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Interview with Chuck Robb by Brien Williams

Charles 'Chuck' S. Robb

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Recommended Citation

Robb, Charles 'Chuck' S., "Interview with Chuck Robb by Brien Williams" (2009). *George J. Mitchell Oral History Project*. 36.

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George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Charles S. “Chuck” Robb
(Interviewer: *Brien Williams*)

GMOH# 124
August 4, 2009

Brien Williams: This is an oral history interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College with former Senator Chuck Robb. We are in his home in McLean, Virginia, and today is Tuesday, August, 2009, and I am Brien Williams.

Charles Robb: Again, I assume you’ll either edit, or if you’re going to use any long rambling quotes or whatever that you’ll clean them up, edit them or something, or run them by us if they’re important.

BW: Right, right. All right, I thought we’d start, if I could ask you just a little bit about your own background. Do you come from a political family or a military family, or what?

CR: Well not really either, although much more of a political family I guess, although not in my parents’ generation, but my grandparents on both sides were in the political environment. My paternal grandfather was a business partner and came to Washington with Henry Gassaway Davis from West Virginia, and they’d been business partners in buying up a lot of coal and timber lands in Virginia and West Virginia and Kentucky. He was actually born in Scotland, so that’s the only, almost all branches in my family come mostly from Virginia, through the Carolinas, Kentucky, West Virginia, Maryland, in that area, going way back to the middle 1600s. I don’t really have an exact date, but I know that we’ve got some records that indicate that at least eight generations ago there was somebody in the Northern Neck of Virginia. And some others have been prominent in political roles at one time or another and I’m not sure of the right number of greats that was the speaker of the House of Burgesses in Williamsburg. My maternal great-great grandfather was secretary of the treasury of the Confederacy, George Alfred Trenholm, he was the second of the three secretaries of the Treasury, he also had a great big shipping business and was the role model for Rhett Butler in *Gone With the Wind*.

My maternal grandfather was in Woodrow Wilson’s ‘kitchen cabinet.’ He was also an editor of – oh, my goodness, I’m drawing a blank right now – but one of the major Kentucky newspapers, he was on the Interstate Commerce Commission and he was director of the Mint, those were political appointments at the time, and wrote a fascinating, unpublished biography, or memoir I guess, that is in the Library of Congress. I had a chance to look at it, but about that whole period, very in-depth coverage of all of the people in the period from about 1910 through the very beginning of the Franklin Roosevelt administration, and it talks about all of the major figures of that time.

So I'd have to confess that I have that political background. Another grandfather was, I guess this was a great-great grandfather, was governor of Kentucky. So there are those folks that are interspersed in there, and I suppose if there is a genetic predisposition toward getting into politics, there was some little genetic piece in the equation. I was also in student politics, I was a class president in high school, I was in the student senate in college, and then I ran for but was defeated for my only electoral defeat, until the final time when I really didn't, the two elections I didn't really care that much about unfortunately were the two that, one was the final one in the Senate. That's a long story but I was trying to find somebody to run in my stead and one of the last people I contacted was Jim Webb, who's there now. When I finish my memoir I'll include all of these interesting stories.

But in any event, I come from, not much of a military background until you go back a good deal beyond that. My father was in the airlines, he was too young really to serve in WWI. He had been both a pilot and then in the business end of the aviation industry, in the managerial side, executive side, did two careers there, did a little ranching in between, sort of a soldier of fortune but not service in the country. I myself expected, number one, to go to college; number two, to go in the service. I never had any thoughts that those two weren't the next two steps for me, and then the rest of my career has been largely dictated by the choices that came to me, many cases un-beckoned.

BW: I'd love to pursue this and go through all the steps to the Senate, but that's a little bit beyond our purview here today. But let's pick it up with what was, what were the circumstances that brought you to run for the Senate?

CR: In truth, I was never really planning to run for the Senate. I'm not a legislator at heart, I loved being governor, I thought that was – and then you will search in vain to find anybody who's held both jobs who won't give you the same answer – in that during the time that I was in the Senate there were always sixteen members of the Senate who had served previously as governor of their states, not one of them would give you a different answer. And since then I have yet to find anyone who has served who didn't say that they preferred the role of governor. Many of the governors have not been particularly happy in the Senate and I was, I suppose, one of those people predicted that I would not be happy. It's controlled chaos, and we'll get to George in a minute. George's ability to control chaos, and to enjoy controlling chaos on a regular basis, was one of his gifts.

But I had run for lieutenant governor, and I made no pretense of not having an interest in running for governor thereafter. And that worked out very well, and as I progressed through – Virginia's now the only state that restricts governors to a single term – but as I progressed, everything went well basically and we went from a position of fiscal difficulty to fiscal solvency. We did a lot of things that were very rewarding, very necessary, we made significant progress in education and economic development, the things that governors do. And I also was able to bring about a lot of integration, not just along racial lines but along gender lines, along all kinds of ways that hadn't been done before, but red or blue, that was not one of the hallmarks of Virginia up until much more recent days. Massive resistance and what have you unfortunately was one of those black

marks that – the state newspaper that led the (*unintelligible*) just in the last two weeks I think made a formal apology for having been involved in massive resistance.

We were very much identified with the segregationist past, and I was able to both transcend that and so that was one of the areas that gave me a great deal of satisfaction because you, as a governor you have much more a sense of immediacy and urgency about everything that you do, and you have a feeling that you're in control. I frequently equate it to the difference between being captain of a smaller ship as being governor, and being a bow thruster on an ocean liner being in the Senate, you're one of a hundred. And unless you're a majority leader, maybe a minority leader, but a majority leader or chairman of a committee that really has almost independent jurisdiction, but even then it's going to be a frustrating matter.

I had not intended to, but my public approval ratings climbed constantly during the time that I was in office, and so when I left, not planning to seek office again, more and more people approached me and eventually I thought, well I enjoyed public service more than I did the practice of law and in fact I made no bones about it when I left the governor's office, all the major law firms approached me and I said, "If you want somebody that's going to practice 24/7 law, I'm not your man." I said, "I'll basically give you a couple of days a week and I want other time to pursue interests that are outside of the law practice." And they were overly generous, both in terms of the way they compensated me, as well as the way they allowed me to basically do my own thing. And so I was, it was a pleasant enough experience and I enjoyed, I was affiliated with Edward Bennett Williams's law firm in its heyday, and then with Hunton Williams, as it was going through really what has been an ongoing part of its heyday. So I don't have any bad feelings, it just wasn't something that lit my fire, like public policy and participating in the public arena.

BW: And right from the start, when you left the governorship, were you thinking three days a week to prepare for a Senate run?

CR: No, no, see, that's the point. Matter of fact, it wasn't until very late in the game someone who'd been a significant financial supporter of mine, when I was running for and serving as governor, had wanted to run for the Senate. He approached me, as most – once you've been a governor, almost every potential statewide candidate, as a courtesy, will come to your home and talk to you for an hour or whatever, but he was, I would have to say, and unlikely elected official. He was not a particularly outgoing personality, he was a psychiatrist by training, and he'd made his fortune with mental hospitals, not necessarily the connection you want for elective office either. I don't mean there's anything bad at all, it's good that you have (*unintelligible*), but it's the kind of like the Eagleton matter, when people associate you with something else it's not helpful.

In any event, I said, "Sure, go ahead, I'll defer entirely, I won't run if you would like to run." He was aware of the fact that people were asking me to run. I said, "No, you go ahead and do it," I said, "test the waters, see how things will work out." And he eventually found out that there was not much support for him, there was a lot of support for me. I had not announced my intentions,

but the incumbent, who had just been elected to his first term, was raising money like crazy for a second term, suddenly decided that I must be going to run and withdrew. And so at that point I had to fish or cut bait, and I said, "Well yes, I will run, but I'm not going to start campaigning now, I'm going to start campaigning..." This was in I guess '88, no, the election would have been in '88 so it must have been just the end of '87. I'm trying to recollect here the sequence. I guess I was out campaigning for other candidates; because I'd been a popular former governor, lots of people wanted you to come campaign for them. And somewhere in the Hopewell area I think, a reporter came up and told me that there's a very important announcement going to be made tonight, and this person has bought time on all the networks to announce that he was not going to run again, and immediately forced me to have to say, "Yes," rather than to let a whole lot of people get in and then get in later and be basically running against people that had helped you and been very supportive. It just would have been awkward so, and that cleared the decks, at that point there was no challenge. Even the Republicans, it was a Republican that was holding the seat, had trouble finding a nominee; they finally got three people to come to their convention and the one who gave the best speech got nominated.

It was not a terribly challenging race. I think I got 71.2 or some percent of the vote, that would have been the year, '88, that Michael Dukakis ran and he got maybe thirty-five to forty percent of the vote, and George Bush got about sixty-some. I don't remember the percentages now, but it was a very split ticket with the D and the R on that (*unintelligible*). So it all started out well enough, but both due to some things that came up that just further distracted me, as well as my, I just really didn't like the frustrating pace of the Senate. I liked it frankly better when George was still there and he appointed me to head the Senate Campaign Committee, and I worked with him on that. He respected my opinion on the Gulf War, he led a whole group, but he gave me a pass on it because he knew that I had done my homework and had spoken out early. This was the first Gulf War; President George Herbert Walker Bush had invited me over to the White House [to] spend a Sunday afternoon with him and with Brent Scowcroft and maybe one or two others, right after the invasion. And so I was very much up to speed, I went over on a CODEL with George Mitchell, as a matter of fact, that he led, of about seven Democratic senators, if I recall correctly.

I convinced myself that General Schwarzkopf and his team had done the things necessary to carry out the plan that they planned to execute, and so I was a proponent of the action that was taken, whereas George and my normal allies, particularly on defense matters, Sam Nunn, Lloyd Bentsen, John Glenn, Howell Heflin, several others had all been sort of pre-empted. Sam was even asked by George to write, or to lead what would be the opposition to the then-president, President Bush Forty-one's initiative. And I was in leadership but George said publicly, "He's been very up front, he's out in front of this, I'm not going to ask him." And it was a very wise move on his part, and a very conscientious move not to attempt to get me to do something that he knew was a matter of conscience I couldn't do. And again, that's all a part of leadership, is knowing when to make those kinds of decisions.

BW: The CODEL, that was to Kuwait?

CR: It was to Kuwait – I can't remember the order, but we went to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, and met with leadership of all three of those countries. And we finally went to – the Kuwaiti leadership of course at that point had been driven out – so we met with them in Saudi Arabia, as I recall. And then we went into, I'm trying to think, I've been to Kuwait a number of times so I'm trying to think if we actually went to Kuwait then. We did as soon as the war was declared over, I was over there almost immediately with Carl Levin and Jim Exon to examine the whole situation, and there were a lot of very tricky things that were at issue at that point. I'm trying to think whether or not we actually met anybody in Kuwait. I guess it was nominally under control.

BW: It was under (*unintelligible*).

CR: It was under siege. Our children grew up thinking that Daddy always, if there's a war going on, there's fighting going on, Daddy's going to want to go there and see it firsthand, and you really do get a much better feel than you can ever get in briefings.

BW: Sure. When you ran the first time for the Senate, did you run as a New Democrat at that point, or was it, that DLC and whatnot, not (*unintelligible*) in place?

CR: Well, since Sam and I founded the DLC, I don't know if we were calling me a New Democrat at the time, but we'd had three successive Republican governors, as well as hadn't had a presidential election go Democratic since 1964, so there was a strong tide against it. And suddenly a Democrat comes in and doesn't excite the old guard, if you will, I mean does things that to them make sense. First of all, is fiscally responsible, secondly, puts money in the places they belong, doesn't unnecessarily raise taxes – I never took a pledge not to raise taxes, but in truth, I didn't even do it through bonded indebtedness, I was able to continue to squinch down on the budget and put money in education and economic development and places that I wanted, and it all worked. And that was really the foundation of the deal, see, and the speech I made to the Convention in '84 in San Francisco was what started the deal.

I was then chairman of the Democratic Governors Association, so I brought all of the, there were about thirty-four, thirty-five Democratic governors, maybe the high water mark of Democratic governors. There may have that many since, but I brought them all on stage at the end of my speech and introduced them one at a time. But before that, I gave a very tough speech, and they gave me primetime to do it in, and no one tried to edit my speech or even suggested what I might say. They gave it to me because of the role that I held. And you look at that, and I was complimentary of each of the institutional components of the Democratic constituency, if you will, and critical, and I combined them, I said we've got to encourage this, but we've got to stop doing this, or whatever the case may be, and went right through. And because I had all the governors there was wild applause, but I don't think the delegates all really heard it but there were a lot of editorial writers that did hear it, and Sam Nunn heard it. And he contacted me right after, he said, "I've got fourteen Democratic senators and we would like to meet with you." And I said, "Sure, fine." Lawton Chiles at that point was going to host a meeting, a retreat, for a weekend down in Florida, and then suddenly a rumor spread that he was going to challenge

Robert C. Byrd, then majority leader, and he pulled the plug on that just because Senator Byrd, once he heard about it, got all his friends to put the kibosh on it as best they could.

So he didn't hold that, and so we didn't formally form the DLC until a bit later, but there's a lot more to the formation of the DLC, and Paul Kirk coming in as chairman. I was also involved in an effort to select a chairman – had nothing to do with, as being anti-Paul Kirk, but we wanted to get somebody who was not associated with one of the prospective candidates for the next presidential election so there would be an honest broker, as well as someone who could deliver some of what subsequently came to be known as the New Democrat type position, I guess. It's not really centrist as such, but it's not beholden to all of the institutional requests and demands of the individual constituency groups that make up the party. And anyway, I can talk at whatever length you like on that subject.

BW: I'm curious; did Walter Mondale have any response to your (*unintelligible*)?

CR: Well, no, that was the convention that nominated him and [Geraldine] Gerry Ferraro, and at the end of the convention, traditionally, on Friday after the Thursday night acceptance speech, they have all of the heads of the major Democratic organizations, so to speak, maybe [] a dozen or so, they have a unity breakfast. I don't know whether they still have it or not, but that was fairly traditional, and they had it in, I guess it would have been San Francisco still. And I still remember a very hefty labor leader came up to me – and this is a unity breakfast – and just punched his finger in my chest three or four times, he says, "I heard what you said, I know what you're doing," and had the same reaction from some of the other groups. In other words, if it wasn't simply saying, 'tell me your agenda, that will be my agenda,' I didn't use any of the buzz words that are used by Republicans when they're normally taking on big labor or whichever other group that they want to do, but it was very clear that I was suggesting that we need to support the things that were helpful and positive about their [organization], and recognize the contribution they make, but at the same time couldn't do other things.

And that circulated around mostly through editorial circles and whatever and word-of-mouth, said, "Chuck Robb's trying to remake the National Democratic Party like he governed in Virginia." That's the reason I mention it, [because] it was a very clear continuation of the kind of priorities that I set and the way I dealt with the whole process of government was articulated in this speech. In any event, I can go on and on, there's a whole lot of history associated with the DLC, but that doesn't relate directly to George.

BW: Well, let's get on to George here for a moment. Was he much in evidence in that '84 Convention, were you aware of him at all, or?

CR: I must confess to you, at this point I cannot tell you that I ever saw him at all, but I don't know. I had my own inbox full, and I had to do a speech, and again, if I ever finish my own memoir, there's some cute stories about giving the speech. And I had a speech writer, who was very good, but he didn't write the speech that I wanted to give and so he said, "Okay, boss, you're on your own." And even then a couple of people that knew me and knew exactly what I

wanted to say wanted to help me with it a little bit, and then they put all these papers out, and it was only maybe less than twenty-four hours before I was going to give the speech and we were starting really from scratch on a whole new speech that I wanted to give. And I told them all the things I wanted in it, they said, “Right, we’ll work at it.” And they had an open window on the, whatever, twentieth floor of a hotel in San Francisco, and the wind came along, blew all the notes out. And so we started again. But I knew this early what I wanted to say, and I wanted to make these comparisons, ‘we’ve got to do this, we can’t do this.’ But to answer your specific question, I don’t think George had raised his profile that much at that point.

BW: And that was even before Iran-Contra, which is where he first began to -

CR: That’s right, yes.

BW: To come into the national limelight.

CR: Yes.

BW: One of your first duties as an incoming senator, of course, was to join the caucus in selecting the majority leader. Talk to me about that.

CR: Okay, I was courted by all three of the folks, as I assume everybody else was. But if you are just elected as a (*unintelligible*), I don’t know, there were maybe five or six of us that were coming in as new Democrats to the caucus, so we would get extra attention because most of the others already had some sort of a relationship, I suspect. And I want to be fairly careful about the way I say this but, and I had great regard for both Danny Inouye and for Bennett Johnston. Danny approached me basically as, ‘what’s the quid pro quo?’ And Bennett I think knew because he was eventually a part of the DLC, thought, well I’ll be with him because I’m from the south, I tend to be fairly more moderate, in the eyes of the traditional Democrats who participate in nominating conventions, they would consider me on the conservative side, even though I’m quite progressive. I frequently avoid using the term ‘liberal,’ because people misconstrue that, but others would say I’m very liberal on all of the ‘rights’ issues. I don’t think you can say a ‘rights’ issue that I’m not strongly committed to, and so, because I’m viewed as more hawkish in defense issues and fiscal issues, there were a lot folks that were a little suspicious.

But in any event Danny said, he was in position, he said, “If I’m elected,” he said, “I’ll give you the desk that LBJ had when he was in the Senate,” which actually was the one that’s used by the majority leader. And Bennett, I can’t remember, but I think he just thought I ought to be with him. Again, this is a very sketchy memory at this point. And I had a high regard for both men, but George, I don’t think George promised me anything, and I heard later from all kinds of people, including some of George’s people said, “He didn’t ask for anything.” And I didn’t. I just don’t view that as a quid pro quo, and that’s why I’m not a good horse trader in that sense. As governor I can understand when you need to compromise with your legislature on things that don’t involve principle, but make it possible to get something done, and you don’t need to be an arbitrary ideologue and just saying you won’t talk to anybody about differences getting to a

common conclusion.

In any event, I saw in George capabilities that I hadn't really followed perhaps that much during the, you're right, it's Iran-Contra is when I first got to know [about] him, but I didn't really know him personally. I just knew him as a figure who was very much involved in those hearings. And he has just a calm, reasonable delivery that he never appears to lose control. He can deliver a very pointed message without looking like he's bleeding from the eyeballs or doing something that would cause people to think he was not rational. So he could eviscerate an opponent in an oral argument without the opponent ever realizing that he'd just removed his heart and his lungs or whatever. It's a special skill, but he had a good ability to really listen and to reason – Linda's father always used to use the term, "let us reason together" – George was very good at that, and he convinced you rather than ordered you.

And a lot of leaders sometimes forget that. In battle sometimes you've got to say, 'I want the first platoon to go over this ridge, go so far, take out this enemy emplacement,' whatever the case may be, I want the second platoon to [do] this and all that, but even that requires, they have to respect your leadership and respect the institutional leadership. There are a lot of people that just forget and just think whoever orders, whoever has one rank, seniority or whatever. And it's true in the Congress, you find a lot of folks that way too, they're just absolutely, once they get to a certain level of authority, forget why it was, or how they got to that position and how they developed the respect that then allowed them to be indifferent to the people that they needed to work with. And some of those folks are really great negotiators, well, I wouldn't say they're negotiators; they're very good at getting what they want no matter what, rather than working with somebody. If they know they've got the votes, they will absolutely shut you out rather than worry about the next time.

And George was just one of those [who] could bring people together. I don't ever recall - Now there were issues we differed on, certainly, and that's one of the reasons that I would never [take a party leadership position], the only leadership role that I was interested in was the Campaign Committee chairmanship, because it's one that I didn't have to be ideological. I just had to go out and organize events and talk to donors, and I could give my pitch rather than giving whatever was necessary as a party pitch. But I could never do what[ever] George or Tom Daschle or Harry Reid now or others have done, and that's to, if it's sort of a consensus party position and you don't agree with it, you've still got to go up there and sell the position. I understand the need to be able to do that, I'm [just] not personally wired to be able to do that.

I don't know of very many instances that I think George had to make that kind of concessions. I think the leadership positions he developed were ones that he truly believed in. But you've got to believe in what you're saying at any time, and I'm terminally ineffective if I'm trying to sell a bill of goods I don't believe in, I just can't do it. There are some people that can sell ice boxes to Eskimos or whatever, but I'm not one of them.

BW: In looking at George Mitchell's career as majority leader from '89 to '95, were there stages in his leadership, do you think? Or did he pretty much, was he performing right at the

start as well as he was -?

CR: I thought he started strong and built from there, but he didn't start at a diminished level. I think he came in at a high level. Remember, there had been some fights between Ted Kennedy and Robert C. Byrd and others over the leadership and whatever, and I don't think either of them, at that stage of their careers, had everybody behind them. In fact, they were always sort of battling [] each other. By the time George had that locked up, I don't think he ever had anyone that gave a thought to challenge him. I don't know that to be the fact, in fact it's the first time I've ever even said that, it hadn't occurred to me. Certain people look like they're the right person for the job at that time, and George looked like that person.

He had some tough matters to resolve. One of the toughest, from my point of view, and this may be interesting in terms of a little background, because the budget, again, I mentioned that I'm much more fiscally conservative and in my mind, I try to be very measured in my own tone, but it just drives me crazy when I see people talking about either spending or tax cuts that are completely oblivious to the consequences in terms of fiscal sanity, et cetera, so it goes way back. I like to call myself thrifty; my wife says I'm cheap. In any event, it's one of those things that are bred in me, as most of everybody in our generation were children of the latter part of the Depression, we were still coming out of it, and somehow that stayed with me, and it stayed with me through government. I was a real penny pincher, but I did it for government, we tried to save every penny we could, constantly trying to catch up any dollars that I could that didn't appear to be targeted in an area that was going to be productive for the long term, and put them into [other] priorities without massive spending increases.

Where was I leading with that? Oh, then I was on the Budget Committee my first year, and Jim Sasser was chairman of the Budget Committee, and I said ultimately that this is just fiscally irresponsible. And it was George Herbert Walker Bush's budget, but what they were, each member of the Budget Committee, in my view, was being bought off for their particular interest, and they'd eventually cave. And I wasn't going to put any parochial interest, any Virginia interest, I said, "I want a fiscally responsible budget." And I finally agreed in the first year I think it was, I said, "I'll go along and vote this out one time." I said, "Next year, I'm not going to vote for a budget that is not fiscally responsible," in other words, that I think is counter to our nation's interest. And I said, "Take me seriously on that. I'll vote the budget out and I'll privately express my reservations about it or whatever, but next year I'm not going to do that."

Well, push came to shove, and there were several holdouts on the budget. But one at a time, a piece, something was put in the budget that was very important to them and they suddenly were ready to support it. But Jim needed my vote, actually he needed either me or Fritz Hollings, and Fritz Hollings could be just ornery from time to time. Fritz, I enjoyed Fritz, but he sometimes would, he was sort of an old school pol and whatever, and I think his fiscal conservatism was probably real but his approach to the process was old Southern power player politics, and he and Jim didn't get along very well, as I recall. So he needed one of our votes, and Fritz, for just whatever reason Fritz had, he wasn't going to give him a vote, and so he worked on me and he worked on me, and I finally told him, I said, "Remember last year? I said I wasn't going to do

this.”

And I’ve forgotten some of the detail in the meantime, but somehow at the end of the first term that I was in Congress, which would have been the 101st, was that George’s first as leader, the 101st Congress? I think it was.

BW: Yes, yes.

CR: Okay, the 101st, I suddenly disappeared from the Budget Committee, and I was shocked. And I went to the Budget Committee chairman and I said, “What’s this all about?” And he said, “Well, you could have helped me out on that budget,” or whatever it was, I could have done – he did have a legitimate need to cut the committee by one I think it was, and I was one of the junior members, but he made it very clear that he wasn’t going to. I said, “Well I’d like to take this to somebody else.” And he said, “You can go to the Steering Committee,” I think it was, which is chaired by the majority leader. I thought, well I’m going to be golden here. Well, George knew that he had to protect his chairman, and it’s a committee of, I guess it’s all chairmen of the committees, I never really knew anything about it, I never had any other action [with it]. I sat around, but I appeared before this group and I said, I explained essentially what I said to you, I may have lost a couple of minor details, but that was the essence of it. And the committee voted to uphold the chairman.

Afterwards, several of the chairmen of committees came out to me and said “You got screwed.” [They said] , “we have to vote that way to uphold the chairman, and the majority leader has to uphold us,” they said, “but you really got screwed on that one.” And I remember two or three of them that came up to me and they said, “We’re sort of obliged as chairmen of our respective committees.” Again, I think it was all committee chairmen who were on the Steering Committee, I’m not certain. But they made no bones about it, it was a pro forma procedure, and I think George tried to hint to me that this was not going to be a productive venture, but I was hardheaded enough to push it. I don’t know if anybody before or since has ever pushed anything like that, I just don’t know, I was clearly flying in the blue sky at that point and had no precedent and nobody to tell me whether this is good, bad or indifferent, and I knew that there were Democrats that were suspicious of me because I was more hawkish on defense – Foreign Relations Committee was petrified when I came on that [committee], and [] fiscally, they knew that I wasn’t going to be voting for a lot of big spending. And the Republicans of course were concerned because I wasn’t going to be voting for a lot of tax cuts. And I can tell you, there’s not a vote anywhere in fiscal responsibility, none, zero. It’s just my own idiosyncrasy that I stuck with it. Dick Cheney was right, he said: there are no votes in being fiscally responsible, which was a terrible policy. He should have said it some other way, that was just too brutally honest, when he was confronted with that question about, I don’t remember when it was, five or six years ago, maybe less.

So George was the chairman of the Steering Committee, and they voted unanimously to uphold the chairman upon the recommendation of the majority leader. And I know that on the merits, I think I had everybody but Jim Sasser’s vote, but the way the process worked, and that’s what just

frustrated me about the Senate generally, the whole legislative log-rolling was never my thing, I came from a structured background in the military, I liked structured background in a lot of things, and I just don't like constant chaos, which is what it is. And of course now, and it was already becoming increasingly partisan, George did a lot to keep that from becoming as partisan as it became thereafter, and continues to this day.

It was an institution that forty or fifty years ago, I mean they made their speeches, but then they'd go and have a drink afterwards, and then there was real camaraderie. I [heard] Linda's father tell tales that I heard and have read a lot of things, and I know that it existed then, I know that there's been a diminution [on] just about [] a straight line basis ever since. I would have to say that I think George probably did more to slow down the growth of rampant partisanship than almost anyone else. But both parties, they're equal opportunity offenders; they spend more time trying to devise amendments that will make the other side look bad so they can use them in an election. Anything like this just drives me crazy.

BW: So what committee assignment did you pick up then when you lost Budget?

CR: I have to stop and think, maybe that's when I went as chairman of the Senate Campaign Committee. I was on Foreign Relations and Commerce and Budget. I could check the records, I've forgotten. I eventually went on Armed Services, Intelligence, and Finance, all of those, and I also was on the Joint Economic Committee and the POW-MIA Committee, which was a special committee. I think I may have been offered something else and turned it down, but I've really forgotten right now, I'm too shaky on that to say that one way or another. I may have said I'll just go ahead and do the Senate Campaign Committee during this term, because the other two were [] two major committees, in any event, Foreign Relations was one of the four "A" committees, if you will, and Commerce was, like a couple of others, are highly desirable committees. Budget has no real authority, the truth of the matter is they just sort of make the big slices and then turn that over to the committees, and even [with] both the White House and the Congress, it was more a principle thing for me than it was a matter of really being able to control it through the budget process.

*End of CD One
CD Two*

CR: In any event, okay.

BW: Place George Mitchell on the sort of continuum from conservative Democrat to liberal Democrat, New Democrat, establishment, where was he?

CR: Well, he's not easy to put in a box. I suspect that he's really more liberal than he's viewed, because he approaches the job in a less antagonistic way of trying to burnish credentials on one side or the other of the divide. I think he was probably a fairly conventional, as opposed to a hard left liberal in most things. But he didn't wear his ideology on his sleeve in a way that made you either be enthralled by him, or out to do him in, because of his philosophy, he was

much more of a reasoned, principled leader, than he was an ideological leader.

I'd say, probably if you had to put him somewhere on the spectrum, within the Democratic spectrum, he would be center left. In the Republican spectrum he'd be left but not far left, that's my own guess. But those kinds of labels never meant much to me, unless somebody pushes them in your face and says, 'that's the reason I'm this.' If somebody says that they're going to be for or against any legislation that has x, y, or z in it, whatever it is, it's hard for me to take them all that seriously, I'd just say they've abdicated their responsibility to try to find solutions. But that's self-serving, because that tracks my own philosophy.

BW: Those of you of the New Democrat breed, and I guess there were quite a few by '88 or '92, is that correct?

CR: Well, I've forgotten how many we – are you talking about the DLC specifically, because my recollection was we had about fourteen or fifteen senators, Democratic senators at that point. All of that would be in, we've got records of all that kind of thing, but I don't have them right now. We had a good number, and in fact we split up the responsibilities when we formed it. Sam took responsibility for recruiting additional senators, but most of those were pretty well already on board, I don't recall (*unintelligible*) any more. I took the responsibility for governors – and why is his name suddenly running from me [Gillis Long], he died shortly thereafter, he'd been head of the Democratic Policy Committee, who was really the only true believer from the House that we had in our first meeting.

Sam and I talked it over and I made a case very persuasively. They wanted me to be the first chairman and I said, "No, I shouldn't be, because I'm now out of office," I had just stepped down from being governor. "It ought to be a currently elected official," and I said, "it really ought to be from the House, because if we do it from either the Senate or the governorship, we'll never get a lot of House members." We wanted to be able to reach out, and so we persuaded Dick Gephardt, who hadn't had any real role in the formation of it, he eventually came to meetings and whatever and was sort of the pro forma head of [it]. And this is not a denigration [of] Dick, in fact I was sitting next to him at a meeting of the DLC honoring Al From, whose first year salary I had to guarantee to get him to come and work with us, because he seemed to share our views, and he since has recast himself as the founder, and that's fine by me because he clearly was the one that kept, he and Will Marshall and Melissa Moss, the three of them were our entire professional staff at that point.

I went out and recruited [governors], and the toughest governor for me to recruit, by far, was Bill Clinton. I called Bill, we talked several times, I mean we'd been governors together and we'd even gone on overseas trips together, and I didn't know (*unintelligible*). Linda and Hillary would go off and do their thing and Bill and I would go do our thing. I remember going to Taiwan one time, and it wasn't till Hillary was about to be the Democratic Party nominee for First Lady, and/or maybe after the election that Linda was telling how bright and how sharp she was. We hadn't paid any attention to our spouses in our meetings, we were meeting with the poobahs and they were doing other interesting cultural things, but it was a complete mystery, it

wasn't negative, it's just that I didn't realize until she presented her first brief on the health care, which she's been criticized for but it was a masterful job, without a note, speaking for two hours on intricate details of all that policy, it was just mindboggling.

I've gone astray, but Bill was caught between the two then-sort-of wings of the party, putting aside the old conservation segregationist part of the old Democratic Party, there was a progressive, more centrist if you balance everything out. I don't normally like 'centrist' because it suggests that you put everything in the middle, and you can be strong on one side or the other but it isn't that you're always in line with the so-called current conventional definition of a conservative, a liberal or centrist, whatever it is. And I've forgotten where I'm going with this.

BW: About the New Democrat, or the Democratic (*unintelligible*).

CR: In any event, Gillis Long, the House member, was going to recruit House members, and we did that, we started off but then when the year was up. And Dick was doing it, but he wasn't a true believer like Sam and I were, and Sam and I had pretty much, using Al and Will as our coordinator and Melissa for helping with the fund-raising – we didn't have many real meetings, we had a few but they were sort of for show, we'd just decide among ourselves for several years there what we were going to do. And the other people liked what we were doing but weren't as really involved. I finally agreed to be chairman even though I was out of office. Sam made a trip by at the house here, if Gillis Long was still alive, he did, Dick Gephardt did it, sort of pro forma, and convinced me that I ought to do it. So I did it for two years and then I got Sam to do it for two years.

But before I would agree to do it, I wanted to get some folks that didn't fit the mold, so I went out and recruited African Americans, Hispanics, women, from other parts of the country, I recruited big city mayors, Harold Washington, Tom Bradley, you know, we already had Bill, who was a member of the House for a long period of time, and he was very active.

BW: Bill Gray?

CR: Bill Gray, yes, in terms of at least eliminating the monochromistic patina of the organization was good, and what's-her-name, her father was chairman of the Democratic Committee earlier, House member, she's been out for a number of years. []

BW: We can fill in -

CR: My short term memory is just zip. Barbara Kennelly, it came to me. She was a true believer, and Lindy Boggs, but there weren't very many so I went out and recruited, even [more] before I [took the chairmanship, including] Henry Cisneros, Barbara Jordan, all those folks I brought into the DLC, so that we would not be immediately written off as the conservative white boys' caucus, which we were on the verge of doing [] particularly with Jesse Jackson taking a lot of serious pokes at us, the Democratic leisure class or whatever it was. It was important that we spread out beyond that, and I had ended up having two or three debates with Jesse Jackson

which were good to build the DLC, but were not necessarily reaching out in ways that we wanted to reach out.

So anyhow, I'm way off the topic, but I don't recall George ever saying anything contrary. He came and spoke to DLC events a couple of times, at my request. I'm sure he was under some pressure, because Bill Clinton was under pressure from two groups, our group encouraging him to join the group, and the traditional, institutional Democratic Party, which is considered considerably more liberal than the mainstream of the party, as in the Republican side their nominating institutional party is more conservative than the rest of the Republican Party. And they were saying, 'don't join up with these guys,' for all the reasons I've just alluded to that I didn't want us to be viewed, because we wouldn't be taken seriously at that point.

So it was important to me to, and the same thing I'd done in Virginia, I'd reached out and I'd been able to put all kinds of African Americans and others, and women who'd been under-represented historically since the beginning. The numbers I was able to [appoint], and it didn't take any particularly hard work, they just hadn't done it. It had been all aging white males, aging caucasian, or white males. And so I opened it up in a whole lot of ways, and I thought it was important that we do the same thing with the DLC.

BW: When you got George Mitchell in to talk to the DLC, what was his topic? I mean not specifically, but I mean -

CR: I honestly don't [remember]. [] I'm very shaky on this right now, it might be, if you wanted to, do you have Al From as one of the people you're going to talk to?

BW: I don't know, I don't know at this moment.

CR: Okay, Al, [whom] Sam and I basically turned it over to[. When I] got Bill Clinton, we thought Bill Clinton, at that point he was the young wunderkind, he was several years younger than Sam and I were, but he was clearly bright and he had a following in both camps. So we thought he may want to use us, but we're using him, too, and it was a marriage made in heaven, so to speak, because both groups did use each other. He gave much more visibility to the DLC, and the DLC agenda certainly gave him more appeal to a broader cross-section of the electorate.

What I'm saying is that I think George probably was under some pressure not to have much to do with us, but I don't remember him ever saying anything that led me to believe that he was not supportive, because we clearly were not trying to undercut him, and by this point that was when Al Gore ran in '88, that would have been the year I ended up endorsing John Glenn and then Al Gore, not because I thought either one of them could win at that time, but because I wanted to send a message about the party. And then I went and campaigned for Fritz Mondale and Michael Dukakis, even though they were, clearly in Dukakis's case, [] a hopeless cause in Virginia. I mean, I didn't run away or endorse somebody else, I didn't necessarily ask them to break all their engagements to come down and campaign with me, but I didn't say I'm not supporting them, I included them.

BW: Were there times when there was tension between you all and the establishment leadership, I mean Mitchell and company?

CR: No, that's what I'm saying, I don't recall any. But Al From became the institutional memory, and I mean he gave in his retirement [speech], after twenty-five years with the group, here recently, Bill Clinton was coming, and all the former chairmen of the DLC came, and it was a very nice gathering and a lot of very nice things were said. But it was to honor Al for having been there twenty-five years; he was the only one that was still actively engaged in that process.

And another thing, just sort of anecdotal but I thought it was important, and I think Sam agreed with me, that we not be seen as being terminally tied to it in a way that it looked like it was our vehicle for our own ambitions, even though in turning it over to Bill Clinton we knew that he was going to be able to use it, and probably would. But as I say, it helped establish the DLC, too. We were still a fringe organization, and Howard Metzenbaum basically formed the *American Prospect* mostly for the purpose of fighting us. Now, they do some great writing. I don't think I've got it now, I've subscribed to it off and on, and there's some very well written pieces in there, but [in] half of them, or at least [it] used to [be the case], they're taking on the DLC directly, 'why we can't let our party do this.'

And I always just kind of smiled at them, because we somehow represented a threat. And to the extent that we weren't going to be tied to an orthodoxy that is inflexible, not in terms of principle but in terms of what we viewed as a truly national agenda. And that's the way we tried to describe it, not liberal, conservative, whatever, national. There were clearly institutional groups that felt threatened. And my speech certainly hadn't done anything to encourage them to believe that they were going to have, were going to run roughshod over us but it certainly shouldn't, if they'd been looking at it, shouldn't have felt threatened by it either.

And we made a point of saying: we're going to support you. When Paul Kirk was being elected, just before he was elected, before he came out on stage I said, "Remember, we're going to go ahead and form this organization." We didn't formally form it till right after his election, because I had been involved not with the DLC but with people who would eventually be part of the DLC, and trying to recruit a national chairman, which was a fool's errand. But we had done that, the last one had been Neil Goldschmidt, and when he decided he'd rather run for governor I thought, 'that's a very smart decision, I wouldn't want to be party leader either.'

BW: So you would make the case probably that the DLC steered Bill Clinton in some very profitable directions.

CR: Well, it gave him legitimacy. I like to think that he believed that the agenda was in fact good, and that he had to be careful that he didn't seem to be co-opted by it or he would lose the traditional base, labor, teachers, African American constituencies, others that are considered part of the institutional base, and no Democrat could afford to lose all of those folks, and wouldn't want to.

I'll use Walter Mondale as an example, as I was talking about it, he gave the appearance, in achieving the nomination, of having gone to each group as a supplicant, with his hand out and his hat in his hand and saying, 'what may I do for you?' as the Democratic nominee. And Walter Mondale is a fine man, but it left me feeling very uneasy about the process. And appearances mean a lot in something like this.

BW: Now, when you were the chairman of the Senatorial Campaign Committee that was the '92 election cycle.

CR: Yes, '90 to '92, right.

BW: And the Democratic Party did quite well in '92.

CR: We got up to fifty-eight, that was our high point for – well now they're at sixty, so they've, but it's taken until now to get back to that point, yes.

BW: So you were a hero in many people's eyes.

CR: Well, I don't know that I was a hero. I think the fact that we got to the highest level either side of, say twenty years on either side, whatever it was. I mean, people probably liked that, but I have to tell you that the institutional parties still viewed me and Sam, and a lot of others, as this white, southern, conservative group that are simply not, they're not one of us viscerally.

Now, when it came to some of the [Democratic base], I mean I became a hero to some of those, particularly the ones in the gay rights community and whatever, because I was outspoken on issues. I was the only southern senator to take the floor and make a speech against DOMA, and against some other things. I took on the flag amendment, which was political suicide. I took on guns, you name it. They eventually came to love me when they found out some of my social views were far more progressive than they had been led to believe, because I was more identified with, Virginia had been a pretty solidly red – they didn't use red and blue then – but a red state and very conservative, and massive resistance, which had been the closest state to the Capitol that really did it as part of the old Byrd machine going way back, that in order to get elected you had to come out and be in favor of massive resistance. I was the first Democrat that was able to be elected without any of that baggage.

BW: Which baggage?

CR: The massive resistance. That's the reason they started liking Republicans, they had been electing very conservative Democrats for years and years, but you had to really pledge, in one way or another that you were not going to support integration. It may have been worded a little more genteelly than that [] for the organization to get behind you. And I was able to bring some of those people actually into my campaign, which made people a little suspicious too, but they

thought that, here's this young fellow that looks like he might be a reasonable leader, and he wants to do things in economic development and will work with the business community, not buy into their agenda on everything but won't be one of these labor hacks or whatever they would have been referred to at that time, won't be constantly bickering in other areas. They were not sure what they were buying initially, I think it's fair to say, but they eventually came to like the style. And that's why when '85 came around and my success was where we were able to sweep the state and have a woman and a black on the ticket for the first time.

All of that had been made acceptable during this period. So business was great, our economy was thriving, we brought all kinds of industry[into] the state, all these things we wanted to do, we'd raised the educational test scores, we raised the salaries we were paying teachers, we raised the money that we put into the economic development arena, we'd gotten rid of a whole lot of outdated [] regulations. We had all kinds of stultifying regulations that, and I put a task force together and we went through it, and I've forgotten the percentages now, but got rid of about a fourth of them completely, and revised two thirds of those that remained, revised and rewrote so that it was modern, doable and whatever, and the trains ran on time, and all the things that you look for and whatever. It was a growing thing. Then you repositioned the party in the eyes of people and we got a rather eclectic ticket elected, and then four years after that got a governor elected that could not have been elected at any other time. Not because he didn't have talent, he could be a very charming individual, but just because of where the state had been. And we moved the state to a new place, and it desperately needed to be there.

BW: And that was -?

CR: Well, we moved it out of the segregationist past -

BW: No, I mean who was the governor who you referred to?

CR: Oh, Doug Wilder, I'm sorry.

BW: I just wanted you to say that, not me.

CR: Oh, I see, yes. And Mary [Sue Terry] was the attorney general for, a woman as attorney general. I mean of course I ended up, in my cabinet I put a woman in charge of the business community, and a black man in charge of the state police and corrections and all of the things that had been oppressing black Virginians over the years. And people just rolled their eyes, but they did a good job and the state thrived. But there were all those, that was a whole lot of low hanging fruit for progressive moves that really didn't require a great deal of effort.

There had been a Republican governor elected in 1969, who's again, one of our best friends, Linwood Holton, he is the senior-most and oldest living former governor right now. But he had helped with [that;] he had accompanied his daughter to one of the public schools in Richmond. It had been a big deal, there had been no governor that had [] come anywhere close to doing that forever. And he deserved all the credit for it, and in the rough draft of my memoir I give him full

credit for all that, in repositioning [the state]. But then it hasn't happened again since under anybody else, and really, I don't think it's happened again since, we did it and I got three days of full-page editorials in the *Richmond News Leader*, which was the real [backwater to] both of the state's newspapers had deep roots in the segregationist past, but this one was keeping that spirit alive and they said, you've, in effect, embarrassed all of us good white folk by sending your children to predominantly black schools.

BW: Do you think George Mitchell foresaw the, what was coming in '94 in terms of the Republican revolution, and that might have had bearing on his decision to not -, to resign?

CR: I don't know. I don't think of George as being someone who would, would be a quitter, is another way of asking that question, and I don't think that he would have done that unless he thought it was something that he couldn't control and it was just going to be so out of sync that it needed new blood or something. His decision not to run again, I remember, I don't remember when he told me, but it wasn't long before it was announced. I've forgotten, but it was not something that he said six months ahead of time: I'm thinking about not running again. But that's true of a lot of the senators, it's very dangerous to let anybody know that you're thinking about it, because as soon as you do they write you off as a lame duck and your ability to get anything done is greatly diminished.

BW: When he discussed that with you, did you try to change his mind?

CR: I don't remember, is the honest answer. I think I would have respected his judgment, but I would I am certain have expressed great disappointment, as I did when [] I tried to get [Sam Nunn] to run for president back in the '80s and worked a long time, but when he left – you know, first of all Warren Rudman left, it's a bipartisan thing, all these people had been [friends] , that I could work with, and they were leaving in that period, I said, 'I'm here high and dry.' And in '94 I ran again under difficult circumstances, because I wasn't going to quit, but I really didn't want to, and then certainly even more so in 2000, I wasn't going to walk away. I had something to prove in '94 and I didn't want to turn it over to Ollie North. I mean, he's an interesting, engaging guy, but he should not be president, should not be in a position of high responsibility in the government, he ought to be out doing what he's doing, which he does very well.

Where was I going with this? You were asking about George -

BW: Well, '94, and George's decision.

CR: Oh right, I was just thinking, there were a whole lot of people that I thought very highly of who were leaving. Alan Simpson was another one, I mean folks that were just good folks, and that is not an inclusive list at all.

BW: But you're suggesting that that last term of yours was kind of lonely.

CR: Yes, and I, again, without going into detail here, but I will write about it when I do my

memoir, I tried very hard to get someone I thought could win the seat, because I basically inherited a seat that the other side had felt that I was going to be impossible to stop. Again, I say this only to the point of, so that you can understand that it's kind of the dynamics of it at the time, I didn't even realize this I think fully, but I went and looked at the clippings, and people, this was in the height of Ronald Reagan's popularity, and in the race for governor in 1985, in a state that had always gone Republican or whatever, and Ronald Reagan numbers were running through the ceiling, whose endorsement would be more important to you, Chuck Robb's or Ronald Reagan's, and mine was above Ronald Reagan's. So it was a heady time.

There was another point I was making that, you just asked me something [].

BW: Just about a lonely period.

CR: Oh, lonely, yes. I had no desire to run again, and I thought I could get someone that I could feel comfortable turning it over to. But again, I was conscious of the fact that, and I knew who was going to be running on the Republican side, and I knew he would be a very formidable opponent, he [had] run roughshod over a whole lot of folks but he was very skilled at the political game and getting his team together. And I thought if I could get somebody that I thought could do a good job, but I would have felt guilty by just turning it over to him, because of the way I'd gotten it, everybody just sort of, the waters had parted and I was enthroned almost, and I was too conscious of that.

So I tried to get Don Beyer, who is going to be sworn in tomorrow as ambassador to Switzerland. He was, and is, a long time [friend]. He served as lieutenant governor for two terms, then got beat running for governor, and in fact he got beat by Jim Gilmore I guess []. In any event, he passed on the first [chance to run for governor] so that Mary [Sue Terry] could run, and then she eventually got beat by George Allen, and then I had Don and Meagan over for dinner, he thought about it for a night and decided he didn't want to do it. So there weren't very many people I thought could make it a good race. Don is really more of an intellectual than he is the typical grandstander, but he can be funny, he can be witty, he's [] great, we've become very, very good friends over the years.

And then the only other person I could think of was somebody I thought, 'well this'll be a hard sell to get the Democrats to do it but I think he could make a good race out of it,' was Jim Webb. And at that point, I had a tough time getting [him to listen]. He'd come by my office, wanted to talk about some of his projects and things that were going on, we'd become good buds and he'd gone and campaigned with me as, nominally, a Republican, certainly, in the '94 election. But he'd mentioned to me, when we were just riding together, just the two of us in a plane, there were two or three, maybe a couple others with us but that was it, said, "I might like to be in the Senate someday, and it doesn't have to be as a Republican." And that stuck with me, so I thought if I don't get Don Beyer who's the person I thought would be the strongest candidate the Democrats could nominate, I'm going to work on Jim Webb.

And I didn't realize why he was a little hesitant to get together, and then finally we got together

for a luncheon and I pitched it to him, I remember it was in the Monocle Restaurant, and we'd had lunch together and been talking, as I say, [] he was so mad at Bill Clinton for ruining his Navy-Marine Corps Armed Services, and I didn't realize this until later, and I don't think I've ever actually talked to him about this aspect, I probably should to confirm my suspicions, but when I asked him was right after the [USS] Cole [got hit]. And I didn't know it at the time, but he had just written a movie, *Rules of Engagement* I think was the name of it, and Linda and I went to see it one time and it's placed in Yemen. And his rationale was that, and it had to do with the lack of money to do refueling at sea, so they had to pull into a port to refuel and that's where they got the thing in there.

But Jim is one, he's very bright, but he's also one that can explode at any minute, he's got a short fuse but he can cover that being, he's got artistic talent and he's a very bright guy, and he's a very brave guy, too. I mean he's got all the things; he's going to end up being a remarkable senator. But at that point, just the thought of any (*unintelligible*) at all was just [anathema], but he had said earlier that, 'oh, of course I'll be on your campaign.' Then he comes, turns out, I don't remember whether it was weeks or a month later or something, whenever this had happened, and endorses George Allen, whom he eventually ran against and beat for the thing. And my chief of staff, Tom Lehner, was telling me about it, he told me that [Jim] was just apoplectic, and I could see him, because I know Jim, I know the way he operates.

In any event, after he said no, there wasn't anybody else [that I thought could win] [] so I reluctantly, and very late in the game [agreed to run]; I mean you can normally tell if somebody's not going to run because they're not raising any money, and I wasn't raising any money. But I just wasn't going to run away from a fight that would obviously be a very tough fight.

BW: Right, right. Let's end up with just a few other questions, and I'm embarrassed to ask you this, but when did Lyndon Johnson die?

CR: He, let's see, on January 22, 1973.

BW: I'd forgotten, because I thought maybe he had had any thoughts about George Mitchell that would be of worth, but of course that's impossible.

CR: I doubt that he ever knew George Mitchell.

BW: Right, right, I just had forgotten when he died, I'm sorry. Is there a Vietnam caucus, or has there ever been a Vietnam Veterans caucus in the -?

CR: Well, it was just a small group, it wasn't really a caucus. There were six of us who had fought in Vietnam. There was a much bigger WWII [group], they didn't have a caucus either I don't think, but the group that had fought in Vietnam were both "Kerreys," Bob Kerrey and John Kerry, and Max Cleland and -

BW: Chuck Hagel.

CR: Chuck Hagel, and myself, oh, and Bob Smith. I don't think Bob Smith, he was there, I'm not sure that he ever had a true combat role, but he was very much into this controversy that just ended two days ago on the Speicher remains – he saw Americans being held in cages beneath the ground and whatever, and it was just contrary to all of the objective evidence, and he would constantly push for that. So he was one of the six who had been in Vietnam. Al Gore had been there, but as a reporter or whatever and was not part of that group.

And I'm just not sure on, Bob Smith was one of them, but Bill Clinton used to use us – oh, John, McCain, I'm sorry, John McCain, that's one, okay, that's one of them. He'd use the courage of John McCain, in some cases and [the others] to do things that had to do with opening up relations to Vietnam, because he didn't want to be seen as [a draft dodger], he'd trot us right out there and have us come over to the White House when he'd be rolling it out on two or three different occasions, just to give him some cover to do what wouldn't look like it was a leftist move, that he would get [] particularly [by] the POW/MIA group, which [was] good enough. Linda's assistant, she's sick today, she's part of Rolling Thunder, and they have the flags and everything else and (*unintelligible*), but the only person that they could ever come up with a name was Speicher, because his remains had never been found. So they had all kinds of fanciful tales and satellite images of, I mean it was bizarre.

But anyhow, we stuck up for each other. In fact, when John McCain, in the primary against George Bush in his first race down in South Carolina, when they questioned his patriotism or something, all of us, all the Democrats, and John McCain was a Republican of course, and Chuck Hagel I think probably did this, too, because they were much closer than they are now, they've split apart a little bit. But we all signed a letter that said in effect, 'do not question John McCain's patriotism,' or whatever, it was longer than that. And this is in a presidential election in which we're going to support the nominee of our own party. But there was that kind of bond, the bonding that combat frequently brings to individuals.

BW: And did you feel that those experiences that we've not talked about, yours in Vietnam, somehow had bearing on your legislative outlook, or -?

CR: Oh, it had a lot of bearing on a whole lot of things. I don't know that legislative outlook would necessarily be the, or would manifest itself first, but it gave me credibility in dealing with military matters, and it was very clear that a whole lot of members of the Senate, well meaning, didn't have a clue when we got briefed on Desert Storm. I can remember, they'd do it up in the S408 or whatever it is, where you can do the top secret [briefings] and everything, and they would be briefing bombing targets for the next day and some guy said, "These people don't understand what you're talking about. Why tell them that? They're going to go out and [inadvertently reveal information helpful to our enemy] []," and eventually they stopped it. In subsequent wars they haven't done anything like that because it, I mean they'll brief you on what *has* happened, and they'll give the intel [intelligence] briefings, but they don't tell you what tomorrow's bombing targets are going to be. But yes, it gave you a definite credibility that you

get in the eyes of some people only if you've done it and been there.

BW: Do you recall any telling moments that you had with George Mitchell, either on a CODEL or in the Capitol, you know, some -?

CR: Well, telling moments is maybe too strong, but there were two or three times that I recall that we traveled as a dog and pony show or whatever to raise money for Democrats, and normally I would be the person who got the group, the folks on the professional staff (*unintelligible*) fund-raising side weren't on the Senate payroll or anything, would send out the invitations, get the host and all that kind of thing, and then we'd show up. And I would talk a little bit about the thing and introduce George, and George was the principal draw for any of those. I loved introducing him because he was the real thing.

And I can say that in an absolute good conscience. I can be very enthusiastic if I really believe it, I couldn't wax enthusiastic for somebody I didn't believe in. In fact, a lot of times you've got a real loser that you got to go do an event for, or they're there and you say something that doesn't hurt them, but I could never say, and this is going to be the next delegate or the next [mayor] or the next governor or the next senator, I would say, if I thought it was close I might go so far as to say, and if every single one of you will work really hard, who *could* be our next governor, or our next senator or our next whatever the (*unintelligible*). But I wouldn't, I just can't say things that I don't believe convincingly. Some people can do it, but I'm not able to do it, I'd be terrible at poker, terrible.

BW: How do you think George Mitchell should be remembered?

CR: Oh, he's going to be remembered probably more for his post-senatorial activities in Ireland and in Major League Baseball, and now the chapter that he is in the process of writing over in the Middle East and South Asia. But he will be remembered I think as a very effective majority leader, who was able to deliver some very strong, and occasionally, essentially partisan messages, without sounding like you're the axe murderer, Freddie [Kruger], whatever the character that is in those, whatever the movies are, (*unintelligible*) – I don't watch them but you see ads for them, whatever. There's some people that just deliver a message and it's so heavy handed that it causes your skin to cringe or whatever when you listen to them.

[*Outside interruption, aside:*]

Where was I? That's how quickly my attention, I mean this has only come on the last two or three years, and fortunately it only manifests itself in terms of memory, it doesn't have any functional downside to my knowledge yet, I mean I'm recognizing the ravages of age, but [] when I'm trying to think of a name or a place, I can start [the] sentence and by the time I get to the end of it, it's just gone.

BW: You know, I think that happens to all of us.

CR: I know, I'm told that, but it happens to me, I mean there has been a dramatic up tick in its occurrence and reoccurrence with me, and it just drives me nuts because it's something I never used to have to put up with. Even our meeting today, I had to stop and think -

(Taping temporarily paused.)

BW: Is there anything else we want to say today?

CR: No, I'm just trying to think, I guess just my first six years were coterminous with George's majority leadership. And again, I thought he was a superb leader, and I mean he's a first-rate human being. He has all of the tactical skills, but he doesn't throw them in your face. And again, that's the difference between leadership and just simply being in charge.

BW: Well put, well put. Thank you.

CR: Thank you.

End of Interview