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### Interview with Patrick Griffin by Brien Williams

Patrick J. Griffin

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

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**Patrick Griffin**  
(Interviewer: *Brien Williams*)

**GMOH# 096**  
May 7, 2009

**Brien Williams:** This is an oral history interview with Patrick J. Griffin for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College. [The date is May 7, 2009.] We are in the Washington offices of Peck, Madigan, Jones & Stewart, a lobbying firm where Mr. Griffin has served as founder and a former president. He is currently owner and partner in Griffin Williams Critical Point Management in Washington, D.C. Good. Bowdoin would like you to start out by telling us your date and place of birth.

**Patrick Griffin:** New York City, 6/22/49.

**BW:** And your parents' names?

**PG:** Daniel and Edith.

**BW:** And a little bit about their background, were they New Yorkers?

**PG:** My mother was born and raised in New York, she's the daughter of immigrants from Italy, and my father was actually born and raised in Ohio, met my mother during the war in New York City, and his parents were Irish immigrants.

**BW:** And did you grow up in a highly politicized environment?

**PG:** Not at all, I grew up in a highly Italian environment, very working class experience, big extended families in Brooklyn and Queens.

**BW:** So where did you go to school, and eventually educa-, university and so forth?

**PG:** I went to school in the local Catholic elementary school, and then with a great deal of effort on the part of my family was able to go to a Jesuit high school in Brooklyn. I had to take a subway and a bus to get there every day, and then went to another Jesuit college – the high school was called Brooklyn Prep, and then I went on to a small Jesuit college in New Jersey called St. Peter's, then I went on to my master's in urban affairs in University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, and then remained there for a doctorate in education in a different school within the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.

**BW:** What led you to Milwaukee?

**PG:** I was very interested at the time, back in the time of the '60s and '70s, [there was] a lot of focus on urban policy. And Milwaukee, while it wasn't the flagship school of Wisconsin, it was really bringing together a lot of interesting thinking and big minds on how to think about urban policy in an integrated way. So the school I went to, the department I went to was one of the first attempts to integrate sociology, economics, geography, psychology into comprehensive urban policy strategies. And that was what kept me there. And my subsequent work in education was actually in urban education, so it was really bringing, I was interested in adult, higher education and its role in urban environments.

**BW:** So you stayed on at the university to teach.

**PG:** Yes, while I got my doctorate they recruited me to be an instructor, and then I got tenure track as an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, yeah.

**BW:** And what did you see at that point your career path to be ahead?

**PG:** Well, it was not clear. Milwaukee was a city under a lot of duress at the time in terms of economics, and while I enjoyed academe, I really didn't feel like that was my career. I really liked community politics and education and bringing those institutions together. So I wasn't on a conventional academic path, I taught all my classes in the community in Milwaukee, hardly any on the campus.

And then just by a fluke, a colleague of mine who saw that I was restless presented the opportunity to apply for what was called at the time Health Education and Welfare Fellow, HEW Fellow. It was the first year of the Carter administration and you filled out this elaborate thing, and they were looking for people who had different kinds of backgrounds but were working in some kind of public service/education/community- So I had a good background for that. And I went through the application process, and was selected out of, there were twelve of us that were selected out of eighteen hundred. So I came to Washington on a sabbatical, and found the politics of Washington a lot easier than the politics of a curriculum committee in the university, and so I never went back.

**BW:** So how long did you stay at HEW?

**PG:** It was for a year, and then, I was working in the assistant secretary for education's office, Mary [Frances] Berry, and then stayed on for a couple of months and then got a job on the Senate Budget Committee, which was newly constituted, or within a year or so, and then spent a year there. And then got hired by Senator Byrd's leadership staff in the late '70s, so I worked for the Democratic Policy Committee after that, and then worked my way up through the Byrd operation, worked the floor, where I first met Senator Mitchell, and then subsequently became elected the secretary to the Democratic Caucus, which is an elected official, it's an official put forth by the Democratic leader, as the Republicans do, and then elected by the caucus and the Senate as a whole. So it was the only elected official when we were Democrats in the minority,

and the Republicans being in the majority had three of them.

**BW:** Those are a lot of stations on the cross.

**PG:** Hmm-hmm.

**BW:** And I'd love to explore each and every one of them, but I don't think we probably have the time to do that. Who was chairman of Budget when you -?

**PG:** Senator Hollings. And I was actually working for Senator Metzenbaum, but I was officially paid for by the Budget Committee.

**BW:** So George Mitchell comes in in 1980, when –

**PG:** Muskie goes –

**BW:** - Senator Muskie goes to State, right. So when were you first aware of this new senator from Maine?

**PG:** Well by that time I had joined the Byrd operation and I was one of Senator Byrd's floor staff, so I was on the floor every minute that the Senate was in session. And our job was to watch the floor for Senator Byrd, or the leadership, and help Democratic senators that were coming on and off the floor. And he was just like a new kid on the block who needed a lot of help, I mean he didn't know, like anyone else walking into that institution, where the bathrooms were. So it was an opportunity to meet him like you would meet any other new senator, and get him familiar to what the floor was about, which is very different than what his personal office is about or what his committee assignments were about. He was a very congenial, funny, down-to-earth fellow, so we took good care of him – [at least] we tried to take good care of him.

**BW:** Now he didn't have the benefit of some years in the House, and didn't even have the benefit of a campaign at that point, although he had run for governor several years before. So would you have described him as being particularly naïve?

**PG:** He didn't have a clue about [ ] the Senate. There's no way any experience that isn't on the Senate floor in particular, can inform that experience, what it's like to operate on the [floor], particularly back then where we were still part of another era. It was pre-TV, it was really the old school. [The] old bulls operated things [then], there was much more cordiality and accommodation, although it was beginning, just on the cusp of changing. So there was no way he could know what that experience [was going to be] about.

What we recognized about him, and I did, is that he knew how to get what he needed to build his program. Now that, again, it's very different than what he had to do with his office staff, his committee assignments, and then back in Maine. It's a really little entity unto itself.

**BW:** Did you see him associating with any particular colleagues, sort of big brothers?

**PG:** Yes and no. Senator Byrd took a liking to him early on, he thought he was a very bright – I don't know if it was right at that moment, but he thought he was a very impressive guy. [He] thought that maybe he had leadership capabilities, and said so in several meetings, or several occasions [ ] to me. Byrd wanted that relationship. I don't know if it ever developed quite the way it was anticipated, particularly as Senator Mitchell's environmental stance became more clear on behalf of Maine and its direct impact on West Virginia, there was a little tension that grew to a big tension.

**BW:** He won election to the Senate in '82.

**PG:** Hmm-hmm.

**BW:** So he became, quote/unquote, 'fully legitimate' as a senator. Did you see, where were you in '82?

**PG:** I was still, now I was Byrd's senior floor staff for '81 to '82, and then right after the '82 election I was elected to the secretary, so I had a lot of exposure to Senator Mitchell before the election, and certainly afterwards.

**BW:** And did you see any change in him, as the way he comported himself?

**PG:** Not really, no, no. He was very cautious, and I didn't see what Byrd saw, I just thought he was a pretty cool guy, funny, laughed [easily]. There was some point where he started getting a little more tense. I remember somebody's people saying stuff, but I didn't listen. I remember one incident that he may remember. Who ran against him in '82?

**BW:** Emery.

**PG:** Emery, and he was being put up for some – so he lost in, maybe it was post-'82 – that Emery was being put up for some nomination of something. And we were going out for a long recess, and they were pressing the Republicans – part of what I did was manage nominations and confirmations and all that – the Republicans were pressing to get him done, maybe a couple others. And I called up Senator Mitchell and I said, "You know, without any fingerprints," I said, "I can just make this guy have a longer recess if you'd like." And he was all very nervous about it, "Oh, I don't know, I don't know." And I said, "Well, if I get any calls I'll say it we just couldn't get it cleared." And I think he checked with David Johnson at the time, and he was tentative about doing it, but he okayed it.

And I think I'm right on this – so we went out and Emery didn't get confirmed, and he got a call and he immediately choked and he kind of, instead of just saying, "I had nothing to do with it," he kind of implicated himself somehow. I don't have the details, but it made him very anxious and it was - And all I said to him, I said, "You didn't have to do that." But he did, I guess that

was his makeup.

**BW:** So, I'm just trying to put your career path together with his. At what point did people begin to think this was a potential majority leader?

**PG:** I don't think that was, I don't recall that ever being that explicit, no. But I had left the Senate in '85, and I'm already, I'm downtown, and I'm in the mix a little bit because I'm still close to Byrd, and in fact when Senator Mitchell wound up running, I was running Senator Inouye's PAC, so I was helping Senator Inouye become the heir apparent to Byrd. And Senator Mitchell and I still had, I think, some affection for each other, or at least pretend affection, I don't know, and so it was a little awkward when he emerged in that race about a year after Inouye had already launched, as a result of the Iran-Contra stuff.

But up until that point I don't, that first year, where Inouye was lining up his votes, there was never even a whisper. The whole thing kind of just turned upside down on Iran-Contra, and it looked like it was sitting there all the time to be had, but I don't ever remember, I think I would have at least been aware of that, from my own self-interest point of view, and I'm in business with David Johnson who was obviously allied with George. So when it all came out, when it all happened, it was rather awkward.

**BW:** Some people attribute his popularity, Mitchell's, to his running the DSCC, and the -

**PG:** Oh yeah, but where he became a prospect was in the Iran-Contra. The DSCC would not have been a guarantee, but you put those two together, he showed real leadership there, and unfortunately in contrast to Inouye who was, I think, trying to exercise a different kind of leadership. It was when they really believed in bipartisanship, and not to take the president down simply because they could, and they could have taken Reagan down and I believe they chose not to, given he was done and all that. And that we had successfully, we were in the last two years of his presidency, taken control of the Senate. So Inouye's playing this kind of laid back thing, Mitchell emerges, then the DSCC thing kind of just lifts him even that higher. I think Iran-Contra had more to do with it than that.

**BW:** And when you say Iran-Contra, that was really that one confrontation with Oliver North, is that correct?

**PG:** Hmm-hmm, people were so annoyed with how it was being played out, they were uncomfortable with Inouye's approach to it, and they wanted some edge, and he stepped right into it.

**BW:** Were you working for Inouye at that time?

**PG:** I was still kind of the treasurer of his PAC, and I remember going back to him and saying, "These guys are fading on you." And he says, "Patrick, they gave me their word." I said, "I think you better check on their word." "That is not the way I do business" – in his kind

of sweet and inscrutable way – and he got his clock cleaned.

**BW:** Did you and he ever have a postmortem about that?

**PG:** Inouye?

**BW:** Uh-huh.

**PG:** No, not really. He was saddened, but no, he didn't go back and say, "I should have done that." He said, "The circumstances changed." I did go back and talk to Senator Mitchell actually when it was going on, and explaining how I got into it with Inouye and that I felt I had to stay with Senator Inouye, and I would have, that was the way I was taught, but it was not anything that I had ever anticipated, in being in opposition to Senator Mitchell. So, he was very kind, we sat in his office and we talked about some old stories about when he became Campaign Committee chairman.

And I promoted him to Byrd on two occasions – as secretary I would be making these recommendations – and Byrd really resisted, because of the environmental stuff, he just didn't like, acid rain position. I think [that] was the issue then, and it was all being blamed on West Virginia and other states. And I said to him that I believed from a caucus point of view, I could hear rumblings that Byrd could not hear, but I said, "You'd really solidify your liberal base, and you can work on your conservative..." And so he finally said, "Oh, okay," but he wasn't happy about it. So subsequent to that – and Byrd said, "But let's not say anything for a month or two."

**BW:** Okay to what?

**PG:** "Let's put him on, but let's get him in here and make sure he understands that we're not going to make this a public deal for about thirty days." I don't know what Byrd's timing consideration was. Well, Mitchell agrees to that, it becomes public around July 1, or June. Within thirty days Byrd gets his first challenge for leadership, and it was Lawton Chiles, and Chiles says that Byrd has gone too left, too liberal.

Now Byrd was [also] being [attacked] by the liberals [p/o]. And Byrd said, "Now who suggested that we promote Mitchell to this?" Now, it wasn't meant for me to answer, it was just like, "What a mess you've gotten me into." Now, it turned out exactly right, because when you got to the votes, Mitchell now had a stake in this leadership race. He was not going to be Campaign Committee chair, because that was one position that the leader could appoint without consultation. So he got involved and then Inouye got involved and it all worked out fine in the end.

So I told this story to Mitchell at that time, because he thought Byrd just loved him. And I said, "He loved you, but..." And he could laugh about it, I mean it was a wonderful, and I felt relieved because I felt disappointed at being in that spot.

**BW:** So I just need a little clarification here. This was when Mitchell was appointed to the Campaign Committee. That's what we're talking -?

**PG:** Right, this was before Iran-Contra.

**BW:** Right, so in '85 you left the Senate, and that's when you began doing what?

**PG:** I was recruited by Burson-Marsteller to open up their legislative practice here in Washington, and then I stayed with them for a couple years. And then David Johnson had just finished working for Mitchell and actually was downtown at a trade association, and I asked him if he would consider going into business, because I didn't like being involved in a big corporate deal. And we put our business together I guess in '87.

**BW:** And what was your business?

**PG:** That was Griffin Johnson; that was the predecessor to [ ] Peck, Madigan, Jones [& Stewart], is what we have now.

**BW:** And your line of business?

**PG:** It was legislative representation of almost anyone who would hire us at the time, but mainly corporate stuff, and we worked mainly the Senate and Senate Democrats, and then we built it to the House, and then it was bipartisan and built a pretty big company, or a good company.

**BW:** So then your next step after that was to the White House?

**PG:** Well, I stayed with David, and then in December of '93 I got recruited to the White House, left in early '96, and then took a little time and then came back into the firm until 2004, and then I went back to the Hill again, to Daschle.

**BW:** Right, oh good, okay, thanks. Tell me why Byrd decided, what were the circumstances that led to Byrd standing down as majority leader and taking on Appropriations? What was that all about?

**PG:** Well, it was a difficult decision, and I was involved in that, not first as it relates to Mitchell, but as it related to Inouye, and I think Byrd was sensing that there was a time that was running. I don't think he really was wanting to give up that role but the rumblings were getting louder, the world was changing some in terms of how the Senate operated; he was not the young kind of inside face now, you needed a kind of a TV face. And I think he was just kind of reading the writing a little bit on the wall. But he wasn't really out there embracing it. It was kind of like, "This is happening, it's time to let go." After some resistance he kind of let the Inouye thing go, which in fairness to him didn't seem like it was a whole new face. And then the Mitchell thing emerged, which in some ways, I think, made more sense to him.

**BW:** Like what, what do you -?

**PG:** In that it really was a different generation, it was a more telegenic and somebody who's very glib and facile on his feet. But Byrd wasn't focusing on Mitchell, it all began that whether there was going to be a transition *was* whether Inouye was going to take his role.

**BW:** And was it a surprise to Byrd that Inouye was beaten so solidly by Mitchell?

**PG:** Well, I think with Byrd, more Byrd is like, "That wouldn't have happened to me."

**BW:** And where was Johnston, Bennett Johnston in all of this?

**PG:** He was dreaming. I don't know what he was thinking. He was out there telling everybody he had thirty votes, or twenty-five, I mean it was a complete scam, he never had more than a handful of votes. And so in the caucus, he moved to make it unanimous.

**BW:** And was Appropriations an appropriate destination for Byrd?

**PG:** I think he knew what he could do with it, and I think it became clear it worked for him.

**BW:** Contrast, I guess, I don't know, the sort of temperament and style of Byrd versus Mitchell in that role of majority leader.

**PG:** Well, I think Byrd was really a leader of his time. It was an inside game; he saw that understanding the Senate and the precedence and the procedures as a source of strength, his mind was almost a telephoto mind where he could remember everything. Loved it. He saw it as a puzzle to work all the time. And in those days, until TV, I think it really was, he was perfectly suited. I think the world began to change a little bit on a number of fronts, and I think Mitchell had those outside skills and so he could play an outside game, but he also had incredible inside skills. And so I think he had more breadth and depth that was more readily adaptable to the changing institution.

**BW:** You spent quite a few years with Byrd.

**PG:** Hmm-hmm.

**BW:** What are a couple of your favorite anecdotes about being with him, or observing him?

**PG:** Well, the Mitchell thing was one of those moments. But he and I didn't get along in the first couple of years of my work there; there was something that just didn't gel. But he was going to face his first reelection race in '82, and his colleagues from West Virginia, Rockefeller and a couple other big funders, said to him, "Unless you get somebody can really work the inside and do this for your politics and your money, you're not going to win and we're not going to

help you.”

And Rockefeller and I got close for some reason, Rockefeller really promoted me to do this, and that gave us a chance to know each other because we traveled, three times a month we were on the road, on a plane.

**BW:** You and Byrd.

**PG:** Yeah, alone, and we got to know each other in a very different way, and I saw many sides of him, his ability to laugh, how smart he was, how quirky he was. And I think he appreciated me in that role. So that wasn't one experience, but it was a formative kind of, opportunity to form a relationship. A big experience within that, though, is while we were on the road one time his grandson was killed in this horrific accident, and he virtually collapsed as a man. I think it was the first time he ever felt his own mortality and vulnerability, where he'd break into tears at any moment. And this was not the guy you worked for.

So that was a very interesting time, to be able to help him, to still respect him, to kind of get what was going on. It would freak people out, because he'd set up these meetings and I'd be bringing all these people in, whether they were funders or whatever, and he'd just start crying, and he'd obsess on his own, on macabre stuff, his grandson. So it was a very interesting time in an election that was serious, but he toughed it out. I guess that's a couple of my [stories].

**BW:** As you were describing this, I was just thinking that in some ways, would it be true to say that Byrd was kind of a Shakespearean character?

**PG:** In what way?

**BW:** Well, a little larger than life, and a little bit off the beaten track in some ways?

**PG:** He was definitely off the beaten track. I think he had an incredible mind, incredible discipline – social skills were quite limited. He could speak to an audience, but he had a hard time developing any intimacy. I think he had serious questions about his ability to trust individually and, that's not that unusual, but when you're a leader you get more chances to show that. And he had a kind of a, not a little, a real old-school drama, from the style of his hair and the bluing that he used for many years, and his vest and his fiddle, he really did kind of come off the page of some, yeah, modern day Shakespearean thing.

**BW:** What were his relationships like with you, on the staff?

**PG:** If he liked you, you couldn't have a better job in the Senate. So when I finally built that relationship, I knew how to staff him, I knew what he was sensitive to, in terms of not getting in front of him. Within that framework, I could do whatever I want. It was an enormously powerful job, in that it was derivative of his power but if you played by his rules you had a lot of room to run. Now, if you got ahead of them, you could get your legs cut out, boom, and he

would say, "You don't want me to turn the corner on you," whether it was me or somebody else. And I came close once or twice after we kind of bonded, but prior to that it wasn't fun. He always seemed like he was challenging in kind of gratuitous, petty ways. But when it turned, it was wonderful. And professionally it was probably the formative experience I had in Washington that I think mostly has helped me.

**BW:** Now, you were never staff to Mitchell, but you and David Johnson probably shared a lot of experiences and whatnot. What do you imagine Mitchell was like as majority leader?

**PG:** Well, a lot of my buddies that were there remained as, that I served with, carried on with Mitchell. What Mitchell, I think, as I remember, gave them is that he was much more cordial; the moment-to-moment seemed more rational and less dramatic. Byrd had drama; you never quite knew what was going on. And he [Mitchell] had a casualness that I think made people feel a lot more comfortable around him. He can get ticked off, but there was a routine and a regularness to the quality of the relationship that made your day-to-day life a lot easier. With Byrd, if you didn't have this kind of relationship with him, it was always eggshells, you didn't know what you might be fighting that day. So I think that was a big deal, and it was a great relief for the people who walked around holding their breath with Byrd.

But he also had an aloofness that, my impression is, you got up to here but you never got there, and he always kind of insulated himself. He had one or two people that were very close I guess, Martha [Pope], I don't know who else at that time. I don't even remember who was staffing him. But the people who were out here loved it, they loved it.

**BW:** While you were working with Dave Johnson, were you doing business with Mitchell?

**PG:** With Mitchell's office, yeah. I don't remember on much, but [at times] it was easier for me to go in there than for David to go. Martha was his chief of staff I guess at the time, or, I don't know.

**BW:** Mary McAleney was in there, too.

**PG:** Mary was in there, yeah. David had good relationships, but sometimes when you're that close to an office it's easier that the guy who's not as close go in. I think we figured that out on a case-by-case basis. And it was very easy. They didn't always do what we wanted, but it was easy working with the office.

**BW:** And were you going in about certain particular issues, or - ?

**PG:** Yeah, I don't -

**BW:** A whole variety.

**PG:** A whole variety of issues, yeah, we had a very diverse practice.

**BW:** So let's turn now to the steps that led up to the White House. How did you become involved, how did you get that appointment?

**PG:** I was doing a [civil society] workshop. I'm on the Board of the National Democratic Institute, which promotes democracy around the world, and I was doing a workshop in Bratislava [when] I got a call from some friends in the White House, said, "Would you be interested in this job?" And I said, "Sure." And then within an hour Mack [Thomas F.] McLarty called and I said, "But I'm not coming out to audition," I said, "is this the real deal?" "Yeah, could you come tomorrow?" And I said, "No, I got to finish my workshop." So I came back two or three days later, and he offered me the job. That was it.

I hadn't worked for Clinton, I didn't know Clinton. Knew a lot of people in there. And then I went to David and I said, "David, can you do this?" because he had to buy me out, and I think he saw the opportunity and he saw the risk, and then he got the money together with his wife, I think they mortgaged the house. It wasn't a big sum, but relative to the time it would be. And then I went in, and that was -

**BW:** What were your first impressions?

**PG:** Of?

**BW:** The White House.

**PG:** That I thought I'd walked into a set on *Saturday Night Live*, everything was smaller, it seemed crazier.

**BW:** Smaller than?

**PG:** Life. I mean it looked, everything seemed, it looked like a set, it looked like a fake, it looked like, this is where they do the filming of the White House for *Saturday Night Live*. And then the characters became crazy on *Saturday Night Live*.

My first couple of months in there, my first month, I thought it was the biggest mistake in my life, it was just complete chaos. I was struck by the lack of professionalism and leadership. I just thought I made a horrible mistake. I was kind of fascinated by the president, [but I] wasn't sure [about] Mack McLarty. I said, "This guy is like, he's out to lunch, I mean everybody's running wild, George is jumping from the chandeliers and -" there was no discipline, [p/o] [was a painful contrast] with the discipline in Byrd's office, how you dealt with the press, [how you made decisions]. It was like, "Wow."

And then at the same point I thought that I just wasn't as good as everybody else and I didn't kind of get it, so it was terrifying. And then the health care issue came up and Harold Ickes, who I met years ago through David, who worked for Muskie in Maine and all that stuff, came and

asked if I would be the point person on the health care, because it was going to go through my shop anyway. So I went, I trusted Harold instinctively, and Hillary, in retrospect, obviously there were a lot of mistakes made but there was a rationality in how that was operating. So I spent a lot of time there and kind of just blocked my thinking about my shop, until Panetta came in and then it became a very rational and the White House worked. [It] wasn't [easy] working for President Clinton, but I had enormous respect for Panetta and I thought we had a good team and a good way of doing business.

**BW:** Did anyone describe your coming in as coming in to do damage control?

**PG:** Not when I went in, no. I was doing damage control [ ] implicitly, because the guy who had the job for ten months [before me] blew himself up. He (Howard Paster) [ ] was very close to Senator Mitchell [ ]. He was so frustrated with Mack McLarty, I'm told, that he forced the question with Clinton between the two of them, and Clinton picked his buddy. So Howard was kind of 'dead man walking' for several months before I got there. And he made some mistakes, I mean we all make mistakes, but I think that was a big mistake. So I replaced him in December.

**BW:** And your specific role was liaison to Congress.

**PG:** I was director of that office, I had about twenty-five people [working for me].

**BW:** And what were the relationships like with Congress when you got there, and what steps did you take to make changes?

**PG:** The Democrats, we were still in control. [They] really weren't wild about him, they already had serious misgivings about whether he was a guy you could trust, based on the previous year. He had alienated, or Howard or somebody had alienated the moderates, so I immediately tried to bring them back in the fold. But we stumbled right into [the] health care [debate, plus] we had this voracious agenda going on [p/o] – education, environment, crime – and then we had Whitewater open up, so I was kind of just nonstop forever.

And then Mitchell and Gephardt I guess it was, no, Foley, Foley was the speaker, and Gephardt and Bowlor. And they were very respectful of the president, but they had a lot of apprehension about what he was up to, and openly resisted him on the crime bill. The leaders refused to even help us, Leon and I set up our own whip shop to pass the crime bill in the House, passed by one vote, and then we had other problems in the Senate but it wasn't the same kind of dynamic. But Mitch-, Foley, Gephardt, and Bowlor said, "If you insist on this gun ban being in it..." blah blah blah. It was horrible, it was really very difficult. But the relationship was, there was a great deal of apprehension about, they just did not trust Clinton.

**BW:** And what steps did you take to try to reverse that?

**PG:** Well I personally I tried to be an honest broker, I couldn't promise anything, but I would not mislead them. Panetta wanted it to work as well as you can, but you're not buddies, you

really do have different interests at some very fundamental but not as obvious ways, and so you're in competition with your own party in ways that are never totally obvious but are very real. So that's just the way the framers set it up. And so you just try to work around it, try to find common ground, and try to share some of the glory. And we had more battles than not.

The health care [debate in] the House had a very different dynamic [than it did in the Senate]. Dingell wouldn't get the bill out [with any major changes]. Mitchell, I really regretted that he kept [trying to pass something]. Many of us inside [the White House] wanted to stop the damned debate, because it was just killing us. And it was killing them, too, going into the '94 election. And Senator Mitchell kept saying, "Well one more time, I got another bill," and he came up with this 700-page bill, and it just protracted the debate and kept us, and them, looking terrible, longer, up until the election.

**BW:** So that was really a tactical error on Mitchell's part.

**PG:** I think so. We made numerous tactical errors, and strategic errors. We should have cut losses, but none of us had the courage, including the president, to tell the first lady, so we all have culpability. But he took it to a whole other level when he introduced that bill. [ ] It drove me nuts, [but] I never told him about it – he would tell us that we were crazy, "What are you doing?" [p/o] And we would try to go back and try to tell the first lady that, and the president would believe us but it didn't matter because he wasn't going to confront her.

Then we'd have these little quiet meetings where nobody knew about them, in the Map Room in the White House, at night, and Mitchell and Gephardt would come in, he says, "Oh, no problem, we can do this bill, we do not need to slow down one bit." And we're looking at him, me and George Stephanopoulos. "What the hell is he saying?" And then she, Mrs. Clinton, would turn around to us, "What are you saying to me? Why are you telling me this stuff?" "Why, what made you think that this is what they were trying to step back from?" I said, "Only that they told us, Mrs. Clinton," I said. "I have no idea why he didn't tell you to your face." I do have an idea why he didn't tell you to your face, but I [chose not to tell her].

**BW:** He, being that case?

**PG:** Mitchell, and Gephardt. And –

**BW:** So you're saying that they were keeping up the pretense that this was going to fly.

**PG:** Yeah, they didn't want to tell her, they didn't want the cat to die on their door, and they didn't have the nerve to tell her that this was a dead cat. So he made us look like fools. I don't blame him, in retrospect, because she was tough.

**BW:** So it sounds like when Ickes came in and then particularly when Panetta came in, there was sort of an adult in the house.

**PG:** Well Ickes didn't run anything else, but it was a safe place to go. As crazy as the strategy might have been, it was a rational place. The rest of the place was not rational until Panetta got there.

**BW:** And did you ever get the impression that Bill Clinton was picking up on the difficulties you all were having and trying to sort of change his strategies, or not?

**PG:** I don't know what the hell he was doing when Mack was still there. I didn't know the place, didn't know him, and all these other guys had been with him for years on the campaign trail. I really didn't have a clue. Panetta, there was a little more, a rational kind of gathering of information and processing it. That's a big part of what you do in the White House, you gather as much as you can, and you process it and then hopefully you come up with an action plan. If that isn't working, information's coming in like this and that and people are acting, and that's what it was beforehand, so it became much more rational after that. But still, it was a pretty dysfunctional place.

**BW:** I want to ask you next about what prompted your leaving the White House in '96, I guess, is that right?

**PG:** Yes. Once I knew we were moving into an election and the congressional stuff was about done [p/o]. [The whole experience] was taking an enormous toll on my life at home, with my wife in particular. I knew if I hadn't tended to that, that that would have been even in worse shape. I don't know if it could have been in worse shape, but if I hadn't, at least we were going to address it. So that was it, and I was just not inspired by the president [enough] to sacrifice [any more].

But if there was a moment that required it, I might have, but there wasn't. It was ending, they were moving into total campaign mode, and in the White House you might as well just go to the beach, if you're in congressional, because now you're -

**BW:** So which month was that when you left?

**PG:** I finally left in March, '96. But we had gone through the whole closure, the shutdown. That was a fascinating time. Losing control of the Congress, from a Democratic point of view, how that got interpreted first on, and then how we played it and how they played us, and triangulation, and Newt overplaying his hand, and the Dole piece, there was a lot of really fascinating moments in there. And that was really exciting, to be part of that. And then I think we won that, from a perception point of view, I think we won that.

**BW:** Putting health care aside for a moment, how else would you characterize Mitchell's role as majority leader during the Clinton years?

**PG:** I think he continued, he was masterful at it, but it's a very different role when your party has a president. I think he had an even larger impact when Bush was president, and his ability to

go toe-to-toe with Bush. And as a congressional leader, you're not leader of the country, you're leader of your caucus, it's a very tricky spot, and people confuse that. Even Pelosi. If you understand Pelosi is the leader of her caucus and not the country, you can understand how she acts more. Mitchell did a brilliant job of leading that caucus, and being a national leader, and really giving Bush One a lot of run for his money. I think it was trickier with Clinton, because you go immediately into sizing each other up, you know, "Who's in charge?" I think he was masterful in how he handled Clinton, but he was no longer the top Democrat in town. So I think it was much tougher, but I think he did a good job given what he was dealt. I think he did a great job given the cards he was dealt.

**BW:** How often did he meet with the president, or with you all?

**PG:** Well, we would have regular contact with him any time we wanted to or needed to. They would have their lunches, we'd have leadership meetings. We didn't have a regular, we pretended to have a regular kind of joint leadership, House and Senate, or just the Senate, or, and occasionally he'd come in and talk to, have lunches with Clinton alone. But it was regular. There was plenty of communication; Mitchell was wonderful in that regard. And he was very candid, to me and, you know, what's working, what's not working. But he was dealing in circumstances that were kind of outside to his job.

**BW:** Did he ever share frustrations?

**PG:** Oh yeah. The health care frustration, even though he, you know. I don't want to put any words in his mouth but they knew Clinton was a handful, and never sure which way he was going to bounce.

**BW:** Just observing the two men, Clinton and Mitchell, what was the body language like, how did they related to one another man-to-man?

**PG:** Well, Clinton related to everybody the same way; he'd kind of come in and overtalk you. I rarely witnessed a lot of dialogue. Clinton would listen to you if you had something, but when he wanted to talk, there was no more dialogue, he just kind of rolled and rolled and rolled. But Mitchell was just very charming and knew how to, never made Clinton feel uncomfortable, I don't think.

**BW:** Was he able to, Mitchell, able to hold Clinton's attention when there was something he really wanted to say?

**PG:** Oh yeah, Clinton respected George's thinking, there was no question. Didn't [always] agree with it, but respected it and always thought there was going to be some interesting insight. But again, they didn't always have the same objectives, I mean the president is, we mentioned before, so - But I think Senator Mitchell tried to be the lieutenant of the president as much you can, but that job gets tougher and tougher if the president loses in popularity, not only generally but with his own caucus.

For example, in that first year, he had the House walk the plank on a big budget vote that particularly had this BTU provision. I mean, he turned BTU into a verb. So after he made the House do that, the Senate said, "We're not going to do it, we changed it." Well that became, "Don't let Clinton BTU you," right? And that was not just about 'BTU,' it really kind of played into what people felt about him, is that you don't know where bottom is, you don't know if you could trust him on this or that, and then the Whitewater, which was a big part of the whole circus in that last year, very effectively done by the Republicans.

The Democrats were our biggest problem. They didn't trust Clinton, they figured he did everything the Republicans accused him of; they figured there was probably some truth in it. Now, to Clinton's and Mrs. Clinton's credit, they could not have scrutinized their lives any harder, and there was zippo in that, and forty million dollars later you got Starr grabbing my intern, she actually worked for me, Monica, in the hotel in Virginia, and that's what they nail him on.

So it fed the suspicion about whether Clinton was on the level even with his own guys. And so Mitchell had to kind of be the interface for that. Give Clinton what he wanted, but also keep his caucus.

**BW:** What about his relations with Hillary?

**PG:** Seemed very good. I remember that being, he was a little suck-up but I think he knew how to, they both, they have similar minds; I thought there was a good connection there. He didn't agree with everything she did, but I thought there was a lot of mutual respect. I have memories of the first time she came up to testify in the Senate and we're hanging out in his office, in the majority leader's office, and just a real warmth. Hillary can be truly warm, and she's a real talent. It was like whether or not she was going to fall on her face, this first testimony, and she was brilliant. But it was a very positive, positive deal; I think he had a lot of respect for her.

**BW:** And what aspects of their minds did they sort of share? You mentioned that just a moment ago.

**PG:** I think they were both very strong intellects, and operated that way. [Bill] Clinton was, too, but he had so much else going on. There was a clarity, they're both very disciplined, very organized, and I think that really is a contrast to Clinton; Clinton is a wonderful mind but not the clarity, [ ] nor the discipline. These guys seemed similar in that way. George had a much broader sense of humor, but Hillary has a good sense of humor, too.

**BW:** You mentioned [Monica] Lewinsky a moment ago – not in my notes – but did you have to play any particular role with her once things were, or was she already out of the White House when -?

**PG:** I was already out of the White House when the story hit. I was there when it was all going on, and I [had a sense] something was going on, but not to [any] extent [p/o].

**BW:** I've forgotten who said it, but that the Republicans, some of them, their hatred for Clinton was palpable.

**PG:** Hmm-hmm.

**BW:** And you working with Congress, how did you interpret that?

**PG:** Well, I used it to my advantage, because as the Democrats got annoyed with Clinton, it was helpful to deflect it to that, "The Republicans hated him for a reason, because of his potential, what he's trying to do, they need to take him down at any price." And I believe that is what they did, notwithstanding what I think about him as a man. I think they broke new ground in terms of how to destroy him, and the politics of personal destruction so he can't operate. And that's what ultimately happened the second term; he wasn't able to do anything because he's fighting to cover his scandal.

So I think that was actually an asset in that. But from my point of view day-to-day is that they always felt that Clinton was either undermining them or didn't have their interests at heart. And he didn't always have their interests at heart, nor should the president have their congressional interests at heart all the time, but there was a real fundamental lack of trust, I think.

**BW:** Do you think there was a generational issue to it?

**PG:** I didn't get as much of that, as much as you see now with Obama. It was more like he was an outsider, didn't get it, there was a little bit that – and I don't know if it's about Democrats – but I think Washington just saw him as, so unfairly I believe, as white trash, and the mistakes he made, he invited kind of discussions that, whether it was true about somebody else, you would not make that a permissible fight.

My wife gives me an example, you could ask Clinton, where did he have oral sex with her and all of that. And you ask Mrs. Bush, "What did you think about your husband's alleged affair?" and she says, "Don't go there," and they don't. And it's an interesting – what's permissible and who's responsible for that. And it's not just about Clinton, but it's an interesting aspect of Washington.

**BW:** Have you, from an academic standpoint, or other people addressed that sort of double standard?

**PG:** No, no, I don't think I've seen anything on that. You could feel it, you could feel it with Bush Two, how he kind of set certain things off. I thought he did it brilliantly on the kind of wild life that he had. And Obama. There was something that was just allowed at that time and I really can't explain it. But it was unfortunate, and I don't think there was only one side of it

either.

**BW:** Was Mitchell's announcement that he was going to retire a big surprise to you all?

**PG:** Yeah, I think it was a real major disappointment to everybody I think.

**BW:** And how was it interpreted?

**PG:** Was that this guy is more than a senator, and he has more to his life to do, and he had a young wife, I think that was a big part of the subtext. Not very highbrow, but -

**BW:** Would the outcome of the '94 election have been any different if he had still been at the helm?

**PG:** No, no. No, we had, the mistakes of that were sown early on, that I don't think were only Clinton's. I think we were still kind of in an old guard, in that regard, I think we were still acting like old, fat and happy Democrats, particularly in the House. Clinton actually, I thought, was trying to tell them, "You better catch up on this reform stuff." They ignored him, pushed back. Then I think we played into it with overreaching, I think the gun ban was a horrible mistake. We insisted on that, and given the most vulnerable Democrats in the House, with all these moderate conservatives, just got clobbered. So I think there were a lot of things that were much bigger than George.

**BW:** You talked about health care and the crime bill and the BTU, were there any other issues that really stand out for you in retrospect, during the time -

**PG:** When Mitchell was there?

**BW:** Uh-huh, and when you were there?

**PG:** No policy issues. After Mitchell there was the budget; everything was about the budget, their version versus our version.

**BW:** Yeah. I guess the only other one that comes to my mind is Haiti, for example.

**PG:** In what way?

**BW:** Well, that that was a disputed issue, whether to go into Haiti or not.

**PG:** Right, it was an ugly debate, it was about race and -

**BW:** Right. So you left, you went back into, quote/unquote, 'private practice,' and then what called you back to work with Tom Daschle?

**PG:** Well, Pete Rouse, who went on to be Obama's chief of staff, is in the White House, kept saying, "Could you come up and help? We're going to have a rough year," and they offered me a couple of different jobs and I kept saying, "No, no." David and I had this deal where we sold the firm to our partners, to Harold [Ickes] and Jeff [Peck] and Peter [Madigan], and then they pressed again and asked if I would do it. And I also needed a couple months for retirement, although I wouldn't have done it just for that, because I think there were plenty of opportunities. So I just said, "Yeah," because I was really getting, I was really tired of the lobbying business.

**BW:** And what was it like to step back [in]?

**PG:** It was an interesting, I went back without portfolio, I went in kind of like a Dutch uncle, so it was the first time I wasn't in charge, or driving my own deal and – not first time, but the first time in a long time. So I took it as a chance to kind of begin this next stage of my life of not having to drive everything, it was a letting go, and could you operate without being a boss or big profile and name. And so I was glad I was there. It had some limitations in terms of being able to have some impact, but personally I felt I did my best and I learned something about how I want to move on from there.

**BW:** Did you see Daschle as the heir apparent, when Mitchell retired?

**PG:** No.

**BW:** That was a surprise.

**PG:** That was a big surprise. I was in the White House, and actually I was very close to Chris Dodd, so I was kind of stunned. We were not involved, obviously, but that's where I thought it was going.

**BW:** Someone else that sort of gets forgotten in all of this was Sasser, who was expected to run for majority leader, and then lost to Frist in Tennessee.

**PG:** Oh, right, but I don't think was really, given how it played out, I would have never guessed Daschle had it either. So, yeah, I forgot about that.

**BW:** And I was kind of curious, what was it like working with Jim Sasser?

**PG:** Oh, I loved it; he's a good guy, thoughtful, smart. He was a little kind of indecisive, that's why he was a good senator from Tennessee, but I never saw him in the role of wanting to be leader, it didn't seem like he had the stomach for that. I would have never guessed it in a million years.

**BW:** And you pretty much said the same thing about Daschle.

**PG:** Yeah, but it turned out that Daschle was like the *über*-staffer, and he knew how to work

that caucus [p/o]. [He knew] how to work that inside game. And Daschle, I think, was quite good at that. I don't think Daschle was [viewed as] a great national strategist, although he did take on some really important issues. He was a very honest guy, a guy who really believed in something. And it's hard in that leadership, because you got to have your own beliefs, how do you get reelected and how do you get, how do you get reelected in South Dakota and how to get reelected in that caucus, and that is a nasty formula to maneuver, and obviously, [in the end], he didn't.

**BW:** Did you see in Daschle the living out of any kind of Mitchell legacy?

**PG:** No. I think they were simpatico, but no, I didn't.

**BW:** Do you think majority leaders have a lasting impact, or is it really, the page turns?

**PG:** No, it turns fast. It's a very different, it's the underbelly of the institution, those caucuses. It's not where high minded things get discussed. And being able to manage that, and be the, *a* face, is very, very tough. A face to the institution, and again, a face, whether it was West Virginia, or Maine or South Dakota, it's a tough thing to balance.

**BW:** Do you have any vivid personal memories of George Mitchell, or touching moments, much like you had with Byrd?

**PG:** Well, the one where I went back and told him the spot I felt I'd gotten in, it seemed like he was a very generous, didn't even bust me, he didn't even tease me. Which he would do, I mean he's a very sarcastic and he can be a biting little guy. But he was very generous that day.

**BW:** This is which day?

**PG:** When I went back in and explained to him how I'd kind of got in the middle of his race, fight against Inouye, and then we went back and did all that history on Byrd which he said he didn't know, and we remained good 'Washington' friends.

And then another time that was interesting, when he was leaving, and he kind of had this notion that he could ask what he wanted from the Clintons, which I was kind of surprised because I thought by now he would know that it was a turning page as he was walking out the door. And so he called me up and he said, "What can we work out here, I want to do something, kind of an Ireland thing," and this is early, early on. And so, I don't know, is it like ambassador without portfolio or something like that, and he says, "This is what I want, Pat. Go fly it, test it."

So I went in, I talked to the president about it, and I had to obviously get the NSC guy, who was I guess Tony Lake at the time, and Tony says, "No, you can't do that." And Tony was a real Anglophile and it was a very, very tenuous time back then, and, "It would be tipping our hand," and all of this stuff. And I'm looking at the president, he says, "Okay," he just didn't appear to care how this would resolve.

So I went back to George, I couldn't quite tell him that they didn't care at all – I tried to convey that they didn't care *a lot*. And we went back and forth, back and forth, and I don't know if there's any record of it, but literally we, Tony and I were sending cards, rewriting the sentence of what Senator Mitchell was going to do in that starting venture, and it was really dumbed way down. I think then Mitchell *was* disappointed in what it turned into in that exercise. Obviously what it turned into was fabulous contribution to peace in that region in the world, but it started out in a very narrow assignment where, for foreign policy reasons, with respect to the White House, I don't think Tony had any beef against George, he was just worried about how that should be handled at that time, and Clinton [didn't appear to] really care whether or not Mitchell was happy. He didn't feel like he owed him. [p/o]

**BW:** And the Tony in this case?

**PG:** Tony Lake. Now, if he had asked for someplace else I think, Tony really was foreign policy based, I don't think there was anything more than that.

**BW:** And what got this started?

**PG:** George called up and said, "What are they going to give me?"

**BW:** And at what point was this? After, well after he'd left?

**PG:** No, I think he was leaving.

**BW:** He was leaving. But he didn't go to Ireland until quite a few years later.

**PG:** Oh yeah, he had some nominal assignment.

**BW:** To Ireland.

**PG:** To Ireland.

**BW:** To the Republic.

**PG:** Or to the, Great Britain or something, it was a nominal assignment. What he got *known* for was what he ultimately did. But in that first, when he left, there was some modest appointment, that turned into a brilliant contribution.

**BW:** How do you think George Mitchell ought to be remembered?

**PG:** Hmm. Hmm, hmm. That's an interesting question. Well [what] immediately comes to mind, he's an extremely thoughtful and tenacious guy that doesn't take a lot to be able to step into a challenge and make something happen. That's what I see in the Senate, by no standard

should he have been majority leader. What he did on the foreign stage, his going into corporate America - I mean, the guy takes on a challenge, just *phht*, goes right to it, and has both the intellect and the interpersonal skills to enhance the chances of success.

**BW:** I was surprised a while ago when you said that he had a good TV face.

**PG:** He's a likeable guy. He has those silly glasses, but, I love them. He had a demeanor; I mean he knew when he was on. Byrd didn't have a clue, and it was never in the program for him.

**BW:** Did you see a real change in the Senate when TV was introduced?

**PG:** Oh yeah, yeah. Not instantly, but.

**BW:** What happened?

**PG:** At first there were red ties, everybody. There's less natural debate, and I don't know if that's all TV's, but I think TV, C-Span, all of that, whether that helped contribute to the polarization of the country, playing to the polarization. You had coordination of what was going on on the floors of the House and Senate, then you had cable industry, not quite at that time but growing, feeding into that. So whether it's chicken or the egg, I don't know, but it was a place where rarely, more and more rarely was real debate in the way history books are written about it. It just really changed, it became much more sanitized.

**BW:** Are we leaving anything important unsaid today?

**PG:** Well, the only thing I would say is that Senator Mitchell's career after the Senate has seemed as interesting and as large as the one he had in the Senate, and I don't know much about what he did in his judicial career but, and [he's] a guy who keeps at it under a lot of adversity.

**BW:** I know you've studied the relationship between the White House and Congress. Have you cited Mitchell on a number of occasions for any particular reason in those?

**PG:** Well, I do when I talk about triangulation, or divided government, and unified government, and his leadership and Foley's leadership when we were - I used Clinton as an example, and then divided government and how sometimes it's easier to work under a divided government than unified. So, but that's mainly what I remember in that.

**BW:** So looking at leaders over the last thirty, thirty-five years or whatnot, does Mitchell rank high there? And I'm thinking of Dole, Baker, Byrd.

**PG:** Oh, no question. He had a broader base of skills than any of the leaders that I have seen. Baker was pretty talented, but he didn't have the sharpness, but it was a different time, but he had great interpersonal skills but he didn't really have a command intellectually of the

institutional process. Mitchell was able to do both. Dole was totally inside. Byrd was inside. I don't know what Reid is.

**BW:** What do you mean by 'inside'?

**PG:** They know how to do the inside game. They knew how to win, or become leader. But rarely can you take that and become an outside player, and I think Mitchell comes as close to having a national role that he's working, rather than what's foisted upon him. So you go back to Pelosi, she's of national profile but she does not know how to work the outside game, but she's brilliant inside. And most of the congressional leaders are that. Mitchell, I think, is one guy who could really work inside and outside and be the exception to that rule.

**BW:** What about O'Neill in that capacity?

**PG:** Hmm, that's an interesting question. I don't think O'Neill worked the outside, I think he was *worked* and became a foible of the outside game. He was a great party loyalist, but I don't think he spoke to the country.

**BW:** Well he certainly had high vis[ability].

**PG:** He did, but that was because the Republicans were smart enough to invest in that, and make him a caricature.

**BW:** Interesting.

**PG:** He's a great guy, the meetings between him and Byrd were like Venus and Mars, you know, guys that come from such different worlds. And Tip would pull his chain. We used to have weekly meetings, or every two weeks, so it would be Byrd, and then it would be me and Rob Liberatore and then Tip would have Chris Matthews and [Kirk O'Donnell] [p/o]. They were just politicians of the same era but from different parts of the world, so different in every way. And O'Neill would just pull his chain all the time. O'Neill would come in and he'd [say], "Bobby, Bobby", and he knew Byrd hated to be called Bobby, right. "Bobby, Bobby, have a cigar." He knew Byrd, he had all these cigars, Byrd still had this kind of real depression kind of thing [ ]. You could watch Byrd kind of trying to figure out, "Where's this going?" right? And the meeting would go on and they'd blow at each other, and then O'Neill would come over – and I'll never forget it – he goes, "Bobby, Bobby, where are the cookies, you have cookies? No cookies?" And Byrd would just get all flustered, right? And he'd call in someone, and we'd come back with, you know, sending the Senate restaurant up with buckets of cookies. And O'Neill would just sit there and delight in just throwing him so off his game, it didn't matter what the conversation was. Then he goes, "Oh, I can't eat this, I got to go, I got to go". It was just a – what a moment in history, watching those two guys go at each other. And then when Wright came in afterwards, I mean, it was interesting, there was a cultural, the connection between Jim Wright and Byrd. [It] was so much different [ ] than [the one with] this big larger-than-life Northeaster [ ]. It was funny.

**BW:** Great, I'm glad we got on that. I bet there's a lot more, too.

**PG:** Good experiences.

**BW:** You're a lucky guy.

**PG:** I've had some really interesting experiences, and I do feel fortunate in that.

**BW:** Well, thanks for sharing some with us.

**PG:** Well, I'm glad to do it. And what is this going to wind up to be?

**BW:** An archive of recollections by a whole group of people who knew and worked with George Mitchell.

**PG:** Good, have you gotten to Byrd yet?

**BW:** No, let's go off here and –

**PG:** Okay.

End of Interview