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Interview with Harris Wofford by Brien Williams

Harris L. Wofford

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project
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Harris Wofford **GMOH# 111**
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Brien Williams: This is an oral history interview with former Senator Harris Wofford for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College. We are in the senator's home in Washington, D.C., and today is Friday, June 12, 2009, and I am Brien Williams. I thought we might start with the steps that brought you to the Senate.

Harris Wofford: To the Senate?

BW: To the Senate, and my first question was, when did you learn of Senator Heinz's death, and under what circumstances?

HW: I was up having lunch with David Riesman, a sociologist at Harvard, of fame; *The Lonely Crowd* is one of his great bestsellers. And I was giving a talk on national service at the Kennedy Institute of Politics, and doing a seminar that led into a supper and drinking wine and such, and the conversation turned around to whether I had the guts to run against Arlen Specter for the Senate two years later, I think it was. And then we talked - Alan Khazei, the founder of City Year, one of the big national service leaders was there, and the woman running it ran for the Senate, a leading Democratic contestant who went on to do interesting things, but she lost her Senate race – it was her seminar. And it was a great huddle on how you might win against Arlen, and could you? And could you run on things like national service?

And that had been the previous afternoon, and the talk was going to be the next evening, and at lunch I got interrupted by an assistant of mine, when I was secretary of labor and industry in Harrisburg, who says that he heard on the radio driving his car that John Heinz had crashed and died, along with a number of young kids, in an elementary schoolyard very near my home in Bryn Mawr. And he stopped the car, went into the nearest bar and said, "I've got to borrow your phone for a minute, can you" – this is pre-cell phone, I guess, isn't it, because he's a big cell phone man now – he said, "I've got to call the next senator from Pennsylvania." The bartender didn't know what he was talking about. And he tracked me down and interrupted me at the faculty club, and it changed the conversation to, well, from his point of view and some of the people at the seminar about, "Now how do we get you appointed to being senator?"

Now Casey said to the Cabinet, "I don't want anybody maneuvering or stirring up or beating the drum for me to pick them, I want this to be a period of mourning for" – I forget how many weeks he said – "I'm going to be doing thinking while I do it, but I don't want any politicing on it," and

I was resolutely following his instructions. Two days later or something, he said, "How well do you know" – whatever this guy's name was – and I didn't remember his name at all. And he said, "You must know him, come on now." And I said, "No, why?" He says, "One of the biggest donors in the Democratic Party, and a state committeeman maybe, and he owns the Coronado Hotel." I said, "Never heard of him." "Well why would he have written this wonderful letter about you, this just stunning letter, if you don't know him?" I said, "I have no idea."

And the next day he said, "I have another couple of letters." And he believed me that I was not doing anything, I think, because he tended to believe that I told the truth. And I really had no guess where these were coming from; they were from major donors of the party, most of whom I didn't know at all. And about a week later Alan Cranston called me and said, "From the moment I heard about John's death, I started writing my major donors, or calling them, and persuading them that you should be the senator and they should write Casey, and I helped them write their different letters, right?" We were old, old friends, Cranston and I had co-chaired with Willie Brown and Marjorie Benton, his ill-fated presidential campaign on the nuclear arms control issue in '84. And, but we go way back to World Federalist days when, I guess I was just out of the Army Air Corps at the end of World War II.

And so Alan did that. I think if - My wife hated me co-chairing that campaign, she was sure it was going to lose, and I was sort of intrigued with running a campaign but I was very loyal to Alan as an old friend, and I thought he was completely right on nuclear arms control, the right approach. And I think, if I hadn't done that for Cranston, he would have been for me going to the Senate, [but] I don't think he would have revved up this tremendous campaign that he put on with the major donors. And interestingly enough, [lack of money] was said to be the biggest obstacle to Casey appointing me. His wife – and some other people – but his wife said, "Of course Harris is the one that you should appoint." We were at Covington & Burling together, and [Casey] very much appreciated my civil rights role particularly [ ].

And later I heard that he told his wife and other people that were speaking for me that, "It can't be Harris because, I've just gotten this multiple disease problem, I've just raised this money for my reelection and I was worn out doing it. Harris has never raised political money, has none himself, and it has to be a rich person. Almost no one has a chance to beat Thornburgh, who they're going to send back to reclaim the seat." No Democrat had won a Senate seat twenty-nine years since Joe [Joseph S.] Clark. And he said, "It has to be [someone] rich, and it has to be somebody who's young in case there's a fluke, they win, so they can hold the seat, and Harris is sixty-five, and it has to be from western Pennsylvania, because that's the only way we can have a dent in Thornburgh."

And so he first offered it to the leading son of the great Irish Catholic family, the patriarch of it has just been appointed either ambassador to Ireland, or to the Vatican, they own the Steelers.

BW: The Rooneys.

HW: Rooney, Art Rooney was the son, who was offered the Senate seat. I don't think the press ever got wind of that, or not in a big way. And he turned it down after about a week, because he had three young kids and he didn't think anybody could really beat Thornburgh. And then Carville, who we had picked to run Casey's gubernatorial campaign but hadn't gotten much publicity for that when Casey won – I was Democratic Party chair at Casey's request full-time for six months during the campaign and helped pick Carville – Carville persuaded Casey to offer the job, to try to get Lee Iacocca to take it. He hadn't lived in Pennsylvania for decades, but he had ties to Lehigh or one of the eastern universities, he wasn't west, he was rich, but he also was old. And Carville said he'd got it all greased, and the only thing that Iacocca said to Carville when he flew out was, "You have to get Casey to come and offer it to me here, I'm not going to go and meet him somewhere else." And so they persuaded Casey to fly out, the whole press got wind of it, had huge headlines, he's flying out to - And he said, "I need twenty-four hours," and he turned it down. And allegedly Ellen turned in bed and said, "Now it has to be Harris," so that's how I got to the Senate.

The first poll was forty-four percent, between me and Thornburgh; he was beating me by forty-four points. And almost no one except Cranston and my family and I, really, thought I could win. And later, the best explanation for why I won was given by Thornburgh, who was persuaded to come back and claim the seat, being told that he was going to have a coronation, and we gave him an election. But Thornburgh was asked, "What happened?" And he said, "Well I was the canary that the Republican Party and the administration sent down in the mine to see what the atmosphere was like, and I'm the canary that didn't come back." So it was viewed as an extraordinary upset.

Now when I got to the Senate, being appointed, Mitchell sai – he was the majority leader – Mitchell said, "I need his vote tomorrow by three o'clock," and they announced it at two o'clock the previous day, and Mitchell said, "We must swear him in before three o'clock, because it's an urgent vote." And so my wife and my chief of staff, they all started packing, and we got [in] two cars and we drove down and got down at about one o'clock in the morning and I got sworn in, and then I was marvelously treated by Mitchell: number one, obviously the leader who welcomed me, and I was another vote for a time, and he also had known me a little bit in the Peace Corps or the Kennedy years. We had a mutual great friend, Berl Bernhard, one of my best friends, who I got to work on the Civil Rights Commission staff and then became the executive director of it. Are you doing Berl?

BW: I have done.

HW: Yes, well Berl's one of my great characters and one of my closest friends ever since law school, '54, and he's a tremendous fan of George Mitchell as you probably know. Anyway, Alan Cranston probably, in part, orchestrated it, but half a dozen, if not more, leaders of the Senate got up and gave these extraordinary speeches about me. Now they all felt it was giving, helping to give me a chance, and they told my story, whatever it was, and they made it sound great. And somebody said they can't remember [such] a response, which I'm sure [ ] was orchestrated, but it did give me, it gave quite a boost in the press and otherwise, that maybe I was

something special and not just a fluke. Various publications, the *New Yorker* [Hendrik] Rick Hertzberg said that, "If the founding fathers had picked a senator that represented what they wanted in the Senate, Harris Wofford would be the…" something like that, it was very extravagant, helpful stuff. And we set off in the campaign.

Mitchell did everything in the six months before the special election to help me, both offering the best committees, from my point of view the best. I can't remember for sure what all of them were, but the Foreign Relations Committee was something I, all my life, would have said, "That's what I want to do." Carville said, "No one has ever won a vote by going on the Foreign Relations Committee, and plenty have lost, and it's one place you're sure to get into trouble, and don't do it." He says, "Don't do it! You can't come out alive if you go on that damn Foreign Relations Committee." I [did go on the Foreign Relations Committee and] on the Health and Education Committee, and the Environment Committee, and so I had great political committee assignments.

And Daschle also teamed up with me, at his suggestion, [ ] I was going to run on the banner of universal health care, and he had already shaped a bill that was very close to what I was initially saying, though I knew very little about health reform or health care, and I liked very much Daschle's approach. It's sort of a Federal Reserve Board of the health industry that would be thinking through how do you cut costs and do various things, and have very substantial powers but wouldn't be running it, but it would have a public option and various things. And [in] his book that he did recently, Daschle is renewing that, and it was a joint Daschle-Wofford bill, and it helped in the campaign.

Now, the first real test was, will the Senate Democratic [Campaign] Committee [DSCC] give any money in this off-year 1991 election? When it's in debt and it's just beginning to try to raise the money to support the – what is it? – a third of the Senate [up for election] and of [that] third, [about] half of them Democrats. Robb, who was the, Senator Robb of Virginia was the person running that committee that year, and he immediately said, "I'm not going to support a dollar to Harris unless every member who's up next year – knowing that this is money that they might have had, and it's going to take us further into debt – unless every member who is up supports the committee giving the money."

And Mitchell went to work, Daschle went to work, Cranston went to work, and Mitchell was our leader, saying, "We should do it." And I think Daschle was up, and I think it was a closed meeting – I wasn't there but I heard about it – where they argued. And Robb was dumbfounded when every single one of the senators coming up said, "We want to do it." And I don't know when it got to half a million, but they and labor were the two that advanced the money to let us go on television before Labor Day and to really have a campaign that had a base. And Mitchell was behind that.

He was throughout, in my experience, campaigning for a man and helping pilot things in the Senate in a way that would help me win the election. And of course the reelection, the same thing, and [in] the three or four years before the '94 sweep by Gingrich and company, and

Santorum. So that's my paean of praise, from a very personal standpoint, to Mitchell, who, for good reasons, for the party and for himself but with great constancy and generosity, helped me, and went beyond what I would have expected. Well, I didn't know what to expect.

He loaned, I think, Mike Feldman, who was sort of a clerk in the Senate caucus room, who's become a big partner in one of the biggest political consulting firms based right across over on the Georgetown harbor there, I know the name, [it's] on my tongue. Mike became a key Vice President Gore campaigner and Clinton campaigner. He's an extraordinary guy, but he was very young then and Mitchell encouraged him to go up and join my campaign and take leave from the Senate, and for all I know he may have campaigned some when he wasn't on leave from the Senate. And he was a terrific help, and that I'm pretty sure, came from Mitchell.

And I had, from the very beginning, clicked with George. I thought he was wise, and was really searching for the common good, and wanted to tap the better angels of our nature, you know, a search for common ground person. And I thought to a considerable extent that he and Dole had that kind of relationship, that's the way it came through to me.

BW: All right. Let me just pause here for a second.

(*Pause in taping.*)

HW: I don't think George came to the little prayer breakfast very often in those years. Paul Simon persuaded me that this little weekly, one-hour, eight in the morning, bipartisan, non-political breakfast, where somebody gave a prayer, and then somebody was chosen to lead a discussion, and it wasn't about bills, and it wasn't by religious doctrine, it was personal experience that you could put in the spiritual realm in some ways, or family, and Paul Simon says, "That's the only way you'll get to know Republicans." And I found that it was true, that at cocktail parties you just buzz and it isn't a real conversation, you don't really get to know people, and at committee meetings you're on opposite sides and arguing against each other often, and it was very valuable for me. I still go occasionally.

Mansfield, until a few months before he died in '95 or something, every day he was in town, unless he was sick or something, came. He hardly ever said anything, but [he was a] former leader, not in my time. George didn't come as a regular participant, but he got periodically invited, as I recall. And I think it's one of the places where I began following, hearing about his work. And undoubtedly, I had other ways over the years to hear him talk about his Ireland assignment. And I'm talking about later, after I wasn't in the Senate, going to that prayer meeting.

And I'm sure you've heard the story about hearing an opera each time before he went to Ireland for negotiation. It's one of my favorite Mitchell stories. I heard him tell it two or three times, that he finally got a significant breakthrough by making them all laugh, by telling them very soberly, "I want to you know that in preparation for my 110th trip," or whatever it is, "I [ ] like operas, but I've come to believe my [best] preparation for the trip is primarily to hear *La*

Traviata," or whatever his favorite opera was, and, "it prepares me for this, and so I'm prepared." And they said, "What do you mean? How does it help?" "Well," he said, "same characters, it's the same plot, it's the same speeches, it's the same tune, and they just, no matter how often I hear it, it's the same disc, and that's what I'm prepared for unless you surprise me and show that someone here will say something new and see if we can move toward a common ground." And he said he attributed laughter on that occasion to that breakthrough. Now, he isn't automatically the funniest fellow. He's very earnest, and that's part of people's respect for him.

BW: Hmm-hmm. You basically said a moment ago, there was an affinity between the two of you.

HW: Well I think it was beyond the personal debt to him for being very generous and helping me, and caring for all the good reasons of the party for my victory, and personally going beyond that. A lot of people don't think he's warm; I found him quite warm. I noticed my legislative chief, who went on to work for Daschle and I said, I told him I was doing this [interview], and he said: "Smart, incredibly smart, secretive – wouldn't tell you if your pants were on fire – Machiavellian, interested in big issues, little chilly, remote and removed, not an inclusive leader, very much a 20th-century type leader, not a futuristic leader. Daschle, his deputy, was elected partly by the party because he was non-Mitchell, or anti-Mitchell, in terms of inclusiveness and modernity; blew it on health care but was hemmed in by Clinton, Kennedy – Clinton, Moynihan and Dole – but he still blew it."

Now, I've read that to you, I was surprised when he said this. Certainly he's incredibly smart. I didn't particularly find him secretive. I think he would tell me if my pants were on fire, because he was a very caring person; I may like Machiavellian art more than my colleague here does; he was certainly interested in big issues, that's something I liked very much. I did not find him a little chilly, remote and removed, not from me, and maybe I got special treatment, but I know how much Berl Bernhard thinks he's warm and fun and great. And I had no idea that there was any spirit like this about Daschle.

I did go up to Daschle when he announced he was going to run for the leadership in '95, before the Congress adjourned, and I went up and said, "I want you to know I'll be supporting [you]" – it wasn't against Mitchell, I never heard anything about being against Mitchell, I thought of them as very much alike. Maybe Daschle was a little more agile, I mean a little looser in manner, but very much a search for common ground guy – I went up and said, "I want to support you." And he said, "Well you're the first person on the floor who's told me that. I knew some people in advance were for me, but you're the first to sign on since I made my announcement on the floor." Probably I was sitting in the chair, because junior senators are in the chair when there's not some big issue coming up.

And on health care, again, I was sort of in the thick of that battle. This [legislative staff] guy was very much in it, too. I felt that Clinton the president and Clinton the first lady in charge of the health care *were* remote and hard to get to, and shaping it themselves, and not very collaborative, or collegial. My friend here says, "Hemmed in by Kennedy," I think Kennedy had a good,

strong position and I didn't know that, maybe he was making it hard to compromise. Moynihan of course was an extraordinary character, and the White House blew it with Moynihan. I never heard Pat complaining about Mitchell. I do know that, from his wife particularly, but right on the floor, Moynihan from the beginning said, "This plan is too overreaching, and nobody consulted me or listened to my advice. I happen to be chairman of that committee, and the way it came up, it's dead on arrival," or something like that. And the White House had some spokesman, stupid spokesman said, "We're not concerned about Senator [Moynihan], we can roll over him," something very close to that.

BW: Senator Mitchell or Senator Moynihan?

HW: He said it to the press, where it was published, and from that moment on Moynihan was basically an enemy of Hillary's effort, in my opinion. In my own campaigning for Barack, Moynihan's wife, who is to this day as anti-[Hillary] as you could imagine -

BW: Anti- ?

HW: Excuse me, excuse me, anti-Hillary, so much so, when Pat finally agreed that she could announce her candidacy, Liz Moynihan says that she accepted it only on condition that she would not be let into the house, and had to do it all outside. I don't know if it's true. There's an exchange of papers that I was privy to seeing, because Hillary was overstating her health care plan in the primary campaign, saying, "We're going to have health care for everybody," and never conveying that, "we're going to force people that don't think that they can afford it to pay if *we* think they can afford it." And most people hearing her thought, "Oh, there's going to be health care for me of some kind." And Barack's position was, "You can make it mandatory when you've really succeeded in bringing costs down so that there's an option for people that just think they can't afford it."

Anyway, Moynihan said to me on the floor, and then I've seen some of the paperwork between Dole and Moynihan. My wife said, as it looked as if the Hillary plan was going down, despite Mitchell's strong efforts to maneuver it through the shoals, it's right that there were these lions, the White House and Hillary and Kennedy and the opponents, et cetera, but it looked like it was going down. And so she, [my wife Clare], who liked Liz Moynihan greatly, they were good friends, said, "Let's get Pat Moynihan, Bob Kerrey, and you together for dinner." We have one other mutual friend, a fellow Rhodes Scholar, Tom [Thomas Lowe] Hughes, who was at the dinner. The purpose of it was to see if there could be a new intervention before it all went down, of a compromise that would at least be a substantial first step. And Pat said, "Harris, you've got to realize that the *first* Clinton term is going to be a *catastrophe*, and *nothing* can save it or this health plan; but there's a chance that we can teach him to govern, and his second term will be satisfactory."

And then on health care he said, when we got down to, "Is there something that we could jointly do?" Because Kerrey had his own initiatives, and I was with Daschle, but it was time to get a compromise, it seemed to me, and to my wife. And Pat said, "No, it's not time. Don't worry,

Harris, there will be a compromise, and we'll have a good first step, because Bob and I at the right moment are going to bring forth a compromise that makes sense. Bob will do it" – Bob Dole, not Bob Kerrey – "Bob will do it because he's a *patriot* and we've agreed that we can hammer one out." And then I, Liz Moynihan showed me the hand note that Dole sent to him at one of the health care hearings, saying, "Is it time to bring forth our plan?" And whatever the timing was he had said, "Later in the spring, Harris, it'll come, just you see, wait."

And periodically I would say, "How are you doing? It's getting hot and late." And he'd say, "It'll happen." And then he came to me and he said, "I'm" – I don't think he says heartbroken, but – "I'm *dismayed* that Bob has just told me that his caucus has tasted blood and that by beating the Hillary plan totally and no step, they can bring down the Clinton administration, and that he couldn't even get his caucus to support his own Dole plan, and he says, 'We're lost.'" And I lost. If we had had a good first step, [a] shift of forty thousand votes out of about four million, I'm sure, it was the number one thing Santorum had against me. "He went down there to get universal health care and what did he get? Certainly didn't get anything there. What he got is national service, AmeriCorps, and what's that? It's a 1960s idea for hippy kids to hold hands around the campfire, singing Kumbaya at taxpayers' expense." That was his opening gambit. And so George, I thought, was trying his very best to get something through, and we all blew it, we all blew it. White House blew it; everybody blew it.

BW: On that topic, what was the thinking of you and Carville and others about choosing health care as your primary issue when you were running in '91? Was that a strategic decision, or was it from the heart?

HW: Well, I don't think it was. Carville has a big, progressive heart, so it's probably something that would always be on his agenda of many things. I think it was a concept that health care was something that, that we could shape something that would be timely, and that people were feeling the rising costs on the one hand, but also the non-portability of plans, and if you've changed your jobs and applied for health care, then you'd have to, any pre-existing condition wouldn't be paid for. We had lost, Pennsylvania lost, in the years before I became secretary of labor and industry, had lost several hundred thousand manufacturing jobs, and we're still losing them in coal and steel, and we had whole communities that were worried about not having health care if they lost their job.

My wife, who always worried about whether we'd make ends meet, because we had no backlog of any wealth, she worried that if I lost the Senate, I was no longer on the state payroll, her autoimmune disease that she had for ten years would disqualify her for health insurance, and she was really scared, I mean we were, as the world goes, wealthy, [and she was scared]. So it quickly proved itself to be a significant thing. And I knew nothing, basically, about it. Clare, my wife, teased this chief legislative man when we were hiring him and said, after the election, after we had won, she said, "Now how do you make sense of what Harris' campaign was? He won in a very significant extent by the banner of health care, and he's never been interested in it and he really knows nothing about it.

"And secondly," she said, " he let Carville get away with taking a World Federalist" – we wrote a book about aid to, about India in our first years together, my wife and I in 1949, first year we were married. I mean [he was] a crusader for world union, and [ ] let Carville get away with [the theme] 'Take care of our own.' I let him get away with it by saying, "It's right that we're giving aid to the Indians and [ ] the Turks and the Kurds, but it's wrong that we're doing nothing at home." But Carville turned that, in various ways, into 'Take care of our own.' I could never say that.

I did once blow it at a union rally, [by] saying, as we were beginning to really have a wave of support, and I said, "And so it's right that we help the Indians and the Indonesians, it's right that we help the Kurks and the Turds [*sic*]", a total slip of the tongue, and the whole place went roaring with laughter, everybody [in the campaign] said, "Oh, what a catastrophe." The unions [spread] bumper stickers, "Vote for Wofford, not the Kurks and the Turds." So I don't think it hurt our election.

[Clare went on]: "And then third, he inherited as chair of the Democratic Party, and now a senator and appointed by Governor Casey and [supported by] the labor movement of Pennsylvania, opposition to NAFTA, and that's absurd, it embarrasses me with all of our friends, and those were his three big pitches. Now how do you make sense of that?" that's how she [put it].

Now, the real story on why and how we ran with [health care]. There is a [TV] ad we had that won prizes, and Carville took credit for it in the *Wall Street Journal* with Al [Albert R.] Hunt [and in] some other places, in which I stand in a doctor's office and I pull the Constitution out of my pocket, pocket Constitution, and say, "In this Constitution, if you're charged with a crime, you have a right to a lawyer. Isn't it even more fundamental if you're sick to have a right to a doctor?" And it got enormous response. That came because, picking up a $5000 check from an ophthalmologist [in] Philadelphia, Dr. [Robert D.] Reinecke, the head of them, gave the check, and he said, "But far more valuable will be if I tell you what I do when I speak on health care, I carry my Constitution in my pocket like Justice Black said every American should do, and I pull it out and I'd say [and he said] just exactly those words."

And so I started doing it, and in black churches they would go, "Amen, Amen," and every kind of audience responded to that pitch. And I told James after a few days, I said, "This is really clicking." And he said, "Senator, that's a theoretical proposition, and it's another way in which you're an academic. American voters don't like theoretical propositions." [ ] And I said, "Well, Lincoln said, 'The genius of Thomas Jefferson is that in the midst of what would have been otherwise a merely propaganda document, he began with a great abstract proposition: "All men are created equal, and born with [certain undeniable] rights,"' et cetera." And so I said, "Try it, James." [ ] I didn't think he was going to, and then when we did our first ads, one of the ones was to try this. And so Dr. Reinecke deserved the credit. All kinds of people have hailed him, and we've had times when he was given credit for it.

BW: You give -

HW: So that's how we got on it. And it turned out to be a lightning rod, an electrical spark, and Clinton picked it up and found it was for him, too.

BW: Right, right. How did you and James Carville interact? I mean, it seemed like you were -

HW: Well, he and I are closer in some ways than Bob Casey and James Carville. The best Gridiron kind of skit that was put on by my chief of communications – ut at that time he was Governor Casey's chief, David Stone – which has Casey and his family, stiffly at dinner, everybody proper and quiet and then somebody said, "There's a message for you." And he goes through the door, and when he goes into the other [room] there's Carville and everybody, they're doing rock 'n' roll and moving around, and Carville is dressed up to look like the devil, and the theory was, it was a pact with the devil and Carville, in the governorship race.

We had our differences. He had an ad in that governorship race that they knew I wouldn't like as party chair, and they didn't tell me. It was a devastating ad against young Bill Scranton, it had him with his beard, and it was this interview he had given that he and his wife had come back to Pennsylvania after being converted to the Maharishi [Mahesh Yogi] whatever-his-name-was guru, anyway, the guru of Transcendental Meditation, and he gave an interview saying, "I'm coming back to Harrisburg to introduce Transcendental Meditation to the legislature of Pennsylvania." He wasn't in office then, he was just [an ex-] pot-smoking hippie Democrat.

We had joked when he first started getting interested in politics, I met him at a dinner with the [future] governor up in Scranton, [at the home of] Maury Myers, his lawyer, [and Sondra Myers]. And the question was: can a 1960s Democrat, hippie, pot-smoking Democrat, McGovern Democrat, transform himself into a respectable Republican and claim his father's name and win the, I guess it was the governorship he was going to go for?

[*Phone ringing*]

BW: Shall I pause here?

HW: And the [Casey campaign ad] had a picture of this guru who looked like Osama bin Laden [an ad many think won the race]. So we had clashes of that kind. The biggest was my reelection campaign. My wife, who had been bored with national service for thirty years, to my amazement said, "You know, I think you're going to be surprised, but I propose that you let Harris really go on AmeriCorps and National Service, because it's a bill that he was, played a key role in shaping and in getting through, along with Ted Kennedy, and he's best talking about it of anything he talks about, and I think it'll look [good when] we can't win on health care now. [ ] There were two other things I had [helped get] through, the Martin Luther King Day of Service, and also the National Civilian Community Corps, those two [passed] before Clinton was elected.

In any case, Carville said, "Clare, I know one thing about national service, I know it's nice, but it's out on the *per-iph-ery*, and no one, *no one* can bring it from the *periphery* into the center of public action, nobody." And when we had the first debates, Santorum showed you can bring it into the public arena as a big political issue, it was devastatingly negative to answer once he said that about the hippies, holding hands [and singing] Kumbaya at taxpayers' expense. So Carville was wrong on that. Now whether if we had really gone big on that with affirmative ads, [whether] it would have made that difference [we don't know]. We lost mainly on the gun issue and abortion issue, and Casey Democrats. We lost by eighty thousand votes, forty thousand votes changing out of [about four million] – and Carville and Begala I think estimate on each of those issues, we lost about two hundred thousand votes. I had no big issue with Thornburgh on gun control, but I voted for the assault weapon ban [in the summer of 1994 and that made the gun issue more prominent].

Now, I don't know whether Mitchell could have kept Dianne Feinstein from bringing up the assault weapon ban. We wanted her to bring it up after the election, and I am a great friend of Dianne's, and people pleaded with her for the sake of Democrats who were up not to bring it up 'til after the election, but she had her own reasons for, well she passionately believed in it. I had no choice but to vote for the ban, it's just not something I could think about. But that turned it into a real gun owners' crusade against me, and Santorum had – have you ever seen the target that was sold? He didn't know about it, I'm sure, he said he didn't – but the gun owners raised money for Santorum selling target sheets that have "Get the real enemy" and "Wofford" in the bulls-eye. And he denounced it when it came out, but they had them all around Pennsylvania. Oh, he actually admitted in an oral taping [for] a documentary being done about me, that he did go to some of the rallies where they did it, but he never agreed with it. So that was - Mitchell might have been able to persuade her [not to bring up the matter that election], that's the only criticism I have of George Mitchell, that he didn't succeed.

BW: Hmm-hmm. Do you recall what the issue was where they were rushing to get your vote when you came in in early '91?

HW: No, I don't. But I do recall Carville being right on [the disadvantage of being on] the Foreign Relations Committee. Maybe the first meeting, or very early meeting, the Mexico Declaration, or the policy that Reagan, I think, put through first to prohibit any American money going to an international organization that facilitates or gives information about abortion, Planned Parenthood and such, and it suddenly came up, no one knew it was going to be brought up in the Foreign Relations Committee, and we went all around the table, I mean they just started voting for some reason on this, and I knew very little about it, [ ] but it seemed to me clearly something that should be changed. It's one of the first things Barack did [when he was elected president]. I voted against the Mexico Doctrine, or whatever it was called, and that turned the general opposition to me among the [Catholic] hierarchy into, somewhat of a crusade -

BW: Hmm-hmm.

HW: - against me.

BW: Hmm-hmm, hmm-hmm. Did you and George Mitchell ever have a discussion about the sort of hard-hitting approach that Republicans took on these hot issues?

HW: No, and it wasn't necessarily something [to talk about] it was so obvious, it was the main fact of our life that, you know, he was constantly trying to deal with it.

BW: Hmm-hmm.

HW: I think his, I'd be fascinated to, I would be fascinated to know what Bob Dole said [about that Republican approach], because I think [he and Mitchell] had a real, it *seemed* that they had a real kind of camaraderie. I always believed that Dole wasn't really a party to the sort of extreme, the hating and the polarizing politics.

BW: Except for his own 1974 campaign.

[*Phone ringing*]

HW: 'Seventy-four?

BW: Yes, when abortion came up as an issue, but that's an aside.

HW: You mean when he ran for office?

BW: That's right.

[*Pause in taping*]

BW: You became in '91 the sort of poster boy for health care.

HW: Right.

BW: And I guess, would you say that because of your success with the issue that the Clinton people really picked up on it and -?

HW: Yes, they also picked up Carville. The day after my election, Clinton called and said, "What about this Ragin' Cajun I've been reading about? Is he crazy or is he good, or would you recommend that I talk to him and think of having him in a big role in my campaign?" And I must have on balance said, "Yes."

BW: So, what you said earlier, I take it that the Clintons really didn't then seek a lot of your advice or input or anything *on* a health care plan.

HW: Not at all. Now, what they did do, and Hillary's answer, is ask for the pro-health care

senators to loan staff to Hillary's task force. And one very fine staff person who was my chief health care person - Two, but she most of all, but we had two who got assigned, and they were on different task forces and I knew more or less what they were doing on those task forces. But it wasn't that they thought that Darrel [Jodrey] was going to supply my ideas, they thought she was a good staff person to do what Ira Magaziner wanted that task force to do.

No, basically, I don't think Hillary ever seemed open or interested in talking to me about it. I finally, because of – not that I had blinding light as to what should be done, but I was close to the Daschle approach, which was different. But I increasingly felt that there had to be a compromise, and I asked to see Bill Clinton, the president, and I did see him once. But no, I have great respect for Hillary, I stayed loyal to her on the health care plan to the end, though several people on my staff thought that for reelection I ought to be distancing myself from her plan. And she's an extraordinary person; I think she's very possibly going to be one of our great secretaries of state.

BW: You -

HW: She was spectacular [ ] when she had the briefing of Congress on the health care plan. She spent two whole days, I think, and I think the Senate and the House separately, and we had three hours with her and basically without a note presenting it, and questions and answers. And the health care plan began at sort of seventy-five percent approval. There's a correlation between the health care plan [ ] in the fall to starting at seventy-five percent, going, by spring, to thirty percent or something like that, it's very closely connected with the fall of Bill Clinton's [support, with] Whitewater and [sexual charges], this is before Monica, but the press stories on Clinton and health care, whatever it is, Lexis[Nexis], the outfit that measures the number of press stories on particular things, [ ] but it was something like twenty-six thousand articles on the sex charges, and twenty-four thousand on Whitewater, and health care sort of nineteen thousand, over the six months period. So there were bigger factors working than just the arguments on health care, and that's the president's popularity. That would certainly happen if Barack's popularity plummeted, his chance of getting anything big or controversial through would be nil. And that was, I think, the bottom line story on health care.

BW: You formed a group, the Universal Coverage Group, is that correct?

HW: In the Senate?

BW: Hmm-hmm.

HW: I was in a little group with Daschle. I don't know what we called it, but we were for universal coverage. That didn't mean the mandatory [requirement], necessarily.

BW: Nor single-payer.

HW: It was not single-payer; theoretically I'm for single-payer. I think it's a misleading and

terribly bad name, people don't know what that means. But if you think of Medicare being for all, and highly subsidized for the poor, or the new public option that Barack is supporting, the aim is universal coverage, but we're getting it by increments and now we need a quantum leap, but we're very close to universal coverage for children.

BW: You were not part of the mainstream group that John Chafee and others formed.

HW: No.

BW: And why didn't you, was that by invitation only?

HW: No, I was a very loyal Clinton person, the way right now I would, even more than I felt about Clinton, I would want to be supporting Barack Obama.

BW: You say supporting Clinton; you mean Clinton and his plan, his health plan?

HW: And other things, but that was the most controversial, yes.

BW: Right.

HW: And I had staff people [who] wanted me to distance [myself], but it wasn't really thinkable for me, I campaigned all over the country for Clinton and I had tremendous hopes for him. Never quite the passion I have for Barack, but I started very high.

BW: Were there other issues that were very important to you which relied on the support of George Mitchell?

HW: Yes, national service, the first National Service Act actually, that's 1990, under Bush the First. And it was Kennedy that took the initiative and he called me down from Pennsylvania where I was secretary of labor and industry and [had] started the Governor's Office on Citizen Service, for an evening, saying, "I've helped shoot down the Democratic Leadership Council Program that gets large scale national service by requiring service, if you want federal aid." And for various reasons, he opposed it and joined the Black Caucus in shooting that down. He said, "But I want to, instead of a stick, I want a carrot. I wanted the National Service Bill." And then we knew we had no chance unless Bush would come along, and he had launched his Points of Light initiative, Thousand Points of Light. And so it became the National Service Pilot Program under a commission on national service that funded some of the first full time service programs like City Year, when we got it passed, and I lobbied and worked for that, and George was helpful on that. When did he go to the Senate?

BW: In ['80].

HW: Yes, see, so he was, by '89 and '90, was he majority leader already? No, was he?

BW: In '89 he was.

HW: Right, well he was helpful on that bill, and combining the Bush Points of Light with the Kennedy-Wofford national service approach. And then we had the *big* Clinton bill, and yes, I think George not only supported it and put it on fast track – the way Barack asked for the great new quantum leap, Kennedy's Serve America Bill, the Hatch-Kennedy Serve America Bill. George was a staunch supporter of it from the beginning. And we would have had substantial bipartisan support if the White House had not insisted on a particular formula and how much money and how fast we would begin. Nancy Kassebaum came in with maybe a dozen [Republican] senators [who] would support the bill if instead of for the first three years [going to fifty thousand national service positions, it only went to thirty-five thuousand or something like that]. We negotiated down, and she finally gave [her] last [number], biggest [ ] for three years and I wanted us to accept it, and I would suspect that George did, but the White House called the signal and [ ] said, "We won't compromise anymore, we're going to win with Democratic votes." I think we got four or five Republicans instead of fifteen.

BW: Hmmm.

HW: And Nancy, [years later] when she was with her husband, the ambassador in Japan, they had, my grandson and [me to dinner]. We were going around the world. And she went back over this, she said, "You know, if you had all accepted [my number], the five years of trying to make it bipartisan might not have been necessary." She was right. I suspect George [might agree, but] I don't think he was able to do anything with the White House, but as far as I know, he didn't.

BW: Did he share with you any frustrations with the White House?

HW: Not personally. In that sense he played his cards close to the vest. He knows everybody likes to tell stories, and knowledge is power, and I didn't have any sense he was in the business of sharing. I thought he was very open in considering things I was interested in, but no, I wish I knew more about his workings. I suspect Berl knows a lot, and then there is a man named George Mitchell who knows even more. Is he doing oral history?

BW: You know, I don't know the answer to that.

HW: You better get him.

BW: Mitchell?

HW: Yes.

BW: Yes, well I think that would probably occur up in Maine, I suspect.

HW: Yes.

BW: But I don't know the story on that.

HW: But I mean he can do it while he's alive, and for John or Robert Kennedy, it's always after -

BW: Right, right, right.

HW: - their death.

BW: Did Mitchell confer with you when he was considering retiring, or did that just come out of the blue as far as you were concerned?

HW: Out of the blue.

BW: And what was your reaction?

HW: Sorrow. But he retired with dignity, unlike Tim Wirth who retired with this wave of recriminations. And [Tim] wrote a *New York Times* piece about the corruption and money, and it left a very sour taste. I think Mitchell, probably everywhere he goes, leaves with a good sense of trust. I have another staff man who worked carefully [in the Senate, a] very, very wise guy; he's now very successful in the Accenture firm, and was my man on national service and other things. [He says,] "George is about public service, active duty citizenship, always stepped forward to listen and learn and make a difference on some of the toughest issues of our time when asked, whether by fellow senators, presidents Clinton, Bush, Obama asked him to do things, [ ] majority leader, Northern Ireland, Israel, Palestine, steroids in baseball. He deserved the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and he won the Liberty Award in Philadelphia a few years ago, one of the biggest things Philadelphia gives." That's somewhat different from my other staff man.

BW: Hmm-hmm.

HW: [p/o] I'm very high on Mitchell in my own experience. [ ] The great mystery, for somebody who was only there four years, [ ] [is the explanation for] the graph downward in collegiality and civility and searching for common ground. [ ] It was much better [ ] when I got there, and I think, I know that that quality seems to have deteriorated since I was there, since Mitchell left.

But again, there are big forces, Gingrich's leadership of the House set the pace, and very sadly, because he began as a man of ideas and his two-hour whatever it was instructions to Democrats in the House on how to spend their holiday and vacation, Christmas, after he'd been elected majority leader, he gave them a list of great books, two or three, that they had to read, and he started talking about a laptop for every young person, and "We have to have answers to poverty." He's a real mixed one.

BW: How do you see the Senate ever getting to the point where long-term planning takes over, rather than short term strategizing? And the reason I ask this question is because it came up -

HW: How does that –?

BW: - in Senator Rockefeller's tribute to you, when you were leaving the Senate.

HW: Jay Rockefeller's?

BW: Hmm-hmm, when he said that, "We should be thinking about the next generation rather than the next election." And it seemed to me that you came into the Senate with a sense of long-term future and what you need to do.

HW: Yes, I was, I didn't have much of a long term.

BW: Personally, right. But I don't mean in terms of your personal career, but in terms of the issues that you were dealing with.

HW: Oh, I think that's a fundamental problem in American politics and life, including the corporate world; the corporate world is wild for the quarterly or whatever their measurement is of profits. And Toynbee, this historian that I love, even though I haven't read all of his nine volumes, we had a great seminar leader that, while I was at Covington & Burling, wanted to read Toynbee with a group, Scott Buchanan, the founder of the Great Books at St. John's College, and we got through about six volumes. But [Toynbee] says of that [ ] [program], he says, "the urgent is the enemy of the important." Looking at civilizations and societies [shows] how the urgent leading to catastrophes and the important being neglected combined [in] the perfect storm of what brings societies down. And certainly the [new] mass media has added, the Internet, this swirling information, has added to this sense of the urgent taking over [ ]. Time to think about things is hard to find in so much of policy-making in the country and in the shaping of public opinion. And so I don't know what wisdom I have [on this].

BW: Well this question occurred to me, I was reading your foreign policy piece that you wrote in 1992, about the downfall of the Soviet Union and what an opportunity there was, at that point, to readjust our foreign policy and our priorities. And I looked at that and I thought, "Boy, we haven't come very far along, have we?"

HW: No. The story of missed opportunities is something, in the memoirs I'm writing [about. It's] so vivid to me that, in foreign policy the greatest opportunity was with the end of the Cold War and with the complete end, at that point, of Stalinism and the flux in the Soviet empire, and [then] the collapse of [that] empire. That was the time for institution-building in the world, and we went petty instead of big, I mean the U.N. became increasingly an irritant rather than an institution that maybe at that point could move beyond the veto. And just take the U.N. itself, let alone the [thing that was], the urgency during so much of my life, the arms race with the Soviet

Union.

[I asked] Carl Kazen, who was deputy head of security for [presidents Kennedy] to Johnson, once said to me [when I asked], "What's your lesson from being in the White House with two presidents?" And he said, "In determining the time they spent thinking about or dealing with questions, I would like to put a sign up in front of the president that [reads], 'There's one in four chances that we'll have war, and you are spending three fourths of your time dealing with the arms race and the urgencies of the assumption there might be war,' and the attention to all the other things that ought to be done goes [under] to that urgent crisis."

And there [were] the developing nations, more than half of the world poor and not really caring about either the Soviet Union or the United States or the Cold War, desperately needing education and development. [It was] not only the resources that were put into the arms race but the lack of moving, even in the arms race, moving to see the opportunity we had with Asia and Africa and Latin America.

Kennedy started in that direction, the Alliance for Progress in South America, [and] we did it in the high vision and high spirit and can-do spirit of winning World War II, we did the Marshall Plan, and [at home] the G.I. Bill and other things. But [ ] it isn't that a Marshall Plan is what was needed for India or Asia or Africa, but the equivalent thereof in vision and size and scope. We lost it, if you're thinking in terms of a world community [that] isn't dominated by anybody. There [was] one silver lining for those that don't want any country to dominate --- we have blown American leadership in the world and it's just almost a miracle that Barack has come along and is rebuilding it with a speed I didn't – I *did* once I got to know him – think [ ] could happen with him. But until he came along I would say, how [do] you repair decades of up and down, but of never really seizing the opportunities that [we had]?

BW: Right. Have you had contacts with George Mitchell?

HW: I went up to the tribute dinner that Berl and his firm put on about a year ago. I've been to [ ] [other] tribute affairs to George, and have had, you know, fun in the interval talking, usually listening to Berl and George talk. And I think he's spoken at the Council on Foreign Relations when I was there. I like very much hearing, I was [and] am deeply interested in his Middle Eastern mission. My wife and I were part of an international group that spent a summer on a kibbutz in Israel in 1950, and I've been a lover of the pioneer state society that they built before they had a state, but I think the tragic vicious circle of the Palestinians and the Israelis is [ ] one of the greatest problems in the world; it festers our relationship with the whole Islamic world [p/o].

Alexander Hamilton said that, "It wasn't the Federalist Paper or rhetoric that persuaded the colonies to form a Constitution – ratify a Constitution – and form a common government; it was the harsh logic of events." And I have a hope that in the Middle East right now, the harsh logic of events is going to make it the time for Mitchell and Barack, I thought [Barack's] Cairo speech was one of the most important things that's happened in foreign policy, in terms of America's

role in the world. And Mitchell is – I don't think he has the soaring vision of Barack, but I think he's the sort of person Barack needs to try to seize the moment and get something good coming out of it.

BW: Right. How do you think George Mitchell should be remembered?

HW: I think he should be remembered as someone, wherever you put him down, tried to find common ground and give an example of how you search for common ground for the common good. And you put him down on any problem or any part of the world, and the needle on his compass goes to the common good. And applying reason and believing that the American system is designed to enable reason to rule, and that it wasn't designed by cheerful optimists, it was designed by people that in the debates in Philadelphia and in the Federalist Papers knew that factions and original sin and everything else of human nature is part of the game, but that the Constitution was designed to make people reason, and they need people like George Marshall [*sic*: Mitchell] to make it work.

BW: George Mitchell.

HW: I like George Marshall, too. Yes, I would say we've just named two Georges that have exactly the same trait. And you know that when Colin Powell was accosted by the editorial board of the *Washington Post* for staying in the Cabinet with Bush, after he knew Bush wasn't listening to him on whichever issue but Iraq, of course, the biggest, that he had turned to Cheney and Rumsfeld and he was ignoring Powell. And Powell said, "There were two things that, my master image of what a soldier statesman should be" – George Marshall – [ ] two things he most wanted: one was to lead the forces liberating Europe, in command, and the other was not to recognize Israel ten minutes after midnight but to take time and become a real mediator in what was going to emerge, to defend Israel but not to go out in front so fast. And the first, Roosevelt said, "I need you at the desk running the war back here," and the second, Truman ignored his advice and went ahead, and Marshall continued and we had a Marshall Plan. And I think George [who] is not a soldier, [is] that kind of a statesman. I put him in the same [category]; it was a good Freudian slip.

BW: Good. I want to pause here for just a second.

(*Pause in taping.*)

BW: This has been a remarkable interview, and I really want to thank you for your time and for all of your information, and for what you stand for.

HW: Now can we, I should have made the bargain before we did the interview, can I have a tape of the interview?

BW: Well, let's talk about that off tape, okay?

End of Interview