


11-21-2008

Interview with Christine Williams by Brien Williams

Christine G. Williams

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Recommended Citation

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George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Christine Williams

(Interviewer: Brien Williams)

GMOH# 050

November 21, 2008

Brien Williams: All right, this is an oral history interview with Christine Williams for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College in Maine. We are in Ms. Williams's home in Chevy Chase, Maryland, today is Friday, November 21, 2008, and I am Brien Williams. I'd like to start by asking you to give your full name and spelling of your name, and the date and place of your birth, and your parents' names.

Christine Williams: My name is Christine G. Williams, that's Christine with a C-H-R-I-S-T-I-N-E, and I was born in Boston, Massachusetts, January 20, 1952. My parents are Donald and Adelaide Williams; they currently live in Concord, Massachusetts.

BW: Good. I wanted to start out today with a little bit of your New England background, so tell us a little bit about where you grew up and so forth.

CW: Well, I grew up primarily in Massachusetts. My father is a Methodist minister, and the Methodists move, that's sort of part of the whole denominational psychology, if you will, and so I was born in Boston but I lived in five or six towns in Massachusetts. I went to Boston University and I majored in history and graduated with a degree in education to teach, really, social studies, history, et cetera. And after I graduated from college, my first year I became a VISTA volunteer and I taught on the Rosebud reservation in South Dakota. That was actually my first time living outside of New England and it was quite a change.

After [one year], I came back from South Dakota [and] then went to Maine and I taught at Brunswick High School, and [for] the 1975-76 school year. So I lived in Maine, or as they say, I wintered over, I wasn't just a summer person, and so that was really one of my connections to Maine, that I'd lived there, I taught at a high school in Brunswick, which is just north of Portland. I taught high school and community college social studies, history, and political science for about eight years, [in South Dakota, Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts].

I was always interested in politics. I taught four years in New Hampshire, and while I was there I worked on the Kennedy campaign in 1980 as a volunteer. After having taught for most of my twenties I decided to go to Washington. I just decided to go there and see if I could get involved with politics more directly. I had a younger sister who had gone to American University and was living in Washington, and so I came down and moved in with her.

And unfortunately, it was 1981 and Ronald Reagan had just been elected, so it was not a good

time to be a Democrat coming to Washington looking for a job, because there were a lot of people out of work. But fortunately, after about six months of pounding the pavements, I was hired in Senator Mitchell's office. This was February of 1982, and at that time [Senator Mitchell] had been appointed, in 1980, to finish out Ed Muskie's term when Muskie became secretary of state, so when I was hired he was still an appointed senator filling out Muskie's term. And I was actually hired originally to run the mail operation, which was not a great job but it was a foot in the door, and after six months of looking I was happy to have the job. And I was very happy to have a job working for a New England senator, because I am a New Englander and that's very important to me, and it was important for me to stay connected to New England so I was very happy that I got that job.

I ran the mail operation for a couple of years, and that was a thankless job but someone had to do it. And during that time there was a lot of transition. A lot of the old Muskie staff had stayed on to work for Mitchell. In fact, I don't think he made any changes when he first took over for Muskie. Gradually over that period there was transition and people left, [including] Estelle Lavoie [] the [person] doing his health, human services, social security, you name it, all the social service kinds of things. She had gone to law school and decided to go back to Maine to practice law, and I was promoted to take her job as a legislative assistant [].

It was about 1984 that I became a legislative assistant for the Senator, and as you probably know, he sat on the Senate Finance Committee, which had jurisdiction over health, social security, welfare, and a number of other programs. And, so at first I had a fairly broad portfolio, but health was always the predominant area because it was the most demanding, it was one of the most challenging. The committee had jurisdiction over Medicare and Medicaid, and so even though I had some other responsibilities, most of my time was spent doing health care issues.

In 1987 Senator Mitchell became the chair of the Health Subcommittee of the Finance Committee, and so at that point in time my portfolio was limited to just health, because we felt like this was going to be [very demanding]. Unfortunately, the way the Finance Committee worked, he did not get any committee staff, so he had to do all the work of the Health Subcommittee still just using his own staff. And in the Senate, budgets are apportioned by populations in the state, so because Maine is a small population he didn't have a big budget, and therefore didn't have [any] financial leeway to hire more staff.

To try to meet the challenges of him assuming the committee chairmanship [], we brought on some health fellows. And our first health fellow [] in 1987 was a Robert Wood Johnson Fellow, policy fellow, named Greg Paulson, [] a geriatrician. He was fantastic, and he really helped us a great deal that first year [] Mitchell chaired the Health Subcommittee. Because Greg was a doctor he understood a lot of the clinical issues, and he and I really assumed responsibility for the committee. Greg [] took some initiative to work on a couple of pieces of legislation, and one of the most important pieces of legislation that Greg really did a lot of the groundwork on was nursing home reform.

The Robert Wood Johnson Fellows actually are placed in Hill offices for about nine months. It's

a twelve-month fellowship, but they spend their first three months in orientation so they're actually only nine months on the job []. Greg Paulson was very, very prolific and did a lot of work in nine months, and he did all of the basic drafting and groundwork for the nursing home reform legislation. He then left me with the responsibility of negotiating with the House – in this case it was Henry Waxman and Pete Stark – to get this bill through the conference, which we did. And this bill is now known as OBRA '87, and it is really a landmark piece of legislation [] improving the quality of care in the nation's nursing homes, and I consider it one of the Senator's significant [legislative achievements] in health care [].

Greg was able to really focus on that, while I did many, many other things. And I always had the responsibility of both national federal issues and anything pertaining to Maine. So any health care issue in Maine, if the Maine Hospital Association came down and had an issue, or the Maine Medical Association, I was responsible for those issues, responsible for those relationships, as well as anything that was happening in the Senate Finance Committee, and as well as anything that might come to the Senate floor that would come out of the then Labor and Human Resources Committee, which was chaired by Senator Kennedy.

So I had a very broad scope of responsibility in health care, and it was really bringing on some of these [] senior health Fellows that allowed us to do some of the things that we were able to do, particularly during the two years the Senator chaired the Health Subcommittee. And as you probably know, Senator Mitchell is a very, very smart man. He, I believe he is the brightest person that I've ever known, and he's a very, very quick study.

I had been a high school teacher prior to working for him, and I'll never forget one of the first times I had to go in and brief him, after I assumed responsibilities for the legislative side, and I explained whatever the issue was to him. And then I said, "And Senator, another way to understand this is," and he interrupted me, he said, "Chris, I got it the first time." And so clearly, you didn't have to explain something to him twice.

He's self-deprecating to a point and always saying, "Well I'm not an expert in this area, I don't really know health care," which he didn't, I mean he was not an expert in health care. But he was so bright and he was such a quick study that he quickly became very knowledgeable and very well versed in many of the intricacies of Medicare, which get into the minutia of payment policy, [and] also some of the bigger, larger issues.

So after the first year, [with] such a positive experience with Greg Paulson, we got another Robert Wood Johnson Fellow for the second year, [] Bob Crittenden. Bob was also a physician; he was a family practitioner from the state of Washington. And Bob was not only a physician, but he had been very immersed in policy issues at the state level, particularly with regard to expansions and coverage. Washington state had been one of the very early states to try to look to see how they could cover the uninsured. When Bob came to work with us, which was about 1988, he began to focus on issues around health insurance and expanding coverage for the uninsured. And Bob actually did a lot of early work for the Senator leading up to what eventually became, [after] the election of President Clinton, [] health care reform.

So we'd actually been working on this a couple of years before Clinton was elected, looking at the issues, looking at what some of the barriers and challenges were, and so in the second year of Senator Mitchell's tenure as chair of the Health Subcommittee, we began to turn our attention to access issues. During those two years he was chairman, we became pretty involved with long term care and nursing home reform and other long term care issues, and then health reform. And these are two very big, big issues.

During the time that I worked with the Senator, we actually drafted two comprehensive long term care bills that were social insurance bills. Now these bills were never enacted, there was a lot of debate about them, but the Mitchell long term care bills at that time became really central in the debate about long term care, and how are we going to cover people, you know, how much were we going to focus on nursing home versus home care, et cetera. And then on the access side, on covering the uninsured, some of the early work that was done, with Bob Crittenden being the lead, fed into subsequent activity around health reform.

So we were very [] active, and Senator Mitchell, within two very short years, became really known in the Senate as very knowledgeable on health care, and I would say on the Senate Finance Committee was one of the one or two or three people, members of that committee, that people really looked to for expertise in health care. And I said that to him on an occasion, and he said, "Well Chris, that scares me." You know, to think [] he was the expert – but he really was. And so he was very engaged, and they're very difficult issues on a number of fronts.

We also at that time became very interested in the issue of outcomes research and looking at area practice variations. [John E.] Jack Wennberg, who was at Dartmouth, had done a lot of work looking at how medical treatment varies dramatically from one geographical location to another. He had done some very early studies, for example, comparing hospitalizations in New Haven versus Boston, and showing that you were much more likely to get certain kinds of surgery if you lived in Boston than if you lived in New Haven.

And so Wennberg did some studies using Maine physicians and looking at the practice variations across the state of Maine. Wennberg got some Maine doctors, including the head of the Maine Medical Association, very interested in these practice variations, and so out of that work the Maine Medical Association created an organization called the Maine Medical Assessment Foundation, [] to look at outcomes of care and variations in practice.

Bob Keller, who was the head of the Maine Medical Assessment Foundation, and Jack Wennberg came to Washington and said to Senator Mitchell, "You know, Senator, we really need to do this at the national level, we need to look at why we have such great variations in practice that cost so much more in one area than another area." So out of those discussions and [] what was happening in Maine, the Senator became very interested in outcomes research, and we wrote a couple of pieces of legislation that ultimately became part of a law that was passed in 1989 that created what is now called the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality, where I now work.

And this agency was created to give more national attention to the variations in practice and to look at outcomes, and to develop recommendations for physicians about what works and what doesn't work. And even today, twenty years later, many people, including the head of the Congressional Budget Office, still believe that thirty to fifty percent of what we spend in health care is absolutely ineffective and unnecessary care. And it is a major driver of the cost escalation in the health care system. And so even after twenty years of [the] agency's now being in existence, and a lot more attention being paid to this, we still haven't solved this problem. Now that we're beginning to talk about health care reform again in 2008, there is [] much more attention being paid to this issue as part of comprehensive health care reform than there was fifteen years ago. There was some talk about it then, but it's much more significant today.

So the Senator always says that this is the bill that he never gets any credit for something that a lot of people don't know, that he was the Senate author of the legislation that created this agency. And this was a very bipartisan effort. There were – Senator Durenberger from Minnesota was very interested on the Republican side. Minnesota is one of those places that gets very, very low reimbursement and is really good in many, many respects and is punished for it because of course the way our reimbursement system works in health care, the more procedures you do, the more money you make, even if those procedures are unnecessary. So when you're holding your cost down, you're actually sometimes penalizing yourself.

So anyway, that was another thing that the Senator did during his tenure on the Health Subcommittee. In 1989 he was elected Senate majority leader, and [] when you're elected to a leadership position you have to give up all your committee chairmanships. [] At the time he had two chairmanships, the Health Subcommittee of Finance, and a subcommittee in the Environment and Public Works Committee, so he had to give up those subcommittees. And it was interesting because a lot of the health care community thought, "Well, he's history," you know, "he's not going to be doing health care, he's the majority leader now, he's got bigger fish to fry." And so I would say for a period of a number of months my phone stopped ringing, which was sort of bizarre. Because here he had been elevated to the majority leader's position, which was the most significant position in the Senate, but people stopped calling me on the health care side and that lasted for a while. In fact, I had trouble getting a new Robert Wood Johnson Fellow that year; people didn't want to interview and come and work for him because they thought, 'Well, I want to go work for whoever's the chair of the committee.'

But very, very soon, people realized that he was going to continue to be interested in health care, and in fact could be even more influential as the majority leader, which of course he was during health reform. So for the next several years we continued to really play a major role in health care, and really played a role not only with supporting legislation, but trying to negotiate and bridge the Senate Finance Committee and the Labor Committee. And he played a pretty strong role there. Of course he still sat on the Finance Committee and he was still engaged to the degree he could be when things came before the committee.

But during that time we began to work with other Democratic offices, particularly we worked

very closely with Senators Rockefeller, Riegle, and Kennedy to draft a health care reform bill. This was 1993 and the staff literally sat in a room for almost a year working on this legislation, trying to negotiate, trying to whittle down some of our differences. And the fifth person in this group was Chris Jennings, who was then working for Senator David Pryor of Arkansas. Now Senator Pryor, who was a Democrat, who also sat on the Finance Committee, was more of a conservative Democrat than the other four were, but we very much wanted to include him, and we thought it would be important to include him. And Chris, at that time, was the vice chair, or the deputy staff director of the Senate Aging Committee, so Senator Pryor sat on the Finance Committee but he chaired the Aging Committee.

The Aging Committee does not have any jurisdiction over legislation; it sort of acts as a bully pulpit for issues, but it's a prominent [voice]. During the time that we were sitting in this room trying to draft our bill, which we subsequently did, Bill Clinton was running for president and Chris Jennings, who was working for Senator Pryor from Arkansas got sucked into the Clinton campaign, because of course David Pryor said, "Oh, I'll loan you my staff guy." And of course that was the end of that because he then went and worked for first Hillary Clinton, then Bill Clinton in the White House as his health policy person.

But the interesting thing here was that Chris Jennings tried to advise us as we were drafting our bill, and he tried to advise us that we would never get this bill past Small Business, because [] we had a pay-or-play provision. In other words, businesses either had to offer health insurance, or they had to pay into a fund. And Chris kept saying, "You'll never get this past Small Business." And of course he was right. But we were more on the liberal side and decided we were going to go ahead with this anyway. In the end, when we introduced this bill, Senator Pryor's name was not on it, it was just the other four. And by that time the whole Clinton thing had sort of taken off, but it was really a precursor to the Clinton plan, if you will, and those of us that had been working on this bill were very familiar with the issues. And they were very comprehensive issues: financing, quality of care issues, access, how do you cover the uninsured, who are the uninsured. We had really spent a year deeply looking at many, many of these issues and trying to figure out how we were going to get to some kind of compromise bill.

So when Bill Clinton was elected, and [] he appointed Hillary as the chair of the health task force, Senator Mitchell tried to advise him about health reform and how difficult it was going to be, and some of the Senator's advice was not taken. One of the most, I think, important pieces of advice that Senator Mitchell gave the Clintons was: you've got to act quickly. You know, you've only got a short honeymoon window, and this is going to be a very difficult bill, and if you really want to get something done you got to move quickly.

He gave them some other advice too, but that was one of the most important pieces of advice that they rejected. Because what happened was, they decided to appoint a five hundred-member task force and it took them nine months to draft a bill. And by that time a lot of other things had happened, they had sort of lost the honeymoon window, and it was much more difficult at that point to get something through, plus the opposition had kind of framed the issue in a negative way.

But during the time that the, after Bill Clinton was elected, he told Mitchell and Mr. Gephardt, who was the majority leader in the House, that he wanted the two of them to introduce his bill into the House and Senate. In other words, the Clinton task force would come up with a bill, and then he would give it to Mitchell and Gephardt, they would introduce it on their respective sides of the Congress. And so I was then sort of appointed by Senator Mitchell to be his official representative to the task force, which sort of meant – I kind of gave up my day job, if you will. And the way that we made that happen was two more Fellows. In this case, I didn't get Robert Wood Johnson Fellows, I got a couple of other Fellows who basically took over my regular job in the office while I literally was gone to the White House for four or five months.

My responsibility was really to monitor the progress of this task force. There were something like [] twenty-five committees, and each committee had a different focus. There was a rural health committee, there was a tele-medicine committee, there was a long term care committee, and each of these groups was working on that piece of this mega-mega bill. What I did with my time was sort of float among the committees, but I did spend more time in certain areas that I knew the Senator was more concerned about. For example, rural health care, long term care, et cetera.

We [] also [had] a Robert Wood Johnson Fellow that year, so I actually had three Fellows during this whole time. And the Robert Wood Johnson Fellow we had was a physician, and he focused on quality, that was kind of his thing. Which was fine with me, because that was a, kind of a whole different area. And that's all he did, was just the quality pieces of the bill. But I spent four or five months literally not in my office. I seldom went to the Hill. I was downtown at the Old Executive Office Building, which is where the task force was meeting.

And I don't know if you know anything about the task force, but there's been many books written on it. It's quite an interesting story. It was run by Ira Magaziner, who was an old friend of the Clintons. And Ira really didn't know much about the ways of Washington, which was not helpful in how he ran this committee. Every so often he would have what he called 'toll gates,' and the toll gates were sort of where the committees would report to the whole group on their progress, where [] they [were] on their recommendations in long term care or rural health or quality. And these committees met day and night, probably twelve hours a day, committees were meeting. Often there were meetings on Saturdays.

I can remember going down there one Saturday in the middle of a blizzard, it must have been March or something, to meet with him. And it was a really bad process, and it's one of the things that we have all told the Obama folks, "We don't want to repeat this," because there were too many people involved, it took too long, it [created] too much complexity in the bill.

But anyway, that having been said, they finally got ready to introduce the bill. And we all make mistakes, and I made a mistake that of course Senator Mitchell, being as brilliant as he is, turned to his advantage. [] We were literally getting the bill printed in the middle of the night – you do a lot of things in the middle of the night on Capitol Hill. And this was a very, very lengthy bill,

but I neglected to tell the printer – now, you wouldn't think you'd have to tell the printer this – but I neglected to tell the printer that he should print this bill on both sides of the paper. So he only printed the bill, the legislation, on one side, it was a one-sided print, so of course it made it twice as big.

So when the day came to introduce the bill, it was this gigantic, I forget how much it weighed, but it weighed a lot. And of course the first thing the Republicans did – there were no Republican co-sponsors of the bill, it was a, strictly a Democratic bill – first thing the Republicans did was pounced upon the size of the bill. It's so complex, it's, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And without missing a beat, Mitchell said, well first he said, "Chris, why didn't you print it on both sides of the paper?" And I said, and of course I was like delirious from having not slept for several days, but I was practically in tears, "I don't know why, Senator, I just, I screwed up." But without missing a beat he said, on the Senate floor, "Well let's get a scale out here, and let's weigh our bill and let's weigh the Republican's bill. What do you know, the Republicans don't have a bill, their bill weighs zero, because they're not prepared to address this issue." I mean literally, it just came to him. And of course it was the absolute best way to sort of deflect the issue. Nobody ever brought it up again. We had the bill reprinted on both sides of the paper and, but needless to say, that was the least of our problems, getting this bill passed.

Senator Mitchell said, and we had many discussions about this, but Senator Mitchell said he feared we would never get past the benefit package, and of course he was absolutely right. We never got past the benefit package or the small business objections. And the bill did come to the Senate floor, but he pulled it from the floor because he was about to have a major disagreement on the floor between Senator Moynihan, who was chairman of the Finance Committee at that point, and Senator Rockefeller, another Democrat and the chair of the Health Subcommittee at that time. And he said, "I cannot have two Democrats, the chair of the Finance Committee and the chair of the Health Subcommittee at each other's throats arguing over our bill on the Senate floor. That's it. That's the end."

And so we had many, many, many negotiations, late night sessions, and in the majority leader's office there were basically four of us finally that worked on the Clinton bill: myself; a woman named Lisa Nolan, who was a Budget person, and her job was to look at the budget implications – she didn't know health care, but she knew the budget; Bob Rozen, who you probably are going to talk to, if you haven't, and Bob was our tax expert, and his job was the whole taxation and financing side of the bill. We had two Fellows, actually, one was a Robert Wood Johnson Fellow, Dr. Oliver Fein, who focused strictly on the quality pieces of the bill, and then our other Fellow was a young man who was a presidential management intern named Parasher Patel, and he was kind of an all-around clean up hitter, if you will. Parasher was really valuable, because he understood [both] the financing and the health care issues. My job was really the health care system issues, if you will, looking at the hospital issues, the physician issues, the real health care system knowledge is what I had. I mean, Bob Rozen was fantastic on the financing, but he didn't really know health care.

So it was a very small team of people, in the majority leader's office, plus Mitchell himself and

John Hilley, who was Mitchell's chief of staff in the majority leader's office. This whole thing was complicated by the fact that John Hilley got pneumonia during this time, and thanks to the bad health care system that we have, was not being treated appropriately, with the appropriate antibiotic, and a lot of the time was in really, really bad shape and had to go home. So that sort of was just another side bar, if you will, to this whole scene.

We spent months and months and months negotiating with the House side, with the National Governors Association, with all kinds of stakeholder groups, consumer groups, hospitals, employers, the big employers versus the small employers, the nurses, I mean you name it. And one of the things that people say, coming out of this legislation, and one of the reasons it failed, was the everybody's second choice was to do nothing. So all these stakeholders wanted their piece of the action. Whatever it was they wanted in there, the [stakeholders] wanted what they wanted, if they didn't get exactly what they wanted, then they were willing to do nothing.

And that was one of the things that sunk the bill. I mean, as I said, there have been many books written on this. There's one book – the title will come back to me – but it was the best ones that were written, about six-hundred-page book about the whole deal. But people did not want to compromise. I mean, people were willing to compromise up to a point, but they didn't really want to give up a great deal.

And I think what's changed between then and now is, things have gotten a lot worse, and business in particular is much more willing to compromise now. The insurance companies just came out with a statement two days ago saying that they are willing to, they're open to insurance market reform as long as everybody's in the system. In other words, as long as there's some kind of mandate. They were nowhere near those positions fifteen years ago, they were fighting tooth and nail for insurance companies wanting to continue to cherry-pick and et cetera.

So it was a very exciting time, and we really, really believed, all of us, that we were going to get a bill. I mean, none of us thought we would end up with nothing. And it was tremendously, tremendously disappointing and depressing. You know, one of the things that the Senator himself says, and I can only go by what he has said – during that time, after he announced he was going to retire from the Senate in March of '94, apparently he was approached by President Clinton about a Supreme Court appointment, and he said no, he wanted to stay in the Senate to do health reform. And I take him at his word, that that is what, why he stayed, and why he wanted to stay.

The other point that sort of reinforces that is, as soon as he announced he was retiring – he had a lot of staff, between his personal office, the Maine office, majority leader staff, Democratic Policy Committee, and of course all of us were going to be out of jobs, because when your boss retires, that's it, you are out of a job. And so he was very, very good about helping people get new jobs, and he told everybody that he would do anything he could to help any of us get jobs and that basically he was encouraging people to start looking for jobs, except for the little group that was working on health reform. He asked us all to stay 'til the end, with a few other key staff people like his chief of staff in the majority leader's office and in the Maine office and his

communications director. But for the most part, everybody else was free to go. And so that to me signaled a real commitment on his part that he really believed we were going to get something, he needed his health staff to stay, and we all really believed we were going to get *something*. And it just really kind of spiraled out of control.

Are you going to ask me questions, or should I just keep talking?

BW: There's no need so far for me to ask a question, and if you're comfortable doing this, you want to pause and take another, clear your throat, or are you good to go?

CW: Well, I'm fine. I'm just trying to think of, I mean I could talk for hours about health reform, about what happened. I mean, and I've been thinking about this recently because there's a lot of talk now about health reform in the Obama administration, and I guess health reform sort of was the summation of all the health issues that we had worked on all those years. Because everything, everything we'd ever done, was part of this bill. I mean everything you could possibly imagine, from looking at the organization and delivery of care, to the financing of care, issues around helping people with financial support, co-pays, that type of thing, looking at income related help for people and all kinds of things. And the Senator was very, very engaged, and we were really, really disappointed when it didn't happen.

And of course we knew, the Mitchell staff knew that the Senator had announced he was going to retire, and we knew we had to find new jobs. We certainly didn't know that the Senate was going to be lost to the Republicans in '94; I mean that was a complete shock to many of us. I mean, and in a way I was fortunate because I already knew I had to find a new job and I had already been looking for a job, and actually had a job lined up before the election. But it was, it was very, it was very, very frustrating.

BW: Well, while you were, this small group was meeting in the majority leader's office, weren't these other plans then being considered, too, or were you the only action on health care?

CW: Oh no, we were the only Democratic action, let's put it that way. I mean, and that was one of the other problems with this health reform initiative. We tried to get bipartisan support, but we never did. So the Republicans were working on their own plan, and the Republican initiative was really led by Senator Dole and Senator John Chafee from Rhode Island. And Mitchell had always had a very good relationship with both of them, and particularly Chafee of course was a Rockefeller Republican, if you will, and a wonderful, wonderful man, and he had done some really, really good things in health care. So the Republicans were actively working on their own proposal, and in fact it was Senator Chafee who first introduced the individual mandate. I mean he, this was like a, wow, this was a, this was a new concept. And of course at the time, the Democrats were very critical of it, oh, you're putting all the burden on the individual instead of on the employer or the government. But no, they were working on a plan.

And then later on, a new group emerged that was called the Mainstream Group, and the Mainstream Group was actually made up of moderate Democrats and Republicans, and the

moderate Democrats were people like John Breaux from Louisiana, Dianne Feinstein from California – I can't remember who else, I think Lieberman, who was a Democrat at the time. So moderate Democrats were getting together with some of the moderate Republicans, including John Chafee, who was really kind of leading it, and they were trying to put something together, too. And near the very, very end, Mitchell called in some of the Mainstream Group, and that included – at the time, you know, we had a lot of moderate Democrats on the Finance Committee. We had Jack Danforth from Missouri, moderate [] Republican, Packwood, Chafee, and Durenberger – these were really moderate Republicans, and they were all on the Finance Committee.

The Finance Committee was always a committee that was much more bipartisan, because the make-up was principally moderate Democrats and moderate Republicans. And that shifted after '94, and it had begun to shift a little before that. But anyway, Mitchell brought in these guys and really was trying to save health reform with *something*. I mean, this was kind of a last ditch effort to get something done. And in the end, it just really, really collapsed. And I do think it was because members, a lot of the members weren't willing to compromise, but more importantly, a lot of the interest groups weren't willing to compromise.

And that really has changed now. In fact, right now there is a group meeting that is the, they call themselves the so-called Strange Bedfellows Coalition, and it's a coalition of about twenty interest groups, including labor, business, the hospitals, the AMA, the consumer organizations, and what they are trying to do before Obama takes office is to work out some of their differences and to see how far they can get in terms of a compromise, because everybody wants to like go out of the box, as soon as he takes office, we're gonna go. We're not going to wait like we did in '94, because that was one of the big mistakes that was made.

So Mitchell, I would say in the last year he was in the Senate, he devoted a great deal of time to health reform. And Senator Daschle was very involved, too, because Senator Daschle had been tapped by Senator Mitchell to run the Democratic Policy Committee for the Senate. In a sense, Daschle was Mitchell's protégée, and then of course he became the majority leader after Mitchell retired. So Senator Daschle was pretty involved from a big picture perspective, and Daschle sat on the Finance Committee also, so he was pretty engaged as well. And of course he's just been named the incoming secretary of HHS, and he will be the point person in the Obama administration for health reform. So there is a lot of continuity, lessons learned, mistakes that are not going to be made again with another attempt at health reform.

BW: Going back to your meetings in the leader's office, were you reporting regularly to the White House, or where was Ira Magaziner at this point?

CW: Well, we were reporting, mostly working with Chris Jennings. Chris, by that time Chris was the health policy person for President Clinton. And of course I knew him well, because he'd been in the Senate. And we, no, he was our contact person, he and, his number two person there was a woman named Jean Lambreau and, but primarily Chris was the point person. And so he was the one we were negotiating with and we were talking with and taking our instructions from

in terms of what we were doing.

Now, my counterpart on the House side was a woman who worked for Gephardt, and we were kind of a good team because – her name was Andrea King, “Andy” King. She was much more of a financing expert than I was. I knew the health care system much better than she did. But she was a very, very smart woman, and she was doing this for Gephardt. And so she was also floating around to all these committees that Ira Magaziner was running. So it was really kind of the Mitchell staff, Andy King for Gephardt, and Chris Jennings at the White House, and that was kind of the small circle. And of course Mrs. Clinton was deeply involved.

BW: That was going to be my next question. Had the Clintons by this point lost interest or withdrawn from the fray, or?

CW: Oh, no, they were very much into it. And Mrs. Clinton, she was named to head up this task force. And, I mean she’s an extremely smart woman. She didn’t really know health care either before she got the assignment, but believe me, by the time, I mean she got up to speed very, very quickly, and she is now one of the leading experts in health care. In fact, her name now has been floated for secretary of state, and when my husband heard that he said, “Well that’s not good for health care.” Because she is, especially with Kennedy’s illness, she is by far the most knowledgeable senator, next to Ted Kennedy, in health care, that’s in the Senate. And so for those of us in the health care world, she would be a lot more valuable doing health care in the Senate, particularly if Kennedy can’t continue to be there.

But no, she was very involved, she used to come up and meet with Mitchell, he talked to her frequently. And she made mistakes too, obviously, and I think it was a mistake Clinton naming her in the first place. I mean, like one of the lessons learned is never hire somebody you can’t fire. But she was extremely knowledgeable. I think another mistake that was made was putting Ira Magaziner in charge of the process, because he was not somebody, number one, who knew Washington, and he wasn’t somebody who worked well with others very much, and people didn’t really like him. And he was a problem.

I mean, one of my best examples of that was that snowy day, I told you, he called us down, Andy [King] and I, called us down on a Saturday morning for a meeting. And he called us down there to tell us, among other things, that he was thinking of doing away with the KLEA regulations in the health reform bill. Now, KLEA were the regulations that regulated laboratories, and I looked at him and I said, “Oh no, you don’t want to do that, because you don’t know what you’re dealing with. That’s Barbara Mikulski’s legislation, and she will kill you. You don’t want Barbara Mikulski after you because you have done away with - ” And the reason she did it was, women got Pap smears misread and got cancer and died, and that’s why she put these, she pushed to get those regulations in. I said, “You don’t want to tangle with Barbara Mikulski, I mean you don’t know what you’re dealing with. You’ve got enough problems with this bill.”

I mean, and he was clueless about why that wouldn’t be a good idea. I mean first of all, Mikulski is like a tiger. She’d go up to the Senate floor and she would rip him apart, on record.

And she was high ranking on the Labor Committee and Kennedy would have protected her. I mean, it was stupid. It was just one example of how out of touch he was, because he didn't know Washington, he didn't, it's like: look, you have to pick your fights. This is not a fight you want to have. And so, I mean that's just one little example, but I'm sure there were many others. And he did manage to irritate a lot of people.

BW: What was his motivation in that, I mean was it just a cost saving, or -?

CW: Well, I think he thought, first of all, he didn't know health care either when he got into this. He thought it was an unnecessary regulation, it was burdensome. And, but he didn't know anything about the history or the politics of it. He was sort of politically tone deaf, actually, and he was a disaster, really.

BW: Let's – you've provided such a brilliant narrative here from your entering Mitchell's office to health care – talk a little bit about the dying embers at the end the effort.

CW: The dying embers?

BW: Well, I mean as you were closing up shop, just what was it like. I don't know whether you stayed to the very end or not.

CW: I did. Well, let me tell you one other thing, which is just sort of an interesting anecdote. Believe it or not, I got married that year, in the middle of all this, and I married the director of policy and strategy at AARP, and he was in the middle of, he was directing all of this for AARP. I mean the whole consumer perspective, everything. In fact, at one point the Senator said to me, "Chris, can't you get AARP to endorse our bill?"

And so John and I were going to get married over Memorial Day weekend, because we thought, we had people coming in from out of town, that would be a good time. John Hilley, who was Mitchell's chief of staff said, "Chris, you cannot get married Memorial Day weekend because the bill will be on the Senate floor, you've got to get married in April." And so we did, we changed the date and we moved the wedding earlier, so we could get married, which we did. We took one week off, and then I worked for the next four months without one day off, not one Saturday, not one Sunday, in the basement of the Capitol, toiling away for health reform. And if I hadn't married somebody that knew exactly what was happening it would have been a problem. And so that was, and that was the whole summer of '94. I didn't get a vacation, I didn't, once I came back from the honeymoon, that was it.

And finally, I can't remember exactly, I think it might have been right after Labor Day when they came back, because I think we worked all through – normally the Senate is in recess in August, and it was in recess but not for us. I mean, we were toiling away. And finally, it was like everybody else knew it was over but Mitchell hadn't quite given up yet. But the day that Moynihan and Rockefeller were going to go to the floor and argue about, of all things, foreign medical graduates, because of course that's what fuels New York City hospitals, and

Rockefeller, who came from a rural state, wanted to cut those back to get more docs in rural areas. Mitchell said, "That's it, I'm pulling the bill off the floor," and that was the end.

And, I mean it was really, really depressing that after all that work for all those, I mean really two years we worked on this, nothing, absolutely nothing came of it. And it was really depressing for me. You know, in a way – I worked for Mitchell almost thirteen years, one month short of thirteen years, and I loved working for him. I mean, I just loved everything about it. He was a great boss, I admired him tremendously, he was inspiring. I mean, Obama reminds me a lot of George Mitchell in many, many ways. He's, Mitchell's not quite as photogenic and charismatic, but he's very inspiring, he's very sincere, he is the child of immigrants himself, Mitchell, and I just loved working for him. And I loved working for the people of Maine, because it connected me to New England, the people are so real, so genuine.

And when he said – I'll never forget the day that he called everybody into this big room in the Senate and announced he wasn't going to run for reelection. And it was like, I remember – and this was three weeks before my wedding. And you can imagine, I was getting ready and had a lot on my mind and stuff. I was just completely devastated, as were a lot of people, and I remember thinking, "This is what death is like." And I say that because it's like you know someday you're going to die, but you don't really believe it, you're in denial. You have to be in denial, or you couldn't go on. And I guess it's, what it felt like, I used to say to myself, "Well someday I won't be working for Mitchell any more. I'm sure there'll be a day when I'll get another job, or he'll leave the Senate or..." you know. But when that day came, and it was like, "This is it, it's over." I was just, I mean I just sobbed, I sort of get choked up even thinking about it, because it was like, what am I going to do now? What am I going to do?

And I think a lot of people felt that way, and even though we didn't know, because he really tried to keep it secret, that he wasn't going to run. He'd already started like raising campaign money for his reelection, had a few fund raisers and stuff, but he called everybody, like it was this emergency last-minute meeting, he called everybody to this big room in the Capitol – because by that time he had a lot of staff, he had his personal staff, majority leader, DPC staff. And I didn't know what was happening, but I knew it was like something big and I immediately went and sat next to one of my colleagues who I had worked with for more than ten years. I just wanted to be next to somebody that was like one of the old timers, you know what I mean?

And there were only probably five people, like his chief of staff and a couple other people that knew about this, and so when he announced it, I mean it was like, it was shock, we were shocked. And he's still so inspiring because he said, "I don't want to do this the rest of my life," you know, "I came here, this is something important, I've done it, but I know there are other things I can do." And of course now we see what he's done. And he's done some really great things, some really, I mean Northern Ireland and the other things that he's done, he's so well respected. And you know, *that* is inspiring *too*, to think about, "Okay, this is over, you'll never," you know, "you'll never do this again."

Diane Dewhirst, who you probably are going to interview, she was his director of

communications. And Diane is a great person, she's very smart, she's very, very talented, and she was one of the ones that was asked to stay 'til the end, too. And she said to me, "Christine," you know, I was sort of trying to rationalize, like, 'Well I'll get another job, and I'll work for somebody else....' And she said, "You'll never have another job like this." And she was right. She said, and Diane is a great person, and she's a very sort of pragmatic person, and she said, "You just got to face it, you'll never have another job like this again." We were so lucky.

So that was really hard, and so I, I then, like after that day, and after I had a complete breakdown about he was leaving, I had a wedding in three weeks, and then I just literally threw myself into health care reform. And so even after health care reform died, I was still really in denial. I mean like I never would have understood it if I hadn't gone through it. I was in denial, like okay, it's going to be over, come Christmas, that's it. And so, and it was, and then I left, but I did, as soon as health reform was over, and this was before we knew the Senate was going to be lost, the Democrats were going to lose the Senate, I started looking for a job.

I mean I've always been very, very determined about job hunting, and I started looking for a job and I just started networking. And of course I was, I was in a pretty good position to get another job. I was the Senate majority leader's staff, at that time the Democrats were still in control, and so I ended up going to the agency that we had created. And it probably would not have been my first choice but I literally, I set up a bunch of interviews for myself that were just strictly networking, and when I went to meet with the director there, he just offered me a job on the spot, "Well of course we'd want you to come here." And I've been there ever since.

And while I've done some interesting things here, and I've done some things that I never did working for the Senator, and I've learned a lot, it has not nearly been as exciting or as much fun or anything as it was working for him.

And you know, people ask me about the Hill and stuff, I mean the Hill, working on the Hill is an experience, but it really, really matters who you work for. And when he left, I knew there was nobody else I would work for. Because it's like, there was nobody at his level; there was nobody that compared with him, in terms of his intellect, his demeanor, certainly not his position. I just couldn't imagine working for anybody else, it would have been such a letdown.

And it's interesting because he is now part of a project at the Brookings Institute called the Leaders Project, and the Brookings Institute has a bipartisan policy center and they have asked four former majority leaders, Mitchell, Bob Dole, Howard Baker, and Tom Daschle to come in and to do a project to establish a framework for health reform for the Obama administration. And so I've gotten pulled back in to working on this.

Now, most of the work is being done by the staff there, plus Chris Jennings is still doing some work. We were on a phone call, well, we had a meeting this week, and Senator Daschle and Dole were in the meeting, and Mitchell and Baker were on the phone because they were out of town. And I was just, I was telling someone this the other day, I mean he is amazing. He's, he's seventy-five years old now, he hasn't done much in health care since he left the Senate thirteen

years ago. Chris Jennings sent him a memo, and he had a whole list of questions, and, “Chris, you need to do this, and this chart you sent me, I think you made an error on page three, you left something off,” And Chris said, “Yes, Senator, you’re right, we did, that was a mistake.” I mean, he’s amazing.

You know, he’s so intelligent, he always asks the right questions, he’s both substantive and particularly astute trying to weigh the policy. [p/o] And, so he never fails to just amaze me, even after all these years.

And he always will say, “Well you know Chris, I haven’t looked at these issues in a long time and I don’t really know this stuff,” but all it takes is, you give him one memo –we helped to put together a forum in Maine in September for this project, and the subject was insurance reform, which is *really* arcane and technical, and something I’m not an expert on. And we looked also at the practice variations. And we had some of the people that were involved in the ‘90s there. He’s just amazing, the questions he asks.

So for the rest of the time, people sort of gradually [p/o] peeled themselves off as they got new jobs. Some people went to work for Senator Daschle, who was still running the Democratic Policy Committee and [] became the next majority leader, although he had to run for that office, and Chris Dodd was running for it as well and it was a very close election. [p/o] So some people went to work for Daschle, some people went to work for some other senators, some people left the Hill, a bunch of people went back to Maine, quite a few people.

[Senator] Mitchell always made an effort to have Maine people on his staff, that was very important to him. And I was in that sort of gray category of people who had wintered over. In other words, I’d lived in Maine, but I wasn’t a native. And there were a number of us, three or four that I can think of now. Bob Carolla was another one who had lived in Maine, who did his Commerce Committee and fishing issues. Steve Hart was another guy who had lived in Maine. But none of us were native to Maine, but we’d lived there and so we were on his personal staff as well.

But he really, really made an effort, and he really nurtured and mentored people, from Maine particularly. He had a very, very robust intern program. He would bring kids down from Maine who were college students, and they would intern in the summer for very sort of meager wages. Now, one of those kids is today the chief of staff to the now Senate majority leader. I mean, this guy, Gary Myrick is his name, he started off as a Mitchell intern, answering the phones in the front office, and worked his way up now to be chief of staff to Harry Reid. And so when Mitchell left, he went to work for Daschle, and he worked on the floor staff, and that’s not atypical, that Mitchell would have nurtured a young kid. And so a lot of these kids had started off as interns, then got jobs in the mail room, and eventually doing legislation and then maybe the floor staff. And so a lot of them were Maine natives, and they did go back to Maine. And Maine is just a great place to raise a family and it’s very family friendly, so a lot of people went back there.

BW: Going back to '94 and his departure, you talked about your wedding. His wedding occurred somewhere in there, too.

CW: Yes. He came to my wedding; he and his then fiancée came to my wedding, which was very, very nice of them. He got married the end of the year; I think it was in December.

BW: Of '94.

CW: Yes.

BW: So that was after.

CW: Yes, yeah.

BW: And was he around when the government shutdown started, or was that all into January of '95? I'm a little vague on that.

CW: I think that was January.

BW: Let's just pause here for a second, okay?

End of Disk One

Disk Two

BW: I want to pick up some questions here as we've gone along. When you were living and working in Maine, did you have direct contact with any of the political figures?

CW: No, no. I mean I was there in the mid '70s, and no, I was just teaching at the high school and I had no contacts with anybody.

BW: And so you might not have even been much aware of George Mitchell at that point.

CW: No, I wasn't. And I think at that time, well he, I believe he ran for governor in '74 and he lost. And then after that, I believe he went back to practice law in Portland so he was just a lawyer in Portland and I was twenty-four years old and, no, I had no contact with him.

BW: And did you work on any Muskie campaigns or anything?

CW: No, no, I didn't. It was strictly sort of networking when I got to Washington. And I actually interviewed with David Johnson, who was his first chief of staff in his office, and David has continued to be a very close friend of the Senator's, and in fact has just moved to Maine himself. And is not a Maine native, but has moved his family up there.

BW: Someone said about you that you did an incredible job of understanding Maine people

and taking that to a national perspective. So talk a little bit, you've mentioned it in passing.

CW: Well, I mean I really loved working with the people in Maine, because I just felt they were so genuine and so sincere. And I actually became quite friendly with a number of them. In particular, the guy who was head of the Maine Nursing Home Association at the time has become a very, very good friend of mine, I still see him when I go to Maine. And a number of other people. I just, one of the things about Mitchell that I really related to, and that I feel the same way, people have real problems. And people in Maine are very real, it's a state where everybody knows everybody, it's a small population, and I really tried to understand what people were going through.

And in health care there's a lot of rural areas, rural hospitals. And aging was another interest of mine and interest of the Senator's, and of course Maine, like all rural states, has a very old population. There's a higher percentage of older people in all rural states. And so that was an interest of mine. So I did, I did try to take some of the things they were saying and translate them. I mean, in particular, looking at the area of practice variations. And it's funny today, because my current boss, Carolyn Clancy at the agency, is always sort of giving me a hard time because I often say, 'Well in Maine they do it such and such a way.' But it's usually the case that Maine is kind of ahead of the curve.

For example, I've had a couple of projects with – my job now is director for strategic partnerships for my agency, so my job is to go out and develop partnerships with the public sector, the private sector, and one of our great partnerships has been with the Administration on Aging and the CDC to try to link clinical settings with community settings for elders, and particularly for elders with chronic conditions. And in Maine they're like way ahead of the curve. They've got a number of projects where they have physicians in clinical practice who work very closely with the area agencies on aging to enroll their patients who have clinical chronic disease, like diabetes, heart failure, as they treat them in the clinical setting, they're enrolled in chronic disease self-management, which shows the patient himself or herself how to keep themselves healthier.

A lot of doctors don't even know about the aging services network, they don't know these area agencies exist. In Maine, they've already got these networks going and they've really done a fantastic job. And that's just one example. When we did nursing home reform in 1987, the standards that we put in, Maine had already met. But across the country, many other states had not met them. So it was really a floor, [] but Maine was already ahead of the curve. And so I think they've done a lot of great things up there, they really care about the people, and I did take a lot of those things into consideration and see what we could do at the national level.

BW: Describe a little bit just the ambiance of Mitchell's office, let's say, before he became majority leader, assuming that there may have been some changes at that point, in terms of how he interacted with the staff, and how you all interacted with each other. Just what was the ambiance like?

CW: I felt it was pretty positive. First of all, there was never any question what your mission was. Your mission was to help the people of Maine and the nation and whatever you could do to help them, that's what you should do. And one of the great things about George Mitchell is that he empowers his staff. He hires people that he believes are good, he trusts, and he empowers them to do good things.

My best example of this, and this was about 1988 or nine ['89], the Jackson Lab burned down. Now the Jackson Laboratory is in Bar Harbor, Maine. It is the number one mouse-producing laboratory in America. It produces the vast number of mice that are used by the NIH for clinical trials. The Jackson Lab burned down; it was a very, very serious fire. The Senator called me into his office one day, he said, "Chris, the Jackson Lab has burned down. They say they need twenty million to rebuild. See if you can get it for them, and if you need my help, let me know." That was it. And he empowered me to go out and get the twenty million dollars, and in a two-year period we got \$18.5 million, which we thought was a very big accomplishment. And from time to time he'd say, "How's it going with the lab; are you making progress?" Sometimes we'd go to him and we'd say, "Senator, we need you to call Senator Harkin," who was chairman of the Appropriations Committee, "We need you to send a letter to Mr. Natcher." "Be happy to do whatever I can." But he completely empowered his staff to get the job done, and he trusted us. He never second guessed anybody.

So there was a lot of trust between he and his staff. There was a lot of sense that we're here to serve the people of Maine, and so when somebody calls you from Maine, you see what you can do for them. I was a little bit older, I got my job with him when I was about thirty, and a lot of these other kids came in, they were twenty-one, twenty-two. But there was a lot of friendliness in, among the staff, various people.

Now in the first couple of years, with the holdovers from the Muskie people, that was sort of a transitional time. But once a lot of those people had gone back to Maine or wherever they were going, a new staff came on, he started hiring his own people, there was a real sense of camaraderie, I would say. I mean we had a lot of fun, we really did. We had a lot of fun and I felt like I had a really good relationship with him. He's the best boss I have ever had, nobody's come close to him. I mean, he's so smart that he always expected people to do their best, but if you screwed up, which we all do, he never raised his voice. I mean, he's got a temperament like Barack Obama, he's very even tempered, if you made a mistake – I mean I made a mistake once, gave him the wrong information on an abortion vote. I mean, that's really serious. And you know, he didn't yell at me; I mean I felt terrible about it. And there were two times, in all the times I worked, all the years I worked for him, there were two times when he was visibly upset with me. Neither time did he raise his voice, but I knew he was mad.

One time was when I put thirteen witnesses on a hearing, when he was chairman of the Health Subcommittee, because his rule was twelve witnesses, and he was very serious about that. And he was very precise, he kept on schedule, and one time I put thirteen witnesses on and – it was because one of our Fellows said, we really need to put another guy. I said, "I know, but the Senator doesn't want – oh well let's do it," so I did it. And so he started, and he came into the

committee hearing, and it was the morning of the hearing, and he saw there were thirteen witnesses. “[] I’ve told you, I only want ten [sic] witnesses.” And I said, “Oh I’m really sorry but, you know, Bob...” “Well Bob doesn’t know, but you do.” You know, so in other words he wasn’t going to let me pass the buck and blame our Fellow. So he was really kind of upset with me. And there we were in the committee, and people were starting to come in for the hearing and stuff, so I just felt really, really bad.

So later in the day, though, I went into his office, very calmly, and I just said, “Senator, you know, I’m really glad that we have a relationship where you feel like if I’ve done something wrong you can speak to me about it, and I know I did something wrong today,” I said, “but you know, I think in the future it would be better if maybe you and I had the conversation in private so that other people wouldn’t overhear us.” And he didn’t say anything, he just nodded his head and I left the office, and then everybody else, all the other staff came to me all the rest of the day saying, “Wow, the Senator is being really nice to me today.” So he obviously realized, you know, he shouldn’t have. But I mean it was a minor, minor thing.

The other time that he yelled at me was during health reform. Not yelled, but... Dole and Chafee wanted to come in and talk to him at the very end of health reform, they wanted to come in and talk to him about, “Can’t we save this?” And he wanted to minimize the meeting, he didn’t want anybody to know about the meeting, and he said, “Look,” he said, “if you come into the meeting, then people are going to think, ‘Oh, my staff was there and something’s happening.’” He said, “I don’t want you in the meeting, I just want it to be the two senators and me and that way I’m going to play it down,” and everything.

So in comes Senators Chafee and Dole, and they brought their staff with them, they brought Sheila Burke who was Dole’s chief of staff, and Christie Ferguson, who was legislative director, or chief of staff by that time, to Chafee, and they were both very senior staff people in the Senate. And so I did not go into the meeting, because he had told me not to go in. Well John Hilley, who was Mitchell’s chief of staff said, “Get in there, get in there.” I said, “John, he told me not to go in.” He says, “Well you *have* to go in, because they’ve got their staff.” I said, “John,” I said, “he made it really clear he didn’t want me to go into that meeting.” He said, “No, I think you should.” So there I was, the chief of staff is telling me to go into the meeting, but Mitchell had said, “Don’t go.”

Well I went in, and he glared at me, just absolutely glared at me. As soon as the meeting was over, he did, he was really mad that day. “I told you not to go in, why did you come in there?” And I said, “Well John told me.” “I don’t care what John told you, I’m the boss.” I mean that was like the only time he ever said that. But I mean in thirteen years, he never raised his voice, I mean even when people made mistakes.

And apparently Ed Muskie was quite a yeller, and Ed Muskie was somebody that did a lot of ranting and raving. And Mitchell always said, “I never want to have people working for me and have them treated like that.” Plus, it’s just his natural temperament. So, I mean it was a very congenial operation. I mean I still to this day have some very good friends from those days.

His chief of staff in the Maine office was a woman named Mary McAleney, who is one of my dear, dear friends, I go up and see her. She's the one that got me involved with the Mitchell Scholarship [*sic*: Institute], raising money for the Scholarship. And it was great. Now, when we started to do health reform in '94, the beginning of '94, he moved me, well once he was elected majority leader he moved a bunch of us onto the majority leader payroll so he could pay us a little bit more.

You know, my only complaint – I hope he's not going to hear this – my only complaint about him was, he was a little tight with a dollar when it came to pay. But I mean in part it was sort of the whole Maine mind set. I'll never forget one time, early in his tenure, before he was actually elected in his own right, the *Maine Sunday Telegram* did a front page exposé of people on Mitchell and Cohen's staff who made more than forty thousand dollars a year, and at that time that was not a lot of money. But, I mean like, so he didn't pay that well, even 'til the very end. I mean the last year I worked for him I got a pretty significant raise, but he was, I would say if you looked across the Senate, he was on the low end of the payroll.

But that having been said, when he became majority leader he moved a bunch of us over to the majority leader payroll so that he could hire more staff and have some more flexibility and stuff. But the last year, when we did health reform, he actually moved me physically to the Capitol, and I had a lovely basement office in the Capitol. But, proximity is everything on the Hill. Because he said, "Look, you're going to be here constantly," and I was, going up and down stairs to his office. And so when I moved over there, then I was a little more removed from the personal office. But I was still the point person for stuff in Maine and people would still call me and, you know.

BW: Point person for things health care?

CW: Any health care issue [].

BW: Before he went to majority leader, I've asked this of a number of people, when he came in the office in the morning, what transpired? I mean, did he come in a back door and you didn't see him, or did he move through the ranks?

CW: Well he didn't, I mean George Mitchell is not what I would call a warm and fuzzy guy. None of us called him by his first name. You know, a lot of people – and this always sort of shocked me – a lot of people who work for other senators, like people who work for Tom Daschle call him Tom. Maybe they didn't when he became majority leader, but a lot of people that worked for him, they called him Tom. We never called him George, we called him Senator Mitchell. I still call him Senator Mitchell. So it was more of a formal relationship, and so he wasn't like a warm and fuzzy guy that came around and talked to you at your desk or anything like that.

But he's not a small talker, he is, he's an introvert, he's very intellectual. In fact, two months ago

I was in Maine, well when we did this forum up there for this leaders project, and he and I went to dinner. We were meeting a bunch of other people from the forum, and he wasn't going to stay for dinner but he just wanted to come to the restaurant and say hello to the people, then he was going to go home. Well he and I got there early and it was just the two of us, and I don't think I've been with him alone, and we were like alone for twenty minutes. And he's not a small talker, and I was like, I mean I, you can see, I can talk, I can keep a conversation going, but I had to keep the conversation going, because he's not a small talker.

So, but it was very congenial. Now, maybe some of the younger people – see, I came to work for him in 1982, early in 1982. I was one of the longest serving people. I mean there's only a few people that were there longer than I was. And so I had a very good relationship with him, and I knew him a long time and I felt comfortable with him, but it was all business, I mean there was no sort of chit-chat about things.

BW: Not even his interest like in baseball, that didn't figure into -?

CW: In fact when he was chair of the DSCC in 1986 he was responsible for getting the Senate back from the Democrats. Have you talked to anybody about that?

BW: Not yet.

CW: Because that was big, and that was sort of like on his trajectory to leadership, he was fantastic. The night that we won, 1986, I mean it was a fantastic victory, over at the DSCC headquarters, when they knew we had taken the Senate back, we had elected enough new Democrats, he stood up there on the podium and the first thing he said was, "Well, this almost makes up for Bill Buckner," because that was the year of course Bill Buckner let the ball roll through his legs and the Red Sox lost again. So I mean he was a huge Red Sox fan, and still is of course. So once in a while you might make chit-chat about that, but he wasn't a small talker, you know, was not a small talker.

The only person who ever called him George, and I don't know if she did it, when she did it, she referred to him as George, was Gayle Cory, who had worked with Mitchell for Ed Muskie, because you know he worked for Muskie. And she's the one who died who we named the scholarship after, and she had been there, I mean she had known him the longest.

BW: What about 'buddies' he had among his colleagues in the Senate?

CW: Well, he didn't have too many buddies. I would say his, probably his closest friend in the Senate was Paul Sarbanes, who was just like him. You know, they were both sons of immigrants, Sarbanes was a Greek, son of Greek immigrants, Sarbanes was the same type of guy, very intellectual, very smart, introverted, not a small talker. But he didn't really hang out with anybody that I knew of.

Now, and this says a lot about Mitchell, his friends were his friends from Maine. Harold

Pachios. Harold Pachios, who is a wonderful man, I mean he's known Mitchell since they, I think they worked at, I think Mitchell was at Preti, Flaherty and Beliveau, which was this law firm in Maine, and Harold is still there. And if you say, "Well who were Mitchell's pals?" that was it. I mean that's how connected he is to Maine, that his real friends were people in Maine. He used to go home every weekend. You know, up until he became majority leader and he really couldn't get back every weekend, he went home almost every single weekend. And he was up there traveling the state, having constituent meetings, and those were his real friends.

I mean, I think he was friendly with David Johnson, after David left the Senate. I mean, he really felt that he owed David Johnson a lot, because David was his first chief of staff and, when Mitchell was appointed, he was thirty-six points behind in the polls to David Emery, who was his challenger, and he beat him. And he gives David Johnson a lot of credit for that win. So I think he was friendly with David after David left his employ. But I couldn't tell you who, what other close friends he had, because he did not spend a lot of time in Washington when he wasn't working.

BW: So how do you account for his being elected as majority leader?

CW: Well, a number of times he was rated the most respected member of the U.S. Senate. He was very well respected on both sides of the aisle. He just, he showed himself. I mean again, like Obama, I mean he's extremely intelligent, he's very hard working, there's nobody who worked harder or longer hours than he did. He started with the DSCC, he orchestrated the win, winning enough Democratic senators to take the Senate back. After that he was given the president pro tem job [*sic*: deputy president pro tempore] – you know about that? Okay. And then he sat on the Iran-Contra Committee, and I don't know where that was in the, sort of the, chronologically, but that was very significant. Has anybody talked to you about that?

BW: Not yet, no.

CW: Well that is another thing that might make me cry, because he was asked to sit on the Iran-Contra Committee, and he was a relatively junior senator, in a way, chaired the committee. And Mitchell, without going into the whole history of that, Mitchell got to cross-examine Oliver North. And if you could ever see a tape of that you should get it, because that was one of the most amazing things.

This was shortly after we got television in the Senate, because I remember, I was sitting in my office in the Senate, watching television, and I was alone in the room. And Mitchell was cross-examining Oliver North. And Oliver North was a right wing nut, and he was there in the basement of the White House doing God-knows-what, sending money to the contras. And Mitchell, and everybody had, all these Republicans, these right-wingers had said, "Oh, he's a patriot, he's a patriot," you know. And Mitchell had a very short speech, which went something like, "God is not asked to take sides in American politics, and questioning and criticizing your government is not the sign of being disloyal. In fact, that's what this country was founded on, the right to challenge your government." And it was like the most inspiring thing I had ever

heard. I sat there crying.

As soon as – and I was alone so I had no one around me to like see anybody else’s reaction, it was just like – as soon as he finished it was like all of a sudden the phones in the office started ringing, telegrams, this was like a few years ago, but telegrams came to the office. I mean people were overwhelmed, and we were flooded with letters, with telegrams, with phone calls. And I sat and for the next couple of days just read through all these. And the one that struck me the most, but they were all like this, was this letter written by this woman who said, “My son fought and died in Vietnam. Senator, this is the America that he fought and died for. Thank you, thank you.” []

And that’s, he dared to sort of like say, ‘the emperor has no clothes,’ and it’s, challenging your government is what we’re supposed to do. And it’s like, my God, that’s right. And it was, because again, it was the Reagan administration and everybody, it was just like what we’ve lived through the last seven years. And it was very inspiring, and so that, his performance on that committee I think sort of further propelled him towards leadership. Because he was, I think, of all the majority leaders ever elected, the one with the least amount of seniority. And many people compared him to Lyndon Johnson, like he was the best majority leader since Lyndon Johnson.

BW: Was his election a close one?

CW: Yes. Well, it’s within the Democratic caucus, and Inouye was also running, and there was a third candidate [Bennett Johnston] who I cannot remember right now. Now Inouye, who’s a very, very nice man, he had been chairman of the Iran-Contra Committee, and I think it’s fair to say people were very disappointed with his performance as the chairman. You know, he came on with this really great reputation and he just wasn’t that strong a leader. And so I think that hurt him, when he ran for majority leader, and I think Mitchell’s performance really helped him. And I think the third person might have been Chris Dodd, who was running.

So what happened was, there was a three-way race, and I think Inouye was eliminated, like he didn’t have anywhere near the votes. I mean the real race was between Dodd [*sic*: Johnston] and Mitchell. And then I think they agreed Dodd, they didn’t have a run off, I think that they knew Mitchell would have the votes if they had a run off and so Dodd sort of conceded. But it wasn’t a shoo-in, he had to run for it.

But I remember the day he was elected, I mean, well it was just so exciting. And of course it changed everything, it changed everything for the office, for us. And I remember he called his senior staff into his office, I think the day after the election or a couple days after the election, to talk about how we were going to operate now that he was majority leader. And at the time, he had a chief of staff who, there was some question about: was she going to go with him, was she not? And we didn’t really know how it was going to work.

But my concern was, look, you’re not going to have as much time to be dealing with us and to be

spending time reviewing stuff, and you're going to have to give us even more autonomy. Now the good thing was that most of us who were doing legislative work had been with him, I mean by that time I had been with him seven years, and most of the other people had been, too. He didn't really have any young, new legislative staff. And all of us stayed on, of course, it was a tremendous opportunity for us too. But it was, it was definitely a transition, and it took us a while to kind of figure out how we were going to make things work.

Although I have to say, even though he was busy and he had a lot of other things on his plate, I never really had a problem getting access to him when I needed to. And that was the other great thing about him. There weren't a lot of layers between you and him. [p/o] And so really we would just touch base with the chief of staff, or if it was something that was Maine related, a Maine health issue, I would talk to his Maine chief of staff. And then I'd just say, "Look, I need to talk to the Senator about something."

BW: And you would say that to?

CW: I'd say it to the chief of staff.

BW: What about secretaries, personal secretaries as gatekeepers and whatnot?

CW: Well, he did have a very good executive assistant in the majority leader's office, but she was great, and she would juggle me and she, she wasn't your typical, she wasn't really a secretary, she was really an executive assistant. Very political, she knew all the stakeholder groups; I mean she was great. And of course because health care had such a high priority, I didn't really have any trouble. I mean sometimes I might have to wait a little bit longer to see him because he had other things that he had to do, but it wasn't really an issue.

BW: I have a totally trivial question here, but actually there was a third time he got angry at you, and that's when you published the health care bill on one side. Why were you the person taking that, placing the order with the government printing office? It seems strange.

CW: Well, it really wasn't me, he just, I was just like the closest person there, why didn't – it was actually the Legislative Drafting Office. I mean, because we didn't actually write the bill. You go to your legislative drafters, you give them sort of the narrative language and they put it into legislative language.

BW: So you weren't literally placing the order over at -

CW: No-no-no-no-no, no, I wasn't.

BW: Did you want to talk some more about the Maine [sic: Mitchell] Institute and fund-raising?

CW: [Sure]. A few years ago, when the Senator left office, he established something called

the Mitchell Institute. He came from a family of very, very modest means, and really, he would not have been able to go to college had he not had financial support, full scholarship, et cetera. And he really wants to try to help Maine students going to college.

There's a real disconnect in Maine between a very high rate of high school graduation and a low rate of kids going on to college. So when he left the Senate, [] he had already started to raise money for reelection, and so when he decided not to run he offered people who had given him money, they could have their contributions back, or they could donate the money to a new scholarship program that he was going to start, and many of them did.

And so he created the Mitchell Institute in 1995, and the purpose of the Institute is to support students going to college, to make sure that every student in Maine that wants to go to college has the ability to go. There's three criteria for application: financial need, academic excellence, and community service. And he now gives a scholarship to every public high school in Maine every year, and so kids have to apply but every high school chooses one student to get this scholarship.

It's a fantastic program. Every fall they have a Fall Gala, a big dinner in South Portland. I've gone up there the last three or four years. And so a couple years ago Mary McAleney, who was Mitchell's chief of staff [for] his Maine office, the personal office, who's a very good friend of mine, started talking about the scholarship and said, "Chris, I would really like to see if we could raise some money from our Senate staff colleagues." And I said, "Well I would love to help you with that. In fact, why don't you make me the Washington committee, because these people have money down here." You know, Bob Rozen, who's now a big muckity-muck lawyer, [and] a few other people who did his tax policy.

So David Johnson and I became the Washington committee, and Mary and a couple of other folks did the Maine side of things, and over a period of, I don't know, six to eight months, or maybe it was about a year, we raised a hundred and thirty thousand dollars to endow a scholarship in the name of Gayle Cory, who was our colleague that died, and it was a great thing. I really enjoyed doing it, it was an opportunity to get reconnected with people that I'd worked with, because it had been about ten years since we left the Senate, at that time, and I really enjoyed doing it. We got contributions everywhere from fifty bucks to, one guy gave us twenty thousand dollars, and so it was really very rewarding for us, it was fun, and the Senator was very, very touched that we had done it. I think it meant a lot to him.

BW: It also says a lot about your cohesiveness as a staff and so forth.

CW: And I think it says a lot about how *we* feel about the Senator. That he wants to do this for other Maine students. These kids that get these scholarships, I mean it's not a lot of money. At this point in time – he's trying to raise more money to increase the level of each scholarship – but at this point he's been giving \$6000 [as] a one-time gift [] over four years. But for kids that are going to Maine public universities, it's a big help. Because a lot of these kids have absolutely no money, and in fact they, many of them are first generation college. And, I told you

about these Pioneer Scholarships? The Pioneer Scholarships are interesting because they are the endowed scholarships, so you have to have raised a hundred and twenty-five, a hundred and thirty thousand dollars, because [] that [is] enough money to generate enough income to give a scholarship every year.

And each of these scholarships, the Pioneer Scholarships, are named for some special person or, for example, the Senator was on the Walt Disney board for a few years and when he left the board, they wanted to give him some lovely gift like a nice watch. And he said, "No, I'd like you to give an endowed scholarship to the Mitchell Institute," which they did. And so that's now called the Walt Disney Scholarship, and that scholarship is given to a student who has demonstrated talent in the arts, who wants to go into the arts, which, it's a great thing.

And our scholarship that we give is really in memory of Gayle Cory and is really to commemorate sort of her spirit, her love of Maine, that kind of thing, and we've gotten to pick the scholars that, within the pool that are eligible for the scholarship that year, we get to name the Cory Scholarship. So that's been really a lot of fun.

And so people feel very committed. I mean, I called a guy here in Washington who had only worked for Mitchell a couple of years very early on, when he was first appointed, and probably left his employ in 1984, he gave us seventy-five hundred bucks. I got a lot of five thousand dollar, seven thousand, ten thousand dollar gifts from the lawyers in Washington.

And now people up in Maine, many of them wouldn't have the assets, and the Senator really, I think really appreciated it and made personal phone calls to many of the larger contributors, people who had given at least several thousand dollars. And so it really did mean a lot to him.

And I have enjoyed going up [to Maine] and going to the dinner and meeting some of these kids. And Maine is a very homogenous state, as you probably know. I mean it's like 99.1% white. But interestingly enough, there have been now a few immigrant groups. There's a whole group of Somalis up there – who must be freezing to death in Lewiston, Maine – there are some southeast Asian children of Vietnamese refugees, and we have now actually seen a couple of kids, including one guy who is a refugee from Darfur who is a Mitchell Scholar, and that's very inspiring. We've now had three of the Mitchell Scholars elected to the state legislature, they now have an alumni association and they're raising money themselves, the alumni. So it's a fantastic thing, and we're really happy to be part of it.

BW: I bet.

CW: I mean, I think one thing, just to emphasize about the Senator, he was always very, very committed to the people of Maine. And when people from Maine came down, whether they were the hospitals, the doctors, he really, really tried to solve their problems. Even though I've talked a lot about health care, early in my tenure I did a few other issues, and one of the other issues I did was Indian affairs. And I had taught on an Indian reservation, as I mentioned, earlier in my career. Maine has four tribes, and in 1980 there was a very big land settlement act and

three of the tribes were included, and this meant they became federally recognized, they were eligible for benefits, et cetera.

Well, there was this one other tribe that was very poor, the Micmacs, and they live way, way, way up in Aroostook County on the Canadian border, and they had not been part of the settlement, and they were extremely poor people, only about four hundred in this band of Indians. And they came to us and they asked if we could help get federal recognition. And I first went to the Senator and he was like, “Oh geez, I don’t want to get into that. We did this in 1980, it was very contentious, I don’t want to reopen that.” And I said, “Look Senator, these people are really, really poor.” He says, “Well, where were they in 1980?” I said, “Look, they’re so poor, they have so few outlets, they didn’t even know this was going on and nobody thought to include them.” So I really had to lobby him, and I did that on a few issues. That was one of them. And he very, very reluctantly said, “Well okay, see what you can do.”

Well, I won’t go through all the gory details. It took us a couple of years, but we finally got federal recognition for the Micmacs. And it was not a small feat; there were a lot of obstacles we had to overcome – on the floor, with the House and with the department and everything. But we finally did it, and the Micmacs came down from Maine to thank the Senator, and I will never forget that day. We sat in his office, and I didn’t even sit at the table, because he was still sort of a bit irritated with me, that I had sort of dragged him into this, even though it had a good outcome. These people sat at the table, at his conference table, and he was majority leader by that time, and they were crying and they were saying, “Senator, thank you so much, we never thought we’d see this day, you don’t know what this means to us, we’re really, really” – I mean they were just, I mean literally, they were crying.

And he looked over at me and he sort of said through his teeth, “Well, you’ve got a big champion in my office,” and that was kind of his only words to me like, “well you did the right thing.” And, you know, it’s very New England. You know what I mean? He never like effusively praised people, but you knew. I mean I felt not only vindicated, but I felt like he really appreciated it in spite of everything. And that happened a couple of other times.

One time, another issue I used to really press him on was long term care. I was a big, big champion for long term care, and that’s a very difficult issue. It’s always like the ugly stepsister in health care. We introduced two comprehensive long term care bills, we wrote and introduced while he was in the Senate. And the second one he really didn’t want to do. He really was opposed to it, he didn’t want to do it, but I talked him into it. And he was really irritated. Irritation is different than being really angry, but he was really irritated with me.

The year that he was going to leave the Senate, the Alzheimer’s Association gave him their annual, lifetime achievement award for his service. And I went with him to get the award, and he stood up there and it was for his commitment to long term care, and he gave like the nicest acceptance speech and he said, “When I worked for Ed Muskie I didn’t believe that the staff really ran the Senate, but now that I’m a senator, I know they do, because this really belongs to Chris Williams.”

You know, so he, he was very appreciative and very – the most effusive and the nicest things he ever, I mean the most effusive he’s ever been about me was when they did the kick-off for this leaders project, which was just like six or eight months ago, years after I stopped working for him. It was almost embarrassing, he went on so much. Because he, well Dole had gotten up there and said, well Sheila Burke was really the brains behind Bob Dole, which is true, in terms of health care. And then Mitchell got up and like went on and on about me, to the point, like I was really kind of embarrassed, because I’m not the brains behind George Mitchell, he’s the brains. I may be the one pushing him and helping him but he, he needs no explanation. So he really, I’ve always felt really appreciated. And of course I’ve known him a long time now.

BW: Any other bills or issues that are really salient in your mind?

CW: Well definitely long term care. In fact, on the long term care front we, during health reform, we had a meeting, a luncheon. You know, every Thursday the Democratic caucus has a luncheon, it’s like a closed luncheon, only senators, no staff go in. Once in a while, like the majority leader’s staff can go or something like that, but very rare.

So there was a day that staff was going in, and it was a day that the White House was briefing the Democratic senators on reform. And Judy Feder was there, and Judy Feder was a White House appointee who had helped us on long term care. She just ran for the Senate against Frank, I mean the House, against Frank Wolf and lost in Virginia. But anyway, Judy was sitting next to Mitchell at lunch, and I was sitting at the same table. And they were talking, or I guess Judy was talking to him, but he leaned over to her and he said, “And Judy, we’re not doing long term care.” Because he was like still, I mean she still brings it up, because it was like, “Look, I’ve got enough problems trying to do access, trying to do universal coverage, I’m not getting into long term care, that’s a place, we’re not going there.”

BW: Was anyone in the Senate carrying water for that issue?

CW: No, he was the only one. And that’s why, when I left, a couple years later I was talking to Rockefeller staff and I said, “Well what’s going on with long term care?” And she said to me, “Chris, the words ‘long term care’ haven’t been uttered since you and Senator Mitchell left.” I mean, it’s a very difficult issue and, well I guess another thing, that sort of reminds me, back in 1989 we did the catastrophic health legislation. That’s another story that was to fill in the gaps where Medicare like doesn’t pay the co-payments, deductibles and stuff. And we passed that legislation with bipartisan support, and then seniors started rebelling. I don’t know if you remember that, but I was actually on vacation in San Francisco watching the news and saw an angry bunch of senior citizens banging on Rostenkowski’s car in Chicago with baseball bats, and I thought, “Oh God, this isn’t good.” And sure enough, the whole bill unraveled.

And Mitchell was chair of the Health Subcommittee then. That was a really horrible thing, because we had a drug benefit in that bill, and it was the first income-related premium in Medicare, attached to that drug bill. And we deliberately wrote it so that even at the highest

income, people were still getting a subsidy. But people just, they didn't get it, they didn't appreciate it, and the seniors killed it.

BW: And they weren't being fomented by interest groups? It was pretty a grass root, or not?

CW: Well, no, some of the interest groups, some of the insurance companies and, yeah, they were, a lot of misinformation was getting out there. I mean, because it was really good for seniors but they didn't appreciate it, we didn't frame the issue well enough, I guess, it's fair to say.

BW: What about women's health, did you do much in that area?

CW: Well – are you talking about abortion?

BW: Well, that and NIH in support of women's -

CW: Well see, NIH didn't come under the Finance Committee jurisdiction, that's the Labor Committee, that's Kennedy's committee. So we did not spend as much time looking at that, but we did of course create my agency, the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality, which is an independent, free standing agency that does health services research. We are a sister agency, very small sister, to NIH. But we didn't spend too much time on that.

And in terms of the abortion issue, thank God I didn't cover abortion. Because that was the jurisdiction of the Judiciary Committee, and he had a different staff person on that committee, that was Anita Jensen – I don't know if you're going to talk to Anita. But that is my recollection of Joe Biden, though, because Joe Biden was chairman of the Judiciary Committee, which of course has all the horrible issues – gun control, abortion and you name it. Joe Biden used to come in, just like you see him, come in to the majority leader's office, always like some ungodly hour of the night, when there would be some contentious bill on the Senate floor, like abortion, let's say, and, "I got to see George, I got to see George or we've got a problem," and, you know how he is. And the Senator would talk to him and stuff. But I didn't deal with that issue because of the committee jurisdiction, so we didn't really get into that very much, I would say.

BW: What about spousal impoverishment?

CW: Spousal impoverishment? Yeah, well we wrote a bill, I mean I wrote that bill, and that was our experience working with Barbara Mikulski. That was 1987. Mikulski had a bill on spousal impoverishment when she was in the House, and when she got elected to the Senate she came to Mitchell and said, "George, I think we should work together; you've got a bill, I've got a bill, let's get together." So we did.

And that was a bill, again, that came to our attention because of the problems that people in Maine had had losing their homes when one person went into a nursing home. And so yeah, we wrote that bill and got it enacted. It's still in place and that was clearly an accomplishment.

BW: And I guess you didn't have anything to do with the Family Leave Act.

CW: No.

BW: That was all later.

CW: Yeah. I think that is Grace Reef, have you talked to Grace yet? Do you have a list of people you're going to talk to?

BW: They haven't actually given me a full list, so -

CW: Oh, they haven't?

BW: No, and you're my second interview in this project.

CW: Who was your first?

BW: Leon Billings, who -

CW: Oh, geez. Well he goes way back. You should definitely talk to Grace, though, because she's one of those people who came as an intern and stayed 'til the bitter end. And she did a lot of his, she did the Family Leave Act and other kinds of things.

BW: Well I think we've covered everything that – well, I guess there was just one other thing and that is, did you at times have real points of dispute with George Mitchell? Like you really didn't agree on certain things?

CW: Well, just when I wanted him to do things he didn't want to do, like getting the Indians federal recognition, or doing long term care. I'm trying to think if there was any other major – those were pretty much – I mean whenever we would negotiate, like when we were doing health reform, I mean I might have a strong opinion about something, but once he said no, he wasn't going to do that, you know. I mean the only thing I really remember is when I wanted him to do something and he didn't want to do it.

BW: But philosophically you were pretty much in sync.

CW: Oh, yes. Well one time he told me he wanted me to write a bill, this was early in my tenure, he wanted me to write a bill to lengthen the school year, because he thought, the Japanese go to school longer. I said, "I'm not doing that. I was a former school teacher, are you kidding me?" I never did it. I think it sort of slipped off his radar screen. [p/o]

I mean one of the great things was, there would be times, like I remember during nursing home reform over '87, when the nursing home people claimed that I had introduced the bill without

talking to them – they'd seen him at some fund raiser – and he came to me the next day, and of course it wasn't true, I had shown them the bill and all this stuff. They just didn't like it, they didn't want it to go in and they didn't think it was pro-industry enough and stuff. And so he said to me, "Well geez, Chris, I ran into Sheldon Gottlieb and he said that you hadn't shown him the bill and you introduced it, and what's the story?" And you know, I mean he didn't accuse me. He wanted to hear my side of the story, and of course I said, "Well that's not true, I did do it."

You know, a couple of other things that I might just mention. We used to, before he became majority leader and he was chairman of the Health Subcommittee, we used to go to Maine every year to hold hearings, health hearings, and these are some of the best stories. In the beginning we held three hearings: Portland, Bangor, Presque Isle. Now Presque Isle is *way* up there, okay? And putting these hearings together was always a challenge because the twelve-person rule, you can never have more than twelve witnesses. And of course when you go to Maine, everybody wants to testify. So I would put these hearings together, and it was always a lot of work and I was always anxious because he knew all these people.

Well I'll never forget, I think it was the last time we went to Presque Isle, and of course this was a big deal and TV cameras would come and everything. Went to Presque Isle, and Presque Isle is like at the end of the world, they have Quonset huts up there. And we used to hold our hearing in the basement of the North Eastland Hotel in Presque Isle, which was the only public building there was [p/o].

And the last time we did it, we had a hearing, and there was a guy who was [] in the audience. We used to have a Q&A for the public. He was this crazy doctor up there, and he stood up, and I can't even remember what it was, but he basically accused me, and of course I was sitting there with Mitchell, he basically accused me of having not invited him, or blew him off or something. And of course it was embarrassing to Mitchell, and there were TV cameras there and stuff.

And I have a bad memory. Even when I was younger I had a bad memory, which is not a good sign. But when he said this about how I hadn't included him and I hadn't talked to him or whatever, I just went blank, I had no recollection of him ever wanting to talk to me or whatever.

So anyway, that was right at the end of the hearing, and the hearing broke up and the Senator looked at me and he said, "I can't believe you didn't invite him," or words to that effect. And I said, "I can't believe I didn't either." You know, I mean something happened, and I don't even know to this day if I screwed up or whatever, but I just remember, as soon as Mitchell left I was like sobbing. I mean not in front of everybody, but I just felt horrible about it.

And Mitchell had this great chief of staff up in Maine, Larry Benoit, and Larry was always using salty language. And I got on the phone – he was back in Portland, I was in Presque Isle – and I told him what happened. And he says, "Jesus Christ, that guy" (we're on tape, I guess – but anyway), he said, "That guy's horrible, don't worry about him," and he made me feel a lot better.

So there were times, I mean everybody makes mistakes and, you know. And it was always

challenging dealing with all the people that wanted to be included.

BW: I have a last question. Put yourself in the position of being back in the classroom as a history teacher in, let's say, 2050, which is probably a long shot. What would you tell students about George Mitchell at that point?

CW: Well, I would tell them that he was really one of the great U.S. senators, that he was very, very committed to the people of Maine, he was very committed to doing the right thing, he was committed to always having the facts, having the evidence, making the best decision he could with the information that he had, that his motives were always good ones, that he did a lot of great things for the people of Maine, whether it was health care, the environment, many, many issue areas. But he also did great things in empowering the people who worked for him, who I think have gone on to do some good things themselves. And I think his scholarship fund really illustrates his commitment to a lasting legacy, to help other people and young people in Maine to go on and to achieve their potential and to really be able to do whatever they want to do.

BW: Very good. Shall we end it on that note?

CW: Yeah.

BW: Great.

End of Interview