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Interview with Fred Wertheimer by Diane Dewhirst

Fred Wertheimer

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Recommended Citation

Wertheimer, Fred, "Interview with Fred Wertheimer by Diane Dewhirst" (2009). *George J. Mitchell Oral History Project*. 7.

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George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Fred Wertheimer

(Interviewer: Diane Dewhirst)

GMOH# 126

July 10, 2009

Diane Dewhirst: This is Diane Dewhirst. I am here with Fred Wertheimer on Friday, July 10, [2009], in downtown Washington, D.C., for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project for Bowdoin University [*sic*: College]. Fred, if you can start off with me and say your full name, where you're from, and spell your last name for me.

Fred Wertheimer: It's Fred Wertheimer. I am currently with Democracy 21, a nonprofit organization that works on democracy issues. During the period of time that I dealt with Senator Mitchell, I was the president of Common Cause, a citizens lobbying organization. My name [] is spelled W-E-R-T-H-E-I-M-E-R.

DD: And your place and date of birth, as much as you want to give.

FW: Place?

DD: Place, where you were born.

FW: I was born in Brooklyn, New York. Date of birth is January 9, 1939.

DD: Senator Mitchell served in the Senate in the '80s and early '90s, first as a senator from Maine and then as Senate majority leader. When did you first meet Senator Mitchell, and what were your first impressions?

FW: Well, it was some point in the 1980s, I'm not exactly sure when. But most of my contacts with Senator Mitchell, on a working basis, had to deal with campaign finance issues, and he became a major leader on those issues when he became the Senate majority leader.

DD: What were your impressions of him, before we get into the success or lack of success with regard to campaign finance reform, and public financing in particular, what were your first impressions with him as far as his style?

FW: Well, I was always impressed with Senator Mitchell. He had a very straightforward style of communicating, soft spoken in many ways, and was extremely tough minded, both in terms of his views about public policy and his leadership capacity in terms of the Democratic Conference that he ran. So, he had a real combination of leadership skills, and a patience to build what you had to build to get to the end of the game, a non-flamboyant, nonthreatening way of communicating. His opponents, particularly Republican opponents, always thought of him as a very tough partisan, but that was not the way he came across publicly. I think the tough partisan aspects came into play whenever he was involved in fights with them, because he was very strong and very strategic and very effective, in my view.

DD: I know this is a while ago, but could you set the scene a little bit about what the state of campaign finance reform was in the early '80s and, I'm sorry, the '80s and the early '90s, what the state of elections were the – I know this is a big question, but the influence of money and kind of what the state of play was as we got up to the efforts to reform the campaign system with Senator Mitchell?

FW: Well, major legislation had been enacted in 1974 that made fundamental changes in the campaign finance system, created a presidential public financing system, it placed limits on contributions from individuals and political action committees to candidates and parties, it created new disclosure laws and created the Federal Election Commission []. This was all in the wake of the Watergate scandals. What

we were not able to do at that time, even though we came close, was pass a system of public financing for congressional races. It passed in the Senate, and we came within forty-one votes of passing it in the House, but ultimately it failed.<p><p>From that time on, the major goal here was to pass a system of congressional public financing to mirror the presidential system, and as we went along in the '70s and early '80s, the [private funding] system for Congress only got worse. There you had a combination of special interest political action committees, lobbyists and interest groups, and individual donors funding congressional campaigns in a way that much of the money [] was seeking influence with members of Congress. And that just kept growing right through 1984.<p><p>Meanwhile, you had had a very successful presidential public financing system for its elections in 1976 and 1980 and 1984. We still hadn't really had any serious advent of the so-called soft money system by which unlimited corporate and union and wealthy individual contributions were laundered into federal campaigns through the national parties. So we had, as a major focus and major problem, the funding of congressional elections. And starting in 1985, Senator Boren joined with Senator Goldwater and Senator Rudman and they came up with a [] bill [] to limit the amount of PAC money that could be given to candidates. Interestingly enough, Senator Goldwater became a real leader of campaign finance reform in this period.<p><p>And I remember, as the president of Common Cause, initially opposing this [PAC bill] on the grounds it was a piecemeal solution to a much larger problem. Senator Boren called me and asked me to come up to his office and made the case to me that I was wrong, and that this was the way to start the battle again, because we really hadn't had a serious battle on this since the '70s, 1977. And he did convince me, so we supported this effort, and after it did not get anywhere, in [1987] we turned around and helped persuade Senator Boren to turn this into a more comprehensive bill with congressional public financing, which he did. He was then joined by Senator Byrd. The fight over trying to limit political action committees took place in '85 and '86, and we got an overwhelming vote for it in the Senate, because they wanted to send it over to the House and kill it over there. In reality it never [had a chance].<p><p>Now let me stop for a minute and explain Common Cause. Common Cause is a [nonpartisan] citizens lobbying organization that was created by John Gardner in 1970 with the goal of combining citizen action around the country with professionals in Washington who understood the [legislative] process. And the goal here was to [combine] citizens around the country [with] lobbyists in Washington to fight legislative battles. And the first big battle that the organization had was to pass legislation to limit the U.S.'s role in the Vietnam War. But very quickly the organization began to focus [on]government integrity and process issues, and took up an agenda of campaign finance reform and lobbying reform and ethics and transparency and accountability, and did this shortly before the Watergate scandals broke and exploded and created an enormous opportunity for the agenda that we were working on. And the principal, the lead agenda item for Common Cause from then, for decades really, was campaign finance reform.<p><p>I went to work at Common Cause as a lobbyist in May of 1971, and [] I was assigned two issues, one was the legislative effort to end U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, and the other was campaign finance reform. And as I [have] pointed out, I stopped working on the Vietnam War in 1975, and unfortunately I've never got to stop on campaign finance reform. John Gardner used to say that reform is not for the short winded, but he never told me it was thirty-seven years and counting on campaign finance reform.<p><p>**DD:** And it had a, it evolved into having a state presence, including in the state of Maine?<p><p>**FW:** Yes,

[Common Cause] started out focused on national issues, but it quickly evolved into having state organizations in various places, and Maine certainly became one of the state organizations. And that state presence was very important, because when I walked in to try to lobby a member of Congress, they weren't dealing with me as me, they were dealing with me because we had activists in states all over the country who knew -<p><p>**DD:** Wrote letters to the editor -<p><p>**FW:** Well, wrote letters to the editor, and knew their members of Congress and talked to them and had the ability to meet with them, and so members of the House, and Senators knew this.<p><p>**DD:** And influenced editorial boards -<p><p>**FW:** We did a lot of work with editorial boards. So, it wasn't my charming personality, whether I had a charming personality or not, it had nothing to do with me getting in the door. And the irony is, we did a lot of very hard hitting work as lobbyists with the media, so we were always in a tension relationship with members of Congress, but they would deal with us because of constituents back home.<p><p>We went through '85 and '86, and then in 1987 we met with Senator Boren, and he was persuaded [] to take on the congressional public financing issue, which is quite a leap for him because he was a very conservative Democrat from Oklahoma. [] He was very smart and really understood the problem here and was committed to dealing with it. And he got Senator Byrd involved, who was the Democratic leader at the time, and Senator Byrd, also a conservative Democrat, became a strong and committed leader on this issue, because he was an institutionalist first and foremost and he was very upset about what special interest money was doing to the institution and the ability to get things done. We also had Senator Stennis, who may have been the most conservative Democrat in the Senate, as a public supporter of public financing of elections for the same reason. You know, he thought it involved the integrity of the institution. And we had Senator Goldwater as well, until he kind of got beat up by some of his colleagues, but Senator Goldwater made some of the most eloquent speeches for why we had to reform the system.<p><p>But Senator Byrd [who was majority leader] took this on, and during 1987 and '88 we had eight cloture votes, we had what was a record amount of cloture votes trying to break a filibuster on campaign finance reform, and were never able to do it. This was the period which was pretty famous at the time, when Senator Byrd sent out the marshals to bring senators back for a cloture vote and they found Senator Packwood hiding in his office, and he refused to come so they carried him into the chamber. And Senator Byrd got a lot of heat for forcing Senator Packwood to attend that session. [p/o]<p><p>Anyway, we were not able to break [the filibuster]. And Senator Mitchell then became Senate majority leader in 1989, and he took up Senator Byrd's position along with Senator Boren. They were the two [campaign finance] leaders, but the key [] obviously was having the majority leader, and that's when my work started with Senator Mitchell on this, and he was very committed to the issue. He was very forceful in his leadership. He really wanted to get this done and I will tell a couple of stories that explain this role.<p><p>Around that time he had a staff member named Bob Rozen, who we worked with, who [] did the tax work, but also was assigned to this issue, and he was terrific. And anyway, we came up with, working with Bob Rozen, myself and Susan Manes, who was at Common Cause but had earlier been the staff director of the Democrat Policy Committee for Senator Byrd when he was majority leader, Senator Byrd's top staff member, and we came up and drafted the first proposal to end the soft money system. And that was a provision that was in the bill introduced by Senators Boren and [Mitchell in 1990]. That same language, twelve years later, almost the exact same language, became law in 2002, introduced at that time by Senators John

McCain and Russ Feingold.<p><p>Well, [the soft money] provision caused an uproar among Democratic state parties because you had to cover them to prevent them from being the vehicles for soft money flowing into federal campaigns, and they demanded a meeting with Senator Mitchell. And they flew in from all over the country. They had sent him a letter, forty-eight of them sent him a letter, I think only two didn't sign the letter, one was the Democrat Party chair from Maine, and the other was from New Jersey, because Bill Bradley was a strong supporter of this and I think he persuaded - No, I have to change this, I think, there are only a couple who didn't sign the letter, I don't think the Maine chair did, but the New Jersey chair did and the guy from Utah did [not sign], the state party chair. Now, no one understood why he wouldn't sign the letter, but he had been a member of the board of Common Cause for years, he had been the finance committee chairman at Common Cause and he was not signing any letter on this. So they came in and had a meeting and made this huge pitch about how [banning soft money] would destroy the Democratic Party and how terrible this was for Democrats, et cetera, et cetera. And of course, I wasn't at the meeting, Bobby was at the meeting, but my understanding was that, and I think Bobby was alone at part of that meeting; you have to check these details.<p><p>**DD:**

I will, I'm interviewing him a week from Friday.<p><p>**FW:** And [he] took the brunt of the anger here. But basically Senator Mitchell gave them the meeting, and gave them an opportunity to voice their concerns, and then basically made no changes in the soft money ban, he just went forward with it.<p><p>**DD:** George Mitchell, I think was a former state chair, or at least a member of the DNC.<p><p>**FW:** I think he had tried to become [] DNC

chair.<p><p>**DD:** National.<p><p>**FW:** National chair, and [had] not won.<p><p>**DD:**

Right, but was very familiar with state party aspects, the in's and out's.<p><p>**FW:**

Was very familiar with the state party aspects of this. So, we [p/o] got a vote starting in 1985 [on campaign finance reform], almost every year but one in the Senate, from 1985 to 1994 there was a continuing all-out effort, and from 1987 to 1994 there was an all-out effort on congressional public financing, but we didn't make it. No, [p/o] the House passed what we considered a phony bill, [in 1990], and we attacked the House for it and it never went to conference, and we didn't want it to go to conference. In '91 and '92, [p/o] we did pass legislation, and the Republicans let it go to George Bush because everyone knew he was going to veto it. So we got a bill passed in the House, a bill passed in the Senate, a conference report that went to the president, and he vetoed it. And this is where it gets really interesting. So now we have the presidential election and after it's vetoed, candidate Clinton says, well if he's elected, he'll pass not only that bill, he'll pass a stronger bill. And in the '92 election we got all the candidates, presidential candidates on record for supporting the soft money ban in Senator Mitchell and Senator Boren's bill.<p><p>We then pressed Bill Clinton hard and pushed the issue of campaign finance reform during the campaign. And in that campaign, it was a three-way race and Ross Perot was pushing two issues very, very hard, one was the deficit and the other was campaign finance reform. To make a long story short, by the time that we got to the election, President Clinton had announced that campaign finance reform would be one of the first three of four issues that would be pushed by his administration, it was one of his first three or four priorities if elected. And he repeated that after he was elected.<p><p>Meanwhile in the House, Speaker Foley, who had said for years in my meetings with him [] it's just not realistic, we can't pass it, but if we have a chance, that's when we'll move it. He had said in the fall of 1992 that if a Democrat is elected president, the first three bills he will move were three bills that

had been vetoed by President Bush. One of the bills that he would move very early, one was family leave, which was moved and passed immediately; the second was voter registration, Motor Voter, which was also moved and passed immediately; and the third was campaign finance reform, which he delayed until November of 1993.<p><p>So shortly after the election, and there are conflicting stories on when this meeting was, there was a meeting down in Arkansas, but there was also a meeting I think about ten days after the president was sworn in. And my understanding of that meeting is that Senator Mitchell and Boren went in there and made a powerful argument for moving quickly on fixing the congressional campaign finance system.<p><p>**DD:** That would have been the Washington meeting, because Boren wasn't in Arkansas. The leaders went down to Arkansas after the election; it was just the leaders.<p><p>**FW:** Yes, I think the House people raised it then as well, but Boren and Mitchell, this meeting was about campaign finance reform, and they really made a case for why we had to move immediately. And Foley, who one would not describe as an assertive speaker in most occasions, basically said to the president: don't tell us when to deal with this issue, we'll decide when to deal with this issue; you've got the budget to deal with, you've got health care to deal with, this is about us. Now, I'm paraphrasing, because I wasn't there, but he basically said, 'don't tell us when to do this, we'll do this when we want to do it,' which was *never*, in his case.<p><p>And so, the president listened to this, didn't make any decision, he went out and the White House drafted a very strong campaign finance bill, that took a while, I think maybe until April, and announced it, and then the president disappeared [on the issue for the rest of the Congress]. He basically didn't lift a finger to help get this done. If he had lifted a finger, I think we would have gotten it done. So Senator Mitchell went ahead with this and he brought it up, and I think he brought it up in May or June, I think it was June, I'm not sure, but anyway, and this was one of the more interesting experiences I've ever had in thirty-eight years of lobbying, that I am about to describe.<p><p>So the bill is brought to the floor, Republicans are filibustering, we have public financing in it, we have some provisions for free or low-cost television time, and we have the soft money ban in it. And we can't break the filibuster with the public financing provisions in it, so Senator Mitchell calls me [in] to meet with him, and I go up to this meeting and he says, "Look, we can't break this filibuster, we either have to drop public financing or we're going to have to pull the bill." I said, "Well, what about pulling the bill and giving us some time to put pressure to get it, come up with the three or four Republican votes we need?" And he looked at me and he said, "We can't do that. If we pull the bill, it's not coming back in this Congress."<p><p>So I looked at him and I said, "Well, obviously we want it to come back in, we don't want this to disappear, we want to be able to build a case. We have a Democrat Congress, a Democrat president, everyone on record is saying they want to do this on the Democrat side, we need to be able to keep fighting for this." He said, "Well the only choice here is whether to drop public financing and move forward, in which case we can then go over to the House and try to pass public financing for House races and then see what we can do in conference, or I'm pulling the bill." And he said, "I'm not making this decision, this is your decision to make, and I need the answer tomorrow."<p><p>**DD:** 'Thank you, senator.'<p><p>**FW:** So, this was kind of interesting, I thought, I'd never kind of run into something like this before. We had a very large coalition of groups working on this, and I had to make a decision what to do with the groups, and it was very complicated. If I went to the groups and called a very large meeting, we were going to be in a war and a portion of those groups were

going to absolutely refuse to drop public financing. If I didn't go to the groups, they were going to be furious. My judgment was that what we had to do was drop public financing, go forward, get the bill, go over to the House and pass a partial public financing measure for House races, and go to conference and see if we can get [the Senate covered as well].<p><p>So I decided to inform the people who had worked most on this issue what was going on, and that was four or five of the groups, but not to call a large meeting because a large meeting would have left me in the same position I would have been in anyway. I would have to go in there and make the decision. [p/o] I went immediately to Senator Boren and told him about this, because Senator Mitchell had done this with me, or I would say *to* me, without Senator Boren being there. So I consulted with Senator Boren, then I went around and talked to a few groups and then came back and said, "Drop it, and let's pass the bill." So he dropped it, and a ton of bricks dropped on me immediately because a number of groups were absolutely furious about this.<p><p>And I explained my view about what our options were and the most intense groups said, "We'll never pass [congressional public financing] in the House of Representatives if it's not in the Senate bill." I said, "So be it." So we broke the filibuster, we passed it in the Senate, and now we went back to the House, and we couldn't get the speaker to schedule this because he just didn't want [the legislation passed]. We finally got it scheduled the last week, I think it was November of 1993, and [in fact] we passed a [public financing] matching system for [congressional] races, it was framed in terms of communication vouchers but it would provide publicly funded communication vouchers which could be spent for [most important campaign expenditures], and we passed it. And it was the first and only time that a [] system of partial public financing had passed the House.<p><p>And we still couldn't get the president, the president hadn't done anything. And I remember, after it passed the House, finally getting a meeting with the president, and we went in there and I asked the president to do a couple of things: one, to create a public climate and make clear that it was important that this be done, and keep the public pressure on and make clear that he wanted this; and two, to contact some of the members who would be on the conference committee. He immediately turned to Stephanopoulos and said, "Let's call some of those members," and of course ignored the main thing here that was necessary. So, and who knows, I doubt that they called [conference members] because we never got a conference until the very end.<p><p>What then happened was, the House said, well we don't want to go to conference until we work this out because we've got problems, so we want to preconference this with the Senate, the various differences, and then reach an agreement, and *then* we'll name conferees. So we're sitting there, we have an entire year to go, we have a president waiting to sign a bill, we have bills that have passed the House and Senate, and then starts this kabuki dance negotiation, which revolves around the fact that the Senate had a ban on PACS in [the bill], because they could never keep it out, because the Republicans kept offering it and the Democrats couldn't vote against it. The House didn't change the PAC provisions, so the way to compromise this was to cut the PAC contribution limits some. I mean, a ban on PACS was probably unconstitutional anyway.<p><p>The CBC, the Congressional Black Caucus, was very concerned about doing anything to PAC contributions because they come from poor districts, they don't get a lot of individual contributions, they were heavily reliant on PAC contributions. Well, this became the hook over which we couldn't reach an agreement, and it was [] a cover for the speaker and the leadership just refusing to enter into an agreement. And I remember having a meeting with Dick Gephardt, who was majority leader then, in the summer

of '94, and saying to him, I think I used these words, "You guys are crazy." He was a strong supporter of public financing, and I said, you guys are crazy. I mean the institution needs this system, and everyone's going to do okay under this system, everyone, Democrats always think the Republicans will kill them under any system, and Republicans always think that any limits on money are going to kill them, and everyone always gets it wrong. Because the people who get hurt, the real issue with public financing when you get down to it, always, is it provides challenges with substantial resources to run against incumbents, and it's an incumbency issue, it's not a party issue.

So I made this case that this is crazy, and he just sat there and listened to me. And underlying all of this was the notion that [the Democrats had] been in power for forty years here and things were just fine and 'why should we rock the boat?' we're doing swell under this system. And three months later they were out on their rear ends, in part because they hadn't done anything [in the Congress], and the Republicans took over for twelve years. And just to finish this [p/o], when I went in to talk to Gephardt as the Democratic leader in, whenever it was, 1998 or 1999, to talk to him about passing the soft money ban, I walked in, I hadn't talked to him about this in years, I walked in and the first, he looked at me and he said, "Well I guess we made a mistake in 1994."

DD: Wow, yes.

FW: [Representative Gephardt] was a critical player in passing the soft money ban. We never would have gotten a vote in the House without him, because he just [] felt that every time you turned around to try to do something as the leader, he was blocked by special interest money. So anyway, they sat there [in 1994] and they would not enter into a deal.

DD: Was Senator Mitchell involved in the efforts to try to preconference or was that -?

FW: Yes, sure, and Bob Rozen was in the middle of that and they were doing everything they could [to get it worked out]. I found Senator Mitchell to be an absolutely committed leader on this issue, who understood what it meant for the country and what it meant for the institution. Now I can't get into his head, I can just look at how he performed here, and he was a tremendous leader and did everything he could to make this possible. And he had all kinds of internal pressures in his own caucus [against doing reform]. What members say inside caucuses and what they say to the public are living in two different worlds.

DD: Two points, before I forget, that I just want to make is, Common Cause did have a big presence in Maine specifically. You spoke in general about it, but in Maine specifically, so I'll talk to Bowdoin about making certain, if we can get some of the Common Cause folks. Because as his press secretary, I know that we were constantly, even when he was Campaign Committee chair in the '80s, and then as he ran his own election in '88 and was getting ready to run his own election in '94, there was the year supporting public financing but now you're going out and raising money, and he was a very good fund raiser nationally, so there was that tension. So that's one thing I just want for the record, for Bowdoin to note, that we should make sure we cover on the Maine front.

The second was, could you just speak to what you were, if you can, his relationship with Senator Boren or other Senators in working on this, because it was quite contentious, as you've described, and if you have anything that you could offer on that front, and then we'll wrap up.

FW: Well, he let Senator Boren [take the lead]. Senator Boren had mastered every aspect of these issues. I mean he was great on this, and he could answer any question and deal with the technicalities of it, and so he took the point, Senator Boren took the point, and Senator Mitchell [] allowed him to do it. He was always supportive. He never, that I can remember, he never backed away from [Senator Boren. He supported him at every point]. And [

] this is a very threatening issue to incumbents. So whatever pressure Senator Mitchell was getting on the outside, of people who wanted this addressed and dealt with, [he was getting lots of negative pressure from within the conference from Senate Democrats]. We dealt with editorial writers in Maine all the time, even going back to '86 when Senator Mitchell was wearing a different hat. And I don't think at that time, given his responsibilities, was all that enthused about the initial PAC limit effort. But nevertheless, he was a great leader on this, and he managed the conference on this, and he managed it well.<p><p>So we finally come down to the end here, and in like the last week, all of a sudden the House Democrats are begging Senator Mitchell to enter into a conference agreement, and they *know* that we can't get a conference agreement through the Senate, because you can't get anything through the Senate in the last week. If any individual objects, and of course we were going to have more than one Republican to object it, they're begging him to enter into an agreement, because they want cover, they don't want to be blamed for doing what they did, which was kill the legislation. And we didn't want a conference agreement at that point because we're in a different position than Senator Mitchell was. These are Democrats begging them, begging him to enter into an agreement, which of course they have prevented [from ever becoming law].<p><p>**DD:** This is October of '94.<p><p>**FW:** Yes, whenever it was, it was in the closing days of the session.<p><p>**DD:** Because we had a lame duck that year, (*unintelligible*).<p><p>**FW:**

No, no, this was in the closing days of the session. And he did it, we didn't scream about it, but it just was the kind of icing on the cake to the games that the House Democratic leadership had played here to thwart this.<p><p>Now the end result is, if this legislation had passed, we would have established the principle of congressional public financing at a minimum in the House, if we couldn't have gotten in the Senate, we would have established free TV time, we would have ended the soft money system eight years in advance [of when it was finally ended]. And during [the] period from 1992 to 1996, [] soft money tripled to \$250 million, it then doubled in 2000 to \$500 million, and we were left in a position where we had a president elected [in 1992] on a commitment to make this [campaign finance] legislation one of his first four priorities [and he never did]. We had a speaker of the House who said it would be one of the first bills passed, and who refused to schedule it until the last week of 1993, the last week of the session, and refused to enter into a conference agreement [until too late in the session in 1994]. We had Senator Mitchell, who had from the first few days fought to get this considered early, and it's always important to consider this [issue] early, the more you move away from the election the harder it becomes. [Senator Mitchell] passed the bill without public financing because it couldn't be done, and then tried to get a conference agreement, and there we were. And weeks later, the Republicans took control of the House and Senate.<p><p>**DD:** And Newt Gingrich.<p><p>**FW:** And what was [for] public congressional financing, an eight-year [] effort started in 1987, [] had come to an end because the Republican leaders who had opposed public financing were never going to let it happen. And that is why the battles then switched, starting in 1995 and '96, but particularly in 1997, the battle switched to banning soft money, and that battle took from 1997 to 2002, and of course Senator Mitchell was long gone by then.<p><p>**DD:** Well, I'm going to see Bobby a week from Friday so you've given me a lot of good grist for him. I want to be respectful of your time. Is there anything that I've forgotten to ask, I think that, or if there's any closing thoughts you have?<p><p>**FW:** No, I would just say a couple of things. You want to understand the true toughness and integrity of

Senator Mitchell, you look at a couple of things. One is the entire structure of Democrat State Party [Chairs] coming to town to tell him to fold, loosen up, do something on [allowing] soft money, and he just stood his ground. He gave them the process opportunity to make [their] case, but he never bent an inch on this.<p><p>And the other real toughness and integrity that people won't [publicly] see comes in the kinds of pressures he had to withstand within the Senate Democratic Conference from people who simply did not want this but would never vote against it, because they couldn't do that. And from my standpoint, if you want [an example] of his political skills, you look at what he did to me on that decision. He was not going to take the heat from the entire reform community for dropping public financing.<p><p>**DD:** Unless you blessed it.<p><p>**FW:** He, no, I didn't bless it: he assigned the decision to me.<p><p>**DD:** Right, right.<p><p>**FW:** Which in retrospect was quite [clever] and I didn't mind it, but it was a tough twenty-four hours for me. So he really led [on the issue] – the people who lead on campaign finance reform in the Congress, and I've been involved in this since 1973, they're usually not the leaders, they're mavericks. They're people who come to this [willing] to challenge the whole system, and you have to challenge your colleagues, so it's people like John McCain and Russ Feingold who have no problem with that, or a Mike Synar who did it in the House of Representatives, or David Boren.<p><p>It's rare that you get the [party] leaders [in Congress] who lead this effort, but we did get that with Senator Byrd for a couple of years, and then we got it very strongly with Senator Mitchell, and years later we got it with Representative Gephardt, and then at a crucial period with Senator Mitchell's successor [], Senator Daschle. In a different way, because he really was subject to [] a different kind of pressure here, and he took some steps for various reasons that made the difference in winning in the Senate.<p><p>But you don't [normally] get this done by the leader of the party. So [Senator Mitchell] did a fabulous job and it was really great from my standpoint to be able to work with him and to watch him in action. That was one of the more fun things I did [p/o] [in my years of working on campaign finance reform].<p><p>**DD:** Thank you very much, Fred Wertheimer. It is six fifty in Washington, thank you. I'm going to let you know what Bobby says about this, because that will be fascinating.<p><p>(an aside)<p><p>End of Interview<p>