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### Interview with Bennett Johnston by Brien Williams

J Bennett Johnston

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

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**J. Bennett Johnston**  
(Interviewer: *Brien Williams*)

**GMOH# 129**  
August 13, 2009

**Brien Williams:** This is an oral history interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College with former Senator J. Bennett Johnston. We are in the Washington law offices of Steptoe & Johnson, LLP, where Senator Johnston serves as a government affairs and public policy adviser, in a strategic alliance between his firm, Johnston & Associates, and Steptoe & Johnson. Today is Thursday, August 13, 2009, and I am Brien Williams. I thought, Senator, I'd like to start out by asking you what it was like coming to the Senate in 1972.

**Bennett Johnston:** Well, it was a very interesting time. I had been a state legislator, but very much a part-time stage legislator, and I had run for governor of Louisiana in 1971 and got in the second primary with Edwin [W.] Edwards, was projected to win by most of the polls but ended up losing by 0.2 percent. It was an off year election in Louisiana and that very next year, '72, I could run for the Senate, and ran and got elected and came to Washington without a lot of Washington experience. People who run these days are strongly supported by the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, and they have all kinds of interest in their races. I had my own race to run. I'm trying to remember, I think I might have gotten \$1500 or something from the DCCC, and when I arrived in town I had to call a friend to give me a ride to the Capitol, didn't really exactly know how to get there and where everything was.

But it was very much a different time at that time, Watergate had just happened, the operative term was, what was it, a third-rate burglary or something like that, and you didn't take it seriously. It was very soon obvious that it was quite serious, and all through that year it kept dribbling out by dribs and drabs, it is amazing how many headline revelations could come from one story. It was quite amazing, and during all that time, of course, I was trying to get used to the Senate. The Senate was very nonpartisan at that time, Democrats and Republican Caucuses rarely took place, usually only to endorse the committee chairman for their particular jobs, but almost never to plot out strategy as parties. Strategy was very much a function of the committee chairmen and their ranking minority member, so it was very much a different time.

Watergate changed a lot of that by, first putting the press very much in the position of critics of the process and of the members. It was a marked change at that time from, I won't say benign friendliness, but more friendly than it was later. And of course ever since then, my first year was in 1973, it has been very much a steady deterioration, both in the way that senators are thought of back home, as well as tremendous partisanship, and a general quality of life of senators.

**BW:** Did you have any contact with Senator [Allen J.] Ellender, who you succeeded?

**BJ:** I was running against Senator Ellender, who at that time was I think eighty-one, was going to be eighty-two if he'd gotten elected. I had met him but had little contact with him. He was Senate pro-tem, and chairman of the Appropriations Committee, had not done a lot for Louisiana in those very powerful positions, and he could have, I thought, but did not. But my getting in the race spurred him into action to exercise the prerogatives of his office.

Before I got in the race, I took an extensive poll with a thousand personal interviews. You'd never do that any more, it would be too expensive to do personal interviews, and they usually have a sample of six hundred, but we had a sample of a thousand. And if I recall the numbers, I was leading him like fifty-six to thirty-four, something like that. And we started the race, and there was some deterioration in those numbers as the race proceeded, but I thought at the end of the day I was going to win a reasonably close race. Although I must say, I was very impressed with how much energy this man of eighty-one had, he maintained quite a schedule, which might have been what ultimately killed him. He had a heart attack there in, as I recall, about two weeks before the primary, and died. [He] got on a plane and did not want to be taken to the hospital or anything in Louisiana, and I think he probably could have been saved if they'd taken him right to the hospital.

But in any event, he died, and John McKeithen, who was the governor at that time and was going out of office in a matter of weeks or months, got into the race, he wanted to get in as a Democrat but it was past qualification time, the State Central Committee said he had to run as an Independent, or he could not run as a Democrat so therefore he had to run as an Independent, which I think did not affect his performance, my polls showed the same as a Democrat or as a Republican. But I won against him and a Republican; I think I got about fifty-four percent of the vote and they split the rest.

**BW:** Did you feel like you were coming in as some version of a new Democrat, or very much in the Southern tradition?

**BJ:** Well, we didn't have such a thing as a New Democrat, but I had clearly broken ground as friendly with and supported by black people, which was really a change. I had very strongly campaigned with and among black people in the governor's race, although I didn't get a majority of it, and was strongly supported in the Senate race. As a matter of fact, that was one of my aces in the hole against Ellender, because he had made these terrible statements against blacks all through his Senate career, calling them apes and this and that. As a matter of fact, Charlie Cook, you know who Charlie Cook is?

**BW:** Now, for the record, explain it.

**BJ:** He is Washington's maybe preeminent researcher of political races and political pundit, he was then in high school, I hired him to go look at the *Congressional Record* and he researched, oh, twenty or thirty of these snippets, so that was going to be a big part of the race. But in any event, in that sense I was a new Democrat. Now by that time, southern Democrats

had come around to be reasonably friendly with blacks, certainly my colleague Russell Long had been. Some of the old bulls of Stennis and Eastland had a long history of opposing Civil Rights, but I think that opposition to blacks had been pretty well past and they were not as culturally able to converse with the black community as some of us younger ones were. In that sense, I was very much a New Democrat. I was very traditional in supporting, for example, the oil and gas industry in Louisiana, a producing state. So, it was very much a new era, we did not feel hidebound; I mean we had our traditional interests in the South which we all supported.

**BW:** In terms of the structure of the Senate when you came in, in '72, the old bulls were still the leading chairmen of the committees.

**BJ:** Right, right.

**BW:** And what kind of influence did they exert?

**BJ:** Well, as I say, policy was pretty much made by the chairmen and their ranking minority members, most committees had a very close relationship between the chairmen and the ranking minority members. Russell Long did tax policy, I think Bob Dole was his long time ranking minority member, they were very close and they found ways to work together. And I think virtually every committee was like that, you rarely saw a floor fight against a committee chairman and what they brought out of committee.

**BW:** But I think I heard you say that by '74, with the post-Watergate, that began to change.

**BJ:** Well, I won't say as early as '74. The criticism of the press certainly began to change. It was a gradual evolution. By 1980, let's see, I guess it must have been the election of '81 with Ronald Reagan that really brought in the partisanship. That's when the Republicans were ideological and they had their agenda, and it was very hard to be against Ronald Reagan at that time, he was tremendously popular. I remember seeing him at press conferences and thinking how embarrassingly bad he was at answering questions, and the public just loved it. So I knew better than to get out there and oppose him strongly.

Each year it got more partisan, and as it got more partisan, I don't remember when we began to have the party caucuses, I suspect it was by the late '70s, but more and more partisan every time. Jesse Helms created the so-called Wedge Amendment. When we came there was never an amendment which was not at least intended by the author to be serious. But the Wedge Amendment was one that sounded good but it would make you vote to oppose taking money from one purpose to give to the crippled children so that they could have a thirty-second ad that said, "Bennett Johnston opposes my crippled children." And he would have a lot of those amendments, and people didn't quite understand why he was doing it, but they soon understood and then both sides began to do it.

Now you have, particularly on the Budget, what they call a 'votorama' where they have just dozens of these votes one after another that are not seriously debated, they're not serious

amendments, but they're seriously intended to give the stuff of thirty-second ads.

**BW:** I was impressed that three years I guess after you arrived, you became the chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee.

**BJ:** Right.

**BW:** That was a quick rise to an important position in the structure of the party, right?

**BJ:** Yes, it was not as important as it is now; we didn't raise that much money. Money was not as big a deal at that time as it is now. But it was, yes, I was very pleased to get that position.

**BW:** I saw a list of the chairs of that committee on the Internet, and yours was the first name, so when was that committee created? At the time you took over as -?

**BJ:** No, Fritz Hollings was chairman when I was running, and then Lloyd Bentsen, and then I succeeded Lloyd Bentsen.

**BW:** Right, right. And the election year of '76, when you were the chairman, was one with a lot of changeover, a lot of new faces in the Senate but interestingly, the balance of power between Republicans and Democrats didn't change.

**BJ:** Right.

**BW:** What was it like as an election year?

**BJ:** Well it was very interesting, with Jimmy Carter. I was a strong supporter of Jimmy Carter, and I was his campaign chairman in Louisiana. And I must say I was very disappointed in Carter, I thought he was going to be much better politically than he was in the sense of the tenor of the country and all that, and he got in just immediately and was contrary to the Congress. After he was defeated, and he didn't come back to Washington for over a year, but he finally came back and had some kind of dinner somewhere, not one member of Congress was invited to that dinner, which kind of tells you something about his relationship with the Congress. And a lot of us were very hurt, and we thought it was something relating to us, but he was that way with all the members. I'm quite friendly with him now, I mean I was always friendly with him, but it was just a, as I say, a big disappointment.

**BW:** So did you become disheartened right after he came, his administration came into office, or was there -?

**BJ:** Pretty quick, yes.

**BW:** Did you try to steer him on a different course at all?

**BJ:** Well, he came in first of all with the hit list on the water projects, and at that time I was chairman of the Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee which had jurisdiction over water project. And water projects were very important politically to members, and as a strong supporter of infrastructure, I think they're important to the country. And Carter got in with some environmentalist idea that the Corps of Engineers was bad and so he was going to make a hit list. Well, I put in an amendment which said, in effect, 'you can't do that, Mr. President,' and it passed overwhelmingly, but it was just a whole series of things. Remember what they called 'the malaise time,' he just didn't quite get it.

**BW:** Now, you had a reelection in '78. How did you handle inoculating yourself from the Carter administration? Or maybe you didn't?

**BJ:** Well, I didn't attend to that much. The big part of that race was keeping out, or hoping that some of the stronger candidates did not run, and they didn't. And as I recall, I won by eighty-six percent of the vote, and so it was not much of a problem in '78. Edwin Edwards had been my rival ever since the governor's race, and every year the *Morning Advocate*, the newspaper, would run a poll and all about the Senate race, they did that for four or five years. And the year before the election it showed me winning like fifty-one to thirty against Edwards, and Edwards said, "Well I never intended to run for the Senate," and that was because he couldn't win. And then nobody else of note got in the race.

**BW:** Were you out in front for Carter in '80 when he ran for reelection?

**BJ:** I was, I appeared for him. I was not, he didn't ask and I didn't take this big role.

**BW:** But you had joint appearances in the state?

**BJ:** Yes.

**BW:** Did you and the other Democrats see the Reagan revolution ahead of time, for '80, or did that come as a surprise?

**BJ:** It, certainly the extent of it came as a surprise. I'd been chairman of the Campaign Committee at that time – no, no, I was not chairman of the Campaign Committee, but I still had my contact. And I remember a friend of mine who had been one of my political advisors, calling me on Election Day and he said, "Something is happening out there, it's just crazy." And that's when we lost all those seats, it was just amazing. And of course Carter lost. The polls did not show the Reagan surge, at least not before the final minutes of the campaign, and so it had been a great surprise to everybody, a shock to everyone.

**BW:** And as you mentioned earlier, it caused a lot of changes in the Senate.

**BJ:** Oh, indeed. Well, did we lose twelve seats at that time? I think it was twelve. And people we had thought were just not vulnerable at all went down; it was a bad Democratic year.

**BW:** Now, just prior to the November election, Ed Muskie went over to the State Department, and George Mitchell replaced him in May of '80. Had you had a close relationship with Ed Muskie?

**BJ:** Yes, reasonably close. I was on the Budget Committee, of which he was a chairman, and it was not a close personal relationship but it was a friendly relationship and I had worked on a number of legislative issues with him.

**BW:** What were your first impressions of George Mitchell when he arrived?

**BJ:** Well, George is always a charmer, and I liked him from the first time I met him and all the way through. He was just a wonderful person. We were quite friendly, we played tennis together, I recall going on a trip or two with him, I don't remember where, maybe just some of the Democratic trips, so we were quite friendly.

**BW:** At what point did you see him as having potential as a leader of the party, and potentially a rival?

**BJ:** You know, I don't remember. I had, it's very curious, we ran against one another for majority leader, I didn't initially have the idea of running. There were two liberals who were friends of mine who had come to me on the floor and said, "Bennett, you ought to run for leader." I forget whether George was a candidate at that time, might not have been, but I know one of those particularly – I don't want to say who because I don't want to have them embarrassed but, one is dead now – but not just one conversation, but dozens of conversations, 'you need to run.'

And by the time the election came up, both voted for Mitchell. So I thought with these two great and influential liberals that it would not be a hard thing for a Democrat from the south to get elected. I'd been very much a leader, particularly on appropriations bills, I handled the Appropriations Committee for John Stennis, and so in retrospect, it seems that it was kind of a dumb thing to think that a relatively conservative southerner who'd been a right-to-life, who'd been with the oil industry, who had not had a great record on labor, could be elected majority leader.

And when I started out, I used to keep a list of people and how they were, who's for me and who's leaning, et cetera, and I had a majority, including leaners. Of course leaners are – Mitchell may have had the same kind of list and might have had those leaners on his list – but it seemed at least early on that it was entirely winnable. But at the end of the day, not only Mitchell's charm and ability, but the basic politics if you're a northeastern Democrat you've got your labor, you've got your choice people, you've got your unions, you've got all of those things, which at the end of the day, I think that along with Mitchell's natural political ability and charm brought the day.

I forget what the count was but it was, on the first ballot Danny Inouye was also running, and between Inouye and I we had a majority of votes. But I knew where every vote was, and it seemed to me not a winnable race for either one of us and I told Inouye, "Why don't we just withdraw and make it unanimous," which we did.

**BW:** After the first ballot.

**BJ:** After the first ballot, right.

**BW:** What was it like going around? I assume you went around to your colleagues to campaign for this position, what was that experience like?

**BJ:** Well, it was very interesting. Senators are very cagey and they don't want to tell you they're against you. And some will, I mean some who are committed and you know who they are and why they are, and basically you're not offended at that sort of thing. The only thing is, it's offensive when somebody tells you they're going to be for you and then they end up not voting for you. There was a whole series of things, I wrote every member a personal letter, and sought most members more than once; you try to calibrate that so you don't make a nuisance of yourself.

**BW:** How did you know then who voted for you and who voted for the other two, because you say the two liberals that came to you at first, you know that they did not support you when it came to the ballot.

**BJ:** Yes, by that time they had, the communication had, they never did tell me that they were going, I just knew it. I forget how I knew it, but you could, there were two senators who had told me they were going to vote for me who ended up not voting [for me], and I just knew because I knew they were the two who would, you know where every vote is, and when it ended up that way I knew who they would be.

**BW:** You mean they did not cast a vote at all, is that what you're saying?

**BJ:** Oh yes, they voted, and it was secret ballot. You just know.

**BW:** So you never knew, no one ever handed you the results by name.

**BJ:** No.

**BW:** So it was all guesswork, or analysis, where you could figure out.

**BJ:** You know.

**BW:** I see, so what the aftermath of that like? I mean how do you then go back to your caucus and -?

**BJ:** Oh, it's, look, it is no problem. That's one thing about the Senate, it was entirely friendly; it was always friendly between me and Mitchell. And George said he would appoint me on the Intelligence Committee, which he did, and it was not a problem in the caucus. You've got so many issues that come up in the Senate, you win a great victory this day, and about the time you are enjoying the exultation of it, then you lose another one, it's just a whole series of things. And your relationship with the colleagues, it's not at all personal, as I say, George Mitchell and I were very friendly through it all, as Danny Inouye was, and so that's just not a problem.

**BW:** Part of the literature on that election was that you were giving forth just prior to the vote that you were pretty certain that you were going to win, is that correct? To the press and so forth?

**BJ:** I don't think I ever put it quite that strongly, I think I put it that with the commitments and the leaners, I said I thought I could win.

**BW:** So when you came home that night and told your wife what had happened in school today, how did you characterize it?

**BJ:** Well, this takes place over a period of weeks, and I think by the Election Day, I won't say it was clear, but it was not nearly as it had been. I was certainly not confident of winning; I thought there was a chance. You know, senators will tell you, sometimes they'll tell you and sometimes they won't, those who I had down as undecided and some who said they'd support me, I remember at least one or maybe two that supported me on the second ballot, and so it seemed possible at that time. But it was not like I thought I was going to win and came home and said, "Honey, it didn't work."

**BW:** So how would you characterize George Mitchell then, as your leader?

**BJ:** Well, George was a very effective leader. He just drove the Republicans crazy, because he didn't give them anything they could really put their hands on, and he was so articulate and would make the Democratic position to be so logical and so appealing that it was hard to be against him, so he drove them crazy. He was attentive to his members, which leaders need to be. A lot of senators don't really want a leader; they want somebody to just manage things so they can do their own thing, but George was a real leader and he directed the party.

**BW:** Did he meet much resistance?

**BJ:** Well, not everybody followed him on everything he wanted to do, I mean obviously, but there was no insurgency against him at any time.

**BW:** Did he have any Achilles' heels?

**BJ:** I don't recall it. He was considered to be a liberal when not everybody was a liberal, so to those who were the most conservative, he would not be exactly where they would be, but that's not an Achilles' heel.

**BW:** What about his relations with the Republicans? How did you see him working that line?

**BJ:** I think he got along well. I think it was Bob Dole then who was Republican leader, and I think they had a good personal relationship. Most leaders and ranking minorities have a good relationship. That was about the only time that didn't work was with, oh, what's-his-name from Tennessee, Bill Frist, and Daschle. What the first thing Bill Frist did was to take out the hot line between the leaders; we don't need that kind of thing, but mostly they have a good relationship.

As I say, I think he drove them crazy, I mean they liked him – I say they liked him, it had gotten to be so ideological, and it's gotten stronger and stronger. With Daschle, Daschle was also very, very effective, and very likeable, but they made him into a poster child of being this terrible guy, and so these Republicans repeat all this over and over again, so I can't say. The party's not monolithic but I can't say they loved him. As I say, I think he drove them crazy.

**BW:** Had you been party to, well no, let me ask you this way, what was the story behind Byrd no longer being the majority leader and going over to Appropriations?

**BJ:** I don't know, I don't think he ever quite explained his inner thoughts, but he'd been leader for a long time, and being Appropriations chairman he could do a lot of things for his state. He's perfected the art of the earmark for his state, which was a poor state and needed help. He didn't do that as majority leader. I had Energy and Water which was a big source of discretionary spending, and I'm sure we did things for West Virginia, as we did for every state, but he didn't do that very much. And I'm sure he saw that as a way to help Virginia, and the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, I don't remember whether he took that immediately, I guess he must have, as soon as it became vacant, as soon as, I guess Stennis, because he followed Stennis.

And so I think he took it as soon as it became available. And the Appropriations chairman, which was one of the things I had to think about when I retired, whether I wanted to wait around and try to be Appropriations chairman, and interestingly enough, I've now been retired, what, twelve years, and still wouldn't be Appropriations chairman. And that's a prize of great worth, so I think that's what it was.

**BW:** Shifting back to Mitchell, what role did he play as majority leader in relations with the White House? I'm thinking of George H.W. Bush and then Bill Clinton, what was his role there, if any?

**BJ:** Well, certainly the majority leader is, I mean he was an expert on health care, and he played an active role in the Clinton health care bill, and as I recall he supported that. When did he retire?

**BW:** He, in '95, he did not seek reelection in '94.

**BJ:** Yes, and the Clinton tax policies, I think he, he was an ally of Democrats in the White House.

**BW:** Okay. It struck me in looking at the Democratic Party at the time he became the majority leader that there really were some pretty strong factions. There were those of you with the sort of Southern tradition, and then the New Democrats, I think of like Chuck Robb coming in in '88 sort of representing that new blood type of thing, and then there was the Metzenbaum traditional liberal wing of the party. Would you agree that that sort of was the spectrum there, and each had sort of their own interests and so forth?

**BJ:** Yes, certainly in Energy, Metzenbaum was on the Energy Committee, Metzenbaum didn't represent a wing, he represented, he was sort of the lone Democratic real liberal. But I guess we did have, I guess we did have wings. Southerners would tend to vote together on a lot of things, certainly the oil and gas states would stick together.

**BW:** But was George Mitchell effective in keeping you all moving along the same track, or was he having to deal with a lot of factions?

**BJ:** Yes, I think he was. He was not quite as assertive on policy matters maybe as Harry Reid is now. For example, Harry Reid on one of these Energy bills just bypassed the committee altogether and put the bill out. Mitchell would have – which I thought was a terrible idea to do for Reid, and it didn't work – but Mitchell was much more effective working with the committee chairmen and gently moving people. He didn't crack the whip, he did it very much by subtle persuasion.

**BW:** Did you share any committee assignments with him, was Intelligence one, for example?

**BJ:** No, we were not on committees together.

**BW:** Let's turn to issues of the day, you've mentioned some of them. Were you strongly together with George Mitchell on some issues that came up, I mean you worked hand-in-hand in promoting certain legislation, or not?

**BJ:** Well I voted with him on many, many matters, but we weren't on committees together so I was just a passive voter on most of these issues, and he would be a passive voter on most of my issues.

**BW:** So were there any issues where you sort of locked heads, locked horns, I'm sorry.

**BJ:** Oh, I think on one, the DG-51 destroyer which we wanted to try to build in Louisiana, and which had been built at Bath or wherever, and we were on opposite sides of that issue, and

he won.

**BW:** Yes, talk about that a little bit, because that's come up in some other interviews.

**BJ:** Yes, well, it's just a competition for jobs in your state, and I forget exactly how it came up but I wanted to see if I could get some of that for Louisiana and was not successful in doing so.

**BW:** I was surprised there was a third player in that, wasn't there, a shipyard in Mississippi, right?

**BJ:** I think so.

**BW:** Ingall's, right. So you were, were you as locked horns with Mississippi on that one as you were with -?

**BJ:** You know I really don't recall that, that much.

**BW:** Were there any particular Maine-Louisiana issues that you shared, or not?

**BJ:** I don't think so.

**BW:** Now, where were you on the Clean Air Bill, which many people say was his major achievement legislatively, in 1990?

**BJ:** I voted for it and I remember going to one White House meeting, but again, that was in EPW Committee and not in the Energy Committee, so I wasn't directly involved in it.

**BW:** In some very interesting readings as I was preparing for this interview, with the energy bills from '91 and '92, there was first the Johnston-Wallop Bill, which did not pass as I recall, and then the next year you came back with another energy bill which Christopher Dodd called one of the major legislative achievements in the 102nd Congress. So talk a little bit about that.

**BJ:** Well actually it was not in successive years, it was in the same Congress. And it was a very broad energy bill that, and as a matter of fact we'd picked pieces of other committees' jurisdiction because they involved energy, for example, nuclear, which was, at least notionally an EPW Committee, Environment and Public Works, one of the biggest pieces was the deregulation of electricity and that was in Banking, so we had this very broad bill.

We had two particular pieces of it that were highly controversial, one was ANWR drilling, and the other was CAFE standards. ANWR was just a big fight, and we had a cloture vote on that, and as I recall we got, was it fifty-seven or fifty-eight votes. I had a vote or two that said, I'll break your tie, but I won't swell your total, and so it came very close, it was like fifty-eight or fifty-nine votes, but we didn't have enough.

And on CAFE, Dick Bryan had had a very extreme, I thought, bill, and we had had extensive hearings and just looked at it, projected, we'd be saving a couple million barrels a day if we had done our form of the bill. And early on the auto industry seemed to indicate that this was something they could live with, it was achievable, you didn't have to reduce power or the size of cars, you'd get this payoff with better technology. And of course as the Bryan bill got less and less popular, then Detroit thought, well we can build SUVs and whatever, and so they turned against that part of it.

So the bill had sort of gone down, and we reincarnated it. I think it was in the same Congress, yes, I think it kind of slept there for a month or two and we brought it back. And it was still a very big bill, it just didn't have those two pieces of it.

**BW:** That was the difference really, ANWR and CAFE.

**BJ:** Yes, we dropped them both and got all the rest.

**BW:** How invested were you personally in the ANWR side of it?

**BJ:** Oh, very much. I'd taken Energy Committee people up there I think three or four times, and was totally confident it could be done safely and environmentally friendly way, and I thought it was kind of a phony issue, and still think it's a great idea.

**BW:** But you probably took a lot of heat from the liberal environmental wing of the Democratic Party.

**BJ:** Oh yes, sure, sure.

**BW:** In view of the shortness of time here, let's, I'm going to skip ahead I guess. Although I, let's just, just tell me a little bit about the BTU tax, in the Clinton budget.

**BJ:** Well, it was not a bad idea, but certainly from - There's some things you can do with your states and some things you can't. In Louisiana you got to be right-to-life, you got to be pro-gun - I never made a speech on any of those subjects - and you got to be pro-oil and gas, and BTU tax was totally opposed by oil and gas industry, and I was at first publicly undecided and then realized I had to be, I couldn't represent my state.

**BW:** Considering the energy bills and then something like the BTU tax, was Mitchell a major player in these things, or was he not?

**BJ:** I don't remember him being a major player on BTU. I'm sure he had been to some extent. I don't think it came up for a vote in the Senate, as I recall. And as a matter, that's one reason so many of the Blue Dogs like Billy Tauzin from, who was a Democrat from Louisiana, and they walked the plank and voted for the BTU tax, and then it didn't come up in the Senate

and that's when he, at least ostensibly, that was the reason he switched over to the Republican Party.

**BW:** I asked you about foreseeing the Reagan revolution in '80, what about the revolution in '94, with the Republicans Gingrich and crowd coming in, did you all foresee that?

**BJ:** We were very hopeful, and Mitchell worked very hard on that and did an excellent job, I mean he really, I think that had a lot to do with him being elected majority leader, because he made so many good friends out there and was so effective as a leader of the party.

**BW:** But what I'm talking about is a Republican revolution in 1994, when they came in, took over the House and -

**BJ:** Oh, I was thinking, excuse me, I was thinking of '86, yes. Oh, in '94, that was pretty foreseeable. It was not quite as much of a surprise, particularly in states like mine, I mean the South had begun to really become very Republicanized.

**BW:** Do you think it had anything to do with George Mitchell decided to resign from the Senate?

**BJ:** I hadn't, well he decided to resign before that election.

**BW:** Yes.

**BJ:** I was not, would not be aware of that, I mean know what went on in his mind, I have no idea.

**BW:** What influence did it have on your own decision to leave, if any?

**BJ:** Well, we had lost the majority at that time, and that is one factor. But really, senators have to decide at a certain point whether they're going to stay for the duration, *à la* Bob Byrd, Danny Inouye, or Fritz Hollings, et cetera, and go for as long as they're able, or whether they want to get out and start a new career. And that was the principal thing with me, that I thought it was time to get out while I still had a lot of juice and have another career. I'd been in the Senate for twenty-four years, I'd been in public office for thirty-two years, and that was the main motivating force, and that was the right decision for me. But having lost the majority was clearly an additional factor, because when you're committee chairman, it's a lot different than when you're ranking minority member, and particularly when you have a committee chairman who's not interested in running his committee in a bipartisan way.

**BW:** In your judgment, when was the best time to have been in the Senate?

**BJ:** Well in my case, I enjoyed very much legislating. Various senators are, some like to make speeches and like to be in the public spotlight, and I can name a lot of those now that you

see getting a lot of that coverage, and I was not immune from wanting to do that, but what I really liked to do was legislate. So my years as chairman of the Energy Committee, and at the same time being chairman of Energy and Water, were certainly very good.

Now, the early years, I enjoyed the whole time but for different reasons. I was younger, less influential, in the early years we took nice trips, we had great friends, it was a very pleasant experience the whole time.

**BW:** Last question, how do you think George Mitchell ought to be remembered?

**BJ:** Well, I think he has really achieved statesman status, which is a term liberally thrown around but achieved by very few. And he clearly did that, and his post-Senate career has been a continuation of that. And I think he is thought of in those almost reverential terms by those of us who knew him, reverential not in the sense of being above everybody in terms of personal relationships, but in terms of skill, ability, moral clarity, et cetera, et cetera, and I think he achieved that, and I'm a great admirer and friend.

**BW:** Great, thank you very much, Senator.

**BJ:** You bet.

End of Interview