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### Interview with Lula Davis by Brien Williams

Lula J. Davis

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

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**Lula J. Davis**  
(Interviewer: *Brien Williams*)

**GMOH# 131**  
August 17, 2009

**Brien Williams:** This is an oral history interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College with Lula Johnson Davis, secretary for the majority of the United States Senate. We're in Ms. Davis's office, S309 of the U.S. Capitol Building. Today is Monday, August 17, 2009, and I am Brien Williams. Let's start with you giving us a little bit of your personal background, where you grew up and so forth?

**Lula Davis:** I'm a Louisiana native, I was born and bred in Fordoche, Louisiana, which is a small, small, small town about forty miles west of Baton Rouge, lived there most of my life. My parents were just, my mother was a homemaker, my father worked in construction; I have three brothers and one sister, a pretty close-knit family. I actually went to school in Louisiana, I graduated from Southern University; I have a bachelor's degree and a master's degree.

How did I get to Washington? I was married to a professor who taught at, well we lived in several places, but he ended up at Howard University, a history professor. And when I came to Washington I needed work, like everybody else, and I just lucked up on a job working for Senator Russell Long, who was the chairman of the Finance Committee at that time. And I was from Louisiana, he was looking to recruit people to work in his office who were from Louisiana, and a friend of mine recommended that I go and interview. And I interviewed and I got the job; had no clue what I was going to be doing. I was a leg. [legislative] correspondent, and on the Hill that's the one who answers letters that come to a senator from his state—they have to be responded to, so I was there to answer letters, along with six other people.

**BW:** What year was that, when you joined his office?

**LD:** Nineteen-eighty, I believe. Yes, he was up for reelection that year, so that they were especially looking for people to work in his office who knew something about the state. Went there, no idea that I would stay for a long period of time, I thought it was a nice place, the people were nice, a lot of them were from Louisiana, we got along very well. And I said two years, well, probably going on, stayed for six years and moved up to a legislative assistant's position, and stayed there until he retired. He retired in, his term was up in '87, and then I was out of work so I had to find another job.

**BW:** Well just before we go there, what was your area when you were a leg.?

**LD:** Well, I first started answering letters in the area of women's issues, which was abortion,

birth control, things like that. Gun control, just random issues, nothing I had any expertise in, but you'd read the letter and the letter did not give the senator's position necessarily, it was basically you sort of danced around it and just made it as innocuous as possible so that you didn't have him locked into a position just in case something came up. And I did that, in fact I kept those areas when I became a legislative assistant, the same issues, and you would advise the senator on, if someone was coming in to meet with him you'd let him know what they were coming to talk to him about.

Now, coming from Louisiana, the Longs were way up there, that's like you idolized the Longs, because the Longs did a lot of good things for the state. So when I started working with him, my grandmother would always say, "You're working for Russell Long?" I said, "Yes, ma'am." And she would say, "You actually get to talk to him?" I would say, "Yes." She thought that was, hmm, pretty good.

And a lot of times when you'd talk to Senator Long you'd think that he wasn't listening to you necessarily, but he heard every word you'd say. He would be sitting back at his desk and sort of laid-back, and he would be taking in everything you'd say. And from time to time, if you had a meeting with him with constituents, you would advise him, before you sat in with the constituents you'd probably advise him to say certain things to them, and from time to time he'd actually say what you'd say he should say, and it worked out pretty well. He was a very, very nice man, cared a great deal about the state, and cared a great deal about the people who worked for him, too, so it was really a good family.

**BW:** I'm just going to pause here for a second.

*(Pause in taping.)*

**BW:** You were talking about Senator Long.

**LD:** As I said, he was a very, very, very interested in the state, cared a great deal about the state, and he had to live up to the legacy that his father had set, so he did a lot of good things. As chairman of the Finance Committee of course he was legend, but our job in his personal office did not overlap into the Finance Committee, because he had staff there, but we all worked together. We would not respond to letters that were out of state related to tax issues, they got forwarded to the Finance Committee, they would respond. We would only respond to in-state letters, that's all.

**BW:** What words would you use to describe Senator Long?

**LD:** I would call him a genius. He was a very, very smart, astute person. He didn't talk a lot, but when he talked you had a lot of trouble understanding because he mumbled a lot, and I think he did that on purpose so that people would listen real closely to try to figure out what he was saying. The tax code in my view is the most complicated thing, but he could figure it out frontward, backwards, upside down, anything like that, and he could come up with ideas that

would help people who were less fortunate than others in terms of what the tax code could provide, what kind of protection it could provide, or opportunity that it could provide.

But he was very, and an astute politician, too, very sharp. And he always came across as like, if you remember the southern politicians, sort of these older men, sort of slow, but very, very smart and sharp, and usually could get their way, legislatively, and they could convince people to do a lot of things that people wouldn't ordinarily want to do. But they were so sharp, and the way they talked to people and the way they laid it out, it was kind of slow and easy, and people said, 'oh yeah, well that sounds like a good idea.' But I'd say for today's politician, he was a brilliant person, I mean really brilliant.

**BW:** Do you think he was part of, quote/unquote, 'a dying breed?'

**LD:** Yes, I think most of the southern politicians in that day were a dying breed. While I don't know that, I never heard Senator Long say anything that I would consider to be a racist remark or anything like that, because I think of where he came from, but I'm sure, his age or where he came from, I'm sure there were things that he may have thought but he never really said. If you think about Senator Byrd, Senator Byrd was a member of the Ku Klux Klan, that's something he has to live with for the rest of his life and some people don't trust him because of that. And he's moved on now, it's like you have to take him at his word. And he's a new person by that experience, and I think Senator Long may have had some of those experiences. But if you think of John Stennis or Ellender, who was also from Louisiana, I'm sure they had some things in their backgrounds that we wouldn't appreciate today, but that probably made them what they are, and were.

**BW:** And of course seniority worked in their favor.

**LD:** Oh, my God did it ever. They had those seats and they could keep them for as long as they wanted them. Just think, Senator Long served for thirty-six years, I think his last election was probably the toughest election he had ever had, because it was just a given, if he was running, he was going to get reelected. And he traveled over the state; I mean he did a lot of time in the state, too. I think early on, politicians in those days had some issues, because most of them drank a lot, and he was not one who didn't drink, he did drink. And he lived up here, [and his first wife didn't move here, she stayed there with her children,] he didn't go back home a lot in his early days when he was here but then, I'd say after he remarried and he was a changed person, he didn't drink any more. He spent a lot of time in Louisiana, and he was just a different guy. [ ]

**BW:** And the second wife did move here.

**LD:** The second wife lived here, she actually worked for a former [senator] from North Carolina [whose name] I can't remember [ ]. I can't think of his name right now but—Morgan, that's who she worked for, former Senator [Robert B.] Morgan. That's where he met her, I think the offices were close by and she was sitting at one of the front desks or something like that. But

she made a big difference in his life, because I think she instilled values in him that she grew up with, not that he didn't have them, but I guess he had forgotten about them at that point.

**BW:** What motivated him not to run again in '86?

**LD:** I think it was his age, and the fact that he wanted to relax for a while and not be under the gun all the time. And also, Democrats had lost control, and he had been chairman of the Finance Committee for sixteen years, and then all of a sudden he was ranking member, made a little bit of a difference. I think that may have been part of it, but I think it's just that he wanted to do something else, and spend some time maybe traveling a little bit more and relaxing.

**BW:** Remind me of who succeeded him?

**LD:** Well, Bob Dole was -

**BW:** On the committee, yes, no, I mean in the Senate.

**LD:** John Breaux, who recently retired.

**BW:** So your job came to an end with Senator Long, and then what?

**LD:** And then I took it easy for a couple of weeks, because I was like, oh well, let's see, get a little bit of unemployment and sit around and see what I'm going to do. And actually [I went to work with] Senator Long, [who was] affiliated with a law firm, [ ] because he was still getting mail, people thought he was still the senator. So his administrative assistant asked if I would come down and help respond to the letters and let them know that he is no longer the senator, and I did that for probably about a month.

And then I decided it's time to find work, so I interviewed at the Democratic Policy Committee, which is a part of the [Democratic] leadership in the Senate, and Senator Byrd was chair at that time. And so the irony of this is that a friend of mine found out about the job and she went to interview, and I asked her if it would be okay with her if I went to interview too. She said, "Sure." Well I got the job and she didn't, and I felt kind of bad about it, but it was working in the office, the Democratic Policy Committee floor office, and I was the assistant to the office manager. I had done some legislative work, and I worked with [the floor staff]: Marty Paone, Charles Kinney, Abby Saffold [ ].

And it just so happens, while I was in that office, a floor position became available, so Charles Kinney, who was the senior person in the office said, "Lula, would you like to apply?" I said, "Oh yes," so I did, I interviewed.

Now, working as a legislative assistant was quite different from working on the floor, because legislative assistant, you have to basically advise the senator on issues, you don't necessarily have to know floor procedure [ ]. And that's what the floor job was, so it was a learning

experience because I didn't know a lot about how the floor worked. So I learned on the job, and Charles and Marty were very good teachers because I could just, they had been doing it, [ ] learn from them. Plus, you get a Rules book, you [review] the Rules book, but it's Greek [to many], it's practical experience basically, you just learn on the job.

And no day is the same day, you can work out different kinds of agreements, and so that's what I learned to do, keep members apprised of what's going on and when votes might occur, and when we have votes on issues, doing a summary of [what the upcoming vote is going to be], so that when they come in they know what it is they're voting on. And that's how I got started on the floor.

**BW:** So a lot of your work was very much instantaneous.

**LD:** Some of it was. The questions you get asked by members are usually the same questions, no matter who they are, how long they've been here, or what time of day it is. It's: When is the last vote? That's the most important question, first thing in the morning they want to know, if you're having a vote at eleven o'clock, they want to know, when is the last vote. And so it's just by being here and you get a feel for how the place is going to work, you can pretty much guess what it is.

And I learned that you guess, but as you find out more information, when that member comes back through you update them, which is what we do, is keep them informed of what's going on, how we expect the day's going to work out and things like that.

**BW:** Who sets that time table that you were reporting on?

**LD:** The majority leader, normally, and you work with the majority leader. And a lot of it depends on a lot of schedules, you have to work around everybody's schedule basically, and you try to do it in a way that everybody is accommodated, or the majority of the people are accommodated, including the leader. And you work with the Republicans, because as you know, in the Senate it's unanimous consent, so in order to get unanimous consent, everybody has to agree. And so it's working with the leaders on both sides, and with the Republican staff to come to some conclusion of when we're going to do something. It's like setting a vote time, meaning we're doing it by consent of course. So we have to, I'll go to my counterpart and say, "Okay, does four o'clock work for you?" And he'll check his leader's schedule and other schedules, I've checked mine, and it might be four ten when we decide that, yeah, it's right now, we can do it at four ten, so that's the way we work it.

**BW:** When you first talked about being on the floor you said it was such an exciting place. Give me a little bit more of the flavor of it, and why it would be such a prize position to get.

**LD:** Because you are working with all of the members, not just one person. While the leader is the big boss, you're working with all of these people and you see them in a different light than you would see them in their office. When they come to you, they're asking your advice on

should I go to this place at this point, or what time are we going to be voting, or how can I get this amendment done and things like that, so it's a different, like working in their office, you're working from a different perspective. Here, they're coming to you because they need your advice on what they should do, when they should do it, and whether or not they should do it.

And that to me is very exciting because you get to see members in a little bit of a different light than working for them personally. Some of them have a little bit more levity to them when they're talking to you, as opposed to the way they might talk to their staff. And I always said, well I don't want anything from them, they want something from me, so I got an upper hand on them. And I always say, it's like the best job in the world because you can tell them no and they understand, yeah, it is no. If they say, "Well I want to do this," and you say "Well no, I don't think you should do that because of this," and they understand that you're just advising them to help them do a better job at what it is they're trying to do, because while members think they understand the Rules of the Senate, they don't. So it's your job basically to keep them on the right path.

**BW:** Did you ever blunder in that kind of situation?

**LD:** No, because I always, I'm cagey about how I answer a question. You never are definite unless you have a consent that's an order to do something. But you always say, "Well I expect that'll happen at this time," but you're not saying it definitely, so they can't come back to you and say, "Well you told me," and it's like, well no I didn't, I said it 'might.' And that's the way you don't get yourself boxed in, because they'll come back to you and tell you, 'well you said.' So it's like, I always say, herding cats, it's like kids, and you always want to keep those kids in line.

And I'm as fair with the Republicans as I am with Democrats, I'm not going to give a Republican, if they ask me a question I'm going to give them sound advice, I'm not going to just lead them astray because I want to get an advantage, because it could turn around pretty swiftly.

**BW:** You said that you were part of the floor staff of the Democratic Policy Committee. What other branches of that committee were there?

**LD:** Well it's split off now; they have a Steering section, and the Communication section. So it used to be it was the Policy Committee and then you had a group who were Steering and Communication, and then they had another section of, it was all a studio type atmosphere. So then they split them off and you have the Policy Committee, you have Steering and Coordination, and then you have Communication. So you have a chairman of the Policy Committee, a chairman of the Steering, and a chairman of the Communications, so even though the leader is the big guy, they have people who actually oversee those different little groups, and they're members of the leadership.

**BW:** And these would be senators?

**LD:** Yes, yes.

**BW:** And Steering, what, Steering, what would that -?

**LD:** Well, Steering is an arm of the leadership that basically decides having outside groups come in to talk to members. They may have, let's say fishermen and hunters and stuff like that, because they want to be broad, and have business groups come in, too, or would have Indian tribes. Steering and Coordination, that's what they do, they actually arrange for people to come in and talk to members. And the Steering Committee also works with the leader in terms of committee assignments, and that happens at the beginning of each congress, like the last time when we got all these seats, we have sixty Democrats now, so we had to provide slots for all of these new members. So it was a part of working with members who had too many so-called committee assignments, and have them give some of them up so that other people could get them, and then expanding some of the committees, too, making them larger which is a little bit unruly, because the Appropriations has thirty members now, that's the largest committee here. Whereas on the House side, I think Appropriations probably has fifty or sixty people, but it's a larger place.

And the Communications center is, they basically have a studio and they provide the outlet for members to go and do direct feeds to their states or have town halls in the studio and things like that. Now, when Mitchell was leader, there were no sub-chairs, Mitchell was chairman of all of it. And then when Daschle became leader, he gave other people an opportunity to be in charge of those other branches. He was still the leader, but he did not serve as chair of those committees.

**BW:** And how did Byrd arrange committees?

**LD:** Oh, Byrd was in charge of all of it, and he kept it close to himself. So it involves more people now, more people have an opportunity to serve in the leadership and have a voice, whereas when Byrd was leader, I mean it was just Byrd. He kept his own counsel, period.

**BW:** And how was it working for him?

**LD:** I never had much direct contact with him. He would come on the floor – he's a very, very nice man, he was always kind to everybody who worked there, he always took the time to talk to the pages and sort of give them a little history lesson. And when he was doing his history of the Senate, I listened to a lot of his lectures on the floor, because for him to go out there with no paper, [absolutely] nothing, and just talk about all of this Greek history and Roman history, and pronounce all these names, it was fascinating just to hear him, because he had so much in his head that some people would never have in a million years. It's like he could just recite poetry, and he would stand there for a while because he would be gathering his thoughts, and then all of a sudden he just started off. And he would go on for an hour, talking about Greek history and Roman history, with no notes because he had read, I mean that's what he would do, when he would have a break, he'd read. That's all he would do, would be to read.

**BW:** And he probably had a photographic memory, or close to it.

**LD:** He did. And it's sad to see him at his age now, where he's not as good as he was because of his health, but he really was fascinating.

**BW:** Some might think that someone with his interests, which were a little bit out of the mainstream of the business of the Senate, wouldn't have enjoyed for so long the top leadership position. How do you account for him being the majority leader, or minority leader, for so long?

**LD:** Oh well, yes, I think it was the fact that he didn't appear to be a kind of guy who'd like the power, but I think he did like the power. And the fact that he could come up from where he came from to attain that was, oh, I think that was a major stepping stone for him and a major thing. For him to give up the leadership just to be chair of Appropriations was, I mean everybody knew what that was about because he was going to take care of his state, and he did a great job of doing that. And he thought that he had been leader, but Appropriations was a bigger fish, and it had a larger ocean that he could control, and he did.

**BW:** So your interpretation is that he, that was something, that change *he* wanted to make.

**LD:** Yes, oh yeah, that was his choice, nobody forced him out. He could have been leader as long as he wanted to be leader, but he saw that he could do more sitting at Appropriations than as leader, because he'd have a bigger purse to control, a much larger purse. Whereas he could get what he wanted as leader, but *he* didn't have to *ask* anybody because he could do it himself.

See, the leaders, they're the big shots, but for them to get things they have to have a committee chair do it for them usually. And Byrd had done that, but he didn't need to do it anymore because he could be chair himself, and it was the perfect opportunity for him.

**BW:** So from the DPC's point of view, what was the transition from Byrd to Mitchell like?

**LD:** Mitchell also kept his own counsel. And Byrd, he never asked anybody anything about anything, Byrd just always did it. Mitchell did confide in a couple people, like Daschle, and he may have had some other confidantes, but when Mitchell was going to do something, he would let you know when he was doing it. And he was not going to go on the floor and make some big thing about something or try to spring something, but he was an astute politician and I was always amazed that he could go out and engage in debate with someone. He never had any papers either, but he always came out, he was very judicious in everything that he did and it was just like, he would just slam the person down, and the person didn't even know they had been slammed. It was phenomenal, he could just sit out there and listen to whatever they were saying, and then just come back on them like a prosecuting attorney or something like that and it was phenomenal. And he was always so good at that, always, no matter what the subject was he was just right on, all the time. And so we'd just sit out there and be amazed that he could just come out there and take care of it and then go back to his office.

**BW:** The judge.

**LD:** The judge, yes, yes, the judge. I only saw him lose his cool once. It was late one evening when he was getting into a shouting match, and I don't know, it was a Republican member, but it was kind of looking pretty bad because we have a press gallery that, and they are just like this, going over, because they want to hear. And so finally someone from, I think it was Martha Pope convinced Senator Mitchell that he needed to take that off the floor into his office so that they could cool down, because they were getting a little bit heated, and they did, and they came back, they were smiling and like patting each other on the back and everything was fine. But he never lost his cool; he was always just calm, just like this, all the time.

**BW:** There must have been some other senators during that period that you would sort of, everyone would get on the top of their toes to listen to.

**LD:** I think Warren Rudman thought he was one of them, because he would always tell you how smart he was and you weren't. But it was okay, yes, I liked to listen to him. I think there probably have been some smart people, but they always seemed to have to read from something in order to show how smart they were, they weren't necessarily talking from the top of their head, or just unprepared.

Bob Kerrey was like that, Bob Kerrey could go out and talk and he wouldn't need prepared remarks because he just understood the issues and could talk about it. But everybody else, they seemed to have to be prepared. And we never really have any great debates anymore, and that's one of the things about the Senate. We've arranged for some great debates, but it wasn't really like people just went out and started debating an issue.

I think the last time was 1991, the first Gulf War, when people actually went out and debated, and they were talking from here, they weren't talking from here, and that was really one of the last times I've seen people really go out and talk about an issue, and talk about an issue because they believed in something, but otherwise it's just prepared and, as I said, it's something that we arrange.

**BW:** Daniel Patrick Moynihan came to my mind as someone I would want to listen to.

**LD:** Well he always spoke so here (*hand gesture up*), when you have to think about everybody's down here (*hand gesture down*), and a lot of times people didn't understand what he was talking about. But he was very good, yes he was, but he always was talking down to people. I remember one time we were on the floor, and Senator Moynihan came in and said [that] he's just going to adjourn the Senate, because he wanted to. And I was like, "Well sir, I don't think you want to do that, that's a prerogative of the leader." So he said, "Well I'm going to do it anyway." And I said, "Well, I've got to get the leader then." So I had a senator put in a quorum call while I can go get Senator Mitchell so Senator Mitchell can come to talk to Senator Moynihan, because Senator Moynihan was not pleased with what was going on so he wanted to

adjourn.

So a senator put in a quorum call and I got Senator Mitchell and he came out to the floor and talked to Senator Moynihan and calmed him down, I guess. I don't know why Senator Moynihan was exercised, but then it all worked out fine. But yes, Moynihan was one of those very smart, very, very smart people.

Now we had people who would, I'm not going to say that they were alcoholics necessarily, but they might go get a nip, like it was late in the evening, and then they just want to come out and start talking, when everybody else wanted to go home. But anyway, that's just something you just deal with and hope for the best.

**BW:** You mentioned that there are very few debates anymore. How has the culture of the Senate changed, and for what reasons?

**LD:** Well, I think television in the Senate has changed the culture, because people saw a camera and they were talking to the camera, and they started wearing a lot of red ties, white shirts, blue collars or whatever. And I think the fact that you have a lot more House members now here in the Senate, and when they were in the House of course, you get a minute or something like that, you don't get a chance to talk at length. Or the fact that they're shut out, and most of the ones who came from the House are Republicans and they were in the minority for so long that when they came over here and they were in the majority it went to their heads, and they thought that they could just do whatever they want, they could run roughshod over anybody because they were in the majority. So it's kind of getting them acclimated to the fact that we work by unanimous consent. We don't have a Rules Committee over here that tells us what to do, that everybody has a say in how things get done. It was sort of a learning process, and getting them back into the fold of 'this is the way it works over here'.

And the slow pace in which we used to do things, and people would actually think about stuff, as opposed to rushing things through. And everybody wants to get done quite quickly; they don't want to spend time thinking about what it is we're doing. I think that's changed, too, and I think people have to campaign a lot more, they have to raise so much more money, and everybody's afraid of their shadow, and I think that's how the Senate has changed over the years that I've been here. I mean hard choices, or difficult decisions, nobody wants to do that necessarily, because they don't want it to come back on them and get blamed for, 'oh, well I did do that.'

The Congress passed a law, and I think it had to do with Medicare – this is some years ago – and there was a card-writing campaign to overturn it because it didn't work out the way it was meant to be. Well they quickly turned that around and voided whatever it was and changed it because, as like now, they rushed it and they didn't take the time to think about what the impact was going to be.

**BW:** Have voting procedures changed over time, or not?

**LD:** In the Senate, not necessarily. We have a standing order at the beginning of every congress that a vote is fifteen minutes, and we give an extra five for people to get here. Now, if a vote is close we extend the time of the vote and it stays open as long as the leader says it stays open. But people, they normally come over and they see what it is they're voting on. Staff normally have told them what it is and they come in and they vote. Sometimes they may think it's a motion to table, which might mean they might want to vote to table, as opposed to up or down which means they would want to vote no, so we have to make sure that when they come in that they understand that it's an up or down or a motion to table.

Because members sometimes come in, they don't pay attention to what's there that says what the vote is, and they just vote. And we think then, 'ah, are you sure?' So we have to make sure we get them to, ask them, so that they can be recorded correctly because you can, you're recorded a certain way, and if changing your vote doesn't change the outcome, you can change your vote. But it could be a close vote, which means that changing your vote would change the outcome, you can't change your vote. So we always want to make sure that they have been recorded correctly.

Now in the Senate, if you're not recorded on a roll call, you cannot by consent be recorded. It's not even a [request which is entertained by the Chair]. You can put something in the record saying you could have voted a certain way or something like that, but you cannot vote if you were never recorded.

**BW:** And all votes are done in person on the Senate floor.

**LD:** That's correct, that's correct, you have to physically be there, they don't have a card or anything, you have to get the eye of the clerk who's calling the role, and they see you and they call your name and you're recorded. That's the way it works in the Senate now. We've had people suggest that you have votes held open for two days, for somebody to get from the west coast or something like that, and it's like 'forget it.' Some people have thought about getting electronic machines, and we said no, that's not going to work either. I mean, you need to physically be in the chamber. Now, you can vote from the lobby, let's say – Senator Breau used to always have on his gym clothes because he would always play tennis, so we would just tell the clerk, he's in the lobby, and he would come to the door, put his hand out and say how he's voting. You can vote from the cloakrooms, and that's the same thing, if you don't have on a suit and tie or you have on your gym shorts or something like that, you can vote from the cloakrooms, but the clerk *sees* you, like we'll tell the clerk, "He's at the door." And now Senator Rockefeller just recently had knee surgery and he was in a wheelchair, and he was voting [ ] from the lobby, and the clerk would look at him, and he would say yes or no, but you have to physically be somewhere in the chamber area to vote, yes.

**BW:** In Russell Long's day, did senators spend more time on the floor, or -?

**LD:** I think they did. They had great filibusters back in those days: natural gas, Civil Rights. We had an organized filibuster on judges, like the nuclear option some years ago, but that was

organized, the other filibusters were not organized; somebody just got up and started talking and they just continued to talk. But no, we don't have any great debates.

**BW:** So your time was always spent, did you have an office, or were you literally on the floor (*unintelligible*)?

**LD:** Well yes, [most of the time was on the floor,] but [I] had an office downstairs. Like now, I have an office here but I'm usually down in the Cloakroom or near the floor almost all day while we're in session. I might run up here to get lunch or something like that, but usually, normally when I run up here to get lunch somebody calls me and says, "Well Senator Reid wants to see you," and so it's like you leave your lunch on your desk and you go back down. But yes, it's spent around the floor, in the environs of the floor, in the Cloakroom, on the floor, or at the leader's office, which is right across from the floor.

**BW:** So you then just moved up?

**LD:** Well, I guess you could say I moved up, yes. My office used to be on the first floor, now I'm on the third floor, so I've moved upstairs.

**BW:** But you've also, you were -

**LD:** Well I was assistant secretary for like seven or eight years, and then Marty retired, went on to bigger and better things, and so I got the job.

**BW:** And how did that feel?

**LD:** I never thought Marty would leave in the first place, and so when he said he was leaving, I'm like, "What?" I was in disbelief and wondered, do I really want this? But I was already pretty much doing all of it, but it's a little bit more than what I was doing; it's a little bit more responsibility. But I like it, because I like where I work, I like the people I work with, so I still have the best job in the world, I think.

**BW:** And you are still part of the Democratic Policy Committee, or not?

**LD:** No, no, the secretary of the majority has an office, so I'm not a part of the Policy Committee anymore now. Each party [has a] secretary [ ] let's say, the top officers in the Senate, so we each have our own office and it's a position that is funded through the legislative branch of Appropriations Committee, [as is the Office of the Secretary of the Senate, the Sergeant-at-Arms.]

**BW:** But when you were assistant -?

**LD:** [ ] [The assistant does not have separate office space. They are normally housed] in the Policy Committee office, that's where my office was, but I was really on the payroll of the

secretary for the majority. [p/o]

**BW:** And you in fact were elected.

**LD:** As secretary, yes, you get elected by your caucus, and a resolution is adopted in the Senate to be in that position; same with the sergeant-at-arms and the secretary of the Senate. And they can throw you out if they want to, or they can keep you, so this Congress, they said I could stay.

**BW:** For people that are not familiar with the structure of the Senate, distinguish between the secretary of the Senate, and the secretary for the majority.

**LD:** Secretary of the Senate [is the chief legislative, financial, and administrative officer of the Senate. This office was established in 1789 and has jurisdiction] over all of the legislative staff who work on the Senate floor, the parliamentarian, the journal, and the legislative clerks, and also the people who work in the *Daily Digest*, [ ] the Dispersing Office comes under the auspices, so it's a huge operation. [p/o] Whereas the secretary for the majority is affiliated with a party, and just like the secretary of the minority. So if we were in the minority, I'd be secretary for the minority, vice versa.

**BW:** Right. Did, when George Mitchell decided to retire, was there a kind of legacy, did his aura continue beyond his time, or did it change?

**LD:** Well, I think it changed because the person who takes over establishes their own legacy and so they have a different style, and everybody is different. And while they're leader, I mean they do things a little bit differently. Senator Daschle was very inclusive of having other people come in to provide him with counsel, whereas, as I said, George Mitchell kept his own counsel [ ]. Daschle thought he would govern by having a larger group supporting him, and from time to time it worked against him because you have that larger group supporting you and then they want their own thing, too. So you have to be careful of who you include in that group, but it worked, the way Daschle did it, it worked for Daschle. But as I said, they're different people. And so it worked.

And you still have the same job, you're just working for a different leader. But when Daschle was the assistant majority leader under Mitchell, you'd get to work with Daschle because Daschle was his guy on the floor, so I was on the floor, so you'd get to know them anyway. So they know you from your job, and so they want you to continue doing the job because you're serving them and the Caucus, and you're always protecting their interests so they want somebody, I'm blessed to say that, they want somebody who knows the job and knows how to do the job, and knows how to get things done and keep trains running, while still protecting Democratic interests; making sure that they don't get shut out when you're trying to get something done, or getting unanimous consent agreement.

**BW:** Right. Somewhere I picked up that the way Mitchell organized things, he was in charge

of floor operations, foreign policy, and that Daschle became sort of the go-to person for domestic policy.

**LD:** Right, that's true, because he had a keen interest in foreign policy, so yes, he did, he had his own staff. Remember that they still had their own staff all the time, and they used their own staff for their purposes. And Daschle had his own staff, too. Now, when Daschle was leader and Reid was the whip, Reid ran the floor, period. Reid was always on the floor. Now, Daschle was on the floor when he needed to be on the floor, but they allowed chairmen to run things that were under their jurisdiction, whereas Senator Reid as whip, he was always there assisting the chairmen, he was always there, because he kept a presence on the floor so that he'd make sure that everything was always going the way it should go. And it's hard for him to break that now as leader, because he likes to be on the floor, but he can't be on the floor because he has other things that he has to do. So from time to time, when the phone rings, you know it's him calling, wants to know what's going on, because he can't break away from having that presence on the floor. But George Mitchell, I mean he did run the floor, but he didn't come to the floor unless he needed to be on the floor, he wasn't just out there 24/7.

**BW:** Was there a big staff turnover when the transition from Mitchell to Daschle, or not?

**LD:** Daschle kept some of the Mitchell people, because of their expertise, but I think normally when the leaders switch that staffs switch too, because of the alliance and the allegiance, [ ] they like the way a certain person does something, and their positions could be changed too, so it's kind of hard for some people because they believe in what they're doing, that it's hard for them to work for someone who doesn't necessarily share the same view.

**BW:** I wanted to cover just a few other sort of summing up issues. How would you describe changes in the nature of Democratic leadership over the period of time you've been around here?

**LD:** Well, I wasn't around when Lyndon Johnson was leader, [but] I understand he ruled with an iron hand. He was pretty much, if someone had committed to vote with him and they decided to change their mind, he would cut them off and wouldn't allow them to vote. Whereas I notice that leaders since, Senator Byrd, Mitchell, Daschle, Reid, they've been more lenient, they understand that people have different viewpoints, they understand that they're not going to get unanimous support for all of their positions, and they allow people to take a walk from time to time. But I think they expect also that when they really are needed, that the person will suck it up and do what the leader has asked them to do. So I've seen that, they've allowed people to be their own person, but also to keep them in the fold.

And I think some of that has been difficult, because if you think about how the nation has changed and how people have split in terms of a lot of different issues. You have southern Democrats who have to be pretty much Republican in order to win, so some of the votes that they have to take are very difficult votes, and so I think leaders have grown to appreciate the fact that they have a diverse Caucus, and it becomes more diverse with the members that we get, that they allow people to do things that they know they have to do, and then but also walk the fine,

narrow line when they have to. So they've allowed people to be themselves.

**BW:** And what about Republican leadership over the same period?

**LD:** Oh, they walk a fine line all the time, they just do whatever their Republican leader tells them to do, period, they don't stray, they don't stray from the fold.

**BW:** So it's a very different party.

**LD:** Very, very different, yes, very different. When Dole was leader there were, you hear a lot of talk about moderate Republicans, I guess they were a lot more, but now it's very difficult I believe for somebody like Snowe or Collins or even, when Specter was a Republican, for them to actually be who they are, and who they represent. And so it's difficult, I mean I feel for them half the time, but I always say, they always have a lot of crazies over there, so – but we have some crazies too, but we don't talk about our crazies as much.

**BW:** Do you, looking back, obviously you're still very much in the mix here, but looking back, was there a happiest period in your career so far, or?

**LD:** I don't think I've had an unhappy period, I always have enjoyed what I do because I don't take any of it personally, nor am I a political person, I'm more of a procedure and how we get things done [person]. So I don't look at the issues, I don't take positions on the issues. If someone asks my opinion I give them my opinion, but as like, 'well you asked, so I told you.' But I always see it as a happy time. I get to work in this building; I get to walk in here every day, so I feel very blessed and very lucky. So no, I don't see it as unhappy necessarily.

**BW:** This is a little bit beyond the purview of this oral history project, but what was the mood like during the Clinton impeachment?

**LD:** Sad. I guess that was an unhappy time, it was just a vendetta; it was like they were just going after him. And it was not a pretty time for us, but it was something we had to do – the Constitution required it, so we did it. And I think the way it was handled was done with some thought, it wasn't just like slam out here, it was thought about, they got a procedure to how it was going to be done in the Senate, and you have to attribute that to the leaders at that time, Daschle and Lott, they did a good job.

**BW:** Talk a little bit about the roles of women in the Senate culture, and have roles changed dramatically?

**LD:** You've got a lot more of them now. I think women have a bigger voice now, because you have like sixteen of them, [ ] and they have a bigger voice. You've got chairs of committees now, and I think that, I think women weren't ever overlooked, but I think now they do pay attention. You have more women senators, you have more women staffers, you have some women staffers who are chiefs of staff and committee staff directors. So it's a good thing, but

everything has its downsides too, but I think it's all good. I'd like to have some more women senators here.

**BW:** So that's the downside, that there aren't enough?

**LD:** Well, I don't think there's a downside, I think it's a good thing, it's an upside to have more women, and have women speak about how things affect them and families. Because they can really speak about families and children and things like that, because they have more experience than the men do, and I think it gives a full view of everything, as opposed to just men all the time. And men don't really know [everything there is to know about all the issues].

**BW:** Now, you worked with Martha Pope probably quite a bit.

**LD:** I did; she was George Mitchell's right hand girl, or man you could say, whatever, but yes.

**BW:** And characterize that relationship a little bit.

**LD:** Mutual respect, that's what I think. She could tell him things that other people could not tell him, because he respected her, he believed in what she said, and they had worked together for a number of years, so he really did respect her. He respected her opinion, and he valued her opinion. And she never led him astray; she always was giving him the right advice.

**BW:** Another person that comes to my mind as being kind of a trailblazer in terms of the Senate was Sheila Burke.

**LD:** Right, Sheila and Martha were pretty close. Sheila was a trailblazer, and Sheila was a very fair, very fair person. I always thought of her as being a Democrat. [ ]

**BW:** She took some heat on that account, didn't she?

**LD:** Yes, she did, she did. Some of the positions she took, she took a lot of heat. But she was always fair, she always treated people with respect, and she voiced her opinion. If you didn't agree with her, so you didn't agree with her, but okay, there are differences of opinion here. But yes, she took a lot of heat.

**BW:** Now were you in the DPC when Jo-Anne Coe was sergeant-at-arms, or '85 to '87?

**LD:** Yes, I was.

**BW:** But she didn't make any big impression, right.

**LD:** No.

**BW:** In looking over the information I was able to gather on the Internet, I notice you're your master's degree was in guidance counseling.

**LD:** Yes, it works well here. I can use it a lot, yes. I find myself, I'm always, I don't get real upset over a lot of things that go on here, I figure it's just another day, you deal with every day and just deal with it, don't get yourself all worked up over things that don't necessarily go right, but people always need somebody to listen to them, and I listen a lot, if somebody wants to talk they can talk, and I listen to members all the time, they like to complain about a lot of different things, but that's life, and it's not always nice but at least we have jobs, and there are a lot of people who don't. And I always remind them, people sent you here to do something, so do it.

**BW:** You talked about George Mitchell coming on the floor to calm down a Republican, or the debate. Are there other sort of George Mitchell moments that you recall?

**LD:** Well, George Mitchell and I used to always have this discussion. I always called him cheap, he was always tight about money, and I was always asking him about, like I need a raise because I don't live in Maine, the cost of living may be less in Maine but I live here. And he's like, "Well Lula, you're always asking for money." And I'd say, "Well yes, because you don't pay anything, get up off it." So he and I would banter all the time about that. But he was always a pleasant person, might have a funny story to tell every now and then, but he was serious too, I mean he took his job very seriously, and he thought what he was doing was very serious and he cared a great deal about what he was doing.

**BW:** I heard others tell -

**LD:** And he had a lot of women who worked for him, a lot of strong women who are very, very smart and who, like Anita – what is Anita's last name – who, Anita Dunn? No, not Anita Dunn, but Anita [Jensen] wrote all of his speeches, I mean she had his voice and she spoke just like George Mitchell, and every speech he needed to give, Anita was writing it for him. And she was still working for him when he was doing the Northern Ireland thing the first time, she was still doing a lot of his speeches, because whatever he wanted, he'd just give her an outline and she could just put it down on paper and it was perfect. Or even Diane [Dewhirst] who was his spokesperson at the time, when he was leader, she was his press person. So he always was surrounded with women who are very strong, and very sharp.

**BW:** I have heard from others complaints about his being a little tight-fisted when it came to salaries.

**LD:** Oh God, yes.

**BW:** How do you, how does that comport with his fairness and his other attributes?

**LD:** I think he was still being fair, but in his eyesight it's like there was a salary structure and he couldn't, I don't think in his own mind, because of where he was from and because salaries

were probably low there, he couldn't justify paying somebody something, it was like he couldn't disconnect the fact that it's here and not there. But yes, I always complained. But he was fair, I mean he was fair, but I just had to complain all the time anyway, just to let him know I was not happy, but I never would have quit the job over money because it wasn't that important. But it was just a matter of just keeping him, by saying something to him about it every year or every six months.

**BW:** Do you think his own personal staff, for example, was among the lowest paid in the Senate?

**LD:** I know they were probably comparable. You have to remember, people can pay people here what they want to pay them, it's like there is no salary structure necessarily, only that you can't make more than a senator, a top staff person can't make more than a senator, but there is no salary, a member can pay you what they want. And I think some offices give bonuses at the end of the year, if they're going to have extra money and they give you a bonus which bumps up your salary. But I always tell people it's like, hey, it took me the longest to get to \$80,000, and that was a lot of money then, so don't be complaining, because there is no salary structure here, it's just up to the member.

Now, granted, normally their chiefs of staff make the bigger bucks, but their legislative directors probably make bucks, their secretaries make bucks, but then you get down to the mail room person or the legislative correspondents, maybe they're making thirty-five thousand, maybe. But a lot of kids come here because they want the experience of it, too, and they're being subsidized by their parents.

**BW:** That's another change I suspect, over the period of time that you've been here, the average age of Senate staffers.

**LD:** It's very, yes, it's very young.

**BW:** And does that have an upside and a downside?

**LD:** I guess the downside is that they're only coming for resume building, but some of them are true believers and come because that's what they want to do, that would be the downside. The upside is that a lot of these kids are coming from, they've traveled overseas, they have a broad view of things, and they've studied very long and hard in school and they have a background in foreign policy, or in criminal justice or something like that, so they have a lot of talent but they're not willing to stay twenty years either. It's more about resume building, you come here and you stay for a few years and then you move on to something else. We have pages come as sixteen-year-olds, and they're from all over the country and some of them, in fact one is now working for the vice president, she does foreign policy for the vice president. But she went to Yale and graduated with honors, and then did some other work, more power to her.

**BW:** Anything we haven't said here?

**LD:** Oh, I think we covered everything.

**BW:** I'm sure you have lots of secrets.

**LD:** Oh, no, secrets I would never reveal – I want to live.

**BW:** Well, thank you very much for the time we've spent and all this information you have shared.

**LD:** Thank you, I look forward to hearing this oral project. Is it going to be available in a library?

End of Interview