

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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William Charles “Bill” Hiss

(Interviewer: Andrea L’Hommedieu)

GMOH# 002

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Andrea L’Hommedieu: This is an interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College. The date is March 20, 2008, and we are at the office of Bill Hiss at Bates College, and this is Andrea L’Hommedieu. Bill, could you start just by giving me your full name?

Bill Hiss: William Charles Hiss, and I’m vice president for external affairs at Bates, and a lecturer in the Asian Studies department.

AL: And where and when were you born?

BH: I was born in Orange, New Jersey, August 6, 1944.

AL: And I won’t ask you a lot more about your background, because we did cover that with the Bates College oral histories, so I’d like to go and talk about your first connection to Senator Mitchell.

BH: In the early 1990s – and I don’t remember the exact year but we can find out – in the early 1990s, when Senator Mitchell was the majority leader of the Senate, he had some appointments to make to federal advisory committees. And at the time, he had a young Bates grad on his staff as one of his administrative assistants, and he was looking for somebody to appoint to one of the federal advisory committees, and the committee was called the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance. It was a joint congressional and Department of Education advisory committee whose function was to give unbiased professional advice from people working in the field on the subject of national use of the federal financial aid programs and access to higher education.

And the way the committee worked was that there were, there were eleven of us on the committee, three appointed by the United States Senate, three appointed by the House of Representatives, and five by the secretary of education. And the appointments had to reflect a range of skills. There always had to be one or two sitting financial aid directors on the committee, there had to be at least one student on the committee, and there had to be good spread of other skills. So Senator Mitchell, because he was the majority leader, had the right to make a few of these appointments, and he, when he could, when he could find somebody who was qualified, he tried to look at people from Maine.

And so he asked his assistant to bring a list of names, possible people who could serve on the committee, and she put my name on, among others I think, and sometime later the Senator was making the decision about who to appoint and he said to whoever was, whoever he was talking with, "Well, I'm going to put that fellow on from Bates. I don't remember his name, but Colleen Quint's husband." Colleen had worked for Senator Mitchell as an assistant.

And at that point I had been running the Bates admissions and financial aid offices for about twenty some years I think, and perhaps – I came in '78 – '88, '90, well maybe not, maybe it's fifteen, sixteen years I had been running the admissions and financial aid offices, my title was dean of admissions and financial aid. So the Senator appointed me to the committee. I had only met him very, very peripheral circumstances, I might have met him at a Democrat fund raiser or something, but he wasn't anybody I knew personally. He didn't know me personally very well.

But he put me on the committee, and I served two three-year terms on the committee. I served one term as Senator Mitchell's appointee, and then just as I came up for a second term, the Senator retired from the Senate, and the Senate leadership changed over and the Republicans were in charge. But Senator Mitchell I guess thought I'd done a good job and went to the Republican senator who would be coming in as majority leader and said, "Look, are you willing just to reappoint Bill Hiss to this committee, because I think he's learned the ropes and the committee staff seems to feel he's valuable." And the Republican leader agreed and so I was reappointed for a second term and served on the committee for a total of six years.

So that was the original place where Senator Mitchell and I got to know each other a bit. I would from time to time come to his office, as to the other members of the Maine delegation, and brief them on particular important changes that I could see coming in the world of financial aid and access to higher ed, because of my work on the committee. And it was a very helpful and good committee; it did the work which the Congress and the secretary set it to do.

Sometimes they would give us a particular topic; other times we undertook research projects on our own. We would have regular hearings around the country, some in Washington, some in other parts of the country; Bates hosted a couple of those meetings. And the intent was to give a steady stream of feedback from the committee to the Congress and the secretary of education on what should be national financial aid policies.

I'll give you an example. While we were on the committee, the subject came up for study of how students applied for financial aid for colleges. At the time, there was no free federal form; what we now have as the FAFSA didn't exist. And the way students applied was by filling out the old FAF, Financial Aid Form that was published by the College Board and the College Scholarship Service, and it was a fee form. You paid I think it was fourteen dollars or something just to fill out that form and apply for financial aid.

The form had a lot of data on it; it was a much more complicated form than most colleges needed, certainly the vast range of public colleges and universities that were, most of them, not doing complicated financial aid analysis. They were just packaging federal loans and federal

grants and work-study and the like. They were getting a lot more data from the FAF than they needed. And when we tried to suggest to the College Board and to the College Scholarship Service that they design a free form that was much simpler, they weren't interested in that at all, frankly. The FAF was a terrific money maker for them, and they just said, "No, we're going to continue to serve this market with the FAF."

We brought this news back to the Congress and there was, I think fair to say, a somewhat dyspeptic reaction from quite a number of people in Congress who were very interested in financial aid and student access to higher ed, and they said in essence, "Why should a student have to pay a private organization to apply for federal financial aid? This doesn't make any sense." So our committee got involved in that issue, and essentially with the staffers at the Department of Education, we designed the original FAFSA, and the whole logic of the FAFSA. It was a free form; you didn't have to pay for it. It was, you filled it out, you submitted it to the Department of Education, they processed it for free, and they would come back with an index saying what your FC, your family contribution, ought to be, and at no cost to the student and reasonably quickly and easily. And that form worked fine for the vast majority of public universities and colleges, and even for some privates.

The College Board took a financial bath on their unwillingness to change from the FAF, and they eventually redesigned a new form, the Profile form, that serves the needs of high-end colleges that need much more sophisticated information in order to do financial aid analysis. But my understanding is, eighty percent, eighty-five percent of the students in the country now only file the FAFSA, and obviously, you know, with millions of students in colleges each year, it saves the students lots and lots of money.

So it was a great experience. At one point there was discussion in the Senate of abandoning one of the federal aid programs, the SEOG program, the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, which is a program designed for students who have very high financial need. The only students who can get an SEOG grant are students who need at least half the costs in financial aid; they can't pay any more than half the costs. And most of the kids who get SEOG money are kids who can't pay anything like even half, you know, a lot of it is like pay ten percent, or five percent, or fifteen percent of the cost.

At the time Senator Snowe was serving as the other member of Congress, the other member of the Senate from Maine, and she had had three Bates grads in a row as chiefs of staff. So I remember sitting in her conference room with the Senator and Kevin Raye, the Bates grad, who was then her chief of staff. And I opened up the Bates financial aid roster, that is, all the students from Maine who were currently at Bates with a spreadsheet of exactly what forms of aid they were getting, and I sat there with a ruler and we went down the names one by one, and I showed her that. I think actually I took the names off, but I had the home towns, so she could see the geographic spread of the youngsters from Maine – and I showed her that virtually all the students from Maine were in all the federal programs. They were getting Pell Grants, they were getting SEOG money, they were getting federal work-study, they were taking out a loan, sometimes they had two different loan systems, you know, the bank loan and the Perkins loan.

And I said, “Senator, if you take the SEOG program away, where is it being made up? You can see that virtually every student from Maine is getting SEOG money.” The Senator sort of whistled through her teeth, and a little while later got up on the floor of the Senate and she gave a little speech that essentially said, ‘over my dead body are you going to get rid of the SEOG program.’ And, you know, she was one of the pivotal swing votes on that issue, and the program has survived to this day.

But it was a very valuable and helpful committee. I mean the people I served with were very different. I mean the chancellor of the University of Mississippi, and the chancellor of the University of South Carolina at Aiken, and a fellow who had been one of the vice-presidents at CitiCorp, who did a lot of the student lending, and two or three financial aid directors, and a couple of graduate students who served different terms. And I think, fair to say, I was not the expert on the committee on the details of the data systems that kept financial aid records, or even the details of financial aid analysis. I supervised that function at Bates but I didn’t myself do the need analysis.

I think perhaps I was useful to the committee as an ethicist of the access process. My training is partly as an ethicist, and an American intellectual historian, and in the American history of religion. But my ethics training was very helpful in that regard, that I was able to ask broader questions on the committee that would be issues like, what is this federal aid program trying to do? What is the goal? Are we trying to increase access for lower middle income kids? Are we trying to reach youngsters at the very bottom five, ten, fifteen percent of the American income ladders? Should it serve immigrants who have not completed their citizenship papers yet, perhaps kids who have a green card but are not full citizens? Should it serve undocumented aliens? You know.

And those kinds of questions that I raised would be different than the questions raised by the financial aid directors who saw in the trenches the particular strengths and weaknesses of a certain kind of administration perhaps that the Department of Education was using for a federal program. And so we raised these questions, published them in our research reports, took testimony in our public meetings. We’d have experts and practitioners come and give testimony to us, and then we would in turn share that back with the Congress and the secretary of education. And it was an enormously valuable function, I think, and I always was grateful to Senator Mitchell for putting me on the committee, because it was a chance for me to see the national aid system at a thirty-thousand-foot level, a chance for me to serve, I hope usefully, in a federal advisory committee that was doing great work.

And simultaneously I was chairing the advisory committee of deans at *U.S. News & World Report* that put the guidebooks together and designed the college ranking systems. So my service on those two committees were a kind of yin/yang operation, that I was learning things on one committee that helped me in my service on the other. I think I tried to raise some of the same questions of social ethics in the *U.S. News* committee that I was raising in the federal advisory committee on student financial assistance.

AL: Well, what was your experience interacting with Senator Mitchell? How did he work with you and talk to you, and what was his approach, or his style?

BH: He did not in the early years – now I’m talking about before he left the Senate and started what became the Mitchell Institute – he did not solicit frequent information from me, but was willing to have me bring information from the committee any time I thought he should see something. Sometimes I would meet with him, infrequently. More often I would transfer information to either his chief of staff or the education LA on his staff, the education legislative assistant, whoever was handling education issues. And that seemed to work well. He was grateful for information or advice when I brought it, but it was infrequent, it wasn’t something that I was in his office four or five times a year. Perhaps it was once or twice a year, and then more frequently I would be sharing written reports.

A lot of what the advisory committee did was automatically, the formal reports that we wrote were automatically sent to every member of Congress, so his staff got the outcome reports that we produced. And if there were questions about those reports, or I thought there was something else that his staff needed to see, then I would go see them. Fair to say, I was doing the same thing with Senator Snowe, and with Congressman Baldacci, and with Congressman Allen, I mean I would do the same thing. And in subsequent years, I’d go see Senator Collins and Congressman Michaud, the same way. I thought it was part of my duty as a member of a federal advisory committee to keep the Maine delegation informed of the committee’s work. Not in stupefying detail; they couldn’t use it, but when I saw major policy issues developing that in turn would end up on the floor of the Congress, I would go and alert the Maine delegation to that.

And there were several of them over the years. Certainly when the Republicans took office, there were attempts to cut back the federal aid system. And they were trying to do that at a moment when the arithmetic number and the expense of colleges and the financial need of the students all at the same time – there was a triple whammy coming in terms of the people headed to college. Many more low income students, many of them immigrants, were headed to college, college costs were going up, and there were more students arithmetically. This was a time of demographic growth. So the triple whammy of those three things happening at the same time was going to have rather significant effects on student abilities to go to college.

Now, in some cases the federal programs are an entitlement, and therefore they would have to fund as many students as applied and were qualified. Well, the federal government has to be prepared for that, and sometimes they weren’t. I mean there’s no question about that. They were talking about cutting funds for federal aid programs when the triple whammy was looking them right in the face, and they weren’t paying attention to it. So some of what we did was to alert and warn the Congress that this demographic change was coming.

Sometimes there were attempts on the part of the committee to say to the colleges, why do you need to cost so much, are there ways you can hold costs down? So we would focus on that. Sometimes there were questions of financial propriety that I would carry to the members of the

Maine delegation. And the obvious example would be the abuses that were uncovered, largely at a segment of colleges called the proprietary colleges. They were profit making private colleges owned by an individual or a corporation that had students, and the Congress had made the decision that the proprietary colleges ought to be eligible for federal funds. That dramatically increased the eligibility, overall eligibility for those funds, but it also led to quite a number of abuses.

And these colleges, as profit making businesses, had every interest in bringing in students, as many arithmetic students as they could and, because they could, many of these students were virtually penniless, could afford very little of their education, and the proprietary colleges were putting them heavily into the federal aid programs and in some cases not delivering a very good education in return for the federal dollars, and in some cases there was outright fraud. They were manufacturing students who didn't exist in order to build the rolls.

And so we had also a watchdog function that I can remember conveying to the Maine delegation, saying, "Be careful about this proprietary sector." The number of aid cases that turn out to be either record-keeping mistakes or fraud at places like Bates, Bowdoin, or Colby, or the University of Maine system will be almost nil. When you get into Uncle Joe's Barber School, or such and such beauty school or something that is a proprietary enterprise, a) you don't have nearly the kind of financial sophistication in those operations that you do in normal colleges and universities; but, b) they have a profit incentive to want to slide as many students into their operation as they can, and that's not in the federal financial interest if those kids either are not qualified, or there's outright fraud going on.

AL: Now tell me, was your next connection to Senator Mitchell in '94, '95, as he left the Senate?

BH: As he left the Senate, he had made up his mind that he wanted, if he could, to start a scholarship fund for Maine students going to Maine colleges. And the original concept was not the Mitchell Institute that we know today; it was just a scholarship fund and far simpler. And the original source of the funds, some of them, was Senator Mitchell's campaign war chest. He had raised a fair amount of money – my memory is it was about \$2 million – but something on that order, \$2.2 million or something that was to be his campaign war chest.

When he decided not to run again for the Senate, he wrote to all the people who had made gifts to say, "I've decided not to run again. If you want, I'll return your money, no problem, no questions asked, just let me know. But here is what I would like to do, if you're willing. If you're willing to leave the money with me, I will put it into a permanent scholarship endowment to help fund scholarships for Maine kids going to Maine colleges." And the vast bulk of the people, my understanding is, wrote back and said, "Keep the money, go ahead, keep the money for that purpose."

So we set up a small board of directors, because it was set up as a private scholarship fund.

AL: And who were your original [members of the board]?

BH: Well, I won't get them all. There were three or four members of the Mitchell family, the Senator's sister, the Senator's aunt – I'll miss a couple of people so I probably ought not to try and give all their names. If I had a list I could give them to you right away. There were three or four members of his staff: Mary McAleney, for example, who had been a long time staffer for the Senator, served on the original scholarship committee. And there were about ten or eleven of us, some political friends – Woody Jones was on the original group, had known the Senator very well, served on Capitol Hill in other roles.

AL: Is he a Maine person?

BH: Yes, [he] grew up in Fryeburg. And I got to be good friends with a number of those people. The Senator wanted me on the committee mainly because – I'll say this playfully – I was the one on the committee who understood how to run a scholarship program. I'd been running a scholarship program for fifteen, eighteen years. Most of the other people on the committee were his family members, his staff members, close friends, his political associates; some of his own personal friends who had been funders of his campaign. Shep Lee, for example, the fellow who owns the Lee car dealerships, was on the original committee.

But I was the one who understood the mechanics of how to make a scholarship program run, and I've often in subsequent years thought that there was a small irony that the Senator put me on two committees. On the federal advisory committee, I was not the apparatchik who understood the details of how the program ran, I was the big picture person; I was the social ethicist asking the broad questions. On the Mitchell scholarship committee, the original Mitchell scholarship committee, it was exactly the opposite. I was the apparatchik who understood the details of how to administer a scholarship program, and get the award letters out to the young people and the like, set up a reading program, you know. I'd done that for Bates for decades, so it worked fine.

I do remember that in the very early process of setting up the scholarship program, the Senator had decided that, if he could do it, what he really wanted to do – well actually, this is a little later. Originally, there were just about twenty-five scholarships per year, and they could go to any citizen of Maine who was headed to a Maine college. And so we would get, oh, a few hundred applications, and we would gather in a location for a whole day and read those, read those applications. And we would pick the twenty-five youngsters who seemed on balance to be the strongest.

It is a sign of how much the Mitchell Institute has grown, and how much more broadly spread the work of the Mitchell Institute is. If you looked at the college destinations of the original program, the first few years, when they were giving out twenty-five awards per year, and then looked at it later on when the full Mitchell Institute was born, the college destinations were dramatically different.

In the first few years, because we were picking a very small number of students who basically

were stars, the vast majority of those kids went to Bates, Bowdoin, or Colby. Later on, as the program became a much bigger program and spread out, if you look at it now, by far the largest number of Mitchell Scholars at any given time is at the University of Maine in Orono. And several of the other public colleges or less prestigious privates have significant numbers of Mitchell Scholars. UMF, St. Joe's, UNE all have pretty significant numbers of Mitchell Scholars at them. And sure, still solid numbers at Bates, Bowdoin, and Colby, but nowhere near the dominant numbers.

The work of the scholarship committee in those early days was quite simple, quite easy. We'd get a packet of scholarship applications, and we would sit in a room for a day and we would read them together, and usually two or three people would read each application, we'd break up into small teams, you know. And then we would make the decisions, and by the end of the day vote on who was going to actually get the scholarships.

I remember one of the early students, I don't remember if she was the first year, but in that first or second year anyway, was Lien Le, who was a Vietnamese immigrant student who had come to Portland as part of the Catholic Charities relief program for immigrants. And Lien was a Vietnamese refugee, had spent a couple of years in a refugee camp, I think in Hong Kong, and then had been brought to Portland with her family. Her father died very quickly after they arrived in the United States. I think there were five kids; Lien was one of the oldest. She helped her mother – she was a junior high school student at the time – she helped her mother raise the other kids, learned English, moved from the ESL to the honors classes at Portland High School, graduated as the valedictorian of three hundred and twenty kids in Portland High School's class that year. Came to Bates, graduated Phi Beta Kappa, *magna [cum laude]* in biology, took a year off to found and run a tutoring program for other immigrant kids in Portland, and then went to Dartmouth Medical School. She received her medical degree a few years ago from Brown, did her residency in internal medicine at the Boston Medical Center, and just this year has been appointed to the faculty at Dartmouth Medical School.

And we always used Lien as our poster child for Bates's policy of optional standardized testing, because she had a very low verbal score. Well of course, she'd only been speaking English for a few years when she took the SATs. And she's our poster child for who you don't want to miss because of their SAT scores. She had proved herself to everyone except the College Board. And I have told quite a number of people, the woman with the 400 verbal – and I repeat that score with Lien's permission, she's always given me permission to tell the score – the woman with a 400 verbal has just been appointed to the faculty of Dartmouth Medical School.

You know, does America need some Vietnamese speaking physicians, women physicians, who can work with immigrant populations? I dare say we do. And I've always been proud of Senator Mitchell's involvement in bringing up the scholarship program, because it found people like Lien. You know, our little committee would find people like Lien who were just fabulous, fabulous young people. In various ways, you know, all different types, who got very well served at the Maine colleges and universities.

So, and anyway, for several years we went along in this little scholarship committee, meeting generally only once or twice a year, and had almost no superstructure by way of administrative support or other things; there was no office or staff. And then – and I don't remember exactly what year this was – but Senator Mitchell called me up and he said, "Bill, would you be willing to come with me for a conversation with a couple of people?" And he was quite close mouthed about what it was going to be, quite secretive.

And so I went along with him, and there were a couple of gentlemen in the room with the Senator and me. As the conversation developed – we talked with those gentlemen for, I don't know, at least a couple of hours, perhaps three hours – it turned out that they were the representatives of the organization that would anonymously provide financial support that would allow the Senator to move what had been a little small stand-alone scholarship program into a much more substantial operation, that became the Mitchell Institute, the Senator George J. Mitchell Scholarship Research Institute. And essentially, the anonymous funders agreed to cover the expenses, the entire operating expenses, the cost of the scholarships, everything, for five years, to allow the Senator time to build up a permanent endowment to underwrite what he wanted to do.

What he wanted to do was have the scholarship program move from being just the twenty-five scholarships that were one-year scholarships. We gave out a \$2500 award, but it was just for the freshman year of college and after that the scholarship ended. The Senator wanted to do two or three things simultaneously. He wanted to dramatically expand the program so that there was a scholarship for a student from every public high school in the state. Originally, in fact, we were thinking of every high school in the state, and then gradually pared it back to be every public high school. And he wanted to give them more money. And I guess my key piece of advice to him was to move the scholarship from being a one-year award of \$2500, to being a four year award of \$1000 a year, a total of \$4000, but the students got the award every year for four years for their four-year college degree. In that sense, the money was spread out more effectively over the entire education, and the family could count on it coming every year.

And in the course of talking with the anonymous donors, it was clear that they also were interested in other functions that the scholarship program could have, including a research function – how well were the students doing, what kinds of support did the students need in order to be successful at colleges, were there other factors involved in the successful support? Did they need, for example, summer career internships, or did they need personal advice or, you know, what kinds of feedback back from the scholars to their high schools would be helpful in encouraging more students who'd come along?

The Senator also, in setting up the scholarship program, reaffirmed what had been his original criteria, but we made it more formal and explicit at this time, that he wanted the scholarships to be based on three different criteria. One was financial need, the second was academic promise, and the third was community service, and those have been the criteria pretty much from the founding of the program. The Senator didn't have a fixed formula for how those three ought to fit together. He wanted all three to be taken into account, but in an individual case, it would be

up to the decisions of the staff in the Mitchell Institute, and the board of directors who do the final readings, to decide how the mixture of the three criteria fell.

In some cases, you might have a youngster whose academic record to date was good rather than brilliant, or okay and promising rather than brilliant, but they had extraordinary financial need. The family EFC, Expected Family Contribution, on the FAFSA for a very significant portion of the Mitchell Scholars is zero. The family can't afford anything. No surprise – if you have a family with a family income of \$22,000 or something, they're trying to send a kid to college, they're barely making it on twenty-two thousand and there's no money to help with the college expenses. Other times you might have a family that had pretty decent income, but they couldn't afford the whole cost of college, and the kid was off the charts in terms of academic promise or community service or a mixture of the two.

And that, I think, has been a very fruitful and productive part of the Mitchell Institute program, that there are kids from a very wide array of backgrounds, although the majority of them, following the original criteria, are youngsters who have very significant financial need, and who have good academic records, and then they also have community service, service to their institutions layered in.

I will tell you a story about the setting up of the original Mitchell Institute that is a little humorous. When the Senator was setting up the original arrangements for the institute and he wanted to have a student win a Mitchell scholarship from every public high school in the state, I tried to talk him out of that. I said to him, "Senator, listen, this is the guy who's been running admissions offices for twenty years; let me offer you an alternate proposal. There are a 129, I think, public high schools in the state of Maine, so instead of having 129 awards, one to each high school, consider another mechanic, another way to look at this. Suppose, in a given year, there might be three just fabulous candidates for a Mitchell Scholarship at Bangor High School, and honestly nobody too, too attractive at, you know, Mt. Blue High School, *or* pick any other school."

I urged him to just have an arithmetic number of scholarships for whoever the most talented kids in the state were, and let which high school they came from float. And the Senator very politely and very carefully listened to my thoughts, he thanked me for my opinions most graciously, and he sent me on my way. That wasn't what he wanted to do. He wanted to have a scholarship for a student from each high school in the state, because he himself, while he had been in the Senate, had visited every high school in the state to give a speech or awards night talk, or a graduation talk or something. He had methodically visited every single high school in the state of Maine – I had not known this until he told me – and he was very proud of that. [He] also had a sort of ground-level apprehension that there was, in every high school in the state each year, some youngster who would very seriously need this money and be deserving of receiving it.

I must say now, in retrospect, he was right. He was absolutely right. That sure, some of the high schools are very, very small high schools – Jackman High School, Katahdin High School. There's a high school out on some of the islands; Vinalhaven High School might only have six

or eight kids graduating in a given year. Is there one of those kids who needs the money, needs help getting a higher education, and has met the criteria of having a good academic record and has served their community in some way? The answer is yes, absolutely yes.

So at that point we became a much more formal organization. The Senator hired a staff, or encouraged the board, allowed the board to go ahead and hire a staff, and as it turned out my wife, Colleen Quint, was hired as the first executive director. She had known the Senator because she had worked on his staff when she first graduated from Bates, and she had gone on to become an education lawyer, was working as an education lawyer, and the Senator at one point called up and asked for my suggestions, people I thought would be candidates to be the executive director, and I said, "Senator, I'm a little embarrassed or –"

AL: Biased?

BH: "Biased. I'm cautious even telling you this, but honestly I think Colleen would be a candidate you ought to take a look at." And he ended up appointing her as executive director, and she's been the only executive director the Mitchell Institute has had, and we're now in our ninth year.

Another playful story -

AL: I'm going to stop real quick and flip -

End of first track

AL: We are now on Side B. And you said you had another playful story.

BH: Well, another playful story. When the Senator appointed my wife, Colleen Quint, as executive director of the new Mitchell Institute, now [that] it was a stand-alone foundation as opposed to a simple, small private scholarship fund, I tried to resign from the board. I said to the Senator, "This is an obvious conflict of interest for me to serve on the board while my wife is the executive director." And the Senator's reply, not to mince words, was essentially, "Nothing doing. You're still the one who understands how to run a scholarship endowment, you understand how to run a scholarship program, you have all kinds of practical, in-the-trenches experience that the other people on the board don't have. So no, you can't resign." And sure, we just need to build proper firewalls. For example, any time Colleen's professional performance or her salary or anything like that is discussed, I recuse myself and leave the room. And that has turned out to work fine.

So we began, and I think, my take is the Senator, in the original design in the Mitchell Institute, went along with the plan to expand the scholarship program from a pure scholarship program to a foundation that would also allow for work to be done that was research, public policy work, in some cases testimony – Colleen very often goes to Augusta to testify before various state agencies. Colleen is now the president of the National Scholarship Providers Association, which

includes some other scholarship foundations from all around the country, some of them very large. The Coca-Cola Scholarship Foundation is a member of the National Scholarship Providers Association.

So the Mitchell Institute gradually has become a much more visible, respected, potent player in public policy discussions, both on the state level and on the New England and national levels. And I think the Senator was certainly willing for that to happen, he was willing for the Mitchell Institute to take on some other functions, for example, of helping students get summer internships, or career exploration routes and the like. But he has always been cautious to make sure that the scholarship function stays at the core and the heart of the Mitchell Institute. And as he's raised money for the Mitchell Institute over the years, and he's done it very, very successfully, he's always been anxious to have that money to go into the scholarship endowment, so that the overall financial stability of the institute to keep on giving scholarships forever is not compromised. And even over time to raise the number of scholarships if we can, and raise the amount of the scholarships.

The board of directors has, in the last couple of years, been very carefully, [in] very calibrated ways, raising the amount of the scholarship. It's gone up now from \$1000 a year to \$1250 a year. And we're looking at ways to see if we can create a pool of additional scholarships which will be for students from private, parochial and home schooled backgrounds, so that youngsters who are at schools like Hebron Academy or St. Dom's or are home schooled could also apply for a Mitchell scholarship. There might not be one for each parochial or private school, but that there would be a pool of scholarships, perhaps ten or twelve, fifteen, that could be applied for by home schooled, private school and parochial school students. And I think all of us are very, very happy about that.

I think the Senator over time has come to see that the policy, the research, the personal support to the scholars, all of these are integral parts. And obviously the ten million dollar Gates Foundation grant which came to the Mitchell Institute to allow them to start a whole variety of new work, to test out essentially what are the mechanisms that allow more students to go to college, and to set up ten or a dozen essentially experiments, test situations, that ran under the Gates Foundation funding all over the state. So one high school was sending youngsters – who had not planned to go to college at all – to the local community college, to try and raise their aspirations. Other schools that were very rural were figuring out how to teach Advanced Placement courses over an electronic television network so that rural schools that otherwise just wouldn't have enough kids to make up an AP chemistry course or an AP literature course could do it on this cooperative ETV arrangement. Others were doing counseling with parents, and others had tutors who would try and raise aspirations.

So all of those things, I think, collectively, have turned the Mitchell Institute into a far more broad scale and potent and effective public servant than any of us really anticipated at the beginning. I mean, we thought we were setting up a scholarship program, and we did. And we thought then we were setting up a small educational foundation, and we did. But it has grown in lots of very, very powerful ways. And the core function, to deliver these hundreds of

scholarships, with 129 public high schools in Maine – if that's the right number now – times four, you have over five hundred Mitchell Scholars moving through college at any given time. That's not a little scholarship program in a state the size of Maine, that's a very large scholarship program.

And we've even expanded the criteria. We came to realize after a while that there would be students who would be much better served at the two-year community colleges than perhaps initially at the four-year colleges, so we've expanded the program to allow students applying to two-year colleges to be candidates for the scholarship. Originally, you had to go to a four-year college in order to be eligible. Now we allow students to go to the community colleges, but also we're willing to carry their support through to a four-year program. So if they go to the community college for two years and then transfer to a four-year program, then the Mitchell scholarship follows them as they transfer. And we think that's a good thing.

The state of Maine, the legislature, voted [to fund] a part of the Mitchell Institute endowment with state funds, and in my opinion one of their more bizarre steps, they decreed that the money they gave would be allowed to have students go out of state. So we have each year up to sixteen scholarships, one for each county in Maine, that can be for a student going out of state. And so each year, there are some Mitchell Scholars who are not going to college or universities in Maine, but they're going to an Ivy League or a big research university in another state.

AL: I had noticed that, that there were some out of state, and I wasn't sure how that worked.

BH: Right. The reason is because the state of Maine legislature decreed that their gift would be allowed, they didn't want to restrict it to students staying in Maine. I say 'bizarre,' because all of the evidence over the years, both in Maine and at other states, has shown that if students go to college in a state, they're much more likely to want to stay in that state, and found a business or grow a profession or something. I mean, it doesn't make any economic sense that the Maine legislature was funding the scholarships to take students out of state. But that's what they did, and so it is like a little subset of the Mitchell Scholars each year, are these students who are – it doesn't have to be sixteen per year, it can be up to sixteen per year – who go out of state.

AL: And that's part of the 129, not separate?

BH: That's right. It's one award from each high school in the state, so up to sixteen of those awards can be for students going out of state.

AL: Now, is there anything that I haven't asked you about your connection, your time working with Senator Mitchell, observations or perspective that you'd like to share?

BH: Two things I would share. First, I can remember, when the Senator was still serving the Senate, going to hear him at a local gathering here in Lewiston-Auburn. It was at the Auburn police station, little function room at the Auburn police station. And he was coming to simply give access to anybody who needed to talk to him about anything. The room was pretty

crowded; there were probably thirty or forty people in the room, and the Senator stayed there for two hours simply answering people's questions, and allowing them to speak if they had something they wanted to convey – they wanted him to vote on a certain bill a certain way – he was there to listen to that. A lot of the people were there to simply say, 'the federal government isn't working for me the way I need it to.' There was a guy who had obviously had a very tough time in Vietnam and was a, you know, a sort of war casualty – not physical, but emotional – and he couldn't get his VA benefits. The Senator had one of his assistants taking down this guy's name and telephone number and contact information, to be able to follow-up with the VA and try and get the guy's benefits straightened out.

I never forgot that afternoon that the Senator spent in the Auburn PD. At that point, the Senator's seat in the United States Senate was absolutely bombproof. The people of Maine would have voted Senator Mitchell back in office until they took him out feet first. And yet, he felt an obligation to go to someplace like the Auburn police station and just take on all comers, and answer all questions, listen to people's sometimes grumpy opinions about something they didn't like, and the like. And he did it with decency and courtesy, sympathy. I thought to myself, 'Maine has been very well served by its United States senators,' and George Mitchell is one, and Bill Cohen is another, and I dare say the two current women, Senator Snowe and Senator Collins, they have served Maine well, on both sides of the aisle. But I never forgot that, as I guess an example of American democracy working as it should. That even somebody whose seat was absolutely bombproof, feels a moral – more than political – obligation to go and listen to his constituents and try to help make their lives better. I've always admired him for that.

The second aspect of the Senator's character and his personality is the extraordinary mixture of his intellectual brilliance. I mean he has one of the quickest and most encompassing minds of anybody I've ever known, with a very open, unpretentious, low key, thoughtful way of dealing with other people. When he gives speeches, as he does each summer, he has a brunch for all of the incoming Mitchell Scholars and their parents. So there'll be a great big hall someplace, either a restaurant or a University of Maine dining room that we take over. There'll be hundreds of people in the room who come to meet Senator Mitchell, and he gives an address and then he has each Mitchell Scholar, during the brunch, will come and have their picture taken with the Senator. I say to the parents at these gatherings, clean off your mantelpiece, you know; you'll have a picture of Senator Mitchell with your kid on the mantelpiece, as a new Mitchell Scholar.

But he gives a speech at these events, and speech at the gala that we have each year to raise money, and any other time he has a chance to talk with students he'll give a talk. Very often, he will tell about his own background as a student from a very modest immigrant family. His mother was a first generation immigrant from Lebanon; his father was a second generation orphan immigrant – his parents had died – from Ireland. And his mother, I think, never learned to write in English, and she worked in a mill on the night shift. His father was a custodian at Colby College in Waterville. Very, very modest background.

Senator Mitchell always tells that story, by way of explaining how important it is that these young people from modest backgrounds get encouragement, get support, get financial support,

get a sometimes a hard shove between the shoulder blades when they didn't think they were qualified or nobody would be interested in them. And he always tells the story of going down to Bowdoin for his interview – and I think he had no money even to take the bus. I think he hitchhiked down to Bowdoin, to get there for an interview – and was stunned that people were interested in him; he couldn't believe it. He thought of himself as this not very exciting and not terribly talented immigrant kid from a pretty poor family, and he always tells with a wonderfully humorous way that some of his brothers were fabulous athletes, and he was no better than a modest athlete, you know. One of his brothers, Swisher, is to this day a great, well-known coach in the state of Maine. And so he always thought of himself as the kind of, you know, bookish, modest, not very athletic, not very flashy kid, you know, and he couldn't believe that Bowdoin was interested in him.

Well, you know, from that we got a majority leader of the U.S. Senate. And I will say, “Welcome to America, friends, welcome to America!” It's what our country has been founded on, based on. Senator Mitchell's life is, both in his own career and success, an example of that, but he has turned around and in the Mitchell Institute has created an organization that will help hundreds and hundreds of thousands of students in the years to come, do exactly the same thing.

And, you know, he now has in the short space of nine years that the Mitchell Institute has been established, he and his colleagues on the staff, Colleen and others, but especially Senator Mitchell, have raised a permanent endowment to supply at least a \$5000 scholarship for a student from every public high school in the state of Maine, every year, forever. I mean, it's just extraordinary. He always says in these talks that, after his family, the Mitchell Institute is the most important thing he's ever done. You know, you stop and think about what else the man has done; he snatched Ireland's chestnuts out of the fire, and there's a very good historical argument that the Senator is largely responsible for the current peace in Ireland, which has held. And if only the people in Israel and Palestine had been willing to listen to him, then he probably could have done the same thing in the Holy Land. He probably could have effected the same kind of permanent peace and understanding that has come to Ireland.

So even in the context of those extraordinary accomplishments, he has considered the Mitchell Institute the most important work he's ever done, most important to him personally after his family. It's [stirring], for those of us who have been involved with him, and I include myself as somebody lucky enough to have been involved with him from the outset of his thinking about the scholarship program – just because I had all this practical information about how to run a scholarship program. My wife has loved the story of when he first decided he was going to start the fund, he said, “I want to talk to that guy, what's-his-name, I put him on the committee, what's-his-name, Colleen's husband.” The fact that he remembered Colleen's name and not mine, you know, Colleen has always taken tremendous delight in that.

But I've been with the Senator in this effort now from the very first days of thinking about the scholarship program, after even a couple of failed attempts to retire or resign from the board because I thought it was a conflict of interest and he said, “Nothing doing.” You know, it has been an extraordinarily satisfying venture for all of us. This year, I taught one of the college's,

one of Bates's first year seminar classes in modern Russian, Japanese, and Vietnamese fiction. In my class were sixteen students from thirteen different states and countries. There were three students from Maine, two students from Massachusetts, one of whom was born in India, and everybody else in the class was from a different state or country.

One of the three students from Maine is a Mitchell Scholar, Isobel Moiles, from Waldoboro, a wonderful young woman and very successful student. She worked hard, and her skills in the class came up pretty dramatically. I think, for a young woman from Waldoboro, taking a course in modern Russian, Japanese, and Vietnamese fiction and film was a real eye opener. I mean, that's not the stuff they're teaching in Waldoboro, probably. And she became a very good student, with another student, a boy from northern rural Vermont. She did her final term paper in the course on modern Indian fiction. The Indian literature and film industry since the independence of India from Great Britain has just taken off like a rocket, and the extraordinarily high quality films and novels and histories that have come out of India in the last thirty or forty years have just been wonderful.

She and the other young man decided to do a major term paper on modern Indian fiction, and they did an extraordinary job. They did the paper together, so it was a joint paper, about twenty-five pages long, quite a paper for a first year in college. I gave that paper the only A+ that I have given to any piece of work in two years of teaching that course. And we are allowed, that is the first year seminar professors are allowed to nominate our very best students to be writing assistants. That is, the subsequent year, they will help the incoming first years with their writing; they act as writing assistants in the classes. I nominated Isobel, along with the young man from Vermont and two other students who are very skilled, and I just found out a few days ago that – I was asked by the person directing the program who I would really like to have as a writing assistant and I said, honestly, Isobel, because I think as a student from rural Maine she could really profit from this experience of being a writing assistant, and frankly, as one of the board members of the Mitchell Institute, I would love to have a Mitchell Scholar as my writing assistant, to be able to have a sustained mentoring experience with one of the Mitchell Scholars. That would be a treat for me, and I think she would grow from it. So [I] just discovered in the last day or so that the director of the writing program approved my recommendation and has offered the spot to Isobel and she has accepted it, so she will be my writing assistant in my course next fall. And it will be a great experience for her.

She is so typical of the Mitchell Scholars that I've gotten to know over the years, very capable, very successful students. Like so many students from Maine, modest, unassuming, not about to brag about anything, and honestly, lots of them, no real clue of how smart they are until they get to a college or a university and get a chance to work in a much more demanding and much more perhaps broad scale environment and test themselves, as Isobel did in my class, against very capable people from all over the world. We had students from Alaska and Kansas, and Indonesia and Vietnam and Japan, and Minnesota and Illinois in the class, and Isobel more than held her own, she did a great job.

It seems to me that, on the ground level, [this] is exactly what the Mitchell scholarships are

supposed to do. Take young people from small towns and rural high schools and immigrant kids, and people whose – nobody in their family has ever gone to college before – give them a chance to see how they can do. And you watch. Just like Lien Le being appointed to the faculty of Dartmouth Medical School, Isobel Moiles is going to do some wonderful stuff in the years to come.

AL: Great, thank you so much, Bill.

BH: Okay, glad to do it.

End of Interview