I'm not sure we always appreciated, but the younger staff, the LCs, the legislative correspondents who were coming in, and they had their own ambitions, hoping to become legislative assistants. Those of us who had been there for a while as LAs were feeling like we were never going to leave, because this was a terrific ride; who expected that he was going to become majority leader?

The LCs' experiences and exposure with the Senator was totally different from ours. They had not been with him in as many situations and didn't have quite the same relationships individually with him. Some did over time, and I don't want to say it was a morale issue, but it was a difference between the newer generation and the middle generation of the Mitchell team. And one way that that bore itself out is that, as I said, our stages in life. At about age twenty-nine, going into my thirties, that really was a passage into adulthood. Some of us got married, some of us started families.

When my son was born, that evening I get a phone call at home and it's the Senator calling to congratulate me, which was a little funny because I was sort of wired and I started to recount what it had all been like. And the Senator had a real reserve with the staff, especially if it had anything to do with medical or health issues or anything that people would think of as private or personal, it was almost like a squeamishness. Over the phone I could just sort of sense his tone, backing off and, so I quickly thanked him.

We went through those kinds of experiences. In the meantime, some of the LCs were much more into being in their twenties. At one point I realized that several of them, and I want to say like maybe six or more, were all living in the same house together here in Arlington on – they used to refer to it as Lorcom Lane. Well, think in terms of what it is like if you are working hard and putting in long hours in your job, and then you come home with, and you're hanging out with your co-workers, and then also added to that, the normal office gossip machine.

So I remember at some point realizing that it really had some influence on relationships inside the office. I might have a conversation with one LC, and then it would be filtering back to everyone. Not that it was a betrayal of confidence or anything, and not that there was any scheming, but it just made for a very interesting dynamic inside the Mitchell team.

BW: Did, was this situation ever brought to the Senator's attention, or did he ever address it, or it just was part of the scenery?

RC: Well, I don't know. Mary McAleney made the observation to me, about how we had had different experiences and that we should keep those in mind. Mary had a good, close relationship with the Senator, so you always assumed things were filtering up. I remember at one point having a conversation with Martha Pope, and for some reason we were walking down a hall together, I don't really remember the context, or even which hall, but it had to do with coordination. It was in the first year that he was elected leader, I was talking about the sense of, "Are we coordinating things correctly?" There was this feeling of flying by the seat of our pants,

and I often would be holding my breath, thinking, “Am I about to run off the edge of a cliff and in the process run *him* off the edge of a cliff?”

And Martha reassured me, she says, “Don’t worry about it, you’re doing fine,” she says. “Some other people aren’t, because they’re freelancing too much.” And a lot of that was how close you stayed to the Senator in terms of exercising authority or making decisions. Some people stretched it more than others. Some people he had more confidence and trust in, not as a sign of lack of trust in someone else, it was just at what level of experience and delegation.

Like I said, “Where does a Maine issue stop and a national one begin?” and he had really not wanted to make a determination of it, or recognized that you can’t separate them. It affected my work load if nothing else, but the other uncertainty was, “At what point do you stop pushing an issue?” Because there were times on certain issues I’d be either putting in a memo or going to try to nudge him on something and occasionally would feel like he would roll his eyes and go, “Oh, not again.” Or worrying about the risks involved: what would it mean to his political standing back in Maine, in terms of the dynamics with other senators on the floor? And I remember telling Mary McAleney at one point, “I just wish he would say ‘stop’ sometimes, ‘This is the line, let’s not push it any farther.’” I can’t remember an instance where he ever said that to me, and there were certainly a couple times where he could have or should have.

But I really sensed that that was part of how he got the most and the best out of us, because it certainly had that effect, whether it was deliberate or not, because you just kept going and kept going, and sometimes you can’t achieve something, or you don’t know how much you can achieve until you keep trying at it, and sometimes realizing that, in the middle of it, that if you knew how hard it was going to be, you never would have got started it in the first place, but then you still have to move through it.

There was one issue where he did have that kind of a reaction with me, where it was incredibly complex, the politics on it at one point we said were fascinating but not worth all the aggravation. And that was the Fish Inspection Bill, which took up 1989 to 1990, and it had all kinds of jurisdictional controversies between different federal agencies, between three different committees, as it turned out, between two of the most volatile personalities in the Senate lining up opposite the Senator. And at one point in the issue, the Senator turned to me with I think some exasperation, saying, “You know, no one really cares about this bill except for some of the bureaucrats, the fishermen just want to be left alone.” It was exasperation at how much time, and what a mess it was, and all the staffs felt the same way so he sort of just expressed exasperation, and then he says to me, “But we started it, let’s finish it.” And that was all he ever said, in terms of what was this issue that we had taken on.

I had been ambivalent about the Fish Inspection Bill. On the one hand I thought it was going to be a heck of a great challenge. On the other hand, I just knew how much work and aggravation it was, and so I sort of had been, even in talking to him about it at the outset, I was probably wishy-washy in terms of how firm a recommendation I was giving him. The specific response and request that we responded to was a request from the Maine Sardine Council, who had been put

up to it by the National Fisheries Institute. Jeff Kaelin came in and made the case as to why Mitchell should be involved to help take care of the industry's interests as part of a broader issue on food and health safety. Which, whether the industry wanted it or not, was coming, and it was an important issue because it also affected the food and health safety, how people perceive the product and how much confidence people have to eat seafood.

A lot of the staff that worked on that issue, as we got into it, the more we learned about different risks associated with seafood. Some of us stopped eating raw seafood like sushi – I think you could go through the same exercise if you're working on a meat and poultry issue. But for a couple things, like raw shellfish, it was sort of like, "Oh, that could happen?" And I just remember there was one person on the Labor Committee who just swore off of it at that point. I think that was an excessive response, but it was one of the dimensions of the issue.

End Disk One
Disk Two

BW: Do you care to name the controversial, the senators that were -?

RC: Oh yeah, in fact, and I'll have to talk to the – Bowdoin archives [i.e. George J. Mitchell Papers] on it, I've got a, you can have a video of the debate, once it reached the floor. There was a jurisdictional issue, as I said. It started with: who would be the lead agency for fish inspection? Currently, now, it's sort of parceled out between the Food and Drug Administration, which has got so many different missions, with the National Marine Fisheries Service, under the Commerce Department, having some other kind of role which I can't even remember at this point. That was the status quo, it's the status quo now.

The intent at that point was to put fish inspection into the Department of Agriculture, where meat and poultry currently are, and there was logic for that. There was also the need for budget resources. And we started out on the issue with the assumption that by putting it in Agriculture, the bill would be referred to the Agriculture Committee, chaired by Senator Leahy, who was a close Mitchell ally, and that it would be set up so that it could become part of the Farm Bill, which was coming up that cycle for reauthorization, or at least offer it as an amendment to it.

Well, as we were getting ready to move on it, someone realized that the Commerce Committee has jurisdiction over the fishing industry and fisheries management. The gray area was between the food safety issues and inspection activity. And Penny Dalton, from the Commerce Committee, chaired by Senator Fritz Hollings, was frankly upset that we were proceeding to do a bill that was not involving them, because from their perspective they wanted to control the action to protect their fishing industry interests, in many ways the same reason we were getting involved. And Penny said to me, she says, "You don't know what you're doing Just because you think it's Department of Agriculture doesn't mean that it's going to go to the Agriculture Committee, it's going to get referred to the Commerce Committee," because there were all these bills ten years ago that were put in and that was the case.

And historically, what I didn't realize was that this gray area had been a huge source of controversy at the time they had reorganized Senate committees back in the '70s. If you dig deep into some of the reports and proceedings from it, it was the exact same issue playing out jurisdictionally. To make it ever more complicated, the Food and Drug Administration falls under the jurisdiction of the Labor Committee, which was Senator Kennedy, who also represented the other part of the New England fishing industry.

The ranking minority member on the Commerce Committee was Senator Ted Stevens from Alaska, who has, in the last year or so, has achieved national fame for other reasons. He and Hollings were probably the most volatile personalities in the Senate and – in terms of temper, in terms of just not caring who they ran over – and from a point of view of power and intimidation that goes a long way. And it gets complex, but by the time the Farm Bill was coming up to the floor, eventually, and Stevens had the impression that the Seafood Bill was already incorporated into the Farm Bill, which it was not. We had made the decision not to do that, which put us at a strategic disadvantage but we didn't want to push it that far.

So he goes down to the floor, threatening to filibuster the Farm Bill, and about how this is outrageous and, "The majority leader is trying to sneak something through." And I remember being on the Senate floor with Leahy's staff, and Mitchell and Leahy were there, and of course much of this had been really boiling at the staff level, but this is the first time it really exploded into the open between the senators. And I can't remember whether it was Mitchell or Leahy sort of turn to us and said, "What did you do to Stevens?" As if, it's all *your* fault for setting it up this way.

I remember Mitchell saying something like, "This is ridiculous, but we can't let him do this so we're going to file a cloture petition, or be ready to do that." It ultimately worked out that in the course of railing against us, Stevens made a comment about, "I'm willing to go head-to-head with their proposal and our proposal any time, but this is unfair." Only one of us heard that, or picked up on it. It was Bob June, a Sea Grant Fellow who was working with us for a year, and he grabs me and goes, "Did you hear what he just said? Did you hear what he just said? He's willing to go head-to-head." So we quickly go to Mitchell and the next thing we know is we have worked out an agreement, the bill is separate from the Farm Bill, it's not going to be proposed as an amendment to the Farm Bill, but it would be a stand-alone bill with a substitute, a Hollings-Stevens substitute to what was a Mitchell-Leahy bill.

At the point that that debate started – I think it got interrupted for a period, and I can't remember what the reason was. I almost want to say that it was a censure motion on another senator, but I may be blurring one event with another. It might have been something involving Senator Durenberger. The only reason I mention it is because this shows the, both the chaos and at times almost the absurdity of the Senate, because one minute we're debating fish inspection, and the next minute we're taking up something else, whether it was a censure or something like a foreign leader who had been invited to address them. There was an interruption, and then a couple hours later we're back on the Senate floor talking about fish inspection.

At the point that started – and this was one where I really wanted to go back to my journal to find out exactly what was said, because – let’s see here. (*Pages turning.*) Well, maybe this isn’t it. Hollings got up and started talking about, “This is nothing more than a power play by the majority leader, sneaking something through, trying to sneak something through on the Farm Bill,” and it was in that vein for a while. And I’m sitting next to Mitchell down on the Senate floor, and Leahy’s with Mitchell and Mitchell’s going, “Look at that, listen to him.... He can’t talk, he can’t debate anything without making it personal.” He [Mitchell] was livid.

With Mitchell, you could tell various levels of anger, and he usually was very controlled at it. This was sort of a mid-level one and it was controlled, but boy was it clear he was angry, and was seeing it as a personal attack. Then you had Stevens coming on, and I mean Stevens was such a wild man that people sort of expected it. But this was the tone of the debate for a while. Then the vote occurred. I can’t remember the vote spread, but it was a major, it was a lopsided vote in our favor. So much so that we were told that the next day Stevens called his entire legislative staff together and was screaming at them for having put him in the position and having lost so badly and mishandled the issue. Something that Mitchell would never have done.

After the debate was over, I walked off the floor with Mitchell and we went back into the leader’s office. I don’t think I was having an interaction with him at that point, I think maybe I was reporting back to Martha Pope. And I sort of glanced over as he was walking out of the main reception area for the leader’s office into his own office, and I swear, he sort of did a little bit of a jump and, almost like a jig, as he went in. It’s very vivid to me, in remembering it, and it was definitely like a little hop. And the way I interpret it was, one, I think he was taking satisfaction out of the victory over Hollings.

The other dimension to it, where I may be reading too much into it, but this was still early in his tenure as majority leader. Occasionally there’d be a floor vote or something happened, where essentially he would put down or beat another Democrat on an issue. Not a major one, but I almost saw it as like a firming-up. If you beat someone, it often settles an issue of power. And I almost saw it like a consolidation that was going on. Frankly, the fact that you’re able to beat Fritz Hollings and Ted Stevens handily has reverberations in perceptions, and even how the different staffs watching from the closed circuit television back in the Russell or Dirksen buildings would perceive.

That was a vote where, as aggravating as the issue was, it wasn’t top level like the minimum wage or many others, but I really think that at that point he took a lot of satisfaction in the way the floor vote came out. And there was a similar vote, very vital to Maine’s interests, which actually took place in the run-up to the majority leader’s election, which pitted Mitchell against Bennett Johnston from Louisiana, who was one of the three contenders at that time.

One of the interests that Maine had was the DDG-51 AEGIS destroyer program for the Navy. Bath Iron Works builds them. One of the issues has always been: how many destroyers or cruisers does the Navy order and build each year; is it one, is it two, is it three? And if so, which shipyard do they go to? And it was a head-to-head bidding. Bath had won the lead contract for

that class of destroyers, the Arleigh Burke class, which meant as the lead shipyard they were the leaders in a lot of the innovations and a lot of the planning and techniques that they developed would then pass on to the other shipyards in it.

And I'm not sure procedurally how it had evolved, but basically Bath and Ingall's shipyard in Mississippi were the two yards that were established in the program. Avondale, located in Louisiana, had not been accepted; their bids had not been accepted. I think it may have been a case of, "Well, your price may be lower but you really don't have this capacity or that capacity," and so they felt shut out and prevailed on their senators, Bennett Johnston and John Breaux, to try to raise an amendment in the Defense Bill – and this would have been in, probably in '87 leading into '88 – trying to really create enough of an opening that there could be a third shipyard in the program.

They had tried in the committee to reach a compromise that had to do with, "The secretary of the navy shall use this and this criteria and other concerns," something like that. That wasn't acceptable to the two senators from Louisiana or to Avondale, so they went with a floor amendment to the Defense Bill, which meant that Mitchell and Cohen, and primarily Mitchell, was going head-to-head with Bennett Johnston on a floor amendment within months, or a year's time, of the majority leader's election. And it ended up being, once again, it was Johnston, Breaux, and I think Stevens jumped in at some point in support of them, but it was Mitchell, Cohen, Cochran from Mississippi, I think one of the other senators from Mississippi, and then also Sam Nunn.

And Mitchell had a good way of focusing the message – in debating an issue. For example, on the minimum wage, at one point he picked up on it himself where he, in squaring off against the Bush administration, he goes, "This is an administration that wants to give a thirty-thousand-dollar-a-year tax break in capital gains to the most wealthy American, while denying a thirty-cents-an-hour increase to ordinary Americans." He had a knack for really capturing the message and simplifying the message.

Well, in the case of the debate with Johnston, with this shipyard trying to get back into the fray, and get another bite at the apple to try to get a destroyer contract, Mitchell gets up and he goes, "This isn't about a fair-play amendment, this is a sore loser amendment." And even I remember sort of going, "Whoa," sitting next to him. It was sort of like, "Whoa, I can't believe he said that," because of the tension between them, but that's actually what it was; I mean he really got to the heart of it.

It had the reverberations in the majority leader's race. I later heard from one of the lobbyists for Bath Iron Works that Johnston was furious with Avondale for having put him in that position opposite Mitchell at that point in time. On the other hand, the bottom line for any senator is to fight for their state's economic interests as a bottom line principle. Like with fish inspection, we knew that there were going to be changes in standards that would be imposed, and in that case our position was, "Well if it's going to happen, we want to be helping to lead it and to watch out for the critical issues." We would watch out for the state's economic interests, but that didn't

mean that we weren't for fish inspection.

In this case, Johnston had to fight for his state's economic interest, and obviously I think Mitchell went to the floor in a position of strength, fighting for Bath Iron Works, but he wasn't flinching from doing it either. No matter what the greater repercussions might be. But again, in terms of perception, consolidation of power or exercise of power, it was an incredible moment, which is the other tape that I've got here, it's hard to believe it was twenty years ago.

BW: It surprises me that, in a way, that the lineup of who was going to run for majority leader preceded the vote by, I would gather, quite a period of time.

RC: Yes, yeah.

BW: And I guess this would have been after Senator Byrd had announced that he was resigning?

RC: Yeah, I don't remember exactly when that was. It may have been soon after the '86 election or early '88. And I know that part of the equation had to do with whether or not Byrd would choose between majority leader and being chair of the Appropriations Committee, and once again, which would have the most power for benefitting West Virginia, versus the national scene.

I don't know what the time was on that but I think, I'm pretty sure that, well, I know that in Mitchell's case there was some point in 1986 or '87, in an interview with the *Brunswick Times Record* where he said something to the effect that, "I would not mind" – I'm sure it's in the clips someplace – but to the effect, "I would not mind being majority leader, and that's something I will be considering."

And I remember when it surfaced in the daily clips, I saw it and it was sort of this blink of, "Oh." And I remember someone else saying, it might have been Martha Pope, it might have been Diane Dewhirst, saying, "Oh, I wonder if someone's going to send that to Bob Byrd." There was a period of uncertainty about what was going to happen and I'm sure that you had three senators going through whatever thought processes and advice that they might be having. Mitchell's ambition was such that, having been chairman of the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee was, if not a stepping stone then certainly a source of some power for him. The fact that he helped elect an entire class of freshman senators and had the key relationships with them certainly was a factor that I expect was at play at the time.

BW: Can - Go ahead.

RC: Staff and those around Mitchell used to spend a lot of time trying to figure out his thought processes and how he had managed to get where he had. And this is a bit secondhand, but a good friend of mine, Suzanne Woodland, who was on Governor Brennan's staff, at the point that he was in the House, we were talking once and I sort of said, "When Mitchell made the

decision to go back to Maine, from Muskie's staff, what was he looking to do?" And Suzanne apparently had had a conversation about that with Brennan, in part because she was trying to figure out whether to go to law school or not and was trying to process, "Well what do I want to do with my life?" She said that when Mitchell went back, Brennan had indicated that it was very clear in Mitchell's mind that he wanted to be a trial lawyer, maybe someday a judge, which of course he ended up being, but that was sort of a maybe.

Brennan took some delight in recalling the fact that he was the one, as Cumberland County district attorney, who had to instruct George Mitchell where to stand in prosecuting a DUI case. And that's how basic it was. And then Mitchell went on to do other things, and then was federal attorney. I think he was federal attorney for maybe six to eight months and then he was on the bench. And actually there's a good story about how they felt him out as to whether he wanted to take Muskie's seat after the Carter appointment of Muskie to secretary of state in 1980.

But, so I'm sure Mitchell was looking ahead, ambition-wise, but I also have heard Mitchell speak in some context where, basically, "You do the best you can at whatever you're doing at that time. You stay open to opportunities, maybe in some cases you create your opportunities, but you can't look too far ahead, you've got to stay focused on what you're doing." That's good career advice for anyone, whether you're going to med school or law school or opening a business.

On the other hand, clearly there was, Mitchell at his core has always had some kind of driving ambition. One of the presidents of Middlebury College who had previously been at Bowdoin, who had lunch with me while I was working in the Senate, and he made a comment that when he was at Bowdoin, he and Mitchell used to get together maybe once a month or once every two or three months for dinner, and they would talk about international affairs, because this other fellow was an expert on U.S.-Soviet relations. And clearly that was an interest Mitchell had, international affairs, especially when you look at what he's doing now.

I remember he said that, "George Mitchell is very ambitious," and there was something driving him. I think he knew where his options might go. But I think at the core, it was like "Stay focused on what you're doing, make sure you're doing a good job and then the rest will come from that."

BW: It's interesting of course- Then he had the experience of being defeated in the '74 governor's race.

RC: Right.

BW: Which might have turned him, or soured him, on politics.

RC: Right, right, yeah, a lot of people would have walked away from it.

BW: But as I hear it, he retooled himself to some degree and then came back in a dramatic '82

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RC: What I used to hear was that he was a completely different candidate from '74 to '82. Among other things, by 1982 he didn't talk like a lawyer as much, he didn't come off as stuffy. I remember him talking about it, or maybe reading in an interview how at some point in his career, he looked at depositions that he had taken as a lawyer and was kind of appalled when he saw how he came off in writing, from when he had been speaking. You know, which is, we're all like that, we all, we don't talk in complete sentences, as the transcript of this interview probably will indicate. But he sort of saw that and became much more conscious of it, and so he in the process became much more concise and focused, in how he spoke. At least that's the story that I've heard, and I can't remember, I think I've heard it from him.

He developed himself. The other thing was that he was one of these people who at the end of a day, before he would go to sleep, he would review the events of the day and try to consciously pick out one thing that was a lesson from it all, good or bad. In both cases it goes to an incredibly disciplined mind, and that was one of the things that certainly I learned from. I've never known a more disciplined mind than I have his. And for someone who was still feeling his way out of law school, it was a powerful example to emulate. Which is one reason why I see him as a mentor in many ways. So there's that part of him.

BW: Bob, I've heard more than one description of his selection as Muskie's successor, so let me share your version.

RC: Well the version I heard was, there he was, I think in Bangor, sitting on the bench, he'd been there for about, maybe six months or a year. Suddenly Muskie's seat is open, and however the powers-that-be discuss these things, there were phone calls are flying, "Well what do you think? Who is this?" and so forth, and so apparently George Mitchell's name was put into the mix.

The story I've heard is that Gayle Cory was the one who was designated to call Mitchell up, as much to say, "Let's gossip, what do you think's going on?" I may have even heard Gayle tell this story – so she has him on the phone, they're just sort of talking, and then she goes, "You know, who do you think it'll be?" And then it was sort of like, "Well, you wouldn't be interested, would you?" And Mitchell, he says, "Well you know, maybe I would." And it was, I don't know, maybe she said, "Well you've got a lifetime appointment," and that he says, "Well I'm not sure I really want to do this for the rest of my life."

That's the story that I heard. Does that fit with what you've heard as well?

BW: Right, right.

RC: And that makes sense. They were incredibly close. My basic understanding is that they were on Muskie's staff starting around the same time at around the same age, way back in the '60s, and so she had a close relationship with him. And what we used to say in the office was that Gayle always called him "The Senator," or "Senator," like the rest of us did, except – I never

actually saw this happen – when she was really mad at him, then it became “George, George!” But otherwise she kept the distance from and respect of the Senator. We never called him George, it was always “Senator,” or we would refer to him as “The Senator.”

And actually at one point we had a legislative correspondent, before Mitchell became majority leader, Serge Seiden. Serge occasionally used to be the one who would drive Mitchell to various places. And Serge was very creative; he’s ended up making a career for himself here in Washington with the theater community. But at one point some of us were hanging out, remarking about how we always referred to Mitchell as “the Senator this,” “the Senator that,” even though a lot of times he might not even be around. And Serge said, “You know, this would make a good TV show, where it would be about a Senate staff, and you could have ‘The Senator’ but he would never be seen. I mean, it would always be the escapades of the staff, talking about, and involved in dramas that the senator was involved in, but ‘The Senator’ would never be seen on it.”

And you know, at the time it just struck us as a hilarious concept, and then for a short while we would occasionally say, “Well, we could have this kind of episode and this kind of episode.” Now this was before the *West Wing* television series happened, but I still think that it would have been an incredibly, with the right people and director and writer, hilarious concept. Because that was what it was. You worked for George Mitchell, but it was also “*the* senator,” which wasn’t “The Senator, Incorporated” but in some cases it was like you were working for a brand, and that it was as much managing the persona as it was working for him and with him.

BW: I have two questions, then I think we’ll take a pause.

RC: Okay.

BW: Gayle Cory of course is not here –

RC: Right, right.

BW: - to be part of this archive. You knew her pretty well.

RC: Yes, very fond of her.

BW: What – I’m not quite sure what the, the appropriate question to ask – what would she be saying about Senator Mitchell, or what would you be saying about her contribution to Mitchell’s career?

RC: Her contribution. She was one of the anchors. I’m not sure I can conceive of my experience with George Mitchell without equally thinking about Gayle. I mean, she was Maine, first of all, and she was politics, and she was an incredibly decent human being, as Mitchell was. And if he ever needed being pulled into line, she was the one who could say, “George.” She was one of his anchors in terms of keeping him grounded both in the reality of Maine and in terms of

someone he could trust.

When he became leader and Gayle was moved into the Senate Post Office, I remember feeling like there was a vacuum just in the day-to-day life of the office. Now, Mary McAleney stepped into that, Mary certainly had the fierceness and loyalty to him that Gayle did, but it was still a very different personality.

Gayle was one of the people who was pivotal. I remember – it's probably Mary McAleney who said to me at one point that, well there were two reasons he moved Gayle to be the Senate postmaster. Number one, I think financially it was a good benefit for her, it was a big up for her, and that, I think Mary told me that that was one thing that Mitchell felt that he could do for her, to help her out. Keeping in mind that Gayle had a special needs daughter, financial future was always a concern.

The other dimension to it is, there's a lot of money that passes through the Senate Post Office, and if you don't have the right person there or a person you can trust, it's certainly an opening for scandal. It was the House Bank that became such a scandal, over on the House side of the Hill, I think maybe in the year or two before that. And so I think, again, she was pivotal, and at the same time he was watching out for her.

I used her for advice. Frankly, it was oftentimes the advice that you needed about how far you should go to bat for someone in case work. Do we intervene, or is it too unseemly? For me, Gayle was my reality check, both from the point of view of an antenna if something might get the Senator in trouble, but then also what's the decent thing to do, the right thing to do, even if it violates some regulation someplace.

And as an example of it, there was a case that came up through the Bangor office that Clyde MacDonald was involved in, and it basically was a young man who had enlisted in the navy and something had happened to him where he ended up going AWOL, and he was in Louisiana in the brig, and was in a deep depression. And Clyde had looked into it and then came and said, "Look, everyone in the town says that this is a really good young man. It may have been the fact that he lost his support network, he's away from home, and he was overwhelmed, didn't know how to deal with it." And he said, "If only for his mental health, if we could get him moved to the brig in Newport, Rhode Island, where the family could be in a position to drive down to be with him occasionally."

Well we worked it through the Navy liaison office for the Senate, and the word back was, "There's absolutely no way, this kid's going to be court-martialed for desertion." I did Navy issues at that point, and so I remember that Gayle pulled me in to deliberate on it, and along with Clyde, they said, "This is someone we really need to go to bat for, the Navy's adhering to procedure but there's a human being involved here and he's never had any trouble, for all the reasons." And so we had Mitchell call the secretary of the navy, which the expression is "you use up a silver bullet," a silver bullet will kill whatever target you put on it, and you don't have many of them. It's a real case of asking someone for a favor and there's going to be a favor

owed in return.

We had Mitchell do it, and actually the Navy at that point decided, well all the witnesses were down in New Orleans and on a ship. If they were going to move him up to Newport, which they did, and because the cost would have been to try to fly their witnesses up to Newport, instead they discharged him. So he was able to put it behind him, and I don't even think it was a dishonorable discharge, it was just a discharge.

And that would not have happened without Gayle. I mean, it wouldn't have happened without Clyde, too, but Gayle was the filter who the field offices interacted with at that point in time, and she was the filter in terms of working with the legislative staff, who were often preoccupied, didn't want to get drawn into case work if they could avoid it. And that's where she played one pivotal role.

The other humorous story I have about Gayle is that when I got married I invited Mitchell with the hope but not too much expectation that he would be able to attend. And he wouldn't, because he was going to be up in Maine, and actually I think that may have even been that the state Democratic Convention was going on. So he couldn't make it.

Well, Gayle was the one assigned to go out and get me a wedding present from him, and so she was very practical in those terms. And for all I know, the Senator may have even said, "Get him this," but it was a blender, and I remember, it's sort of a joke in our family, "Well the Senator gave us a blender," it was sort of like this very practical, utilitarian, but not much sentiment behind it.

Gayle, on the other hand, gave me her own gift, and it was a box of Christmas ornaments, and some really thoughtful ones, like a lobster, a bear, a ranger, I mean there was sort of a Maine motif to it, but there were also some really other very thoughtful selections, and with a note saying – I got married in October – "This is for your first Christmas together." I mean it blew me away. Of all the presents that we got, that I remember the most. That's Gayle. She would be carrying out the utilitarian tasks for the Senator, and on the other hand also had a heart of gold.

BW: The other question I wanted to ask you, going back to the Hollings issue and fisheries and whatnot, and the Louisiana shipyards - As leader, was Mitchell able to overcome these harsh interactions and get Hollings back on the team, or were there wounds that lasted?

RC: Well first of all, I don't know that Hollings was ever on anyone's team, and that was partly the nature of the personality. I think they had a wary respect for each other. Once in the Senate Cloakroom, I guess it was in the evening, because in the cloakroom they would lay out like snacks, cheese, crackers and there's be like a whole spread there and the senators would be eating nervously or something – I think the Republicans had the same thing in their cloakroom – and the TV would be on and they'd be watching basketball or whatever was going on.

And it's always interesting to watch the interactions between the senators, body language and eye movements and so forth. And I don't know who Mitchell was talking with, in a more relaxed way. And Hollings came in, and they acknowledged each other, but it wasn't any word spoken. It was more of looking at each other, you know, eye contact, and Mitchell sort of lifting his chin up and acknowledging him, nodding, and Hollings, doing the same thing back. There was at least a wary respect for each other. I think Hollings, temper-wise, was someone who would cool down and go on to the next thing.

I do not think that Mitchell ever let his anger get away, sort of overwhelm his reason and calculation on things. Jeff Peterson may have talked about the Marine Research Bill that he and I worked on together, where we decided it would be really great to get a lot of money pumped into the marine research community in Maine, partly to support the fishing industries. I mean fisheries management has to depend on good science. So we're trying to figure out the right way to do it, and Jeff had the perspective, "Well, if we're going to do it, let's not do it crassly, let's do what's good for the country as well." So we had this Marine Research Bill that was going to create all these scientific committees in regions around the country and money would flow through them and so forth and so on.

Hollings hated the bill. Had nothing to do with Mitchell, he just didn't like the concept. It was a jurisdictional thing, because he had worked with the Sea Grant Program all these years and he saw it as a diversion of money, of limited money. Someone actually said, you know, "New pork beats old pork," so if you establish this then suddenly the other ones are going to fade a little bit. And I think that was true. In fact I think Martha Pope said that to me at one point, going, "Why are we taking this approach?"

Well the end result of that bill was that instead of getting this new program set up on a national basis, Hollings started giving I think it was like maybe a million or two million a year to Maine fisheries research. In other words, he was going to take care of Mitchell's interest, but he wasn't going to take care of other things. So I think they got along, they did what they needed to do to work together and with their interests. I don't think the Fish Inspection Bill had a lasting repercussion.

With Stevens, Stevens has always been so unpredictable, and always so nasty in many ways, I think Stevens even admitted that about himself, that you sort of just dealt with it, you didn't worry about it, that was just Stevens and to the degree that you could stay out of the way of him, yeah.

There was one issue, boy, it was a side of Mitchell I think I've only seen once, where it was political warning, "If this guy crosses me...." And it was on the lobster bill, which was an issue that actually played out over two years. It had to do with the minimum lobster size, in terms of being able to take lobsters. To simplify it, the New England minimum lobster size is larger than the Canadian one, so from the Maine industry's point of view, and the Massachusetts industry, they always viewed that as unfair because the Canadians were catching smaller lobsters and then putting them into the U.S. market, at a disadvantage for the U.S. industry.

There was another argument, which is that lobsters, to some degree, are a trans-boundary stock, so that, to the degree that smaller lobsters are being taken in Canada, they aren't reproducing, affecting how many lobsters there are on our side of the line. And because of that unfairness, there was always this pressure that the entire management system on the U.S. side was going to collapse, because the fishermen weren't going to stand for it. The only way you could do it is if you just sort of drew the line and said, "No small Canadian lobsters coming in." It's to some degree a symbolic issue.

Well we tried to get the provision into the, I think it was the implementing legislation for the U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement in 1988. In a conference committee, the U.S. trade representative was opposing it, and the House Ways and Means Trade Subcommittee chairman, Sam Gibbons of Florida, who was a real power in the House, opposed it on free trade principles, and carried the water for the Bush administration on it. And so they killed it in the Free Trade Agreement, and there's some good stories that come out of that phase of it, but I'll not go there. For now at least.

Well, the next year, after Mitchell became leader, we tried again. And we worked it so that we passed it as part of a NOAA reauthorization bill, and then it was being sent over to the House. And we were being told that Gibbons was going to kill it again, and in fact his chief of staff called me up to say that. And now procedurally I'm going to get really mixed up here, because it may have been that it went back and forth, it may have gone over to the House, the House may have passed it and it came back – something happened where it got blended in with the U.S.-Japan Fisheries Agreement, called the GIFA [Governing International Fisheries Agreement].

And so anyway, the word was coming down that Gibbons was going to block it, not realizing that if that happened, all of the fisheries trade with Japan was going to suddenly be in a deep freeze. That was one economic reason not to drop it. But someone, it may have been Congressman Studts' staff [Jeff Pike], who were close with and worked on this issue with us, may have said that, "Gibbons still says he's going to kill the bill, and he's also mad because he's also saying, 'Well Mitchell hasn't even talked to me about this in the last year.'" At which point a light went on in my head that, "Oh my God, he's right." And I had just read Tip O'Neill's memoir where there's this famous anecdote about his next door neighbor, who he had always been close to, he finds out, didn't vote for him. And he said, "Well why not?" And she said, "Because you never asked me." And that that was a lesson that he had, and it suddenly hit me, I said, "Oh, we've never asked him."

So I quickly drafted this letter, saying things like "I took to heart many of your concerns from the last time, we've revised the bill this way." It was a very deferential appeal. And I walked in and said, "Senator, you need to sign this right away and I'll take it over to his staff." And he looks at it, sees who it's addressed to, and he signs it and he looks at me, and he's about to go on the Senate floor for some other issue, but he looks at me, and says, "I want you to make sure that you tell me if he is any problem at all." And it was like, "Oh, okay." And I knew that there was a foreboding that, if this became a problem there was going to be some kind of retribution for it,

on some issue, because Mitchell, even as leader, was on the Finance Committee, and there would have been some kind of tit-for-tat involved in it. That's the only time I ever really felt that way, or at least saw it. But it was a very interesting, it was a very interesting moment.

There was one member of the administration that we had to meet with on occasion involving some of the Navy issues, and Mitchell sort of said to me, he goes, "Try to work this out at the staff level. I don't want to have to be in meetings with this guy if I can avoid it," he says, "I absolutely cannot stand him." And that's the only other time I've ever heard him really churn up, where it was either something personal or where he felt that someone was yanking him around unfairly.

BW: I'm going to pause for just a moment.

RC: Okay.

BW: Okay, we're going to stop here, Bob, for this session, and hopefully have a second one coming up. Thank you.

End of Interview