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George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Thomas A. “Tom” Daschle
(Interviewer: *Brien Williams*)

GMOH# 086
April 20, 2009

Brien Williams: This is an oral history interview with Senator Thomas A. “Tom” Daschle for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College. We are in the Washington law offices of Alston Bird, where Senator Daschle is a special public policy advisor [note 4/5/2010: he is no longer with Alston & Bird]. Today is Monday, April 20, 2009, and I’m Brien Williams.

I thought my first question would be, when you were a member of the House, were you aware of Senator Mitchell in the other chamber, or was he sort of off your radar when you were a House member?

Tom Daschle: Well, I was in the lower ranks of leadership in the House, and so it afforded me the opportunity to come over to the Senate on legislative business on some frequent basis, and so I think in part because of that, George I think was elected in ‘80, wasn’t he, yes, and -

BW: Well, he was appointed in ‘80.

TD: Appointed in ‘80, that’s right, that’s right. He came to the Senate in ‘80, and I had only been there two years prior to that, so I don’t think in the early years I probably did as much as I did in the, maybe in the mid-‘80s. But I got to know him extremely well from ‘84 on, because he was chairman of the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee, and I had made the decision to leave the House and to run for the Senate in ‘84, and my election was in ‘86 and he was immensely helpful to all of us that cycle. He was very willing to come out to the states, and came to South Dakota on a couple of occasions, did numerous fund raisers for me all over the country, and especially in Washington. But I think he became immensely popular with the freshman cla-, with the class of 1986, in part because of his accessibility and the amount of help he offered.

BW: Did he figure in your decision to run for the Senate at all?

TD: He did. I recall I was tugged to a certain extent. There were those who argued that if I stayed in the House I might be able to continue to ascend in leadership. I had, at least at that time, what appeared to be a safer seat, even though it started somewhat precariously, and that appealed to me. I loved the House, I had developed some wonderful friendships, but it also appealed to me to be in the Senate. And George, I think, was really as instrumental as anybody in persuading me, I mean anybody in the Congress, in persuading me to take a look at it.

BW: Go ahead.

TD: Oh I was just going to say, it required running against an incumbent, which was one of the more difficult decisions; a reasonably popular incumbent. But he was, as I said, very helpful.

BW: What about the class of '86? I guess there are some pretty stellar characters that came in at that time. I notice that both Senator McCain and Senator Reid came to the Senate with you. Anything else about that class that is memorable for you?

TD: Well, it was a class that I look back on with immense fondness. Barbara Mikulski, Wyche Fowler, Tim Wirth, just a number of people that I, Bob Graham, I think we had a big class, there was like seven or eight of us – Terry Sanford – but it was a terrific group. And we were particularly close, I think. We took back the Senate that year, it went from Republican to Democratic because of the size of our class, and it was an exciting time. I mean, any time you take back the majority there's a high expectation, there's just a lot of excitement, and it was one of the high points of my political career, obviously.

BW: What accounted for the Democratic swing that year?

TD: Well, I think any time you're in the final years of any administration, this was the off year election in the second term of the Reagan administration, there was a significant amount of fatigue about the Reagan administration, there was concern about the Iran-Contra scandal, and I think economic circumstances were difficult – not as difficult as they are today, but they were difficult. So it was a combination, I think, of just fatigue for the Republicans, they had governed for six years, for Reagan in particular – people forget that to a certain extent today. But I also think it was just the caliber of the candidates. We had some very good candidates around the country that - Ben Campbell I think was in that group – no, that couldn't have been it, because it was Tim Wirth, but in any case, it was a good class, under very conducive circumstances.

BW: Compare your early days in the Senate with the time you were in the House. I mean, you speak fondly of the House, which I don't hear all the time, it's a little more rough and tumble, some people say. But what was it like for you to move, make that transition?

TD: Well it was rough and tumble even then but it was, I think, less so. And Tip O'Neill was the speaker, who was just adored by everybody. He and I shared the same birthday, so he was kind enough to include me in his celebrations often. But it was just a time of transition, moving from the icons of the House to less well-known people, and not nearly as confrontational as it is today. So it was a different time.

But my time in the Senate was extraordinary right from the beginning. I was lucky enough to get onto the Senate Finance Committee, which is one of the more powerful committees in the Senate and, as a freshman, and we argued that because we were responsible for taking back the majority that we ought to have opportunities to serve in the best committees, and so Barbara and Harry

were able to get on Approps; I was able to get on Finance. And there was a leadership election in the first two years of course, Bennett Johnson and -

BW: Senator Inouye.

TD: Dan Inouye, and George, and we decided as a block, except for Harry, to all support George, and it was a conscious decision. Harry had developed a very close friendship with Bennett Johnson over the years, and so he supported Bennett. But all the rest of us supported George, and it made the difference, he won in a large measure because of it. So, and then shortly after that he was kind enough to ask me to become the chairman of the Senate Policy, Democratic Policy Committee, which I found immensely fulfilling and satisfying. So it was really a very fulfilling time for me politically and professionally.

BW: Talk a little bit about the, what I'm tempted to call the bond that developed between you and George Mitchell, and maybe that's not the word that you would use to describe it, but the fact that you got put on the Policy Committee so rapidly, so soon after arriving and whatnot gives me the opinion that he was recognizing something in you that he wanted to connect with.

TD: Well he, first of all, I think he was appreciative of the role the freshmen played in his election as leader. I played a role in trying to keep our little group organized and was sort of the, I guess the intermediary with the three candidates is one way to describe it, and orchestrated some meetings and then orchestrated sort of a collective decision, helped orchestrate, I don't want to take more credit than I deserve, but helped to orchestrate some of this, and it was through all of that. And then in the campaign, when I ran for election to the Senate, I think that's where it started. We just developed a friendship that was very comfortable, I think, for both of us, and so it progressed and became more substantial as a result of the professional relationships that we developed. And then I think it just sort of was maybe a natural evolution to the desire on his part to expand his leadership team and to make the offer to me to be included.

BW: And I notice that you stayed on the Policy Committee for ten years.

TD: I did. Well he, initially he asked me to be the co-chair, it was always the leader that was the chair of the Policy Committee because it is a fairly influential position, and that has always been the case. So I was the first co-chair, and so when I became leader I decided to maintain that practice of keeping a co-chair and I turned to one of my closest allies and friends, Harry Reid, and it sort of, in his case, became kind of the launching pad. Because you have so much day-to-day contact as Policy chair with the rest of the caucus, and then you have a prominent position when there are retreats, you organize the retreats. You organize what is called the 'Wednesday lunch' and, no, it's the 'Thursday lunch,' Wednesday lunch was ranking members, but Thursday lunch was Policy Committee, and so you'd bring in a guest every Thursday.

And so there's a lot of exposure to members, and if you do an okay job, I think they see you as a potential for higher positions within the caucus, and that happened to Harry, he went then on to become the whip, the second position, and then up to the top. And so when Harry became whip,

I asked another very close associate, Byron Dorgan, to be Policy chair. And he's broken all records now with regard to longevity on the Policy Committee. I think, if I had to guess, it was 1998 that he became Policy chair, and he's been chair ever since. But -

BW: You itemized some of the responsibilities of the Policy chair, it's something that, most people don't, aren't even aware of. Can you describe a little bit more some of the duties of that position?

TD: Well I think every leader has a certain amount of discretion on the degree to which the Policy chair plays a role. The two, it's evolved – these days the, when I took over it wasn't quite as active, we didn't do a Thursday lunch, and then George and I agreed that it was something we should try to do. We did only occasional retreats, and George and I both felt it was important to do them at least annually, and then we picked up, now we do them twice, they do them twice a year. One is just a short one right after the session begins; another one is a longer one about halfway through the year.

So I would say that there are three primary functions: one is, you're the research arm, you create the analysis for the caucus, and you have a fairly significant staff to provide the best information that one can about the issues of the day and kind of, the whole idea is to provide good information, but also of course to make your arguments for why a certain position makes the most sense. So that's number one. Number two is, as I say, sort of the convener of the caucus for the functions that are oftentimes held either in retreats or on these Thursday luncheons, and then sometimes also in organizing special events, a lot of special events happen.

And then the third thing is, you have special assignments. When we started, George asked if I could, actually it was a time consuming assignment but he suggested that we try to figure out, what was the consensus around what the agenda should be. So I was asked and went to every office and interviewed every member and asked them for their ideas on what the agenda should be, and took notes and then provided a report to the caucus and to the leader with regard to that agenda. And we did that for several years.

So those are the primary functions of the Policy Committee. Now they also have a great website and they spend a lot of time transmitting the information through their website, but it's also a part of what the caucus is doing.

BW: And this kind of high energy activity is something that I guess is attributable to you and Senator Mitchell, I understand.

TD: Well that's right, he really felt it was important to push the envelope and break the mold, and his demeanor allowed that to happen without generating too much anxiety on the part of some of the more senior members who oftentimes prefer the status quo. He had just a wonderful way about making sure that people always felt comfortable with the things we were doing, and so the comfort level during his tenure was very high, generally.

BW: Let's go back to, you were talking about the sort of bond that developed between you and Senator Mitchell during your campaign and subsequently. Do you identify certain personality qualities that maybe you two men share?

TD: Well, I think that we're both sort of sons of immigrants, he Lebanese, me German-Russian, both from states that aren't particularly large, somewhat rural. Both [of us] had sort of a staff background before we came – his was a little more circuitous than mine but he, staff and then judgeship and then appointment, and me it was staff and then a very, very narrow election to the House – but nonetheless, sort of a staff past that I think is a real asset, all things considered, about legislative process, about knowledge, respect for the institutions. He, as you probably know, or you may not know, he has a great sense of humor, and so we would share humorous stories when we acquired them. And so we, there's quite a bit in common. We both had, unfortunately, had failed marriages early in our life and then came back to build new families, and I think that might have, I mean I don't know that we've ever even talked about it, but I think that was another similarity in our past.

BW: What about temperament?

TD: Temperament too, now that I, that's a good point. I think we're both, the Maine temperament is not the same as a Midwestern temperament, but there are some similarities.

BW: Did, let me just follow up on that, did you have many opportunities to have what I would call 'down time' with Senator Mitchell, sort of buddy periods?

TD: Not a particular lot. A lot of times we would do these events, fund-raising events that seemed incessant – it's gotten even worse – but it required travel, and required going to nice places and required time together. And he and I seemed to travel, find ourselves in those situations with some frequency. I would drop by his office, again, with some frequency, just to chat about things, but didn't really have much of a chance. It seemed like our lives were so busy, and getting back to Maine and South Dakota, and so our time together was largely in the Senate and then on these trips that we took around the country for, primarily for political purposes.

BW: Did you share baseball interests or stories?

TD: Well, nobody is in his league, oh, there's only one other senator in his league on baseball, and that's Kent Conrad. You should talk to Kent about that, because Kent is, Kent's wife Lucy works for the National Baseball Association, so, but they go to a lot of spring games, but George is profoundly, you know - So I, the answer is no, I wasn't in his league at all.

BW: Did your relationship with George Mitchell prompt some jealousy among your colleagues?

TD: Hmm, I guess you'd have to ask others. Not that I'm aware of, but it's possible.

BW: I guess that might lead to, and I'm jumping around just a little bit here. My tendency is go chronologically, but I'm breaking that rule just today. When you ran for leader, Jim Sasser was meant to be your opponent, I'd say, as you put it in your own book.

TD: That's correct.

BW: And then he lost in Tennessee, and Dodd came in his place. Why did Dodd step forward, and what did that mean in terms of your popularity in the caucus?

TD: Well, there was concern, understandable concern, among the more senior members, Senator Byrd in particular, about the degree of experience that I had to run for leader. I was elected in '86; the election was in '94, so that was not a long period of time by Senate standards and, well they actually, the election, I mean the campaign for leader started in '93. And so there was primarily, I never took it personally, because I understood their concern. I wasn't one of the more senior members, Jim Sasser had a lot more experience, chairman of the Budget Committee, and so when he lost, totally unexpectedly, to Bill Frist, Chris stepped in and picked up all of his votes. And Chris was a very appropriate opponent. I mean he represented that seniority as well, he had immensely good connections, and his network within the caucus was good, he was highly respected, and he was a very good opponent. It was a hard fought race, I only won by one vote, and, but I think it was, if you could put it in one word, it's seniority.

BW: How did you defuse that argument against your candidacy?

TD: Well, I, ironically a little bit like Barack Obama did: that it's not experience, it's judgment, and that it's the work ethic, and that I think I can make up for my lack of appropriate experience with my work ethic and my approach to leadership. And Joe Biden, I remember the day I got elected, asked if he could come and see me and I said, "Absolutely." And he came in and he said, "Obviously none of us voted for you." He said, "I would really encourage you to reach out, do as much as possible to recognize the role that the legislative leaders have in the Congress." And he made an appropriate point, that there is a difference between elected leaders and legislative leaders, that the elected leadership represents the whole caucus, but the legislative leadership, through their seniority and through the tradition of the Senate, acquire their seniority by their longevity on a particular committee.

And so he wanted me to recognize that distinction, and I instituted something that still goes on today, the first meeting was in January of 2005, a Wednesday lunch with just the chairs. And we've been doing it ever since, and I think it's such an important part. We go around the table, every legislative chair would offer their report, make their recommendations for things we needed to do. And two years, every, you stand election every two years, and two years later Robert Byrd nominated me, and it really meant a lot to me that he did, and I was selected unanimously. But I think in part it was just this confidence level that people had that we were moving in the right direction.

BW: When you were saying that you visited all members of the caucus, as co-chair of the

Policy Committee, I was thinking that that was probably a good way to develop relationships with all of these people.

TD: It was, I, there wasn't a person in the caucus with whom I had a relationship problem, I felt very comfortable, and appreciative of the relationships I had. They're really, we didn't have any, at that point there really wasn't much personality friction, I think everybody seemed to get along, and I give George a lot of credit for that. But yeah, no, it was a good. I mean that's why being [on the] Policy Committee or being whip affords you the opportunity to consider leadership at a higher level.

BW: Neither you nor George passed through whiphood, neither of you were whips before.

TD: Right, no, we, in his case it was the DSCC I think, for the most part. In my case it was the Policy Committee. He offered me the DSCC, and I thought about it but I thought it would be harder for me to play that role. I didn't have a big base – nor did he – and I was more interested in sort of the legislative side of things than the political side of things, even though I was reasonably comfortable with both.

BW: What was George Mitchell's role in your decision to stand for leader?

TD: Well, I didn't expect him, nor did I receive an endorsement, because it was a decision that I just knew was going to be one that: first, wouldn't involve him, he wouldn't be voting; and two, it just wouldn't be his place to weigh in on an election generally. And I knew that he and Jim Sasser were very close friends, they were allies, they came in about the same time, and so they had a very good friendship, and it was probably not any better than the one that he and I had but it certainly, potentially as good. And so I didn't expect him necessarily to weigh in. And he didn't, and he kept a respectable distance. I didn't want to put him in an uncomfortable place so I didn't come to him frequently with, he would reference it from time to time in our conversations but there was no ongoing effort to try to direct or in some way guide this little caucus campaign.

BW: And he at no point sort of pushed you, encouraged you to take that step, is that right?

TD: That's true. It's also true that he didn't *discourage* it at all, he was judiciously neutral, and that included, for me, it was pretty much expected that that would be the role he would play.

BW: Were there others that were pushing you to stand?

TD: Oh, I was very grateful for the early encouragement I got from a lot of people. My two North Dakota allies, Jeff Bingaman and Barbara Mikulski, Jay Rockefeller, more the early class, people that I had worked with in various capacities on the committees and then in the caucus. But yeah, there was a good deal of support, and that's really what encouraged me to – Carl Levin was also extremely helpful to me.

BW: And what does campaigning for leadership consist of?

TD: Well basically, it's simply going to one's office, going to one of the senators' offices and making your case. It has to be in person, you'd never do something like that on the telephone. It didn't involve any paraphernalia obviously, it was just a quiet -

BW: No lawn signs.

TD: No lawn signs, no bumper stickers. So it was really just that, and then making very careful record of the conversation. I would say that I probably started out with maybe ten votes that people committed to right out of the box, but I knew I had to get something close to twenty-five and, depending on how the election turned out, so it was a meticulous effort to try to get people to commit and then make record of it. And then it wasn't enough to get them to commit, it was also maintaining that commitment, because people sometimes can change their mind. And so the concern was never to change their mind, and that was especially the case of course when Jim Sasser lost and I needed to come back.

And a good example of that was John Kerry. John committed to me early. He and I served on the POW Committee together and went to Vietnam, and traveled, and just developed a really good friendship, and he was a very good, committed supporter. But then when Sasser lost, Chris Dodd was now the opponent and John was under extraordinary pressure to change, because he was from the Northeast, as was John, and because he was a long time friend of Ted Kennedy's, and Ted was very hopeful that he could deliver John Kerry and put pressure on him. He got a lot of pressure at home. But he kept his commitment, and it really meant a lot to me that he did.

So it was, that's the essence of a campaign. I remember the Election Day there were some people whose commitments we were still wary about having locked in, and so we had lieutenants sitting next to them and making sure that they encouraged them up to the very last moment.

BW: What's the protocol there? The only members in the caucus that vote are the ones who are going to be in the next session.

TD: That's correct.

BW: But not including the newly elected. Is that, would that be correct?

TD: No, the newly elected are, they vote too, right, they're qualified, they become a member of the caucus as soon as the election is certified. So you meet in the Old Senate Chamber, and nominating speeches are given, and then slips of paper are handed out and you personally take these slips of paper down and put them in a wooden box on the table, and then two electors are chosen and the box is opened and the names are called, out loud, and you keep a tally as the names are called.

In my case, a couple of days before the election I went around just to be sure everybody was

going to be there, and I ran into Ben Campbell who said that he had forgotten that the election was scheduled and he had to be in Chicago. And I should have known this, but I wasn't even sure you could vote proxy if you're not going to be there, and we knew we were, this was really going to be close. So we quickly clarified what happens in a case of an absent senator, and found out that it could be voted proxy. And so I got his proxy and made sure that it was delivered to the sergeant-at-arms, who is responsible for the mechanics of the election.

So the names are called – “Daschle, Dodd, Daschle, Dodd” – and it ended up a tie vote. We had lost the majority at that point; we had forty-eight senators, so you had to have at least twenty-four. And after the tie was called, there was one envelope left in the box and it was Ben Campbell's, and they opened it up and he had voted for me and I was declared the winner by one vote. And then about two weeks after that he switched parties and so Chris jokingly said he was going to ask for a recount. But, so that's how it happens. Then I went down to the front and acknowledged the election and thanked those who voted for me, and expressed the hope that those who didn't could have their confidence restored, and people came down to wish me well and walked out and went up to a news conference and announced the election.

BW: Now, was there still, was the Senate still meeting after that election, in the old, what would that have been, the hundred and – I'm not good on this.

TD: That's right.

BW: So what I'm saying is, for a while, George Mitchell was still leader, or not?

TD: [] No, he was leader until the election was held, and then you take over the leadership from that day forward. So he was, I remember it was kind of an awkward moment, because I had asked my leadership team to meet before we had a press conference to talk about what we were going to say and how we were going to say it, and I chose the leader's conference room to do that, in the leader's suite. And I wasn't aware that George was, he would have not necessarily been expected to be there, but it turns out he *was* there and I hadn't asked ahead of time whether we could use his little conference room.

And there he was, but he greeted me and congratulated me, and I'll never forget, I asked him, “So now what advice do you have for your prede-, you successor?” And he said, “Learn how to grovel.” And he was of course joking, but only somewhat so. I think you do have to learn to be a good persuader, and Dean Rusk once said, “The best way to persuade is with your ears.” And I think George Mitchell shares that point of view; that you got to be a good listener. And he was a good listener, and sometimes it may appear you're groveling, but you're listening and persuading and using whatever means you have to bring people to your way of thinking. And so that's how it all started.

BW: Other than telling you you're going to have to grovel, he must have given you some other advice, or during that transition did you rely on him for anything?

TD: I did. He was extremely helpful to me in making this transition, turning over records and office space and staff assistance. His primary, he had two people in particular that I'm sure you've already talked to, or intend to, Pat Sarcone and John Hilley, and it's probably no coincidence that both of them at one point worked with me as well afterwards. But they were very helpful, and George was too, and gave me great advice and the tension, to the extent there was *any* tension leading up to it, he was judiciously neutral, but then afterwards of course there was no need for any concerns in that regard any longer, and so he was very supportive.

BW: Did you catch his mood in that period? Reluctance to be leaving, or exuberance about the windshield rather than the rear-view mirror, or how would you describe his frame of mind?

TD: I think it was a very, I'll never forget, I remember exactly where I was, I was actually coming home and I was gett-, I got a call that George Mitchell had just announced that he wasn't running again. This was in February of 2003 -

BW: No, not 2003.

TD: I mean of 1993. And it just shocked me, because I was sure he was going to run, it was just assumed that he was going to run, and he was a relatively young man at the time. But that sort of evolution, as a departing leader, was evident. I mean, I think he felt somewhat relieved to turn over all of this to somebody else, so there was that, but I think there's always a little bit of reluctance, a little bit of sense of disappointment that you're leaving as well. It's a magnificent opportunity professionally, I mean it's really an extraordinary experience, and in some ways it's one of the toughest political jobs in Washington. You don't have nearly the support that a president does, but you have many of the same roles as a president, and so you're challenged. And I think it's always with mixed feelings, you leave.

My situation was vastly different in 2004, but nonetheless, I think every leader has the same experience of sort of bittersweet feelings. In some ways, relieved not to have to put up with the pressure and the extraordinary intensity but reluctant, in some ways, to give it up because it's a very fulfilling experience, largely.

BW: Did you ever have, did you ever go to him after announced and say, "Now what have you done that for?" Or, you know, "What was your thinking on this?" Or challenge him, or just be curious?

TD: Oh, I think we had some, oh yeah we did, we had some conversations. I don't remember the details of the conversations any longer, but I was very surprised. And of course right away it led me to think, "Well, if I'm ever going to run for higher office in the Senate, this is probably the time I'm going to have to do it." I remember having dinner with my wife within a few days after that, and concluding that this was kind of a pivotal moment for me. But then, of course, I started to get encouragement from colleagues and that was all I needed to make my launch. But yeah, we had some conversations about it, and he was just looking for, I think he would have been baseball commissioner had the chance arisen, but I think he also was looking forward to

other roles, and he had them.

BW: Do you think he sensed the dark cloud that lay ahead, with the '94 elections?

TD: I don't know. That's a good question. He might have. I don't know to what extent. That'd be a great question to pose to him.

BW: How about you?

TD: I didn't, no, I didn't see it coming. I knew we were in trouble. There were two things really; it was President Clinton's rough beginning and all the talk of Whitewater and the scandals, but then there was also a thing that so few people remember, but there was a check scandal that mostly involved the House. They had a House bank, and it's so funny because when we came to the Senate we were thinking of different things that we wanted, and a couple of the freshmen, who really found it so convenient to have a House bank, suggested we have a Senate bank too, replicating what the House did.

But there was a practice that you really never knew what your balance was, it was pretty loose bookkeeping, and you just, you didn't have to know, you just deposited the checks and they covered whatever your checks were and then you were supposed to always keep it somewhat in balance. But it was just a very loosely structured accounting system, even though they kept the big numbers. I mean before you left, you had to settle up with the bank, but you didn't have to settle up every month, or you didn't have to settle up, so a lot of people were overdrawn, but not necessarily even knowing that they were overdrawn because it really wasn't, you never got a monthly statement, you could ask for it but you didn't get it regularly.

So it was just an old throwback and, but because somehow it was all discovered that a lot of members of Congress were way overdrawn, it became a huge scandal. And fortunately I was in the Senate at the time, but I got through that in reasonably good shape, but a lot of members didn't. And it was mostly Democrats, and so it was viewed as a Democratic scandal and that also was catalytic, I think, in bringing about this change in mood.

BW: Let's go back to the other end of George Mitchell's tenure. Was it a surprise that Robert Byrd decided not to run again as leader and chose instead to go to Appropriations?

TD: I think it was a little surprise, I think to a certain extent Senator Byrd recognized that the politics of the Senate were changing, and that you needed to be as much of a political leader as well as a legislative leader, and he was more comfortable as a legislative leader. He was never really comfortable with all the modern ways of politics, and felt especially in that '86 period that it was time to move gradually to becoming more legislative and less political.

(Pause in taping.)

BW: I guess, in view of the shortness of time, my sort of closing question is how you think

George Mitchell ought to be remembered as time goes on.

TD: I think George Mitchell should be remembered as a very thoughtful leader who brought real dignity to the job, who understood the importance of reaching across the aisle, who had an immense amount of integrity and good judgment, and was extremely popular with his colleagues on both sides of the aisle. He's viewed in some circles on the Republican side as a partisan leader, but so was I, and I think the times sort of required a certain degree of partisanship. But I don't think anyone would ever question his intent or his integrity, or the degree to which he attempted to reduce the level of partisanship in the Senate.

BW: Since he left the Senate, have you had a lot of contact with him, or not?

TD: Well we created, three years ago I think it was, the Bipartisan Policy Center, George and I, Bob Dole and Howard Baker, and it was in that context in particular that we have worked together. We were working on a health project right now, until he took his leave of absence. But on occasion we had other reasons to talk and to get together, occasionally we'd get together for dinner, or breakfast, somewhat infrequently, but nonetheless occasionally, and we've stayed in touch that way as well.

BW: You wrote about toying with the idea of a presidential run for yourself. Have you ever speculated on whether George Mitchell might have made a good president, or what kind of a president he might have been, or has that just never crossed your mind?

TD: No, it has crossed my mind. There was some talk about George as a candidate on a couple of occasions, and I think there is a great deal of goodwill towards George in that context, and I think people would have liked to have seen him run for president. I think he was largely viewed as a clear success as leader, respected, a good spokesperson, very articulate, came off well on television, and I think he had all the qualities to be a good candidate.

BW: Do you have any personal memory of some interaction that was really memorable or telling about you and him, just some, quote/unquote, 'precious moment' that you two guys shared?

TD: Oh, let's see. He used to, we used to share jokes and stories, and I'm trying to think if there are any that come immediately to mind. But he was, he loved a good story, and usually when we would learn or hear one we'd share it with each other, and so that would always be a lot of fun. We – I'm trying to think. He, the two stories that he loved telling the most were the one about just being elected and experiencing his first filibuster. I don't know if, is that a story you're familiar with? Yeah.

BW: The cot story? And Elizabeth Taylor.

TD: The cot story, right. And the other one was his brother, the sports, in sports, recognized on the front page. And he was listed on the front page of one of the Maine newspapers as

George Mitchell, “the brother of” his brother, is it John? I can’t think of his last name, his first name. But George had a very amusing way of telling that story as well. But he and I both have a tendency to repeat stories we like, and frequently people would joke about the fact that we tell them so often. And he was the, he, like I, have been the brunt of a few jokes I think, for the fact that we tell the same stories more often than we probably should. But we’ve laughed about that, too.

BW: Was Ronald Reagan ever a source for some of your stories?

TD: Oh yeah, oh, absolutely. You know, in a lighthearted way, we’d joke about colleagues and presidents, but never in a mean-spirited way, but there was always just sort of a sense of humor about it all.

BW: I was thinking of Reagan’s fondness of telling jokes; I mean he would have been a good source probably for some good old Irish tales.

TD: He was, oh absolutely.

BW: Great, well I’m sorry we don’t have more time, but thank you very much -

TD: Well I am too.

BW: This had been very informative and I appreciate your time.

TD: Well, thank you for doing it and good luck with the project.

End of Interview