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### Interview with John Warner by Brien Williams

John W. Warner

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## ***George J. Mitchell Oral History Project***

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**Senator John Warner**  
(Interviewer: *Brien Williams*)

**GMOH# 078**  
March 31, 2009

*(Significant revisions throughout; transcription edited without changes indicated; original recording restricted)*

**Brien Williams:** All right, this is an oral history interview with Senator John W. Warner for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College in Maine. We're in Senator Warner's home in Alexandria, Virginia, and today is Tuesday, March 31, 2009, and I'm Brien Williams. I wanted to ask you, what motivated you to run for the Senate in '78, what was your thinking and so forth?

**Senator Warner:** Well, I'd had the good fortune in 1960 to be an advance man for Vice President Nixon. I went to the Eisenhower-Nixon White House in the spring of 1960, I remember very well, and worked in the office which handled public relations and speeches. After about four months I was transferred to the traveling staff supporting the vice president. I didn't get to know President Eisenhower, but did have the privilege to meet him. It was a very thrilling experience. I was in my early thirties. After a long, hard fought battle Vice President Nixon lost to Senator Jack Kennedy; years later I was privileged to know President Kennedy. I had been at the University of Virginia Law School with his brother Bobby Kennedy; and, I'll be sitting in this room in a week or ten days doing an oral history for my very valued friend Senator Ted Kennedy. We served together on the Senate Armed Services Committee for thirty years.

That was my initiation into politics. In the interim between '60, the loss of that campaign, and '68, I maintained contact with Vice President Nixon, and again, traveled with him on several occasions. Early in the '68 campaign he asked if I would help organize and develop his Washington campaign office. The campaign rented the Willard Hotel, then empty, I believe in some phase of bankruptcy—one can hardly imagine that beautiful edifice being in that status. We polished it up and had close to fifteen hundred individuals, largely campaign volunteers, in that historic hotel.

Shortly after the election, I went into the president-elect's transition office, developed a desire for public office, left my law firm, accepted an appointment as undersecretary of the navy, and started in February of 1969. Then in 1972 I was elevated to secretary of the navy, spending a total of over five years in the Navy Secretariat, during the very tragic war in Vietnam.

In the spring of 1974 the president appointed me as director of ARBA [American Revolution Bicentennial Administration], an organization created by Congress to oversee the Executive Branch's role in the nation's bicentennial. Presidents Nixon, then Ford, were anxious to

provide assistance to all fifty states in organizing their own programs to honor our nation. Further both wanted me to run for Congress, and this post would be experience in working with state governments and more opportunities to work with Congress as every member was keen on the bicentennial.

Each of these opportunities of public service contributed to the decision to seek elective office. I was helped by many in preparing for, and being elected to, the U.S. Senate in 1978.

Now I'm privileged to be asked to share recollections about my friend George Mitchell.

**BW:** Hmm-hmm. You were talking about 1978 -

**JW:** Yes, I took the Senate oath of office in January '79.

**BW:** Now that was kind of a transition period I think, because Mansfield and Hugh Scott had been the leaders in the previous Congress.

**JW:** Yes.

**BW:** And both of them had left the Senate at that point, and then you had Robert Byrd and Howard Baker -

**JW:** Yes, both fine persons and strong leaders.

**BW:** So was that a kind of changing, were things shifting at that time quite a bit?

**JW:** While I had testified before committees of Congress many times, my direct experience with leaders began after I was sworn into the Senate. Hugh Scott had supported me during my campaign, and following my joining the Senate Robert C. Byrd became a close working partner as our states had a number of common interests. As to Senator Mike Mansfield, I met him only several times during my tenure in the Pentagon. An impressive man!

So those were the days when there were a number of long serving, experienced, 'titans' in the Senate on both sides. Senators Howard Baker and Bob Dole, I say gratefully, were my mentors. Sen. Robert Byrd became a close advisor. Chairmen and ranking, on both sides of the aisle, were often very helpful to newly elected senators.

**BW:** Now what about Muskie, was he one of those titans?

**JW:** Well, I knew him just slightly. He was on the Foreign Relations Committee, was the chairman, a powerful position. I was a new member on the Armed Services Committee; and we had a cordial relationship, but he left early on to join the administration.

**BW:** Right, right. So when did you first become aware of George Mitchell?

**JW:** When he came to the Senate to fill out Muskie's term.

**BW:** Hmm-hmm.

**JW:** Bear with me for an amusing short story about his first year. Senator Robert Byrd was a very forceful man, he was of the old school like Lyndon Johnson, John Stennis, "Scoop" Jackson, Baker, Bob Dole, and many other seniors in those days. When Majority Leader Byrd encountered a filibuster, senators were expected to remain on the Hill. So one night, a filibuster was going on, Senate workers pulled out of storage old canvas army cots, as they did in those days, and put them in the various rooms that circled around the Senate Chamber. I remember being in the Marlboro Room that night, there were probably close to fifteen of us in that room, "dozing," "snoozing" covered by "musty" old army blankets. I mean Senate customs purposefully didn't try to provide for "comfort zones" for all-night filibusters. But anyway, that's the way we often experienced filibusters.

George Mitchell was among the group in the Marlboro room. We didn't pay much attention to each other, as it was dark and members were fumbling around, looking for an empty cot, coming and going, but trying to get a couple winks of sleep subject to votes being called. Quiet commotion blended with the snoring!

Several weeks later, I can't remember exactly how long, Senator Mitchell told a story, I believe to a black-tie dinner, in New York City. As the story was related to me, Mitchell told the audience this was his first filibuster, for he'd only been in the Senate a short period of time. He had extreme difficulty in trying to drop off to sleep in a room where there were many different and varying "serenades" of noise. He was staring at the ceiling and he just sort of said to himself, "Dear Lord, why in the world did I ever leave the daily routine that I had as a federal judge to join this outfit and take this lifestyle on?" Further, he said to himself, "I turned over and I saw a young senator next to me with a big smile on his face, sound asleep. And suddenly that scene calmed me—I drifted off into my own sleep, as I realized that that husband was dreaming he was home with his wife, Elizabeth Taylor."

It was a fair, true, factually accurate story about a Senate filibuster. We shared at many good laughs together through the years.

This story illustrates one of the many remarkable skills that George Mitchell possessed; he used humor masterfully, not only as leader, but in politics, elections and at other events. A very gifted man. All of us in politics, if you don't learn to use humor—be it on the giving or on the receiving end—like it or not, you are not going to survive in politics.

**BW:** The public sense of him, mainly from television for example, is that he was fairly serious, often in a quiet subtle way.

**JW:** Oh yes, he was serious minded, confident in himself, and controlled in temperament.

**BW:** So did he portion off his humor, would that only occur in certain situations, or not?

**JW:** Well, I'm not sure I can quantify it. I just remember some incidents. For example, a tradition in the Senate, especially when a leader's portrait is unveiled, is to invite the leaders back to share recollections about their service. You have a copy of his remarks, when brilliantly and humbly he spoke to a large group of colleagues, and Senate staff, at his ceremony. You'll see finely disbursed, sparkling bits of humor and self-depreciation in his remarks.

**BW:** Well, he described himself as "senator with an asterisk" when he first arrived in the Senate.

**JW:** That interesting.

**BW:** Because he was just appointed, and in fact when the campaign started for him to be elected on his own in '82, he was way behind in the polls.

**JW:** It takes time to formulate your image as a Senator.

**BW:** But in the end won quite handily.

**JW:** By sixty-one percent.

**BW:** That's right, that's right.

**JW:** And then went on to win another election by eighty-one percent, and if I can say—with a measure of humility—that tied one of my record re-election votes! I believe through the years, we both experienced a strong measure of 'good luck!'

**BW:** Well did, how soon did people begin, maybe particularly on the Republican side, to see him as a person to be reckoned with, as a comer?

**JW:** Certainly, when his party elected him to the leadership. Senator Bob Dole was the minority leader, and both of those men had a 'steel' backbone for strength. Dole's was forged by the most arduous, heroic military service in World War II and long experience in politics. George had military service; he was an intelligence officer, I believe, during the Cold War period, and years as a federal trial judge. They were a superb team of Senate leaders. That steel showed, occasionally; and, floor actions were skillfully managed by them. That type of leadership and mutual respect is needed to run the United States Senate. Dole once commented to me, he never felt that Mitchell was manipulating the truth when counseling together, "he always spoke straightforwardly," and I believe that George held similar views about Bob Dole. Dole had a renowned sense of humor; he really did! They were a good match for each other.

**BW:** What was Mitchell's reputation like in the Republican Caucus, and were there times when you all were just really frustrated with him, or not?

**JW:** Well, the answer to that question is: on occasion yes, because it's the nature of politics in the Senate. When you are in the minority; we have sort of a constant frustration. When you're in the majority you have to exercise restraints on your power to get matters resolved. So I've seen it all. People debate back and forth, but its bipartisanship that gets issues resolved. The founding fathers crafted into the Constitution that senators have six-year terms, so that body becomes a more deliberative forum. That it is; that it always will be, I hope!

You may know this historic story, but shortly after the Constitutional Convention, Ambassador Thomas Jefferson came back from France and met with George Washington, who was to become president. They were enjoying a cup of tea and Jefferson sort of chided Washington for helping to develop this concept of a Senate and a House, a bicameral legislature. Jefferson opined: "It works much better in Europe with the unicameral system." And Washington said, "Well Mr. Jefferson, I just noticed that as you sipped your tea, it was a little too warm for your taste, and you poured it in your saucer." And Jefferson looked at him with a puzzled gaze and said, "Well yes, I did that, but what's that got to do -?" "Well you just exhibited the purpose for a Senate and a House. When the House gets overheated, as they are prone to do, they pour their decisions into the saucer of the Senate to cool off, let issues be addressed with a more patient, calmer spirit."

**BW:** You, I went back and looked in the records, and you actually served with nine leaders, majority and minority.

**JW:** That's interesting.

**BW:** And I'm wondering sort of, as a group, did they have common qualities, or does that position require - I guess you referred a moment ago to some of the things that it takes to be a leader.

**JW:** Well, each Congress is different, but each does have some common qualities, and that is to - Frankly, in the old days we cast, fifty-one votes, or a simple majority vote, or unanimous consent, to resolve a measure. Today, the implementation of the sixty-vote rule, filibuster and so forth, it's become more often a sixty-vote procedure. So you have to get those sixty votes. The ability of leaders to provide a measure of compromise becomes more difficult to achieve; and bipartisan Senate actions become less frequent.

**BW:** And isn't that the thing that has been lacking some in recent years?

**JW:** I think history will have to judge my period as it will the current Congress. I look back on the Senate, I know, that when Bob Byrd was leader, and George Mitchell, and Baker and Dole were leaders, the Senate resolved and acted upon many controversial issues. We worked with the leaders—and we achieved results by just 'hanging in' until, usually, bipartisanship found common ground. The Clean Air Act; that, was one of Mitchell's biggest challenges.

**BW:** Well, you've brought it up, why don't we talk about it right now.

**JW:** George was on the Environment and Public Works Committee, as I was, and he was very interested in environmental issues. The Senate learned to recognize him for that; he was determined, when he became leader, to strengthen clean air laws. An example: the committee went through its usual processes and reported out a bill, including the clean air issues, it came to the floor, and that bill was debated for several weeks, which is a long time. Hope to get the committee bill passed was dimming. Mitchell recognized that the bill on the floor was not going to carry the day, so he very skillfully began meeting with, either individually, or maybe one or two, three senators at a time, from both sides of the aisle, to say, "All right, what is it about the committee bill that you think needs to be changed?" He was masterful at persuasion, in a way you left thinking you could take a measure of credit for passage of a bill. In his office, he quietly rewrote basically a new bill, while the Senate was out there arguing over the committee bill. Senator John Chafee, of Rhode Island, Senator Pat Moynihan, of New Jersey, I and others worked closely with George to achieve his goals. Soon, he brought a revised, substitute bill to the floor, allowed full debate, allowed some amendments, and it passed. It was his patience, his determination, his willingness to listen, his personal willingness to compromise, that enabled that bill to pass with bipartisan support.

And then it went to the House-Senate conference and I observed his ingenuity in attaining a Clean Air bill that had a greater number of new policy decisions, compared to previous environmental legislation. The House seemed tempted to trade and give ground to the Senate on policy if they can get their programs, I mean their projects. People call it 'pork,' but I believe it more often results in meaningful projects. He engineered that bill through; I was impressed at Mitchell's agility in negotiating the final terms of the conference bill.

**BW:** Was the bill that finally was passed more or less conservative than the one that had come out of committee? In other words, had he done things to move it in a particular direction, or not?

**JW:** He simply did what he, not in an expedient way, but, what he believed necessary to reconcile in, a constructive way, the differences to get to the votes for a meaningful advancement of important environmental legislation.

**BW:** Are there other issues that you associate with him as particularly important?

**JW:** Yes, let's talk about the ISTEPA [Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act] highway bill that also was reported out of the Environment and Public Works Committee. A major piece of legislation, usually passed once every four years. Senator John Chafee, who was one of the finest men I ever knew, we were first partnered, when in 1969 he was secretary of the navy, I was his first deputy, as undersecretary. After two years, or so, he left DoD to run for the Senate in Rhode Island and I moved up to become secretary, so our bond of strong friendship was formed back in the turbulent years of the Vietnam War. We were reunited when I was elected to the Senate in January 1979. Chafee was an honest, hardworking New Englander, and George Mitchell saw in Chafee some strong leadership qualities which he could trust. And Chafee was in Leadership positions on the Committee on Environment throughout his distinguished Senate career.

And when it came time to get ISTEA (a new highway bill) passed, again Chafee, Moynihan, I, and many others, pitched in to help Mitchell. The committee, in a bipartisan way, tried to make some innovative new policy decisions—new transportation concepts. Initiatives, like bike paths, we authorized opportunities for states to create trails for hiking, cycling for transportation and to enjoy the environment. This beautiful bike path along the Potomac River from D.C. to George Washington's home at Mt. Vernon, Virginia, which is just outside of the window where we are seated, was a program expanded in ISTEA. The committee were all supporters of the environment and America's great outdoors, and were able to direct funds taking new initiatives and spending for transportation needs over the coming three- four-year period. Another concept in that legislation was to recognize the advantages of transportation nodes—joining corridors for highway, rail, and air in states where possible.

We felt it was time to greater emphasis on the growing needs of mass transportation, including the bicyclists, the joggers, the hikers, and advancements for automobiles and trucks. Mitchell was totally supportive. That bill, the 1991 transportation bill, it was called "A transformational, intermodal, piece of legislation." Again conferencing with the House to get that bill out, George was at the forefront.

**BW:** Now how much cooperation were you getting from the White House, for example, on that bill?

**JW:** I don't remember; I can't quantify that.

**BW:** Why was it -?

**JW:** George maintained close ties with the White House and the president was anxious to have both of those pieces of major legislation, so I'm confident that Mitchell got the level of support he deemed essential for passage of these bills.

But there were times when he and I were of opposite views. An important example was the First Gulf War Resolution; America needed to lead when Saddam Hussein brutally invaded Kuwait. The world was shocked. At the direction of the Republican Leader Dole, I drafted a short, to the point resolution for Congress to thereby authorize the "use of U.S. military force." Senator Joe Lieberman was the principal co-sponsor and eventually, about thirty-four others co-sponsored; the bill was SJ2. There was forceful floor debate. George spoke against the timing, very eloquently and very fairly. His theory was that the U.S. would be moving too swiftly, at that point, to involve use of military force; he believed the U.S. was not giving enough time to allow international diplomacy to hopefully resolve this situation. This was a legitimate perspective—he was not alone in his position—but the world was viewing with astonishment, dismay as rampant death, destruction, and challenges to sovereignty were in full view every day. Other nations were stepping up to share the leadership and put this aggression to a halt swiftly.

Well, in the end I believe, with all due respect to George, he was mistaken at the beginning; and

the resolution passed the Senate. A coalition of nations eventually formally joined together; and, their combined military achieved the goals of a U.N. resolution after just one hundred consecutive "hours" of vigorous, continuous battles against the Iraqi invaders.

As the fighting was nearing an end, with a coalition victory, there was controversy over whether or not the U.S.-led coalition of forces should pursue Saddam Hussein's troops as they were crossing from the Kuwait border into Iraq; continuing military force could inflict more damage thereby degrading Iraq's future military potential. The president felt constrained because such further military action was not 'specifically' authorized in the United Nations resolution. Mitchell supported the president's decision not to have Allied forces cross the border. President Bush, Bush Forty-One, came under a lot of criticism for not seizing the opportunity to cross the border in 'hot pursuit.' But Bush was correct, I believe, because the coalition didn't have a United Nations declaration supporting that tactic—that added use of force. Although, George had fought against the timing of the initial use of force, he fully backed the president once the coalition fighting started and backed the president's decision to stop at the border of Iraq. History will judge the options and decisions made by this coalition of nations.

**BW:** I'm a little confused. You were saying that Mitchell did not support -?

**JW:** He didn't support the time schedule for commencement of military action by coalition forces, because he believed diplomacy, given more time, could effectively stop Saddam's ravaging and other efforts to have the sovereign nation of Kuwait fall.

**BW:** Right.

**JW:** The pending resolution passed, it carried by just fifty-two yeas to forty-seven no votes. But once U.S. Congress acted and troops went into action, George fully supported the president. And then we got to that critical point after a "hundred hours" of hard fighting, it seemed over; but some fast decisions were being considered by the coalition leaders: do we use this military force which is in place, and at the ready, given the Iraqi soldiers were in disarray dropping their weapons, and fleeing? The issue: should coalition forces in hot pursuit have crossed the border into the sovereign country of Iraq to further degrade Iraq's military? And the decision was made by the president: no. George supported that decision, as did I and a majority of other Senators.

George viewed national security as one of his major responsibilities but didn't try and elevate it above all other priorities unless there was a critical problem. Eventually Congress passed the Goldwater-Nichols Military Reorganization legislation—a significant Senate-House bipartisan action.

**BW:** What about on other military matters? I mean, this was obviously one of the areas that you were -

**JW:** Well, we had experienced leadership in the Senate, Senator Sam Nunn was chairman of the Armed Services Committee for much of this period, John Tower was ranking, Goldwater

was very knowledgeable about military subjects as were many other committee members. There were a large number of former military serving at that time in the Senate. The Senate as a body was very supportive of our military; but, it was time for the Armed Services Committee to consider reorganization and restructuring of certain parts and missions of the Department of Defense.

**BW:** So where would he, as leader, have come into the action on something like an Armed Services bill that was moving forward?

**JW:** Yes, there was always a measure of difficulty in getting the annual authorization bill through both houses. Often it is the largest dollar authorization bill that annually goes before Congress. I've worked on thirty of these bills over my years. For example, each year reconciling issues in conference, there'd occur a measure of deadlock, and leaders, both houses, both parties, occasionally had to become involved. Mitchell gave Senate conference leaders a helping hand when requested, especially when final passage of a conference report was being held up on the floor.

**BW:** What about you and he as competitors, in terms of particularly naval affairs, with the historic Portsmouth Navy Yard in Maine and Newport News Yard in your state?

**JW:** Well, that's interesting, because my good friend Ted Kennedy, oh, he gave a speech every year on that point. He would get up in committee mark-up session and say, "Here is John Warner, and another aircraft carrier will be built in his state, billions of dollars, but in New England, all we received was a few destroyers and a navy band." He was eloquent, humorous; and a very hard working Senator. A valued friend!

Like all Senators, George carefully reviewed legislation that impacted the DoD facilities in Maine. Portsmouth escaped the BRAC [Base Closure and Realignment Commission] procedures, but other areas in New England took hits. It was essential to reduce the large number of bases and installations DoD had nationwide. BRAC decision-making had a measure of independence from the Congress, for it was structured in law that way.

Maine is rightfully proud of a very historic, fine shipyard, Portsmouth, that built medium sized naval ships. The craftsmen in that part of the world are quite exceptional, it's, you know, grandfather-to-father-to-son type of culture and loyalty. The yard's still there, fortunately, and it's still building the destroyer class of ships. Excellent ships that have been an important part of our naval fleets throughout our nation's history.

**BW:** So were you ever sort of arm wrestling over contracts, which way they'd go?

**JW:** I have no recollection of that, or George making severe demands that he had to have this or that. I'm sure however, as we say, "you take care of the leader quietly," but he, certainly with me, he was never heavy handed. My state builds large ships, his built smaller ships, so we did not directly compete.

**BW:** Do you recall anything about the BRAC closing of the Loring Air Force Base?

**JW:** Yes, it was a contentious one. That Air Force base was pivotal in the history of the Cold War because it had aircraft based there that were in the overall U.S. strategic nuclear deterrence plans. The U.S. had a basic concept of combining air, submarine, and missiles as a three-legged deterrence, and Loring was an integral part of the overall strategic defense plan of the Cold War era. It was hard for the Maine delegation to lose that base. They strongly believed national security required it to remain open. But the independent Base Closure and Realignment Commission made the decision to close it, as permitted by law.

**BW:** What, in '94, when things tended to shift rather dramatically to your side of the aisle, did people attribute the lack of success of Democrats to George Mitchell at all?

**JW:** No, I have no recollection of such attribution. He made a conscious decision not to seek reelection as his term of six years was nearing the end.

**BW:** Did that decision surprise you?

**JW:** I missed him, as did many others, but fully respect his decision. As I look back over, let's see, I started in politics in the '60s, so that's forty, forty-nine years, almost half a century ago and I reflected carefully during my last year and, likewise decided to retire.

Ronald Reagan emerged on the national political scene as George was completing his Senate service.

**BW:** Expand on that just a little bit.

**JW:** Ronald Reagan was a strong, strong personality, and he had a remarkable ability to communicate with people. And that election was, you know, his to win.

**BW:** In '80.

**JW:** Yes.

**BW:** So many people have told me that they feel that the culture of the Senate has changed radically, attributed in part to the fact that so many people have come over from the House, which tends to be more contentious anyway. And I was wondering, through your thirty years there, was it a more congenial place at one time?

**JW:** Yes, I believe it was, as there were many strong friendships across the aisle.

I made the decision to step down, when I was ending my fifth term and approaching the age of 82. I believed that when you hit eighty you are lucky, but the 'unexpected' can happen. Citizens of my state had treated me most fairly and respectfully; and, now it was time for me to be 'realistic' about the 'uncertainties' in your SO's. I would be 88 should I have finished a

sixth term! It was a tough decision to step down; but, I don't regret it, for those lucky enough to live to your eighties, we learn to deal with reality and to appreciate the future. The Senate culture, life I so respected and enjoyed was changing.

**BW:** It strikes me that there are so many senators from Maine who have had, and are having now, pretty distinguished careers.

**JW:** Yes, definitely. I well remember Senator Margaret Chase Smith. I testified before her as secretary of the navy. She was a long serving, highly respected member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Bill Cohen, Olympia Snowe, Susan Collins all have very commendable records of achievement, known for independent positions, and widely respected in the Senate. Among my closest friends.

**BW:** Do you think it's something about the water up there, it's so clean?

**JW:** No, I think it's, if I may say it, it's much like my state. Work hard, be recorded for 90 plus percent of all Senate votes, listen to and reply to your constituents, visit the state often, show your independence by voting your conscience. Voters will give you a pass 'now and then' to vote in support of an issue even though they may not be fully supportive. It's by so doing that you earn a reputation in your state of being a 'statesman,' 'statesperson,' or however constituents wish to express respect for their senator. And I tell you, I have observed Bill Cohen, Olympia Snowe, and Susan Collins, as votes were being cast, many times, and I know the courageous tenacity in their hearts, because they're voting the basic philosophy of New England, not a party whip's or chairman's urging. All were and are hardworking, wise senators.

And New England has a very proud history in the creation of this great republic, and that courage is bred into those Maine folks. That plus the cold climate, I think, 'firms' them up.

**BW:** Now you were a member of the gang of sixteen.

**JW:** Gang of Fourteen, it was a group of seven Republicans and seven Democrats who were seeking to establish a bipartisan block of votes for the purpose of getting the Senate to exercise 'advice and consent.'

**BW:** Fourteen, I'm sorry, right, right.

**JW:** Yes, I was a member. As were both the Maine senators, Snowe and Collins.

**BW:** That's right. Talk a little bit about the filibuster and, over your career.

**JW:** Well, it was sparingly used when I first came. As the years passed, it just sort of went into a transformation where a simple majority vote gave way to a sixty-vote procedure. During the brief existence of the Gang of Fourteen, the majority leader was Senator Bill Frist. We shared a strong friendship and mutual respect, but there came a critical period of time when we

had a difference.

He was considering the idea of trying to change that sixty-vote rule. As was his responsibility, he wanted to get Senate action on pending judicial nominations. But I believed that the filibuster rules had served the Senate well institutionally, protected minority views, certainly in my time, and I wasn't going to be a party to changes. So that was the inducement for me to join the Gang of Fourteen, which was instrumental in getting a number of judicial nominees confirmed for the Federal Circuit Courts and the Supreme Court. Leader Frist, a fine person, eventually received what he wanted: confirmation of the judicial nominations. The gang helped get Senate action.

**BW:** When you first came to the Senate, how often were filibusters employed?

**JW:** Not, certainly not, with the frequency of today, but I experienced several real tough all night filibusters. I mean, they locked down the floor and you went at it; sometimes it was days and nights. Today, if there is not sixty votes it is, 'stop'—you're off the bill. Like the environment-energy bill that Joe Lieberman and I put through the Environment Committee and to the floor, we worked fourteen months to get that bill up, and it was gone in three days, a weekend in between, but about seventy-two hours of Senate debate. I don't fault leadership, since we could not show sixty votes following a reasonable length of debate and the Senate had to move on to other issues.

**BW:** What do you think Jefferson and Washington, sitting there speculating at an earlier stage, would say about the use of the filibuster today, and whether there ought to be some structural changes?

**JW:** Well, I would hope they'd say, "You'd best keep it," because the Senate stands for the general principle of respect for minority views. The filibuster rule should remain at sixty, but be used sparingly.

**BW:** How much time in your early days did you spend on the floor, and did that change over time?

**JW:** Well, I spent considerable time, because I served in a number of committee leadership positions. Of the thirty years I've been in the Senate, I think for about half of those years, give or take, I was either a chairman, or ranking member of several committees: Rules, Intelligence, and Armed Services. So, that required being on the floor many times to help manage a bill and support the interests of your committee. Because the amending rights of other members was respected, a committee leader was expected to present the views of your committee members, in opposition or support, of an amendment to a pending floor measure.

**BW:** I guess I've gotten the impression when I've been around Senate offices that, because of the introduction of television, people don't bother to go down to the floor any more, they just come in when it's time to vote. Is that fair?

**JW:** Well, one has to have a full understanding how there are many demands for a senator's time and attention on a typical day with the floor in session. You have important committee sessions to attend, constituents waiting, and innumerable calls to return. Many duties control the presence or absence on the floor of individual Senators.

I favor transparency for the benefit of the public as often as reasonably possible; and, favored rule changes to allow televising of the floor. Live coverage of speakers has achieved a greater measure of public understanding of how the Senate functions. It gives a senator more opportunity to communicate with his 'folks' back in the state by T.V.

**BW:** A lot of times there are hardly, hardly anyone's there, they're just talking to the camera and the current television rules don't allow cameras to view the entire chamber except when votes are being taken.

**JW:** And that's a rigid, good rule, because senators are entitled to privacy while they are quietly working at their desks in the Chamber, others may be softly conversing, while a single senator is using the desk microphone to address the Senate and the camera covers that one speaker and transmits the picture with live voice. If several are debating the camera goes from one to another.

**BW:** When Bill Clinton came into office, Robert Dole pretty much said, "We're not going to work with this guy." Would that be correct, and how did you feel about that?

**JW:** I don't have any recollection that he made a pronouncement like that. Dole, and I, did many things together, and I told him one day, "You ought to run for majority leader." And he said, "Oh heck, I don't think I could win." I kept telling him that, and finally I said, our caucus was preparing to elect a leader, I said, "If you'll authorize me, I'll pick one or two others and we'll organize your campaign." Well, he hemmed and hawed, and finally said, "Okay, give it a try." Well, we did, and lo and behold he won.

Dole was an outstanding leader. But I never recall his laying down that sort of an edict about President Clinton. On issues of national security, I was privileged to often, with other Senators, to counsel him. Working with him was an enjoyable challenge. He worked with presidents in keeping with the traditions of the Senate and Senate leaders. Bob is a true American hero—and humble about his many achievements, from a combat soldier in World War II to leader of the U.S. Senate. Both sides admired his strong, fair leadership. They understandably had their differences, but I am certain Mitchell and Dole had a strong mutual respect.

President Clinton frequently invited Senators to his office for formal and informal discussions. I enjoyed those sessions as Clinton would listen carefully to our views.

**BW:** I've forgotten where I read that. I think it was partially in opposition to the health plan, the health care plan of the Clintons.

**JW:** The Clinton health care, they got off on the wrong track. The former first lady,

however, has proven to be a fine Senator. She joined the Armed Services Committee, I had the opportunity to know and respect her ability. When she came on the committee, she said, "Now, Mr. Chairman, I'm here to learn, work, and make a contribution." I said, "Fine, and I'm going to do what I can to foster that if you promise that during public committee hearings you will refrain any political 'grandstanding.'" Our job is to care for the men and women of the armed forces which is truly a bipartisan mission. She said, "I agree" and she worked very well with the committee members, both sides, and earned a strong record on national security matters. A most likeable, intelligent senator.

**BW:** I guess my next question would be how you think George Mitchell ought to be remembered as time goes on?

**JW:** As one of the Senate's contemporary very strong, accomplished leaders. His hallmark was his skill in the 'fine art' of persuading others to accept his views. A masterful talent!

**BW:** And what do you think about his accomplishments since he's left the Senate?

**JW:** Well, of course, Ireland was an extraordinary accomplishment. However, I was a little puzzled when he accepted this Middle East assignment because it just seemed impossible, but it was, and is, an important challenge. But maybe he, and I have to repeat, *maybe*, he sees some course to lessen tensions in the region that I don't. I've been to the region many times, I've been embroiled in many issues, but we all know and respect the strength and vitality of the Jewish state. And I'm just not sure what he sees as possible solutions; but, I certainly, he has my support, if he can do it, just do it. Israel is a democracy vital to that region of the world.

**BW:** Are we leaving anything unsaid here that -?

**JW:** No, I think we pretty well covered many of my recollections about George. I don't want to tie you up too long. But I think, I feel very privileged to have merited this opportunity. But, put the focus of this interview on Mitchell, not me!

**BW:** I'm going to ask you one last question.

**JW:** Sure.

**BW:** What does it feel like after thirty years to step away from that place?

**JW:** One is my deep sense of gratitude to the people of my state. I only had one serious challenge after I scraped by in that 'one-half-of-one percent' win in my first election. Mark Warner later challenged me fairly in a campaign for my seat. Publicly, he confirmed that he spent eleven million dollars of his own money, which was his right to do under the law, on a robust, fair challenge. But we never became enemies during that campaign, and later worked closely together when he became governor. We've become very trusted friends. I'm frankly pleased with his service and leadership in the Senate and I wish him and his family well. Senator Jim Webb, a very courageous, bright senator, was my junior colleague for my last two

years. The new, expanded G.I. Bill, legislation I shall always look back on with great pride as Jim and I worked on new concepts. I received my education pursuant to earlier G.I. Bill laws during the World War II and Korean War era and by working for this new bill I had a sense of 'payback' in gratitude for my generation of veterans. Jim was a leader among a group of veterans, then serving in the Senate, that drafted the bill.

I am always grateful to America for the many opportunities given to me.

**BW:** So what will you be doing at Hogan & Hartson, now Hogan Lovells?

**JW:** I will quietly rejoin, after being 'AWOL' for thirty-seven years of public service, and pursue the matters that interest me with an equal balance of *pro bono* activities. Politics will always be of interest but I am retiring from taking active roles—I did that for half a century now it's time for me to step to the sidelines. I'm "benched!"

**BW:** Good.

**JW:** Thank you, it's been a pleasure.

**BW:** Good.

**JW:** You're marvelous at it, your own voice intonation, your own patience, you're a master at this, you've done a lot of it, I'd judge. But remember it about George, and his strong leadership.

**BW:** Well, thank you very much.

*End of Interview.*