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George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Steve Hart

(Interviewer: Brien Williams)

GMOH# 054

December 11, 2008

Brien Williams: This is an oral history interview with Steve Hart, who is the deputy director of legislative affairs at the USDA Forest Service, is that correct?

Steve Hart: That's right.

BW: Good. - for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College in Maine. We are in Mr. Hart's office in Washington, D.C., and today is Thursday, December 11, 2008, and I'm Brien Williams. Steve, they've asked for you to give first your full name and spelling, date and place of birth, and your parents' names.

SH: Full name is Walter, W-A-L-T-E-R, middle name Stephen, S-T-E-P-H-E-N, last name Hart, H-A-R-T. I was born January 17, 1955, Georgetown Hospital here in D.C., and my father's name is Peter William Hart, my mother's name is Mary Jane Strauss Hart.

BW: Thank you. The first bit of biography I have for you is at Arizona State, and then at Ball State in Indiana.

SH: Right.

BW: So how did you get from Washington that far west?

SH: Well, we ended up at - My father, when we were here in D.C., worked for the CIA, left the CIA and went into college, academics, he was a librarian, he was actually a cataloguer at the CIA, moved to Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, N.C., from there we ended up at Portland State University in Portland, New York - that's where I started school. And one February or March, it was spring break, and I had to go to the library and it was about twenty degrees and it was snowing, and most of the class, my classmates were in Florida on spring break and I said, "I'm sick of this, I'm going to school where I can wear shorts all year long." Next year I was at Arizona State. So it wasn't a very difficult, you know, sort of philosophical debate, where I went. It was where it was going to be warm and that's where I ended up. Worked out okay.

BW: And you majored in mass communications.

SH: Yes.

BW: And then you went directly from there to Ball State?

SH: No, I, after I got out of Arizona State with a degree in mass communications, I went to try to find my luck in the world, ended up at a small radio station doing news in Wapakoneta, Ohio, which didn't last very long. The station decided they didn't need a morning and afternoon newsperson – so I was the 'afternoon,' so I was let go. Ended up finding a job at a small radio station in Dover, New Hampshire – and this was in '79 I think – so right before the 1980 presidential primaries in New Hampshire . Reagan, George Bush, those famous, "I paid for this microphone," that's in Dover, New Hampshire, debate that I was at.

And that's also where I met my wife, over this, the Dover city school board agenda in Dover. And from there I decided radio news was not what I wanted to do, and that's when I went to Ball State, got a degree in journalism, minor in public relations, went back to be with my wife in Maine. She was at that point a reporter for UPI, knew a number of the political people, knew all of the political people. They were looking for press secretaries for a Democratic primary – congressional in 1982, a guy named Phil Merrill. The person who hired me was Mary McAleney, who ended up being Mitchell's chief of staff. Anyway, Mary hired me for my first political job, worked for Phil 'til he lost in the primary. After that I was hired by John Kerry, who won the primary. John came very close in 1982 to winning that seat. I think, if my memory's correct, he had the highest vote total of any losing candidate in 1982, and you know, Maine's a small state: if you know a couple people, you know, in perspective, a lot of people. I had gotten a pretty good reputation working for Merrill and then for John Kerry, and then David Johnson hired me to be a legislative assistant and I started in March of '83.

BW: And somewhere along the line you must have acquired a new wardrobe for the northeast again, right?

SH: You know what? And then I, when I went to D.C. I didn't have a really good suit so I bought a wool, a navy blue wool flannel suit in March, just in time for it to start to be spring and summer in D.C., and I sweated to death 'til I figured out that was not the kind of wardrobe I needed in Washington. So my first suit purchase for Mitchell's office was fine for the three months of winter we have here, but for most of the year it wasn't too good.

BW: But you were happy reestablishing yourself in the northeast, and in Washington?

SH: Well, you know, having been born here, and I lived here 'til I was twelve or thirt-, twelve I think, this is an interesting place, my parents loved it, came here, loved it here. And you know, I can't say when I was growing up I was really engaged with politics. Followed it a little bit, but not too much. But you know, I grew to really like this place and I really grew to like working for Mitchell and working in the Senate, so I can't imagine being anywhere else, I don't have really transportable skills. You know, I say to my wife as a reporter, you know, she could do that at papers all over the country or news organizations. What I do really is so locally focused here on the Congress and Capitol Hill that I don't, can't really travel. Which is fine, because I like it

here.

BW: Just a brief note, what about your own family political background, did you come out of a hotbed Democratic household, or Republican?

SH: Both of my parents were Democrats, New Deal Democrats, I think pro-union, the traditional sort of Catholic ethnic, lower middle class in my father's case, you know, he was in poverty when he was growing up, a Depression era family in poverty with only a mother – his dad died in an industrial accident. So very blue collar, lower middle class for my father, although he is probably the most erudite man I ever met in my life, and so your birth and your youth doesn't determine who you are and he's a great example of that.

My mother got out of high school and her family was not at all of the mind that women went to school, so she joined the army, used the G.I. Bill when she got out. I guess she got four years on the G.I. Bill, maybe five? I think it's four, so she did her undergraduate in three, and then got a graduate degree at St. Francis College in Pennsylvania, library science. So she knew what she wanted to do, and she knew that the government had made that option open to her and so she was very supportive of the Roosevelt and the Democrats who had made that possible for the middle class people who worked hard to succeed, so.

BW: What was your father's line of work?

SH: He was a librarian, too. Both my parents are librarians, so never made a lot of money. You know, it's funny, because people go into my house and they don't see a lot of books and they say, "Both parents are librarians, you must have read a lot." I said, "Yeah, I read them, but if you buy a book that's it. If you use the library, that's jobs for librarians." So in our family we didn't buy a lot of books, there were libraries there for people to get them and read them and return them.

BW: Did you and George Mitchell ever have a discussion about what we might call humble beginnings and so forth?

SH: No, no, but you know, it was part of what Mitchell talked about a lot, and certainly I think it affect-, it certainly affected his political perspective, his personal perspective. No, but I didn't share a lot of my personal stuff with the Senator.

BW: Prior to your contact with, well, what was your contact with Dave Johnson, how did you and he connect?

SH: David called me. I did express interest and I – probably through Mary after the campaign, when Merrill lost. I'm not sure exactly the details of what Mary was doing then, but I said to Mary, "Yeah, I'd love to work for Mitchell." He had won in eighty-, yeah, he won in '82 so he was on the ticket in '82, and so through those campaign things I probably, David probably had seen some of the things that I had done.

It was an interesting thing. John Kerry was, I think, underestimated in the primaries and had squeaked out a win. Actually maybe not too squeak, I'm not sure of the percentage he won. But anyway, he'd barely gotten by and the perception was that running against Jock McKernan he would be, he would have a very difficult time. Jock, a younger, handsome, very articulate, smooth guy, and John's seen not that way.

And so when I was hired as the press secretary for John, and he did very well in the campaign, I think I got maybe more credit that was deserved for helping him mature as a speaker and a candidate. I probably did some things for him, but he was, as I said, underestimated as a candidate. So, I'm sure David was up there and saw that stuff, and Mary would speak highly of me and my capacity, and so I'm not exactly sure how I ended up hooking up with Dave, but I did indicate to Mitchell, Mitchell's staff, that I was interested in working for him if there was a job. And I think John, I think probably the primary catalyst was John Kerry, on my behalf with George, so -

BW: And what was your first contact with George Mitchell?

SH: You know, I really can't remember. I don't think I ever really talked to Geo-, the Senator until I came to D.C. – and this is an aside, you know, we say 'George.' When I first came down to the office one of the, I kept calling him George, and Charlene Sturbitts, who was in the office with me, and Tom Gallagher, I forget which one of them it was, but one of them sort of gently said to me, "We don't refer to him as George. This is at the House side. It's 'Senator,' or 'Senator Mitchell.'" And so I don't really ever call him George, so I, it's Senator Mitchell, it's just a habit ingrained. But it was, when you were up in Maine in the campaign it was 'George,' and I soon learned that that wasn't the office protocol. But I can't remember ever really talking to him I think probably before I started working for him. I didn't interview with him, I interviewed with Dave.

BW: And then when you came into the office, was there any formal introduction, or did he -?

SH: Probably something the first day, stand up with the staff. I hadn't known many of them. I think some of them knew me, the ones who had more of a role in the campaign – Gayle Cory, Charlie Jacobs, David obviously, I think that was probably, probably only two or three that I knew. There may have been another one or two people that had been involved with the campaign that, after, gosh, that was '83 so that's a long time ago, I can't remember all of those folks. But I don't think there was a large universe of people that I knew before I started working for him.

BW: So you were given what role?

SH: I was a legislative assistant. There was a - I'm trying, I can't even remember the person who had left Mitchell's staff. I picked, essentially picked up that portfolio and just was a replaceable cog in the machine. He was gone, Steve had his job, and that was, the expectation

was I would learn on-the-job how to do the job. And so I just started trying to learn the Senate, learn Mitchell's positions that, you know, you get in the campaign you deal very, very much in broad generalities. Some specifics, but not a tremendous amount. But then you get down in Washington and you're working on specific legislation and committee responsibilities. The details are quite daunting. So just trying to figure out how to get from place to place, what the committee structure meant, how a member on a committee worked, how the Senate functioned, those interactions with other Senate offices, the interactions with interest groups and lobbyists down here, and then to try to establish connections with people in Maine on those issues that I had responsibility for. So it was just a, it was a lot of flailing around, trying to figure out how to do it.

BW: Were there certain people that were sort of go-to people?

SH: Oh, Charlene was terrific, Charlene and Tom Gallagher. Charlene was the legislative director for Mitchell, she also did his staff work for the EPW committee. And Mitchell was on three committees – I don't, yeah, he was on Finance, he was on EPW, and he was on Veterans' Affairs at that time when I first, I believe those were the three when he started. Charlene did a lot of the staff work for EPW, Tom did the staff work for Finance, and among my responsibilities I staffed him on the Veterans' Affairs Committee. In fact, the entire eleven years that I worked for Mitchell I did his veteran affairs work and he was on that committee. And so they were very, very helpful to me, telling me what you need to do for markups and hearings and how to go about staffing the Senator on the committee. So that was, they were very helpful.

But then there were other people on Mitchell's staff that were very helpful. It was a very competent bunch of people, generally very nice, there were some exceptions of course, people that were irritating or whatever, but generally very competent. Mitchell had a, staff did not have a real flair for the dramatic or the flamboyant, neither did he, and so I think the staff reflected that personality. Generally lower key, ability to function under pressure, not as – it's interesting, I don't view our staff as hyper-partisan. I think some people might view Mitchell as a very partisan person, clearly as majority leader he was driven by partisanship to try to advance the Democratic agenda, but I didn't view our staff as hyper-partisan. And I think the, what was expressed to me early on is our responsibility to function in a very professional way, listen to all points of view, make judgments based on the facts. Mitchell used to always say to us, "I'll get the facts from you, I'll go over to the floor and I'll get the politics." So I didn't spend a lot of time, wasn't expected, really wasn't wanted to get the politics for him, it was a substantive recommendation.

Of course, politics, Maine and national, were involved to a degree in all this. I mean you can't take the politics out of the Senate, but he was a, he was really very much for us to be – at least with me, and maybe others there were other considerations, but I don't believe it was, that he treated me differently than anybody else – he was really looking for us to help him make informed judgments and then for him to filter that through his political-personal, the relationship that he had with other senators, the things he felt he needed to do for Maine, all of those kinds of things that he kept in his mind. We were just giving him, we were helping him get a factual

basis to make decisions. So.

BW: Do you think that that approach was fairly common in the Senate at that time, or was the Mitchell office a little bit exceptional?

SH: I would hope it wasn't exceptional. There were a number of people that- Well, it was interesting because when we first came down, across the hall from us was Barry Goldwater's office. I'm trying to remember who else might have been on the hall, but Barry Goldwater was across the hall. And I remember one time that I, Jim Fleming I think was the fellow's name that worked for Gold-, no, Jim Fleming was, Mr. Fleming was from Ford. Jim - anyway, there was a fellow from Goldwater's staff who, and there was some vote about, there was something about water issues, and water issues in Arizona are different than water issues in Maine.

You know, in my current job I know a lot more about water, because of the way that we do things out west, than I did in the Senate. But I didn't know anything about western water rights or western water law, so I walked across the hall and asked him, "Could you help me understand this?" And he said, "Most Senate off-, most people don't come in to, wouldn't ask. They'd go down on the floor and just vote." So he was sort of surprised that we would do it, but for me it's, I, again, it's my own personal style too. I think everybody's allowed to have an opinion, but everybody's not allowed to have their own set of facts.

And so I don't understand this stuff, and the expectation I always had in the Senate, and more often than not it was the case, that people helped each other understand issues. Because at some point that person that helped you, you could help them. And the relationships in the Senate, even between members and staff, are very important, that if I ask you for something and you say to me, "This is it, this is a fact," it better be a fact because I'm counting on you. And if it's not, then I know that I'm going to have trouble trusting you in the future, so things that we may want to work together on, we may not be if I don't trust you.

So we were able to work well with other Senate offices I think because of that expectation. So I don't think it was the exception, but I don't necessarily, I'm not naïve enough to think it was the rule. But we found, I found more often than not an ability to work with people, have that trust.

BW: In '83 when you arrived and were learning the ropes, were you sort of given a honeymoon period there to just go off and study things, or were you -?

SH: No, no, we had, the expectation was I'd do the job with some help from people around the staff. Mitchell was extraordinarily capable, so I couldn't screw up too badly. But who I should be talking to, how I should do these things, how I should be, listening to, my responsibilities, writing memos and all that, some of the sort of the protocol kinds of things, but the substance sorts of things not too much.

BW: About how long did it take for you to become really confident in what you were doing?

SH: Well I was there eleven years and I say to people, there were really three big changes in my attitude in the Senate. The first was when I first came in, where I was thinking, 'I don't know anything about this stuff, I don't know anything about these subjects, I don't know anything about the Senate, and these people here are so smart and so talented and so experienced, how am I ever going to do this?' And I can't say when that – so that's the bottom, that's my starting point.

And then I started to grow in confidence that I knew this stuff better, I understood the budget cycle, I understood Senate procedures, I understood how to work with Senate leg counsel to get bills drafted, I learned to read bills, learned to read, match them up with the law, see what, how a bill would change the law and the implications of that, learn the people that I needed to deal with in Maine and establish those relationships.

And so you went through a couple of Congresses where that growth continued. And I think then at some point I became, I think probably like most Senate staffers after a while, I knew what I was doing, I knew what I was doing. I'd been there a while, I'd seen them come and go, you know, this wasn't my first Congress. And then I would get different subject areas, and even then I would feel some sense of, 'Do I really understand this stuff?' Yeah, I think, after a while I thought pretty highly of myself.

And then at some point, I reached a point where I was saying to myself, "You know, do I really know all that much about the stuff that I'm dealing with?" I had this sort of, I don't want to say crisis of confidence, but I think it was more a realization of my limits of the understanding. I understood these subjects in a very narrow sense, in the intersection of the policy and the substance and the politics in the context of the Senate. But for me to say that I understood energy issues, or natural resource issues, I began to say to myself, "You know, you really don't. You have this prism through which you view these things, but you don't really understand. You can't understand them as much as these people who spent their entire careers dealing with energy issues or agriculture or natural resource stuff."

And so then I came down off my plateau of self-confidence, and I may have reached the trough where again, I didn't think I knew enough to be ably advising the Senator on things, and I think I passed that, I got out of that and I, my confidence went back up, I was – and I don't think I ever got back up to where I had been before by the time I left in '94. So I don't know what that curve was. Probably '83 to like '89 is when I was thinking, 'I really, I need to know a lot more.' Then I think '89 was the first year that Mitchell would have been – I mean he was leader in eighty-, I think it was '88?

BW: He was elected in '88 and then he started serving in '89.

SH: Well actually, he told us from the first day, "I'm leader." I remember somebody mentioned to him that, "You'll be leader next year." He goes, "I'm leader." So '88, so about '89 I'm thinking, 'Now Mitchell's majority leader, I'm here, he's got confidence in me, I'm -' you know, and then from there it started to, it went for a while and then I started to have this – I don't

think it's a lack of confidence, I think it was a growing realizing that these things were bigger than I had given them credit for.

BW: So, did you start out really just with Veterans' Affairs, or -?

SH: I'm trying to remember what my issues are when I started. It was kind of a mix-and-match, people would leave or things would change. I recall very vividly I did not have agriculture at the start of my time there, I think I probably had government affairs, veterans' affairs, I may have had natural resources, energy, from the start, and there may have been one or two other things in there that I had. I can't recall when I picked up veterans' – I mean agriculture. I know it was before the '85 Farm Bill, because I recall what a, that was another one of those times when you just said, "Oh my God, I don't know anything at all about all this agricultural stuff," and I was dealing with people who had spent their whole lives dealing with subsidies and tobacco programs and peanuts, and knew the intricacies of that, dairy – God almighty, dairy is hard as hell to understand – and sugar and all of those things. So I picked that one up, then for a while I was on the committee staff of Government Affairs, around the time they created the cabinet, the Department of Veterans Affairs, I was working on Mitchell's staff on Government Affairs and Veterans' Affairs. For a while I did the work for Mitchell on the nuclear issues on EPW.

So I can't remember where I was when, in all instances, or what I had when I started with. I really even can't tell you what I had when I ended, because they sort of morph together. The constants, though, the constant was veteran affairs, from the first day to the last, agriculture really from about '84 to the end, some government affairs, and energy and natural resources. I get the impression energy and natural resources for most of the time, if not all the time I was there. Those were the three big constants, I think.

BW: Did you volunteer for these areas, or were you assigned these areas?

SH: I kind of think I sort of thought I, this sounded interesting to me and I'd like to do it.

BW: So who would you go to?

SH: Oh, Charlene or David Johnson, and we'd figure out when people left what was – and there was also some sense of who could, with balancing the different priorities of Mitchell's responsibilities at any one time. In eighty-, when he was the chairman of the Senate Democratic Campaign Committee there was a sense that he was going to be out of the office a lot with these extra responsibilities, so there was a sort of sense that maybe we need to focus on certain things, so people who had that expertise would be focusing on those things. And so I may have been able to just slide in behind somebody else, I'm not exactly sure. I think Bill Anderson, that's I think what it was, when Bill Anderson left Mitchell's staff is when I, I think I picked up agriculture, I think that's what that was.

BW: Talk just for a second about the relationship between working on an issue where

Mitchell was a committee, was involved in the committee level, and an issue such as farm, which I suspect might have been outside of his own committee assignments.

SH: Yeah.

BW: Was there a difference in terms of -?

SH: Well the only interaction with Agriculture and Mitchell's committee assignments, and that's an excellent one, is with Finance on trade issues. You know, he was not supportive of the, of NAFTA, I think primarily because of parochial interests. Maine didn't feel like it was going to benefit out of NAFTA, there were going to be jobs lost and trade was not going to be necessarily favorable to Maine interests. And there were, and agriculture was one of those products where I don't think they felt they were going to do well under NAFTA.

So in Agriculture, one of the things you kind of discover quickly when you do agricultural policy in Congress, is how parochial it is. I mean people are there on the committees, you get on the ag committees because you want to, you have an interest in a commodity or agriculture. Very few people get on it because they care about forestry in the Senate; it's the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee. Very few people get on there because they care about forestry. They care about row crops primarily, but there's also some interest in the food issues, feeding issues, food safety, that sort of stuff.

And so Mitchell's involvement in agriculture issues were just like most senators, I mean they were primarily the result of parochial interests. Agriculture is not the biggest commodity in, part of the Maine economy, although it's probably, people underestimate how big it is, but Aroostook County, with potatoes, was a primary interest. We spent a lot of time dealing with potatoes, potato issues, imports, trade issues, market conditions of potato – Mitchell was the sponsor of a potato marketing initiative, each grower would pay a certain percentage into a fund to the Potato Marketing Board to do generic advertising in support of potatoes. And so I worked on that for him. We did some stuff with, one time with maple syrup. That was a, that was very, again, very parochial. Things with dairy, got involved with dairy, because of the import of dairy farms.

So you would try to work as you could to get a Maine issue on the mix of issues that were going to be part of larger ag bills. Now I will say, once Mitchell became majority leader that was a lot easier, but it was a challenge. A lot of it had to do with appropriations, just finding earmarks for certain things, and so I dealt a lot with finding the earmarks for any appropriations bills, for Agriculture stuff, something for potatoes, some stuff for blueberry research. I can't remember some of the other ones. I did some things for cranberries I think, because we were trying to help a fledgling industry get started in Maine. That was actually one where the, our field staffer, Clyde MacDonald, up in Bangor was a enthusiastic supporter of growing cranberries, and so he was, he actually sort of pulled us into being supportive of the cranberry industry, but trying to find, to work in the Senate for appropriation earmarks in some instances for other things with cranberries, dealing with marketing associations, that sort of stuff; he worked on that.

BW: Just as a footnote in context here, did earmarks have the bad name that they've acquired in more recent times?

SH: Well, they did and they didn't. You know, every – Proxmire was there doing these Golden Fleece Awards, and so there was a certain amount of that. I remember one time, I think in the Reagan years, the administration put together a list of earmarked projects, pork barrel that they wanted to rescind the spending authority. And I remember that one of them was this blueberry research that we had done, low bush blueberries. I don't know if you're at all familiar with blueberries, but most people are familiar with cultivated blueberries which are a little bit larger. Maine low bush blueberries are very small, they're tart and, a little tarter, they're sort of a unique product out of Maine, important commodity.

But anyway, so we had done this research that would then be, we gave some money to the Maine Blueberry Commission which would then do peer review, do studies on how to improve blueberries, and it was viewed as an earmark, listed as one of these earmarks. And I went in to talk to Mitchell about it, and he was actually quite pleased that it was on the list because if they were going to have a debate about that, that would give him an opportunity to go down to the Senate floor and defend the Maine blueberry industry, the small but important Maine blueberry industry. So he was happy with that.

And the other thing is, in retrospect, when I looked at the list of things, the projects that I'd put together in my issue areas, some land conservation initiatives, some funding there for Acadia National Park or for the White Mountain National Forest in, the portion that's in Maine, the earmarks I was looking for for the potato industry, a million here maybe, the list of things that we would put together, that Mitchell would put together. Now he had things he wanted to do for Bath Iron Works, they had to have a destroyer, and that's a billion dollars, so I mean that wasn't small potatoes, and something for Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, and he would be very, doing what he could to defend Loring Air Force Base and those sorts of things. I guess he did an earmark in one of the highway bills for the Portland, the bridge connecting Portland and South Portland, as a demo project.

But in retrospect, when I look at the Senate at that time, and what Mitchell's list looked like, it was, it's small potatoes compared to what has happened since '95, when the Republicans came in and sort of institutionalized and made earmarks a mechanism for consolidating political power. When I was there it was what people were expected to do to represent their state. It wasn't – Gingrich, and I think I would give the credit, or blame, mostly to DeLay, he's the fellow from Texas, who essentially institutionalized earmarking as a way to reward your supporters. Not even your in-state supporters, but your interest group supporters in a really formal way. And the volume of them increased dramatically, the size of them in some instances.

Again, I mean I'm saying this as a fellow who worked for a guy from Maine who wanted a destroyer. But Mitchell wanted *one* of the destroyers, he didn't ask for *all* of them, which is what they ended up, it became, they asked for all of them. He's not like Byrd, asking that you move entire agencies to West Virginia. The scope of what was asked for and what they got, the

rapaciousness of it is just startling to me. Even saying that, I think the way the last campaign carried on about earmarks, I mean the percentage of the budget that's with earmarks is still two percent or less domestic spending, which is not much when you consider the entitlement spending and the debt and all of that.

So. So I was happy to put together these lists of earmarks for Mitchell, which I thought were reasonable, had significant and considerable merit. It's not like we took everybody's request. And I felt we could go in and make requests, particularly if you got it in the Interior bill, where we're looking at land and water conversation fund, use of those monies in Maine. We did things in cooperation with other states.

And let me just tell you one that I worked on that I was very proud of, the thing that Mitchell did for the Bicentennial Lighthouse Fund, where we, or I worked with the - Valerie Nelson was the person's name that represented the Lighthouse Association, around the bicentennial of the, the year before, the year of and the year after of the first lighthouse. One of the first public works projects in Congress was the lighthouses, one of which was Portland Head. And so anyway, I worked with her to get funding for, in the appropriations bill, that would be used to - I think it was, I think it ended up being a couple million, I can't remember the number - for three years, and it would, if a local organization raised a hundred thousand dollars for a lighthouse on the federal register could - of historic properties - could maybe get a match from the feds so would double the amount of money they could do for lighthouse restoration. It was a great, Maine had more properties listed on the federal register than anybody else, so when they did the first year of allocation, Maine had way more money than anybody else. Well, not way more, but more than anybody else.

And so the for second year I was talking to the Interior people, I said, it doesn't really make, it's not necessarily a good thing that Maine gets, each year of a million dollars, Maine gets three hundred thousand. So we actually worked to change the formula so that Maine wouldn't get the most amount of money all three years. It was sort of like high, low, high. Balanced out at the end, we still got more than our, we still got a fair share. But we were perfectly willing to share the money. I can't imagine, in some instances, a lot of offices would do that. But we were willing, and I think that's what, that's sort of, I think represented how Mitchell did business. I think he represented the state of Maine, but he was reasonable, responsible, and fair in what we looked to do in that appropriation, in that lighthouse fund.

So, and that's how Mitchell did business, and that's one of the reasons I liked working for him. He was, again, he was reasonable, he was responsible, he was fair, he was ethical. He was a smart guy. He was really a pleasure to work for.

BW: Couple of questions. Were there any instances where an issue came up to be an earmark where you and the office were agog, just saying, "Oh God, we got to go forward with this," without really wanting to or-?

SH: Well I actually had one, but it was actually sort of funny. It was with the Portland, the

lighthouse, it was Portland Head, which was down by Mitchell's office. And they had, it was a park, it was a Coast Guard facility in a park, and we had, I think we had worked on getting the, we had - Oh, I know what it was. They had complained about upkeep of the lighthouse and they had spent some money and they weren't getting, they hadn't been compensated or reimbursed or whatever the term is, from the Coast Guard.

So Mitchell, he used to walk around, he lived in Cape Elizabeth so that they knew, obviously everybody knew he was a senator, and they asked him for some help with getting some money for the Coast Guard for the repairs of the building, so he asked me to do it, to look into it. Anyway, long story short, we ended up transferring the entire site from the Coast Guard to Cape Elizabeth for their park. And I thought, "Well, this is a great thing," and the city was happy and yada-yada-yada.

So a couple years later he comes to me again and he said, the city council, I was talking to somebody and he said, "And they never got paid for that work they'd done on the lighthouse and I said you'd help them." And I said, "Senator, we got them the lighthouse," I said, "look at the value of what they got for nothing." You've been to Portland Head? I mean, it's just unbelievable. I mean a hundred times more than they spent on those windows. "Oh, I know, but see if you can help them out." So I ended up having to, I don't know how that actually got resolved, but I do remember he, just saying to him, "God, can you just stop?"

But one of the things you learn when you're there, if you're smart, you learn that there is really no end to what people will ask for. You think, "They can't, they can't possibly ask for more," or, "they can't possibly ask for this again." Yes, they can, yes they can.

BW: So you sometimes were put in a position to, having to deny people.

SH: Oh yeah, oh yeah, we would say, "We can't do this." And Mitchell liked, Mitchell was, again, he had a sense of what was appropriate for him to ask for. And that's not all, it's not all earmarks as in money, some of earmarks that you put in are things that are legislative.

I'll tell you one that I worked on has to do with maple syrup. Maine and Vermont have the most explicit standards, the highest standards for maple syrup, you can't add water to maple syrup. If you add it, it's not maple syrup. And I think FDA was working on a rule, regulation, that would allow some water in maple syrup. I'm trying to, I can't remember all the details but anyway, it was an FDA reg that Maine and Vermont felt would undermine their state laws and their ability to market pure maple syrup.

So we were working with Leahy and Jeffords on this I think, and it was right around the time of some health care, I think it was the Clinton health care bill. And Kennedy's committee was working on something and they needed, I think it was Jeffords' support, it must have been Jeffords' support; he was a Republican then. And so to get Jeffords, this is, they had to help him on this maple syrup issue. If you can imagine that: health care, maple syrup standards.

So anyway, if we're going to help Vermont we may as well help Maine. And I remember I went down and we had these meetings with FDA it they just were not going to budge. Mike Taylor I think was the fellow down at FDA at the time. Anyway, they weren't going to budge so we had to do something legislative. So we ended up putting this exemption for maple syrup standards in this Nurses Training Act of whatever year it is. Nurses Training Act is actually enacted into law, so Maine and Vermont got their exemptions from the FDA reg on maple syrup standards as this Nurses Training Bill, so -

But that's what you had to do and that's, when you're there a while you learn how to do that, and of course it was made a lot easier because Mitchell was leader in our ability to work with the committees and get stuff. I remember, I think it was Dingell's staff was just appalled that we were doing something like that in this bill, and they just weren't going to let us do it. And I said, "Well, I think you will." I think when Dingell understands the relationship of doing this bill, this thing here, and getting Jeffords' support on the health care bill, I think you will do it."

BW: Just trace the typical path of an earmark, from the commitment in the Senate office to getting it on a bill that gets it voted on, and what strategy is involved in where it goes?

SH: Well, if you're looking at the appropriation process, each year the appropriators expect each member of Congress to give them a list of the projects which they were doing. And we would get the president's budget in February, appropriation hearings would start February, March into April. And around April, May, the expectation were you would put your list together. People with committees, I mean communities or individuals or entities. The Forest Service would come down and talk to us about things that they had going in Maine, and you'd hear from Interior about what, the Acadia superintendent would give you a, come down and see you around the budget time. The mayors came down, the county, everybody's cycle includes a visit to Washington in March, April, May, February, March, April, May, that's when the budget people come down. The postmasters would come down and they'd ask you about some stuff, and theirs weren't really earmarks as much as they were support for, you know - Some of them were big-picture things, some of them were parochial, some of them were personal.

So you had that cycle and you'd put a list together, and there are thirteen appropriations bills and you would have a list of what was going to be in each one. Now, on legislative earmarks it was different. We'll deal with those after. But you know, you'd put an annual list together, and it was a responsibility for me. Since Mitchell and Cohen often made their requests on the things that we did, agriculture, energy, natural resources, they did them together. We would meet together with the Democratic and Republican staff of the appropriation subcommittees and we would make the case for the projects that we thought merited additional consideration, and then it was up to each of us to go back, each of us - Cathy DeCosta, who did this for a while for Cohen, when I first came there it was Cathy DeCosta, and then there were a couple of other people - it was up to us to go back and work with other members of the subcommittee staff to talk to them about what we'd asked for and let them know why we thought it was important, what we had hoped to get in their bill. And then if it was, made it into the Senate bill, then the expectation was that you would continue to lobby the Senate staff so that they could retain those

earmarks in conference.

And again, that, it was different for us when Mitchell was majority leader because there was an expectation that if it was in there for the majority leader it was, they were going to defend it more than if was for say the one-hundredth senator in seniority. So our job got a little easier – a lot easier actually – when Mitchell was majority leader, but we worked awful hard.

But it wasn't a slam dunk by any case that we got something in the Senate. We had one in particular, something about a buyout for potato, it was right around the start of the Clinton administration so that must have been, they came in in ninety-, they were elected in '92, so it would have been '93, we had a potato failure, there was a blight, and we were trying to get some assistance. That would have been '93, '94, and we had real pushback from the House Appropriations Committee. I had to, I had to actually sit down and talk to, Whitten I think was still chairman then, we had to have a meeting with Whitten's staff, they didn't want to do it. And I don't think they ended up doing it. So, as I recall, they didn't do it.

BW: You talked about sometimes working, I may have misunderstood you, but sometimes working for one of Mitchell's subcommittees and then time in his office. What did that mean, and were you moving payrolls from place to place?

SH: Yeah, I was on the Senate Government Affairs Committee for two years, one Congress, and I can't remember which one, I think, well it was the Congress in which the Department of Veterans Affairs was created. But it's, it may have changed now that it's Homeland Sec-, Government Affairs and Homeland Security, that there's more interest in it, but for a long time there was not, you know, huge interest in being on the Government Affairs Committee. Jurisdiction wasn't seen as all that sexy. And so they used to, each member used to get at least one paid staffer, and so as an opportunity to keep me on, keep me around doing what I did but have somebody else pay for it, Mitchell, like a lot of senators, liked to send some money back to the Senate every year, his office allotment, to show how frugal he was and what a good steward of the public trust, that he would find ways not to spend all of his money. And so one way to not spend all your money is to put one of your staff on the Government Affairs Committee payroll with the understanding that, in addition to doing some, the committee stuff, whatever you needed to do for the committee you would do for the committee, but that would also give you some time to do some things for Maine.

BW: So did you physically move somewhere else?

SH: No, I stayed, actually that's one of the other things, you stay right in Mitchell's office and you work for the committee, you're on the committee payroll.

BW: I have heard it said that Mitchell was one of the tighter senators in terms of compensation.

SH: Well I made a lot, it's funny, I was hired at \$15,000 when I came to the Senate as a

legislative assistant. I don't think that was a lot of money, but I don't think I, I don't think I brought a lot to the table so I didn't think that was – and I did well there, in my own view. I was able to buy a home in 1986. Different market of course, but I was able to buy a home. I got I thought very fair increases in my salary, and when it was, before Mitchell announced his retirement, I'd been there ten years, I thought, I ought to look around at some other jobs. I wasn't necessarily really interested in lobbying, but I looked around at some other jobs and I didn't find a whole lot of people willing to pay me what he was paying me.

Now, I do know that when I went out and, when I left Mitchell's office I went to be director of legislative and public information for what at that time was Farmer's Home. I made a lot more money there, so I mean I went into civil service and got a big increase in salary. So I think that's probably, I don't think that's, he wasn't known as a big payer. Was he particularly low-balling us? I never really paid much attention to my salary or other people's salaries, so I can't tell you. I know he did like to talk about the psychic remuneration that we got working for him – he would say that every once in a while.

BW: By which he meant?

SH: You know, you feel good about yourself working for Mitchell.

BW: He did say that?

SH: Yeah, the psychic remuneration, yeah. And which was fine. Again, I, he was a great boss in many ways for me. I learned a lot from him, I had a lot of respect for the Senator and the work that he did and the way he did things, I was very supportive of his politics and the policy in what he tried to pursue, impressed with him as a person and with his intellect and his capacity. He's the hardest working guy. We worked hard Monday through Friday, and he got on a plane and worked hard Saturday and Sunday, came back and worked hard Monday through Friday. So I felt a lot of that, you feel good working for a guy like Mitchell, so - And the pay, again, I don't think if you're working in the Senate you ought to be thinking about working for the pay. I mean, and I actually also don't, I'm not real keen on people thinking this, that I'm punching my ticket to get a big paycheck at the end of this either. So for me it was public service, it was a job, it was a terrific opportunity for me to see things and meet people, and have a role in people's lives.

I left Mitchell's office in '94, I went, I can't remember when I went back up to Maine, I went up some time and I met people who six, seven years later would express their appreciation for the things I had done working for Mitchell. And many don't, you don't get a lot of opportunities for that, and that's the psychic remuneration, eight years later people say, "I remember you and I saw, we appreciated the work you did for us." And you see some things that you'd done and maybe the positive influence you had on people's lives. So he was right about that.

BW: As a staffer, your comments on the role of lobbyists, sort of generically – although probably you can draw a distinction between the local folks coming down from Maine and the

big ticket organizations on K Street.

SH: Right, right, right.

BW: And sort of, do you rely on them, do you like meeting with them? Just give us some of the flavor of interactions.

SH: Yeah, let me, just as an observation, I was just amazed in this last campaign when you heard about Sarah Palin hiring lobbyists to represent the town of Wasilla with the Alaska delegation. I just can't imagine that you need a senator, I mean your sense, feeling that as a community, to have a voice with your senator you've got to hire somebody, given the way Mitchell required us – demanded us – the expectation, very clearly: you will meet with Maine people. You know, "I represent the state of Maine, you will meet with Maine people." Hiring a lobbyist to me was just amazing.

End of Disk One

Disk Two

SH: When Mitchell was on the Finance Committee of course, he needed to deal with a lot of lobbyists. As the leader of the Senate Campaign, Democratic Senate Campaign Committee where he was needing to raise money for campaigns, he met with a lot of lobbyists. And as majority leader and as a player in Democratic, National Democratic politics, he met with a lot of lobbyists, and they were people who raised money, and some for him. So you met with lobbyists, and there were people that you knew, the lobbyists would call, they would get them and their client on Mitchell's schedule; but there was always time for the Maine folks. And a lot of those, when we were up in the state, Mitchell kept a very vigorous schedule circulating around Maine. He didn't spend all his time in Portland and Bangor. Twice a year he was in Aroostook County, he'd visit all the counties on a regular basis. Mary McAleney was a scheduler, and Diane Smith was a scheduler. Gayle worked on that stuff too, and they would get him around the state and he would be available to people. And they were available in Washington, too, and we were to make ourselves available to talk to Maine people.

There were some people in our office that weren't all that keen about that, but I always enjoyed the people that I met from Maine, more often than not I enjoyed them. They brought a perspective that was different, it helped me understand the state better, helped me make a better, have a better understanding of the issues and better understanding and better able to articulate it with other people why these were important. And not too much in the way of lobbyists for Maine. As I said, there were some, the trade associations in Maine; you would deal with their lobbyist. Oftentimes I didn't find them particularly effective, the Washington folks who would represent the potato industry I didn't, I'd much rather deal with the Maine Potato Commission, or is it, yeah, I think the Maine Potato Commission. The dairy folks I didn't particularly like; I liked dealing with the Maine commissioner of agriculture.

So, but Mitchell made himself available, I mean, and that was just part of doing business and it

was understood. There was not some sense, however, that he was beholden to anybody, or that they would come in and would do what he wanted, that he would jump to what they wanted. But he did feel an obligation, I mean, and I understand that.

BW: But sometimes lobbyists came and they met with staff members rather than with him.

SH: Absolutely.

BW: And when did they get a meeting with him, and when did they get a meeting with you or your colleagues?

SH: Well, a lot of times it was the follow up, the substantive stuff, they would meet with Mitchell. When he was leader, I tell people, when I am over here and people schedule meetings for an hour, I say to them, "When I worked in Mitchell's office he'd have three meetings an hour. He had this conference room and he would meet with the folks say at a nine, you had the nine to nine twenty slot. Well you would be ushered into the room at nine o'clock and you'd have five minutes with him, as a staffer, lay out what they wanted to talk about, catch up on some chitchat, Mitchell would come in the door pretty much regularly come in at nine-o-five, he'd be there for ten minutes, he'd start a lot of the meetings." I'm telling you, he'd sit down, he'd say, "All right, what's the message, who's got the message, what's the message?" And he'd give them ten minutes, he'd have to excuse himself and he'd leave, and you had another five minutes to close up the meeting and get them out so the next group would be in at twenty after. And so you spent time talking a lot with lobbyists, and a lot of the details of the things that you left.

Mitchell was very, very capable; he knew many of the details as well or better than the staff did. I mean, I remember one article described George Mitchell at one of these Finance Committee conferences, I think probably on health care, as the best staffer in the hall, in the room. He had been a Senate staffer and he understood that, so he was really, he was really good at all of those things. He made all of us look good, he was so capable.

But there were times you would meet with the lobbyists, they would call you to give you some information. Good lobbyists are really effective, in that they help you do your work and help you help them. Some people depended on them more than I did. I didn't ask them to write me speeches or, but certainly if I needed somebody to do a little bit of, pre-Internet, if I needed somebody to do some research I certainly would call them and say, "Look, can you help me find this information?" you know, and expect that they've got that help. And they help you understand, they're a good source of information, who they're, what they're hearing on the Hill. They do represent people that we, in many instances, we're not opposed to, so they're the representative.

Mitchell always used to say that, "Everybody views things through the narrow prism of their own self-interest," and that's what those lobbyists did, and it was that amalgamation of all those narrow prisms that helped us arrive at a view of what was the right thing to do. I still use that

‘narrow prism of your own self-interest’ because it’s, it is true, how you view things.

BW: So far, emphasis has been on small cranberries and such. What about the major big ticket issues during your time there. I’m not being critical about where we’ve been -

SH: No-no-no, and you know what? That was mostly what I did, the issues that I did, veterans’ affairs, a lot of that had to deal with Togus. Even when I was dealing, even then when I was dealing with big issues, there really was a Maine focus to it. That was what I think was what Mitchell was looking for us to do, a lot of ways, is it was particularly important for him as, after he, anytime, but particularly after he became majority leader, that there was not a sense in the state of Maine that he was leaving them behind, that he was bigger than Maine. So he was very attuned to the state and wanted us to focus a lot of our energy.

He had people on his staff who dealt with these major issues. After Tom Gallagher and Bob Rozen did the tax issues and so, so Bobby dealt with all those mega tax issues, but he also dealt with UNUM and states on, the state of Maine on their tax issues, fishing industry. So you know, there was that focus. Chris Williams, who when she was doing the health care stuff, UNUM was in all the time, all the Maine Medical Center, the Maine hospitals. So they, in the course of their work they made sure that the Maine interests were represented and understood and incorporated to the degree they could –

My issues even, my issues generally were not those that played a lot on the national scale. When you deal with energy, Maine is a consumer, not a producer. When you deal with natural resources, public lands, most, Maine is a very small percentage of the land that’s public lands, mostly it’s out west. And I think the sense from Mitchell was, that was more a purview of the western state senators and that he didn’t want to, he didn’t play much in that. Although I think we probably took a pretty dependable Democratic position on public lands issues while he was there, so. But he did not make a name for himself or play much in those national issues. Focus on the Maine issues was my responsibility.

BW: Who took the lead on the Clean Air -?

SH: Charlene Sturbitts, and after Charlene – and I’m trying to think when she left. I would say she left early on, I think she left before ‘90; I don’t think she was there when Mitchell was leader. I’m trying to remember who did the EP-, Kate Kimball was there, did a lot of that, Bob Davison did some issues, Jeff Peterson for EPW stuff, he dealt a lot with the committee staff with that.

BW: What changes did you observe as Mitchell moved into the role of leader, how did that affect -?

SH: He wasn’t in the office. I mean, our, the Russell Office really became focused on the state, and if you wanted to see him you went over to the leader. Again, he had a, he tried as hard as he could to make sure that the people of Maine didn’t think he’d left them behind, so he kept a

very, he kept a very rigorous Maine schedule, and kept seeing people from Maine. They came down and they'd get his picture with them. He was amazing to get his picture taken with these constituents. He would be in front of the fireplace and they would come in and get their pictures. I swear to God, if you put ten of those pictures that they took in those sessions, and they'd take ten pictures in two minutes, he didn't even change his posture. I mean, it's just like one of those cardboard cutouts, he was so consistent with the pictures, he was amazing. But he took a lot, did a lot of that in, up in the state.

I think we had, when you're leader you have an opportunity to invite yourself to the meetings more, so I think in my case there were some things that we did that, because he was leader, I had an opportunity to get involved with things that I hadn't before. I had a couple projects that he had us do as leader, after [hurricane] Hugo and – for instance, he asked me to try to put together a package of relief items that could go onto an appropriations bill, Hugo, I was working with the committee staff and the staff from Thurmond and Hollings, and it must have been Nunn, and I can't remember who the sec-, it was either Fowler, by that point it must have been Fowler, trying to put a package of things together. And those were just late, late nights; I wouldn't leave the office 'til eleven or twelve for like a week straight, trying to make that thing come together. So that was a change, and there were other things where you just, as leader you had to, he had to be involved. He had to be more involved in budget negotiations; they had that big confab out at Andrews Air Force where he led the, led it. I mean, I wasn't involved with that, that was his staff. And so your opportunities to interact with him were reduced. We weren't, we didn't have a lot of face time with the boss anytime, he was a busy guy and you saw him when you needed to see him and talked when you needed to talk to him. But you, the threshold to get in to see him when he was leader increased. Although again, I always felt, and maybe it was because I'd been there for a while when he was leader, and by the time I left I'd been with him for ten years, my need to see him wasn't as high as other people's so, I felt like I didn't a lot, but you, there were, a higher threshold to get in to see him, demands were extreme.

BW: On average, how many occasions of face time would you get, say, a week or a month or something, do you think?

SH: I, is it possible I went weeks without seeing him? Probably, you know, during the, when he was in this, probably. So, I was not a frequent – but once he moved into the leader, and the appropriations people had to see him, his budget person had to see him, Bobby had to go in to see him with the tax stuff, the armed services people had to go in and see him, the foreign affairs people because of all of the treaties, and all the nominations, the judicial people, all the Supreme Court nominations had to spend time with him. The political people had to see him. So only so many, and then of course you have all the senators who feel the need to see him, so.

BW: Plus, I guess, meetings at the White House.

SH: Yeah, yeah. So, and the ceremonial stuff that he had to meet with. So, I mean the demands on his time were very, very high, and he had confidence in us to do the job. We had a very, I say to people I was, it was always clear to me that when you started on a path, some

project or some legislation, he would try to set some expectations in the front end of it, and you were left to pursue it, and when you reached a fork in the road you had to come back and check in, talk about those options and where you were going, make the decision with him on what fork to take, keep going 'til you got the next one, the next one, and then at some point Mitchell had to come in and close the deal, and that's when you went back in to see him and he'd do what he needed to do to close the deal. He was great, you'd, say, get a 'dear colleague' letter, you'd be working with other members and staffs and you'd have this letter and you'd say to him, you'd give him the list, and, "Here's who needs to sign this letter," and he'd take it over at a vote and he'd get those names and he'd get more names. He just was great at closing the deal, calling somebody and saying, "Here's, [I] understand this is where we are, can we do this?" and closed it. He was just great, but gave us a lot of latitude to get him to that point. Needed to, we just couldn't, everybody can't spend all the time with him.

BW: How much of his time was devoted to being the, quote/unquote, 'public face of the Democratic Party' in front of the media and the public, and how much doing this kind of hard core work?

SH: He, I would say not as much as people would think. He made his rounds on the Sunday talk shows, he had his, I don't know if they did daily stand-ups with the press, but I think before the Senate session opened he'd have five minutes with them. Not as much as people would think. I mean, I think as leader, running the Senate is a full time job behind the scenes, and there's a lot of ceremonial stuff with it, there's a lot of institutional things with it, you're the head of the party so you have all of those working on the agenda things, you have a lot of the politics because you're working to get members reelected or either increase your majority or, so you got a lot of politics, you have to pay attention to that. And that, the public face representing the Democratic majority in the Senate was not that large a role.

BW: Now during your period of time, Bob Byrd was -

SH: He was leader when we started, and then Mitchell, Mitchell ran, Byrd stepped down in '86, yeah, the election was eighty-, was it, '86 was the election Mitchell was the leader?

BW: Eighty-eight.

SH: Yes, so I mean '86 was when he was with the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee, and so then the following year, with those senators in place, Byrd stepped down and Mitchell was elected, yeah.

BW: How would you compare leaders?

SH: I think Mitchell was viewed as much better at the public face than Byrd, who was viewed as not effective articulating the party position. Mitchell was extraordinarily effective at it. One of the few guys in the age of television that actually did better with paragraphs than sentences, and was able to express himself thoughtfully in a way that Byrd was just not able to do. And

even, I mean that was a much younger Bob Byrd.

In fact, one of the things about working for Mitchell is, you talk about what was different than us, you had the opportunity to go over and edit your senator's remarks. We didn't do very much of that at all. Never felt the need. He was, he could speak in complete paragraphs. And –

BW: How much of a distraction was Iran-Contra for him?

SH: Very, very busy time for him. I mean I think he really threw himself into it. I wouldn't view it as a distraction. Again, I think it's, if you look at the time he had to put in it, was it more or less than what he had to put into being the leader? I don't think it was, I mean, so it was just one of those things, you factored that into the amount of time you had to, the amount of time you had to do, and in a lot of ways, the independence that you had to do your job without micromanagement of Mitchell. So it wasn't viewed, well I didn't view it as a distraction.

BW: Did he ever come back from a hearing on Iran-Contra sort of shaking his head in consternation, or did you see any editorial non-verbal language?

SH: No, no. And you know what? If I did, it just is not sticking in my memory. I don't, you know, it's funny, when you think about that period, it really was just in some ways – so Iran-Contra was when, that was ninety-?

BW: It was '87.

SH: Eighty-seven? So you know, he had been Democratic Campaign Committee chairman from, in '85 and '86, and that was a very busy time. So then Iran-Contra then, and then leader, so it just sort of seemed like different, a different rationale or reason for the demands on his time, but just didn't seem, you know what I mean? It was just sort of, 'That's what he's doing.'

BW: Did you have any role to play in his '88 reelection campaign?

SH: Only as a member of the staff where we had to help compile the records of achievements and his activities. But no, I wasn't a strategist; I didn't have any of that. He had to, again, he had a pretty bright line between the office activities and political activities, so we understood the distinction that we needed to make, and if we were going to be involved in any part of the campaign we would take leave. [I] took a leave to go to the convention that year, I think.

BW: You did?

SH: Yeah. Yeah, I mean the Maine state convention, yeah; we took leave to go up there.

BW: How do you account for his meteoric rise to leader in such a short time?

SH: Well, I think there's a couple of [reasons]. One, you certainly have to, everything I ever

saw of George Mitchell is that he is a very hard worker, and is willing, and his ability to stay focused and work is extraordinary. His intellectual capacity is extraordinarily high, his ability to keep information and use it. I remember once I did a briefing memo for him for a guy who had just been elected, was the commissioner of agriculture, the director of Forestry, and they walked in, I didn't have any idea Mitchell even knew who he was, and it turned out he'd been a city councilor in some town up in northeast Maine, Mitchell knew him. "When d'you get off the council? I haven't heard from you." You know. He knew everybody in Maine. His ability to understand issues, his ability to filter issues through his political philosophy, his skill as a communicator. So I think all of those personal traits were there. As I said, that was one of the things, we'd read him the reviews, how he was the best staffer in the Finance Committee markup.

He, and then he had, you had the performance he had done with the Campaign Committee, getting the eight, I think we brought eight Democratic, picked up eight seats in '86?

BW: Something like that, yeah.

SH: The work that he had done on Iran-Contra, his capacity and, how well he had done with the, just doing his work on Environment and Public Works and Finance, and personal relationships he had with other Democrats, the temperament that he had. I mean I think they all add up.

BW: Talk about relationship with other Democrats, or other members of the Senate. How collegial was he, how did that work, was there a buddy system?

SH: I think he's a reserved person. His personal style is, he's an introvert, he learned to be socially gregarious. He works at it, not in a glad-handing kind of way, but he works to be friendly to people. I think he's, I'm an introvert, I'm much happier going home after work and reading or watching a basketball game and not spending too much time with people, you have to do a lot of that with politics. He learned to do that, made himself do that.

So I think his relationship with other senators was I think based on the respect for them as senators and the work that they did. And it crossed party lines, I think he got along really well with Rudman; he got along well with Cohen I think, worked out a much better relationship with Cohen than we had with Cohen's staff. Staffers tend to be a little petty and pick up on the slights. We ended up working together really well with Cohen, but still, everything, every once in a while they would do something that would just tweak us and it would irritate us.

I think he, I think he was respected as a senator who did hard work and was honest with them and aboveboard with them. I can't think of any great friendships that he had with people; I think he had professional relationships with them. So it's not that they were great friends, but I think there was a tremendous amount of respect and I think, looking at it from my perspective, I think well deserved respect for Mitchell.

BW: You had no idea who his tennis partners were?

SH: He played with people, I guess he played some with Breaux; he played some with Bennett Johnston. But no, my view of Mitchell is, is that he can't even go to the grocery store without people knowing who he is. So I never traded in any of the gossip about his personal life or those sorts of things. I felt very much that he deserved some zone of privacy and I, so I sort of, there were people in the staffs who may have talked about that, who he was playing tennis with or whatever, who he was dating, after the divorce. I had no interest in that. I felt he, as I said, I felt he deserved some privacy and some, yeah, some privacy from the staff.

BW: How do you account for his retiring in '94?

SH: I just think he thought, 'I'm sixty years old and I have things I need to do with my life.' When you were in the Senate when I was in the Senate, you saw Stennis, you saw, I mean Byrd was not as bad then as he is now, just - You saw Burdick from North Dakota. I think also in my own - I never talked to the Senator about this - but I bet there were a lot of senators in '90, '91, actually probably in '93 and '94, after Clinton had been elected, where they saw themselves, you know, 'I could have run,' things, you know, Bush seemed high as, invincible in '90 when he had that eighty-nine percent approval rating after Iraq War, and, 'Maybe I could have beaten him, but I didn't do it.'

So I'm thinking Mitchell probably thought to himself, 'A lot of these guys are kicking themselves for not doing it when they had the chance,' and so I think he - and the other thing that I think, I think he saw '94 coming. He's smart. He saw '94 coming. And so he was going to go out as majority leader, sixty years old, majority leader, tremendous accomplishments in his time in the Senate, a tremendous reputation. I think he saw it, I think he thought this was a good time to leave.

BW: Do you think he *was* eyeing '96 and a possible run for the presidency?

SH: I don't, I don't.

BW: It would have been 2000, or-?

SH: I don't know that he really thought about running for president. I mean, you know, he had [been] shaped by that Muskie experience I think. And again, I thought he, I think once he saw '94 coming, he saw himself as sixty, I think he thought there's a lot in life that he still could do. I don't think he's driven by money, but he certainly is, by all, by everything that I can see he's, and understand of the world, he's probably done very well financially since then, but I don't think that's what drives him. I just think he saw opportunities for him to do something.

BW: There are three comments that I picked up in some articles at the time, one said that, "Mitchell relies less on staff than other senators," and I think you've confirmed that.

SH: He was really, really capable, he was really capable. I think anybody who, in our staff, who sits and tells you how they were responsible for any part of his success, they're kidding themselves.

BW: Also read that George Mitchell was, quote/unquote, "cold and calculating as leader."

SH: I think that's probably true. I mean he saw early on – this is one of the things I remember him talking about – he saw in Muskie's case how Muskie's temper didn't serve him well and so he was, he knew what he needed to do and did what he needed to do. But he would, he was honorable and fair and judicious, and did not hold vendettas. But was he able to look at things objectively and dispassionately and make difficult decisions? Yes, he was.

BW: I also read that his staff, particularly in the leadership's office, could be quite unpleasant or aggressive, or -

SH: Really? Where'd you read that?

BW: I haven't got that in my notes here.

SH: Oh, oh.

BW: I mean, I haven't got it on this paper.

SH: Because, you know, I think that Mitchell always expected us, at least this was what, expected us to treat people with respect. I can't remember, I just can't remember in my instance where I can recall, say, a Mitchell staffer shouting at people. Threatening them, I don't think Mitchell would allow us to be threatening to people, that, 'We're going to do this if you don't do this' sort of thing.

I had one instance in this potato blight where I was pressing Agriculture to do something, and I remember the chief of staff of Agriculture, a guy named Ron Blakely, just a punk, ended up going to jail – it's kind of petty of me to throw that in there, but I just feel like, because he's such a punk. Anyway, he was, they weren't going to help us in the way that we wanted to do it, and I kept pressing him to do it. And so finally, you know, we had this list of stuff we wanted him to do, and Blakely called me on behalf of Secretary Espy and said, "We're not going to be able to do," you know, "we're not going to be able to help you do this." And I said, "Well, if that's your decision we'll make arrangements for Espy to call Mitchell." And he said, "Well no, I'm telling you." I said to him, "Well, Ron, Mitchell can take 'yes' from a staffer, Mitchell's not taking 'no' from a staffer, so if the secretary wants to call Mitchell and tell him no, we'll make those arrangements. Otherwise, we're not going to accept this as the end."

That's about as strident as I got with people, because that's how Mitchell was with people. He wasn't going to yell at people, and I don't think he would condone that sort of stuff. So maybe there were some people in the leadership office, Martha Pope, for instance, when she was with

Mitchell, Martha could be cold-blooded. John – I can't remember the guy who was the chief of-, his name escapes me right at the moment – but I always thought he was a pleasant fellow. And clearly Pat Sarcone was, who was his executive assistant in the leader's office, was a lovely person who went out of her way, I mean with the demands that you have on that schedule, went out of her way to be accommodating and pleasant to people. So I guess I would dispute that, that we were, so.

BW: You mentioned Senator Muskie. By the time you got to the office in '83, was his aura still lingering a bit?

SH: Very much, there were still people who'd worked for Muskie and then stayed on with Mitchell. Oh yeah, oh yeah.

BW: And did you sometimes hear people say, oh, "Muskie would have done that a lot differently?"

SH: No, never heard that, never heard that.

BW: So what *did* you hear?

SH: There were just people who had worked for Muskie, and so when things came up with Clean Water or all the environmental things, the Budget Act, the things that Muskie had done. I mean, there were lots of things that Muskie had done, things that Mitchell, Muskie had started in Maine that Mitchell was doing, people that had that connection. It was, I don't want to say reverential but it was, Muskie was held in tremendous regard. I mean that was, again people who had worked for him, you would talk about how Muskie might have acted differently and the stories of Muskie's temper. And Leon Billings was a character that we'd see a lot. Leon was a, he was a, a hold-, I don't want to say a holdover from the Muskie years, but he was a part of those Muskie years. Gayle Cory, part of the Muskie years. So there were a lot of people with Muskie histories, and so it was not uncommon with many of the same old, '83, people who'd come down from Maine that had been dealing with Muskie for years and were now dealing with Mitchell, so, but -

BW: But the Muskie holdovers were accepting of newcomers.

SH: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. They were, let me see, Mitchell came in in – when did Mitchell come in?

BW: In '80.

SH: Eighty? That's what I was thinking, '80. I joined in '83, so a lot of the folks who had been there and the transition, the initial wave of people out after '82. There were the '80-'82 people who couldn't stay for the election, and then you had those folks who after the election in '82 had left, stayed through the election. And so there were a handful of people. I think Charlie

Jacobs, Gayle Cory, the office manager, Donna Beck I think, Charlene, Estelle Lavoie, Mike – I'm not sure Mike Hastings ever worked for Muskie, I think not. But anyway, so there were half a dozen there. And then there were some people up in the field offices, so there was a Muskie history but not a huge one.

BW: How do you think Mitchell will be remembered over time, and how do you think he ought to be remembered?

SH: Well, I think his enduring reputation fifty years from now, as many people will know him from the Mitchell Report on Steroids as leader. I think the impression of that. I think of all the things that he's done post-leader, I mean obviously the stuff with Northern Ireland was tremendous, the things he's done with Israel, tremendous, the baseball report, tremendous – I'm not hugely keen of the work he did on the tobacco settlement, but I'm appreciative of and I'm glad that somebody of his caliber did it, helped to get that in place. I wish he hadn't been involved with tobacco, but there's no way around that. Everything that he's done has made me proud that I have that affiliation, so -

I think he'll be seen as a, in retrospect, as one of the most capable people that held the seat for Maine. Certainly among the most distinguished. Somebody who really represented and articulated and demonstrated the core values of the Democratic Party. Great guy.

BW: Have we left anything unsaid, do you think?

SH: Well, I would say the one part that we haven't really talked about is when we talk about my responsibilities with Maine. It seemed for a while my specialties were to be involved with awful field hearings with Mitchell. We had a hearing on post-traumatic stress disorder treatment at the Togus facility. We had it a Saturday morning, there'd been a lot of unhappiness about the treatment of Vietnam era veterans for post-traumatic stress at Togus, and so Mitchell agreed to have a field hearing. The Saturday morning paper came out and one of the veterans had committed suicide that day before in his trailer, so that was in the morning paper. Then we had our hearing, just an awful, awful experience.

We had a proposal to do designated wilderness in the White Mountain National Forest Caribou Shelter that turned out to be a very unpleasant hearing at one of the local high schools, I can't remember what it was. We had a set of hearings regarding the proposed nuclear waste dump in northern Maine that, we went into this one high school auditorium and the entire room was full of people holding 'No' signs. Very ugly, very angry, difficult issues with nuclear waste disposal. There were two proposed sites in Maine for nuclear waste dis-, national nuclear waste disposals. That's when I was on EPW doing, working on the nuclear issues on EPW, so I had that area for Mitchell. He decided we would have these hearings – they were awful.

And then we had another one on this proposal for Northern Forest study, the Northern Forest lands, we had this awful hearing in the Bangor city council chambers. It was so small that half of the people who were accusing him and Cohen of being Communist couldn't get in the room,

so we went back and had a second one in the Bangor Auditorium. So it seemed like every time that I was going with Mitchell for a hearing, it was just this awful, awful experience. And he was gracious through the whole thing, and bore up well to the – he was getting a lot of criticism, a lot of it very unfair, very vitriolic, I mean almost nutty, with this Northern Forest land stuff and with the nuclear waste dump, associating him with doing it, when he was just doing a hearing about it. But –

BW: What was his position on that particular issue?

SH: Oh, we were opposed to it, the dump. And what was interesting is that at some point, looking at some of the briefing materials we were putting, I was putting together for Mitchell, he came to the realization, the conclusion, I think a lot faster than many people that the trajectory of the nuclear power industry, there really wasn't going to be a need for a second dump, repository. The one now is in Yucca Mountain, that was one of two sites, that the way the industry was going, we wouldn't need to build a second one. The second one was predicated on the, a new wave of reactors, and so he saw that as then, "If you don't need a second one, let's de-authorize the second one." So that was his approach: "Let's not worry about finding a good site for this stuff, let's de-authorize it because we don't need it." So he was a pretty smart guy to see that, again. A lot of people saw it. Maybe *I* should have seen it, said to him, "Why don't we de-authorize it?" but *he* saw it. So we sort of helped him. He's not a senator that was led anywhere. We helped him.

BW: Have you been back to the state of Maine with him at any time in more recent years?

SH: No, I've seen him only a couple times. When they unveiled the Senate portrait was the last one I think I've seen him. We move in, we don't move in the same social circles or professional circles. And I hadn't, I don't really have a personal relationship with him. I – and I'm not in Maine. There are people in Maine that he sees, or the people that stay in touch with him more than I did. You know, just in, to a certain degree, although I think the world of him, we had a professional relationship that was not, he didn't hire me because, I mean it's not like *he* hired me because *he* wanted me. I think he, his office hired me because, as a political favor to a Democrat who'd lost an office. But he was generous to me, he gave me an opportunity to do some things I never would have otherwise had. From him I've gone on to this career, and it's financially rewarding to me and intellectually engaging, and so I have a lot to owe him. He was very generous to me when my son was ill, while I was on his staff, generous in terms of the expectation that I would not produce much work for the period while my son was in recuperation, so -

BW: Did you ever get a pat on the back and a thanks?

SH: Oh yeah, oh yeah, yeah. "Did a good job on that," or, "You're doing what I want you to do," or when Espy – actually, I told you that story about that staffer, and Espy did call him, and he said what a prick I had been to his chief of staff. And Mitchell said to me, "You keep doing it, it's exactly what I want you to do for the state of Maine." So no, there weren't, he's not

overly effusive in his praise, but as I said, I felt I was compensated fairly, I felt I had opportunity I never would have had without him. He gave me what I needed and he was fair to me and generous in his, I mean not effusive, but he was, when you did a good job he told you, "That was good, that was good."

BW: Good, that's it?

SH: Yeah.

BW: Great, thank you.

SH: You're welcome.

End of Interview