

Bowdoin College

Bowdoin Digital Commons

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

Special Collections and Archives

5-26-2009

Interview with Regina Sullivan by Brien Williams

Regina Sullivan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/mitchelloralhistory>



Part of the [Law and Politics Commons](#), [Oral History Commons](#), [Political History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sullivan, Regina, "Interview with Regina Sullivan by Brien Williams" (2009). *George J. Mitchell Oral History Project*. 18.

<https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/mitchelloralhistory/18>

This Interview is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Collections and Archives at Bowdoin Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in George J. Mitchell Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of Bowdoin Digital Commons. For more information, please contact mdoyle@bowdoin.edu.

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College Library, 3000 College Sta., Brunswick, Maine 04011

© Bowdoin College

Regina Sullivan
(Interviewer: *Brien Williams*)

GMOH# 103
May 26, 2009

Brien Williams: This is an oral history interview with Regina Sullivan for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College in Maine. We're in Regina's Washington offices of R. Sullivan & Associates, her government relations firm. Today is Tuesday, May 26, 2009, and I am Brien Williams. Regina, let's start with you giving me the date and place of your birth?

Regina Sullivan: January 16, 1957, I was born in the Bronx, New York.

BW: And your parents' names?

RS: Richard J. and Julia Sullivan.

BW: And what were their professions, or what did they do?

RS: My father was chief counsel to the House Public Works and Transportation Committee for thirty-six years, and my mother was a homemaker mother and ran a nonprofit organization she started called Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Foundation.

BW: Good. So did you spend much of your life in the Bronx?

RS: No, we moved to Washington when I was eight months old, but we went back and forth to New York until I was eleven.

BW: So where did you go to school and then to college and so forth?

RS: I went to Marymount grade school here in Arlington, Virginia, and then to Bishop Dennis J. O'Connell High School, and then I went to Regis University in Denver, Colorado.

BW: And got a degree in?

RS: Economics, bachelor of science in economics.

BW: And at that point you saw your career path leading where?

RS: I was going to get my masters in economics, because I thought about teaching.

BW: But there must have been something that changed.

RS: Came back home to Washington and had no money, starving college graduate, I was home with my parents and decided I wanted to go back to Colorado, and my father helped me get a position temporarily working for Senator Muskie. I answered the phones and did filing, and I worked for Senator Muskie, went back to Colorado, ran a city council race, decided I didn't want to stay in Denver, and came back and was fortunate that Senator Muskie's chief of staff, Leon Billings, had an opening, essentially leg correspondent, legislative correspondent and receptionist, and I did that for Senator Muskie until Senator Mitchell was appointed.

BW: So tell me about that, your first tour with Senator Muskie. Was that for the committee, a committee or was that for him?

RS: No, I worked on the personal staff and I filed. This was back in the days when there'd be lots of paper, a lot more than we do now, so I did a lot of filing, and I answered the phones, I helped back up the receptionist. I did pretty much any grunt work that they needed, which I was happy to do.

BW: And what motivated your return to Colorado again?

RS: I didn't want to stay in Washington. I had grown up here, and I decided I wanted to go back to Denver – I had really enjoyed living there – and try and find a career there. I got back to Denver and two weeks later a friend of mine who was a state senator introduced me to a gentleman who wanted to run for city council, I'd been very active in politics in Denver during college, and I ended up helping run his race. He won, but I decided that I didn't want to work in the city council in Denver. So I came back, with no job, again, and went to see Leon Billings, who'd been very helpful to me when I had worked there for the four months, and Leon had an opening and so I was fortunate enough to get a position.

BW: Tell me just a little bit about your political activity while in college, what was that about?

RS: I had a good friend who was a professor, a communications professor, Dennis Gallagher, and we were involved in his campaign, he was from Denver, local state senator, and helping out in the legislature. And then I was fortunate my senior year to work for then-mayor Bill [William H.] McNichols in his office. I worked and went to school, and worked on a project dealing with summer youth unemployment issues. Denver had a very significant problem with a lot of young people not having positions during the summer, so I did a lot of research for him on, and helped put together a program to address that. So I was very active politically locally, too, with our city council. And we'd had a gentleman who'd been there a long time, and who I was never very fond of, and had helped, just campaign work, the standard leafleting and working precincts, and all that's before all the high tech stuff, and so got to know the district well and that's why when I went back I was able to help.

BW: And did you, in your political activities, trend Democrat or trend Republican?

RS: Oh, I'm a Democrat. Hard core.

BW: And growing up, with your father, with his position on Capitol Hill, did you have much contact with Capitol Hill as a kid or a young person?

RS: I went to work as an intern on the House Banking Committee when I was seventeen, for two summers. I was fortunate to work on the committee. And I worked also for Congressman Lud Ashley from Ohio, who was on the Banking Committee, so I spent four summers on the House side, working there. It was a good time to work there, it was during Watergate hearings and we were next door to them so it was really fortunate, the Banking Committee wasn't as active, but it was certainly a fun place to be. And I loved it, I grew up around it, so always liked it.

BW: So what are some of your recollections from that first time in Muskie's office, what did it feel like, what was the ambiance of the office and so forth?

RS: Well Senator Muskie at that point in his career was chairman of the Budget Committee, chairman of the Environmental Pollution Subcommittee, so he was a significant leader in the Senate, had run for president, clearly. And for somebody who was twenty-one years old, it was a pretty heady environment. I tried to be enthusiastic, but also it was a pretty serious office, and he was a pretty serious gentleman, but such an incredible legislator. It was a real privilege to get to work for him.

BW: And Leon Billings was working there at the time.

RS: Yes, he was our chief of staff.

BW: So you came back then to the office and started out again as a legislative correspondent, is that when you returned?

RS: Right, we wrote the mail, and I also answered the phones, kind of split your time. That's back in the days obviously where we answered every [] single letter that came in the office, and since he had run for nationwide office, he got a lot of mail. So it was great for me, because I had to really stretch myself and get into subject areas I'd not had anything to do with.

I remember writing the mail on some of the Defense authorization [and] appropriations, issues I knew nothing about and were very complex, and it was a good experience for me because it broadened my horizon on legislative stuff. I think when I was younger I just focused on the things I liked, and he had all these significant roles, and clearly his role in the environment, too. So I got to deal a lot with the Budget Committee staff, because he was chairman at the time, so we saw them a lot, too.

It was a very active office, and Leon was, and our legislative director, too. They were good about including the front office staff, the receptionist on what was going on, which was helpful because we were the folks on the front line when people came in. It was a wonderful experience.

BW: Who would you defer to for information on, say, a defense issue that you were unfamiliar with?

RS: The legislative, of course, assistant, whoever was the LD, or leg assistant at the time, Jim Case was our leg director at the time.

BW: And your mail would be reviewed before it went out?

RS: Oh, yes.

BW: By whom?

RS: Well, let's see, we would write for, the legislative assistant would review it, Jim Case would often look at it, Leon would look at it. We had some standard letters obviously, and that was back in the days where we had robo machines [] [to] process the letters. And so what it would do is it would put the master response in, and then you could put the name and address. It was an early mail merge product. And so it would be reviewed also by the woman who was, to make sure it would work, who did that. And we reported to Leslie Finn, who was our office manager. She didn't review the mail, but she kept track of how timely we were in getting it. Each week we'd have a report on how many letters we'd gotten to respond to, and how many we'd gotten out. So it was good accountability, especially for a young person coming into a work environment.

BW: So were you aware of the senator's decision to go to the State Department, was that, it was all happening behind doors?

RS: No, no, it was, right, I was the twenty-one year old receptionist answering the phone; he didn't ask me my opinion on it – no. So no, we were not, I mean until the day it happened really, the day before it happened - We had a staff meeting and were told.

BW: So no surprise there – he left. Was there a surprise when George Mitchell was announced as his successor?

RS: Well, Gayle Cory, who is another person who spent a lot of time with the younger staff and was extremely helpful to us and a real mentor to me, she kind of let us know who was on the list. Obviously there was a lot of speculation. Senator Mitchell's name wasn't, I don't remember it being there at first. And he had come in the office about a year before because he'd been appointed to be a federal judge and we'd all met him, but I think there were other names that were, at first seemed to be more popular. And he hadn't run for office in so long, so people said the speculation was they weren't sure he'd want to do it or that kind of thing, because he had

this great secure job. So I was surprised, but I'm sure the people from Maine weren't.

BW: And what was it like when he arrived?

RS: Well, Senator Muskie left and took his top five staff people and left the rest of us, and some senior folks who had been with him, to help out Senator Mitchell. It was, I think, a learning experience, I would have to say, for everybody. Now Senator Mitchell obviously had worked in the Senate so he knew how it functioned, which I think was incredibly helpful to him given how quickly he had to start up.

He got us all together and I remember him saying, "This is new for me and new for you and this is a surprise for all of us, and I'd just like to ask you to stay with me for a certain period of time" – I can't remember how many months he said – "and I'll stay committed to you for that long and see how it works." Because I think he wanted to reassure us we weren't all going to get fired, or we weren't going to, which was really, so it made you feel like, "Okay, well he's willing to make that commitment." And most of us stayed.

So I remember it being very exciting when he first got there, because he was a very different person. Senator Muskie had been so senior, and understandably, and for me, I really didn't see him that much; sometimes I would go for a week and not see him because he'd go in his door to the office. Senator Mitchell was not just a much younger man, but also because he was brand new to the whole thing, I was much more involved in what was going on in the office. So I knew more about what he was doing; I'd heard it from the Senator as opposed to always from the staff. So for me that was a big change.

BW: I think I recall that both Gayle Cory and Leon Billings went to State, is that right?

RS: They did.

BW: So who was the sort of senior person then on the staff?

RS: Jim Case, who had been our leg director, became our chief of staff for a period of time.

BW: Short period of time?

RS: I was trying to remember the dates of this. He was there for, I'm not a hundred percent sure I'm going to get the dates right, he was there for four or five months, and then Senator Mitchell hired David Johnson. David had been a Muskie staffer, because he had worked on the Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Relations, which Senator Muskie had chaired, for a while, so he wasn't unfamiliar to us. And he had been suggested to [Senator Mitchell] as someone who would be good to help him, given that: one, David had the Senate experience; and two, we were heading into a pretty significant campaign.

BW: When George Mitchell arrived, did he bring some people with him, or he sort of, he and

his trunk arrived.

RS: No. He and his suitcases, exactly, arrived.

BW: Were there any missteps that you recall when he sort of was getting his bearings?

RS: No. Missteps? No. I think it had to be pretty overwhelming for him, too, because he hadn't run for office in so long, I think that part of it obviously was our biggest challenge. No, there were no missteps, I mean he, he came into it and, you know the famous story about him going to his first Banking Committee hearing, and they were holding a hearing on drug intervention in Florida. Anyway, I know it sounds weird in the Banking Committee, but I'm trying to remember exactly how the context was, and he, and Senator Proxmire chaired the committee, a very, to say the least, somebody who had a reputation for being a very critical person and not big with compliments, although an extraordinarily good legislator.

Senator Mitchell came in and he did his prosecutorial thing, he started questioning the witness and did a phenomenal job. Well Senator Proxmire put out a, essentially, I don't think it was a press release, but told the Maine press – I'm trying to remember how it worked – that, "This guy is really phenomenal, I was totally impressed with how he questioned the witness." He came in, he was the youngest guy and they had the chair at the end of the dais where he was kind of -

And he didn't get great committee assignments at first. That was one of the things I think he went right after, was trying to change his committee assignments, or at least make some inroads. And he did, he ended up on the Finance Committee, which is where he wanted to go.

But no, I don't remember a lot of missteps, he got right on the political thing, hired some folks to help him campaign-wise, was very, obviously, as I said, was very engaged with us, and he was focused on trying to figure out legislatively where he could get going and the issues he knew. He knew what issues he cared about and what were important to his constituents in Maine. And he went home every weekend, every single weekend, I mean as soon as he could get out of there he went home. And worked so hard.

BW: The question just escaped me so I'll move on.

RS: Okay.

BW: So what were your positions? And you were with him until '86.

RS: Right. I stayed on the front desk at first, and then I was helping - Charlie Jacobs came down from Maine – he did hire Charlie Jacobs, he had been a Muskie staffer in Maine – and Charlie was head of scheduling, and I became Charlie's deputy, his assistant with the scheduling, because the Senator went home every weekend and so we wanted to make certain he used that time as best he could.

Senator Mitchell had done scheduling a long time ago for Senator Muskie, early in his career had helped out some scheduling on campaigns, I mean way back, so he really knew what he wanted as far as the schedule went. So he was very engaged with helping Charlie, with Charlie and I putting it together, telling us, directing us on that.

It was a great experience for me because I really had to get to know Maine quickly, and had to understand how the issues we were dealing with in Washington related to what he was doing back at home so we could take advantage of that, and optimize on the people he saw. Maine's not an easy place to get a large crowd together, with the exception of a few places. So for me it was a great experience.

Then I left about six months before the election in '82 and moved to Maine, and Charlie had already moved back up there, and Larry Benoit, who was the campaign manager, and I was in the campaign office, went off the Senate payroll, went on the campaign payroll, and worked on the campaign doing advance and scheduling. I did a lot of scheduling; I traveled with him sometimes also, and did that until I came back after the election. I then did press work for about a year-and-a-half, I was the deputy press secretary, John Trattner was our press secretary at the time, and then went back to the front office to help do scheduling, and he took over chairmanship for the DSCC, so [I] helped deal with the two staffs, interaction between the two staffs, that was really my role. And then in December of '86 I left.

BW: And why did you do that?

RS: I had decided I wanted to, I had an opportunity to go work with a friend of mine, just the two of us, we started a business in government relations, and I was ready to do something different for a change. He'd gotten the majority back, so it was a good thing.

BW: And there was someone else to answer the phone and do the scheduling and so on.

RS: And do all the scheduling, right, and the press work, exactly. And by that point, too, the original staff, the folks that I had worked with, some people started leaving and things changed, and I was really just, I was ready, I was twenty-eight? How old was I? Yeah, I was ready for a change, to do something different. And frankly, the hours in the Senate were not conducive to doing a lot else with your life, and I really wanted to do other things other than work.

BW: What piece of the government relations pie did you and your partner stake out for yourselves?

RS: We actually did a lot of – that was one of the attractive things about it – we did a lot of work for cities and municipal interests, which I really enjoy doing, still do. So we did a lot of work for clients out in California. He had had, he'd worked on the House side, and so it was kind of a good complement, having this House and Senate experience. And we did a lot of municipal city work, that kind of thing.

BW: Let's talk about the scheduling first, and then I want to -

RS: Sure.

BW: - go into, well maybe the, well, let me be disorganized here.

RS: That's okay.

BW: First of all, the question I wanted to ask you when you were talking about Senator Mitchell's inaugural days in the Senate, did he select any mentors to sort of tag along with or seek advice from that you recall, did he have any best pals?

RS: You know, I'm sure he did, but - I'm trying to think of, there was, I don't know if he would ever call him a mentor, but one senator who I know was particular helpful to Senator Mitchell was Senator Russell Long, who was chair of the Finance Committee. Being on the Finance Committee was significant; it's a committee which certainly I think some of the best and brightest members of the Senate have served on it, and it was also frankly politically helpful because it's a committee, there's a lot of business interest related, they're involved in the legislation that's developed there.

Senator Muskie was such a mentor to him, he was busy obviously trying to figure out, solve all the problems he was trying to do when he was secretary of state, but I think stayed very helpful to him. The funny thing was, after the election, despite all the things that happened during it, he and Senator Cohen got to be very close, I'm sure you've talked to folks about that, who are much more knowledgeable than I am. But I don't remember him having, he was someone the caucus was very helpful to. Obviously they had an interest in seeing him be elected to a full term, but I don't remember anybody who he was particularly, we had a number of interesting people on our hall, but I think he was more focused on taking care of his constituents.

BW: Did Secretary of State Muskie drift by at all during that period, or no?

RS: No, I mean they talked to him and he was always there and did whatever he wanted, you know, helped him with whatever he needed. Senator Muskie's staff were also helpful. But, they had a lot going on in the State Department, too. Senator Mitchell had a lot of very good, very close friends in Maine who were supportive of him in the political world and in the business world, and just across the board. He was someone who was, I realized very quickly how extraordinarily well known and well thought of he was, that whole group in Maine, they just were tremendously supportive. And he came to the Senate and very quickly showed his incredible intellect and to the lobbying community, to the Washington establishment community, it made people sit up and pay attention to him.

BW: When you went to Maine to join the campaign, were the polls already showing that he was making great strides, or was he still the underdog?

RS: No, my recollection of the first poll that he got, that Pat Cadell did was that we were thirty-six or thirty-five points, he was thirty-six or thirty-five points behind, way behind. And he was still significantly behind, although he was gaining ground, when I went up to Maine, but we were still definitely considered the underdog.

BW: So what was that campaign like for you?

RS: I had been involved in campaigns, but not at that level, and not in that intensity. It was an incredible experience. It was incredible to watch the work ethic that he had and the discipline he had. We would say, “Oh you’ve done that gate in Jay, Maine, at four thirty in the morning three times.” “I’m going to go do it again because maybe I missed a hundred people.” He had run for governor and had lost to an Independent, and Senator Mitchell learned a lot from that experience. And it was great because you couldn’t help but be inspired by his work ethic, and when you felt tired it was like, he was still on the road at midnight, and you’re like complaining about being in the campaign headquarters helping out with letters or something, stuffing envelopes.

But it was, like I said, there was an incredible group of people who, he really just garnered so much support. It was hard. Dave Emery definitely had the establishment, he had a lot of money but he made mistakes, and Senator Mitchell capitalized on those; he put together a really good team to put together his ads. David Johnson did a great job raising money for him and helping him with Washington, and then he raised money in Maine, so we had the resources that we needed. And like I said, he was just willing to work until he’d met everybody in Maine, at least twice.

BW: How do you – this is a question I should be asking him, not you – but how does a man of such intellect thrive on going at four thirty in the morning to talk to factory workers?

RS: I think that’s one of the things that people were surprised about, because Senator Mitchell has very much a judicial temperament, and I could just see him on the bench. I never saw him, but I could just picture how it would be, I can see him on the Supreme Court as chief justice. But he really seemed, I would be with him at events, I’m sure there were days where he was like, ‘Oh, I can’t shake another hand,’ but he really seemed to enjoy so much of it.

Frankly, I think he liked sometimes where he got out, he’d go to Waterville and walk along Main Street or go to Baldacci’s or go to another, and sit there and talk with people, probably more than he liked sometimes having to go to those fund raisers with the big rollers. But he just really seemed, he was definitely a Mainer, despite having this marvelous education and having the position he did, he seemed to like it, I mean he really seemed to enjoy it. And he was fun to watch at a plant gate and places like that, because he would talk to everybody in a very warm, friendly way. I mean he made them feel like he knew them.

BW: What would his topics be when he chatted with folks?

RS: I think obviously it would depend on where we were, the venue he was in. We had a set group of, he was very involved obviously in environmental issues – that was really important to Maine constituents. Social Security was hot, it was a big issue; there were a lot of veterans, he was on the Veterans’ Committee, which was great from both a substantive perspective and also from a political perspective. So it just depended on where he was. But he’s a very down-to-earth man in a lot of ways [].

BW: There must be Republican, hardcore Republican pockets in Maine.

RS: Oh sure.

BW: And how did he, did he just avoid those areas?

RS: No, no. He, no. Places like Rockland, which, he opened a field office there, Senator Muskie didn’t have a field office there, Rockland/Camden, which at the time, I can’t speak to it now politically, but was pretty Republican. The suburbs of Portland which were, he had a lot of friends there, but wealthier areas which tend to be [Republican]. No, he never, in fact he would do events there every time, every chance we got. I mean you had to focus on where your key supporters were, but no, he did not avoid doing that. In fact, I think he went out of his way sometimes to do those events.

BW: Did he ever deal with hostility?

RS: Oh, yeah. During the campaign? Sure, you always do in campaigns. I don’t remember any bad incidents or any - We were fortunate. And this was back, frankly, too, they were much kinder, gentler campaigns. Senator Cohen’s chief of staff and press secretary came onto Congressman Emery’s campaign later in the campaign, when they saw that he was sliding in the polls. That I think was a little difficult, because at the time you really didn’t do that in the Senate, even if you were of two different parties, it was unusual to send your staff to campaign against your colleague. So I think that was a little difficult to take. But other than that, we didn’t, and they were very good, too. We didn’t have a lot of, that I recall, a lot of hostility.

BW: When you say they were very good, what do you mean?

RS: Well they had run campaigns in Maine before. Senator Cohen was clearly very successful, they were good at fund-raising, he had a good press secretary who really knew the press. And the *Bangor Daily News* and Bangor area, which tends to be Republican, too, and the *Bangor Daily News*, which has a very conservative editorial page, knew Cohen’s staff and had relationships there, so that made it even more of a challenge from press perspective.

BW: And they were endorsing Emery?

RS: They did endorse him.

BW: Did these Cohen staff people, did they dip into dirty tricks?

RS: No. We did have – and they weren't responsible for this – but Congressman Emery did run ads against Senator Mitchell early on in the campaign on a vote on the Veterans' Committee, veterans' vote, and a Social Security vote, and they were inaccurate. And one was a vote Senator Muskie had cast, and the other one was, may have been a Muskie one, or one that Mitchell cast and he [Congressman Emery] mischaracterized it.

But I remember there was a full-page ad in the Portland and the Bangor papers that said, "Senator Mitchell sets the record straight," and then the second time it said, "Senator Mitchell sets the record straight *again*." Because at the time, newspapers, unlike now, had a very good audience. But it wasn't dirty – well I guess you could call that dirty tricks, compared to now. And there was one commercial that was run about a vote he cast early in the morning hours on a tax bill that affected the three-martini lunch, it was a change in the deduction rate, and it was not really accurate but it was a picture of a waitress carrying a martini []. But it didn't really seem to have a lot of effect, because we countered it with an ad that was pretty effective at saying, "That's not exactly what it meant," and explaining it.

Compared to now, though, Brien, *pfft*, no. Dirty tricks, no, not compared to now.

BW: At some point you must have grasped the thought that the tide was turning.

RS: Yes, I mean we worked, it was just a blur in some ways, the last couple of months, I can remember thinking we were getting positive feedback from the polls, but it only made him want to work harder. Well, I mean he had run for governor, lost to an independent, and he was supposed to win that one. So I think it just made him work harder. And we all, it was great.

Election night he was working so hard, he was in Lewiston, Maine, when Dan Rather called the election at eight o'clock at night, even though everybody had said to him, he had made a commitment to go to Lewiston, to an event with the Democratic Party, and by this point he was kind of flying, not kind of, he was flying around a good part of, with a good bunch of the team on the Democratic ballot, and so he had made a commitment to do this event. And everybody said, "Well you really need to be back in Portland, because your party's here, and they're going to call your race." No, he was on the road. This was before cell phones, too, so I mean he knew.

BW: So did he ever get back to Portland that night?

RS: He got back, oh yeah, he got back. He was just a little bit late, and he wasn't really late for the event, but Pat Leahy called at 8:01 and said, "Hey, can I talk to Senator Mitchell, George?" And I said, "Well Senator, I would let you but he's on the road," because I took the calls from some of the folks that night. I just remember that clearly. Yes, we saw the tide turn I think a couple weeks, month before, but it was close for a long time.

BW: What kind of living conditions were you -?

RS: The campaign rented two houses down near Old Orchard Beach that had belonged to a long-time friend of Senator Mitchell's, and the girls were in one house and the guys were in the other house, because we had a lot of staff come up from Washington, eventually we had a lot of staff come up, take time off, use vacation, come up and work on the campaign, which was fun. Everybody wanted to be there, and so it was great. I mean frankly, they were very nice. We didn't see the houses much because we didn't sleep that much, but it was really nice.

BW: But what about when you were in the far reaches of the state, then you'd stay in -?

RS: Well it depended on, I didn't do a lot of overnights, I tended to, especially at that point, to be in Portland most of the time. He had a young man, David Lemoine, who later ran for office in Maine, who drove him around, and David ended up being the one, he usually stayed in hotels. Or family, when he was near them, so.

BW: So you were doing desk work.

RS: I was, yes, I was putting together the schedule every day, yup, at that point. And dealing with the: 'What's gone wrong?' 'What's gone right?'

BW: You talked about Senator Mitchell inheriting a good number of Muskie's staff down here, what about Muskie people on the campaign in Maine?

RS: Actually in the field offices, I don't remember anybody leaving the field offices that Senator Muskie had in place, when he came in, I don't think they did. I think he kept all that staff too.

BW: So this would suggest to me there was a high degree of continuity between Senator Muskie and Senator Mitchell.

RS: Absolutely, yes, and I think that obviously would contribute to the smooth transition that we made as a staff.

BW: Talk a little bit about being a scheduler.

RS: It taught me for the first time in my adult life that you need to be detail-oriented, because it was clear details were important. I enjoyed it because you had to marry the issues, the campaign focus, and the wanting to get him out to see as many people as possible, and then the overlay of the media piece too, to make sure that he did things that the press would find worthy of covering.

So the complexities of putting that all together for me was fascinating, and it was an interesting way to really get to know Maine, get to know politics, get to know how to really work at that level of a campaign. The scheduling and advance on a campaign is just at the heart of it, I think.

So for me that was fun because everything came through Charlie and I – not everything – but in a lot of ways. Larry was our boss, campaign manager, clearly he was the one calling the shots, but we really had our hands in everything that he did, so that was fun.

BW: So it was – go on.

RS: No, go ahead, I'm sorry.

BW: You're making a distinction between being a scheduler on the campaign and being a scheduler in the Washington office.

RS: At that period I didn't do the Washington scheduling, he had a secretary who did that. I just had always focused on the Maine schedule, until I came back after the campaign.

BW: And then you started doing -

RS: No, then I did press work. I wanted to do press work, I have always been interested in the media, I like to write, and I wanted the opportunity to work in press, so I asked him if I could move over to the press side. And I worked as - And then John Trattner came over from the State Department, pretty high-level press secretary for a new senator, and John had such great experience, I wanted to work with him too. And so I had the opportunity to do that for about a year, a little more than that.

Senator Mitchell had a couple of folks who were doing Maine and D.C. scheduling and he wanted to make a change, and Gayle then was back and had asked me if I would come work again in the front office with them, so I thought that was the right thing to do so I went ahead and did that. And I did scheduling in Maine, working with Gayle I did his Washington schedule, I interacted with the legislative staff to help David out with that, Johnson, who was our chief of staff still. So I did a lot of different things in that period after I was press secretary, and through my tenure there, through '86.

And then when he became chairman of the Campaign Committee, that was a whole other level of different scheduling, and he had a whole huge staff at the Campaign Committee that also had to be dealt with. David left to go run the Campaign Committee, we had a period where Gayle ran the office, and then we had a new chief of staff, so I think I helped provide some continuity for him across that, and that's what I did really the last year I was there, was deal with the interaction between the Campaign Committee and the personal staff.

BW: Now when he was chairman of the Campaign Committee, that involved a fair amount of travel.

RS: He traveled a lot.

BW: So what impact did that have on his maintaining contacts in Maine?

RS: He still went home a lot; he still went home every chance he got. He was still, I think he went from every weekend to probably every other weekend. I mean, he still went back after he got elected. He got elected, and the next morning we sat down early in the morning and he said, "Okay, I want to do a 'thank you' tour." We're like, "Can we just have one day off?" "No." [He] wanted to do a 'thank you' tour. He got on the phone and called, I must have dialed, I'm not kidding, fifty people in that morning.

He was excited, to say the least, but he also then- And so he went on a tour all over the state, so we scheduled all of that, so that he could go thank people. I know it sounds like I'm, you know, I mean he's not perfect, but he just has a work ethic that is an incredibly impressive one. He was so grateful that he wanted people to know it, and he wanted them to see him in person, he didn't want it to just be in a commercial, or just go to Portland and Bangor. No, he wanted to go back to all, Presque Isle and Lewiston and, which he did, we scheduled that.

BW: What, as someone very close to his movements and whatnot, what about a private life, did he -?

RS: Well his wife and daughter were up in Maine, and he obviously got to see them every weekend. I mean, given how crazy his schedule was, and his daughter was a young child at the time and he did what a lot of senators do, they stayed there during the beginning of his tenure. And I don't think he had much of a private life at first, because all he was doing was working. His daughter then came down, he finally bought himself a place to live here after he was elected, and his daughter came down and spent summers and interned.

And so he worked so much, and his private life, his family life, was really back in Maine more than it was in Washington. Sally came and visited, his then-wife, some in Washington, but then they were divorced. I don't remember what year they were divorced, but.

BW: Nineteen eighty-seven.

RS: 'Eighty-seven, right.

BW: Were you scheduling her much around the state, or did he do most of the campaigning on his own?

RS: He did most of the campaigning. She went with him to certain appearances and certain things, but no, I didn't schedule her. Gayle Cory dealt with Mrs. Mitchell, talked to her; they had known each other forever.

BW: So Gayle Cory was at State for a brief period of time, I mean that was a very -

RS: Well, she was at State while he [Muskie] was secretary, and then she came up to Maine obviously and worked on the campaign and then came back to the Senate after, Senator Mitchell

was elected, to work with us.

BW: And what was that like, her return?

RS: It was great, she was great. She was tremendous. She was, they were so close, the two of them, and he really trusted and valued her instincts and opinions on everything from scheduling to issues. They really, it was a very close relationship, and she knew the state so well. We used to kid her that *she* should have been appointed.

BW: That leads to another area that I'd be curious in your observations about, and that is, how would you characterize Senator Mitchell's relationships with women?

RS: I think with all the women in the office he had a really good relationship. He was very, Senator Mitchell was very good, and as you know from the women you have seen, he was very good about giving women opportunities to move ahead. He hired Charlene Sturbitts to be our legislative director; Gayle obviously played a key role. He was very good – Martha Pope too, later on – he was very good about giving women opportunities.

And he's a very nice, I mean he has a demeanor, he's a very even-keeled person, and he was very good with the staff, in the way he dealt with us, I thought. I think he had a good relationship with all the women in the office.

BW: Did you see a difference in his behavior with women versus men?

RS: No. I think if you were good at what you did, you knew what you were doing, he treated you as a professional.

BW: Everyone talks about the hard work that you all did, and he most of all. Were there play times, fun times too, or not?

RS: Oh yes, we had some good times on the campaign. Not so much with him, I mean staff-wise we did. But we worked awfully hard, but oh sure, we had a good time. I can remember we had a lobster place not far from where the houses were that we rented and that was the first time I think I ever cooked a lobster – Charlie Jacobs showed me how to do it. And it was not hard, I grew up here and did crabs, he's like, "This is not hard, they don't kick as much." One of the women I had worked with in Muskie's office taught, I went to her parents' house in Waterville and they taught me how to open a lobster up, because it was all prepared, you know, like a spoiled little kid down here.

But yes, we had a lot of fun actually on the campaign. Most of the folks on the campaign, we were relatively young, sort of typical of campaigns, and then we had like the thirty-year-olds, the older, our bosses, and everybody, yes, liked to have a good time, so it was fun.

BW: But it was usually, didn't include the Senator.

RS: No. He went home. You know, after that campaigning he'd be tired, and I think he wanted to go home and see Andrea.

BW: David Johnson mentions some of the elaborate planning that had to go into these Friday, Thursday night or Friday departures for him.

RS: Oh.

BW: Talk about that a little bit, just the hecticness of it.

RS: Well, because remember, this is back before e-mail and instantly being able to communicate, so you had to have as much information on that piece of paper, that book you sent him home with every weekend, because you had to have the schedule down to ever detail, and all the contact information because if something happened you had to pull over and go find a phone and be able to call the person, if he had bad weather, if the flight was delayed, if they got behind traveling, if he stayed too long, guess what, shaking hands, that happened.

And behind that had to be all the substantive information, if you were doing a veterans' group, what happened was that the leg person who was in charge of veterans' issues had to, it was Steve as I recall, had to make sure all the materials were there. So it was very detailed. And of course we also had to, this was back in the days where you could book him on every flight – you can't do that any more with airlines. We would, because the unpredictability of the Senate, we were in the minority in addition, although they were pretty good about telling us. I know the cloakroom boys, the Democratic Cloakroom guys better than anybody in the Senate at the time, because I would bug them so much, and they wanted to help. Because the Senator, we would try and push it so we'd back stuff up to Friday afternoon to schedule for him, hoping we could get him out either Thursday night or Friday morning so he could take advantage of the whole weekend, and sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't.

The Senate was unpredictable back then too, as far as when roll calls, and he never wanted to miss roll call votes, never. He wanted to be able to go to Maine every weekend, but he didn't want to miss votes to do it. He was not one of those guys who was comfortable with an eighty percent voting, he wanted that hundred percent. So it was a challenge to try and see if, yes, I mean Fridays would be like, oh, most people relax on Fridays. It was the most stressful day in the office for me and for David, I think, too, dealing with the legislative stuff and the votes on the floor, no big deal, Senator Mitchell's so good at that anyway, but just getting him out the door. And he used to kid us and say, "I bet you can't wait for me to leave." And at first of course not knowing him you'd be, "Oh no," then we'd be like, "You're right."

Well, because he was anxious to get out too, get back and get going, but we would book him on all the flights and then finally he would usually, most Fridays he would get out. He spent some weekends, not some weekends, but later on Friday, and his famous story about staying overnight because of the filibuster, when he first got there. But yes, it was pretty stressful, David's

accurate about that.

BW: Do you recall any particularly snafus?

RS: Oh, I made many. Well, I can remember thinking he was going to get on one flight, getting out earlier, and scheduling something where there were a number of people waiting. And what we would do is we send staff to advance it, and they would be prepared on Friday afternoon, or we'd try to have them prepared to be able to fill in for him, in a lot of cases, and explain the situation. I don't think that makes people happy, if they come to see a senator.

But I, oh, I'm sure I made so many mistakes in that job, because I was learning as I was going, but I was so fortunate because he was so helpful to me. He taught me how to read – this is back before you could get on the Internet with flight info, and you had to read the OAG, the Official Airline Guide – and Senator Mitchell had, like I said, had done scheduling and also knew how to read an airline guide, and I had never used one. I was twenty-one years old, I'd never used an airline guide. I picked up the phone and called them for the one flight, wherever I went, I remember he said, "Okay, here's how you go, here's where you start." Because I was trying to, we were going from all little places, that was back especially when commercial carriers served a lot more communities than they do now in Maine. And he was just very helpful in doing it, because I didn't know, have a good sense of that at first.

BW: Did you develop some telephone relationships with travel agents, or airline?

RS: No, actually the airlines have VIP desks for the congressional offices, back then they did. I don't think it's permitted any more. But - And Scott Yohe and Pete West, who were at Delta, because it was principally Delta that served Maine at the time, although we had a couple of other carriers, but I actually am still friends with Scott Yohe, and know Pete too. They were on the VIP desk, starting off their careers at Delta, and they were extremely helpful, because then you could, like I said, you could book him on more than one flight.

BW: I think Dave Johnson mentioned that a whole bunch of reservations in various people's names, too, not just the Senator's.

RS: Well yes, you couldn't, book him on the nine, the ten, the eleven, twelve, but I would go on one, David would be on the eleven, oh yes, I had a whole matrix of how I would do it. And see, sometimes what I would do, one of the rare things I would mess up on was, I would cancel one because of the vote situation, think, "Oh, I can get it," and then he would come back from the floor and go, "Oh, Senator Byrd just told me we can leave." "Oh." I remember thinking, "Oh, he's going to fire me, because I cancelled that flight." And I would call and beg the guy, I would be like, and most of the time, I think maybe one time he had to wait. He wasn't happy with me, I'm sure, but he got on most of the time.

BW: Now those Delta flights were from National to Boston, and then a changeover, or were they going right into Portland?

RS: Well, they flew nonstop into Portland at the time, is my recollection – God, I’d have to look that up – and then everything else was a connection from there.

BW: And that wasn’t Delta, that was probably - Or was it?

RS: Delta to Presque Isle and Bangor. In fact, they still fly there. And then there was Bar Harbor Airlines, and – oh my God, there was another one – Bar Harbor and another small little one and I’ve forgotten the name, they’re both out of business now, and they flew all over the state.

BW: Did people doing scheduling for the senators ever, did you have a little scheduling community, I mean were other -?

RS: Oh yes, other schedulers in the Senate?

BW: Yes.

RS: I remember Senator Chafee’s scheduler, because he was very close to Senator Chafee; come to think of it, they were very close friends, even early on. She was great. I called her, I don’t remember what it was, I called her a couple of times and she was very helpful. And Senator Cohen’s scheduler was helpful too, at first. But, oh yes, we commiserated with each other for sure, definitely. You need to have somebody, actually we were across the hall from John Tower. At first, we got to stay in Muskie’s space for a short period of time, and we had John Tower and then we had Wendell Ford, and both of their schedulers I got to know, too. And it didn’t have anything to do with being, there was no partisanship, it was commiserating over – because their bosses wanted to go home and do things too, so you would commiserate over how to deal with it.

BW: Why did you say that Cohen’s scheduler was helpful “at first”?

RS: Well, because then when we just got into the political mode, it got awkward to deal with. I mean they were still, he and Mitchell signed letters together up until, as I remember, before the election they would be on letters, delegation letters together.

BW: And of course they wrote a book together.

RS: And they wrote a book on [the Iran-Contra hearings]. Our foreign policy person after the campaign, being Mike Hastings, came over to work for us, to do defense and foreign policy. He was with Cohen, and he liked Senator Mitchell and he liked Senator [Cohen], but he decided he wanted to come over and work for Senator Mitchell.

BW: That was pretty rare.

RS: Yes, it was very rare. Now it's unheard of.

BW: How do you see your service with Senator Muskie and then with Senator Mitchell sort of fitting into the pattern of your life since? Was that a critical -?

RS: Yes, I grew up here, and was fortunate to grow up around the institution, that is the Congress. I learned the Rules of the House at the Sunday dinner table from my dad, because my father was very good, very into teaching us that. I knew after I worked for them that I wanted to stay involved in this arena for a while anyway, and it was just very helpful to me to focus on – one, I just felt so fortunate to be part of it, because I think we are so lucky. Not to be hokey, but we are such lucky people to have the government we do. I wish people appreciated it more. And Senator Muskie and Senator Mitchell both were such an inspiration, in totally different ways. Because of where they were in their careers, I got to really see someone who's very senior, and then from, what happens at the beginning of someone's career. And I've been fortunate to watch him do all the wonderful things he's done since then.

But for me, one thing I realized was how much I love the legislative process, how interested I was in staying involved in that. I'm not being very articulate here, because I don't think about it much, to be honest with you. I've been so lucky that I tell young people, like the two men I work with here, "You know what? It's great to work here with us, to do government relations." And my sister-in-law worked for Senator Mitchell, too, that's how I met her, but there's nothing like working on Capitol Hill. If you want the experience that will teach you what this town is about, and you're fortunate enough to work for somebody like George Mitchell and Ed Muskie, it will set the stage for your life, particularly if you want to stay involved in this world. But also, even if you don't, I have moved, later now in my career, into trying to do more work in nonprofit and service oriented, and part of it inspired by them.

BW: When you left, did Senator Mitchell play any role in your establishing your business, or, there's no hand-off there?

RS: No, no, no. Cliff and I had a good, my partner and I had a good idea about what did we want to do. He was very supportive, I mean he was great and said it'd be helpful, and we had ethics rules and I was very respectful of staying away from the office and the staff. I'd see very close friends, and still am with those, but really respected that that was something that was, and I think that's a right, frankly I think those rules, I'm glad to see them strengthened. But he was, I still saw him and, stayed in touch with him, but then I moved away to Texas, so I didn't see many people.

BW: When you advise young people here, are, do you feel that there are still senators of the Muskie-Mitchell ilk?

RS: Yes, I do. I think they're, and especially I'm heartened by some of the group that just came in, I think there are definitely people like them.

BW: Because a lot of people talk about a kind of golden age of an earlier period, with these titans and sort of the Russell Long forward to Bob Dole and whatnot, and that things have gotten too -

RS: I think things are way too partisan, they've gotten way too partisan, and I do believe that part of it is driven by the fact that the personal relationships are not, that they don't get to know each other as people like they used to, to a certain extent. I know that from watching my father and the members of that committee he dealt with for years too, I saw that early on in my life. And I think it's gotten way too partisan, yes, absolutely, but I think there are some extremely impressive, the Senate, I think, is an institution which draws very impressive people to it, and when they go vote for a senator, I think they recognize what a significant job it is – at least I hope so – and they tend to send very good people there. I think there are some tremendous leaders in the Senate right now, I really do, and I deal with the Senate a lot in my business.

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

RS: Oh, I don't know how you encapsulate in any short period of time someone who has done such an extraordinary job with their life, who has contributed so much to so many people. And he was always so grateful for what his parents gave him, and his brothers and sister, his brothers' and sister's support, and all the people who helped him along the way. I think his legacy is going to be tremendous in all the accomplishments he's had in the Senate. I also think that Senator Mitchell, who told us early on in his career in the Senate he wasn't going to stay there forever, has taken every experience he's had the opportunity to have and utilized it and then moved on to do something else. He didn't stay – he could [have], it's wonderful to stay, Ted Kennedy is a hero in my book – it's wonderful to stay there but Senator Mitchell knew, I think, that he wanted to do lots of other things with his life, too. And the work he's done in the Mideast, the work he did in Ireland, the studies he does on the U.N. with former Speaker Gingrich, all that body of work is just an incredible legacy, in my opinion.

BW: Anything else we want to say?

RS: No, I think that's it.

BW: Yeah.

RS: Thank you Brien, I appreciate it. I hope I was helpful.

End of Interview