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### Interview with Diane Dewhirst (2) by Mike Hastings

Diane Dewhirst

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

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**Diane Dewhirst (2)**

*(Interviewer: Michael Hastings)*

**GMOH# 218**

May 17, 2010

**Mike Hastings:** This is a second recorded interview with Diane Dewhirst. This interview is taking place at Diane's home in Washington, D.C., I'm Michael Hastings, the interviewer, the date is May 17, 2010. Diane, for identification purposes, could you state your full name and spell your last name.

**Diane Dewhirst:** Diane Dewhirst, D-E-W-H-I-R-S-T.

**MH:** At the end of our first interview, I was ready to begin asking questions about Iran-Contra. Can you set the stage and talk about when you first realized that he [i.e. Senator Mitchell] was going to play a major role in those hearings?

**DD:** After the Democrats won control of the Senate at the end of '86 and the beginning of '87, Senator Mitchell returned to his role as – which he was very happy to do – as a senator from Maine, and getting ready for reelection for 1988. And so we were in control [with a Democratic majority in the Senate], so he had some very wonderful subcommittees, a subcommittee on the Finance Committee which had to do with health, and a subcommittee on EPW where he was going to move acid rain and clean air legislation. And in fact, one of the things, maybe I talked about this already, but one of the things that he did was, he made the clean air debate through his committee in a bipartisan way with Stafford and Chafee and Cohen and others – not Cohen, because he wasn't on the committee, but he was supportive of it – a health issue, not just a tree-hugging issue. And so he was, I mean we were really into that.

And then Iran-Contra came along, and Senator Byrd appointed [the Democrats on the select committee], I think across the board people would have to say it was a distinguished group, thoughtful, not terribly partisan. I mean Mitchell had just been the chair of the Campaign Committee, but that's one of the ironies about Mitchell, was that he was terribly partisan but he never came across as such. But it was Senator Cohen, Senator Mitchell, Senator Rudman, Dick Cheney, Lee Hamilton, Senator Inouye, Senator Sarbanes, all very thoughtful, plotting – and I say that with the highest of compliments, plotting and plodding in a lot of ways – members. And remember, Ronald Reagan was still popular, some of the luster was off but it was a tough political thing that you really had to be thoughtful to do. And it took up an enormous amount of time.

**MH:** You mean your time, or the whole staff?

**DD:** His time, and because I moved over to be his press secretary, I went from the Campaign Committee to be his official press secretary in the state of Maine office, which was a real honor to do, and he asked me to do it which I was really flattered by, because I thought I'd just keep doing campaigns. And I said to him, I think this is an indication of him, he said, "So did Rich talk" – this was Rich Arenberg who was the AA at the time – "did Rich talk to you about coming over to the office?" And I said "Yes, he did," I said, "but you got to know, I don't know anything about Maine, I don't know anything about the issues, I don't know anything about the process." And he – [or Gayle Corey, or Rich Arenberg – someone] said to me, "Yes, but you know me."

**MH:** Looking back on it, do you think that your reservations were well founded? Was he right, or were you?

**DD:** No, he was right, he was right. Again. And I also found out through that, that the legislative process has more politics than you can shake a stick at. Electoral politics is one thing, legislative politics is a whole other, and it is, as my current boss Nancy Pelosi describes it, it's a kaleidoscope, that one minute you're with this group and you're doing politics on this thing, and the next minute you're in this group and doing politics on this thing, and one minute Chafee's with you and you're calling press conferences with him, and then the in the next minute, for the next issue, you're against him on the other side of the aisle. So it's [always changing].

So yes, it took up an enormous amount of time. And here, we were thinking okay, we're laying the groundwork for reelection, we're trying to keep some sort of national profile but that was not our priority, we were going to go and get legislation passed. We were doing long-term care in Finance, we were doing some other, spousal impoverishment in the Health subcommittee, and we wanted to do Clean Air, we wanted to lay the ground on acid rain and clean air, so we were really looking to go into areas that I knew nothing about but that's legislative. And then Iran-Contra came along and then once again, we had national press. So for me personally, as the press secretary, it was a big change and a big time commitment. And you know the way stories go here, it's yin and yang, it's okay, what's the administration's point of view, how are they going to get them, and who are the Democrats that are doing them, of saying what did you know and when did you know it, you know, paraphrasing from other investigations.

And one of Mitchell's strengths – and I'm sure others have spoken to this – was that he knew how to conduct himself in anything that resembled a court of law. And yes, maybe it was because he was a judge for nine months, but I think it was more inbred than that. He knew how to listen, he knew how to speak in ways that people could take notes from: I., II., well let me go back and do A., B. and C. – capital letters, lower case letters – and he was very logical. But he listened, and he always said that one of his tricks, one of his talents was that he would listen, so you never had a circumstance, never ever ever had a circumstance where he was asking a question that had just been answered. And you see that happen all the time in hearings, and I don't blame members for it. They're looking to get just their take on the question or whatever, but Mitchell never did that, he always would listen to what the question was, pull something from what somebody else was, and then take it in the direction that he wanted it to go in. And

that made him brilliant for this role.

The biggest piece of that was kind of peeling through the onions of all the timelines and who did what to whom and all that type of thing. And the biggest thing was - So, press knew him and trusted him, knew he had a legal point of view, knew he *could* be partisan so they were looking for that yin and the yang, and they would pair him very often with Dick Cheney. So they'd have a Republican member from the House, and they'd have a Democratic member from the Senate, and we did more McNeil/Lehrers together. This was before cable, or just as cable was coming I guess, no, before cable.

**MH:** Did you prepare for those in any special way?

**DD:** Yes, he and Rich, who was his person-

**MH:** Rich Arenberg, his administrative assistant in the state of Maine office.

**DD:** Correct.

**MH:** But who transitioned over to becoming his staff guy in Intelligence before the Iran-Contra hearings.

**DD:** Correct, correct, and then there was also a counsel, [an attorney] named Jamie [Kaplan].

**MH:** Oh yes, right, Jamie, from Portland, Maine who had worked with him when he was (*unintelligible*), right, I'll think of his name in a second.

**DD:** Yes, yes, so they would prep him. And because a lot of it had to do with Intelligence, I wasn't privy to it. You had to be careful about how far you could go in asking what types of questions. But yes, he spent a lot of time

**MH:** Jamie Kaplan.

**DD:** Kaplan, exactly. He spent a lot of time prepping for it, and we spent a lot of time press-wise, because we were sought after. And he would pair with Rudman a lot, and I think Hamilton was the other chair, if I'm not mistaken. I think it was Inouye and Hamilton, and so very often they wouldn't get into the mix as much, they would kind of stay above it, so the person they would go to - And he got paired with Senator Cohen. And as you know, they wrote a book, *Men of Zeal*, at the end of all that.

**MH:** A word about that. I mean it is unusual, isn't it, to have two senators from the same state on an investigative committee?

**DD:** Yes.

**MH:** How did their relationship change because of Iran-Contra? Or did it?

**DD:** I was not around in the '82 cycle where it was not warm and fuzzy, shall we say, that there were some hard feelings from that because of what was, what I understood, Mitchell [staff] felt that Senator Cohen put Senator Cohen's staff on George Mitchell's opponent's campaign staff to do him in, and that caused some hard feelings I think, at a staff level, and it took a long time to work through that. And I don't even know when it got worked through, because I came in mid-stream and I knew of the tensions, but I wasn't privy to the healing process. But if there needed to be a healing process, Iran-Contra kind of was one, because they came up with mutual respect for each other.

Cohen came at it from an Armed Services and Intelligence Committee perspective, Mitchell came at it from an Intelligence Committee and a legal perspective, not that Senator Cohen doesn't have legal credentials, but that's kind of how they were branded. And I think they had a tremendous amount of mutual respect for each other, so much so they wrote a book together that they, I wasn't involved in the book but he had told that they would, they came up with an outline, they each wrote a chapter, they divided up which chapters, they then exchanged chapters, and Mitchell did it all in longhand on yellow pads.

**MH:** So he wrote the book, his chapters, himself.

**DD:** Yes, as did Cohen, and then they-

**MH:** Did he have staff like you read them over?

**DD:** No, we weren't allowed, because that would have been taxpayers' dollars. He had, I think Jamie was gone by then, so Jamie may have no longer been on taxpayers' payroll, so maybe Jamie was able to. There was obviously fact-checks and stuff going on, but you're not allowed to, there's a fine line because that was a profit-making book, and we were taxpayers' dollars so [we] couldn't.

**MH:** I've read the book and it's remarkably substantive, I mean exceptionally so.

**DD:** Yes, they did it quickly afterwards. And what they did was they, well he also kept notes so he had his own, but what they did was, he wrote a chapter and he wrote a chapter and then they switched and they edited each other's. You can kind of tell, Senator Cohen, who is also a poet and a novelist, is a little bit more flowery than Mitchell, so you can kind of tell which chapters are to which senator.

Anyway, the big thing in Iran-Contra was the Ollie North testimony, and I think that the way that Mitchell conducted himself and his being able to articulate what many people felt was the most egregious part of the Iran-Contra stuff, and to do it in a way that was pointed and in a sound bite, but measured and reasonable to most Americans. I think that helped him be identified as [p/o] smart legislatively, which he had demonstrated through his legislative work, smart politically,

which he had demonstrated in [1986], and he can articulate on national television, in a tense situation, and be extremely effective. And so I think that those three things wrapped together and helped him become majority leader.

**MH:** His assessment of Oliver North's perspective, you just characterized as a sound bite.

**DD:** "God doesn't take sides in politics."

**MH:** Were you ready for that? Were you prepared in terms of what was going to come immediately after he said it?

**DD:** No.

**MH:** He didn't really realize the import himself of that phrase.

**DD:** I can't even remember where that phrase came from, I think it was a combination of he and somebody else [Harold Pachios?].

**MH:** I think it was, I shouldn't venture to say, I'd have to go back and look at other references.

**DD:** I think it was he and somebody else, and it may be in the book actually, but it got articulated. And we certainly knew that the line of questioning was going to be on all the networks, and he was questioning North, and we knew what kind of bravado – is that the right word? – that North had, so we knew it was going to be a tense moment and a big [one]. But I didn't know. If others knew, they didn't tell me, I didn't know. I didn't realize it was going to be as big a deal as it was, and that Oliver North would be on the cover of *Time*, and it would be Mitchell that had the box that said, "This is the guy who interrogated him," and all that kind of stuff. I didn't know.

**MH:** Do you recall any major press-related problems coming out of the Mitchell involvement in the Iran-Contra hearings, in other words, were there any, did any of the national press really go after Mitchell for something he said at all during that?

**DD:** I'd like to think that we, we had done a very good job of working with the political press, many of whom also do kind of the Bigfoot ['big picture' reporting], you know, for instance today it would be, and maybe even then it was, E. J. Dionne, who does political and goes out and does the campaigns and whatever, but then comes back to Washington and does the Bigfoot kind of ['big] picture' or whatever. And we had done a lot of nurturing of those folks, and a lot of those folks knew him from before, from the Muskie campaign, so we had kind of brought them along. So when he got to this point, now there was a whole group of the Walter Pincus-es, the intelligence reporters and whatever, but word had spread that this guy was on the up-and-up and that he was really smart. And Mitchell never gave a lot in the press, he would never give them everything that they wanted, and he never dished on anybody, but he also helped them

understand. And so while he never gave them any scoops, I would like to think that he, not to sound haughty on his behalf, but that he educated them and he also prevented them from making mistakes.

**MH:** We have limited amount of time, so I'm going to move through his service in the Senate fairly quickly in the next hour. He becomes majority leader in 1989. What is the first big issue to cross his path?

**DD:** Wasn't this Jim Wright?

**MH:** I think so, yes.

**DD:** I think this was the year of Jim Wright, John Tower, and I think a pay raise debacle, if I'm not mistaken. But an example of what the power of a majority leader, the newfound power of a majority leader, was: timing and megaphone, would sum it up. Mitchell for years had introduced oil spill legislation – it's still appropriate to this day.

**MH:** Appropriate because we're looking today at an enormous spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

**DD:** Yes, I'm sorry, this was Exxon Valdez, and Mitchell said, "I'm going to reintroduce my bill, because this would address a lot of this." I think it might have been the cap.

**MH:** Raising the cap.

**DD:** The cap issue. I can't remember. I know that's an issue now today, with regard to the BP problem, but I think it had to do with that, and then it also had to do with cleanup. And so we basically got the same bill out – I don't know if all my facts are right, but this is close – and he went to the floor and said, "I'm going to introduce it." Now, a bill introduction, you don't [usually] get press on a bill introduction. You get hometown press, and you get industry press if you're lucky, but you don't, bill introduction, it's not action except at home. [In this case], it was a page three *Washington Post* banner headline, "Majority Leader Pledges to Oil Spill ..." blah-blah-blah, and for me, and for him, if he were here and I think candid, and I think he would be, that was like: whoa, I get it now.

Because we'd introduced it, I wasn't there for that long, but he had introduced it for years and we'd gotten a lovely *Bangor Daily News* and we got a lovely *Lewiston Sun*, and Mal Leary did a piece on it, Jerry Harvaky did something in the AP and it was all lovely – I can't believe all those names just came back to me – but it was a Helen Dewar, who was a wonderful, she's no longer with us but she was a wonderful *Washington Post* reporter and it was, I can remember, it was above the fold, page three above the fold, and it was across, and we were like 'whoa,' and we were kind of like, 'He just gave a floor speech.' But [it was] the timing, and [his position as] Senate majority leader, and that to me was the best example [of new found power as majority leader].

The whole thing about being Senate majority leader, [at first] I felt like, I was with him for all six years, and I felt like I ran around like a deer in headlights, and I think all of us did. Because it wasn't until we got through a whole [legislative] cycle of knowing the Appropriations bills and how you were going to get [which] authorizations done, and when does reconciliation come, and the debt limit and the budget and the State of the Union, and da-da-da, and getting a rhythm to it, it wasn't until the second cycle, so that would have been '91-'92, that we really felt like, I really felt like I knew what I was doing at all.

**MH:** How did your shop change?

**DD:** You mean from when I went from the Senate?

**MH:** Right, from the Senate. You were just all alone as the press person, maybe with one assistant in the state of Maine office?

**DD:** Yes, for a while it was Marcia Diamond, and then, oh, we were going to send, gosh, what was his name, David, we were going to send him to Maine and then Mary was going to return to Maine if we felt we needed her.

**MH:** That's Mary McAleney.

**DD:** McAleney, I'm sorry, and it was David whomever.

**MH:** And he did eventually go back and he did things out of Maine.

**DD:** He did, he did.

**MH:** There was kind of a Maine office for the press office.

**DD:** Right, but that was during the '87-'88, and then Kelly Currie came in and handled Maine. When I moved over to the Capitol and had a staff of, I guess it was technically about twelve, but some of those were functions for the whole caucus. For instance, we had a satellite news service that had five people in it that had a booker, a producer and three cameramen who technically reported to me but they were great, they were on their own, and a radio guy, so I guess that was six.

**MH:** And what did they do?

**DD:** They did video news service [for the entire Democratic Senate Caucus]. So for instance, if you were doing a press conference they would go and [feed] the press conference and then send it up, shoot it home to Maine [stations for local use].

**MH:** Because all the other senators just used the Senate press -



**DD:** No, the Democrats and Republicans each had their own, and then the recording studio was a backup for it, but this was something new that was done in the mid-'80s, and that came under the Senate majority leader. And then we had a guy who did the clips, and we had an office manager, and there was a press assistant who answered the phone, and so it was very different, very, very different. And it was like drinking water out of a fire hose, because not only were we responsible for him and planning personal PR for him, you were also responsible for knowing what was going on in the Senate. So if there was a fire in a corner of a Senate office building, you got a phone call. If they wanted to know why a nomination wasn't moving off the calendar, I got a phone call. And it took me a long time to figure out how to do all that, how to field all that.

And what we did with regard to Maine was, we got a great guy, Kelly Currie, fabulous, fabulous, fabulous, he's an attorney in Brooklyn now, and then later went with Mitchell to do the Ireland stuff and work with Martha and that crew, Martha Pope. But what we did was, we designated a person to work closely with me but work specifically on Maine issues. And people used to get mad because – Steve Campbell was a reporter at the *Portland Press Herald*, and he used to get mad and he'd say, "Well why won't you let us talk to you?" And I said, "You get better service by talking to Kelly because he is always going to be there for you. I can't always be there for you, I'm happy to talk to you." But I didn't want to talk to him, because I didn't want to undercut Kelly, I wanted Kelly to have stature in and of himself. I said, you don't get it, you're getting – and Mitchell was very good, very, very, very good about always tending to the Maine press, very good. In fact, so much so that I had a couple of national reporters call me out and say, "You cannot be giving the Maine press, we understand the whole home [thing], but you can't be giving them such a lead on stuff when we don't have it, you're going to get nailed, you cannot." Friends of mine in the press who said, "You're going to make a big mistake here, you cannot, you've got to do [all at the same time]."

**MH:** Had you done that a couple of times?

**DD:** I didn't realize, I didn't know what I had, because I didn't realize that even a – I'll give you an example: A response to a State of the Union, which was a nothing statement, nothing, nothing, not even worth the paper it was printed on then, because we used to distribute pieces of paper.

**MH:** It was a nothing statement from the majority leader.

**DD:** That's right, and I can remember Steve Gerstel, he was with UPI, he's no longer with us either, but he taught me so much.

**MH:** How do you spell that, Gerstel?

**DD:** G-E-R-S-T-E-L. And he pulled me aside, and in fact he walked into my office and he held up the piece of paper and he said, "This is what I'm talking about." I'm like, "You're kidding me." I said, "It's a nothing statement." He said, "Doesn't matter. You can't be doing

that.” So it was a big learning curve for me, and it was a big learning curve for him. And then I’ll tell you one more story about the press.

When we started in ‘89 we had Bob Schieffer, Brit Hume, Cokie Roberts was with NPR, Andrea Mitchell, and Candy Crowley who covered the Senate. That is a tough crew, all of whom are still very good reporters, and I think Brit’s retired.

**MH:** Just recently.

**DD:** Yes, from day-to-day. But very good reporters and very tough, and there was a wave of stories about how the Hill was someplace to cover again, because it was the new Republican president and the Democratic leadership, so it really was, Mitchell, Foley and Gephardt were really the face of the Democrats until the presidential campaigns heated up in ‘91, but for that ‘89, ‘90, ‘91, and until Clinton showed he really could get it, which wasn’t until April of ‘92, they were really the face. And we were on Sunday TV all the time, and it was a lot of hours, it was seven days a week.

But the reason I mention the network guys is, the networks complained that Mitchell was not giving them anything. And I used to go in with, sometimes with Martha Pope and sometimes with John Hilley, and there were others of us but, and want Mitchell to sit down and go through and kind of do background or explanations of things to people. And he’d always say – I may have said this before, [and I’m paraphrasing] – but he’d say, “I’m not going to do that.” And he said, “I’ll explain, but I’m not going to dump on my colleagues.” He said, “I’ll do that” – this wasn’t a direct quote but this is what I heard, and this is what I’m sure he meant to deliver – he said, “When you tell me I don’t have to go ask them for another vote, I’ll do that.” Well, that was never going to happen. And it was hard to argue with him, because here he’s Senate majority leader, elected in his own right by people. Me, elected by no one, and I’m trying to tell him to behave differently? And it wasn’t in him, it just was not in him to do it. And those five guys, those five television people that I mention, Cokie was radio but then she moved over to TV, complained. And so I talked to Mitchell about it and Mitchell said, “Bring them in, I’ll talk to them.” And I thought, ‘oh man, he’s going to cut my legs out.’ And he said the exact same thing to them.

**MH:** One at a time?

**DD:** No, we brought in a group, in his office, and we even choreographed it to have it in the inside of his office. And he said, “I’ll hear them out.” And I’m like, “Okay, good.” And I thought, if they make progress with him where I haven’t, good for them and I’ll do whatever. You know, a press secretary is a reflection of the person, so it’s not like I was setting this up. He was giving me guidance. And he backed up what I said, which I was grateful for, but to be honest with you I didn’t really care, I just wanted them, I thought, they’re complaining, they have jobs to do, they feel like we’re not helping them do their jobs.

**MH:** You wanted them to move on.

**DD:** Well, I wanted them to move on, but he was like, “I’m going to do what I can do, and I understand what you guys are...” whatever, and then those guys understood a little bit better about what I was dealing with.

**MH:** In a second I want you to fast-forward to the Clarence [Thomas] hearings, but before we get there can you, did you have a kind of a routine in terms of the press office? I mean I’m sure it interrupted frequently, if not more than that, but what was the desired routine in terms of how your day went?

**DD:** I would either talk to Mitchell on the phone, or greet him when he came in, and he liked to read clips, and I could always tell when he read the clips because the staple would be folded, and I could see that he had actually read them. [ ] He was a wonderful person, he was easy to work for, he didn’t complain a lot, but when he did you knew it. And so I would go through with him some things, and then we had something called “dugout” in the morning, and dugout was on the Senate floor with just whoever was there covering that day. And if it was very early, sometimes it was nobody, and sometimes it was just the wire reporter. And we would go down and we’d go through the news of the day. They could bring notebooks, but they couldn’t bring equipment then. Doesn’t exist any more unfortunately, it was a nice old tradition. And the guys would come down, the Senate majority leader looks at the president of the Senate, and above it is where the press [gallery] is, and so they’d announce [a] dugout [session] in fifteen minutes and they’d come onto the floor, and he’d walk down. If it was a birthday he’d say something about somebody’s birthday, or somebody who had been away, or somebody who’d been sick, it was a nice little kind of routine. And sometimes it was a big deal, and sometimes it was just nothing. And sometimes he’d make news there and then I’d have to make sure everybody else knew what the news was that he made, or make sure at least that a wire reporter was there so [others] would be covered [i.e., have access to the news, if made].

So we’d go through that, and then depending on the day, Tuesday we had caucuses and we’d have a stakeout after the caucuses, so I’d go down before that and sit before the leadership meeting, and go through with him what was up. And usually before that I would walk through the galleries, because I would pick up stuff, and I would return phone calls that way, we didn’t have email then, but also you just pick up stuff. And because people did not think I was forthcoming, I had to go to them. And then I’d go down around three thirty with whatever deadline questions I’d have, and then I’d watch the evening news, and we kind of had a team that did that, and if there was something that was going on then I’d report back.

**MH:** Who was part of your team that did that?

**DD:** The folks in the Majority Leader’s Office so there was, I did not have a deputy until late, until ‘92, and that was Mary Ann Hill, and then there was a woman by the name of Mary Helen Fuller, who was an institution in the Senate and I could not have done anything without her. There was also a young man by the name of Jim Manley, who today is Senator Reid’s press secretary, who worked there. There was another young guy by the name of Brad Austin who is

now with USAID in Afghanistan. There were others, but those are the ones that I [recall].

**MH:** So we're up to, it's six thirty, seven p.m. now in the day, so -

**DD:** It depends on if the Senate's in or not, whether you – and again, it's not like you watched it all the time, but if you had a story that was going that you had been working on and you knew from talking to the producers, or Mitchell had done an interview or whatever, and then you'd start all over, but I was down there a lot. He was never a problem to get to. He wasn't big for the phone with me, I'd rather see him. And you stood in his office, because he wasn't big on staff meetings. I don't know about when you worked for him, but he was not big on staff meetings.

**MH:** He didn't tolerate bull sessions, he wanted you to get in and get out.

**DD:** Uh-huh. I think a lot of them think that's your work, not mine, when it's a staff meeting. I sat in on leadership meetings, I would try to walk with him in the hallways, because the press would always talk to him and it was kind of way to, I guess I thought I was protecting him, not that he ever really needed protection, but I thought I was eyes and ears.

**MH:** Okay, I'm going to stop you there.

**DD:** Clarence Thomas.

**MH:** As we're doing this interview, Elena Kagan, who is President Obama's nominee to take the seat of John Paul Stevens, is going around the Senate side introducing herself to senators, and we anticipate hearings over the summer, and the president's hope is that she be in place by the first Tuesday in October. Talk to us about that process with regard to Clarence Thomas and George Mitchell's role in that process.

**DD:** God, I interviewed Anita – I'm allowed to say that, yeah – I interviewed Anita Jensen, who did judiciary issues for Mitchell, and I'm hoping she talked about it. Anita was the person who would know best about this, but we had already had a Supreme Court appointment. I think it was Rehnquist, as chief I believe, if my chronology is right. So Senator Mitchell really did defer to his chairman. People say he was very centralized, but he really did defer to his chairman, and he really did defer to Senator Biden, who he was very close to and Senator Biden was very supportive of Senator Mitchell.

Here's my best Clarence Thomas – there were two things that happened with Clarence Thomas that I can remember. One was that we were doing this dugout on the floor and he gave an answer to the question about, because remember George Bush had said that Clarence Thomas was, in fact it's been in the paper recently with regard to the Kagan [nomination], was the best qualified jurist to be on the Supreme Court, with regard to Clarence Thomas, and Mitchell (my words, not his) pooh-poohed that – that, was he really the best? And it caused a bit of a racial, possibly a racial problem, and then he phrased it in a way that, he then went [back] to the floor

and expanded the statement [in a floor statement] and phrased it in a way that did not cause any problems. But the idea that Clarence Thomas was *the* best jurist in the country, it just defied credibility, and Mitchell knew it but I, [and others, said], “Okay, fine, but you can’t say it the way you said it.”

And then, this is my favorite, and this has been in books and stuff so I can say all this. Senator Mitchell was meeting with the caucus to try to decide what to do with regard to Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas, and we’re in a caucus meeting. And it happened that the person who was in charge of security in the Senate was Martha Pope, who was the sergeant-at-arms; the person who was in charge of the caucus was a woman, Abby Saffold, secretary of the Senate; the person who was director of communications was a woman, Diane Dewhirst. We are sitting at the table. And Abby goes to the door and comes in and she flags me and she says, “The House women are here and they want to come into the caucus, and you should know, they’ve got a camera crew with them.”

So Abby goes up and the Senator’s at the lectern dealing with the caucus and trying to deal with this and everything, and Abby goes up and says something to him. So Abby and I both go out in our roles, not because we are women but because of what our roles were. There was press out there, I went out; she’s in charge of the caucus, she went out. And Barbara Boxer was there and she says -

**MH:** Then-Representative Barbara Boxer.

**DD:** Then-Representative Barbara Boxer, and there’s probably fourteen women there.

**MH:** This is unusual.

**DD:** Yes.

**MH:** Just unusual for House members, let alone all of them being women, to come over.

**DD:** Yes, at one time, right, and they said, “We want to talk to Mitchell.” And Abby said very politely, “I just want you to know that Senator Mitchell’s in the middle of a caucus, he’d be happy to meet with you later,” blah-blah-blah-blah. And Barbara Boxer says, “No, not later, we want it – not – now.” [We] go back in. I’m like, ‘holy-moly’, and in fact Senator Bradley later pulled me aside and said, “My god, you walked in here, your eyes were like ‘yikes.’” Went back, Mitchell, mutter-mutter-mutter, comes back, and Abby says, “I’m so sorry, he cannot leave right now. He will be happy to meet with you when this is over.” They said, “No, that’s not good enough, we want it right now. Go back” and whatever.

So we take them down to the majority leader’s office, and he leaves the caucus and goes [to the meeting]. And of course cameras are breaking rules all over the place, they’re on the second floor, they’re rolling, Andrea Mitchell’s got a microphone in his face, and it’s all going down. And so he sits down at the end of the table, and Barbara Boxer is on his left and Pat Schroeder is

on his right, and he leans over and he says hello, hi, how are you, and he leans over and he grabs Pat Schroeder's forearm and he says, "What can I do for you?" And she says, "We're here to help." He said, "Mmm, help, okay." So he hears them out. And they get mad at him because he says, "You can't come in to the caucus, you just can't, we don't do that." And they say, "Well we never said we wanted to come in." Okay, yeah right, whatever, but they were standing at the door, but that's okay.

And then, oh gosh, how did this follow, oh, and Barbara Boxer is just giving me – who since then has been lovely, and I know her and she's lovely but this was a tough thing. [Earlier], when she was outside the door [of the caucus], I said to her (before we walked down to the other office), I said [to another member], "Ma'am, I'm so sorry," and Barbara Boxer came over to me and she put her finger in my chest and she said, "That's no ma'am, that's Representative Louise Slaughter of the state of New York." I was like, "Okay, I'm sorry, Representative Slaughter." So Barbara Boxer is like firing me darts through this whole meeting because she thinks I told Mitchell that they wanted to come in.

And anyway, so Mitchell says, "I'm trying to accomplish exactly what you want, give me some time, I hear you, thank you so much," and he walks back. And we walk back and Mitchell said, "What did you do to Boxer?" And I said, "I called Louise Slaughter 'ma'am.'" He goes, "You did what?" I said, "I called her ma'am, instead of representative." He goes, "You're kidding me?" I'm like, I don't know, that's what they're saying. Anyway, the next day in *U.S.A. Today*, there was a picture which is famous now, of the women from the House walking up the Senate steps, and it's kind of a shadowy, almost like a silhouette of them, marching on the Senate. And he wasn't mad, he was more – the worst thing Mitchell could be would be disappointed: I'm disappointed that the staff did this, you know. Oh, just be mad, I'd rather you be mad than be disappointed. But he was mad, hurt, disappointed, and he called me and he said, "They have time to call the press to get a picture, but they don't have time to call me and tell me that they're coming?" That's my Clarence Thomas. It was painful.

**MH:** I recall a Nina Totenberg. I don't know whether it was [an] essay, but it was absolutely castigating Mitchell -

**DD:** Commentary.

**MH:** - for his handling of the Clarence [Thomas hearings], as majority leader, his handling, and I don't recall exactly what her points were, but it seemed to me that she was saying that he wasn't listening to the substance of what was being alleged, and he was just simply trying to get the thing through. How did you deal with something like that, a national reporter who's basically personally insulted by the way he did it?

**DD:** Well, there were a couple of these, but this one was particularly tough. Mitchell had very good relations with the press. At times he would freeze them out, at times he would take a pass, we had like informal rotations of things and we'd take a pass on things, but in the end he always came around again and realized that they were - You know, Nina's situation was that

she was not only a, she had a cause and she was a reporter, and maybe that's wrong but she's human. She then went on a speaking tour, though, and even went to Maine and talked about it. And a lot of it Mitchell could now, Mitchell did not – this would have been an example of where Mitchell [maybe] could have helped himself by being more forthcoming about what had happened behind the scenes, because he wouldn't have taken so many body blows. But he felt that as leader it was his responsible to take some of the body blows so that he could take it on behalf of others.

**MH:** Thank you. I'm going to move ahead now, he's majority leader, I believe, if I'm not mistaken, he approves foreign travel.

**DD:** Yes, CODELs, congressional delegations.

**MH:** And he also, I assume that he also is invited to go overseas himself.

**DD:** Yes.

**MH:** Did you accompany him on any?

**DD:** I did. His first trip was to Ottawa, he felt that it was important to visit the neighbors, so he went to Ottawa, and it was [Prime Minister Brian] Mulroney, and I went on that, and that was largely environmental, economic cooperation, border security wasn't a big issue then, and then he went to Mexico. I did not go to Mexico with him, but while he was in Mexico the invasion of Panama happened and all I remember is going into the office at four o'clock in the morning, I can't remember anything else about that. So those were his first two trips – if they weren't the first two, they were early.

Then he took a congressional trip to the Soviet Union and Germany to mark the end of the Berlin Wall, and on the trip were Sasser, Sarbanes, Bradley, I think Rudman, because you always tried to make it a bipartisan one and he was our bipartisan guy, and John Glenn, and it was in '89 I think. And would that have been the thirtieth anniversary? It was an anniversary of a cosmonaut going into space.

**MH:** Yuri Gagarin.

**DD:** Yes, and John Glenn was and is an international icon, and he and Annie went and it was a privilege, and it was exciting, and I get sweaty palms thinking about it to this day. But when we walked through Berlin, and I stood next to John Glenn with a little hammer and took out a piece of the Berlin Wall with him, and Mitchell was so lovely, so lovely, he would open up a meeting and then turn it over to acknowledge Glenn and, not turn it over to him but let Glenn have his due. And I can remember at one point, Annie was so upset because she felt that John was so uncomfortable – I don't call him John, this is what Annie is saying – "John is so uncomfortable because he's getting this attention and we just don't want, this is Mitchell's first CODEL and he's the Senate majority leader." And I think it was Abby and I, or maybe it was

Martha and I, told Mitchell this, and Mitchell's like, "Come on, he's John Glenn."

**MH:** Let me just interrupt. George Mitchell, right out of college, went to Berlin and was in military intelligence, in Berlin, so it must have, I mean there must have been some interesting reflections on his part. I mean he never, at least I'm not aware that he ever went into much detail about what he did when he was in the army in Berlin, I think he felt that, at least when I worked for him, he felt that it was something that you shouldn't -

**DD:** Covert.

**MH:** But did he reflect on that at all when he was there?

**DD:** He mentioned it, that he had been there before, and he had some stupid little saying in German that he kept saying, about Charlie Checkpoint or something like that, that we kind of all mouthed, because he would say whatever, with all due respect to the German people. But we went to West Berlin, East Berlin, St. Petersburg, and Moscow, and it was quite a trip, it was quite a trip. And we met with Gorbachev and we toured all those beautiful places in St. Petersburg, and saw the difference between the remains of the war that existed in West Berlin and the stark prefab buildings of East Berlin, and the Wall coming down and whatever, it was really quite something.

**MH:** Was that the first time he'd met Gorbachev? I only say this because I've seen some of the photographs, there's a lot of photographs of Mitchell with Gorbachev, and I wondered if it was that trip or whether it was when Gorbachev came to the United States.

**DD:** I don't know, I don't know. But he got to be buddies with this Russian like comparable head of the legislative, his name was - oh God, I just had it, [Yevgeny] Primakov.

**MH:** Who was his Russian counterpart.

**DD:** Correct, Primakov, and Primakov came to Maine. So Mitchell went to Primakov's vacation home.

**MH:** Dacha.

**DD:** Dacha, right, and then I think Mitchell took him to Waterville. I'm not kidding. Maybe Portland, I don't [remember]. But anyway, but Primakov, yes, we spent a lot of time with Primakov, we were back and forth, and they were buds.

**MH:** I'd like to ask -

**DD:** Oh, there were other trips. We also went to - my mother accused me of going to war-torn areas - we went to Croatia, during the war, to open the consulate there, and we went to another, it was all Yugoslavia there, but it was then -



**MH:** Montenegro?

**DD:** We went to one other one and I can't remember what the other one was, but we went there.

**MH:** Did he ever go to the Middle East?

**DD:** Yes, we went to the Middle East, and then we also went to the first Iraq War, and we went to, let's see, Kuwait invaded Iraq, so we went to see the troops.

**MH:** Iraq invaded Kuwait.

**DD:** Iraq invaded Kuwait, I'm sorry, so we went to visit the troops in Jordan, and then we went to some other place, secret place near – I still don't know where we went – to see the troops near the battle. And we went to Jeddah, we stayed at a palace in Jeddah.

**MH:** How about Lebanon, did you ever get to Lebanon?

**DD:** He did, I didn't.

**MH:** But as majority leader, he did get to go where his -

**DD:** No, I don't think he, I don't know, I don't remember. And then we did the Middle East, we did Egypt, Israel, went to Bethlehem, it was quite something.

**MH:** Did you come away with any view about congressional delegation trips?

**DD:** Well first of all, I can see where people can phrase them as, can come away with thinking that they're boondoggles, I can see that. But Mitchell didn't partake in any of it, Mitchell's CODELs never partook, they're brutal, they're absolutely brutal.

**MH:** Heavily scheduled.

**DD:** Heavily scheduled, a lot of protocol, just every time you enter a country you have to go through country briefings, you have to acclimate yourself to what the issues are, even though you've got huge briefing books, you've been briefed before you go. But once you get there the countries are so happy to have you, our own people there, that they want to – and then you've got to go through the protocol of everything that's happening there, and *then* you get to your – I mean protocol of, if you met with the president or you met with prime minister, and then you'd have to meet with your counterpart, and then if you wanted to talk about water issues in Cairo you had to go and meet with the environmental person. And you were all doing this before you were giving your speech at the university, da-da-da-da, all that. They're exhausting, but I do think that they're something, I personally think we should do them better, and we should do them

with more disclosure, but there is something to be said for folks who have decisions to be made about foreign policy and where American dollars go to get that type of experience firsthand, I do subscribe to that. So we went to Yugoslavia, we went to the Middle East, we went to the war, we went to the Soviet Union, Mexico, Canada, I think that was it.

**MH:** You have another appointment later on and I'm going to respect our time limit on this, but I have two things I want to finish up with. First, can you reflect a little bit on the failed effort to pass a national health insurance policy, and secondly, I'd like you to talk about Mitchell's relationship with Robert Dole, his predecessor as majority leader, and his colleague, when he was majority leader, who was minority leader.

**DD:** On health care, Mitchell had a vast knowledge of the health care issues because of legislation that he had introduced and his work on the Senate Finance Committee, and he gave great latitude, with that knowledge, he gave great latitude to his chairmen who were going to be involved in this. And one was Daniel Patrick Moynihan, brilliant but tough, who felt that – as history has told – who felt that welfare reform should have come first and did not want to do the health care reform under the time table that President Clinton and then First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton wanted to do. And Mitchell served the president, so he was going to try to make that happen. So you had that going on, on one side. And then you had Senator Kennedy, and it was a cause of a lifetime for him, and Senator Mitchell spent a lot of time addressing those radical points of view.

I think, everything in hindsight, but I think that he tried to - There was this whole issue about whether you used – nothing's new – whether you used reconciliation to pass health care, and if you do it in a way that means you only have to have fifty-one votes as opposed to sixty votes. And even though we had fifty-seven, and we thought that there were folks within, a John Breaux, a senator from Louisiana coalition, or some of the moderates to try to get sixty, how do you go about doing this? And it depends on, you have to write the bill, you have to know which way you're doing it because you write the bill differently, because reconciliation is a process that throws anything that doesn't have to do with the budget or deficit reduction, that's kind of the shorthand way of saying it, out, so you have to know what you're doing. And this was back and forth, and this was a big bone of contention. Mitchell was going to do what the White House wanted to do, and we ultimately went with that. But it was unfortunate, because there were missteps in the process, there were missteps I think in the messaging, and at the time it was just probably too big. And I remember that Senator Dole had this killer of a chart about what the government was going to look like once health care reform was done, and people say that didn't bring it down. I think it helped bring it down. So there were a lot of problems along the way.

But I personally think that you have to start somewhere, and that that effort made this effort that we just did with the historic health reform legislation that was passed by President Obama two months ago, possible. Just like Clean Air. Clean Air failed a bunch of times before it got passed, and before the reauthorization of it, acid rain, you know, it's just the way the legislative process works. Mitchell spent a lot of time trying to walk the administration through things, and they didn't always take his advice. I was not privy to it, I was privy to the press component to it,

and some of the strategy, but I wasn't in on the legislative council meetings and all that kind of stuff. And there are others who I know, because I've interviewed them, have spoken at great length about it.

**MH:** Bob Dole.

**DD:** Bob Dole. The best way that I can talk about that is reflecting what people say to me now, which is, the Senate was a different place then. That there was a mutual respect that people had, and that there was a mutual understanding of what each other had to do. And I don't know if that's true or not, but it seemed to be more civil and more communication then, maybe greater trust. I personally think that had something to do with the fact that we did have a pause to govern then. Not much of one, but we don't have any pause to govern now. You at least used to go into a two-year cycle and say, "Okay, we have sixteen months to get something done." We don't pause to govern anymore, and there's a whole bunch of reasons for that.

But in a different day, when Senator Mitchell was majority leader and Senator Dole, they both had very good senses of humor, they laughed a lot, they worked very hard, they were honest with each other, they did not surprise each other, their staffs worked together all the time to say, "Listen, I got Metzenbaum who's going to blow this thing up," or, "I've got McCain who's coming in to get us again on catastrophic health care." And they had a phone that they could pick up and they'd talk immediately to each other, it was on Mitchell's desk. And I don't know that it was used, I mean it wasn't used hourly, but it was used a lot. And when it would ring, Mitchell would pick it up.

**MH:** The fact that it was there was probably more important than the use of it.

**DD:** The fact it was there. And I don't know that I've ever told this story. The night that the Senate went Republican in '94, Dole was having a party in his office. And Sheila Burke, who was Senator Dole's chief of staff, called and talked to Mitchell. Or no, he called her, and then he hung up and he said – and I was in the office and I think John Hilley was there – and he said, "I should go congratulate Dole." And I think I called Sheila, I don't know, somebody called Sheila and said, "Is the senator down there? Mitchell's going to come down and congratulate him." And within two minutes, a phone call back and said, "Dole doesn't want him to have to walk through this. Dole's going to come down to him." And I think that says a lot about what their relationship was, because Senator Dole didn't want Senator Mitchell to have to walk through a party when his party lost majority leader, and I think that pretty much says it all.

I think they – oh, *and* – I was shoveling snow this winter at school with a Dole staffer. Senator Dole was recently hospitalized with a knee issue, at Walter Reed, and he e-mailed me and said, "Would you pass this on to Senator Mitchell?" So I did, over to the State Department, and like six days later the guy e-mailed me back, he said, "I was there when Senator Mitchell called him." I think that says it all.

**MH:** A great place to end. Thank you very much, Diane Dewhirst.

**DD:** Thank you.

*End of Interview.*