

Bowdoin College

Bowdoin Digital Commons

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

Special Collections and Archives

3-5-2009

Interview with Dale Bumpers by Brien Williams

Dale L. Bumpers

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/mitchelloralhistory>



Part of the [Law and Politics Commons](#), [Oral History Commons](#), [Political History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bumpers, Dale L., "Interview with Dale Bumpers by Brien Williams" (2009). *George J. Mitchell Oral History Project*. 172.

<https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/mitchelloralhistory/172>

This Interview is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Collections and Archives at Bowdoin Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in George J. Mitchell Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of Bowdoin Digital Commons. For more information, please contact mdoyle@bowdoin.edu.

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College Library, 3000 College Sta., Brunswick, Maine 04011

© Bowdoin College

Dale Bumpers

(Interviewer: Brien Williams)

GMOH# 069

March 5, 2009

[Brien Williams: This is an oral history interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College with Senator Dale Bumpers. Today is March 5, 2009. We are at the law offices of Arent Fox in Washington, D.C.]

(recording begins mid-sentence)

Dale Bumpers: [I had] reservations about how I *would* be treated, because I had assumed that Senator Fulbright, having been I guess at that time a thirty-year senator, had a fine relationship with others, they respected him, liked him, and would resent my having defeated him just because I could. That's the way they would see it. But it didn't turn out that way. I was received with open arms, and if there was any resentment on the part of anybody, I don't remember it and I don't know what it was [].

Senator Fulbright had some close friends here, but as I say, they were all very kind to me, and I couldn't have been received more warmly.

Brien Williams: Was that typical of incoming freshmen in the Senate in those days.

DB: It depended on the person; it depended on the kind of campaign that had been run. There have been times when some of us, even in our own party, were not terribly upset because one of our colleagues got defeated, because it was somebody we didn't respect or didn't admire []. But that's true in everything, that's not just true in politics. That's true in business, that's true in everything. [] I know of two or three people who were sort of shunned when they came here because of the kind of campaign they had run against somebody that we thought was a very decent and admirable senator.

BW: Now, you came in with [the] class of '74.

DB: Yes.

BW: And what was that like?

DB: Well, it was a big class, as you know, and it was [mostly] due to Watergate []. Senator Fulbright fell into that category, [] but he certainly had nothing to do with Watergate. He was not a part of it. He was a man of immense principle. And so, as I say, I was received very warmly.

BW: Had things changed by 1980, in terms of the Senate when George Mitchell replaced Senator Muskie? Was it a different Senate by then, six years later?

DB: It was, and you have to forgive me my loss of memory on that, but I think Mike Mansfield still leader in 1980, or do you know?

BW: I do know, just give me -

DB: I think he was. Did George come in '80?

BW: Uh-huh. Yes, yeah, so it would have been Baker, yes.

DB: Well, I don't remember what year George was elected leader.

BW: That was '89.

DB: Eighty-nine?

BW: Yeah.

DB: But he made quite a mark for himself when he came here. He was a very principled person, he was all business – he had a great sense of humor. [] He was a man that just immediately brought people to him, to his side. He didn't have to go to them, they came to him because he proved almost immediately that he was a very wise man.

His speeches were interesting, right on point, and the reason he ultimately became the leader is because he was all business. He had a good sense of humor, all of those things, but any time he took on a bill or an amendment that he wanted to pass or not pass, he did it in a very admirable way, a very principled way, and people shortly came to admire him very much.

BW: He came to the Senate in 1980 and said himself that he felt like he was a senator with an asterisk after his name, because he was appointed by the governor of Maine to fulfill Muskie's seat.

DB: Right, right.

BW: But then he won, by coming from way behind, in 1982 –

DB: Right.

BW: - for his first own legitimate -

DB: Well, your memory is much better than mine on that.

BW: Well, I've been studying it, Senator. And yet it's interesting that only nine years later he becomes the leader of the party in the Senate. Any particular reason you think that, or what you've, you've pretty well covered it, I guess.

DB: Well, that was not just by accident [but] because of what I [just] got through mentioning a minute ago. He proved immediately that he was well read, he had a good [knowledge of] history, he had been a federal judge, and when he came to the floor to speak, people listened. And in the caucuses on Tuesday, when we all had lunch together, he was almost always the most listened-to senator, which showed the kind of respect that people had developed for him. When he spoke on the floor, he spoke with sensibility, poise, intellect, and so when he chose to run for leader – it was a tough race. It was not easy, as that race never is. It was a race that opened up, and he took advantage of it and was elected, but people had developed a great admiration for George. He was a nice looking guy, he dressed well, he had a mellifluous voice, he spoke with authority, and I knew he was going to be elected. I voted for him.

BW: Even though he was up against some pretty good competition in Senator Inouye and Bennett Johnston.

DB: Yes, he was.

BW: He was the -

DB: Let me strike that. I voted for Bennett Johnston the first go around, and that was just a calculated political vote because if Bennett was elected leader, I became chairman of the Energy Committee. And that's the way things work around here.

BW: That's interesting, yeah.

DB: But George called me. My memory may fail me on this, but I think there was a runoff between Bennett, I mean between George and Inouye. Do you remember that?

BW: I don't think so.

DB: You might check that out. That would be an interesting point. But I think there was, because I remember George calling me. I was in Boston, and he called me. I don't know what I was doing there, but he called me long before the first vote: would I support him? The reason I think there might have been a runoff, [George] knew that I had to be for Bennett Johnston, and he called me and he said, "If Bennett doesn't make it and there's a runoff, can I count on you?" And I said yes.

BW: In 1986 you were being reelected, and George Mitchell was the chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. Did he play any role in your reelection campaign in 1986?

DB: No.

BW: No major funds were shifted and whatnot?

DB: No, I never depended on the committee for money, I depended on my constituents.

BW: And in those days, was fund-raising as important as it's become and as time consuming?

DB: It was becoming so. In those days – that's the right question – in those days you could see where we were headed, because money was becoming increasingly important every day. It was noxious to me, and I thought, 'If we continue along this trend, we're going to wind up...' right where we are today. Because I think it's the greatest threat to our country. But [] it didn't play a role in my campaign. A fellow who was [later] elected to the House [] was my opponent in 1986. He was very bright and [] a very worthy adversary. That was Asa Hutchinson, I don't know whether you remember him or not.

BW: Did you share any committee assignments with George Mitchell?

DB: No.

BW: So when he became leader, what was his leadership style like? As a leader, how would he operate?

DB: He was very businesslike. He had a great sense of humor and he didn't hesitate to use it in his presentations and so on. But basically, he was all business. [] He would present the case in a very convincing way []. He was very persuasive, and he was very logical. But as I say, he had a good sense of humor [and] people learned to respect him. He had all the qualities that you'd look for in a majority leader.

BW: Compare him to Senator Byrd, who he succeeded.

DB: That's like day and night. Senator Byrd was very professional in his approach. [If] Senator Byrd made a presentation on a point that he was interested in and wanted the Democrats to take that position and follow his lead on it, he was all business. He made the point clearly. He was considerably more controversial as leader than George was. There were some senators, particularly the more liberal senators, who were often reluctant to follow his lead on some things, and of course that presented a controversy that sometimes boiled out into the open.

BW: What do you imagine motivated Senator Byrd to step down from leader and become chairman of the Appropriations Committee?

DB: All I can do is just give you my best guess on that, because I was not privy to his reasoning []. But my guess is that he sensed that there was a growing antagonism toward his

leadership style, and I think he thought he might be a loser if he hung around much longer. That's pure conjecture on my part. Senator Byrd and I [] had a very good relationship.

BW: You mentioned Senator Baker a moment ago, how was he as leader, from the Democratic perspective?

DB: He was a very good one. The Republicans could not have chosen better than Howard Baker. Howard Baker enjoyed a very good relationship with a lot of Democratic senators, including this one, and he would never hesitate to visit with Democratic senators on a point, trying to persuade them that it was not political; it was something that was necessary for the country and so on. He was very persuasive.

I never will forget, this is almost off the point, but I remember my wife, who was a [] peacenik, started an organization called Peace Links, and it became a fairly large and forceful organization. [] When they first started, it was mostly a women's organization, Women Against Nuclear War, and so she got me to introduce a resolution. She said, "We honor wars and memorial days but we never honor peace, and I think we ought to have a day [for] peace, where people stop and contemplate and relish and appreciate the days that we live in peace."

And I began to think about it and I thought, "That is a good point." We honor every war we've ever been in, and we have these big ceremonies and it's all military []. And so I offered a resolution one night – it wasn't a resolution, it was an amendment – to set up a Peace Day, to declare a certain day a Peace Day, where people in this country would honor peace.

There was a fellow from Alabama named Jeremiah Denton – I don't know whether you remember him or not. He took strong exception to this, of course. He [was] a Vietnam War veteran, and he took the floor and virtually called Betty a Communist. And the first thing I knew, Ted Kennedy and [others were] getting up to speak to defend Betty.

And about midnight, I never will forget, Howard Baker came over to my desk and he said, "Dale, I'd love to vote for this, I think this is a very fine idea, but you can see this is going to go on all night" – it was about midnight then. He said, "You know, there are about ten guys willing to [speak], feel that they're obligated to defend Betty, and I'd give anything if you would just pull this amendment down and offer it some other time, because this is an important piece of legislation, we need to get it passed tonight." And so I finally honored that request. It was a really interesting moment in the history of the United States Senate.

BW: Did you ever raise the amendment again or-?

DB: No.

BW: What about -

DB: I told Betty, when she formed that organization, I knew all these wives had been meeting

at my house []. And I never will forget, one night I came home and she said, “Well, we did it.” And I said, “What’d you do?” And she said, “We formed our organization today, Women Against Nuclear War, Peace Links.” And I said, “I’ll tell you what you did, you just defeated me in my next election, because people in Arkansas are not that hot for peace. They like peace at Christmas time, but any other time [they’re] suspicious.”

And it worried me, and so the next time I was running, which was, I believe that was in ‘86, I never will forget it, my first press conference, one of the reporters asked me, [] “Senator, do you think your wife’s activities in the peace movement will have an adverse effect on your campaign?” And I said – because she also had an organization on vaccinating children she and Rosalynn Carter had started called Every Child by Two, and Betty was well known for both of those organizations – and when he asked me that question I said, “Well, I suppose it will for everybody that favors whooping cough and nuclear war.” And I never got another question on either one.

Of course everybody [knew her group] had [arranged the] vaccinat[ion of] three hundred thousand children in Arkansas [in] one day, when I was governor. So people learned to admire and respect Betty, and it turned out [fine].

BW: I’m reminded of a comment you made in your autobiography about issues being much more complex than they are portrayed in the political arena, one of the reasons why you decided in the end to retire from the Senate. And this seemed, would seem to me to be kind of a similar type of case, that peace becomes a sort of slogan that people don’t react to with understanding but more just have a kind of gut reaction and, as in the case of Senator Denton, move from the issue of peace to being a Communist. That is, oversimplifying a complex issue.

DB: Yes, yes.

BW: Thinking about some other leaders, what about Robert Dole? How did you perceive him as a leader?

DB: I had a good relationship with Bob Dole. He told George Mitchell one time, so George told me, that I was one of the people that he hated to see take the floor in the Senate. He didn’t elaborate on it; I like to think that he thought I was persuasive. But two or three times I went to Robert Dole, when he was leader, with a problem that I thought he could accept if he wanted to and didn’t want to be cantankerous about it, and he accepted both of them. I had a good relationship with Bob Dole, and I think most of the people on our side also had a good relationship with him.

BW: The public perception was that he was a bit -

DB: Caustic?

BW: Hmm-hmm.

DB: He could be that, he could be very contentious. I'm talking from a personal standpoint; I had a good relationship with him.

BW: And despite being caustic, he was still a fairly effective leader, would you say?

DB: Yes, I would say he was.

BW: You – of course when you say humor, everyone thinks about Dole, because he is so well known for his sense of humor. Was George Mitchell as prone to be humorous in public situations, or was it more in private or in the caucus or somewhere?

DB: George in public was all business. He didn't display a sense of humor that most of us knew he had in private. And Bob Dole was just the very opposite, he had those little barbs that were pretty humorous most of the time.

BW: Did you take any hits over the years?

DB: I don't remember any. I probably took them back in the Republican Cloakroom, but not out in the open.

BW: Not out in the open. There's one other leader I'd like to ask you about, and that is Tom Daschle, and how you see the transition from George Mitchell as leader to Daschle, what was that like?

DB: Well, interestingly, George and Tom had some similar characteristics. They were both extremely articulate in setting up the schedule, telling the Senate where we're headed and all that sort of thing so we could be on alert and know where we were going. I think they both served our party well. I admired George Mitchell because I knew he was very cerebral, I knew he didn't do things just off the cuff, he thought them out before he presented them to us. Tom Daschle was very much the same way. They were both excellent leaders. As was Mike Mansfield. I served two years under Mike, I guess, and we couldn't have had better leadership. And as just an aside, I was really just sick about what happened to Tom Daschle in this recent brouhaha.

BW: Did, some people characterize him as being sort of George Mitchell's protégé, and that Tom Daschle looked on Mitchell as his mentor and so forth. Would that be your perception?

DB: I don't know how to describe it. Not totally, but there was that element in their relationship. George Mitchell, if he had a flaw – and this is sort of a selfish thing on my part because I was not a part of the inner circle with George Mitchell – but George Mitchell had a clique of about four or five people that he relied [on] very heavily []. If he had a really difficult issue, and one that didn't have a clear ending and it was difficult to know whether we ought to go forward with it or not []. I'm just sort of embellishing that – but there were [times when] he

would not go forward with an issue unless [certain senators] signed off on it.

BW: Would you be willing to name those?

DB: Sure. Jim Sasser was one, Paul Sarbanes. Let me think. On military matters of course, Sam Nunn. Tom Daschle was one. I tell you, that's been so long ago, this is difficult for me. I really, let's see, it was Daschle, Sasser, Sarbanes, well, I wish I hadn't gotten into it, because there were at least two others and I can't think right now who they were.

BW: Where were you in the Democratic community as a senator? Not part of the inner circle, as you just said, with Mitchell.

DB: [] I didn't hesitate to approach George if he didn't approach me about a burning issue. George came to me on occasion, and asked me what I thought about something like that, but when it came to the final decision and whether we were going to go with it or not, I'm listing the people that he relied on more than anybody else.

BW: You mentioned that when he spoke, people listened.

DB: Yes.

BW: Who else in the caucus would have had that kind of respect?

DB: Oh, golly. Well when I first came here of course, I can remember a senator from Michigan, Phil Hart, was an articulate spokesman [and highly respected]. When Mike Mansfield was here, Ed Muskie was an outstanding spokesman. [So was] Hubert Humphrey []. You know, sometime – I don't want to get too far afield here – but when I came here, we had a few people who, nobody liked or admired, but we had a lot, we had a lot of people who were truly brilliant men, outstanding, there for all the right reasons and so on. And I'm not saying we don't have it anymore, because I'm not there, I've been gone ten years and maybe it's different, and we all have a tendency to think things were better when [we] were there. It's always that way.

But as I say, you take Jack Javits on the Republican [side]. We had Republicans, Jim Pearson from Kansas, who nobody [much] knew, was one of the finest senators I ever served with, a Republican from Kansas. But there were so many people on the Republican side who were truly outstanding. Even Chuck Percy, he was not a mental giant, but he had good values, and he stood up for the same things that most Democrats did.

But if you were to go back and look at the Senate in 1975, you'd say, "Where have they all gone?" Because it was a really, truly outstanding group. But that all came to an end in 1980. As you know, Watergate had played out at that time. The benefit, the Democrats obviously were the beneficiaries of Watergate in 1975, but, and then we brought in what I consider – I'm reluctant to say things like this, but 1980 was just a disaster for this nation. It was true in the House and it was true in Senate. I'm not going to call names or anything, but it was just unbelievable.

I think we elected two Democrats [in 1980]. I think Chris Dodd and maybe, oh, let's see, Al Dixon from Illinois; he and Chris Dodd were the only two Democrats [elected], and I believe there were eleven Republicans. They took over the Senate that year – it's where I turn with chagrin and dismay.

BW: Looking back on George Mitchell's career from a legislative point of view, what were his big battles, and his major accomplishments?

DB: Well, that's hard to say. If you had a list of them I'd comment on each one, but I can't -

BW: Right. You were not part of the Iran-Contra investigation -

DB: No, no, I was not.

BW: So that was not anything, and that's where he, in some respects, came into major prominence and so on.

DB: Right. That's right.

BW: And then things like Clean Water and Clean Air, and I imagine you and he were on the same side on those issues.

DB: Sure, sure.

BW: What about the invasion of Iraq in '91?

DB: I voted for it.

BW: Both of you.

DB: I mean, I voted against it, I'm sorry. I think George Mitchell demonstrated the best qualities that he ever demonstrated when we were debating that in the caucus. He felt very strongly that we shouldn't do that, we shouldn't go in there. And having said that – this is just a personal note – I voted against going in, and I think it was a wrong vote.

First of all, who's the nation we were saving there?

BW: Kuwait.

DB: Kuwait, Kuwait had been fairly generous with us on oil policy, OPEC and so on, and I had a tendency to feel that Saddam Hussein might just, if he could pull that caper off, there'd be another one to follow it very soon and that we ought to address that front-on. But George Mitchell, frankly, convinced me otherwise, and so I took the opposite position.

I can remember Al Gore was my seat mate in the Senate, and he and I discussed it, and I did my very best to change Al's mind [but] I couldn't. He voted for it. Of course, he was getting ready to run for president []. If you're running for president, don't vote against a war. It turned out extremely well because George H. had the good sense to get out of there once we accomplished what we went in for. But I always felt that that was one of the votes that I was saddened by, that I have cast.

BW: Any others come to mind?

DB: No. The ones I'm proudest of were constitutional amendments. I never voted for a constitutional amendment all the time I was in the Senate. I mean the idea of Jesse Helms offering a constitutional amendment was just anathema to me. [] But when I think about those people in Philadelphia convening to draft our organic law, which has become the longest living organic law in the world, I have such an admiration and respect [for them], and I agree with Arthur Schlesinger when he said that was the greatest assemblage of minds ever under one roof in the history of the world.

And I saw some of the people that, for example, came to the Senate in 1980 offering constitutional amendments for everything except 'the sun can't shine tomorrow.' And I learned more constitutional law here, by far, than I did in law school, and I listened to the debates very intently I should say, and I just never offered an amendment to the Constitution to allow the Congress to deal with campaign finance, and I [regret] that.

[p/o]

[] My father taught me that politics was what he called a noble profession []. He wanted me to be a lawyer, because he didn't think I could be a politician unless I was a lawyer. [] But he got killed in a car wreck, and when I ran I felt like I was vindicating his feelings about me. I thought Bennett Johnston said it very well, and I can tell you I am really despondent at times about the way campaign finance is handled in this country. It has become [the] shame of this nation.

BW: Do you see any possibility of reform?

DB: Not in the near future.

BW: You know, I was struck in reading your biography, and looking at people like Mitchell and Dole and so forth, in your generation there were a lot of men who came to the Senate from very humble beginnings. I mean your dad was owner of a hardware store and whatnot, but I mean it was not big time business and so forth. And George Mitchell's beginnings were very, very humble, as you probably know.

DB: Yes.

BW: Is that still true, do you think, and did that have any effect on how you as a group sort of addressed issues and thought of yourselves?

DB: I'm sure it did. If you were to ask me to catalogue that for you, on how I know that, I couldn't do it. But the answer to your question is yes. [p/o]

My God, in our household, we were told when we died we were going to Franklin Roosevelt, and we talked politics at the dinner table every night. If somebody had spoken on the courthouse lawn that day – and I was ten years old – my father wanted me to know, wanted me to tell him what was said, and, “Don't tell me he was a good-looking guy, because I'm not interested in that. I want to know what he said, what you thought about him,” and so on.

BW: Another quality that you may have had as a group was living through the Depression.

DB: Yes.

BW: And the WWII experience. [p/o]

DB: [The war] obviously had a heavy influence on me. I was too young to really appreciate the Depression, but I can remember my mother walking around the house crying, because she went to the bank to get her money out and the bank was closed and she lost the \$1900 her father had given her for a wedding present. And she talked about it forever. We were very much influenced by my mother's negativism, and also her conservative values where money was concerned. She never let the grocery bill go over fifteen dollars a month.

But my father served in the state legislature and he wanted to run for Congress, and the man he would have had to run against was one of the wealthiest. He wasn't, but his wife was one of the wealthiest people in Arkansas. And my mother went around the house just never letting it drop; “Your father's going to sacrifice your college education, we're going to go to the poorhouse, you boys will never get an education. He's running against one of the wealthiest men in the state,” and blah blah blah, you know. But that's the kind of household we grew up in, and that was the influence that the Depression had. And my father finally gave it up for two reasons: number one, he *was* running against a wealthy man and he didn't have two pesos to throw together; and the other was mother's deep, strong feelings against it.

But he loved politics and he would have been, [had he and my mother not been killed in a car wreck, very pleased by my political career]. I was in law school at the time, but I think all my life from that time on I felt that I *had* to seek political office, to keep faith [with] my father. I'm telling you a lot more about me than I am George Mitchell, but I ran for the state House and lost, and I went back to my office the next day and it never really upset me all that much. Some people can never get over it; didn't bother me all that much. That was 1962, and in 1970 I saw an opportunity, and I still had never given up on keeping faith for my father, and so that's when I jumped in the governor's race.

BW: Very interesting. What was your reaction when George Mitchell announced that he was going to retire from the Senate?

DB: I was saddened by it, because I [thought] George still had a lot to contribute to this country, just as he's doing right now.

BW: Did you have any sense for why he was doing it, choosing that time to leave?

DB: If I were just going to take a guess, I would say that George feels that he has not enjoyed the family life that he would like to enjoy. I think they just have one child, don't they?

BW: With his first wife, yes.

DB: I mean by his first wife. Well, he and his second wife have a child – two. Okay, that's what I was thinking about. I think George felt, and I think his wife felt, that he needed to spend more time at home and help raise those children.

BW: What was your take on that, as a family man?

DB: Well, I can appreciate the conflicted thoughts that George would have on that, his feelings about it. Because he is essentially a public man, he is a politician, and he wants to be involved. If he didn't, he wouldn't have taken this assignment, one of the toughest assignments anybody could have.

And I think most of us, Sam Nunn [being] an exception, [] never had any [] reservations about giving up politics. But recently I've had some cause to think differently about that, because he's being quoted more now, and he was quoted during this campaign quite often.

BW: Would you mind telling the story of how you came to be the person to defend Bill Clinton in the impeachment situation?

DB: I think George Mitchell was the right man for that job, and I think that he was offered the job, doing what I did, closing the debates. And I'm not sure why George declined, but I talked to him about it before I told Bill Clinton I'd do it, and I confess to you that he gave me a thought that I used in that speech that I thought was extremely important, and that he says, "The proportionality of the charge and the penalty are way out of whack, [if he had some marital difficulties] to take the presidency away from him for that is a terribly disproportionate charge and penalty." And I used that; I used that word, "proportionality," which I'd never used before in my life when George gave it to me.

BW: You use the term, the GOP, members of the GOP had a real hatred for Bill Clinton, in your book. How do you account for that?

DB: They couldn't get *to* him. He raised taxes in 1992, which was in my opinion one of the

bravest and [] most sensible things that happened during my twenty-four years there. He was dead right. It was the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation [Act] of 1992, and it passed without a single Republican vote, in the House *or* the Senate. You think about that. One of the bravest, most sensible pieces of legislation to guide this country for the immediate future, and maybe the long-term future. And I don't think the Republicans ever got over it.

Bill [Clinton] was [very] smart [] and they just could not get to him, and it really grated on their nerves. They wanted desperately for him to stumble, they wanted him out. But the truth of the matter is, he is one of the best presidents we ever had [].

BW: I got the impression that their hatred was more personal, not just a tax issue.

DB: No, you're absolutely right. I said, I mention taxes, and I certainly don't want to leave the impression that that was the [only] thing. I think they just disliked him, and they disliked Hillary [] as intensely as they did him. And they were willing to go to any length, including impeaching him, to get even. And I don't know what they were getting even about. I thought it was one of the crassest things I ever saw and heard in my life. I couldn't believe it was going on.

BW: Was there a sort of generational issue there a little bit? He came on as a brash young guy?

DB: Could have been, could have been.

BW: And the military record, or non-record, was kind of hanging out there, too. You, as sort of part of that generation, were able to accept Bill Clinton for who he was.

DB: Well of course, Bill and I had been close friends in Arkansas. He was governor and I was senator, and he was attorney general when I was governor. And there was one thing, slipped my mind a moment ago that I wanted to mention and I can't recall it.

BW: About Bill Clinton?

DB: Hmm-hmm. I'll tell you, it was about the Republicans. And this was a point I made in the closing argument, because it points up in a very dramatic way what we talked about a moment ago. They were *intent* on getting him out, or doing anything they could to take away his authority, get him out of the office, just anything, and it was demonstrated in the grand jury of Monica Lewinsky. The prosecuting attorney [] asked her about this marble bear that Bill had bought when he went to Canada to meet with Yeltsin, and the prosecutor asked her, "Did he give you this bear?" "Yes." "Did he tell you that the bear was a symbol of strength?" "Yes." "Did he tell you that the bear was a symbol of your conduct and his, that you both had to be brave?" I mean, it was essentially that. I'm paraphrasing a little bit. And she said, "No, he didn't say that. He said it was a symbol of bravery, he didn't say I should carry it with me all the time to remind me that we had to be brave to withstand this onslaught." And he went over that three times, asked her three times, "Didn't he tell you that the bear was a symbol of strength, and it was a

symbol of what you and he had to do, to stand up and be brave?" And she said, "No," she said no three times.

And yet, almost the [exact] language [from the Grand Jury report] was put in the House Judiciary Committee Articles of Impeachment. They came to the [House] floor and stayed there. [It] came over here, and it was [still] there. When it came over here, that language was still there in the Article of Impeachment. She said, "No," three times to the prosecutor, and [yet] here it is [still] saying, "Yes." And I [asked], "You know what we call that? We call that wanting to win too badly." And as far as I was concerned, that was the most important point I made in the whole presentation.

BW: Did you have any second thoughts afterwards of things you hadn't said or [did say]?

DB: No.

BW: No? Good.

DB: My thoughts were, I think [that], 'I should have pursued that thought, or I should have done this or that or the other.' You couldn't make a one-hour speech like that and, as historically valuable as it was, without thinking of a few things you wish you had said.

BW: How did it feel delivering that, at the moment, what was it like?

DB: You know, it was amazing. I thought that I would be nervous, I thought that I would forget things and, I sort of, it was sort of an extemporaneous speech. I had notes, and that had been my method all my life, just to make notes and look at those notes periodically and let that be it. I very seldom spoke from a text, very seldom. And if I had it to do over again, there's very little that I would change. I only had three days to prepare for it, but I prepared feverishly for it and when I started making notes, there were some [points] I knew immediately that I wanted to make. And one of the things was to say – and Bill, I know him too well, he probably resented it to some extent – but I said, "He [may be] guilty of an infidelity, [but] if you read the Constitution, that is not an impeachable offense." I said, "There may be some members sitting in front of me who have been guilty of the same thing." I couldn't resist that.

BW: What was the immediate aftermath of that speech?

DB: Unbelievable, shocking. I was the most surprised person of all. It was just [] another speech but it never occurred to me I was going to receive the accolades that I did.

BW: When I heard that you were going to be the final spokesperson I thought, 'Logical.' And I think I thought that because it seems to me, throughout your career, you also were one of those people that other people listened to, just as you characterize George Mitchell. Am I -?

DB: I like to believe that.

BW: I don't want to push your -

[response omitted]

BW: Oh, that leaves me then to enquire whether you had ever aspired to be leader yourself?

DB: No. I was approached many times about that. I never had any ambition to be leader.

BW: And I guess I read somewhere that Bill Clinton, in his book, said that you were thinking of a presidential run in '83?

DB: In 1984. I have been saddened at times for not having done it, but I've also recognized all my life that it would have been a tragic mistake for me to have done it. Nobody was going to beat Ronald Reagan in 1984.

BW: But you could have positioned yourself for '88.

DB: Yes, that's right, and I thought about that. But that's really, when I ran for governor, like everybody else, you have your, not necessarily your sights on it, but you think all things are possible. And having come from nowhere, getting twenty-one percent of the vote. Happily we have runoffs in Arkansas. I got twenty-one percent, Orval Faubus got thirty-six. Eight people in the Democratic campaign, lieutenant governor, speaker of the house, everybody was in it, and I had one percent name recognition when I started out. It was foolish by any standard, but it was just one of those things. One percent, four percent, seven percent, eleven percent, three days before the election fourteen percent, and I got twenty-one percent. All I wanted to do was get in a runoff with Orval Faubus, because I knew people were not going to vote for him again. And so two weeks later [I received] fifty-six percent [of the vote].

BW: Wow. That is an incredible story.

DB: Well, I like to think that I'm not arrogant or overly ambitious, but when you do that, you can't help but think a little further down the road.

BW: What are your thoughts like, contemplating being president? I mean where does that live in your head?

DB: Well, I'll tell you, I was not obsessed with it. You know, some people are. Every move they make is calculated toward a presidential race. I can personally say I was not afflicted. I thought, if I vote for the right things, say the right things, defend the Constitution as I should, all those things, it'll fall into place. I was not trying to make room for myself, I was just thinking, the time will come. But as I say, the best time was in 1984, and I knew I couldn't do it. I was getting a lot of encouragement, a lot of people didn't like Ronald Reagan, but he was very popular at the time. I couldn't have done it. I could have positioned myself maybe for 1988, and

I think George H. was eminently beatable.

BW: Were you – excuse me for not knowing this – were you on shortlist for vice presidential at any point?

DB: I don't think so. I was mentioned. I don't mean that, I mean they mentioned everybody and I remember being mentioned, but not in a meaningful way.

BW: This may be a final question, from my standpoint at least. Thinking back to your twenty-four years, sort of as a generational thing, how do you think *your* time should be remembered in American history? Which is your time, and George Mitchell's time and so forth, what should be the take?

DB: Well that's a tough question, Brien. I think probably that I voted against constitutional amendments, or amendments that were leading up to a constitutional amendment, thirty-eight times, and I voted 'no' every time. A lot of people think, "Well, don't you want that speech on the, in the impeachment trial, don't you want that as -?" You know, that'll take care of itself; history can handle that however they want to. But when I was voting against some of the constitutional amendments to prohibit bussing, and I can tell you, that was a very popular thing, and particularly in a state like Arkansas. Because the whole point was, if you vote for a constitutional amendment prohibiting bussing, the door's open from then on []. And I was not a great champion of bussing, I just knew that if you adopted a constitutional amendment to prohibit it, you're going to have to go back and revisit the *Brown v. Board of Education* a lot of times.

And so, there was an editor of the second largest newspaper in Arkansas who [didn't care for] me, who wrote the most glowing editorial about me, because I had voted against that amendment. Nobody was more shocked than I was, but my vote was cast for the noblest of reasons, and I fully expected to get defeated on that. It's hard today to know how hot people were about those issues.

In my little hometown, Charleston, Arkansas, which at the time maybe had a thousand people, we were the first school of the eleven states of the old Confederacy to integrate after the Brown decision. We are now a national commemorative site, and that's because there were half a dozen people in that city who stood up and did it. That's not very, that's not a nationally known thing. And [I was one of those] who got that little town made a national commemorate site. Fayetteville, where the University of Arkansas is, had three blacks, and they followed [Charleston and integrated] two weeks later. We had about twenty-one.

BW: And were you and Betty involved in -?

DB: Right in the middle of it. I went on the school board the night the vote was taken, because my brother-in-law was getting ready to leave to go to Korea, and they elected me [to replace him]. He was a strong leader in this, incidentally, and they elected me to [replace him]

and of course you can imagine what the next school board election was like. [] I got another fellow in town to join me, and we [both won]. The people in that town didn't want any part of what happened in Little Rock. See, this was two or three years later, and my colleague and I [] just wiped them [out]. It was an amazing thing. Incidentally, which shows you that's just a philosophical thing. If you stand up for what you think is right, people know. Even though they may disagree with you, they have a grudging admiration for people who do that.

And that was a, I tell this story – this is sort of off what I'm talking about right now – Betty was a third grade teacher and she's told me a number of times about how she stood in the window, watching that bus drive up and watch those black children [who] came from two miles east of town; they had a one-room school out there that they'd been attending for years and years. And those kids, I think twenty of them, or sixteen of them got off that bus, and she said she noticed these three little girls, all of [whom] came to her third grade class. And the end of that story is, two years ago we went to the school reunion, in Charleston, Arkansas, and three of those – there were four girls [and 2-3 boys] – and three of those, now rather elderly women, were [at the reunion], and two of them had Ph.D.'s. Doesn't that tell you something?

BW: That's a great story.

DB: [Today people] [] want to talk about the speech at the impeachment trial, but that [integration story] is a powerful, powerful story, isn't it?

BW: Absolutely, absolutely.

DB: I get teary-eyed when I think about what we went through to do all that. But the interesting thing in that little old town [was] when the school superintendent said we're going to integrate, we can save \$3000 a year on a bus, on a driver – and that's sort of the way we approached it. And now, that little school will be a history for centuries.

BW: Gosh. Should we end on that note?

DB: Yeah.

BW: Thank you.

DB: That's a good one to end on. I feel like this was more about me than it was George Mitchell.

End of Interview

Addendum via telephone call on Monday, March 9, 2009:

Sen. Bumpers: I regarded Senator George Mitchell as one of the most cerebral members of the Senate who also had an outstanding command of Senate rules. As a result, I consider him the

best leader with whom I served. However, Mike Mansfield would have to be considered an equal.