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George J. Mitchell

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George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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George Mitchell (4)
(Interviewer: *Andrea L'Hommedieu*)

GMOH #224
March 21, 2011

Andrea L'Hommedieu: [This is an interview] for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College. The date is March 21, 2011. This is Andrea L'Hommedieu, and today we're doing another in a series of interviews with former Senator George J. Mitchell, Jr.

Senator Mitchell, last time we talked about the DSCC and a little bit about Iran-Contra, Senator Byrd in a broad sense, and a little bit about the Senate majority leader and some of the issues you faced there, and the Clean Air Act legislation. I wanted to turn today to health care, and if you could talk some about the dynamics that were in play during the health care debate in the early '90s, and what you recall as being the major pieces that went on in that time.

Senator Mitchell: Following President Clinton's election in November of 1992, he invited the speaker of the House of Representatives, Tom Foley, the majority leader of the House Dick Gephardt and I as Senate majority leader to come to Little Rock—I believe it was in early December of 1992 but I'm not sure of the exact date—where we had dinner with he and Mrs. Clinton and had a long discussion about how we would try to proceed in the coming year. It was in part social, to get to know each other better, to talk about getting acquainted and personal matters, but also substantive in the sense that there was some discussion about issues. And the issues were pretty clear to everyone. Health care was one among many that was discussed.

In [1993] there began to be developed by the White House legislative initiatives, ideas for how to proceed. Obviously the budget and the economic program was a very major item. I can recall, as I mentioned in our last interview, that under Clinton's predecessor President George H.W. Bush, the deficit broke through the barrier of one hundred billion dollars and it seemed like an enormous amount at the time, which it was—in comparison to what's happened now of course, it's very small. But that preoccupied everyone for a long time, and that continued to be a real concern when Clinton took office.

So I think for the first year the emphasis was on coming up with a major economic program that took precedence over other issues, and that culminated in the summer of 1993 with the passage of a major economic program initiated by President Clinton. It was the biggest battle by far in the first couple of years of Clinton's administration, and it was a very close thing. The legislation passed the Congress, although it was opposed by every single Republican in the Congress, Senate and House, and in the Senate the vote was fifty-fifty, and Vice President Gore, presiding over the Senate at the time, cast the tie-breaking vote to enact the program.

It was important and consequential. All of the Republicans opposed it, as I said, and pretty much all of them predicted that if this economic program passed, the budget deficit would increase, unemployment would increase, economic growth would slow down or stop, inflation would be high. And of course, as we all know, subsequently the exact opposite of what they predicted occurred. The deficit shrunk, ultimately became a surplus during Clinton's time in office, unemployment declined, employment rose, interest rates declined, economic growth increased. It really was a significant economic program.

Now obviously, as we all know, there are many factors that contribute to the direction and actions of the national economy. And the policies of the president or the Congress, while they have some effect, are not the exclusive factor dictating or driving the result. But I always said in response, frequently with Republicans and joking about it, that they all predicted that bad things would happen if Clinton's program passed, and if all those bad things *had* happened, they would of course have attributed it to Clinton's program. So since good things happened, it's pretty hard for them to argue, well, his program had nothing to do with the *good* things. (*laughter*) In other words, you can't say that the president's program is the cause in the event of failure, but is irrelevant in the event of success.

Now, once that program passed—and it was the end of the summer session in 1993 (I think it was about the first of August)—attention turned to health care. There had been a lot of work on it before then. People had been engaged in an effort to draft legislation, but the focus really became much more intense on health care. I don't recall the dates of it, but at some point in the effort the president had designated his wife as sort of the leader of the effort on health care in his behalf, and we had had a lot of hearings on it. This would be during ['93 and '94]. The effort was moving on, although it was not the highest priority item while the budget was going on, the economic program [was being considered]. But work was being done [on health care].

We'd had a lot of hearings in Congress, a lot of conferences involving all of the Democratic senators, separate series of meetings involving the Democratic and Republican senators on the Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over health care, and so there was a lot of discussion, a lot of effort. The drafting of legislation was under the supervision of Mrs. Clinton and a team of experts who had been put together by the White House and the administration to come up with it.

That culminated in November of 1993—I believe it was late November—with the introduction of legislation in the Congress, the president's legislation that had gone through this whole drafting process. It was extremely comprehensive. I think it was over a thousand pages long, very detailed, and I introduced the bill in the Senate and Dick Gephardt introduced it in the House. The expectation of course was that action would begin in the following year when the Congress returned to session. The introduction of the legislation came at the end of the session in 1993.

Interestingly enough, in December of that year, Senator John Chafee, a Republican senator from Rhode Island, introduced legislation in the Senate also, which had twenty-two Republican co-

sponsors, including Bob Dole, who was then the Republican leader in the Senate. It was a very hopeful sign, and a hopeful time. Senator Chafee and I served on two committees together, the Environment and Public Works Committee and the Finance Committee. He was from Rhode Island; I am from Maine. He had a home in Maine, his family had a summer home in Sorrento, in Hancock County, and I had met Senator Chafee when I was the United States attorney. I think I may have told you that story—maybe I didn't, I'll digress to tell it now because it's relevant to the health care situation. I'll try to be brief.

I served as United States attorney in Maine, the chief federal prosecutor, from 1977 until I became a federal judge late in 1979, and I supervised and conducted a series of prosecutions involving a rather widespread theft of antiques. It began in large private estates, mostly summer estates in Maine, but ultimately spread to the burglarizing and stealing from antique businesses by a number of gangs of thieves who would truck these down to Boston, to a place in Virginia, and a place in Florida, where auctions were conducted of antiques. They'd be stolen here, driven down, sold for a few hundred dollars to an auctioneer who would then turn around and sell them for many thousands of dollars.

One day I got a call from a staff member of Senator Chafee's office telling me that the Chafee family home in Sorrento, it's a summer home that his family owned, had been broken into and some important and valuable antiques had been stolen. They'd heard about my series of investigations—there were quite a large number of cases brought—and enquired about it. And to make a very long story short, I finally recovered these antiques for them and turned them back to Senator Chafee. So I didn't [] personally meet him, but I talked to him on the phone a few times and he was very grateful. So when I got to the Senate we got to be quite good friends and we worked closely together. He was a terrific guy, really a very able guy, what would be considered now as quite a moderate Republican.

When he introduced the health care bill, it was a pretty good bill. It didn't have what I would have preferred, and it was not as far-reaching as the administration's bill that I'd introduced the month before. But I talked with him immediately thereafter, and we saw the possibility, the prospect of being able to do something on health care.

AL: Was this a counter bill to what he had seen introduced by you? Or had he also been working on a completely separate -?

GM: I think he would have been working on something, because a bill of the magnitude that we both developed couldn't have been done in a matter of a few weeks. I think, if my recollection is correct, we introduced our bill perhaps the last week in November, and then he would have introduced his bill three or four weeks later, just prior to Christmas I think, 1993. So he'd been working on it for a while. And we knew the differences in the approaches of the two parties. But his bill actually—I don't remember all the details—but it wasn't too far off what Obama subsequently introduced a long time later, and which became the very controversial Health Care Reform Bill.

So Chafee and I talked a lot and we worked together, and over the next seven months there was a lot of discussion about trying to move this process forward. But two things happened that deflated our hopes and defeated any prospect of moving forward. The first is that the insurance industry, which was of course very adamantly opposed to the health care legislation, mounted a massive television advertisement campaign which was, until that time, the largest expenditure ever made to influence legislation in the United States. It's since been surpassed many times but at that time it was a huge thing, and they had a very famous ad, the so-called 'Harry and Louise' ads. A couple of actors pretending to be a husband and wife talked about the bill in a negative way and it caught on. It was a very effective advertising technique and negative campaign against the bill, and the Republicans themselves began to coalesce against it.

So in our discussions, we the Democrats kept moving toward the center, while the Republicans kept moving to the right, so that we were chasing after them in terms of the provisions in the bill, and they were moving away from us faster than we were able to move toward them. So there were very many fitful starts and negotiating sessions and negotiating groups, the end result of which by late August of that year, after an effort to move the bill on the floor of the Senate failed, that I withdrew the bill and the effort didn't succeed.

As an interesting aside, when the Senate Finance Committee took the bill up—I think it was in early July of that year (it would be 1994, of course it was an election year and so that didn't make it any easier)—by then the Republicans had moved away even from their own bill. And as I said, Chafee was a really good friend, and either the day before or the day of what they call the mark-up of the bill in the Senate committee, I said to him, "John, I'm going to take your bill and I'm going to introduce it as an amendment at the Finance Committee. Now, surely you guys are going to support your own bill." "Oh, don't do that," he said, "you'll just embarrass me, I can't vote for that anymore." The Republicans had sort of moved. They'd moved away. Even a guy as reasonable as he wasn't in a position to support the bill that he'd introduced. And of course our bill went a lot further. [So I didn't do it, he was such a good guy and good friend].

One of the many problems that we had was that the administration had made the decision early to introduce an actual bill, not to propose a concept or an idea and let Congress fill it out, not to establish general principles which the president would insist be in the bill and that [if] the congressional bill met those principles he [would support]. It was a very detailed bill. For years thereafter, the general perception was that it had been a mistake to send up a full bill, and when Obama took office he was reacting to that failure. He wasn't around at the time, but he'd obviously been told by a lot of people: "The effort failed in the '90s because it was too prescriptive and what you should do is just say you favor certain ideas and let Congress fill in the blanks." He did that, and of course he got criticized for that. So it's one of those things, you're darned if you do and darned if you don't. If you do it one way some people don't like it, if you do it the other way other people don't like it.

It was a tremendous accomplishment by the Obama administration because, having gone through it, I recognize that the Senate process enables delay and obstruction much more so than it permits swift action and movement toward the passage of legislation. And the more comprehensive and

complex the legislation, the more those principles apply. It would be hard to be more comprehensive and complicated than health care, which of course represents a very substantial portion of our national economy and which affects every single American. It's unavoidable that as an American, from the moment of birth to the moment of death, you have some contact with a health care system.

So I began to believe that it would be very difficult if not impossible to pass comprehensive legislation after our failure, that maybe we've got to try to do it in increments, which did occur over a period of time. But the experience in the Obama administration was that they were able to get it done in a very difficult circumstance, and of course here it is now, March of 2011, and it's still extremely controversial. [It] was undoubtedly a negative factor in the election for Democrats of November 2010, and will no doubt be a major factor in the general election of 2012. Republicans have made it clear that one of their major objectives is to repeal the health care bill, and one of their major campaign tactics is to make that the issue in the campaign.

I have no idea whether or how they'll succeed in 2012, but I can tell you from my own experience that we're discussing here, it is a very complex, difficult subject on which there is a lot of misunderstanding, mistrust, and bad experience on the part of Americans. So I think it's a good thing that legislation was enacted. I think it's a good thing that we tried, even though we did not succeed. And my hope is that the reform will not be repealed but in fact will be expanded into areas that in some ways wasn't possible when it was passed this past year.

AL: And can you talk about the 'Hillary factor,' as you might call it, in that health care debate? I've heard people say that she knew it inside-out, she had worked very closely with the pieces of that bill.

GM: She did know it inside-out. She spent a lot of time on it, and she's an obviously intelligent person and devoted a tremendous amount of time and effort to the legislation. You won't recall this, but in the course of the deliberation on it she traveled around the country, and I invited her to come to Maine and we had a huge event at the University of Maine at Orono on the health care issue and legislation. I worked very closely with her and thought she did a good job.

Look, we all made mistakes in the process, that's for sure. And there's no denying or prettying up the reality that we weren't able to pass it, in part I think because of our own mishandling or misunderstanding of the best tactic to proceed, in part because of the skill of the Republicans at obstruction, and in part because of the tremendous advertising campaign that made it very negative around the country. And the reality is that there are a lot of people in this country who don't favor changing the health care system. A lot of people have tremendous vested economic interest in the continuation of the current system because very large sums of money are made. Most people, not just people in the health care industry, this is people everywhere, are generally able to rationalize that something that benefits them is probably good for others in the country as well. Years ago the then chairman of General Motors expressed it pretty directly. He said "What's good for General Motors is good for the United States." So I think many people are able to rationalize that, including people in the health care industry and others who have different

points of view on that or other subjects as well.

AL: And when we talk about environmental legislation and your work on renewing provisions in the Clean Air Act, and also adding provisions, is that correct if I characterize it that way?

GM: Yes.

AL: I'd like to talk about that, and also how you saw the environmental issue as also a health issue.

GM: It clearly was and *is* a health issue. We live in an age of incredible scientific discovery, and it's become, I think, increasingly obvious that health and the environment are inextricably and deeply interrelated. I don't see how any reasonable person can dispute the general premise. Some people might argue how much of an effect, but it seems to me pretty clear that there is an effect, and a healthy environment is a major factor in healthy lives.

That is certainly the case with water pollution and air pollution. History is pretty clear that some of the most dramatic and devastating of ancient plagues and epidemics were the direct consequence of poor sanitation, particularly the absence of clean water. And the same is true of clean air of course, as we now know has been very well established around the world. The dramatic increases in carbon dioxide over and above natural emissions of carbon dioxide, that is man-made emissions, have a direct effect on health.

I felt that while there was a good environmental case to be made with Clean Air and Water legislation, [] the health impact tended to resonate more with people. Because for many people, a pretty environment or a clean environment tend to be abstractions in their minds unrelated to their daily lives, the need to survive and get by and cope from day to day. But health concerns do have an impact. So I felt in terms of the reality of the situation and the ability to gain the attention of the public and the support of the public, making clear the health effects would be a positive in terms of gathering support for particularly Clean Air legislation and Clean Water. We had huge battles over both Clean Air and Clean Water in the time that I was in the Senate.

AL: Can you talk a little bit about that in terms of what some of those battles were and what areas were opposing it?

GM: I talked in our last interview about the revisions of the Clean Air Act that were made in 1990 and that was a major battle, in part waged on health care. I mentioned to you at the time that the core leadership on that battle was bipartisan. It was really four senators. Many participated, but the central participants were four, two Democrats and two Republicans: Max Baucus of Montana and myself being the Democrats; John Chafee of Rhode Island who I previously mentioned, and Dave Durenberger of Minnesota, both moderate Republicans, both very strong for protection of the environment and both extremely significant participants in the revisions to the Clean Air Bill.

And they also were involved in other efforts. I'll just describe two other bills. I can't remember whether I've discussed these with you before, we've had so many sessions. One is the Clean Water legislation, (*aside omitted*) and if it's repetitious you can excise one or another version, or maybe bring them together.

Senator Muskie, my predecessor, was in my judgment beyond any doubt the greatest environmental [legislator] in American history. He was the principal author of the two laws that are the foundation of protecting America's environment, beginning in the latter part of the twentieth century and now continuing into the twenty-first, and those were of course the Clean Air Act, which we've discussed, and the Clean Water Act.

At the time that Senator Muskie began his efforts on clean water, approximately eighty-five percent of the waterways in this country were polluted, many of them unfit for drinking, for swimming, for boating, for any personal or recreational use. After the Clean [Water] Act was passed and in effect for a long period of time, those numbers were reversed. Eighty-five percent of the covered waterways (that is, covered under the act) were relatively free of pollution and fit for all of the purposes I described, some or all the purposes that I described, and only fifteen percent remained polluted.

You're from Maine, and we're all familiar with the examples here in Maine—the Androscoggin River. Well, when I was born my parents lived literally on the Kennebec River, and I mean literally. You stepped out the back door, you stepped right into the river. Right across from where we lived, in Winslow, was a huge paper mill, at the time a company called Hollingsworth & Whitney. It subsequently became part of Scott Paper and then it closed down. I worked at that mill when I was in college—summers—worked at that mill. Almost directly adjacent to where we lived was a large textile mill, the Wyandotte Worsted [], where my mother spent many years working.

So both of these industries on one side of the river and the other, just above where we lived, simply poured all of their waste into the river. There wasn't any national legislation to protect, and in most states the legislatures were reluctant to act because they were influenced by the industries. The Kennebec River when I lived there was the last place anybody would want to live. It was a slum. It's all been torn down now, a bunch of tenement houses right on the river, because the river smelled to high heaven, it was constantly covered with scum on the surface. When I was a kid, no sensible person would ever think of going into or on the Kennebec. Now the Kennebec is used for boating, fishing, it's had a tremendous recovery, as has the Penobscot, the Androscoggin, and others. You can replicate this all over the country. It was not just industrial waste but human waste. Many municipalities didn't have waste treatment facilities, so human waste was simply pumped into the rivers and out to sea.

That had a dramatic effect on human health everywhere, and it also had an effect on people who lived near the river. When I was six my parents moved to a home just a few hundred yards away. There was a railroad track that separated where we [previously] lived from the town, so we had the river on one side and the railroad track on the other. We moved across the railroad

track to the ‘good side’ just a few hundred yards from the river, but it was like going to the Garden of Eden.

Muskie had a truly dramatic effect on the lives of not just people alive at the time but on people who are going to live in this country, permanently, in cleaning up the waters. When Reagan came in, of course he was elected on a policy which he expressed very pungently in his inaugural address. He said that the government is not the solution, government is the problem. One of the things he wanted to do, said he would do, was to repeal much of the federal regulatory mechanisms, many of the mechanisms which he felt were harmful to business. Among them was the Clean Water Act. He wanted to repeal the Clean Water Act, to turn it back to the states, where of course for nearly two hundred years there had been an abysmal failure; you simply didn’t have any kind of effective clean water program in this country.

Amazingly enough, he almost got it done. We had a big battle in the Senate. I was on the Environmental Pollution Subcommittee by then, trying to preserve the Clean Water Act. We had to make a number of changes in the law, downsize a bit, but the real effort was to save it from extinction. I’ll go back to Senator Chafee, who I’ve mentioned a lot, he was helpful in that effort. He helped us keep the bill alive, even though as a Republican he went along with some of the changes. Some of them made sense. No program is perfect; they can all be improved. It is my recollection, although I’d have to check this—Anita [Jensen] would know this very well—that they came within one vote in the Senate of repealing the Clean Water Act.

I think what happened is, Reagan vetoed the bill. This would have been in the latter part of the ‘80s, 1985 or 1990, sometime in that period. We overrode his veto and we prevailed by one vote, to prevent the repeal of the Clean Water Act. I mean, it’s just shocking when you think about it.

AL: And that brings up questions, and one of them was, during that time, when it was such a serious battle to save it, were you in touch with Senator Muskie, was he involved from the outside?

GM: No, not a great deal. I didn’t want to bother Senator Muskie. He had left the Senate, he had a life of his own, and he was busy at the time. I did talk with him from time to time. We remained very good friends until his death, and I always regarded him as my hero, my mentor, and a great role model. But I knew what his feelings were, I didn’t have to call him up to see how he felt about the Clean Air Act. So, while there were occasional discussions, it was not an intense contact on that or any other issue.

AL: And I think if you look over the now decades of it being in place, there’s been periodically attacks against it, trying to weaken it, but it’s stood up very well.

GM: It has for all this time.

AL: Do you have a sense of what it was about the way it was crafted that’s kept it so strong?

GM: Well, I think it's much more the reality that people recognize that eighty-five percent of the waterways in this country were heavily polluted, in the system that existed, that is, under state control, and it wasn't going to change. It took concerted federal action—because it's very expensive; states didn't have the money—with federal funding to assist states in constructing the necessary facilities to deal with the problem, and to establish the regulatory structure that would see to it that municipalities, industries, and individuals complied with the law.

I think it was, without detracting a single bit from the importance of the roles that Senator Muskie and everyone played in it, that the problem was so apparent, the need so obvious, and the remedy so successful that people don't want to get rid of it. Even in a time like this very moment, when you have a large national effort by some to dismantle what they regard as unnecessary and inappropriate regulation. I don't think I've seen even the Tea Party now proposing to repeal the Clean Water Act. I don't know that. I don't follow their proposals too closely, but I've not read or heard of any effort in the Congress to repeal the Clean Water Act. I don't think it would get very far.

AL: I know on the state level in Maine, there are efforts to downgrade those on the state level—environmental regulations—so I don't know if that's maybe happening in states here but not at the federal level?

GM: Well, one of the reasons I think for the endurance of the Clean Water Act is that it is administered by the states. The federal program establishes national regulation, but the states still have a role to play. It doesn't completely replace or displace the states. It works through them, provides funding to the states, although it is federal standards that have to be met. And I think that's helped to make it effective. So while you will have in states from time to time some action of that type, I don't think there is a concerted effort now to repeal it. But there was in the '80s, during the Reagan administration, which fortunately failed.

The other issue—I think I may have already discussed with you—was the oil spill legislation?

AL: Yes, you did talk about that. And thinking broadly—and if it's too broad tell me and I will ask something a different way—but as you think about all the different legislative issues you've worked on, are there any maybe that are small but stick out in your mind, that I might not know to ask about?

GM: Well yes, there is one that I spent a lot of time at. It's really small in the national scheme of things but important in Maine, and that was the Acadia National Park issue. When I was appointed to replace Senator Muskie, one of the first things I did on taking office was to meet with the members of Senator Muskie's staff. When Governor Brennan appointed me he said he would never ask me for anything, which I was really impressed by, and he never did. He never once ever called me up and said, "Will you vote for this bill, would you do that?" He said, "You do what's best in your judgment for the people of Maine and the country; that's all I ask of you." That's all he ever asked me.

But one thing he said to me, he was conveying a message from Senator Muskie to whoever was to be appointed to replace him, was please do your best to keep as many members of my staff on as possible. Of course I knew many of them. I'd worked on Senator Muskie's staff so obviously I was sensitive to that and wanted to do that. One of the first things I did was to meet with everybody who had been on his staff, to ask them what they were doing. Some people I'd met before, but I had not been on his staff for many years and others had come on in the meantime.

And so I met Estelle Lavoie, who you know, I think. Estelle practices law here in Portland now. One of the things she was working on was a controversy involving Acadia National Park in Hancock County. Acadia was I believe for some time, and may still be, the only national park that was created entirely on land that was donated to the government, private land that was a donation to the government. It became a park during the administration of Woodrow Wilson, and it grew over time but had no authority to acquire land other than by donation. As a result, there was no contiguous area, there wasn't a boundary. It wasn't that government had gone out and surveyed some land and drew a circle and said we'll take over everything inside this area, as is the case with most national parks.

The land was spread out over ten towns, disconnected, and the towns, the officials in the towns became upset because it became quite common for wealthy individuals to donate their homes, their estates, to the park. The towns would lose the property off the tax rolls, and it wasn't very usable as a park to have twenty acres and a house somewhere that's ten miles away from the nearest portion of the national park. How could it be effectively used and integrated into the park? A good bit of tension had developed between the officials in the towns and the Park Service, and in particular with a national organization that was a charitable entity that supported the national parks, the National Parks Association I think it was called at the time.

Estelle described it to me and encouraged me to get involved, which I did unwittingly, because I had no idea how much of my time and effort it would take. But I much later joked that this was the best training I ever had for my experience in Northern Ireland and the Middle East, which was dealing with the Acadia Park boundary problem. For six years, I worked six years, it would have been from 1980 to about '86, I spent what must have been in the aggregate thousands of hours involved in the Acadia Park boundary issue.

What it entailed was first meeting with all sides to try to get a sense of what the problem was and how to deal with it, and then arranging a series of land swaps to try to amass a contiguous body of land that would form the park. For example, the town of Bar Harbor owned some land that is now smack in the middle of Acadia National Park, and some parts of Bar Harbor, places where there had been large estates, were owned by the park. I met with Bar Harbor town officials many times over a period of time to engage in a series of land swaps, so that they would get these properties back on the tax rolls, and the park would come close to establishing a contiguous landmass. But that took a really long time, because there were a lot of parcels of land, and I dealt with individuals as well, I'd go out and meet with individuals.

AL: So you were hands on.

GM: Hands on, yes. I now have a home in Seal Harbor. A side issue with this is how I got interested and liked it up there a lot. But most of my meetings up there during that period were in January and February and it was really cold and difficult. But by 1986, I think it was, we'd gotten enough done so that I had drafted and had enacted legislation which established a contiguous, relatively contiguous, landmass.

You know if you go to Acadia, it's not like most national parks where you drive into a gate and you're inside and you know when you go out. In Acadia you go in on a road, and you're driving, you may be in a town and you don't realize it, and then you're in the park, you don't realize it, then you're back in town. But it's a relatively contiguous landmass. [We] also established for the first time the principle that the park has the power of acquiring land under certain circumstances, which they didn't have before.

It was met with widespread, although not unanimous, approval. Some people didn't like it. I got some flak. It's impossible to satisfy everybody under these circumstances. But one consequence of that is, when I ran for election, I became the first Democrat since the Civil War to carry Hancock County, or so I was told. I never went and looked at the records. And I used to kid Senator Muskie, who in one election, I think it was '64, won fifteen out of sixteen counties but didn't carry Hancock County. I used to kid him that I carried Hancock. Because I became not well known but better known than I would have been up there.

In the process of going there, I really got to like the place. I liked the people, I liked the place. I had been a couple of times when I was a kid but really didn't know much about the area. When I first got married and moved to Maine after leaving Senator Muskie's staff in 1965, my wife and daughter and I used to go down to Wells, a place called Drake's Island, every summer. But by the time I got into the Senate in 1980 and started with Acadia I got to really like it up there, and so began renting for brief periods of time cottages in various places during the summer, and did so for maybe twenty years. And then in about 2000 I was able to buy a piece of land and I eventually built a house up there, so now my family and I spend the summer months up there. I have young children, as you know, and once they get out of school we go up and we stay till Labor Day, and then back to school.

I really love it up there. It's small in the international scheme of things, but it took a huge amount of my time. And I think it was a good experience to go through, to have a lot of patience listening to people, to spend a lot of time meeting with local planning board and local planning council and hearing different points of view and trying to reconcile them.

End of Side A

Side B

AL: Did you have any further thoughts on that?

GM: No, except to say that I worked very hard at it and I got a good result, but I think I was the principal beneficiary because I really got reacquainted with Acadia and it's a place I really love. And fortunately, my children just love it, they love to come to Maine. In the summer they can't wait to get up there. And so I guess the moral is if you work hard to do the right thing, you end up being the principal beneficiary.

AL: And also, your work has taken you so many places in the world and demanded so much of your time, it's nice that they have that sense of Maine in their growing up.

GM: Yes, that's right. One of the big problems I had last summer, in my current position, is that I wasn't able to spend much time up there. That was really tough, really tough for me. Over the years I gradually increased the time that I could spend up there in the summer. While I was in the Senate it was very brief, three or four days maybe. I don't think I ever stayed there for as much as a week when I was in the Senate, because during the August vacation you travel around the state and meet constituents and do a lot of things. Gradually I increased it over time, but last summer I had a huge regression and spent not much time up there. I was in the Middle East most of last summer. It's one of the most difficult parts of what I'm doing now, is being gone and not being around with my kids and my family.

AL: I wanted to talk some about staff, because you've had many staff in many situations over the years and just sort of your reflections on staff. What strikes me in the Senate, you or someone on your staff hired and brought in a lot of Maine kids, as you might call them, young people from Maine. Can you talk about that? Was that something that you intended, did it just happen that way?

GM: No, it didn't just happen that way. I not only intended, I directed that it occur. First, in general terms, I'll begin with an old saying. When I was a member of the staff of Senator Muskie, I did not agree with the saying that the staff runs the Senate. But when I got to be a senator, I realized that there's much *to* the saying. If the staff doesn't run the Senate, it has a big role in running the senators. The demands upon a senator's time in terms of issues, in terms of constituents, in terms of all those in our country who seek to influence national policy and national legislation, the demands are huge. No one person, no matter how intelligent and hard-working, could ever deal with it on his or her own. So having a staff that is capable, intelligent, includes people who know how to deal with constituents in a democracy is very important. I was lucky that Senator Muskie had assembled a first rate staff that I inherited and I gradually built on.

In the first eight years that I was in the Senate, I hired people for my staff. While the vast majority were from Maine, they weren't all from Maine. The numbers were relatively small, in keeping with the size of the Senate staff. But when I was elected majority leader, I suddenly found that I had authority over much larger activities. I appointed the Senate sergeant-at-arms who managed the operations of the Capitol on the Senate side. I think the budget then was one hundred million dollars a year, there were thousands of employees. I wanted to be able to give as many youngsters from Maine as possible the chance, provided they were qualified and capable and interested in working. I knew there was a good work ethic in Maine—I'd been

around the state enough, traveled extensively in the state—that I could help.

So we began a process of providing opportunities for Maine youngsters in a wide variety of jobs in the Capitol. So for quite a while, if you got on an elevator, or took a tour of the Capitol, or a lot of other things, chances were pretty good it would be a young man or woman from Augusta or Presque Isle or Rumford who would be showing you around. We had a very large number of people who came up that way, and who started with me, and many of them are still there.

AL: A lot of them are still there. And a lot of women, which I think was probably at a time when women were really fairly early in having significant numbers of them in the Senate. Is that fair to say, from your experience?

GM: Well it is. Among the things I'm proud of, is I appointed the first female postmaster of the Senate, that was Gayle Fitzgerald Cory from Bath. I appointed the first female sergeant-at-arms of the Senate, that was Martha Pope, who had been my chief of staff before that. So yes, there were a lot of Maine women *and* men who worked, and many still there. Gary Myrick, who's from Sangerville, came to work for me, and now he's the chief of staff to Harry Reid (he's the current Senate majority leader). Gary's a terrific young man. He's done a great job. And I run into—I don't go to the Senate much anymore, very rarely do I go there—but I run into people who come up to me and say, "You remember, you hired me?" I don't remember everyone, actually. There's just so many of them and it's quite a while ago, but I'm constantly reminded of that.

AL: We've been able to interview many of them for the project (I hope it's considered many), and a lot of them talk about this opportunity, as a kid in Maine we wouldn't have had, and how it's nice to reflect back to you how important they say it was that they had that opportunity.

(Taping paused at request of Senator Mitchell.)

AL: I wanted to talk a little bit about family, in terms of growing up, the Waterville community. And you've spoken about it here or there in terms of other anecdotes that you've told, but I would be interested to know, what was the Waterville community like and how did it help shape who you became, the interactions and the people and just the sense of place?

GM: Well I think, like probably most human beings, the most influential persons in my life were my parents more than the place. But obviously that's where they were, and so it all melds together. I was the fourth child in my family. My three brothers were older than I, and my sister is younger; she came along a couple of years later.

It's kind of a coincidence you ask this question, because I just talked to my sister yesterday. On April 13, the Ellis Island Foundation is honoring me and a couple of other Americans who either themselves or their parents came through Ellis Island, one or more of their parents, and my mother came through Ellis Island in 1920. So they're making a film about me, and we've been

dredging up all kinds of pictures and information that I wasn't aware of before. I probably should tell this story of my parents. I think I probably have done it before, and I've described it a little bit in one of my books, but I'll summarize it here now.

My mother was born in Lebanon in October of 1902 in a small village in the south central part of Lebanon. It's called Bkassime, and it's in the mountains near a fairly good-sized city called Jezzin. She was one of four daughters, and she was the youngest. Two of her older sisters immigrated to the United States and ended up in Maine. That's how I happened to be born in Waterville.

A brief digression, but it sets the stage. I once researched this. There's an oral history project that was done in Waterville that I got to read some of the interviews and manuscripts of, and apparently in 1883 a young man from Lebanon named William Abraham immigrated to the United States and he ended up settling in Waterville. I believe, although I'm not sure of this, that he married a girl from Waterville and opened a store, and as so often happened in the history of the United States, that led to a stream of emigration from the area that he came from that followed him. I think his brother and his brother's wife, and then before you know it there are five hundred families, all from this area of small towns surrounding the city of Jezzin in south Lebanon.

These were almost all Maronite Christians, most of them Roman Catholic but some Orthodox Christians. The history of the Middle East is filled with outbreaks of violence involving Christians, Muslims, and Jews, and periodically in that period you'd see spikes of immigration to the United States following such outbreaks. I don't know whether that's what motivated my mother's two sisters, but one of them ended up in Bangor and married a Lebanese man named Karam. Her name was Rose, and their daughter, Rosemary Karam, married a man named Bob Baldacci, who was from a Bangor family, and Bob Baldacci was active politically in Bangor and their son, John Baldacci, became the governor of Maine. So John Baldacci and I are cousins. His grandmother and my mother were sisters.

My mother's second sister, whose name was Marium, married a man in Lebanon named Thomas Boles. They had a daughter, born in Lebanon, and then they immigrated to the United States and they ended up in Waterville. So you had two sisters from the same family, one in Bangor and one in Waterville. And approximately, I believe it was eight or nine years later, Tom and Marium Boles had been settled in Waterville, and they wanted their daughter to join them. My mother was by then eighteen years old, this was in 1920, and so she was chosen by the family to take what would be her niece, her sister's daughter, bring her to the United States, and then she was to return.

Allegedly, although I don't—I've learned about this from my sister who knows a lot more about this history than I do—her parents had arranged a marriage for my mother in Paris. So she was going to immigrate to Paris, as many Lebanese did throughout history, and I don't know why that didn't work out. But she came, she brought her niece here, and rather than going back, my mother stayed, so she was living with her sister and her brother-in-law in Waterville, in a place

called the Head of Falls. It's what I mentioned earlier, it was on the banks of the Kennebec. It's a very small triangular piece of land bounded on one side by the Kennebec River, on another side by railroad tracks, and on the third side by, then, a textile mill. It was filled with tenements, filled with immigrants, almost all of whom worked in the textile mill.

My father's parents were born in Ireland. Now, the history I'm about to give you for my father I did not learn until after his death. My father was not a talkative man, didn't discuss his history, his background very much. I'm not sure how much of it he was aware of. But after he died, there was a prominent lawyer in Waterville, a man named Jim Boyle, who was a little bit older than my father who knew and befriended my father, because my father was also of Irish heritage. After my father died Jim Boyle called me and said he'd like to see me in his office. I went to see him and he said, "I thought you'd be interested in knowing a little bit about your father's background." I didn't know any of this, so what I'm now telling you I learned from this lawyer who knew and befriended and helped my father.

My father's parents were born in Ireland, and immigrated to the United States in the latter part of the nineteenth century. They settled in Boston, and in September of 1900 my father was born in Boston. He did not know his parents. Apparently, and I don't know, will never know if this story is true, his mother died, father couldn't care for the kids, and my father and his siblings, I think he had five brothers and sisters, were sent to orphanages in the Boston area and my father was raised in an orphanage. It was at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Huntington Avenue in Boston. It's right sort of in the heart of the city of Boston, right on the intersection where the Boston Symphony Hall now stands. It was apparently an orphanage [] run by Catholic nuns.

I don't know at what age, after some years—back in those days, according to what Jim Boyle told me, the nuns would take these boys out on the weekends, what they called the Saturday specials, and they would go mostly by train to towns in mostly Maine, New Hampshire, the rural parts of Massachusetts, and go to the Catholic churches on Sunday. At the end of each Mass, whatever children they had would stand up in the front of the church—the altar rail—and any parishioner who wanted to adopt a child could just take the child and leave with him.

Now, of course you can see the potential for abuse was very large, and there was a good bit of abuse apparently in rural areas where kids would be taken. They'd basically just work on farms and they weren't educated or anything, so obviously the practice was subsequently discontinued and regulated, I don't know the circumstances under which. But in that fashion, my father was adopted by an elderly couple whose name was Mitchell.

Now, this elderly couple, the Mitchells, had themselves been born in Lebanon, and they had left Lebanon and moved to Alexandria in Egypt at some point in their lives, lived there for, as I'm told, about ten years, and then they came to the United States. And they ended up—John and Mary Mitchell were their names, they were childless, they were elderly—and they adopted my father in a church in Bangor. They were living at the time in Bangor. I don't know how old he was at the time, but according to what Jim Boyle told me, no adoption papers. You just take the

kid by the hand, you walk out the church and he's your son. They changed his name. His name at birth was Joseph Kilroy and they changed his name to George Mitchell, again without any legal documentation of any kind. That's what they began calling him.

They moved to Waterville and opened a small store, and lived right next door to Thomas and Marium Boles, so my father grew up there. He went to a Catholic school in Waterville, St. Francis, one of the churches in Waterville that had an elementary school, and they subsequently had a fire that destroyed all of the church records. But the best we understand, my father may have gone to the fourth grade, but he left [] just after the fourth grade in school. He didn't have any education beyond that. But he grew up there, so when my mother came in 1920 they would have been living next door and that's how they met, and ultimately were married. It would have been about in 1925, when he was twenty-five and she was I think twenty-three.

They then moved to—I'm not sure of the town in Massachusetts, a small town in Massachusetts where they found work in a textile mill there, and where my two oldest brothers were born, in Massachusetts. The name of the town slips my mind.

AL: I'm sure they mentioned it in their interviews, so we'll just fill it in [Westfield].

GM: In any event, they then came back to Waterville and every two years for twelve years they had a child, and one of them, my brother Paul is the oldest, then John, then a third son was born named Edward but he died shortly after birth, so there's a gap between John and my brother Robbie, who was two years older than me, and then my sister Barbara is two years younger than me. My brother Robbie died in 1996 of cancer—leukemia, bone marrow cancer—so the survivors are my brother Paul, who's the oldest, then John, then myself and Barbara.

When I was born we lived in the area called, as I said, Head of Falls. It's right on the banks of the Kennebec River, and it's where the river drops. There's a dam, you can see it when you cross over from Winslow to Waterville [], there's a drop in the water there, right along the shore. It's now all cleared land, all the tenements have been torn down. I think they established a parking lot there.

AL: Your brother took me on a tour when I went up.

GM: Did he? You've seen it. So that's where I grew up. When I was six, it would have been 1939, my father bought a house on Front Street, which is across the tracks, on the other side of the tracks, and where by then the Maronite Church, St. Joseph's had been constructed. I think at the time there were maybe five hundred families who were of Lebanese heritage but they were Catholics. The Maronite Church became a part of the Roman Catholic Church I think several centuries ago. It was founded I think in the fifth century by a monk named Maron in what is now Lebanon, and then sometimes later, and I don't know when, in the Middle Ages sometimes, they became affiliated with the Catholic Church. So it's a Catholic Church, the Eastern rite of the Catholic Church.

Our life centered on the church. My mother was deeply and profoundly religious, went to Mass every day. And when I was growing up there was a parochial school. St. Joseph's had a church [school], I don't think it exists anymore, and so I went to [the] first six [years of] elementary school at St. Joseph's Church. I grew up there on Front Street and it was, I think in terms of American life and American history, an unexceptional childhood. My parents worked, my mother worked nights in textile mills all of her adult life, eleven o'clock at night till seven in the morning. My father was a laborer. The Central Maine Power Co. at that time had a bottled gas division, and he worked for them for a while, and then in 1950, when I was a senior in high school, they abolished the division and he lost his job.

I'll back up in a moment, but I'll just digress because this comes to my mind. My father was out of work for about a year my senior year in high school. It was a very, very difficult year. My older brothers were all off in [college], my sister Barbara was [at home], too, and my father was profoundly affected by being unemployed.

AL: How did he show that?

GM: Oh, he became very depressed, silent, didn't say much. It was a tough year. For many people like that, their entire self esteem is bound up in their work, and to be unemployed for a year after having worked since he was a small boy was very hard for him. But finally he got a job as a janitor at Colby College, and gosh, you'd think he'd become the president of the college. He loved it, and he was very happy with it, and he worked at that until he retired—so that would have been the last fifteen years of his life, of his working life. He would have been about fifty when he became a janitor and he retired from Colby when he was sixty-five, so it would have been fifteen years, and then he died of a heart attack when he was seventy-two.

But, backing up, it was a great childhood. We were poor, but everybody we knew was in the same circumstance, so everything's relative. There was no awareness of it. Nobody ever went hungry or anything like that. My mother worked steadily, even throughout my father's unemployment. I think she made more money than he did. I don't know that for sure, but she was a skilled weaver in a woolen mill and probably made more than a janitor.

My mother was really the most amazing person I've ever met. If you think about it, five kids in the house I grew up in, so there were seven people living there. One bathroom, one really tiny bathroom. My brother and I shared a room together, my brother Robbie and I. My mother worked from eleven o'clock at night till seven in the morning. There were at that time I believe about two dozen textile mills within an hour drive of Waterville. There were a couple in Waterville, there were a couple in Fairfield, there was one in Clinton. They were up in that whole central Maine area. Although my mother didn't work in any one for her whole life, she always had work, because one mill would go down, another would be running, and she'd just move to that one. Over the course of, I don't know, thirty or forty years, she worked at all of these mills in the area. But all from eleven o'clock at night till seven o'clock in the morning, with five kids.

My father was a really good guy, but as I said, he was a quiet guy. But in the custom of the time, he never did anything at home. I mean, my mother did all the cooking, all the cleaning, all the washing, everything. In that era husbands didn't help out with the household chores or anything, the wife did it all. She was amazing. As I said, she was very religious, deeply, deeply committed to her faith.

Just as a humorous aside, later in life—the Joly family was very prominent in Waterville, and Cy Joly, Cyril, became mayor at one point. He's a good guy, a good friend, and he had a brother named Bob who is a great guy. Cyril was a Republican, and my father was a very staunch Democrat. But my mother used to say, "Well, he can't be all bad, I see him in Mass." (*laughter*) So, she didn't really understand politics, but to her a guy who went to Mass, as Cy Joly did, had to be, there had to be some redeeming qualities to him.

So that's the way we grew up. Everybody worked, all the time. I don't know how old I was, but just a real tiny kid when I got a paper route, delivering newspapers. I shoveled snow, I mowed lawns, I washed cars. I worked in a used car lot for years, washing every car, cleaning them in and out. My brother Robbie was quite an entrepreneur. When he was a young boy he started out engaging in a variety of entrepreneurial business activities. While in high school he promoted an event at which a then very famous, internationally famous clown, a guy called Emmett Kelly came to our little—like a little traveling circus thing—and performed in I think it was the old Colby field house. Robbie was in high school, he was promoting this event. He was very good. I've told several stories about him, growing up, which you know all of them. Like the Boys' Club.

AL: Yes, that one for sure.

GM: Yeah, we played around the Boys' Club a lot. I don't think there was anything at all exceptional about it. My brothers were very famous athletes, my brothers Paul and John and Robbie all were great athletes. I was not, so that had a big effect on me. I developed a real massive inferiority complex for a long period of time, not being able to be as good in athletics as my brothers. I was younger and smaller than most of the kids, because I was born in August so I entered school in September, and then I skipped a grade in school. I was sixteen when I graduated from high school. Most of the kids in my class were a year or two older than I was. Most kids get out of high school when they're about eighteen. So I always felt inferior, smaller, less athletic than my brothers.

But it was a great family life. I mean, I loved Waterville, I still love Waterville. I think it's a great place. We go there every year. I take my kids every summer, we go to Waterville to visit my family and so forth.

AL: Can you talk about your mom's cooking? I think talking about the food you had in the home and sort of the special meals is a really important piece for people connected with their childhoods. Do you have memories of certain things?

GM: Oh yes, of course. My mother was tireless. I really honestly don't know how she did this, how she could work eleven o'clock at night to seven in the morning, five days a week. We'd get up in the morning, she'd make our breakfast, then she'd put us to bed at night and then she'd go off to work. It still amazes me. [She] cooked and baked every day. I described in my book, I said the house smelled sweeter than the sweetest perfume, because every day my mother was baking bread, and so there was fresh bread every day, and it smelled just wonderful.

She was a great cook, and she was very hospitable. I have in fact told the story often about how anybody who came to my house, and I mean anybody, if you came in, you had to have a meal—the plumber, the electrician. Back in those days doctors used to come and make house calls so - Dr. Goodrich was his name, I remember him, a wonderful man: he'd come to the house, [he] had to have a meal. My mother would insist, wouldn't hear of it, somebody not eating a meal.

I don't remember who, I think it was the plumber or someone said, well the first time he came he said, "No-no-no, I just ate." My mother said, "No, you got to eat." So the plumber said to my father, "After that I always came when I was ready for a meal." In other words, he didn't eat before coming, because he was going to get a big meal. (*laughter*) She was very, very hospitable.

She had a great sense of humor. She couldn't read or write English, and she spoke with a fractured and heavily accented—but when anybody would point out a mistake she would repeat it even more exaggerated, for humorous effect. She just couldn't say some words. She couldn't say the "th" words, so the word thirty would come out "sirty," and my brothers would make fun of her and she'd say it to great effect. And smooth would come out "smool," she could not pronounce the "th." It's a function of growing up and being able to handle certain phonetic sounds. But she had a great sense of humor.

She was passionately devoted to her children. She really didn't understand American sports at all, but she went to every game. My brothers played all the time, they were great players, and my mother would go, and she couldn't tell a basketball from a home run or a football from anything else, but there they were and there she was rooting them on. My father was much [less active]. He wasn't that interested in sports, which was actually good for me because I was not very good at all with athletics. Of course I had this, as I said, inferiority complex. But my father kept telling me, "Don't worry about it. You study. You work hard in school and you'll see in the end it won't make any difference." Well of course I didn't believe him at the time, but it worked out okay. And as I said later many times, he gave me an incentive to surpass my brothers in *something*, since I couldn't do it in sports.

AL: And you said he only went, as far as you know, through school a very few years, but that he was somebody who really enjoyed learning.

GM: He did. But my father had very deep and good knowledge in a few specific areas. He was very interested in *some* things: geography was one, and railroads was another. Don't ask me why—I have no idea. But my father, one of the few luxuries he had for a man who had no

money was, he was a subscriber to the *National Geographic* magazine. Back in those years the magazine always had a large map with every edition. I subscribe now, as a heritage clearly of my father, but they don't send you a map every edition.

My father would devour those magazines, and he loved to pore over those maps. And I can remember as a kid sitting on his lap, and he'd be pointing out this river or this mountain, this city, this country, with a little bit of history about it. He wasn't as strong on history as he was on geography, but he did know something about every place.

I did tell the story in my book, which is a great story and I've never forgotten it, it's so dramatic. He was so knowledgeable about geography. He really literally knew everything [] about every place on earth. After I became an adult he would get a big kick out of, whenever I'd come home to visit I would first pore over some atlas or some geography or history book and develop a quiz for him, always trying to stump him. The last time I saw him was in 1972. I think I was home in the spring; he died in July. That was the year Muskie was running for president and I had left to go participate in Muskie's campaign and I was traveling with him. I think Muskie left the race after the primaries of Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, so it would have been sometime in the spring, and I may have gone home to visit then.

I remember precisely, exactly, the quiz I had for my father. It was three questions, starting from very easy to very difficult. The first question was: which country in the world has the most cities with a population of a million people or more? Well, you think about it, that's a very easy question, obviously it's China. It's the biggest country, the most people, so clearly it has the most cities of a million people. Second question was: how many such cities are there in China? Without hesitation he said, "fourteen." Third question was, name them. And not only did he name them, he named them in the precise order of their size. Now, there was one through fourteen. I really, I thought I would stump him with this one, but he rattled them right off. We had a good laugh, and I said, as I had always said at each one, "I'm going to get you next time, I'm going to make it really tough. You won't be able to get it." He laughed, he said, "You'll never stump me." And of course as it turns out he died. I never did stump him.

He loved geography, and I know that my interest is based upon his. Now, unlike him, he never traveled. Most of the time I was growing up we didn't own a car. Somewhat later my father had a car for a brief period of time, but of course we had no money and no car. We never went anywhere. I don't remember my father ever leaving the state of Maine. He might have gone somewhere but I don't recall it, and we hardly ever went anywhere other than Waterville. Now I've had the privilege to travel all over the world. I've been I think probably to a majority of the 190 countries in the world, and all over, and I still have the same interest he does. I love to go over these maps.

My son has taken an interest in it, too. He's very, very, very good at geography. In his first day in school—he's in the seventh grade now. This just popped into my mind. It's irrelevant to what we're saying but it's an interesting story. The first day in school the teacher said—and the teacher later told me, "I asked the question not expecting anybody to answer"—he said,

“Whoever can answer this question can be first in line.” The question was, what’s the capital of the country of Burkina Faso? And he said, without an instant hesitation my son piped up, he said, “Ouagadougou.” I didn’t even know that Ouagadougou was the capital of Burkina, it’s a country in Africa, and he knew the answer.

So I said to my son, when the teacher called my wife to tell her, he said, “I was amazed Andrew knew this.” I said to Andrew, “Well,” I said, “you never met your grandfather, my father, but boy, he would have been proud of you, to know the capital of Burkina Faso.” So it’s something that’s, like many things, carried on. I have a great interest in geography. I love to plow over maps. Whenever I go to a country I always get—and I’ve got several atlases at home so I usually do it at home—I go over the atlas. I know exactly where every place is and what the major features are, the rivers, the mountains and so on, so when I fly I can identify landmarks on the ground. I really enjoy it, and I got that from my father.

The other subject he was really interested in was railroads. I have no idea why my father was fascinated with railroads. He could tell you the history of every railroad, every mile of track in South Dakota, and this place and that place. He devoured railroad magazines. I never knew there was such a thing, and I didn’t maintain his interest. But I thought about him in one small way, and I really wish—I’m often asked, did your parents ever know you got to the Senate, and the answer is no, they both died. Although my mother was alive when I entered the Senate, she was in a nursing home, and she was suffering from dementia, so she didn’t really have any idea.

But there was a period of time in which Maine was one of only two states in the country that did not have passenger rail service. Passenger rail service was discontinued in Maine, I think it was in the 1950s, and it wasn’t resumed until I got to the Senate. What happened was, there’s a group here in Maine, they’re called Northeast Train Riders or something, formed of people who campaigned for the resumption of passenger rail service to Maine. I was in the Senate, and they came to see me, and I thought it was a good idea, and I said I would do what I could.

The fellow who was the head of what is now Amtrak, the national rail system, I got to know because I was on the Environment and Public Works Subcommittee that was involved in the reauthorization every six years of the major transportation bill. It was mostly a highway bill, but it also involved Amtrak and some mass transit. His name was Graham Claytor—great guy. I don’t know where he’s from, but he had a pronounced Southern accent. But a really great guy, and I’d gotten to know him through my work on the committee. I called him and I said, “You know, I know you support rail traffic, you run the doggone thing, and I’m shocked to find out that my state is one of two that doesn’t have passenger rail service. I think you should at least study the possibility of bringing it back.”

So to make a very long story short, studies were conducted. There was much dispute at the time. It was a very controversial item, but I got Graham Claytor to allocate [equipment] to the service between Boston and Portland []. It wasn’t new equipment. He said to me, “Now, Senator, I can’t take the brand new engine and cars and put them on Portland, but I’ll come up with some good equipment for you.” And we got the train service started between Portland and Boston. A

couple of years ago they invited me up here, actually at this hotel. They had a dinner. I don't know what it was, the 20th anniversary or the 15th anniversary or something, and they gave me a plaque in commemoration and I thought, and I told my wife, I said, "Boy, my father would have been really proud of this." You know, to bring passenger rail service back to Maine. I understand it's been successful. In other words, the passenger traffic has exceeded expectations.

Ironically I had the most trouble with New Hampshire at the time. They didn't want to do it, they didn't want to have the state contribute anything to it. But a lot of the traffic comes from New Hampshire now because people commute to Boston and back. So, my father knew railroads extremely well. I did not, but I was pleased to be able to play a major role in bringing it back to Maine. And now I understand they're going to extend it to Brunswick.

AL: I believe that's the next hope. The tape is almost done, so I think this is probably a good place to stop. Thank you.

End of Interview