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Interview with George Mitchell (3) by Andrea L'Hommedieu

George J. Mitchell

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George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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George J. Mitchell (3)
(Interviewer: Andrea L'Hommedieu)

GMOH #223
December 20, 2010

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College. The date is December 20, 2010, this is Andrea L'Hommedieu, and I am interviewing George J. Mitchell, Jr. Could you start, Senator, just by talking a little bit about your time on the DSCC, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, and what your role was in terms of what sort of support were you able to give other senators in the races around the country?

George Mitchell: Each of the two major political parties has several fund-raising and campaign support organizations, and one of them includes, in each house of Congress, an entity for that purpose. So there is a Democratic Senate Campaign Committee, a Republican Senate Campaign Committee, and then two counterparts in the House, Democratic and Republican.

In 1984, I was asked by the then-Senate majority [*sic*: minority] leader, Robert Byrd of West Virginia, if I would serve in the next election cycle, which is a two-year period, through the 1986 election, and I agreed to do so. I can't recall the exact date that I assumed the office, but it would have been toward the end of 1984 or the beginning of 1985. And I then served until two years later—late 1986, early 1987.

It was, to start at the end, a very successful election for the Democrats in the Senate. We had been in the minority at the time I assumed my position, but in the election of 1986 eleven new Democratic senators were elected, and Democrats regained the majority, and Senator Byrd became majority leader again. He had been minority leader in the previous four years, and I may have misspoken and called him the majority leader. At the time he appointed me he was the minority leader—we were in the minority.

It's a large undertaking. It involves several major categories of activity. The first, and of course critically important, is raising money to be distributed among the Democratic candidates. The second, which begins earlier actually than raising the money, or at least in parallel, is recruiting candidates—going around the country and trying to identify and persuade strong candidates to run as Democrats for the Senate. And the third is to support them in their campaigns, and critically, to establish priorities in campaign funding. When the money and the candidates come together, at least in those days, there was never enough money. The amount we raised was far less than the Republicans.

(telephone interruption)

There were at the time very difficult choices to be made about which candidate gets what money, because the money was inadequate to meet all of the demands that existed, although by current standards—twenty-five years later—the amount of money that we were involved with was minuscule. The costs of campaigns have risen so dramatically in the past quarter century. It is my recollection, and I'm not certain about this, that we raised over that two-year period about twelve million dollars, and the Republicans raised I think about ninety million dollars. There was a tremendous disproportion in the amount that was raised by the campaign committees that tended to be offset by other entities that were raising money, although I think it's fair to say that throughout that period we were very much at a financial disadvantage, and the Republicans were able to raise, over all, a lot more money.

Of course that was in part a reflection of the fact that the president at the time was a Republican, and the party that has the presidency has a unique fund-raising vehicle. There may be a House and Senate committee of each party, but there's only one president, and whoever he is has been able to raise substantial sums of money on behalf of his party. So we were at quite a disadvantage, and the latter task—decisions as to allocation—were very difficult, and painful sometimes, because everyone wanted money and some didn't get it, or didn't get it in amounts that they felt were sufficient.

That was a tough part of the job, but it worked out well. In terms of the recruiting of candidates, of course, many times you don't have to worry about recruiting candidates to run for office—there are a lot of them on their own initiative. One of the tasks is try to get the strongest candidates to run, or the best candidates to run.

AL: And how did you go about that process? It must have been difficult.

GM: It's a mixture of things. In some states, where there maybe was a strong and entrenched Republican or the state itself had a history of voting Republican, we often didn't have many candidates and it was an aggressive search effort. In other states, where Democrats had a good chance, there were many, many candidates, and it was trying to figure out who might be the strongest and how could we appropriately help them. And then a third category in between are places where good candidates may be thinking about running but aren't certain about how much help they'll get or what kind of help is available, and spending time with them, describing what we could or would try to do, encouraging them and reassuring them that there would be help in a variety of ways, not just financial support, was important.

And so as it turned out, we fielded a very strong slate of candidates, and the victory was enormous and unexpected—because President Reagan had been reelected in 1984 in an overwhelming victory. As you recall, he defeated former Vice President Mondale, and I think Reagan won almost all of the states except for a couple. The Iran-Contra affair had broken just after the election, so I think the president's popularity took a little bit of a dip, although ultimately he came back toward the end. Maybe more than a little bit of a dip, maybe a substantial dip.

But in any event, it was a huge victory, winning eleven new seats, and I think it was in large part due to the high quality of the candidates that ran that year. Just offhand, recalling a few: Bob Graham, who had been the governor of Florida, popular governor, able public official and candidate ran for the Senate and won; Tom Daschle, who had been in the House of Representatives for South Dakota, and in South Dakota there's only one House member so the House member's as well-known statewide as are the senators, very able and popular. He won, and I brought Tom into the Senate leadership after he was elected, and he ultimately of course succeeded me as Senate majority leader.

AL: And was that because you saw something in him?

GM: Yes, I thought very highly of him. I had known him previously, because Tom was a Vietnam veteran and on the House of Representatives Veterans' Affairs Committee, and I had served on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee since entering the Senate, and we'd worked together on some major legislation, particularly improving veterans' health care. And so I'd known Tom for some time and had a high regard for him. So he was not a new person to me when I took the Campaign Committee job.

Kent Conrad, who still is the senator from North Dakota, who had been, I believe they call him commissioner of finance, or commissioner of taxation in North Dakota, an important statewide position. He was a candidate. Barbara Mikulski from Maryland, she had been in the House of Representatives, she started in her hometown of Baltimore—a very able and very feisty and attractive candidate. And Bob Kerrey, who had been the governor of Nebraska, who was also a very attractive and able candidate—a Vietnam War veteran who had lost a leg in that conflict—was one, also. There were many, many others, good candidates who ran strong campaigns.

AL: Harris Wofford, was he one during that election cycle?

GM: No, I think Harris ran later. I'm not positive of that, but I can't recall exactly what year Harris was elected, but I don't think he was first elected in 1986. He may have been elected at a later time.

The way campaigns end up is often quite unpredictable. You think that under the so-called law of averages, if you had a lot of close races they might split between the two, but often a whole bunch of close races go one way or the other. In 1980, a big Republican year in which Reagan was elected and Republicans won I think eleven or twelve seats in the Senate and gained control of the Senate, a lot of close races fell to the Republicans. In '82, when I ran and was elected to a full term in my own right, the economy was down and there were a lot of close races that came back to the Democratic side. And then in '84 the Republicans did well, and then '86 we did well. So there was kind of a back-and-forth during that period. I got to know all of the senators who were elected in '86, worked closely with them, and that served me well when I ran for Senate majority leader two years later, which we can get into at a later time. But there were eleven of them, and I think when I ran for majority leader we had fifty-five Democratic senators, so they would have been about a fifth of the electorate in the majority leader's race.

But over all, it was a well organized, well run campaign. As I said, probably the most personally painful part was making allocations. Some Democrats who ran for the Senate, who didn't win, were upset that we didn't give them more money. It's an ongoing sort of a triage system where, as the campaign progresses, as you have to make judgments on who realistically has a chance and who doesn't, based on constant polling and talking to people from that state, the candidate himself or herself. And of course no candidate will agree that he or she is going to lose, they all think that they're going to win.

I'd had some experience of that myself when I first ran. As you recall, I was thirty-six percentage points behind, and so I had to try to make the case that I could win, and I was lucky enough to come back and win. So I was quite sympathetic as campaign chairman to candidates who were way behind and claimed they could win. Nonetheless, the amount of money was limited so we had some very difficult choices. But in any event, it turned out well.

AL: During that time as chair of the DSCC, did you have an opportunity to work on the structure of how things were funded, in terms of how you received funds?

GM: Campaign funds?

AL: Yes.

GM: Oh yes, I was very much engaged in fund-raising. I traveled all over the country to help candidates. I went and appeared with these candidates during the campaign, and almost always, if I went to a state where a candidate was running, that would include a series of events, usually a day in a state. There would be public events, press conferences, and always at least one fund raiser—sometimes more than one—to help them raise money for their campaigns.

AL: You mentioned Iran-Contra, and I know you wrote a book about the experience. So I don't want to duplicate the things that you talked about in the book. But sitting here so many years later and thinking about those hearings, what sticks out in your memory in terms of what happened and your role, and how it turned out? Has that changed at all over time, your perspective?

GM: The Iran-Contra affair first became public (I guess you'd call it), broke publicly, shortly after the election of 1986, so it wasn't a factor at all in the election. But it of course attracted a lot of publicity and led to an effort to have a congressional investigation to try to determine what if any laws were broken and what happened.

The hearings, which were very widely viewed, were held in the summer of 1987. So in the interim, between the breaking of the events in November of '86 and the summer of '87, there was a period of first dispute and disagreement between the parties on exactly how this inquiry should occur. There were first some Republicans who thought there should be no inquiry. They were of course wanting to defend the Reagan administration, but I think they realized very quickly that was impossible. The next effort was to limit the investigation. In fact, I remember pretty clearly that the first Republican proposal was that the investigation be limited to two

weeks. Well of course, in two weeks you couldn't even hire staff and get clearances for them to view and study classified material, so that meant no investigation at all.

I can't remember the date on which it occurred, but at some point following this breaking, the then-Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd, who had resumed that position after the '86 election when Democrats regained control of the Senate, called me and asked me if I would be willing to serve as a member of the congressional committee investigating Iran-Contra. It was unusual in that it was a joint House-Senate committee, it's what they call a select committee, which are not common, and reflected the seriousness or gravity of the allegations. There was one other unusual aspect of it in that Senator Bill Cohen, who was then the Republican senator from Maine and my colleague, was appointed by the Republican leader to the committee. So Maine was the only state that had two senators on the committee of investigation.

The first thing that I was asked to do by Senator Byrd was to conduct a search for a good team of lawyers—private lawyers—to represent the committee in the investigation. And I did that—I conducted many interviews, was assisted and accompanied in that by Senator Howell Heflin of Alabama, who previously had been a member of the Alabama Supreme Court, also a lawyer and very experienced. I had previously been a federal judge and the U.S. attorney for Maine before I entered the Senate. So Howell Heflin and I - And we consulted with others also, we consulted with some of our Republican colleagues, including Warren Rudman who was then the senator from New Hampshire, who had been the attorney general of New Hampshire before he entered the Senate and who was and is a close friend of mine. He was the top Republican on the committee, was sort of what we call the vice-chairman. Senator Dan Inouye, Democrat of Hawaii, was the chairman.

So we all consulted and spent several weeks interviewing and trying to find lawyers who would represent a good team, and we did so. We also organized our own teams. Every Senate member of the committee was able to hire one lawyer of his own choosing to be a staff person on the committee, and I selected Jamie Kaplan, who I had met when I was U.S. attorney because he had been a clerk for then Federal Judge Edward Gignoux in Portland. And so Jamie worked on my behalf, along with other members of my staff.

It was a very difficult, extremely controversial undertaking. Looking back on it, it's kind of humorous in some respects. I did tell the story in great detail in the book that I co-authored with Senator Cohen. In fact, it was the first book I've written, but not the first for Senator Cohen. And he spoke to me about it. He had written some books previously and he had a literary agent. I'd never written a book, I had no idea how the business end of it worked. So when Bill talked to me, that it was unusual that Maine had two senators on the committee and it might make a good book, I agreed to do so. And we divided up the sections and he wrote about half, I wrote about half, and then we combined it into one. So it actually served me well, because I then went on to write three other books on my own. So I owe Bill a debt of gratitude for getting me involved in that project and for showing me basically how you go about at least the business end of writing a book.

Not wanting to duplicate the book, as you suggested, some of the things that stand out: the overwhelming amount of public attention that it attracted. I will have to repeat partially what's in the book, but of course the climactic moment was the testimony of then-Marine Colonel Oliver North. He was seen as a hero by many Americans, and he received a lot of popular acclaim. And there was a feeling that the hearings weren't going too well.

The way the committee had set up was that there were I think twenty-six members, and it was not feasible to have each of the twenty-six question every witness for five minutes each. That's the standard congressional practice, when a congressional committee holds a hearing, whatever number of members show up, you get five minutes to ask a question. Well of course you couldn't sustain a line of inquiry that way, and a skillful witness could deflect any serious questioning by kind of just talking for five minutes and then get on to the next person. So the committee decided to designate one member from each side, Democrat and Republican, to question the witness for an hour, and I was chosen to question Colonel North.

It was a daunting task, because he'd gotten a lot of publicity and he had a skillful and aggressive lawyer representing him. And I describe in the book the circumstances under which I struggled with how to focus my line of questioning. And I talked on the phone the weekend before the questioning with Harold Pachios, a very close friend, a lawyer in Portland, who I thought made some very common-sense and helpful suggestions, guiding me in the direction of what I should take in my questioning. And I saw firsthand that Colonel North himself and other witnesses were able to avoid meaningful responses. In fact, many of them made false responses, and I'll get to that point in a moment. And so I thought the important thing was to get across a counter point of view, which I did at the conclusion of my questioning. As I described in my book, within seconds, literally within seconds, while I was still sitting there, tens of thousands of telephone calls and telegrams, messages, followed by a tidal wave of letters came into my office. Fortunately for me, mostly favorable, although some very strongly unfavorable as well from people who supported Colonel North.

The other lasting impression I have is how much false testimony was provided. There really were a lot of false statements made before the committee by a lot of witnesses. Some were prosecuted, some were convicted of perjury and other crimes. But many were not. It was just obvious, sitting up there, that a very large number of persons were simply not telling the truth. It was a little bit of a shock to me, because I had served as a United States attorney, as a federal judge, and while obviously in real life there is some false testimony given in court cases, I think it's much less—perhaps it's the setting, perhaps it's the fear of being caught that was greater than a congressional hearing, which is temporary. But it was distressing to sit there and listen to so many people saying things that I and many others on the committee felt were just obviously and simply untrue, without any regard that the oath, that they swore to tell the truth, meant to them.

AL: And it was all public, so everybody was seeing this and some of them believing it.

GM: It was all public, oh yes, everybody was seeing it. But a lot of people were convinced by the false testimony. The other thing that I remember was, I was chosen to deliver the response to President Reagan's nationally televised address on this subject. As Senate majority leader, later,

I gave several responses to the presidents' State of the Union Address, but this was before I was majority leader, this was in 1987, so it was the first time I addressed a national audience. And there were some humorous aspects to it.

AL: What were those?

GM: Well first off, I don't think I did a particularly good job, because a dispute broke out among some of the technical staff people about whether I should rely exclusively on the teleprompter or whether I should have a written text in front of me. And apparently the teleprompter had malfunctioned at some point, and so out of an excess of caution I was strongly urged, "You'd better have the papers in front of you and do it from the papers." And I was later told by people that they could hear the papers shuffling. It wasn't too effective.

The other problem is, of course—in all of these responses—is that you don't know what the president's going to say until you hear it. So you have to prepare what you're going to say guessing what the president may or may not say. And since you go on immediately, you don't really have a choice to fundamentally change what you're going to say. You can ad lib a few comments based on what the president says. So it's often like a response that doesn't really respond to the statement because you don't know what it is. In an ordinary circumstance, you might get some prior notice of the president's statement, but we didn't on that evening. But for me it was quite an experience because I hadn't done it before, to address a nationwide audience in response to the president's comments.

And so those were among the thoughts that I have about the Iran-Contra hearing, in addition to what is written in my book. You asked that I don't duplicate it. I had to duplicate some, but I didn't want to duplicate it all.

AL: Senator Robert C. Byrd chose you to chair the DSCC, and later you succeeded him as majority leader, and so you knew him for several years at that point. Can you talk about how early you knew him, in terms of did it go all the way back to being on Senator Muskie's staff? How early was it, and how did the relationship develop over time?

GM: I did not ever meet Senator Byrd personally until I became a senator. And really, for the first two years of my term in the Senate I was an appointed senator. The vast majority of appointed senators don't get reelected. Don't get elected in the first place to a full term, or reelected later. Most of them don't run—they serve on an interim basis and then don't seek the office themselves. Most of those who do seek the office don't get elected. So it was pretty widely assumed that I was only going to be there for a couple of years.

And then as the polling began that showed, in my case at least, as of May of 1981, about a year after I entered the Senate and about sixteen months before the election when I'd have to run, I was thirty-six percentage points behind. And of course senators, through the campaign committee, kept tabs on what I was doing, so I think everyone pretty much thought that I was going to be there for a short time. It's like you kind of get an asterisk over your head as you walk around.

I recall in fact one humorous incident in 1982. Senator Moynihan, Pat Moynihan of New York, who I became friendly with—we served on two committees together, the Senate Finance Committee and the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee—got up and spoke at a luncheon caucus of Democratic senators one Tuesday noon. Each party has a lunch every Tuesday noon where they meet in a caucus and try to decide what they're going to do that week. And he was upbeat about the Democrats' prospects in the coming election, and then he said, jokingly and laughing, "Why, even George Mitchell's only twenty-two points behind." Of course everybody laughed. And he didn't have a malicious intent, but it sort of emphasized the fact that I was not given much of a chance. And although I know that Pat meant it in the best way, probably six or seven senators came up to me after the lunch and said, "Look, we believe in you, we think you can do it." They thought I was going to be depressed by the fact that his comment got a big laugh at the caucus.

AL: So what were you thinking? Were you thinking, I know I can do it? Was that internal confidence there, or were you really not sure yet?

GM: Well, I think realistically you have to always consider the possibility that you're not going to succeed, obviously. But I was determined, and I felt that I could win. And actually, by the time that Moynihan made his comment I'd cut the margin down quite a bit. It went from thirty-six, by then it was twenty-two, later it got down to sixteen, and twelve, and of course eventually I won by twenty-two percentage points. So over a long period of time there was quite a shift, and as the margin narrowed I felt I had a chance. When he made that remark—I can't remember when it was, I think it was early in 1982—I had begun to feel, I wouldn't call it confidence that I was going to win, but confidence in feeling that I had a chance to win, that if I could keep it going I might be able to win. I never, at the time, imagined that I would win by such a large margin, that the circumstances would change so dramatically between then and the election. But it pointed out the attitude, or the way I was viewed and regarded by other senators.

So, back to Senator Byrd. I had not known him before. I met him, and we had a cordial relationship. I don't think that by any stretch of the imagination he would have regarded me as an intimate or an advisor or anything other than a very junior senator who probably doesn't have much chance to be elected. But after I was elected in 1982, and by such a convincing margin, I think it's fair to say that attitudes towards me changed. I acquired perhaps a little more legitimacy in the eyes of other senators. And I worked very hard to do a good job and to represent the people of Maine in the right way, and I think that other senators were favorably impressed, including Senator Byrd.

So when the time came in 1984 for him to—he was then the minority leader. I keep calling him majority leader, he was elected majority leader in the '70s. The Republican sweep in 1980 gave them control of the Senate so he was minority leader from '80 to '86, then he served one more Congress, from '86 to '88 as majority leader, then I was elected. But I always think of him as the majority leader.

So I was pleasantly surprised when he asked me to serve as chairman of the Campaign Committee. It's a tough job, but the task requires someone who can articulate the views and principles of the parties, can make an effective case publicly, can organize the effort, can work with candidates, and can raise money. And so I was flattered that he asked me, and I worked very hard at it. And did a good job. So much so that after the election of 1986, Senator Byrd wanted to include me into the leadership of the Democratic majority in the Senate, so he created a position that I think had only existed once or twice before, more honorary than anything. So I was elected by the Democrats as the deputy president pro tempore of the Senate.

Now, the president pro tempore of the Senate is the person who has served in the Senate the longest at that time, and is the official in the Senate who stands in succession to the presidency behind the Speaker of the House. The majority leader, who is the effective leader, runs the Senate. The president pro tempore is just an honorary position, but the majority leader is a position that was not created in the Constitution, or really by any law or statute. It was a custom and a practice that developed to meet the needs of the Senate during the 19th century. So the Senate majority leader, while he effectively runs the Senate, it isn't a statutory or Constitutional position. The president pro tempore is, although it has no power. And a deputy president pro tempore has really no power, but it made me a part of the Democratic leadership in the Senate.

So when the leadership would meet, I was included in the meetings, my advice was sought. I participated when the leadership went to the White House to meet with the president—I would occasionally accompany the leaders. So it gave me a role in the leadership, however limited and nominal, and was of I think considerable assistance to me later when I sought the position of Senate majority leader. And that was in 1988, two years after we regained control of the Senate.

AL: I was going to ask you, from your observations in that position of Senator Byrd and others, do you recall what in essence you took from that, in terms of your own run for majority leader?

GM: Well first and foremost, it's a tough job. It's a very, very difficult position, as you can see right now. Poor Harry Reid, the current Senate majority leader, (*laughing*) has such a difficult job. A couple of months ago I spoke at a conference in Washington with the State Department for U.S. ambassadors from around the world, and in the question/answer period one of the ambassadors got up and said, "Senator Mitchell, you've got the toughest job in the world"—referring to my position as special envoy for Middle East peace, trying to deal with Israelis and Palestinians. And I said, "No, I used to have the toughest job," I said, "Harry Reid's got it now. At the very most, the job I have now is second." So I learned by watching Senator Byrd, it's really a difficult job. You have ninety-nine other senators, each of whom is a major public figure in his or her own right.

AL: And they all have different interests they have to meet for their constituents.

GM: Very different interests for their constituents, very different personalities, very different personal ambitions. And Senate rules, which make it difficult to pass a bill, but make it relatively easy to prevent a bill from passing. What I've said many times in answer to questions,

particularly from political scientists or when I speak at universities, is that the Senate really is a microcosm of the American system. The men who—there were about forty-five of them—who gathered in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787 to write what became the American Constitution, [had] lived under a British king, and [they] did not want there ever to be an American king. And looking back, we can see that they were brilliantly successful. We have had forty-four presidents and no kings.

The mechanism that they chose to achieve this objective was to divide and disperse power, to create competing tensions between the various branches of government. They established three separate branches—the executive, the legislative and the judicial—and they divided power. There are overlapping, and to this day unresolved differences of power in the Constitution. For example, the president is the commander in chief of all the armed forces, but only the Congress can declare war. And you go down through the Constitution and you see many such examples.

Well, I've always felt that the Senate is in microcosm the ultimate in the belief that we've got to divide power, and the most effective way—now, [these are] my own words, this is nowhere written—the most effective way to prevent bad things from happening is to prevent anything from happening. To make it very hard to do anything—to pass a bill—and make it relatively easy to stop it. Because as you'll recall, the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the Constitution is, in my judgment, the most eloquent and effective statement of the right of the individual to be free from oppression by government ever written. But it's directed at oppression by government, that's what the Bill of Rights is about, the rights of the individual to be free from government oppression.

And so the Senate is very hard to manage and run. I'll tell you a couple of anecdotes. In the Senate, any one senator can stop things from happening. One out of a hundred can effectively block anything, because the Senate has two rules that are unique to it. The first is the unlimited right of debate. Any senator can get up at any time, say anything he or she wants on any subject, even though it may be unrelated to what's being discussed, and talk as long as he or she wants to, to gum up the works, to prevent things from happening. When a bill does get to the Senate, any senator can offer any amendment he or she wants. Most people are shocked to learn that amendments are frequently offered in the Senate when a senator sits at his desk and writes something down on a piece of paper, walks up and hands it to the clerk. They can actually do that, hand written on a piece of paper. Just walk up and offer it, and that's an amendment. And there's no limit to it. And there's no rule of germaneness, that it has to bear a direct relationship.

And the way you overcome those two provisions, unlimited debate and unrestricted right of amendment, is through the imposition of cloture, which requires sixty senators to vote for. That's what a filibuster means. A filibuster is: trying to prevent cloture from occurring. And since you need sixty votes to get people to stop talking, or requiring that amendments be limited to the subject matter of the legislation, that is, to be germane, that means forty-one senators, a minority, can prevent anything from happening. And to get things going, one senator can hold the fort for quite a while.

I listened to sixteen-hour speeches, nine-hour speeches, eight-hour speeches. I wasn't present when Strom Thurmond gave what was the longest—I think it was about twenty-two hours. So it's extremely difficult to manage. And to get agreement on anything requires the consent of a hundred senators. So while it's not publicly known, or frequently viewed, a major part of the job of the leaders—the majority leader and the minority leader—is to work out what are called consent agreements, and then to get the respective members of their party to agree to them.

Senator Dole was the minority leader the six years that I was Senate majority leader, and we spent countless, countless, hundreds, maybe thousands of hours during that six years, directly and through our aides, negotiating consent agreements every day. We'll do the following today, and something will happen at two, and something will happen at six. Without that, any senator can just stop it. And you have a process, what they call clearance, by which when Senator Dole and I would reach an agreement, my aides would telephone, send out a notice, to the office of every Democratic senator, and his office would simultaneously do the same thing, to get the other ninety-eight senators, both Democratic and Republican, to agree to the consent order that we drafted. And any senator who didn't agree to it could object. So then you'd have to go have a negotiation with that senator. If he was a Democrat I would do it, or a Republican, Dole would do it. And then we'd have to get back together again, try to figure out, how do we accommodate this concern.

So, this is a very, very, overly long story, but one of the humorous things that happened is, one night during an extremely long session, (*recording interrupted for technical reasons*) and I can't remember the bill but it was very aggravating. We kept trying to get an agreement, and the objections kept coming up and coming up and coming up, and we'd go back and work at it. I don't know whether we spent a dozen hours working on this. Finally, at about one thirty in the morning, we thought we had finally an agreement. So I got up and started reading the agreement. Now, the Senate's in session, I'm standing at my desk, and I'm now reading off the terms of the agreement, and Senator Dole is standing at his desk and he's going to say, "No objection," and so the agreement takes effect and whatever we described in terms of the process would then be employed on this bill.

And when I'm in the middle of reading it, a young Democratic aide, a very smart, able guy, comes running out of what they call the Democratic Cloakroom—it's kind of a room alongside the Senate where senators sit, where there a lot of phones; it's a communication center really—and he said, "Stop! Stop!" Waved to me and kind of in an aside whisper. So I stopped and took a pause in the proceedings—you have what's called a quorum call—and I said, "What's wrong?" He said, "I just got a call"—I won't name the senator to you here now—"Senator Such-and-Such called and he's objecting." I said, "We've been through this, we've been at this all day long now, we've had all the objections. You tell him I want to talk to him, tell him to come here right now, on the floor, and I want to talk to him because I want to get this thing done tonight." He said, "Well, he can't come." I said, "Why not?" He said, "He's home in bed."

I said, "He's home in bed?" He said, "Yeah, he's watching this on TV." And I said, "Well, you call him back and tell him that I just established a new rule." I said, "A person who is lying down in his bed at home cannot express an objection to an order like this (*laughing*)." I said, "Ideally,

he has to be right here to express it, right on the Senate floor, but at the very least he can't be lying down at home in bed." So I get up and I went through and the thing was approved (*laughing*). And the next day, the senator came over, he was very angry. We were good friends, and we had a good laugh about that. I told him, "Look, you can't go home and get in bed and lie there and watch this and then pick up the phone and express objections. If you've really got an objection, you got to stay here and sweat it out like the rest of us, so I can have access to you."

It's one of these jokes where you had to be there to get it (*laughing*), but it illustrates the point of the difficulty of serving as Senate majority leader. So I learned by observing the leadership close up that it was a very, very tough job. And very difficult for people to get along with. And that shaped how I approached the job.

AL: Did it shape how you approached the other things post-Senate, in terms of Sharm el-Sheik and Northern Ireland, and now your current position?

GM: That's a longer subject, but let me go forward. I'm kind of rambling now, but I assume that's what you want in these discussions. Later, when I got to be majority leader, when I was elected majority leader was I think in late November of 1988, I had just been reelected to a full term. And the Democrats elected the majority leader, we were in the majority, the Republicans elected the minority leader. And I was elected Senate majority leader and Bob Dole was reelected the minority leader. He had been minority leader—he'd been a majority leader for a while, and then minority leader.

So one of the first persons I saw on the day of my election as Senate majority leader was Dole. I went to see him. I called him up and said, "I'd like to come see you," and I went to see him, and we congratulated each other. And I'd known him, not real well, but I'd known him before. I was a member of the Finance Committee and he was chairman of that committee previously, so we were on the same committee, although not always together. We had different views on some of the issues.

And the first thing I did was congratulate him, and he congratulated me, and then I said, "Look, Bob, I haven't been here very long. I've been in the Senate for eight years," which was a very short time to be elected majority leader. I said, "But I've observed enough to know how difficult these jobs are in the best of circumstances," I said. "And in the worst of circumstances, I think they're just darn near impossible." So I suggested to him that he and I agree on a relatively simple and straightforward set of principles that would guide our conduct, that would make it easier for us to work together.

First: no surprises. I told him, "I'll never surprise you. I'll always give you a fair notice of what I plan to do so that you can respond." And he agreed with that. "Second," I said, "I'll never try to embarrass you. The Senate is such that inevitably, in some legislation in which we disagree, my view will prevail, and others on which we disagree you will prevail. And nobody gets a hundred percent of their way in the Senate. And so since we have to come back to work together every day, no matter who's won or lost the previous day, it's a lot less difficult if we haven't embarrassed each other. And so I'm not going to do it. I would never say or do anything that

will embarrass you, and I will try very hard to find a good exit for you on some issues.” And I did that later, which meant a great deal to him.

There had been some disagreement over office space. And the majority leader controls the space of the Senate side of the Capitol, so I told him that he could have whatever office space he wanted. I wanted to accommodate him to make certain that he didn't feel in any sense disadvantaged or uncomfortable in that way. And I told him that we just should try as best we can in very difficult circumstances to keep the rancor and personal difficulty to a minimum. We recognized that there were fifty- —I can't remember the exact number—by then I think it would have been fifty-three or fifty-four Democratic senators and there would have been forty-six or forty-seven Republicans, and that while we were the respective leaders, we couldn't speak for every person. Every senator had his or her own right to speak. But I said, “Let's just try to keep it down to the minimum possible.”

[p/o] He agreed right away, he said, “Look, that's absolutely right.” And the fact of the matter is that from that moment on to this moment, Bob Dole and I never have had a harsh word pass between us, in public or in private. We disagreed daily on the consent agreements, on legislation. We debated bills. But I never insulted him, I never tried to embarrass him, I never tried to make his job more difficult than it was, and he reciprocated in kind, and so we built up a very good trusting personal relationship. Which is I think much more difficult these days than it was then.

AL: I have heard over the many, many interviews that we've done, the sort of consensus that the culture of the Senate has changed in years since you were there. I wondered if you saw the change starting when you were there, or do you think it really occurred after you left?

GM: I think the process has gone on for a very long time. Long before I was there. There is a kind of a myth -

AL: Sort of, 'It was better in my day?'

GM: Yes, yes, right. But there is a human tendency to look to the past through rose-colored glasses, as though there wasn't any partisanship, there wasn't any bickering, there weren't any hard feelings, and it was all sort of civics book ideal, debate on the merits. But if you go back over American history, there's never been a period in which that existed. You go back and read the histories of Jefferson and Adams, and Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr, and the vilification of Lincoln, it was really rough stuff then.

Now, I do believe it's worse now, for a variety of reasons. One is the power of electronic communications. Not just this microphone and recorder you have there, but particularly television. The qualitative change in the amounts of money that are involved, that are just vast sums that combine with the power of a thirty-second [TV advertisement], and the ubiquitous nature of television. Is there a home in America that doesn't have television? Really, it's just amazing what an impact it has. And a variety of other reasons, but there has never been a mythical rose-colored period when there wasn't this kind of combination of partisanship, to some

extent single issues, personal ambition, rancor. I do think it is very bad now, and it was not anywhere near this bad in the six years that I served as Senate majority leader. It was tough, very rough. I had many, many sleepless nights over aggravations that occurred, difficulties, problems that arose. It's awfully, awfully tough to manage. But nonetheless, all that having been said, the bottom line is you're correct: it's much more difficult now than it was then, even though that was a mere fifteen to twenty years ago.

AL: Was health care one of those issues that was very difficult?

GM: Yes. Very, very difficult. Very difficult. (*brief pause*) I want to talk more about Senator Byrd if I could? We've had a lot of digressions on that, and we will come back and do another session with you on health care. But I want to carry forward my description about Senator Byrd.

He was an extraordinary man, one of the most extraordinary persons I've ever met, in any country, in any walk of life. You know the outlines of his story, raised not by his natural parents but by other relatives, in extreme poverty, with a limited early education. Worked a variety of jobs: he was a butcher for a period of time, he worked in a shipyard. But by virtue of his extraordinary drive and intellect and ambition rose to become the longest serving senator in American history, and I think a unique figure in the history of the Senate. I don't think there ever has been, nor do I think there ever will be, anyone quite like him.

Like all great men, he had many great faults, but no one of us is perfect. I certainly am not, and he certainly was not. But it was so amazing to meet and work with him and to learn about his background, his approach, his habits. Once he gave a speech to a group of senators in which he described his life in a way that was very moving, but in a sense sad. He didn't have any interests outside of the Senate. (*brief interruption*) He gave this speech in which he said that, well, he went to the movies once and he was bored after about fifteen minutes and he left. He was I think somewhat disdainful of all the talk about sports among senators. You know, a bunch of adult American men talking about baseball and football and stuff, he wasn't interested in that kind of thing.

But he read all the works of Shakespeare—I think he said seven times. He could recite—he had a powerful memory—he could recite very long excerpts from Shakespeare or from other classics, or poetry. Once there was a long debate over the so-called line item veto. Could the president, instead of either signing or vetoing a whole bill, select out individual items and veto them. It's been proposed many times as a way to stop unnecessary spending and rejected. The court finally agreed with Senator Byrd's position that it was unconstitutional. But in the debate over in the Senate, Senator Byrd gave I think it was twelve or thirteen one-hour speeches largely, not entirely, but largely extemporaneous, in which he linked the fight over the line item veto to the history of the Roman Republic, and the decline of the Republic and the rise of dictators, emperors in Rome.

And the Senate historian had those speeches bound in a volume, so it was published. And it's the most amazing thing to read it, because, I was sitting there for part of it, and he knew every bit

of Roman history from all time. And there was always a stenographer in the Senate taking down every word. They have these small stenographic machines strapped around their neck, and they'd stand next to the senators or in front of them, and Senator Byrd would constantly have to spell a name for him. He'd use the name of a Roman emperor or some Roman general, and he would spell the name for the stenographer (*laughter*). Or the places in Roman history. Of course, many people thought the argument was farfetched and the speeches too long, but I was fascinated by them. Just the fact that this man could stand up there and recite extemporaneously this entire history.

And there was another amusing incident that happened with Senator Byrd. Again, one of those instances where you had to be there to appreciate it. When the Queen of England, Queen Elizabeth, came to Washington to visit then-President George H.W. Bush, this would have been in the early '90s, she spoke at the White House and then she addressed a joint session of Congress. And by tradition, the speaker of the House of Representatives and the majority leader of the Senate from time to time will invite honored guests, like the queen, to a luncheon in the rotunda of the Capitol. And it was my pleasure with then-Speaker Foley to host a luncheon for Queen Elizabeth, and so we chose who would sit at this table, maybe ten people at a round table. A lot of other tables around, but it was a seat of honor to sit with the queen. She's a wonderful person. I've met her several times since. Much later I was knighted by the Queen of England and so I went to Buckingham Palace to be knighted by her, and we've chatted on a few occasions.

AL: I didn't know that, that's an interesting piece to add.

GM: We'll get to that later. But it was an interesting occasion. And so I invited Senator Byrd to come sit, because I thought it was an honor that he ought to have. And as we stood before sitting down, I introduced each of the other persons at the table to the queen. And Senator Byrd was by then advanced in years and he was a little bit hard of hearing, and so I said to the queen, after introducing Senator Byrd, I said, "Senator Byrd can recite from memory the name and the date of rule of every one of your predecessors as the king or queen of England." Which he could do, I'd heard him do it before, or parts of it. So Senator Byrd apparently took that to be an invitation to recite these names. So he started off reciting the names of every previous monarch and the dates of rule in English history, which he could do. It was just amazing. And after a couple of minutes or so, I don't know, maybe he'd covered fifty or a hundred years, the queen said, "Well, Senator Byrd, those were all before my time." So we got a good laugh out of it. But he was an amazing man, really amazing.

Now, we had our differences, we had some very tough times over some legislation later, which I'll cover in the next visit. He obviously liked me and helped me. He appointed me as chairman of the Campaign Committee in '84, he appointed me as deputy president pro tempore of the Senate. However, he did not support me when I ran for Senate majority leader.

AL: He went to Appropriations is what happened, right? He left that position. Do you have a sense that he was sort of divided about whether he wanted to stay in that position, or move on?

GM: Yes, he was very divided. Very divided. And perhaps at a later time I'll tell you the whole story. But after he announced that he was not going to seek reelection as Senate majority leader, two other very experienced and able senators announced that they were going to run, Senator Inouye of Hawaii and Senator Bennett Johnston of Louisiana, both of whom were friends of mine and both extremely able men.

AL: And I think we got that on an earlier interview, the race part, and the vote that you -

GM: That's right. And the one who didn't vote for me, but I'll go into it in more detail later. But Senator Byrd later thought about changing his mind and running again. And I had told him earlier that I would support him, because I did support him. But then when he announced he wasn't going to run, I had a couple of senators come up and suggest it to me, then a few more, and so then I decided to run myself and was elected.

In the meantime, he thought about running again and suggested maybe I should withdraw and then he could run. He thought he could win against the other two if I stepped out of the race. And I wouldn't, and so he got upset at me. And then later we had quite a disagreement over legislation, the Clean Air Act. He of course represented West Virginia, which was a large coal mining state, and understandably on behalf of his constituents was very worried about the Clean Air Act, and I was a principal author of the Clean Air Act. So we had a very tough time on that. He was upset for quite a while—but we got over it, and by the time I left the Senate we were—I think it was mutual, but I guess I had just the highest and greatest respect for him. He really was an amazing man. And as I said, there will never be another one quite like him in the Senate.

AL: It's probably important to note here that we did try to get an interview with him for this project, but he was not able to do it.

GM: Yes, well he declined in recent years and of course passed away earlier this year. And it was a very difficult thing for me to do, because I flew from Tel Aviv, Israel, all the way back to go to his funeral. I was really exhausted when I got there. It was earlier this year, and it was an extremely hot day and they had us all seated out on the steps of the capitol, in West Virginia. But I wouldn't have missed it for anything, because I really did admire him. And I think some day there will be a monumental biography of him, because he had such an extraordinary life. Just so interesting, and not all of it admirable. He was a Ku Klux Klan supporter in his youth, he made mistakes. We all make mistakes. But he's such a towering figure in the Senate and in the Senate's history, and in the history of our country. But I think some day, some skillful author will write a very great biography of him.

AL: In terms of your role as majority leader, you served under two different presidents during that time, George H.W. Bush and then William Clinton. And I've heard people say that it's sometimes more difficult to serve as majority leader under a president of your own party. What was your experience, and can you describe how it was under the two of those different presidents?

GM: That was not true of my experience. My experience was just the contrary. It was much easier with President Clinton. With President Bush, the first two years were very productive and quite cordial. The last two years were not so. And then I served two years with President Clinton, which of course included the passage of his economic program that was followed by a very good period with the American economy, and then the failure of the health care effort the next year.

When President Bush first entered office, in his inaugural address on the steps in front of the Capitol, he offered a hand of friendship, physically and orally to us. And myself and the House Democratic leadership said we accepted and we wanted to work together. And we had a number of notable successes of cooperation, one of which was the Clean Air Act, which caused me so much heartache with Senator Byrd, on the other hand was a cooperative effort with President Bush. And I said publicly many times that I don't think President Bush got the credit he deserved on the Clean Air bill.

What happened was that Senator Muskie, my predecessor in the Senate, was the principal author of the original Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, which passed in the early '70s. By the time I got to the Senate a decade later, it became clear that while the initial legislation was truly landmark in nature, significant changes and additions to its scope had to be made for it to be truly effective. And so early in the '80s and building up throughout the '80s was an effort to revise and extend and improve the Clean Air bill. But President Reagan was in office and he was adamantly against it. The oil industry was against, the power industry was against, and the president was against it, and for the first six years of the decade the Republicans controlled the Senate, so there was really very little progress in that area.

President Bush of course had been vice president to Reagan, and when he was elected the issue had been and was: will there or won't there be a Clean Air Bill? And the answer was pretty much no. But President Bush, a few months after taking office, gave a major speech on the environment in which he said he favored Clean Air legislation. Which was a dramatic change from the Reagan position, and which immediately transformed the issue from 'will there or won't there be a Clean Air Bill?' to 'well there's going to be one, now what's going to be in it?' So the issue became: what will be in the legislation?

We then began what turned out to be a couple of years of effort to draft a bill, and there were essentially three groups of participants. One was the president and the administration, the second was focused in the Senate Committee on the Environment and Public Works, and led really by four senators, myself, Max Baucus of Montana, a Democrat, and John Chafee of Rhode Island, a Republican, and Dave Durenberger of Minnesota, a Republican. That was the core of the group on the committee. And then you had the House. I should say four groups. You had the outside groups, all of whom were divided. The environmental groups of course were for it, industry were all against it.

It was an extremely long, drawn out process—there have been a couple of books written about it—much of which took place in my Senate majority leader's office, where I set up a process by which we would debate and discuss the various terms. And any senator who wanted to could

attend the sessions, and in the course of the months and years we did it more than half the members of the Senate actually participated in the discussions, although most of them didn't participate except for a narrow issue that they were involved in. The core of the discussions were the committee and the four senators I mentioned on one end, and the White House on the other. The White House chief of staff and their designated negotiator, a fellow named Roger Porter, who was an extremely able outstanding public official who represented President Bush in the negotiations.

It was a very difficult process. There was a lot of compromising. And it was a very tough time for me personally, and for Max Baucus. Max and I went through a lot in the Senate together. Because the environmental groups were pushing for a much stronger bill, and the president, while he'd committed to there being a Clean Air Act, his definition of what should be in it now was quite different. And then you had the industry on the outside wanting no bill at all. So there were a lot of competing forces.

And Max and I, particularly as Democrats, took a tremendous amount of criticism and flack from environmental groups for making any compromises at all. In fact, I think this is true, I've never checked it, I think the only time in my life I ever got a full headline across the whole top of the *Portland Press Herald* was when a group of environmental organizations held a press conference to attack me for making these compromises.

AL: The irony.

GM: Well, the real irony is—to jump ahead of the story—the next year after we got the bill done, and it was a strong bill, they all appointed me “Man of the Year.” They gave me trophies and plaques, and would I go and speak to their groups so they could tell me how grateful they were. The same groups that the year before had just vilified. It wasn't so tough on me, because I'd just gotten elected in 1988 by a fairly large margin, so I felt fairly secure politically, and I knew my election wasn't until '94. I ended up not running, but if I had run I would have won.

Max Baucus was running for reelection in a Republican state, and here these environmentalists were attacking him left and right. His opponent was a hundred miles to the more conservative side of the issue. It was a classic example of single issue groups, [who] like purity and perfection, and they're uncomfortable with the messiness of compromise that comes from a body like the Senate.

So we went through a heck of a hard time. Max and I were trying to hold the fort, and we had the environmentalists pounding on us. And me especially, what they wanted was me to bring the bill up in its original form, as reported out of committee. And we didn't have the votes for it. We couldn't pass it. And they kept insisting that the votes were there, and if I would just bring it to the floor—if I would have the guts to bring it to the floor—we could pass. I said, “Well, we don't just need fifty-one, we need sixty, because of cloture,” that I explained earlier.

So, I'll never forget it. The majority leader's office has two doors to enter and exit from. The rear door leads into a large conference room where these discussions were held. The front door

leads into a small conference room, that then leads into the reception area. And so I frequently had two meetings going at once, a larger meeting in the back room, and a smaller meeting in the smaller conference room, and I would shuttle between the two. And one day we were having—this is one of many, many days we had these negotiations—and it was on an amendment that Senator John Hienz of Pennsylvania was interested in. Jack, as we all knew him, was a moderate Republican and a very able, attractive, very wealthy guy from the Heinz family. I think he was widely seen as a prospective national candidate someday. But Pennsylvania has a big coal producing region, and so he was against a lot of the bill. And it turned out I was sitting right next to him, and I got asked to go in and meet with a group of environmental organizations in the small conference room, so I excused myself from the big conference, I went into the other room.

And the purpose of their being there was, they told me that they were here to give me a list of sixty senators that would vote for cloture if I, Senator Mitchell, just had the courage to bring the bill up. And I said, “I’ve been sitting in this room for weeks with these guys. We don’t have sixty votes.” Well, they said, “We do, we’ve canvassed them, and if you just bring it up and force it, they’ll vote for it.” So I said, “Well, let me see that list.” So they went through describing, this senator will vote. And I said, “Who told you that?” Well, rarely was it the senator himself. It was always some guy who knew some guy who knew some guy who knew some aide who said he will vote for it. And I was looking at the list, it was sixty that they had, and I see Jack Heinz’s name on it, and I said, “Senator Heinz is going to vote for this bill?” “Oh yes,” they said, “we’ve been assured.” I said, “Well you just wait a minute, he’s in my back office right now, you guys wait here just a second.”

So I got up, I walked back into the other room, Heinz was still there. I took my seat next to him, and while the discussion continued I leaned over to him and I said, “Jack, I’m in a meeting now and I’ve been told that you’ve committed to vote for cloture on this bill, and that’s really wonderful news and I really appreciate it a lot. I want you to know that.” And he looked at me and he says, “Are you crazy? I’d never vote for cloture with this bill. I never told anybody that,” he said. “You know I can’t vote for cloture on this bill with these coal provisions in my constituency in Pennsylvania.” “Oh,” I said, “well I’m sorry. I guess I must have misunderstood something that was said to me.”

So (*laughing*) I went back into the other room and I said, “I just talked to Heinz. He’s sitting fifteen feet away from here in another conference room, and he says there’s absolutely no chance that he will vote for cloture.” And I said, “I know that to be true of at least a dozen people on this list that you’re giving me. We don’t have the votes. In fact,” I said, “we would be hard pressed to get fifty votes on the bill as it now stands.” I said, “So what you’re suggesting means the end of the bill, it means I bring it up, we vote on cloture, we lose. Because I know we can’t get sixty votes. And if we get less than fifty, the substance of the bill will have been rejected. Not just that we can’t get cloture, but we can’t even get fifty votes.” I said, “And that’s the end of the bill. I would rather go back and keep trying to get a compromise that can attract a sufficient number of senators to get cloture and pass the bill. And that means negotiating with the president and the Republican administration.”

Well, some of them, in quite an insulting fashion, criticized me, disagreed, basically said I didn't have any guts and so forth, and gave me a really hard time. But I knew I was right. I knew all the time that there was a chance, because I felt Bush was serious and that we could get a strong bill. So we negotiated a bill over a period of many months. Now, Senator Byrd was very upset because we rejected an amendment that he offered on the effect on coal miners, and that led to a huge fight on the floor. Separately, the environmentalists then persuaded several Democratic senators to offer amendments that would have strengthened it from the environmental standpoint. But under the agreement that we reached with the president, we would go on the floor with a bill that was agreed on, and we'd committed ourselves to opposing all amendments.

So I was placed in the extremely awkward position of having to oppose amendments by Democratic senators—strengthening amendments by Democratic senators that I personally felt should be in the bill but I knew the president would veto if we did it and put them in the bill. Part of the deal was, we'll commit to support this bill on the Senate floor together, and we'll oppose all amendments. Now, the White House made a huge miscalculation. I then offered to extend that commitment through the entire legislative process. I said, "I propose that we agree that our commitment holds for the bill through the House, through the conference between the House and the Senate." The White House rejected my offer. They said, "No, our agreement only goes through the Senate process." For the obvious reason that they thought they could weaken the bill in the House, where they thought they had more support. And that therefore the bill that came out of the Senate was the high water mark, and they would dilute it some in the House and in the conference.

It was a huge miscalculation because the House—it's a whole separate story—did a really good job. They thought that John Dingell, chairman of the major House committee on the bill who represents an area of Michigan that has a large auto industry, and he's been a strong spokesman for them, would prevent strong environmental provisions from being enacted. But Dingell's another amazing guy, just amazing. He served in the House for fifty years, and his father served for many years before him. He and his father represented that district for, I don't know, it must be somewhere close to a century. And he's a very able guy, very smart, tough, aggressive, strong chairman. And they completely misread it. We established a very good working relationship. And I knew Dingell wanted to protect the auto industry, just like I wanted to protect people from Maine, but that he also recognized that this was important and that the train was leaving the station, and he did the right thing. He did the really right thing. And we ended up with a stronger bill that ultimately became law.

But at the time, working with it, it was extremely difficult. And going back now, we ended up getting a bill through the Senate, although I was extremely uncomfortable. Senator Gore offered a strengthening amendment, I had to oppose that. Senator John Kerrey offered one and I had to oppose that. Senator Tom Harkin offered one, I had to oppose that. All good friends of mine, all offering what I thought were sensible measures that I wished we could have put in. I don't remember the details of what their amendments were now, but I had to stand up and publicly oppose them.

And then when Senator Byrd offered his amendment on coal mining, he was by then chairman of the Appropriations Committee with tremendous power over appropriations. And I was the only senator who stood up and spoke against his amendment, and it was defeated by one vote. And at Senator Byrd's funeral just a few months ago, Vice President Biden told the story of how he cast the deciding vote, and Senator Byrd took the clerk's tally of the vote—it's a long, narrow piece of paper that has a list of a hundred senator's names on it, and there's a clerk that sits there, and as each senator votes the clerk makes a checkmark, yes or no. And Senator Byrd got the original tally, he framed it and he hung it up outside of his Appropriations Committee office for the rest of his tenure.

AL: So if anybody needed anything, they better look at that list.

GM: So there were sixteen Democratic senators who voted with me on the other side of Senator Byrd's amendment, which means the majority of the Democrats voted with him on that. Biden was one of [the sixteen], and Byrd circled his name on the list (*laughter*). Biden told this story at Senator Byrd's funeral. I said to him, "I wish you hadn't mentioned that." Because he said out loud, "Well," he said, "I voted with Senator Mitchell instead of Senator Byrd, and Senator Byrd was angry at me." I mean, it was told in a humorous vein. But it's true, it was very difficult.

I'll maybe someday give a little more detail of that, but it was a very, very difficult period. But we ended up defeating almost all the amendments. The House then passed a bill. We went to conference. I was by then majority leader, so I relinquished my position as chairman of the Environmental Subcommittee to Max Baucus, and he did a terrific job in the conference and we ended up passing a strong bill. It was a monumental effort that stretched over a period of years, with a lot of ups and downs. Then it finally ended up the right way.

AL: And in terms of your staff, did you have people who were with you through that whole process?

GM: Oh yes, yes. Kate Kimball, Charlene Sturbitts. Have you interviewed Charlene? She could tell you about that. Martha Pope I think probably also.

AL: But that was just years and years.

GM: Years of effort. Anita Jensen is now doing this research and she sent me some stuff on some of the history of it. And there's a book that was written about it. It was actually quite a good little book by a guy named Richard Cohen, who was a reporter for I think at the time the *National Journal*. He covered it closely, and he wrote not a very long book [*Washington at Work*], a couple hundred pages. I haven't seen it for a long time, but I remember reading it, and it was really a pretty good description of what occurred, without some of the inner workings that I've described here.

But there were a lot of ups and downs. I remember very clearly the day that Senator Byrd offered his amendment, I was sick as a dog. I had the flu, I had a head cold, my nose was

running, I was sniffing and coughing, and I had to go on the Senate floor, sit there and fight his amendment. Because he was chair of the Appropriations Committee, nobody wanted to speak against it, even those who were going to vote against it.

(brief pause in recording)

AL: Could you talk about when George H.W. Bush said, “Read my lips, no new taxes,” and that sort of piece?

GM: He made the pledge of course in his speech at the Republican nominating convention in the summer of 1988. And I can’t remember now exactly when it unfolded in the Senate. You may get for me the next time the precise dates. I can tell you the story without dates associated with it.

There began, once he was in office and once the Congress began, a discussion about how we were going to handle the budget. We had then a budget deficit—I think it was around one hundred billion dollars—and everybody thought the sky was going to fall. And it seems incredible in light of the trillion dollar deficits that we have now, but there was a lot of concern about the deficit exceeding one hundred billion dollars, or \$150 billion. And I was visited by a man named Dick Darman, who was an advisor to President Bush. I think he may have been serving as his budget director, but he was a very influential advisor, an extremely smart guy. I got along very well with him. He had some detractors in his own party, and some in ours, but I always thought he was awfully smart and I enjoyed working with him.

He basically said, “Look, we know we got to have a tax increase. It is impossible to deal with this deficit without it, but you know, the president’s got this pledge out there and he has to stick to that pledge.” And I thought that their plan was—and this was later verified by the White House chief of staff, former New Hampshire Governor John Sununu—was to sort of lure us into proposing a tax increase that they would then shoot down as part of the vindication of the “Read my lips” pledge.

And so I prevailed upon the other members of the Democratic leadership that we should not take a position until after the president made his budget proposal, ‘til he suggested how we could deal with this, and then we would review it and respond. And that was largely not entirely observed. A couple of Democrats felt the need to get out and say “we’ve got to raise taxes,” but most of the Senate and House leadership thought that was a prudent and sensible tactic to deal with the issue.

So Darman came to my office, one of several visits, and proposed that we have a meeting, the congressional leadership with the White House leadership, and we should talk about this issue. And he said, “Out of this discussion, a tax increase will emerge.” And I said, “Well, what do you mean a tax increase will emerge out of this discussion?” And he fluttered his hands like this, in a rising fashion, and said, “Well, it’ll just emerge from the discussion.”

And I kind of laughed and I fluttered back and I said, “I don’t think this is good enough. We want to know what does the president propose, because we’re concerned that you guys are trying

to play a political trick on us. To get us to propose a tax increase, which the president will then say no to and he'll then stand up and say, 'See, I told you so. But I said, read my lips, no new taxes.'" Because when he made that statement he said, "And I'll say it, and those Democrats will come back and they'll say again, 'We want a tax increase,' and I'll say no, and then they'll come back and I'll say 'No, read my lips'." That was sort of the line.

And I said, "We may not be the smartest guys in the world, but it's pretty clear what you're planning on doing. So we want to hear what's the president deciding." Well it went on and off like this for quite a while, and there were huge battles over the budget. We had the Andrews Air Force Base, we went to seclude ourselves there, we couldn't finish it, we had other issues. Newt Gingrich was then in the House leadership, Bob Packwood was the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, the Republican side. By then I think he was the ranking member, not the chairman, had been the chairman, was ranking member.

So this went back and forth for quite a while, and then one morning, real early, about between six and seven in the morning, maybe around six, I was in my apartment in Washington and the phone rang and it was Governor Sununu on the phone. He said, "Would you come down to the White House and have breakfast with the president this morning?" I said, "Oh, well of course. Is he asking me alone, are others coming?" "No," he said, "we've already talked to Tom Foley and Dick Gephardt." Foley was the speaker of the House, Dick Gephardt was the House majority leader, Democrats. "And they said they would come down." I said, "Well yes, of course, I will always go to meet the president at his invitation."

So I called Foley, and he and Gephardt had agreed, and we thought we'd ride down together, meet up at the Capitol and go down to breakfast. I think we went down about seven thirty in the morning or so, and we did have breakfast with President Bush. Dick Darman, Governor Sununu, and I believe Nicholas Brady, who was then the secretary of the treasury (close friend of the president). And in a very cordial and civil atmosphere, each side presented their position. Foley had been designated by Gephardt and I to speak of our position which was: we'd like to hear from you, we know we've got to do some tough things, but we'd like to get your proposal. And the president readily agreed, which suggested to us that they had decided they've got to do this and they're just going to go ahead and do it.

So the president said to Dick Darman and John Sununu, "Why don't you go into the next room and draft up a statement." So the two of them went into the next room, and we continued with coffee and chatting. Within minutes they were back, which led us to believe that the statement itself may have been prepared in advance. But nonetheless, it wasn't very long, a paragraph. And they gave us the statement and we sat there and read it. And I immediately, before any discussion occurred, requested the opportunity for Tom Foley, Dick Gephardt, and I to go into another room, have a separate discussion, so that we could consider how we wanted to respond to it. And of course that was agreed, and so we went into the other room, and I said, "Well the first thing, this is a joint statement by the president and the congressional leadership." I said, "This is not a statement by the president." So I took a pen and I scratched out everywhere where it said "we" and I put in the word "I", and I scratched out of the title "the president and the

congressional leadership”, so the statement was by the president alone. We wanted the statement to come from him, not from us and not from the combined effort.

There was another provision that said—I can’t remember the exact words. Somewhere in a box in my attic I’ve got the original document, but I don’t remember the exact words. It said, “there will be no increase in income tax revenues” or something like that. It was an obvious effort to be able to later say we’re not increasing income tax rates or something. And we debated what to do about that, and I took the position that this is what they appear to be intending, but it’ll never work because once he makes a separate statement proposing a tax increase it’s all going to be lost for them in the huge furor that will follow. So I said, “My proposal is that the president makes this statement this morning. We will go right back up to the Hill and we, the three of us, will have a joint press conference in which we, in our own voices, say we accept the president’s proposal, we will support it and we’ll proceed on that basis.”

They agreed. The president agreed right away. We left, went up to the Hill, White House released a statement in which the president [said] “I”, not “we” or in some neutral third party voice. We responded as I suggested, and of course from his perspective, all hell broke loose and he got a lot of flak over it. Now, they originally tried to argue that that phrase, I don’t remember exactly how it was worded, income tax revenues, meant that they weren’t really calling for a tax increase. But as I anticipated, it carried no weight, and politically it was very harmful to him. And I guess he was upset at me later, thinking that I had somehow—it became kind of a popular mythology among Republicans that somehow I had forced him, I’d talked him into this.

Honestly, the reality was, in my judgment, when they called us to that breakfast, they’d already made up their minds that they had to do this, in terms of dealing with the deficit. Because the discussion really was almost pro forma that we had. The president stated his position, Tom Foley stated our position very articulately, very effectively, very low key. There was no shouting, no banging of the table, no harsh words. Tom made his speech and the president said okay. And then he sent them out to draft a statement.

They did try to make it a joint statement. And when we came back in from the meeting, I’m the one who spoke for the three of us, which I think may have given the president that impression. But I explained what changes we wanted, the president agreed, and the statement was issued. And that’s really how it happened. Now, that’s a small part of the whole larger story, but in human terms, in personal terms, that’s what occurred.

AL: I think this is probably a good place to stop?

GM: O.K.

AL: Thank you so much.

GM: Thank you.

End of Interview