

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Anita Jensen

(Interviewer: Diane Dewhirst)

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Diane Dewhirst: I'm going to do a backup, Anita, if that's okay, just to make sure.

Anita Jensen: Yeah, that's fine

DD: Because I want to make sure that we get all of your words down. Okay, so thank you. My name is Diane Dewhirst, and we are here on February 17, 2009, in Washington, D.C., in the morning. And my name is Diane Dewhirst, and we are doing the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project with Anita Jensen. And I have a few questions that I'm supposed to ask you to get this off and going, and then we'll proceed with your perspective on Senator Mitchell's career. Could you please state your full name, where you live, and where your parents are from?

AJ: My full name at the moment is Anita Sadolin Holst Jensen, because my husband has a triple-barreled name, but I only use the Jensen part of it because it would confuse people. I live in Montgomery County, Maryland, and [have] been there for twenty-four, -five years now.

DD: Your parents' names?

AJ: Oh, my father was called Arvids Lusis. He – I never knew him; I was born after he was on the Eastern Front in World War II. My mother's name was Rasma Rasmanis, she was from Latvia – so was my father, so they were both Latvian by, you know, by birth. I was born in a little town called Chemnitz in Germany, which became East Germany which is now back to being Germany again, and I grew up basically in Australia.

DD: Okay, we're going to turn the microphone here for a minute. In general, we're looking at Senator Mitchell's history and his record, and I wondered if you could briefly summarize your positions with Senator Mitchell, what you did for him throughout his career, and in general, what was it like to work with Senator Mitchell?

AJ: I started with Mitchell the month he entered the Senate, because I was a leftover from the Edmund S. Muskie shop. Muskie had accepted President Carter's offer to become secretary of state, so Mitchell came in May of 1980, and that was the year that the Senate changed majorities and went Republican for the first time in, I think, close to forty years, so the following year there would have been Republicans in charge. As a result, for the first half year until, through, into December, the Senate stayed in session until the 21st or something of December, 1980, because it was, you know, the Democrats said, "As long as we've got control, we're going to get through

what we can do.” So we got Stephen Breyer confirmed, which the Republicans didn’t want to do – he’s now on the Supreme Court, he used to be a Ted Kennedy staffer.

And then beginning in 1981 and until the election in 1982, my principal major work was to create, write up, edit, do layout on a series of Mitchell newsletters, the purpose of which was to put his name before the public as often as possible, in the best possible circumstances, and to remind the public by frequency, I should say, that he was still there and still plugging away and still working hard for Maine, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So I wrote, we sent, in that two-year cycle we sent I believe seven newsletters for every man, woman, and child in Maine. It was pretty - There was a lot of newsletters, what can I tell you.

Because in 1981 was also the year that President Reagan was elected, so we had a Republican president, and we had a Republican majority in the Senate, and I’ve got to say most of us who were there for any length of time were simply not accustomed to having a Republican in charge, Republicans in charge of the Senate. Because I started with Muskie in 1970, I never saw any Republicans in charge because they were never in the majority.

But that’s what I did, and I also wrote speeches but not as much as later on, because I was basically doing newsletters all the time. Back in those days the Senate was prohibited from doing a “Dear resident” mailing, so we had to have names and addresses for each piece of mail, which was, by itself it was a major undertaking to collect those names and then to keep them updated so we weren’t wasting too much time. But that’s how I spent my initial years.

Then after that I started doing a lot of statements, basically most of the statements that he did, and after some time in 1983, I can’t remember exactly the date, he asked me to take over the Judiciary Committee work, and I pointed out to him that I was not an attorney and not a lawyer, and he said that he was lawyer enough for the two of us, which I guess is probably right, and I did Judiciary work. And I did what has been colloquially called the really crummy issues. I did abortion, prayer in the schools, civil rights, gun control, you name it, if it was horrible and if it had lunatics on both sides, I was in charge of it. So that was basically what I did with Mitchell.

I thought, his career, well I mean he went from being, in 1980, the most junior senator that you could be, since he wasn’t even there to be sworn in in ‘79, to becoming the leader of the Senate in 19-, he was elected in 1988, just after his second election. He won election in 1982, which he had to do to stay in the Senate, and won fairly handily I would say, and then in 1988 he won with over eighty percent of the vote, which is something like, the only people who get that is the Hawaiian senators, and they’ve been there since before God, you know.

So we were all sort of, we were all – actually, I was terrified that if he was going to run again in ‘94 we would have to improve on our vote percentage, and I couldn’t work out how the hell we were going to do that. Well, I thought eighty-one-point-something was pretty damn good.

So that’s sort of what we did. Of course after he became majority leader we spent, all of us spent a lot more time in the Capitol than we had been doing prior to that. Normally, we lived in the

Russell Building, and Mitchell himself of course spent time in the committees where he was a member. He was on the Finance Committee, he was on Environment and Public Works, he was on the Veterans' Affairs Committee and – what was the other one?

DD: Banking for a while.

AJ: Yeah, that was just the first half-year. He got on that because they kicked, somebody kicked him off Foreign Relations. Muskie had been on Foreign Relations and he would have inherited that, but there was always a waiting list to go on Foreign Affairs, so –

DD: What was it like to work for him, what was his style, what was your relationship with him?

AJ: Well, I do think that's a grossly unfair question, because you know I can't possibly answer it. He was pretty low-key to work for. He was sometimes totally unreasonable, I thought, but he was always polite. He didn't swear at you. I'm not saying Ed Muskie swore at people, but he was known to lose his temper. I don't think I ever saw Mitchell *really* lose his temper much. He would whinge a bit; he particularly whinged after he realized how much fund-raising a senator had to do to get money to be elected with. He really whinged about the fund-raising; he hated it. So, but other than that he was a fairly even-tempered guy, and I learned pretty early on that as long as you weren't going to be hopelessly sarcastic around him, he was pretty open to suggestions. He did not like smart-ass people very much. I can't say I blame him, but you know, there you go.

He invented himself as a campaigner, because when he was first appointed, Governor Joe Brennan appointed him to the Senate when Muskie left, and it was thought in Maine and in Democratic circles in particular that he didn't stand a snowball's chance of being elected for a full term in 1982, because he couldn't, he didn't smile at people a lot, he wasn't a glad hander, he didn't punch people on the back, he didn't act like a jock, and he played tennis. We were running against, in '82 we were running against Dave Emery who was from Rockland, Maine, the coast, and he had billed himself always as a sportsman. He was, there were shots of him holding, doing, big rifles and things, and posing in the background, and Mitchell didn't have anything like that, he played *tennis*. And they're saying like, "Oh, terrific, a Portland lawyer who plays tennis – this is really going to go down well."

So there was a general belief that he wouldn't, he didn't, have a hope of winning, and Governor Curtis, who had been governor before Brennan, actually went so far as to run advertisements in the Maine papers offering himself to be drafted for the job of running against Mitchell, because I guess he would have preferred not to have a primary contest. And of course we didn't have one because he dropped out. It appeared that people weren't actually all that interested in having Ken Curtis run again, but that was just the way it turned out.

But because Dave Emery was running, he was very aggressive, and Senator Cohen, who was the senior senator from Maine at that time, who was also a Republican, Cohen went out of his way to

help Emery in a way that in Maine politics had never been done before. He loaned him his press secretary, he loaned him his AA, and made sure that Emery had a staff that knew what it was doing and knew a little bit about the Senate. Which didn't mean that they were perfect, because they weren't, by a long shot, but we were up against a very difficult set of circumstances because there did seem to be a Republican tide, if you will, in politics, especially with, given Ronald Reagan. In 1981, on March 30, Ronald Reagan was shot by accident, by a lunatic who wanted to impress a movie actress called Jodie Foster – go figure, I mean you can't make this stuff up. But as a result, because he did recover, and because he was quoted as having made jokes on his way into the operating theater, there was this sort of massive surge of sympathy for Reagan, so that it became impossible almost to say anything negative about Reagan.

So that we were in a position where this guy was doing really crummy things in terms of cutting programs, and we couldn't actually accuse him of it because, politically, that didn't fly. So we had to sort of, we had to attack the person who was doing this who wasn't our nice president, Mr. Reagan, because Mr. Reagan wouldn't do a thing like that. So that was, that made running difficult, and the fact that we won with more than sixty percent in '82, when I think many people expected us to win with just fifty-one, but a lot of that was due to the fact that Mitchell reinvented himself.

He made up and polished and worked on a series of jokes. There was the cow joke, you remember the cow joke? Where, you know, a farmer was talking about, "Why don't we send the cow to..." about sending cows to Saudi Arabia, and the farmer said, "Well why don't we send you to Saudi Arabia and keep the cow," or something. "Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha," it was all very funny. But actually when he told it, if you hadn't heard it six hundred times, it *was* pretty funny. And that's one of the things that he did, he really forced himself to become good at this, and to do it so that it sounded spontaneous, which of course it wasn't but, you know, I mean, so what?

But he really reinvented his persona, he began smiling a lot more, a lot more, as opposed to – and he stopped talking like a lawyer. Not that he ever, I don't think he really ever did, but he consciously sort of dumbed himself down a little, because – But other than that, I mean he had the great joke in 1988, you know, the Liz Taylor joke – that is much too long for me to tell here, but which is in the Mitchell Archive, I've typed it up several times so I know it's there somewhere.

DD: Going to his Senate career and some of his achievements, and some of his work, just to, I'm just going to name a few for you that I know you were involved in: there was of course choice, which you've mentioned, there were guns, Bork, Clarence Thomas, the Civil Rights Bill of 1991, can you reflect on some of that, Anita?

AJ: Yeah, there were, well it was the Brady Bill, too, which was guns, which he actually successfully got through the Senate, which was pretty amazing, given everything. The Republicans forced us to put an end date on it so when it expired, of course, it expired and there was no way anybody was going to rewrite it. But he did do a lot.

The Bork nomination, and of course the Rehnquist, Rehnquist was nominated to move up from being associate justice to being chief justice, and he voted against Rehnquist, which he did because I reminded him of a couple of cases that Rehnquist had decided that I thought were particularly egregiously wrong, and he agreed with me. He cited the, he cited two paragraphs out of the stupid memo in his speech, so I have to assume he agreed with me. And there was Clarence Thomas, which he was blamed for, although I have to say it was Danforth throwing the hissy fit, it was not Mitchell. We, Mitchell tried his best to be reasonable about Clarence Thomas, but Danforth didn't *want* anyone to be reasonable, he wanted to be hysterical and to charge, hurl accusations around about black people, blah-blah-blah.

And Bork of course was, Bork was a case where Reagan went on the air in the South and really stumped for Bork, which he left I think to do a day late and a dollar short, it was just, he started doing it too late, when people's opinions on Bork had already pretty much hardened, and where the opposition to Bork had had a chance to make itself heard and become quite clear and concise about what was wrong with Bork, which was a fair few things. See, you have to remember one of the big things going into the '80s, after Reagan won, was that the Republicans had an enduring desire to change the makeup of the court, and to change what the type of interpretation of the Constitution that the Supreme Court had handed down when it was the Burger court.

They were really anxious to put doctrinaire 'wing-nuts,' if you'll excuse the expression, on the Supreme Court, and they didn't want to be, they didn't want to be pushed back against. The attorney general in Reagan's first couple of years was a guy called William French Smith, and he would give these speeches about original intent, and then when his last attorney general came in, that was Ed Meese, and Ed Meese I think believed that he invented original intent himself, because he really would not shut up about it. So I actually had a forced learning experience, because I had to figure out what the hell original intent *meant*, when used by these people.

So, you know, he was pretty, and because Mitchell had resigned a federal judgeship to become a senator which – we didn't have any other federal judges in the Senate – the judiciary world, if you will, the judicial world, thought he was sort of their pet senator. So whenever there was a question of payroll for the judges, adding a judge here and there, it was Mitchell's chore to get it through the Senate, or you know, go figure. But he was sort of carrying the torch for a lot of these kinds of – well, what would you call them, you know, little chores.

But we, he spoke also, he engaged in a, in 1984 I think it was, I think it was '84, he engaged in a filibuster, I guess an anti-filibuster, I don't know what – anyway, he and Strom Thurmond had an extraordinary lengthy series of statements about the wretched death penalty, and how it doesn't actually prevent anybody from wanting to kill other people and so on, and of course Strom Thurmond believed, sincerely, I'm sure, that it was a deterrent to homicide. I don't know, people believe all sorts of strange things. So we got, I think that was the first time Mitchell was invited to go on CNN, which was sort of a bit of a breakthrough for him because he was a junior senator from a very small state, and in those days of course we had a Republican president and we were in the minority in the Senate so there wasn't, there was not much way for Mitchell to make a name for himself.

But basically he really didn't like that kind of grandstanding. He agreed to do it because people besieged him. I mean Ted Kennedy, of course Kennedy didn't mind filibustering, but Kennedy really beat on him to get involved in this particular thing. It was when we were rewriting Title 18 – Title 18 is the criminal code of the United States, we did a rewrite of Title 18 in 1984, mostly to clear out the undergrowth. So to a large extent it wasn't all that controversial, but there were elements in it that *were* controversial and which of course the Republicans wanted to use to move their agenda forward, and one was the death penalty, obviously. One was the, what do you call it, [exclusionary rule on] evidence (been out of the Senate too long, can't remember anything).

DD: Don't worry about it.

AJ: Anyway, so there were elements of controversy about the rewrite of Title 18, but, and the death penalty I suppose was the biggest one of all. (*Cough*) Excuse me.

DD: It's okay. You okay?

AJ: Yeah. And...

DD: Can I-?

AJ: Sure!

DD: You mentioned Senator Kennedy. One of the pieces of legislation that the majority leader worked on was the Civil Rights Bill of 1991; can you talk about his work with Senator Kennedy, his style, that effort?

AJ: That was a very touchy series of meetings. It was in the first George H.W. Bush administration, and we, with Kennedy but also with other people in the Judiciary Committee, like Joe Biden, tried our best to find a middle path. Mitchell did not want a screaming match about civil rights issues, he really did not. He wanted us to work out something that was going to be more or less agreeable to both sides, and that could more or less pass.

But we discovered, at least I discovered halfway through the negotiations on the 1991 Civil Rights Bill, that Boyden Gray, who was the president's attorney, or counsel, had never given some of our suggestions to the president. So he was demanding that we do things that he didn't even know what he was asking for, which we felt a little less than thrilled about, let's put it that way. Because, you know, it's not really negotiating in good faith if you don't show your principal what you're talking about.

But that was, like most things in those days, there was a great deal of Astroturf, grass roots that aren't grass roots sort of stuff ginned up about that bill, so thousands and thousands of postcards and identical letters and whatever, came pouring into the office. Which just, I mean it didn't

really affect me that much, but it really made life messy for the people working out in the Russell Building, because that's where all the paper went. So they would do this, and senators who weren't used to it would sometimes think, 'God, my whole state is up in arms about this.' And of course it wasn't, it never was. But so what, you know.

And there was the thing he did that I thought was the most impressive – and I suppose you're going to talk to Rozen, right? – was the tax bill in 19-

DD: '86.

AJ: '86, also the Budget work he did with Bush, where Bush backed down on the "read my lips, no new taxes," yada-yada-yada, and in '94, when we needed Al Gore to cast a tie-breaking vote for us and pass Bill Clinton's tax hike, which of course led to surpluses in the budget later which then of course vanished under the gaze of W. Bush. I mean, stuff goes around.

DD: What about health care reform?

AJ: Health care reform came the same year that we were trying to do a really big crime bill. Now, I didn't do health care reform, per se, but I wrote an awful lot of the statements, to the point where I was doing it in my sleep, and it was, I think the consensus today has been that, I think what they did was they overdid it. I mean, when I found out from what's-her-name, the girl who was – you know?

DD: Chris Williams?

AJ: Chris, yeah, when I found out from Christine that they were actually arguing over what age a woman should start having mammograms, I really thought they, now come on, these are not physicians, these people don't know, they don't know anything about what age a woman should be, this is sort of not a political judgment, or it certainly shouldn't be a goddamn political judgment. And it was at that point that I thought, 'No, this is not going to work.' Because you can't go around, you know, arbitrarily declaring from a policy perspective that you *will* go and have mammograms when you turn forty-five, but not a minute before. I mean it's just foolish, that's what I thought.

DD: But what about Mitchell's role in this? He'd been on the Finance Committee, had done long-term care, had done outcomes research, had done spousal impoverishment, and then the Clinton administration came along and health care, what was his -?

AJ: Well his goal initially was to corral the votes. I don't think he knew, I don't know what Christine told him, I wasn't there at the briefings, put it that way, so I have no idea what he knew about how the whole negotiating process had gone over at the White House. But it became pretty evident that the Republicans weren't going to have anything, they weren't going to have it, so in 1994 – I think the, I don't remember what year the advertisements started – but "Harry and Louise" advertisements, a whole series of them went out -

DD: I think '93.

AJ: Okay, started late '93, a whole series of them had Harry and Louise sitting at the kitchen table with their little eyebrows all wrinkled up about, "Oh dear, dear, dear, he's going to dictate our health care to us," blah-blah-blah. They were pretty corny, but it worked to the degree that it scared enough people and it gave the Republicans an excuse to vote against health care reform – they needed an excuse, Harry and Louise became the excuse – and that's, we could not get the votes. Mitchell ultimately, towards the end of the day when the debate was sort of winding down, suggested that we allow people to buy into the system the Senate used for its health care, which is a choice among about, I don't know, thirty or forty different health plans. You choose whichever one you can afford, and which one has the lowest deductible, or whatever your choice is. There's certainly a lot of choices there.

Now, the federal government subsidizes all our health care to some extent, and in this case you'd have to ask your employer to do it for you or pay it all yourself. But it would have been at least coverage which you couldn't be refused. One of the big things that people didn't seem to understand in '93 and '94 wasn't so much that it cost a lot, although they did sort of grasp that, but that there were, people were being turned down for no good reason, they were being denied the ability to buy coverage at *any* price, which is downright ridiculous. So, and of course that's still happening and so today there are of course more than thirty-six million Americans who have no coverage, and we all pretend to think it's all right.

DD: What happened to that proposal from Senator Mitchell, and what happened in the end in health care and what was his role in that?

AJ: Well, the end, I mean he made his statement about, you know, let's do it this way, and they voted and it lost, because a lot of the Democratic senators – without wishing to go into it – didn't want to be part of that either. They were scared. Nineteen ninety-four turned out to be a very tough election year for Democratic members of the Congress, both in the House and the Senate side, and in fact in 1995 the Congress became majority Republican, both House and Senate, which certainly was a, something of a shock to me because I guess I hadn't really been following the political part of it that closely because Mitchell wasn't running, he was retiring. So that did come as a huge surprise to me, and guys like Sasser lost, which I didn't really think he would, I mean Tennessee, yeah, what's the problem?

So by then a lot of so-called Democrats were also getting antsy, and of course after the election some of our so-called Democrats like Dick Shelby decided that they were really, in their heart-of-hearts they were really Republicans all along. Ha-ha-ha. So you know, that's sort of the realignment of the Deep South, everybody finally got to stop saying that we're Democrats but we vote with the, and finally got to admit that they were just bloody Republicans.

DD: The Senator's environmental work, Super Fund, Clean Air, Clean Water?

AJ: Environmental stuff was stuff he started doing even in 1980, oil spill legislation, not letting the state laws on oil spills be pre-empted. Maine had a pretty stiff law on oil spills and it really, it *was* something that mattered to Maine people, that's why they wrote a stiff law, hello. But he worked on that consistently for a long time.

He did work on the Super Fund, which was the toxics and stuff, and of course also on the Clean Air Act, which I think without Mitchell's work and leadership in 1990 would not have been rewritten and turned into law. I just don't think they would have gotten it through. And even with all the work he did, and he did a whole lot of work, he still couldn't get car fuel efficiency, couldn't get it through because they just, people were just digging in their heels at that point in time because, I mean it was a Republican, what do you call it, administration in 1990, and they were beholden to their supporters, who of course did not include the environmental groups.

But I know he did a lot of work, Kate Kimball worked with him on that, and I don't know if she's still in town or not, or where she is for that matter. Charlene Sturbitts also worked with him in the first years. She had been on Muskie's subcommittee on air/water pollution, and in '82, in '81, when the Senate changed hands and became Republican, majority Republican, she came on to the personal staff, so Charlene was there for the first two to three years, I want to say. I really am trying to remember. I think she quit in about '84, maybe '85, but she was, so she was there for a lot of the, certainly the oil spill stuff and Super Fund and all those.

But I don't, Kate Kimball started after that, and a guy with red hair, what's his?

DD: Jeff Peterson.

AJ: Jeff Peterson, yeah, he was also an enviro type.

DD: He did water.

AJ: Yeah, he did water. Well, I mean I, I don't really know how they divvied it up over in that committee, because I didn't really do that much with it. I wrote some of the speeches, I mean you don't have to know how the negotiating is going on legislation to write a speech, so -

DD: You worked, did you work a little bit with Rich Arenberg on Iran-Contra and the Senator's work on the committee, the Select Committee?

AJ: I didn't work on the committee work, in other words the hearings, but I wrote, ha-ha, the speeches, and he did have a few. And we also had this thing that we did, the weekly column, every week we would offer the Maine newspapers a column on some damn - it was a thumb-sucker, you know, every week, we would sort of deliver up this robust non-thought on something very non important. So Iran-Contra was sort of one of those obscure, Constitutionally-based arguments on why it was against the law to do what the Reagan people had done. In other words, subsidized the Contras with money, no, excuse me, subsidize the Contras with money that they were getting from, under the table from the feds, I guess, and then bribe the Iranians to let

our hostages go. I mean it was a complete mess. It wasn't the Iranians, it was the Lebanese, yeah.

Because there were Americans being held hostage in the Middle East, mainly I think in Jordan and Lebanon, and they were trying to bribe them, and also of course Iran. That was the famous time when some of the president's staff were, apparently had gone to Tehran with gifts, including a cake shaped like a key – which was the most bizarre detail, and I still to this day have no idea what that was supposed to mean – but it was, he also wrote a book about it, he worked with Cohen and wrote a book about his, about the Iran-Contra hearings and so on, discussing some of the Constitutional issues, what was executive privilege and what wasn't.

DD: I'm just going through what the Oral History Project is looking at specifically and just checking to make certain, did you have anything to do with the Maine Indian Land Claims settlement?

AJ: No, thank God.

DD: That was no?

AJ: No, no.

DD: Also, what about the Affordable Housing Act? And then I just want you to reflect on his race in '88, and when he became majority leader.

AJ: I didn't work on affordable housing, most of that, because it had to do with tax consequences and tax benefits was done through Finance. So, Bobby Rozen might be a better bet on that. And what was the other thing you asked about?

DD: The Senate race in 1988, and then him becoming Senate majority leader.

AJ: The Senate race in '88 was much less of a cliffhanger, obviously. I mean once you win with eighty-one percent of the vote, you know, you have not really run very hard, as it were. There were, it seemed like there was almost nothing he could do wrong, which was obviously silly, but he was an immensely popular senator. It was just amazing. At the end of the election, when he discovered the two very small towns in northern Aroostook County, they were called something-or-other plantations back then, had not voted for him, he actually got a charter plane and flew up there, right, and all the inhabitants of these towns – we're talking thirty-seven people, right? – met, met with him and they apologized for not voting for him. I mean it was the most bizarre thing. But it got in all the papers, and of course Maine people like to think that they're idiosyncratic and unusual and do things, you know, blah-blah, so it was sort of a, you know, pretty popular thing to do.

The Senate race he kept very close to the vest, because this is something where it's one-on-one, member to member. I know that he told me once, in '94, when he had made his decision to quit,

he told me that the thing he hated most about being majority leader was that the guys, meaning the senators, would bring their personal problems to him, and he really hated being Dear Abby. And I didn't ask, because I thought it was, it would be in bad taste, but you felt like saying, "What, that they couldn't get it up with their girlfriend? Or what are we talking about here?" But he was sincere about that, and I think he, I don't doubt that he meant it.

So, the Senate majority race was very closely held. Gayle Cory, who passed away in 1996, was probably the best positioned to know anything about it on the staff, because she had worked with Mitchell when he was a Muskie staffer back in the '60s, so they knew each other from before and they were sort of more or less almost on first-name terms. I mean he, she didn't call him George in the office, obviously, but she called him Senator like everybody else did, but they *were* pretty good friends.

But what was, what I found amazing was that he must have known how this was going to go down, because Danny Inouye was running against him and Danny Inouye had been in the Senate since 1946 or something – well, maybe that's not right, but a really long time – from Hawaii, and kept getting reelected with eighty percent of the vote every time. So I thought that Inouye might have a better shot at it because he's, after all, he had seniority, been there since God, and you know, why Mitchell? And then of course Mitchell walked away with it, and they made it, they made... what do you call that?

DD: Confirmation? Unanimous?

AJ: Yeah, they made it unanimous, because it seemed like there were only going to be about three or four guys holding out, so that's what they did.

DD: When did you first meet Senator Mitchell, or then George Mitchell? And then can you reflect on your impressions on him overall and what his most significant accomplishment was?

AJ: I met Mitchell in 1971, I think. But he would have absolutely no memory of it, because at that point in time I was, I was sort of a munchkin in the campaign situation, and I never really worked *on* the campaign. He was working on Muskie's campaign for the Democratic nomination for the presidency, I really always worked at Muskie's Senate office so I was never actually – I didn't spend a lot of time in the campaign shop downtown.

I met him in his recent incarnation at an evening event at the White House in 1980 when, just about a week before he was going to be sworn in, or maybe it was the day before, it was very close in time, when Muskie had already been confirmed as secretary of state and then Mitchell came in about a week later and was the senator. He stayed for a while at the Sheraton I think it was, I can't remember which one, one of those two big hotels across the park, and because I lived in Mt. Pleasant at the time, I got the chore of driving him to the office every day. So I would pull up in my battered old Volkswagen, which is what it was, and he would hop in and we would go to the Senate.

And he would ask me, of course every day, “Well, what are we going to do today?” And I would tell him and he would say, “That’s,” you know, “this place is so ridiculous. When I was a judge I knew what my schedule was going to be for years in advance,” blah blah blah. He kept saying that and he would, every so often I would drive him to Brooks Brothers so that he could buy another blazer. We figured he must have a whole wardrobe full of the damn things, because he had a huge number, I mean he wore blue blazers all the time.

But he was, he became more sartorially, acceptable as time passed. Because initially, there was this striped belt that he wore, he insisted on wearing, that drove many of the females in our office especially nuts. But that, he wasn’t scruffy, however, he was always sort of tidy. But he looked like the sort of guy who might have been born wearing a shirt and tie and carrying a briefcase, he was not, casual is not a word I associate with Mitchell.

(Aside - flipping tape)

DD: And we are now on Side Two with Anita, we are coming to an end here, I have two more questions. What was his greatest legislative accomplishment, and what did I forget to ask you?

AJ: I think the, what I would probably class as the most important thing he did I would have to say was Clean Air. I really would, because that’s, that is a lasting thing, it’s not going to be pre-empted by anything. And it’s, to have it written into statute, law, makes a difference. It’s part of the Maine legacy, if you want to put it that way, because Ed Muskie wrote the very first important Clean Air Act, the first one that actually did anything, in 1970, and people in Maine expected Mitchell to carry on the environmental work in that sort of tradition. So he did that.

He was, I also think that the budget negotiations in 1989-90 with the senior George Bush staff were fairly significant, because since 1980 the Republicans have been going on and on and on about how you can’t ever raise taxes. If you mention that you’re going to raise taxes it’s like, it’s the third rail of politics, you’ll be defeated, you’ll die a miserable death, blah-blah-blah, and they have convinced themselves that this was true, that there was no way that you could raise taxes and live to tell of it. So Mitchell and the, along with the members of the Budget Committee, the Finance Committee rather, and administration all adjourned to Andrews Air Force Base I think it was, outside Washington, and they spent like several, about a week, week and a half, hunkered down there dealing, just dealing. And the fact that he was able to sit there, and not lose his temper, and still come out having, let us say, made the point, right, and Bush backed down and said, “Okay, we’ll raise taxes,” I thought was pretty impressive.

I mean, you have to remember, after he left the Senate, one of the things that Bill Clinton asked him to do was go to Northern Ireland and see if he could help negotiate an end to the sporadic nineteen years or whatever it had been of people bombing each other and blowing each other up and tossing bombs at cars and what have you, and it took him a good two-and-a-half to three, or two-and-a-half, I think, years to do it, but he actually came out with a, an agreement of sorts.

DD: The Good Friday Agreement?

AJ: Yeah, the Good Friday Agreement, it's quite famous actually. So I have always thought that he was so willing to see the other person's point of view, whether he agreed with it or not, and he so rarely allowed his preferences to show, which of course means that he sounded a lot more, what would you call it, genuine, than a lot of people do when they're just pretending to be sort of, "Yeah, I know what you're saying, *but...*" blah-blah. So I've always thought that was one of his more outstanding traits, that he *was* able to hide his own feelings on a subject even when he *had* pretty strong feelings on a subject, he just wasn't going to let them out.

He was that kind of guy. He was not warm and cuddly; I will say that for the record. That would be about the *last* thing I would accuse him of being. But he was very smart, and had a tendency sometimes to treat the staff as not being perhaps the brightest bulbs in the, on the tree. I mean we were, some of us took umbrage at that, some of us sort of let it slide off our back, it all depended on who you were, I suppose. That was one of those things. I don't think *he* ever knew that he was behaving like that; I don't think it ever crossed his mind that some of us felt moderately insulted. But you know, I certainly never told him that.

DD: What did I forget?

AJ: Well, there are a bunch of things I forgot. What else did you, I mean I, the first, in 1980, one of the best things about, that we had going for us in the '82 election was that towards the end of the year, when we were in that horrible post-election lame-duck session that would not die, it just went on and on and on, he, there was a story published in, by NCPAC, which I think stood for the National Conservative Political Action Committee, and it essentially had, it was one of these vote count sheets of votes on which Mitchell had voted wrong on veterans. And we looked at that, you know, and some of them were definitely, Mitchell voted against that, he voted against that, but some of them were Ed Muskie's votes. So Mitchell of course had a wonderful time, went up to Maine and said, "Look, I don't mind defending my own votes, you know, I'll be happy to defend my own votes, but I'll be damned if I defend Ed Muskie's votes."

So we really strung that out as far as we possibly could, and we got a lot of mileage out of it. And I think that was one of the reasons he ended up going on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, because having made such a fuss about veterans, he could hardly sort of just shuck them off at this point. So I thought, I always thought that was one of the things that came out, that we didn't do anything to deserve, but that by happenstance worked very well for him. So that's, those sorts of things happened.

There was also, I remember in 1980 he used to have to sit and preside, because the most junior senator got to sit and preside, and mostly members would sit there and sign mail, right? Because the parliamentarians and the floor staff actually do the work, the senator's just a figurehead. Essentially. And he did that, and one day he came back to the office after he'd had his two hours on the floor or whatever and said, "Anita, let me ask you, Senator Byrd is making these long, long, long speeches about Senate history, why is he doing that?" And I said, "You know, sir, he likes the Senate, it's his body, he's been here a long time." And I said, "My suggestion would be

that you write him a nice handwritten little note saying that you've been presiding and you've been listening to him and you're just amazed at the reach of his intellect and knowledge and so on." Mitchell looked at me and said, "Oh Anita, don't be silly," you know, I mean.

DD: And then did he do it?

AJ: Yes, then he did it, and the following year he was a member of the Finance Committee. *I'm* not saying the two things are connected. *Fa-a-r* be it for me to say that. But I do think it was, hmm, fortuitous, I do think it was. So there were a few little things like that. We did a session of taping in Portland, in the summer this year, because I was going up to Maine and so Andrea came over from Bowdoin, or we went over to Bowdoin, I don't know, whatever it was, oh, we went to the law firm, and saw Estelle, who was there, worked there, and a few other people were able to get together. And when there is more than just you wracking your own brain, you get a lot more back and forth going, and I think it was one of the better things. We tried not to talk over each other, because that makes it unintelligible, but we got some of the sort of fun stuff that you forget, you just forget, in the course of time.

DD: Yeah, others have suggested that as well.

AJ: Yeah, to do a round table?

DD: Yeah, yeah.

AJ: I think it's a good idea, I really think it's a good idea. Because, I mean here in the D.C. area we have quite a lot of staff, former staff. You could get quite a lot –

DD: Right.

AJ: - of them to front up, chew the fat.

DD: Anything else, ma'am?

AJ: No, not really.

DD: Thank you, Anita Jensen.

End of Interview