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### Interview with Brett O'Brien by Diane Dewhirst

Brett O'Brien

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

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**Brett O'Brien**

*(Interviewer: Diane Dewhirst)*

**GMOH# 183**

November 24, 2009

**Diane Dewhirst:** This is Diane Dewhirst, I'm here with Brett O'Brien for the George Mitchell Oral History Project for Bowdoin College. We are in downtown Washington, [D.C.], on Tuesday, November 24, 2009, at twelve-one-ish, something like that. Brett, I'm going to ask you to talk about yourself, your date and place of birth, your parents' names, and if they need to be spelled, where they're from, a little bit about your education and interests, and how you got to Washington.

**Brett O'Brien:** My name is Brett O'Brien, B-R-E-T-T, O-apostrophe-B-R-I-E-N, was born on January 27th, 1963 in Inglewood, California, a suburban area of Los Angeles. My father is William O'Brien, my mother is Rosalie O'Brien, R-O-S-A-L-I-E. He grew up in parts of Los Angeles, Santa Monica more than others, my mother grew up in San Diego. I was born in Los Angeles and about six months after that moved down to San Diego where I grew up for most of my youth, and then went on to, in 1981 went to Harvard University as an undergraduate, I graduated in 1985, lived in Egypt after that, working at the American University in Cairo for a year, did a master's program at the London School of Economics after that, which is a one-year master's program, and then came to Washington to get more involved in international relations work, starting at the Congressional Research Service on a short-term internship in their foreign affairs and national defense division.

**DD:** What about your interests as a youth that may have foreshadowed or not your illustrious career?

**BB:** Well, I guess I would say two things. Number one, we lived in San Diego, at the confluence of the U.S.-Mexico border. It was very, kind of a diverse ethnic community, Latino community, Asian Americans and others, who were in San Diego either because they'd come from Mexico or were there as part of their Navy service, or other means. I think that was one interest that I had, we spent a lot of time in Mexico, across the border, because my grandfather and my father worked down there on occasion.

And then I think the other reason why I've been interested in international relations was due to my grandfather directly. He would often tell stories and had his own experiences of traveling around the world, and from a relatively young age, I think probably when I was about ten or eleven, he started taking his grandchildren on trips too. First just short fishing trips around San Diego or into Mexico, and then later on bigger, more adventurous trips, but he also went all around the world on various trips and safaris and would come back with stories, pictures and

artifacts from many places around the world that I never even dreamed of seeing, but I dreamed about, and I think those were probably the original kind of inspirations for me.

**DD:** Can you talk a little bit about your first job in Washington, and how and when that led to other jobs and to working for Senator Mitchell?

**BB:** Well, like I said, when I first came to Washington, had a three-month internship at the Library of Congress working in the Congressional Research Service, and specifically in the foreign affairs and national defense division, doing basically research on questions that members of Congress and their staff would pose to the Congressional Research Service. I didn't realize it at the time, or I didn't realize it when I first took the position, that the Congressional Research Service was revered by most congressional offices because we were able to tackle problems, answer questions in record time, get information to staff who needed it for advising their member of Congress on votes or meetings, what have you, and that allowed us to, it gave me a good foundation for making a step to an actual congressional office when that internship ended.

[I] worked for a congressman from San Diego after that, Jim Bates, a Democrat from San Diego, for about a year-and-a-half after that, as a legislative assistant doing foreign affairs, defense, and a whole range of other issues. It allowed me to go from sort of a research role to [working on] legislative and political processes more directly. When I came to Washington I thought I'd be more a think tank or academic type, but between the Congressional Research Service and then these first steps into Congress, it really piqued my interest and gave me an opportunity that I didn't think I would have [elsewhere].

So I worked there for about a year-and-a-half, and then in the spring of '87 [*sic*: '89] was looking for a new position and learned of an opportunity at the Senate Democratic Policy Committee as a researcher and writer, but also as an assistant to the Senate majority leader's legislative aides. And that was Senator Mitchell; he had just taken the position, [after having] won the role as Senate majority leader.

**DD:** That must have been in '89, then.

**BB:** 'Eighty-nine, that's right, '87 to '89 I worked for Bates, yes, and it was in '89, yes, sorry. [ ] He was trying to [change] the Democratic Policy Committee, which had in the past been, as I understood it, sort of an adjunct to Senator Byrd who had then been majority leader, as an adjunct to his staff. Because Senator Mitchell won the majority leader position against two much more experienced, seasoned members of the Senate, [he] wanted to do more outreach to members of the Democratic Caucus in order to demonstrate that he was there to serve them, and really transformed, as I remember it, transformed the Democratic Policy Committee from an adjunct of his staff to a service organization. And that's why someone like myself was appealing to them, because I had both research and writing experience at the Congressional Research Service, and legislative experience in foreign policy and defense issues having worked for this member of Congress. So to fit the role of both the researcher and writer for the Democratic Policy Committee, putting out research and documents to Democratic Senate offices, and serving

as an assistant to his three legislative aides, I was a good fit for that position. That's how I ended up where I did.

**DD:** Do you remember, or what were the circumstances in first meeting Senator Mitchell and what your impressions were?

**BB:** Well the way the hiring worked at the Democratic Policy Committee, I never interviewed with him to take the position, I was interviewed by the staff director of the committee at the time, Tom – the guy with the moustache.

**DD:** Sliter.

**BB:** Tom Sliter. So I was interviewed by him, and I think I had a cursory meeting with Senator Daschle, who had been appointed by Senator Mitchell to be the co-chair of the Democratic Policy Committee. So I began the job there having had those interviews, but never meeting Senator Mitchell. And I think it was through the course of my work with his legislative aides at the time, Sarah Sewall, Scott Harris, Ed King, that in supporting them, and I must have been in the course of trucking something over to the Capitol Building from the Hart Building, or standing in for one of them when they weren't available to staff a meeting or to get something to Senator Mitchell on the Senate floor, that I met him.

And it obviously was a, I don't remember the exact moment but I do remember it being somewhat an intimidating experience, because I had never met this person who I allegedly worked for, and had never really had any interaction. He didn't know who I was, I didn't think, and so I do remember being nervous. But through the course of initial meetings, introductions, and then later on when first Scott left the office and I took over his portfolio of defense issues, and then Sarah left and I took over some of her portfolio, mostly Middle East issues, that I got to develop a more personal, direct and longer term relationship with the Senator.

**DD:** While the Senator was majority leader up until when he left at the end of '94, there were some big ticket items on the foreign policy front, even though I think most folks remember the health care, the deficit reduction, all of which had consequences for other parts of the budget and therefore other parts of the issue spectrum, but there was certainly the first war in Iraq under Bush One, there was the War Powers Act, and there was continuously, and something that affected him at home, and that was the base closure process. Can you address any or all of those, and then we'll talk more specifically about the base closure process.

**BB:** Yes, just thinking through this and rewinding the tape, there are a few other things that come to mind as well. I think, like I said, my first direct contact with him in a sustained manner was working on the defense issues. And one of the beauties of the way he structured the office was, and in some ways different than other offices that I worked in, was that while we were working out of the Democratic Policy Committee staffing him on the spectrum of national policy issues, we were also responsible for handling these issues as they [related to] the state of Maine.

And one thing just in general that was great about that, is that while much of our day-to-day experiences were spent dealing with [and] negotiating [ ] national issues, like [ ] the Defense Authorization Bill, making sure that his interests and the committee's interests in the process was moving smoothly, we were always tied to real people in Maine and what their needs were, what their concerns were, and it really gave, I found, a really strong and constructive grounding in why we were doing all this stuff. In the course of working with him on some of these issues, I really saw [ ] what he believed because he would be the toughest and [certainly] most astute [ ] negotiator on these national issues, but he would tie them right back to the folks [whom] he was working for in Maine.

And I saw that in many respect with, for example, working on the Navy's destroyer program and the work that he did, that we did, on behalf of Bath Iron Works, which at that time had survived as one of the two remaining private sector shipyards in the country. And the way in which the Navy and the Department of Defense, and whichever president was in power at the time, would view the budget, because the destroyers were such a big part of the Navy's budget, these national policy decisions on budget and programs would have a big effect on how Bath Iron Works would fare. And so that was one.

**DD:** Talk to me a little bit about Bath and the competition and what, go through that a little bit.

**BB:** Yes, well the way the system worked was that two shipyards, each year the Navy would receive a certain amount of money to buy X number of ships. Some years it would be five, others it would be four, and increasingly as the years went on it was down to three, and each year these two shipyards would have to prepare proposals to bid on this number of ships, and the Navy would decide [ ] which shipyard got more or less based on the competition that year. And so it was always, in a duopoly like that, very intense competition, very emotional at times because the livelihood of not only the shipyard company but also its workers depended on the number of ships that they had. Their number of employees would fluctuate significantly depending on what they got each year. And so every cycle, every annual budget cycle was a very intense process of talking with the shipyard workers, their management, their representatives down in Washington, working their interests through the Senate Armed Services Committee, the Senate Appropriations Committee, and the conference.

And if you want an anecdote of how personally the Senator felt this, I remember distinctly, it must have been in '92, it had to have been in '92, in the summer of '92, I think it was that year the Senate Armed Services Committee had agreed to put in five destroyers, and there was a good likelihood that Bath would get three of those destroyers.

**DD:** What was the other shipyard?

**BB:** It was in Mississippi, Tuscaloosa [*sic*: Pascagoula] I think, Ingalls Shipyard. And [in 1992] things were looking good [for Bath Iron Works] in the authorization process, but there was an impending conference [with] the House on the number of ships, and I think they were going

to authorize [p/o] three ships that year, and the Senate side was going to authorize four. And it really came to a point where during the August recess in 1992, the staffs of the Senate and House committees were going to [convene] to work out what was going to happen [ ].

We were getting word at the staff level that the Senate was going to agree to the House's [ ] smaller number of ships, and I knew that that would have significant implications for Bath Iron Works. It just so happened that Senator Mitchell was at the Democratic Convention at the time, and it was imperative in my view that he talk to Senator Kennedy, who was the chairman of the Sea Power Subcommittee on the Armed Services Committee. I brought this to the attention of our chief of staff and he said, "Well, let's see what we can do." And within a couple hours, the phone rang at my desk, it was Senator Mitchell, he said, "I'm here on the floor of the Democratic Convention, tell me what I need to tell Senator Kennedy and I will go over and tell him right now."

And so in the midst of the hoopla over a new presidential candidate named Bill Clinton, Senator Mitchell took time out of his responsibilities (he was probably the co-chair of the convention) to [ ] track down Senator Kennedy on the convention floor and personally appeal to him to ensure that this conference, [which] was taking place among staff in August, was going to have the appropriate outcome for Bath Iron Works. [ ] It was telling to me that, while I was trying to deal with this at a level that couldn't get any farther, he was willing to take the time out of what must have been a million responsibilities on a single day during the convention to make this work. And you know, it did, the outcome was to our benefit.

Before we get to the Portsmouth stuff, the other thing that I think was telling for me was the work that we did on Lebanon. [ ] It was an issue that I inherited from Sarah [Sewall] when she left, but obviously was one that was of deep personal interest to the Senator and something that he had worked on for many years, and as a result of that, [p/o] when I took over the Middle East portfolio, I [suddenly] became familiar with many people [ ]: the Lebanese ambassador in Washington, the representatives of the American University in Beirut, Lebanon American University, all of these folks who had communicated with Senator Mitchell over many years in trying to sustain an American style education in Lebanon for the Lebanese people.

[p/o] There were two things that we worked on. One was ensuring that foreign assistance money from the State Department made its way to these educational institutions on an annual basis, which is something that the State Department did globally but it was always a challenge to make sure that adequate funding was getting to this one set of universities and colleges in Lebanon, which is something that he focused on very much.

But the other piece of it was the ban on travel to Lebanon that had been established in the mid-'80s after the civil war really began raging and the Marine barracks were bombed, something that over time was somewhat antiquated because the threat level had declined quite a bit. [ ] It [also had become] detrimental to our ability to promote people-to-people exchanges, democracy, all of the values that we wanted to promote in that region. So he took it on himself to make a very strong appeal to the new Clinton administration on this subject, and I was doing the staff

work. [ ] We were doing quite a bit [ ] with the State Department and with the relevant committees to get a reconsideration of this very Draconian [ ] ban on travel to Lebanon by U.S. citizens, for whatever reason, business, pleasure, tourism, family ties, whatever, it was a very Draconian travel ban.

After struggling a bit with the new State Department under Secretary Christopher and reporting this to Senator Mitchell, he said, "Let's go see Secretary Christopher." And we went down, I think it was in March of, it would have been in March of '93 I think. I had prepared [ ] staff materials for him, but he went well beyond that in talking to Secretary Christopher in a very small setting, I think probably four or five of us in the room total, explaining on a very personal level to Secretary Christopher his own heritage, his own family's history in Lebanon, the opportunity that he had in coming to the United States to do good, and his desire, along with that of [ ] many Lebanese Americans, to give back to Lebanon and to promote the kind of education and economic opportunities that he had been given.

So that's why foreign assistance to Lebanon was important, business ties with Lebanon were important, education in Lebanon was important, and the ability to communicate effectively between the United States and Lebanon was important. And that's really why, in the absence of a serious threat level, [p/o] [there was] a good reason [ ] for a review of the ban, and hopefully with the review, [p/o] [an opportunity] to lift the ban, or modify the ban in a way that would allow at least educators to go over there, business people to go over there, in order to promote better bilateral relations, better commerce, and more opportunities for folks on both sides of the relationship.

At the end of the meeting Christopher agreed to undertake a review. [ ] It took a while, but in the end – and I think this may have been after Senator Mitchell left the Senate, might have been as late as '95 – they did lift the ban. But I think it really was that first meeting where he had a chance to talk with Secretary Christopher in a very personal way that was the beginning of a process that resulted in a good outcome.

**DD:** Speaking of emotional things, which I'm sure others have spoken about as well, can you address the base closure process in general, and then what your role in the Mitchell office was specifically with regard to Portsmouth. Did you not do Brunswick?

**BB:** No, and Brunswick.

**DD:** And Brunswick, right, both Brunswick and Portsmouth, and also how that might have affected the work that the delegation did together. So a little bit of process first, then specifics, and then working with the other -

**BB:** I'm trying to remember the detail. Well, I started in '89 when they were going through the first, I think 1990 was the first base closure round, and at that time Scott Harris, who was handling defense issues, was working on protecting Loring Air Force Base, and I didn't have too much of a window into that so I won't speak to that too much. But in the course of the 1990

base closure process, it was determined by the Defense Department and the Base Closure Commission that Loring should be closed.

This is a process that was established by Congress, I think in '85, to address the excess capacity at military bases around the country. As the Soviet Union collapsed in the late '80s, there became a stronger rationale for closing no longer needed military bases and converting some of those resources to other issues. And so a commission was established to take this away from Congress, which it was concluded Congress would not be able to make the best decisions on which bases should be closed or kept open; but also taken away from the executive branch, which in some cases would not necessarily be seen as a fair arbiter of the issue either.

So in that context, I think it was a big surprise when it was determined that Loring Air Force Base should be closed. People didn't understand the process very well, and people didn't understand by what criteria this commission would be reviewing them. And it was a work in progress, so it was something that was opaque but would over time become more transparent. The loss of Loring was traumatic, and folks in Aroostook County weren't sure what the future would hold for them. Thankfully, through the efforts of Senator Mitchell and others, they were able to establish a commercial hub there with some private companies, and with the agreement by a U.S. federal agency that I don't recall now, it might have been the I.N.S. with a passport processing center, or something like that, to establish an anchor facility at Loring and to enable the community to have sustained job opportunities, economic development in an area that didn't have much otherwise.

But still, that really brought focus to the subsequent rounds of base closures, and one such opportunity came around in 1992 when the next base closure round was announced. Two remaining, significant sized bases in Maine were Brunswick Naval Air Station with about, if I remember correctly, fifteen hundred to twenty-five hundred employees and military personnel, and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, which had about six thousand personnel, most of them civilian engineers and production workers. So there was a very keen focus on the base closing process come '92, having endured the 1990 base closure process, and Senator Mitchell was very, very focused on ensuring that, in particular, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard was not put in jeopardy.

He was concerned about the other bases as well, but just having seen how the '89 process went, '89-'90 process went, and looking at the criteria that had been evaluated, had been used in '89 and '90 to evaluate all of the bases at that time, we could see that Portsmouth was the most likely Maine facility that would be in jeopardy. And for all of the Maine facilities, it would have the hugest consequences given the number of people who worked there, and given the large percentage of permanent Maine residents who worked there, because it was a shipyard, as opposed to Brunswick which had about a fifty-fifty split of permanent residents who worked at the base and military personnel who would be rotated in and out on a regular basis.

**DD:** And didn't that have a specific mission, that we thought that was less vulnerable?

**BB:** Brunswick did, yes, exactly, it had responsibility for patrolling [ ] the North Atlantic, and

there was not another base of that type in the northeast.

**DD:** That could pick that up.

**BB:** Exactly, so we thought for the most part Brunswick would be relatively okay, although we needed to monitor it closely and advocate for it at the appropriate times. But Portsmouth was clearly in jeopardy. In the previous round, if I'm not mistaken, one or two other shipyards were closed and -

**DD:** Charleston?

**BB:** No, Charleston we went up against in '92, and Long Beach was also, I think Long Beach was closed in '90, and that was the threat because by doing that analysis, the Navy's analysis, the Base Closure Commission's analysis, it clearly showed that Portsmouth could be the next most vulnerable facility. And so Senator Mitchell took it upon himself and tasked me to develop the strongest argument, using the criteria that had been used in these previous rounds, to make the case for Portsmouth. And so I went about doing that, gathering information and doing the research and putting together a case.

I think two things were important in the course of doing that, the first being something that had begun prior to my joining the office, I think probably back in as early as '85, '86, '87. Senator Mitchell, working with the Navy, secured funding for a new dry dock at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, a dry dock that would enable it to modernize the most advanced class of nuclear submarines at the time, the Los Angeles—or 688—class of submarines.

**DD:** Wow, your memory is very impressive.

**BB:** Oh, I'm trying, I'm trying. Some of these are seared in the memory. So the new dry dock was the addition to Portsmouth Naval Shipyard that really made it relevant for the Navy of the 21st century, because it could do all of the repair work to the largest class of submarines of its kind. They were coming in to dry dock every few years, they would be in dry dock for over a year each, it was a steady flow of work, it was a needed requirement of the Navy, and that was a specialization that Portsmouth had developed over the years, and it was a specialization that was imperative to uphold in order to be viable in an era of declining defense budgets and a reduction of bases. So the new dry dock put it on the map in terms of viability and relevance for the future.

The other thing that was significant as a foundation for our efforts was his determination to make whatever we did an effort that involved the community, the work force, the Naval presence in Portsmouth, and [the] congressional delegation, and not only the Maine congressional delegation but the New Hampshire delegation as well. So we went to work to both do the substantive research, but also develop the network that enabled us to make a very strong case in the '92 base closure round for sustaining Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.

When the Defense Department made its initial recommendations which [bases] were to go to this

commission to be evaluated, the shipyard that was identified for closure was Charleston. [p/o] Portsmouth was the second most vulnerable facility according the Navy's criteria, and so we were the most likely target for Charleston to go after, to basically say to the commission, 'you should close Portsmouth rather than close Charleston'. And their arguments were [that], just as we were specialists, they were generalists, and just as we had certain capabilities with 688-class submarines, other shipyards had some of that capability as well, and most significantly Norfolk Naval Shipyard.

So what began was a significant struggle to advocate to each and every one of the commissioners on the Base Closure Commission why Portsmouth should remain open. And he made it [ ] a personal cause to meet with each and every one of the commissioners to make the case, based on the numbers that we had developed that showed that to lose Portsmouth would be to lose a capability that would be hard to replicate in other parts of the Navy. Norfolk at that time was not as capable of doing this type of work. They also repaired carriers and destroyers and other types of equipment, [and] they had a work load that was full, [ ] so we made the case both on the needs of the Navy, the capabilities of the work force, and the efficiency of doing it at a place like Portsmouth which had developed this expertise over time.

We spent many hours with the workers and their union representatives, the likes of Arnie Paul and Terry Eleftherion – man, those names are coming back. He was a partner to them, a partner to the management of the shipyard, the civilian management of the shipyard, and also to the military leadership there. Whether they came to Washington or he went to Maine, it was a frequent subject of conversation and an excessive part of my work [ ] over the course of six months to a year working on that project. But also, when we did this we did almost always either bring in the staff of the other members of the delegation, or the members of the delegation themselves. There's one anecdote here that -

**DD:** He and Cohen tag-teamed a lot.

**BB:** Yes, he and Senator Cohen did quite a bit of work tag-teaming [ ], both on this and on the Bath Iron Works issues, because [while] Senator Mitchell had the role of majority leader and the influence that that allowed, Senator Cohen was on the Senate Armed Services Committee.

**DD:** Long-serving.

**BB:** Yes, long time member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, on the Sea Power Subcommittee, and was very focused on these issues as well. So the two of them, often in unison, sometimes sort of as a tag-team, would focus on the various key players in the base closure process to make the case, either separately but in collaboration, or physically together.

**DD:** And was that Snowe's district?

**BB:** It was, no, Snowe had the northern district -

**DD:** So she had Loring.

**BB:** She had Loring. It was Tom Andrews, and then the other Tom, Tom Allen. But we brought in Judd Gregg and -

**DD:** Rudman, was he still there?

**BB:** Rudman left, he was gone, I think he left in '88.

**DD:** No, no, no, because he was on Iran-Contra.

**BB:** That's right, yeah, because this was '92, he must have left in '90?

**DD:** Okay, maybe he left in '90.

**BB:** I think he left in '90, because it was Gregg and -

**DD:** Whoever that other senator is.

**BB:** Yes, and then Dick Swett at the time was a congressman, and the other Republican senator from New Hampshire whose name escapes me. But it really became a delegation-wide effort, and lots of meetings, lots of research. And I'll just tell this one anecdote that I think epitomized all of this.

Part of the process was an inspection of the shipyard by the Base Closure Commission, or representatives of the commission, and this took place in the summer of '92, if I'm not mistaken, where a group of, I think, three or four of the commissioners went up. And Senator Mitchell thought that it was critical that the congressional delegation join them for this visit, so they all did, all eight of them, accompanied the members of the commission through the base visit. And it just so happened that that was on a Saturday morning, and that Saturday afternoon the commission was going to have its regional hearing, where it heard comments from the public and members of Congress in a public [hearing] in Boston.

So immediately after the shipyard visit, the delegation got in a bus – actually there were several buses, the delegation was in one bus, and representatives of the shipyard, employees, the unions and others, got in [the other buses], and we made our way down to Boston for this hearing. Prior to that, there was going to be an opportunity for the congressional delegation to speak for I think fifteen to twenty minutes out of an hour's long period that would be focused strictly on Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. And through the course of the discussion Senator Mitchell initially said, well let's see if we can break this up where each of the senators and each of the representatives could speak for a few minutes on one dimension of our argument. And when we consulted on that it was concluded that rather than break it up into lots of different pieces, the delegation thought that it would be best represented by one person, and that [Senator Mitchell should] be that person to speak on behalf of the entire delegation during the period that the

delegation had for speaking on this.

I was tasked with writing the statement that he was going to deliver, and pulling together all the resources that I had at my disposal and the arguments that we had been using over the months, to put together this speech. And then [ ], on that bus ride, he took the speech, reworked parts of it, really brought what I had put together into a much more dynamic arrangement, and then he told me to go seat by seat through the bus and consult with every [ ] other member of the delegation on this three-hour bus ride from Portsmouth to Boston, where he requested—and took—the perspective and insights and input from the other members of the delegation. Which I thought was both brilliant in terms of substance, because he was able to take what I had put together and make it much more strong, but [it] also [gave] everyone an investment in the process, which they certainly had but he really wanted to make sure that everybody knew that when he spoke, he was speaking on behalf of the delegation, not just as the person that they had chosen to speak his views.

And I thought that was a significant moment of keeping the team together at probably the most critical and perilous political moment, making the public statement on behalf of your community in front of this commission that was going to decide the fate of six thousand employees. He really brought them in and made a very compelling argument at the commission hearing, and it ended up being successful.

One other point, just as the epilogue of the base closure story, was two years later, when it was announced in 1994 that there would be another base closure round in 1995. And this was still at a period when [ ] new political appointees were coming into the -

**DD:** From a Democratic administration.

**BB:** Yes, the new Clinton administration. And so I remember vividly, in early '94, and I actually think it was after he announced that he was retiring -

**DD:** He announced in March of '94.

**BB:** In March of '94, that we [ ] learned that Deputy Secretary of the Navy Richard Danzig was going to be [ ] the manager of the base closure process for the Navy. So it must have been within just a few weeks of Danzig taking office that we requested a meeting with him, and had done a full analysis after the fact of the '92 process, [p/o]. I think Danzig thought that it was basically a courtesy call, and Senator Mitchell bombarded him with charts and graphs and studies of Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. Danzig was both [ ] a bit taken aback, but also very impressed that we were a year-and-a-half ahead of time, and [despite] looking forward to retirement, [Senator Mitchell was] focused on this and reaching out to him at our earliest opportunity to defend the base, even though we had no idea how it was going to play out later on.

**DD:** Through all these different avenues and issue areas, can you talk a little bit about what

you witnessed as Senator Mitchell's decision making process? What would happen if someone disagreed with him, perhaps even you in giving advice, and also his relationship with his colleagues?

**BB:** Well I think the most striking thing for me, and one of the reasons why it was fun to be working in this office, and [what made working in this] job different than many offices, is that Senator Mitchell put a lot of trust in his staff. I think he made sure he surrounded himself with very good staff, smart staff, and diplomatic staff in the broadest sense of the term. And he relied on them [ ] tremendously—for representing him, advising him, and giving him good advice on a whole range of issues. And I think that was the thing for me, that he was very demanding, but he [ ] also [ ] put virtually all of his trust into his staff. And that was very empowering, it made you work hard, made you really bust your butt to get things right. But you knew if you did that, then you would have his confidence going into any negotiation or issue that was coming up.

And so I found that was very important, because when I went to represent something to another office, I felt that he was going to back me up. And many times, if we did disagree with other offices, whether it be on how many destroyers to have in a budget a particular year, or whether or not the time was right to modify the ban on travel to Lebanon, that the case that I was making would be made again by him, at a higher level with a particular senator. On some of these issues [ ], while he was sitting in the seat of most significance in the Senate, often relied on those who could bring more influence to bear on an issue, or more validation on an issue, and that's why I think in the base closure process, bringing the whole delegation along was significant. [ ] Working with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, [which was led by] Senator Pell at the time, on some of the issues relating to the Middle East, Lebanon and the first Iraq War [p/o], he really brought people around to his view, or allied himself with people who shared his view in order to get something done.

The other thing that I found very useful, and I continue to believe this, is that oftentimes when – well I remember distinctly a meeting, but I don't remember what the issue was at the time – [ ] there was an opportunity to take a fairly political line on an issue that, from a political standpoint, would disadvantage the other party or others in the Senate, and would be to our short term benefit. I know on one occasion but probably more because it's definitely ingrained in my memory, he said, "Look, when we work on these things, the way this is going to work is that the best policy is going to make for the best politics, and so let's get the policy right, and if we can get the policy right, then the politics will take care of themselves. And we don't have to play games or seek a political advantage, because that will come to us as a result of doing the right thing."

And that's something that I carried with me, because despite the political odds on various issues that I've worked on since then, I've always found, or at least I've always felt that if you've got the substantive arguments behind you, you should be able to prevail. And I think he showed that with a number of things that he worked on, and that I was able to work on with him. It's something that I think drove him in many ways, in the way he argued some of the bigger issues on the Senate floor, budget, health care and those types of things.

**DD:** I heard it many times. Is there anything, any story you'd like to tell, any last impressions, any other thoughts that maybe we've missed in this hour that we've been talking?

**BB:** I guess the one thing I'd say is after he announced he was leaving the Senate, I began, as we all did, [ ] looking for new jobs. And through the course of the following two months I was able to learn that Dick Gephardt, who was the House majority leader, was looking for someone to do foreign policy and defense issues for him, so I thought what a great stepping stone to go from working in the Senate for Senator Mitchell to going over to the House side and getting experience over there on the same type of thing, and in the case of the Gephardt office, being a lead foreign policy and defense person.

I had a couple of initial interviews, and it was getting close to the point where it was looking like this might be a real opportunity, and so I felt [ ] it would be useful for Senator Mitchell to talk to Congressman Gephardt about me and the work that I had done. And so I remember, we were in the Senate subway, and we were coming back from a meeting, I don't know why we were coming back from somewhere because he rarely left the Capitol Building. We were coming back from a meeting or a hearing or something like that, and we were in the subway and I explained to him that this [was] an opportunity I was looking at, it looked like it might be a possibility, and would he be willing to give a call to Dick Gephardt before my interview with him. And he turned to me and he said, "No," he said, "I'm going to call him before your interview *and* after your interview, and let's see what we can do to make this happen."

And so I really appreciated that comment and, again—to the end—his [ ] faith in his staff and his willingness to help, and in the end his determination to make sure that folks found a good place to go after his tenure. That was a lasting memory.

**DD:** Thank you, Brett, I appreciate your time, and I'm sure Bowdoin does as well.

End of Interview