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George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Michael Aube
(Interviewer: *Mike Hastings*)

GMOH# 019
June 20, 2008

Mike Hastings: The following is a recorded interview of the Senator George J. Mitchell Oral History Project, an activity of Bowdoin College. Andrea L'Hommedieu is the project director. This interview is being conducted at the office of the state director of rural development at 967 Illinois Avenue in Bangor, Maine, on Friday, June 20, 2008. The interviewee is Michael Aube, the interviewer is Michael Hastings. Mike Aube, would you please begin by stating your full name, spelling it, providing your date and place of birth, and your parents' full names.

Michael Aube: My name is Michael Aube, last name is spelled A-U-B-E, I was born on July 17, 1950 in Biddeford, Maine. My parents' names are Germaine Roy Aube and Edmund Felix Aube.

MH: Mike, you were interviewed on April 4, 2000, for the Senator Edmund S. Muskie Oral History Project. Given that the details of your upbringing, education and family history were covered in that interview, I'm not going to make you repeat them again here. But could you update us on what you've been doing since 2000?

MA: Since 2000, well in 2000 I was probably working for the U.S. Department of Commerce, the agency being Economic Development Administration, and really kind of an extension of my, most of my professional career has been in some level of public sector involvement with economic and community development, particularly as it focuses here in the state of Maine.

Probably two highlights that I would mention since that time, or two areas that took most of my time, let's put it that way, were my being on the city council and mayor of the city of Bangor in 2000, and then trans-, making a change in May of 2000 to this job as state director for USDA Rural Development. I was with the EDA – Economic Development Administration – I had responsibility for Maine, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, and only in a true federal system would one look at that geography in that context. And so that, the commuting was kind of interesting for me.

MH: Maine, Connecticut, and Rhode Island?

MA: Maine, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. You drove through other states that were somebody else's jurisdiction to get to where you were going to be. And I think that was really a function of the time of the, how vacancies occurred and the fact that they were downsizing even

then, in early 2000, well 1998 is when that began, of reducing staff out in the field, and there was no support staff and you had one person handling multiple state jurisdictions. And so I was, although I enjoyed the program and felt that I was able to contribute to the landscape, if you will, I was contacted by Senator Snowe's office to see if I would be interested in assuming the responsibility for state director for USDA Rural Development. And as a result of the change in administrations, Olympia, as the lead senator, Republican senator, in the state of Maine, had several positions that she could nominate for the president's consideration.

And so she, I was asked if I would consider that, and I did and was interviewed by a team of people, which I found quite fascinating of who they were made up of – housing interests and community development, banking interest and et cetera – and as a result of several interviews was then, my name was submitted to the White House for consideration and then was asked to come on board, and that's what I've been doing since that time, is state director of USDA Rural Development.

MH: How big a staff do you have?

MA: Well, in 2001 the staff was about 113, we're now down to eighty-four. A couple of items have changed that, there's been obviously a reduction in force across the country, but more than that the consolidation into the service center, which is Natural Resource, Conservation Service, and Farm Service Agency, and Rural Development. We all had our own IT staffs, but with combined technology, phone system, communications networks, et cetera. The idea was to consolidate them and the department did do that so we lost several, all of us lost several FTEs to that, which, that's worked out fine.

But at a program level, I'm really pleased that in the prior years, Rural Development does non-farm basically activity in the state of Maine for rural communities, and we have, we're a missionary that has forty-five different programs at this point in time to deliver here in the state of Maine, all of which have different eligibility criteria, both geographic, demographic, and financial thresholds so that people or institutions have to meet in order to qualify. And so it becomes more complicated and so you need to specialize in that regard.

But as a state, during the '90s, the state was averaging about \$125 million per year in grants, loans and loan guarantees into the state of Maine, and I'm happy to say that we've kind of hit a threshold between \$190 and \$200 million a year, and in fact from May 2001 to September of 2007, we reached the billion dollar mark of investments here in the state of Maine. So we're very pleased with that record. And we've got good staff, we're doing a lot of cross-training, people have to do multiple tasks, no more specialization, and so that has been very good.

And I think what I've contributed to that is to try to have the staff have a greater awareness of the needs in Maine and how our resources might be accessed, and the fact that all of our programs are really linked in trying to build communities and strengthen them here in Maine.

MH: How does the work differ from your previous work as like EDA director then?

MA: Well, just the size of the magnitude. I mean with EDA I had three states, a staff of one, myself, I would consider it very successful if I were to be able to get a four or five million dollar investment into the state of Maine. And in fact, I tease some of my counterparts that I was, in many, some of our years here I've been able to get more money into Maine than they've gotten nationally in some of their activities, when we've gone over the \$200 million mark. And so it really is apples and oranges, it's a different fulfillment. But we're able to do housing and business loans and investments, and hospitals, critical access care hospitals, and broadband and distance learning and telemedicine. I really -

MH: Could you give me an example of one project that you're particularly proud of?

MA: Well I think the, yeah, the Calais Regional Hospital, where clearly, as you look at the need to provide appropriate health care throughout all of Maine in the rural areas which has an aging population, you're not going to attract people to stay there or to come there if you don't have some significant foundation of access to health care. And this was an old, dilapidated hospital, wooden building, you know, the staff was very committed to it, but it had its limitations. And we were able to provide a, just under a \$20 million loan and loan guarantee to make that happen. And you look at what that institution does for the hospital, it attracted new doctors who now have moved in from elsewhere outside of Maine, making that their residence, hopefully feeling happy about that so it brings in that kind of a caliber of an asset to a community, and then the health care is there.

And I'm happy that, we've done this in Lincoln and Blue Hill and Penobscot Bay, so the network of hospital systems is beginning to come into play as they're much more congenial and complementary. They're still competitive, and you've got the big giants, the big three or four who provide everything, but they see this as a feeder system and that they could not provide that service out there, in the Calais, Maines, in the Blue Hills or the Lincolns or the Millinocket Regional. And so to the extent that we can provide investment in the form of grants, loans and loan guarantees, I think that's something that I'm proud of.

I mean what would Washington be like if it didn't have any health care operations at all. I mean it's a challenge as it is, the level of health care, so I think that's just one example that I would cite.

MH: Let's backtrack a little bit. You mentioned that you were mayor of Bangor and you were on the city council. Tell us about your city council work, when did that begin?

MA: That began in 1997, 1997, yeah, I was elected for my first term in 1997.

MH: How many terms did you serve?

MA: I served two. And got reelected in two thou-, in '99, got reelected in '99 to serve in 2000. And it was interesting when I first got elected to the council, I decided that, "Well, you

know, maybe what I can do is be mayor when we get into the next centennial,” if you will. And little did I know that was going to come with the Y2K scare that everyone was panicking, particularly in the public sector. And I remember working with the city administrator then who, they had established actually Chris-, New Year’s Eve a kind of bunker that was going to watch all the computer systems, make sure the firefighters and the police and the ambulance and all the public services, the water system, everything was not going to go haywire. And I thought it was really an overextended exploitation of fear that, nationally, and Ed Barrett asked me, he says, “Are you going to come in as the mayor and be in the bunker with us that night?”

MH: And Ed Barrett is?

MA: City manager with the city of Bangor, still is, and he was city manager at the time. He says, “Are you going to come and join us?” I says, “No, I think I’m going to a dinner party, you can call me if there’s an emergency.” And nothing happened but, but I think that was fun. And then, that was at a time, I was very fortunate to serve at the time with some really great people on the city council in Bangor, and that’s when I think significant changes, the investments in the downtown, the application for the folk festival and all these things that have come to fruition over the years that are, that now are already beginning to take as regular, if you will, or ongoing activities, that investment in cultural activities in downtown, et cetera. We had a good group and we really worked together to make that happen.

MH: You’d worked in congressional offices, you’d worked in state and federal agencies, did the running of a municipal government, did you find it very different from the – or was it what you expected?

MA: No, I think I found it different. And I think it’s a cliché and people – I never knew if I believed it or not, that you know, the best form of government is as local as you can get it. I really think that’s true. You know, having worked in Washington, the issue there is much broader policy, how to, the question becomes, how do you, like in economic development, how do you deliver an economic development program that really is going to be hopefully targeted, will address certain needs, and how do you shape that, and what’s an appropriate level of funding? And at the state level you go to that to a certain extent, but again, I think with a different process. But at the local level, I mean it really is, “Okay, here’s what you got, here’s the problem, how do we fix it? And it needs to be fixed now.”

And so it was, and it was wonderful because in Bangor we have nonpartisan elections, and so whether you’re a Democrat or a Republican or whatever, that was left at the doorstep. And I think that was one of the greatest strengths at the local level. Sure, there were disagreements and, but oftentimes we weren’t talking philosophy and policy, we were talking; “How do we make something happen, how do you get more sidewalks on the east side?” I mean that’s a very legitimate, and so to bring that kind of thought process to it is, with the result being that it either happens or doesn’t happen. If it didn’t happen, it failed, you know, the establishment of policies and waiting five or six years for them to see fruition, I think that’s the greatest difference, from my perspective.

All of them are needed. I think the other thing it taught me, I remember as I reflect back, and this goes back to my Muskie days when I first went to work for Senator Muskie in Washington, D.C. He chaired the Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Relations [IGR], which I don't believe exists any more. And if working at the local level ever made me understand the value of what that really means, it was being at the local level. Because there are clearly defined roles between local government, state government and federal government, and I think those are really blurred in many ways now, and, you know, where locals look, "Well, the federal agencies need to solve all this," or the feds say, "Well, that's a local issue."

There's more fighting as opposed to, "What's our area of responsibility? How is that implemented? And how is it done in a trusting way?" We're a federal agency here and, you know, in all honesty, we have responsibility for accountability of the resources being spent to make sure they're done right, but, you know, there comes a point where you're spending more time on accountability than you are on having results perform. And I think that frustration I think I share, but if we could ever get back to this intergovernmental approach in, of fairness and trusting, it would, really would make sense, in my opinion.

MH: Mike, let's turn to your relationship over the years with Senator Mitchell. I reread the Muskie interview with you in 2000, and I was looking for when you and Mitchell first crossed paths. Do you recall when that was?

MA: I do, it was probably in the, well it was, either 1971 or 1972 at the, when the, the election between George McGovern and Richard Nixon. And I was very much, having just come out of college then, I had run for the legislature in the Democratic primary against Barry Hobbins in Saco, being, I was going to school in Boston, and being your senior year and towards the end, I didn't come home every weekend to campaign and I ended up losing.

But in any case, Barry went on to the legislature and I ended up working as a teachers assistant in Saco that year, but got very engaged in the entire McGovern campaign and established a grassroots effort in Saco and in York County to try to deliver the vote as a, really the big issue then was the war, and an anti-war candidate, if you will. And we were successful in doing that, and that's when I think I first, George Mitchell was national, he was Democratic National Committeeman at the time and that's where we probably, our paths first crossed, and he provided advice to us and encouragement and the like, and built that relationship with him then, and his involvement with Democratic Party politics at that point in time.

MH: Were you on the State Democratic Committee?

MA: I was not in, when I first met him. I ended up in the, after, in the post election of '72, I was elected president of Maine Young Democrats statewide and as a result of that meeting went on the Democratic State Committee at the time and engaged in that process.

MH: What was the process by which became president of the meeting?

MA: We had an election, it was young people's – young people, yeah, right, God, hard to believe – we got together and had our convention, and it was time to elect the officers and I decided to run. And it's ironic, I was from Saco then and I beat Geaghan from Geaghan's Roundhouse, I don't think it was Chris, I think it was -

MH: Here in Bangor?

MA: In Bangor, yeah, who was the opposition candidate, if you will, and I was able to defeat him after actually three ballots, and was able to then become president of Maine Young Dems and tried to use that position, if you will, to advance the cause, if you will, of getting more young people involved in that regard. And that's where our paths crossed, because this would have been fall, late fall of '72, and through '73, 1973 is when George Mitchell was beginning in earnest to think in terms of perhaps running for governor. And Ken Curtis was the governor at the time, and it appeared that, and this all preceded all the Watergate, the Watergate information stuff was out there but the electorate had not reacted to it, we were all probably in a state of suspension at this time, going through that process, and so George Mitchell was evaluating that.

And we had in 1973 a referenda question on, "Should Maine have public power?" And that election, again an off-year election, provided ample opportunity for all the candidates, on both the Democrat and the Republican side, to begin to test their waters and put together organizations. And Peter Kelley, from Caribou, Senator Peter Kelley from Caribou was the lead proponent, if you will, for public power in Maine and used that as his stepping stone to run for governor as well.

And so as president of Maine Young Democrats, it was, and the perception that you maybe can control young other chapters, if you will, throughout the state – I must say it was much better organized than it is now, both Republican and Democrat. I mean, we had fairly good organizational structure so you could place sixteen calls and get sixteen younger people in each county, and they would make calls, I mean you could have that network. I don't know if that, probably it's an e-mail system now, but whatever.

And so it was kind of fun to have people, like Joe Brennan was attorney general and – no, he was not attorney general, he was a senator, Senator Joe Brennan, Senator Peter Kelly, George Mitchell, and I can't remember if there was another active Democrat seeking the nomination, but all sort of courting for your support, if you will. And I had made an early decision, I was impressed with George Mitchell's intellect and his, his thought process of coming out and concluding how he felt about certain issues, and decided to, I would, if there was a, if I could do something to help him I would do that. So I kept on, he, I kept on telling him that, and Debbie Bedard, who was also from Saco and, she was secretary of the Maine Young Democrats at the time, and she and I offered George, offered many times, and he kept on saying, "Well, you know, once I'm ready to go maybe I'll give you guys a call."

And I think, like typical of any campaign, I think events began to overtake possibly the strategies

of where they wanted to go, and so it was in the, either August or September of '73 that Debbie Bedard and I were asked to be the first ones to be employees of the – I don't know what it was called then, the Mitchell, couldn't have been the Mitchell for Governor, but whatever status he set up to the tune of fifty-five dollars a week he paid us each to work for him.

And my job, Debbie's job was to, we had some space that was given to us by, in the Eastland Hotel, by the Dunfeys obviously, had a little office space there and, tucked in either the third or fourth floor, I don't remember, with some office equipment and a couple phones. And my job was to do scheduling and driving George Mitchell around the state so he could advocate for public power, using that as a way of building and then bringing the na-, who did we meet with and what was, building that database, and Debbie's job was to send out the thank you letters and, you know, starting to hear some connections and that kind of stuff. And so we spent that fall doing that. Public power was defeated.

MH: Did you travel with him during that period?

MA: I did, I did. And I'll never forget, the first night I had to, in fact he, I think we got hired like on a Saturday or something. Well, hired, when we were asked, and okay, why don't we do this and three weeks later or whatever, and so I show up at the office, and he was with the law firm at that point in time, right on Congress Street, 477 Congress I think was the, it was right down the street from where our office was.

MH: Right.

MA: So he could walk up at lunchtime and see these two people really working or just sitting there or whatever. And conversely, if we needed to go down and get something, knowledge or process, we would.

And I'll never forget that first day, I hadn't anticipated that there'd be driving. And he called and he says, "Well, I'm giving a talk tonight in Boothbay Harbor at the Ponderosa Campground." Which, every time I go by there now I think, "That's the first place I ever went officially with George Mitchell." And I drove him down there and he gave a talk on public power and that was the, from there just, you know, three or four times a week he'd either go visit with a, a county committee meeting or a local town Democratic committee meeting or a forum on public power or whatever, and Joe Brennan and Pete Kelley were also crisscrossing the state, doing the same thing.

MH: Was that the first time that you'd gone to those kind of meetings?

MA: Yeah, yeah, I would say it was, in terms of, I mean, you know, as a kid I had gone to my own town Democratic city committee meeting, but this was the first time really kind of reaching out and beginning to build recognition for who are these people, and who is a, quote/unquote, "power player," or "influence person" in Boothbay Harbor or Presque Isle or whatever.

So we traveled all over and I think, one of the funny stories I can think of, I don't know if it was, I think that may have been during the gubernatorial campaign was, to say that George Mitchell is a light sleeper is a, is not an overstatement. We stayed one night at the, Bruce and Nancy Chandler's residence in China, Maine, and it was a summer night and, and I mean China, Maine is pretty, pretty rural and pretty quiet, and they had a big old farmhouse up from the main road. And we got up the next morning to go to our next place, and Senator Mitchell, well then George Mitchell, lawyer Mitchell, looked really tired. And so we're having breakfast and I said, "Geez, you look tired." He goes, "God, I couldn't sleep, there's so much noise, the cars going by." Well I'm thinking, "Cars going by?" If there were six cars that went by between ten p.m. and six a.m., I'd be shocked. That's when I learned that he needs the back bedroom, he really is a light sleeper and the slightest noise wakes him up. And I just remember the humor of that.

And that's how you learn things. I remember going around with him, you know, you learn their dislikes and their likes and so forth.

MH: Was he a demanding boss, in those early days?

MA: Yes and no. I think he, I think the best way to address that is, he was, he expected structure and he expected good organizational, you know, if we were to be there at seven, we're going to be there at seven and, "Who is it that I'm going to meet?" and, expectation was that. But I think he had learned from his days in working with Ed Muskie that screaming and shouting were probably not something that was in his style, he had been screamed and shouted at too many times by Muskie.

And, but I do remember during the campaign trail one year, it was early on, we went up to Rumford and he did the mill gate and it was typical campaigning, and my job was to drive him there. And he does all the hand shaking and I'm standing there, I'm handing out a, a one-page brochure, "Vote for George Mitchell because he's a great guy," it says all over it. We go to get in the car to leave, and he goes, "Well, you need to go inside." And I said, "Well, why do I need to go inside?" He says, "I had to do this for Ed Muskie, you're going to do it for me. All these guys grabbed the brochure, went to the bathroom and just left them somewhere, they're still good, go get them." And that's a true story. I had to go in, I went in and sure, he was right, I mean there was probably sixty, seventy brochures which, his feeling was, "Those cost a lot of money," and even though Eddie, his brother-in-law, was printing them for us, I think the point was, "There's value in getting those back and we'll hand them out at the next place."

And so my job was to drive him there, hand out the brochures, go find the men's room or the cafeteria or the workroom, and gather up the brochures that were no longer being held by the, by bodies, and recycle them. So demanding, I think he was demanding in that sense, of structure and effort and so forth.

MH: Now, the Senator ultimately lost that race for governor.

MA: Right.

MH: What went wrong?

MA: Well, in my opinion a couple things. I think when he, when he first announced we were still in the, the Watergate had not come to fruition, I think Vice President Agnew had resigned, Nixon had not yet resigned, and then did in August of '74. The pardon came in September, I guess, by President Ford. And there was a huge reaction in Maine, we are in many ways very libertarian in our upbringing, if you will, and I think there was a backlash towards people who were of the party system.

Keep in m-, remember what happened in '74 in Maine, despite the huge, around the country, the Democrats were the beneficiary of the anti-Republican vote, but in Maine we threw out Peter Kyros [Sr.], who had been in Congress for eight terms maybe, ten terms?

MH: I think that was about eight.

MA: Yeah, and Dave Emery, someone from Rockland, Maine, who was put up as a sacrificial lamb, I'm sure was saying, "We're going through a recount, what happened here? Why am I winning this?" you know, "I'm a Republican," Republicans took it on the face. And George lost; George Mitchell lost in part because there was an Independent, Jim Longley, who was running and was able to capture that frustration and that anger to his way, and George was seen as part of the party machinery.

He, because he *had* been extremely active in the party many years, had been the engineer, if you will, of prior Muskie campaigns, Muskie stewardship. So there was this huge frustration and, and I think, and the bottom line is the floor fell out from underneath Jim Erwin's campaign, Republican Jim Erwin. Had he maintained his base, I think George would have won a plurality in a three-way race.

But George Mitchell took it on the chin during that whole campaign, the primary campaign, from Aaron Levine. Aaron Levine was from Winslow, I believe, or Waterville, Waterville-Winslow area, and for some reason, to which I have always felt there was a personal conflict there and I don't know what it is, I don't -

MH: Who was Aaron Levine?

MA: Aaron Levine was basically a businessman from Waterville-Winslow, elderly – elderly, older than George at the time, and older than Joe Brennan and Peter Kelley, who were the, you know, the new young Turks, if you will, at the time. And Aaron was adamant that, "George Mitchell lies," and, I mean it was, I think that something may have happened between, when George worked for Senator Muskie and the Levine, I believe Levine owned some slaughterhouses, and I remember asking George once, "Why is he so negative toward you?" I mean he'd talk about what he could do for Maine, but then he'd go right into an attack on George Mitchell. He wouldn't attack Joe Brennan, he wouldn't attack Peter Kelley, but he'd attack

George. In pretty strong words, I mean, you know, 'liar' and 'dishonest' and this and that.

MH: Was he a candidate?

MA: He was a candidate.

MH: He was a candidate, for the Democratic -

MA: Yeah, he qualified; he had his name on the ballot.

MH: Okay, okay.

MA: I don't know how many votes he ended up with, but again, night after night after night, you know, attending debates as you do.

MH: Hmm-hmm.

MA: Someone questioning your integrity and everything else. And the irony of it is, George Mitchell grew up in Waterville, you know, that was always a stop on the campaign trail. If there was a way to swing by and see his mother and, we would have to do that.

And geez, I can remember first time I went, and then it became a ritual, he'd say, "Well, we'll swing by and see my mother, we'll have lunch there and -"

MH: So you met George's mother?

MA: Oh yeah, yeah, and the first -

MH: What was she like?

MA: Oh, she was wonderful, absolutely wonderful, very, if I remember correctly, small, frail. I mean, frail, I don't mean that in a weak sense but a typical, what one would think of a grandmother type at that point in time, and living by herself in Waterville, in the house that George grew up in. Whenever we'd go there, though, the brothers and the sister would show up, I mean it was sort of like, I don't know if a whistle went off or something, but they'd all come in and they'd all have lunch and so Robbie was there, and his sister and the brothers were there. And so I got to know the family as well, which was really nice, the personal level. And they all, I used to always think, I don't think George was the oldest, but he -

MH: No, no, Paul I think is.

MA: Paul is, but I think he commanded the leadership role in that family.

MH: Actually I think -

MA: Robbie's older, I think.

MH: He's slightly older, they were very close, Robbie and -

MA: In age, yeah, I think so. But Paul is the oldest, I believe. But George commanded the leadership. George was the one they loved, George was, "He's going to take care of this," you know, whether it was a family matter or a political matter. And you saw that strong ethnic trad-, what you would call traditional values; hard work, love for your family, you know, this is where I grew up. And he'd walk to the mill across the way and that's where he worked as a, in college, as he was going to college. And you could see at least from whence they came that these roots were not of, they were not George Mitchell who is a lawyer on Congress Street, had a big office on the eighth floor or whatever it was. That there was this real connectivity and relationship to his family and to his mother. And she was wonderful; she'd make these Lebanese meals that were wonderful. That's where I was first introduced to like kibbeh and other types of food, and she'd have it there, and it was just a nice experience to visit and see them.

And I would see them after the election, post election, after George lost, and they were always as friendly and, and would care deeply about George.

MH: Who else did you work closely with in that gubernatorial campaign? Who else was on the staff, anyone you remember?

MA: On the staff, well yeah, Tony Buxton ended up being the chair, the chair – the head, head honcho, if you will, of the staff. Jay McCloskey, who served a term as U.S. attorney came on board as our press secretary, and then over time it grew. We were the core in the primary, and then in the general, obviously, that expanded out and so forth.

MH: What was Tony Buxton's role?

MA: He really was the campaign manager, if you will.

MH: Was he raising funds?

MA: He would raise funds, but he was the day-to-day. The real fund raiser was, I can picture him, now he's president of Key Bank, Scott Hutchinson, yeah, Scott. And we had a good finance team, there was, Scott Hutchinson, a Republican, who I think really chaired it with Bob Dunfey, and after the primary Severin Beliveau came into the fold, Harold Pachios was there, and the Cianchettes were very active in the primary, and they stayed with George throughout it all.

I think, just to get back to, one of the things that was slow in happening after the, it was a tough primary, Lloyd LaFountain, that's the other candidate, who was from Biddeford. And so I remember our strategy was that I was assigned to try to organize a get-out-the-vote effort for

York County as the primary came, was getting closer, and I was getting worried that Lloyd LaFountain was beginning to catch ground and was talking to George Mitchell about that and said, you know, here's where . . . He goes, "That's fine, if every vote that goes to Lloyd LaFountain doesn't go to Joe Brennan." We knew the candidate to beat was Joe Brennan, he was the strongest candidate, although Peter Kelley was out there. He, again, it became, he just didn't have the numbers, being from Aroostook County, that George felt that if we could ensure that Joe Brennan didn't get a hold in York County, that Lloyd did, then the votes would be there. And that strategy is what worked eventually, but Joe Brennan took it very hard and many of his supporters took it very, very hard and didn't come on board as enthusiastically until later in the campaign.

And that hurt George to a certain degree, so he had a tough primary, with someone who didn't jump on board immediately, and you had had this Aaron Levine attacking integrity and perhaps your past and so forth, and that made it hard to regroup. That, the Watergate, Jim Erwin. And I don't, and George Mitchell didn't connect with people as he did in his Senate campaigns. I mean he was not a polished speaker. He was articulate, he was so logical, but the charisma part was not there yet for him. I mean, he wasn't standoffish, I never saw him as that, but he couldn't, he had a hard time connecting. And Jim Longley connected with people in a very gut way of this whole, "Think about it, what are these people doing to us?"

And there was huge frustration, and you know, in Maine, like every other time we've run for governor, unemployment, job creations are the issue. And I laugh now because I remember filming a commercial with George, and we had to set this thing up and we went to Lewiston, Maine, we found an abandoned factory. I mean you could go to any mill town and find an abandoned factory. He walked through there, and had his, just a shirt and tie on, kicked a pipe or walked over a pipe and he goes, "This place used to have five hundred jobs, now it's empty. As governor, I'll bring jobs back." I think I've seen that same commercial every four years, both parties, everyone uses it, so jobs were as key then as it is now in Maine and you try to capitalize on that. But Jim Longley was able to capitalize on real frustration with the political process and ended up being governor.

MH: So after a disappointing election night, what did you go on to do?

MA: Well, two things. After that disappointing election night, I think George, if you remember correctly, went up, decided to throw his name into the ring for Democratic National Committeeman.

MH: Yes.

MA: And I think it was either, was it Fowler, it may have been, but Bob Strauss –

MH: Bob Strauss, yeah.

MA: - yeah, ended up winning. And so we were involved a little bit on the peripheral of that,

some of us, of trying to help George maybe gain that post as something that -

MH: Actually chairman of the Democratic -

MA: Chairman of the Democratic National Party, yeah, so, but Bob Strauss won – in typical Bob Strauss fashion, we’ll leave it at that – and George came back home and he then, he went, set about to try to get us all jobs or things to do, and he was able to get me a job to work for the state legislature. So in December of 1974 I went to work for Ed Pert, who was clerk of the House, just doing some work there. I had to, like everyone else had to find my way back to pay my bills and a little income here. And Debbie Bedard got hired up there, as did a couple other folks, and so we were all at the legislature, Democrats were in power.

But the Muskie campaign was going to begin in earnest, the ‘76 campaign, and so, and they knew that was going to be a huge challenge. And so Charlie Micoeau, George Mitchell talked to Charlie Micoeau and said, “You know, there’s a few people here you might want to consider bringing on board and -”

MH: Charlie was the, was looking for staff at that time?

MA: No, he was executive assistant.

MH: Okay, right.

MA: Whatever those titles were in those days.

MH: Okay, which is what you became for Mitchell at some point in time.

MA: Yeah, at some point in time, exactly. So he was the executive assistant for Muskie, and a Mainer, and he offered me a job in Washington and so in July of ‘75, June of ‘75 I left the legislature, packed things in my car and went down and ended up working on the Senate Budget Committee. Then, so George Mitchell made that connection for me, if you will, in that regard and then went on from there.

MH: For how many years did you work for Muskie?

MA: ‘Til he went over to become secretary of state, so -

MH: Right up until 1980, May of 1980.

MA: Right, May of 1980.

MH: During that period, did you have much contact with George Mitchell?

MA: Some, when he would come to town we’d either, he’d have some of us together for

dinner or that kind of activity. But he had come back, keep in mind, I think that he came back and quickly became, what was it, '78 would have become, when did he become, when did he become U.S. attorney? '76.

MH: Well, actually it would have been the beginning of '77.

MA: 'Seventy-seven, correct, yeah, after the '76 election. So I went down in '75, so between '75 and '76 we'd see George on occasion. He went back to law practice to make money, because he too had to pay the bills and do that kind of activity, and remained somewhat engaged and sometimes would come down to Washington with clients or whatever and that's when we'd see him. And then, then he became U.S. attorney and then a federal judge during the Carter years as a result of Muskie's selection of him, and so we didn't see him as much then obviously because of his commitment back, to the profession and to what he had to do.

And then when Muskie went to State, I had an opportunity to go with him -

MH: To the State Department.

MA: To the State Department. There were several people, well almost, several of us could have gone, and about four or five went, and I decided that I really liked the Hill work and legislation, and then of course the sweepstakes began because who was Joe Brennan, then governor, going to pick to be Ed Muskie's follow up, if you will, as Muskie went to the State Department? And I can remember the names being floated around in the office, and some of us had panic with some and, you know, would Joe appoint himself? Or would, Severin Beliveau was very much in the mix and wanted it badly and Joe was his best friend, and we knew Joe and George had never really patched things up to the extent that they perhaps should have after that heav-, very contested race in '74 for governor, in the primaries.

But for whatever reason, and I always have my suspicion, I've never seen it in writing, that Muskie had indicated to Joe Brennan that, "I'm not doing this unless you pick George Mitchell." That's just a suspicion I have. Ed Muskie didn't need to go to the State Department; he loved what he was doing. Was it a way to wrap his career? Yeah, but you know, I think he also wanted to leave on his terms. And that may be taking too much credit away from Joe Brennan who I think, obviously, made the right decision.

So the irony for me was, here's a guy who was, that I worked for in '74, '73, '74, and now coming down to be senator. And that style was very, very different, as you know, and where with Ed Muskie, Ed Muskie was the boss and you feared when you were called to the chamber, as opposed to with George Mitchell who would actually come around and sit in the chair next to you and talk about how you're handling this environmental issue or how, "What are we doing on that? What are we getting for mail?" It was just so different.

But one of the funny stories I do remember about that is, back in those days you would, when the boss left town on Friday night you'd call and have someone deliver ice, and someone would

deliver glasses and you'd have a little toast in the office, if you will, and a little party. And I had, I called, Muskie had left and I had called the superintendent's office, I forget who it is you call, and said, "We want some ice to Senator Mitchell's office," and they go, "Who?" And I said, "Senator Mitchell." "Well, who the hell is he?" I mean it was, they all knew who Muskie was because he had been there, you know.

MH: Yeah.

MA: And, "Who is this George Mitchell guy? Where did he come from?" And, "What do you mean you want a car to drive this guy to the airport, who the heck is this guy?" Well we were used to that culture of being able to get whatever we want, and we had to learn that, you know, maybe we're not four or five on the pecking list any more, we're at one hundred.

And that was a real learning lesson for staff, as it was for George. I remember his frustration where he had a, with Jim Case and I once, how frustrated he was with the Senate business. Because he desperately wanted to come home every single weekend, and he knew he'd have a tough election effort because, one, he had lost in '74 and he had to reintroduce himself, and he got appointed and was this more of the same, and he really wanted to work at that. And the demands of the Senate, you know, he was frustrated once and he says, I remember talking about it, "Somehow we got to control this calendar. Who the hell controls this calendar?" And we said, "The majority leader does, Senator Byrd." And he goes, "Well, we got to figure out how I can be Senate majority leader." And this was like in, you know, early, early in his career, and the irony of it is that he does become Senate majority leader. And I always thought, when I thought about that, "Well that's just because he wanted to control the calendar."

MH: Now you had developed a legislative specialty by this point, I mean you were doing what?

MA: Yeah, primarily I was, I staffed the Environment and Public Works Committee, doing the work on economic and community development stuff, so it was that kind of level of activity in Maine as well as in the legislation in Washington. And Muskie had used that position on the committee to do environmental work, which I didn't staff that part of it but certainly the economic development side. And if you think about the structure of that committee, I don't know its origins but if you think in terms of an Ed Muskie legacy, and even a George Mitchell legacy, that economic development and job creation can occur in a complementary way with a cleaner environment. It really was a unique way to blend authority, and I was always impressed by that process and so that ended up being my focus and what I was doing.

Then, as things change in the office and you aspire or you get moved to different things, I became George's executive assistant, which really dealt with, I still kept that Environment and Public Works, or economic development stuff portfolio, if you will, but had kind of more of a management function in terms of the field operation in the state and we, we kept all the offices open that were the ori-, the Muskie offices. Which really expanded, the Muskie offices expanded when he went to, in '76, because he only had, he had one office maybe, the Waterville

office, which was the home town, and that network was not going to work to serve him well for reelection I don't think, and so what did we end up with, five or six?

MH: Five or six, or -? (*unintelligible*).

MA: Yeah, Presque Isle and Portland, York County, Lewiston-Auburn, Waterville stayed, and that had to be done. And so I had, as executive assistant, had to manage that operation, with the field staff and particularly with a very active, much more active George Mitchell instead of an Ed Muskie in terms of that type of work – different points in their career obviously. And so that was fun; that was challenging. But to me, the irony of it, I mean I left in 1981, and George took over, was it '80?

MH: He did.

MA: 'Eighty, 1980.

MH: Right.

MA: Yeah.

MH: You and I overlapped –

MA: A little bit.

MH: - by about three months.

MA: Three months?

MH: I think you left in January.

MA: I did.

MH: And I started in middle of October.

MA: Okay, yeah. I left, I had gotten married in 1979 and we, my wife worked for the American Association of Port Authorities and she was very active in that, and we -

MH: What did Marian do for them?

MA: She was their controller, as well as, because of her Spanish background, was able to deal with all the South American Spanish-speaking ports, which are part of the American – it's a true American association, not America as we think of it of fifty states, but South American and North America, it was that, and so she dealt with a weekly Spanish newsletter, and if they had to have meetings in Mexico City, et cetera. So she had a great job, she loved her job. And I loved

my job, but we got married and we decided that, after we saw our first tax bill, with no property that we owned in Washington, D.C., that wow, why is one of us working, and we had no deductions.

And that I think, coupled with the fact that when Senator Mitchell came in, it was not unusual for him if he was in Washington over the weekend to call you Saturday morning at eight a.m., after a long week, and say, "What time are you coming into the office? We can go over this." That happened over and over and over, as I'm sure you know. And we said, "Maybe this is the time to separate from Washington, D.C.," and that's how we came to Maine.

MH: And you took, that was when you took the job with -

MA: Eastern Maine Development Corporation, right. Nonprofit development agency, which is a beneficiary, receives some benefits from EDA, which came out of the Environment and Public Works legislation so my background there was linked to that.

MH: Now somewhere in this mix, when did you switch parties?

MA: Two factors contributed to that. I think I began questioning in the, during the Jimmy Carter term I'm beginning to question the wisdom of what was happening. But also, when I came to Maine, got involved in a whole bunch of different things. In fact, Joe Brennan appointed, was then governor, appointed me to be on the State Board of Education, and then the Technical, well, Eastern Maine Technical, it wasn't the colleges, they were the technical schools then, and I was on their board.

MH: Institute.

MA: Institutes.

MH: Technical institutes.

MA: Yeah, yeah, how quickly we forget. And so I was involved with that, and enjoyed it. But it was at a time when Senator [Charles] Pray and Speaker [John] Martin were running the state, and I had a real run-in with them when I was chairman of the board of the technical college, the technical institutes, and we had a woman who was executive director which, they were correct, was a poor choice, who offended people and didn't do a good job. And, but I didn't think it was the Maine way to just terminate someone immediately, but rather try to deal with it on terms that make sense from my perspective.

And Charlie and John were not helpful in that process, and I'd go visit them and talk to them, and I can remember one meeting, even Bev Bustin saying to me she's -

MH: Now Bev Bustin -

MA: Beverly Bustin, who was Senator Bev Bustin, but also had been –

MH: On our staff...

MA: - on our staff with Senator Mitchell running the Augusta office.

MH: I was just trying to identify these people (*unintelligible*).

MA: Good point, yeah, right, because, Beverly was there, and of course I was her boss.

MH: Right.

MA: De facto, when I was executive assistant. And we got talking and she says, “John Martin’s not talking to you about this?” I says, “You know, it’s just awkward.” And she says, “Well, we’re going to go down there.” So we went down and we met with John and, and I guess it was then that they, I just saw all the power that they had, and I became frustrated by the alliances that they were doing that power with and that was eating at me. And so, even though as a Democrat, still active Democrat, in fact I remember having fund raisers at our home for George’s reelection, and he had video tapes that they had sent down, you’d show that and you’d raise some money and do all these things, and clearly remained a big supporter of George Mitchell’s and, but beginning to get increasingly frustrated with the state apparatus, if you will.

And [I] was able to ride that through, and then I endorsed, I supported Severin Beliveau in the Democratic primary for governor in 1978, and he lost to Jim Tierney; Jim Tierney became the nominee. And although I knew Jim Tierney, I also had gotten to know Jock McKernan, and having lived in Bangor at that point in time ten years, whatever roughly, gotten to know Jock and liked him as a person and ended up supporting him and being on the list of Democrats for McKernan. Well that did me in with Charlie Pray. I must say, I think John Martin was much more gentlemanly about it than Charlie Pray, but Charlie was forever, ever going after me.

And when I became, when I was nominated to be commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development in McKernan’s second term as governor, everything was going fine until the morning of my screening by the committee. Charlie, who was president of the Senate, summoned me to the office and said, “I’m going to go up there and oppose you, and as Senate president, they will not vote you out.” Well I went through, that was a very trying period. And there were other personal reasons, which I really can’t go into at this point, of what was driving Charlie Pray’s thought process, but we had, a lot of people appealed to him, friends like Charlie Micoeau who had hired me, Senator Mitchell and others saying, “He’s really a good guy, just because he’s working for a Republican doesn’t mean that he can’t do the job, that’s been his training, that’s his background,” et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. But Charlie was adamant that that was not going to happen.

But what Charlie did not know in my past was, I grew up in Biddeford and Saco, and the ranking Senate Democrat on the committee was Dennis Dutremble, and Dennis Dutremble knew all my

family from Biddeford and Saco that still lived down there; my aunts, my uncles, all of his age. And they were wondering what was going on because this became a little newsworthy at the time, and so we kind of unleashed the family, if you will, on Dennis, making phone calls.

MH: The Duke.

MA: The Duke, exactly, Duke Dutremble, ‘Toupee Two.’ There was, he and his dad, Toupee One, Toupee Two, they all had the toupees, losing their hair. He was just a, Duke Dutremble was a very nice, just a nice, nice guy. Well, I think he had heard enough, and I remember going to a subsequent hearing in about two weeks and Charlie Pray’s chief staff member shows up again at the hearing and pleads with the committee to continue to hold this because there will be more information coming out soon, and Dennis Dutremble giving this passionate plea that, “Unless the president of the Senate has information that leads me to vote ‘no,’ we’re going to vote today and we’re voting this out of committee. We can’t -,” his point was, “We can’t hold somebody to a standard that, which we don’t know what the issue is.” And so I got out of committee. There were thirteen members of the committee, I got one; the committee voted twelve to one not to be nominated. One person, the House chair voted against me, and then it went to the Senate for confirmation and I think the Senate had thirty-three votes and I got thirty-two and one opposed, and so then became that.

And to his credit, people like John Martin, who said, “Okay, we lost that battle, and Mike’s the commissioner of DECD,” immediately, “How do we work together? How do we make this work for my group in Aroostook County?” Whereas Charlie fought me night and day, and I finally said, “That’s it, I can’t be a Democrat any more with that kind of leadership,” and so became a Republican.

MH: So it was really more organizational than ideological?

MA: Oh, absolutely, because when I look at ‘Main Street’ Democrats and Republicans in Maine, there really isn’t much difference, in the mainstream; there are on the extremes, which there should be in any situation. But yeah, it’s no secret that Republicans in Maine elect, you know, Susan Snowe – Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe and Jock McKernan, they’re more in the mainstream, the Bill Cohens, I mean they’re in the mainstream. The irony of it is when you elect somebody in your primaries from the extremes, you’re not going to win. And I think that is a Maine virtue that, so, but it was really organizational more, because I mean you look at some of the issues.

And I saw some of the – I think, again, it comes with power and it goes through cycles, Democrats and Republicans, they’re all alike in that sense – that power breeds relationships that end up collapsing on themselves. We’re witnessing that now nationally, and that’s the cycle that we’re going through.

But I thought, yeah, so I did that. And, but I must say that I find it interesting that, in this current position that I’m in, which is quote/unquote ‘a political position,’ how people are selected for

the, for my, as my counterparts. There are forty-seven of us around the country, and they go from the system that Olympia set up, which was a review board, to, "Geez, we like Mike, give him the job," you know, and the extremes. I have counterparts who are Democrats, still Democrats, they were selected because they were the best person in those states, and then there are in other states people who are actually civil servants, were in the agency and got promoted from within by the senior ranking senator. And so I find that mix kind of interesting, of how people arrived at quote/unquote 'political patronage.' It's very, very – in Maine I think we tend to have a much more standard to some of that selection process. At least that's my sense of it.

MH: Did you, after coming to Bangor, have you been, have you kept a relationship with Senator Mitchell?

MA: I have, on a couple, well continue, you get the newsletters, and you get the Mitchell Scholarship and other events that you see him at. And I must say, when I came back to Bangor and was working here, it was not unusual, if I got off at the airport and he was on the flight, and I'd get my bag and here I was, either the commissioner of DECD or at EDCM, the Economic Development Council, he'd say, "You want a ride to the Hill?" And I'd hop in the car with him, give me a ride to the Hill in his chauffeured car, which was a kick to do that.

But yeah, I always had that relationship, and as I indicated to you earlier, I even helped, he helped my daughter this year in terms of his prior relationship being the chairman of the board with the Walt, with the Disney Corporation. And my daughter Laura has gone down to do a career start program for Disney, Walt Disney World in Orlando, and she was able to get her term played out and at the end of her term decided that she wanted to renew the relationship and applied the first day, web-based, online, and found out three or four weeks later as her friends were all getting their commitment letters or thank you for your service, enjoy your trip home, she wasn't getting anything and was wondering where the decision was. And she, we encouraged her to go speak to people, and she did and found out that all the applications that were web-based in the first, I think, three days of the open season, if you will, for application, they were all lost, and they didn't know who had applied so they couldn't tell people, "Your application has been lost," et cetera, et cetera, so they told her to apply but that they had filled pretty much almost all the vacancies at the time. And I thought that was a little unfair, so I wrote George Mitchell an e-mail, which he does e-mail you back and, to his credit.

At the time, I find it ironic, and I thought about it that night, I says, "Here I am sending him an e-mail about my daughter, asking him to do this, when he was looking into the whole steroid issue," and, Major League Baseball, and I'm thinking, he's probably saying, "Why is he bothering me?" And he may have said that, but I got a response that he would look into it, and a few days later Laura was able to have her application considered and now she's off and running. And so we, from the standpoint of his impact on people has been significant in Maine, and in my family, and certainly that's appreciated.

He doesn't forget where he came from and what he does. That's what I've found him, I've never found him to change, he just, it's just George Mitchell, I mean it's -

MH: I'm going to ask you, the next question is kind of a reflective one.

MA: Yeah.

MH: What do you think has been his contribution to politics in Maine?

MA: Politics in Maine...

MH: In other words, do you think that people emulate him in terms of how campaigns are conducted, or do you think that it was any kind of watershed in any sort of way? Or – I mean he has, he is someone who has, he's had a distinguished career after politics here.

MA: Correct.

MH: And he's still very, very active, nationally and internationally.

MA: I think to me what he has done, in all honesty, his qualities and his strengths would really serve us well as a governor. And he's gone the, he's done the judicial route, which was outstanding, and he has done the legislative policy route, and he continues in private sector to influence those kinds of, if you will, important societal changes that need to take place. But I think we lost such an opportunity to use those skills as an executive. Because I found him, I think ultimately when you go around and you talk to people in Maine about George Mitchell, they find him fair, you know, that judicial side, they find him listening and caring, and if there was a way to resolve an issue he looked for appropriate resolution and not conflict. And I think those are the standards of, I think why people like George Mitchell. I mean when you think of George Mitchell, you think of those types of qualities.

He had great leadership, he had the ability, I think, to bring people together and try to move the ball down the court. I mean people make fun now and say, "Well, I shouldn't make fun ..." but they talk about how George Bush, Sr., the father, George Herbert Walker Bush, caved in to Mitchell on the tax issue. Well I always, I look at that a little different, I think that was probably two people who got together and said, "Here's the appropriate thing to do and let's do it." And certainly there were differences of opinion between two individuals -

MH: Which taxes are you talking about just (*unintelligible*)?

MA: Well, the tax issue when George was majority leader and where, you know, "read my lips, no new taxes," and then one of the first things that they do with a Mitchell majority leader is raise taxes, and that required, obviously, the White House's concurrence. And it isn't the tax issue, it's the fact that the ability, that they were able to sit down and talk this thing through.

And that's a skill that I saw, and a trait in George Mitchell I saw even as a lawyer, when he was a lawyer, I mean he really could do things. And I think, to me, that's what people think of. You

still visit, “Oh, George Mitchell, what a great guy, he helped me with this.” More than that, people are saying, “He really listened to us,” I mean as a person. He didn’t have, his staff may have done a lot of the work, having been there, but he knew what was going on and as a person cared, and I think that that translated very well into the requirements of perhaps today’s politics.

I think his greatest skill, I find it, his love for the Red Sox is just unbelievable. And I, when he was running for governor in 1974, it was, we were at Bowdoin College and he was campaigning there, it was probably mid- to late September, and again, it’s ‘74, and perhaps the more younger people in the state were more in tune as to what was really happening than, what was going to happen in that election than some of us more polished pols, if you will, knew. And this young man got up and, at a forum that we had here at Bowdoin College, and George having gone to Bowdoin, I think was trying to, you know, “This is going to be, I can get a few hundred votes out of here and get into the Brunswick, Cumberland County basket.” And a young man got up and he says, “All you politicians are alike, all you want to do is talk about bah-bah-bah-bah-bah. You have no connection to reality as to what, what are the real pressures, what are the things really care about,” and everything else, and went on and on and on; one of those kinds of diatribes.

And Mitchell listened and he said, “Well, what’s the thing that you love the most?” And he says, “Well I love the Red Sox.” And Mitchell says, “Yeah, I do too.” And he goes, “Yeah, well, of course you’d say that, whatever, bah-bah-bah,” a little bantering back and forth. George Mitchell says to him, and he goes, “Well, if I give you the starting line-up for the Red Sox and their batting averages, will you vote for me?” The kid took him on, as a bet, he says, “Sure.” And George Mitchell went down the line-up, each player and what their batting average was, in mid- to late September, as of the day, not, I’m not, “Oh, he’s batting around .250,” no, “He’s batting .263,” he knew them all, he had read them all and he, he had this great mind, as we all know, and the kid was blown away.

And, but George just, that’s the other side of George Mitchell, his ability to, he knew about these other things, they weren’t peripheral in terms of his life. And I left there thinking, “Wow, that poor kid never knew what hit him.” But in many ways, I think he gained respect for him, that his point was, “I like baseball too and let me show you how much I like it.” I just think it’s super.

MH: Is there any question that I haven’t asked that you’d like to answer?

MA: Oh, I don’t know.

MH: This is your chance.

MA: I don’t know.

MH: Well, we’ll end it there then, that’s very good, and thank you for your time, and just repeat, this had been an interview of the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project, the interviewer is Mike Hastings, the interviewee is Mike Aube, and it’s June the 20th, 2008.

MA: First day of summer.

MH: Thank you.

End of Interview