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Interview with Bob Rozen (2) by Diane Dewhirst

Robert 'Bob' M. Rozen

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George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Robert Rozen (2)

(Interviewer: Diane Dewhirst)

GMOH# 182

November 20, 2009

Diane Dewhirst: This is Diane Dewhirst for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project for Bowdoin, I'm here with Bobby Rozen for part two, on November 20, 2009, Washington, D.C., we're in downtown Washington. We are following up on a previous discussion where we covered much of economic in general, some campaign finance reform, some budget, and Bobby's background and his role with Senator Mitchell. We wanted to talk a little bit about Senator Mitchell's record with regard to capital gains, the Bush administration, and overall budget tax issues.

Robert Rozen: Okay, thanks Diane. This is, as you said, part two, and it's quite possible that some of what was said in part one will be repeated, since that was some time ago and I don't remember everything that [we] talked about.

So, in 1989 there was a major debate in Washington regarding the level of taxation for capital gains, and an important thing to know about George Mitchell is that he was a strong believer in tax fairness, that high income households should pay their fair share of taxes. And I'm pretty sure in part one we talked about the Tax Reform Act of 1986, the role he played, the major amendment he offered on the floor for a higher rate, and the tradeoff. One of the major tradeoffs for tax reform was that you sharply lower the top rate on ordinary income, and as part of that you brought the rate on capital gains up to the rate on ordinary income.

DD: Can you explain what capital gains are?

RR: Capital gains are gains on a sale of capital assets, and that's something that high income households, the wealthiest, let's say, ten percent of the population, I don't know the figure, [own] eighty-five, ninety percent of all capital assets, and so anything you do on capital gains tends to disproportionately affect high income households.

So this grand bargain in '86 was, you reduced the rate on income from wages and interest and dividends down from, I think it was fifty percent reduced down to twenty-eight percent, and you brought the capital gains rate up from I think it was twenty percent, you brought it up to twenty-eight percent, so that was a grand compromise in '86. And then two years later the proponents of lower capital gains taxes decided, well, we got that great deal in '86, but we want to now reduce the capital gains rate back down to twenty percent. And Mitchell, who played a key role in the '86 Tax Reform Bill, was very much opposed to that.

So what happened in '89 was that the Ways and Means Committee, in a [surprising] move [p/o] overrode the wishes of the chairman and [voted] to lower the tax rate on capital gains. [p/o] This is during a period when Democrats [were] the majority party and running things [in the House]. So [the bill] came over to the Senate and George Mitchell was very much opposed to that, because it was just basically a tax cut for rich people at a time when, even then, when deficits were bad, not as bad as today, so he was determined to defeat that. But having won a victory in the House, the forces for a capital gains tax cut were marshaling their strength and it was a -

DD: With a Republican president.

RR: With a Republican president, and a number of Democrats, I'd say there were about eleven Democrats, or maybe fewer, that were [p/o] led by Bob Graham and, let's see, I think Dick Bryan and – there were several of them, I can't remember all of them. And so they were determined to get this done, Mitchell was determined to stop it, it was a big issue, and so there were a lot of strategies that were done to block it, but everybody assumed there was no way Mitchell could stop this. After all, there were all these Democrats supporting it.

And I remember at one time, I don't know if you remember this, Diane, but there was an article in the *Wall Street Journal*, I think at the time they had this middle column on the front page and it was all about Mitchell standing up to this capital gains effort. If you go back and look at the newspapers in '89 there was a lot written about it, and I remember at one point watching the Saturday evening talk shows, the talking heads were on, and everybody unanimously agreed, there's no way Mitchell can stop this.

But he did stop it, and I think it was a big event for Mitchell because he got a lot of attention to it – he was the leader of course, but he just defied the odds. And what happened was, the key to it was that, first of all, I think that there was the media attention to the unfairness of this, but secondly, he went toe-to-toe with these Democrats in his caucus and he urged them, and ultimately it was a matter of personal intervention, 'do this for me, you don't need this, this doesn't make sense, it goes against what we did a few years ago, it's not necessary, there's no economic argument.' And ultimately they decided, based upon, I think, the force of his personality and argument, to back down and give him this victory.

DD: And what was the action that was taken or not taken in order to give him that victory?

RR: Well, part of what happened is that – I'm going by memory here, it may be a little faulty – but one of the leverage points for getting this done was that Congress had to pass a, increase the debt limit. And it was always, it's difficult today, although there have been changes and reforms in the process to reduce the leverage that people have when we increase the debt limit, but at that time, in the Senate, it was a very difficult process to increase the debt limit. And these Democrats, certainly the Republicans, but these Democrats were saying they were not going to vote to increase it unless they got this capital gains provision. I remember there was a lot of high drama, because if you didn't pass the debt limit things shut down.

DD: Saturday sessions and -

RR: I think at this point what happened was that there was a long-term debt limit that came over, and a short-term debt limit. A short-term debt limit is just basically kicking the can down the road because you couldn't reach agreement, maybe for a month or so. And I remember that there was a senator from Wisconsin, I think he was a one-termer, Kasten I think his name was, and – am I allowed to say this, talk about senators?

DD: Yes.

RR: He had a drinking problem, and the drama was that he was prepared to stand up and block this, I think was even after maybe we got the Republicans to back down, and this was late at night, and Mitchell wanted to bring up the short-term debt limit increase extension, and he wasn't in a condition to object. But Mitchell, being the fair person that he was, delayed consideration of this so he could sober up. He wasn't going to make him come out and make a fool of himself. So finally he sobered up, and they brought it up, going through the steps that he would object to, and he objected to the short-term extension, as we expected.

And Mitchell – I think I was surprised by this, or maybe I was surprised that it worked – he then decided to bring up the long-term extension, and Kasten was, psychologically, he was all prepared to block the short-term, he didn't think about blocking the long-term so he let that go, and that kind of removed the pressure at the time. The long-term extension went through and we were able to get by it, which was kind of remarkable, and unexpected.

But I think it really made an impression on Mitchell. First of all, his ability to block that, to defy the odds and put the finger in the dyke, I think it really increased his standing among folks in Washington because everyone thought, "There's no way Mitchell can stop this," and he stopped it. And part of it, I think the real key to doing it was, he just implored these Democrats to be with him.

DD: And to be Democrats.

RR: To be Democrats, but I think it was the politics of personal persuasion, the force of his – and I really think the way he operated as majority leader, and maybe we talked about this last time, much more than his successors, much more than Daschle and Reid, it was more of a top down leadership rather than bottom up. He didn't work as much as they did, and I'm not critical of the way they do it, maybe this wasn't the best way to operate. He didn't have the caucus get together and try to figure out a position, he kind of decided what was the best position, working with people in the caucus, and then sold it to people. And I think his intellect and his popularity enabled him to be successful in that way, and certainly the capital gains is an example of that.

DD: There was also some criticism for that style.

RR: Yes, and that's why I say, I'm not saying that that was a preferable style, but it was a style that worked with him and it - I think it was perhaps a bit of his personality, the caucus at the time, and his abilities.

DD: Health care, you were, we touched on this before, and Chris Williams, who's been interviewed elsewhere by Brien, has talked about the policy pieces of this, but there were on the, however you guys divided it up, I know you did the financing side of it, but could talk a little bit about Senator Mitchell serving on the Finance Committee where he developed his bona fides, so to speak, on health care with various bills, long-term care and whatnot, that I know was in '88, and spousal impoverishment and catastrophic care, and then the health care effort in '93 and '94 with the Clinton administration.

RR: Sure. Mitchell was a very strong proponent of universal health care, and as you know, I wasn't a health care person but I was in my role as economics, tax, financing, budget, whatever, I was part of the effort with Chris on comprehensive health care reform. And so I think starting probably in, well, going back maybe to the late '80s and early '90s, Mitchell, with Riegle and Kennedy and Rockefeller, I think Pryor a little bit as well, we had this working group for like three years, four years, a couple of Congresses, that developed legislation for comprehensive health care reform, and countless meetings, most of them I think in Riegle's office on the first floor of Dirksen, and came up with legislation. And I remember during the Clinton campaign, the legislation that we worked on became somewhat of a basis for Clinton's - and I wouldn't want to say that Clinton wouldn't have done this - but there was kind of a basis for what Clinton worked on during the campaign and what he advocated, so when he was elected, there was a basis to begin work on it.

And you also mentioned catastrophic care, which I was not as involved in, the catastrophic care legislation, which was kind of a debacle for the Democratic Party. So there was an act, and it actually had higher income elderly helping finance it with a surtax or something and there was the incident with the elderly people in Illinois on the hood of, or surrounding Rostenkowski's car. And after initially Democrats not backing down - and AARP was very much behind this legislation - ultimately everyone had to back down and they repealed the law. But I am pretty sure, if you go back and check, Mitchell was just stubborn about it, adamant, he wasn't willing to fold.

DD: He and Dole together, if you recall, were not willing to fold, and it was McCain who often came to the floor to cause great angst and shenanigans to make us miserable.

RR: And when the final vote occurred, I seem to recall there were a handful, maybe eleven senators, and Mitchell was one of them, I'm not sure Dole stuck it out that long, but he just thought that was the wrong thing, because he believed so much in extending coverage. So when Clinton was elected -

DD: But before Clinton, there was long-term care, some work that he had done on the Finance Committee, he had done throughout, which was a long-term care bill in '88 and some

other measures that he did before. Can you speak to that?

RR: I remember working on that a bit but I'm going to have to take a pass on commenting on that, because I don't really think that my recollection of it is that strong.

DD: Okay, I'm sure Chris has, thank you.

RR: So health care reform, the Clinton health care plan – that was another debacle, to say the least. And of course the consideration of health care was put off for a year, because the first year was devoted to deficit reduction, we had the major deficit reduction bill of 1993. And so while there were a lot of discussions, meetings with the White House, these task forces, and there was a lot done on health care in '93 behind the scenes, it really wasn't something that Congress devoted attention to until '94.

And Mitchell was a complete ally of the White House on this and worked very closely with the First Lady and helped make sure that her efforts in the Senate were, I guess helped sell it to the caucus. So we were part of that effort, a lot of people don't want to admit to being part of it but of course we were the leaders, we were part of it. And I really think that a lot of what's written about the health care debate is kind of revisionist thinking, stories about, well we could have cut a deal with the Republicans, or that this was all top down and that Congress didn't have a role, I think that's wildly exaggerated, because I do believe that Congress had a huge role.

One of the things that was very difficult, I don't think we necessarily managed it very well either, in our office or at the White House, but we didn't have everybody singing from the same hymn, and we didn't have good cooperation. Ted Kennedy and the Labor, well I think it was called the Labor Committee then and HELP [i.e. Health, Education, Labor & Pensions] Committee today, were total supporters. [] Ted Kennedy was a stand-up guy, liked George Mitchell, wanting to completely work with the White House and help get universal health care passed into law. But we had considerable more problems with the Finance Committee, which also played a key role.

DD: And there were two committees that were required?

RR: Yes, the Labor Committee at the time and the Finance Committee were the two committees that had, just like today, they both had jurisdiction. They share jurisdiction in certain areas, and in other areas they have their own jurisdiction [over health issues]. So we weren't getting the cooperation from Senator Moynihan, who really, he was a problem, not just on health care but on all issues. He evidently did not like --

DD: (*Unintelligible*).

RR: I'm not even going to say that, Diane, because I don't believe that, I don't believe in -

DD: Okay, go ahead.

RR: So at one point, I believe I heard this from George Mitchell, I may have heard it from somebody else, Bill Clinton told Mitchell that the worst personnel decision he made was to make Lloyd Bentsen secretary of the treasury. And the reason was because Bentsen was the chair of the Finance Committee and his move to Treasury meant that Moynihan became the chair, and Moynihan's goal in life seemed to be making things as unpleasant as possible for the president and for the majority leader. And there are so many stories that I could tell about that. I don't want this to be about Moynihan, but as they affected Mitchell, it was like every week. I don't think it started, but it was made worse when somebody at the White House was quoted in the paper as saying that, you know, the question was put, "Well what are you going to do with Moynihan?" And I think the answer was, "We'll roll Moynihan at the right time." So that was something that Moynihan always cited.

DD: It was early in the administration.

RR: And it was early in the administration, because Moynihan just wasn't a true believer in health care reform. So every week he would do something to make the White House and the majority leader jump through hoops on his behalf. And I believe that the White House and the majority leader handled it the wrong way, because they jumped through hoops every time. He bent over, and they kissed his ass every time, basically. Can I say that on this? Sorry.

DD: Well, you did say it.

RR: And he would go on the talk shows on Sunday, not having a clue what the hell he was talking about, and he would pontificate, and part of that pontification would be stabbing the White House in the back in some way.

DD: And it was often Mitchell who had to bring it back around so that whatever damage had been done -

RR: Right, Mitchell had to clean up after him. So there was such a battle over the jurisdiction on the health care bill. And one of the things that Moynihan did, because he was so jealous of Kennedy and upset with Kennedy, he decided to put a standing hold on any bill that came out of that Labor Committee. So any bill, no matter what kind, you couldn't pass through the Senate, you had to clear it through the Finance Committee, because he was worried about jurisdiction.

DD: Could you explain a hold?

RR: Well, a hold being that, basically, before any bill goes through the Senate, most legislation moves by unanimous consent, or it's brought up on unanimous consent on a motion to proceed before you actually debate it. So there's a process for getting clearance from every office to make sure that every senator is fine with that, so you clear a number of bills by unanimous consent that way. So by putting a hold on it, it means you have to be consulted before a bill moves, so he could just be a pain in the butt to Kennedy.

So as this process went forward, Labor reported out a health care bill, and much like the debate this year actually but for different reasons, the Finance Committee was much later, Moynihan just would not move a bill. The White House and the majority leader kept urging him to get ready to move a bill, and finally Moynihan agreed to move a bill, but rather than moving a bill through a process that was a serious legislative process where you have, you know, whether it be back room discussions where you try to work out a consensus, or maybe get all the Democratic votes for the bill, and try to work with Republicans, Moynihan decided that he wouldn't treat this seriously, he would just move a bill in one day, in one morning. So he'd basically railroaded a bill through committee; that was his intent.

And that's not what we wanted, that's really not something that furthered the process. Everybody knew that Labor would pass a bill, Finance would pass a bill, and the majority leader would then put a bill together, but nevertheless, for the Finance chairman to treat the process so cavalierly did not help at all.

DD: Wasn't there also a tremendous effort leading up to this of Mitchell acting as and shuttling diplomacy on advising the White House on how best to put this together and to work different members and -

RR: Oh yes, I'm kind of skipping things. Diane is, can you -?

DD: No, no, you need to speak to that.

RR: Yes, Diane raised the question, in case it doesn't come through, about whether, wasn't there a lot of effort before that of shuttled diplomacy. Yes, there were countless efforts, meetings, working with the caucus.

DD: Can you address that, and also the issue of reconciliation, about whether to do it on reconci-, wasn't that a big issue, as to whether to do it on reconciliation, and Senator Byrd's role in that?

RR: Yes. Hold that thought. This was in '94, the Finance markup probably occurred in June I would guess, I don't know the exact date, but before that, yes, there were countless meetings and efforts and briefing sessions and all kinds of discussions occurred well before that, with the entire caucus, with the Finance Committee, that Mitchell led, and with the active participation of Hillary to get the Senate comfortable with the health care legislation and it wasn't something where the White House came up with a plan. They did a very detailed plan with legislative language, but it wasn't something that, that they came up with a plan and said, okay, you got to do this. It was: here's our plan, you work from this and make the changes that are necessary to get it through the Senate.

And I point that out because, first of all, George Mitchell would not have operated that way, he would not just have taken somebody else's paper. But also that's the conventional wisdom

today, that that's what happened, and that's not what happened. And I point that out because at the time, they did work out a lot of details, and there was legislation drafted, it was thought that that would be useful. Now in this year's health care reform debate, Obama didn't do that, because everybody thinks one of the lessons from '94 was, don't be too specific. I don't really think that that's what killed the bill at all in '94, and a lot of people are criticizing Obama now for not being as involved. He is as involved, it's just not perhaps seen as much in the public.

Back to Mitchell. So there were a lot of meetings, with a lot of efforts to reach out to Republicans, there were a lot of discussions with John Chafee, who was close to Mitchell, there were a lot of discussions with Dole, and there was a group of moderates led by Breaux as well, and so there were a lot of outreach efforts, a lot of efforts to: how do we get this done? One of the things that went on that was – I'm going to get back to this Finance markup in a second – but one of the interesting things that went on with health care, but not only with health care, is that, I was talking about Moynihan and the very bad relationship we had with Moynihan, and it wasn't just George Mitchell. Just an aside, I remember talking to Daschle, right before I left the Senate when Mitchell retired, I remember going by and having a courtesy call with Daschle. He was about to become the Democratic leader, and he was reminiscing about how difficult Moynihan [was], and he said that was his goal, was to have a good relationship with Moynihan, and it didn't work out that way of course. Because it's natural for any Finance Committee chair for there to be tension with the leader, because the leader's trying to tell you what to do, when you can do it, how you can do it, and you're chairman of the Finance Committee, you think you're more important. So that's natural, but let's just say Moynihan took it well beyond that.

[p/o] If Mitchell wanted to get the Democratic members of the Finance Committee together [to talk strategy], he couldn't call the meeting, Moynihan insisted that he had to call the meeting together, and it had to be, not in the leader's office, but it had to be in the Finance Committee room over in Dirksen, or the room that they had in the Capitol, on the fourth floor of the Capitol. And then at times when he would call the full committee together (Dole was the Republican leader, so you had the two leaders on the committee), and [] Moynihan did everything he could, and was very close to and worked well with Dole, and with Packwood, who was the Finance ranking Republican. So if there was a meeting that he would call, and people would get together, he would begin the meeting, even if Mitchell said 'I'm coming,' he would begin the meeting before Mitchell got there. However, if he called the meeting and Dole wasn't there, everybody would wait until Dole got there. So he bent over backwards to be nice to Dole and to be really, I think, mean and difficult for the majority leader, for Mitchell.

So he finally calls the markup of the health care bill, and he's jamming it through and it's very unseemly, and the members are speaking and they're saying, this is terrible, it's a bad process, and Dole in particular, the guy who Moynihan sucked up to all the time, just is very, very critical of Moynihan and the way this is handled, and he's just going on and on and on being very critical. And so after he speaks, Moynihan calls on Mitchell and Mitchell is praising Moynihan, just going well beyond the call of duty. Not perfunctory praise.

DD: *(Unintelligible)*.

RR: Well, no, I was shocked, and [later that afternoon we were] back later in 221 in [the leader's] office and I said, "What were you doing there with Moynihan? Why did you go on and on, and what a great chairman he was?" And he looked at me and he goes, "I didn't even ask to be called on." In other words, Moynihan recognized him to defend [his abuse of the Committee process—a process Mitchell didn't agree with]—and Mitchell went well beyond the call of duty [defending Moynihan].

So they reported out a bill, and I think it was a bit of a charade, and it didn't help the process by any means. So the next step was for Mitchell to put together the legislation to take the Labor Committee bill and to take the Finance bill and put this into a form that could get through the Senate. And I remember that, as today, we spent so much time working with CBO, and there was this great exchange, and I saved the exchange. An aside: This is actually before, I think this was a hearing before the Finance markup, and the head of CBO, Robert Reischauer appeared, and Mitchell walked him through CBO findings about the bill, and it was the most brilliant walk through. He had the best – I may have mentioned in the early one, when Mitchell went to the Finance Committee he, whether for a hearing or whatever, he showed his prosecutorial skills, he'd ask a question, he followed up.

Well, Reischauer appeared and Mitchell walked him through all the great things that appeared, and he would say, "Well did you find that it did this?" And he would say this and Mitchell would repeat it like once or twice, and he just made his points brilliantly. And in fact, later that day the White House put out, they had like a daily press release on health care, and all they put out was this transcript, it's like two- or three-page transcript of Mitchell's exchange with Reischauer, it was so brilliant.

So the bill's reported, and it's Mitchell's job to put the bill together, to take the two bills, and a lot of work with CBO, a lot of hands-on work on his part, a lot of caucuses with the Democrats to try to figure out what would work, but ultimately we just could not get the votes together. And I remember in August of '94, I think we went in the first week of recess, then the second week of recess, and finally -

DD: Which is unheard of.

RR: Which is unheard of, because a lot of people had to cancel their plans. And finally the pressure was just too great, we couldn't get the votes together, and so we were going to be, Mitchell was going to call a recess and say, "We'll come back and do this in September." And this is not necessarily about Mitchell, but it's about the events that occurred at the time, and this was the first two years of the Clinton presidency, which, the White House was just notoriously -

DD: Three months before Congressional elections.

RR: Yes, they were notoriously undisciplined, leaking all the time, just absurd. So we're

about to pull the plug, not on the bill but on consideration in August, before we come back in September, and we all understood in the Majority Leader's Office that the bill was not dead, we couldn't give any hint that it was dead, but we got all these calls. Diane, you got calls, I got calls, others got calls from different people in the White House: "Don't do anything to suggest the process is dead." Of course we're not going to do that. So Mitchell decides it's time for a recess, and the next day there's an article in the paper about pulling the health care bill, and there's a quote from an unnamed White House source, "The bill is dead." And that was pretty typical. So, and it was dead, but we continued in September.

DD: It was on life support, perhaps.

RR: Well, we knew it was dead, but we didn't want to say that.

DD: We still had the machinery hooked up.

RR: In fact, some staff stayed and missed the entire August recess, some Mitchell staff, maybe all Mitchell staff. I missed it.

DD: And Mitchell.

RR: Missed it probably, yes.

DD: Well, it was Kennedy who was the, but Kennedy was the holdout, Kennedy was also the one that Mitchell had to convince.

RR: Yes, Kennedy was indefatigable on wanting to get this done, as was Mitchell, but I think Mitchell was a little more -

DD: Realistic.

RR: More realistic, and as the process went through and we kept reducing the universality of the coverage because you make decisions on [how to pay for it] and on difficult regulation, and the result is you go back from a hundred percent to ninety-eight percent to ninety-four percent or whatever, and we just couldn't go back enough to get enough votes. Because the Republicans ultimately decided that [they opposed all legislation]. Even [the bill] that they were [originally] willing to advance, when the bill got to the floor you couldn't even work out a compromise to get their bill, because they retreated. Much like today, they decided it was better not to [support anything], even though there were more Republican moderates, they just decided it was better to vote no.

And of course they were proven right, because the '94 election [was] a debacle for the Democratic Party. There's lots of reasons it was a debacle but one reason is something, I think it's a lesson that people, the Democrats have today that is a true lesson, and that is that when you work on something major, and you can't do it because some Democrats are concerned that some

constituencies will be mad, that's really a shortsighted way to look at it. Ultimately you're just going to make your supporters angry, they're not going to have a reason to come out and vote for you, and that's what happened in '94, because we failed in health care, I think that was a large reason. Not just failed on health care, but we failed on other things as well, there were a lot of reasons. [You] mentioned the gun vote, there are a lot of reasons you can cite: there was the House bank scandal, and there was Clinton's lower ratings, [et cetera].

DD: Wasn't there an attempt, can you talk about before it was pulled, and Mitchell's valiant effort to keep it going, and how close at one point some people thought we were in the winter, but as the months went on the realization that it wasn't going to. Could you talk a little bit about the effort made with the moderates, because as I recall, there was a huge effort made and the White House was banking on some of the moderates coming around, and it was Mitchell's role to kind of explain that we were never going to get those guys, and the White House was banking somewhat on Breaux and that crew. That's how I recall some of this, but I'm just wondering what your perspective on that was.

RR: Well, I don't remember it in detail, but I do remember that Breaux was a leader of the moderates, there was a Republican-Democratic group and they met in Chafee's office just down from 207, and they were very active on health care, and I think it was a serious effort. And Chafee was a Republican moderate who was close to Mitchell, they were both on the Environment and Public Works Committee, they were the chair and the ranking member of the Pollution Subcommittee in the '80s, before Mitchell became leader, and worked well together. And Breaux, I want to say Breaux could be difficult because he was a moderate, he wasn't with the leadership all the time, but quite often when you needed him, he was a standup player, and I think Mitchell and Breaux worked very well together.

One of the ways that Breaux had of operating, which he did with Mitchell [quite often]; while he wouldn't be with you, and he would work with Republicans, he would come and tell you everything that he was up to, and I think that built a trust. He wouldn't [be with you, but] he would tell you right up front. But other than the fact that there were lots of meetings and discussions with this group, I don't remember the – I should have looked at my notes, and if you could stop it I could, I actually have notes that I can look at.

DD: I'm sure that we've got this.

RR: You've got other people, okay.

DD: Was there anything else -?

RR: And of course Mitchell was a, I'm not sure to what extent his ability to influence his members was undermined by his decision to retire. I think he made his decision in May?

DD: March 4.

RR: March 4? He announced it March 4?

DD: Hmm-hmm.

RR: Okay, and -

DD: Twelve days before I had my first child.

RR: Really. So I think that when you're leader and you are retiring, it probably undermines your ability to some extent to influence your caucus. One of the senses I had and I think that we all had in the leader's office, is how little leverage you have as leader. Mitchell used to say he had a very strong patience muscle, and when you're leader there's just not a lot of things you can take away [from a senator]. If you're a chairman you can prevent [members] from getting legislation, and when you're leader you always need somebody's vote so you really are disinclined to punish anybody, you're certainly disinclined to do anything that would undermine their reelection. So it can be a very difficult job, and you have to get people to go along with you by appealing to them intellectually, emotionally, personally, and nothing was ever easy. And I think it's a little more difficult when everybody knows you're not going to be leader the next year. And I can't point at anything in particular, but I think it was a little bit harder.

Mitchell also used to say, and I think this is relevant to today, when you have the crazies that come out, the lunatic fringe, which is always in existence in America – John Hilley reminded me of this recently – that when Democrats would come back, let's say after a recess or whatever, or maybe they somehow respond to some right wing lunatics that were attacking Congress, Mitchell used to say, at least to the staff, maybe to the caucus, that the only people in America who listen to these crazy people are Senate Democrats.

DD: We wanted to, if there was anything that you recall, and I can't remember exactly what it was, with regard to campaign finance reform, but I think we covered that pretty well before. But if you could address two things, and then we can finish up. One was, in general, Mitchell's leadership style and working with the members, just in general, not with regard to a specific issue. And two, the state of Maine and working with Senator Cohen.

RR: Okay, well leadership style we talked a little bit about. Mitchell had two good friends I think, I mean he had a lot of friends, but he had particularly two senators that he worked closely with. One of them in particular had a very similar demeanor and intellect to Mitchell and was often a shill in the caucus, speaking up to support Mitchell's point of view, and that was Paul Sarbanes, both very cerebral members. Paul Sarbanes was just a great member, very low profile, used to drive his office crazy because he would never seek press on anything, but he was very influential with Mitchell, they actually did some things socially together, which senators don't do that much of, and I think two kind of subdued individuals. Sarbanes was not nearly as well respected, I mean I think he was intellectually, but not as a politician and not as a leader.

DD: Externally he was.

RR: Externally. Internally he had a lot of influence because people respected him so much. And he would always support Mitchell, and he would often go down to the floor with – well let me, before I go there, the other person who Mitchell was close to, who I really think personality wise was different than the other two, and I think he was smarter than people thought but he didn't give the appearance of being an intellectual giant, maybe it was his accent, but a really great guy though, was Jim Sasser, the chairman of the Budget Committee, who Mitchell particularly had to work closely with because all the '90 and the '93 budget deals were with Sasser.

And the three of them would actually do things, a little bit socially together, but they would be together and they would support each other, and particularly those two would support Mitchell. And they would go to the floor with another senator, Don Riegle, I think Don Riegle retired a little earlier, but they would go to the floor and we'd have a theme that we wanted them to discuss and they'd go to the floor and hold forth, they had charts, and make their arguments. And because a lot of times in the leadership you have a theme that you want to get across and you try to get members to go to the floor and talk about that theme, and it was always difficult to do, there weren't a lot of members who wanted to do that, but you could always get Sasser and Sarbanes, and earlier, Riegle to do that.

I'll just also talk about leadership, the role of the leader, and I was talking about he had to have a really strong patience muscle, and I think we've talked about it before, how well he got along with Dole. And the reason – it doesn't always happen – but one reason that the two leaders might have a good working relationship, or at least a good personal relationship is because they are in the same position, they're both dealing with [] very difficult caucus[es]. And because the leader doesn't have that much leverage over [his] members, you have some members that are always extorting something from them. And the one impression that I had from working in the leadership, was that there was a certain percentage of the caucus, twenty-five percent, fifteen percent, twenty, whatever, that would just extort all the time, they would extort something from the leader for their vote. Even when they had to give you a vote, they extorted. And I'm sure it just wore Mitchell out. It wore me out, as a staffer. It was just ridiculous.

And I think that's one reason Mitchell retired. He wanted to do more things, he wanted to make money, but I think he just grew tired of working with these -

DD: Herding cats.

RR: Herding cats. [p/o] Many of the [senators were] intellectually very strong, very impressive people, but some of them had a tendency to just want to extort all the time. Maybe three-quarters of the caucus were standup people, maybe half, that would give your vote -

DD: I don't think we need to put a number to it.

RR: Okay, we don't have to do that, but, so anyway, I just think that gets to be exasperating

after a while, and I think he was exasperated. I think Sarbanes was going to retire in '93, I think he may have mentioned that to Mitchell, Mitchell talked him out of it and then Mitchell decided, 'I can't put up with this any longer,' and it was a shock to Sarbanes at the time, after Mitchell had talked him into staying.

What was the other issue?

DD: Maine and Cohen.

RR: Maine and Cohen.

DD: And I don't know what issues you worked on for Maine specifically, besides the Clean Air and the -

RR: Well until he became leader, I used to do trade issues, which I really didn't like to do because Maine was very much a protectionist state. I used to say there were more people in Maine who knew what the International Trade Commission was, per capita, the awareness of the International Trade Commission was higher in Maine than in any other state, because their industries were always taking cases to the ITC to seek import relief for hard wood lumber, for fish, for potatoes, for shoes, for textiles. And Mitchell was, his mother of course worked in a textile mill, Mitchell was very sympathetic. Mitchell went beyond the call of duty in serving Maine. When he became leader, he went back to Maine more than he had when he wasn't leader, because he didn't want anybody to think, when he became leader, that he became too big for Maine.

He went back to Maine more than the rest of the delegation, and he was just totally committed, and part of that commitment was, he was a bit of a trade protectionist, in spite of the advice that his, I mean I didn't even try to advise him otherwise, but he became leader, and there were national issues like NAFTA. Mitchell was very late to support NAFTA. Here's the president, his president he supported all the time, he was one of the last people to make up their mind about NAFTA. I remember John Hilley and I were in his office [discussing] economic theory, about jobs in a rich country, and where those jobs ought to be [with] education and training, and Mitchell wasn't prepared to support NAFTA because he wanted to hold on to those low skilled, low income jobs.

But certainly before he became leader, he was fighting and testifying before the ITC, protecting the shoe industry. I remember, I started working in '85 for Mitchell, I think in '85, '86, maybe '87 the shoe industry was just decimated, I think they lost half their employment, and it was very tough on Mitchell because he identified with those workers and he cared about Maine. And so trade was not something that he was inclined to be a statesman on, and even to support President Clinton on NAFTA. But he did eventually support him.

So anyway, Mitchell I think particularly started working closely with Cohen, I mean they were, Cohen was first in the House and Mitchell was in the Senate, and I think he -

DD: He was a senior senator, he was a senator. He served in the House (*unintelligible*) Mitchell.

RR: I'm sorry. They were on the Iran-Contra Committee together, and then they wrote a book together about that, and I think that was an experience that brought them closer together. Whenever you have two members from the same state, whether they're from the same party or not, there's always a certain rivalry at the staff level to get each member out in front of an issue. And Mitchell, although he didn't care for Cohen's chief of staff, because I think of the '82 campaigns and things that went on, he worked very well with Cohen, I think he really liked Cohen, and certainly there wasn't a rivalry at the member level that there was at the staff level, and I think we worked pretty well with Cohen even at the staff level. So it's my impression that they worked very well together and were good friends, and they were both, I think, intellectually capable.

Interesting story that somebody else probably told, that after Mitchell left the Senate and was going to become secretary of state, I guess there's no reason for me to tell a story about that?

DD: Go ahead, you started.

RR: Well John Hilley, I'm sure, has much more information on this, because John Hilley was head of leg[islative] affairs [at the White House]. But I happened to be in Hilley's office when he was head of leg affairs, and Mitchell called one day, and Mitchell was going to meet with the president to discuss his impending nomination to be secretary of state, and they were considering Cohen to be secretary of defense at the same time. And I remember John advising him, don't say anything bad about Cohen because they've picked him to be Defense secretary, and you're not going to help your cause if you say anything; you should be supportive of Cohen as secretary of defense. And I had the impression that Mitchell had been selected to be secretary of state, from talking to John and from John's conversation with Mitchell in front of me, and a few days later they picked Madeleine Albright to be secretary of state.

DD: Oh, was this in round two? Because it was Christopher first.

RR: Well, this was to replace Christopher, this was after Mitchell had been gone from the Senate, and I don't know what happened but I think people assume that Hillary got involved in some way and urged [that Bill name] the first female secretary of state. But at least at one time, I think Mitchell thought it was his. I certainly thought it was his, and I was there when Hilley was telling him it was his.

DD: Oops.

RR: Oops. And it must have been difficult for Mitchell to have thought that he had the job or was going to get, had a good chance to get the job, and instead his Republican colleague, Mitchell wasn't in the Senate at the time, Cohen I believe still was, but it must have been

difficult for him when Cohen got that job.

DD: I think we're about wrapping up here. Is there anything that I've forgotten, or we haven't covered? I know that you spent many years with him and were able to observe on many different occasions, is there any other stories that you would like to share? I think we've covered most of the big issues that I've been asked to cover.

RR: I could jump around a little bit with stories. Well, I joined the staff when Mitchell was head of the Senatorial Campaign Committee, and I remember one, I'm spilling the beans on everything, I remember first of all -

DD: (*Unintelligible*).

RR: I do?

DD: Yeah, you do. It's going to have your name attached to it.

RR: Okay. First of all, I'm not sure if I said this in my previous time, but in the ten years I worked for George Mitchell, I never had anything related to money and policy. I went to one campaign event; I'm not sure why I went to that, but it just -

DD: You did say that.

RR: Okay, but did I also say that there was one meeting that occurred where somebody came in to lobby an issue, when Mitchell was head of the Campaign Committee, and this was a former member who represented independent oil, and this was during tax reform, and he told Mitchell, this was the only time I ever was in a meeting where money was discussed, he said, "If you take this position I think I can raise you a lot of money," the Campaign Committee. And you could tell, as soon as he said that, Mitchell just kind of, you could tell by his body language that Mitchell just totally shut down the idea that Mitchell would do that. You couldn't say anything more likely to elicit the opposite of what that guy wanted, a former member of Congress whose name I will not mention, okay, from Oklahoma.

DD: Any other stories that you might -?

RR: I'm sure there are others, because as I was talking about Cohen I was about to tell some story but then it left my mind.

DD: Happens at our age.

RR: It happens at our age, yes.

DD: You don't have to.

RR: No, well one thing, we were talking about Sasser before, I probably mentioned that it was really Sasser and Mitchell in '90 that insisted, when they went to the White House, that the President Bush had to eat his words on no new taxes. I think I already mentioned that.

DD: Yes, you did.

RR: I don't know, if you could stop this I could search my memory, but you can't, so -

DD: I'm technically unable.

RR: Is there anything that, any other things that -

DD: I think we've covered the issues that we've been asked to cover, and if there's something else that you must say, I can always come back, because it's always nice to see you.

RR: No, I'm not going to do that.

DD: Okay, thank you, Bobby.

RR: Thank you.

End of Interview