

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Charlene Sturbitts
(Interviewer: *Brien Williams*)

GMOH# 108
June 16, 2009

Brien Williams: This is an oral history interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College with Charlene Sturbitts, who serves as attorney and advisor in the Office of Legislation and Regulatory Law, of the Office of the General Counsel of the U.S. Department of Energy. I got that right?

Charlene Sturbitts: You did.

BW: Good. We are in her Washington, D.C., office, today is Tuesday, June 16, 2009, and I am Brien Williams. Before we begin, I want to make a note for the record that you were interviewed by Don Nicoll for the Muskie Oral History Project at Bates College, and in particular, in the second interview, Mr. Nicoll interviewed you a great deal on your service to Senator Mitchell, so we're not going to cover those areas again today, but people should know that they should go to the Bates interview, in particular, for your discussion of environmental legislation with Senator Mitchell.

Let's start with your date of birth and place of birth.

CS: Date of birth is June 16, 1950, and Evanston, Illinois.

BW: And your parents' names?

CS: My parents' names were Mary Jane and William Sturbitts.

BW: And did you grow up in Evanston?

CS: No, I grew up right here in Washington, D.C., actually in the suburb of Chevy Chase, Maryland, lived there throughout my childhood, and only after I got out of school did I move to the District of Columbia, and now I live in Arlington, Virginia.

BW: Why, how come you were born in Evanston?

CS: My father had gone to Notre Dame, and after he graduated he got a job offer from Marshall Field in Chicago, so that's how I came to be born in Evanston, Illinois.

BW: Was politics a big part of your family in growing up, and lots of discussions and

whatnot, or not?

CS: Yes and no. My father worked for the Central Intelligence Agency, so we were always talking about current events – never talked about his job, what he did. And I also happened to end up at school with a number of kids whose parents were in politics, like the Kennedys, the Shivers, and it was just all around. And so from a pretty early age I was reading the *Washington Post* every day. And so yes, I guess you could say I've been interested in politics as long as I can remember.

BW: Now you worked on the Edmund Muskie presidential campaign in 1972 as a volunteer, correct?

CS: As a volunteer in college, I did.

BW: Did you ever have any contact with Senator Muskie at that point, or during the campaign?

CS: No, I didn't, and I never dreamed that I would end up working on a subcommittee that he chaired. And so that was all fairly fortuitous, and not connected to my having been a volunteer in his presidential campaign.

BW: And George Mitchell played a major role in that campaign as one of the managers -

CS: Right.

BW: - of the campaign, but you had no contact with him.

CS: No, no, I had no idea who he was.

BW: And when did you first become aware of who he was?

CS: I knew his name when I worked on the Senate Environmental Pollution Subcommittee for Senator Muskie. There were times when he would call the Muskie office on some issue or other, and it might be referred to someone who handled environmental issues. So I knew that there was a George Mitchell who was close to Senator Muskie, but I didn't personally ever handle any issue and have interaction with him until he actually was appointed senator.

BW: So he was presumably calling down from Maine, or visiting in town or something.

CS: Yes, I think he had probably clients who he was working for who had some issue that was of interest to Muskie's office. But I don't know that for sure.

BW: Now you talked a good deal about your work for the subcommittee in the prior interview so we won't go into that, but do describe the circumstances that brought you to work for George

Mitchell from the subcommittee.

CS: So I was working for the subcommittee, as a subcommittee counsel, and one day in May the president, President Carter, nominated Senator Muskie to be secretary of state. So that meant that when Muskie was confirmed, he was no longer the chairman of our subcommittee, and we serve at the pleasure of the chairman and a new chairman was appointed to the subcommittee, that was Senator Gravel of Alaska, and so all of the subcommittee staff were out of jobs.

The chairman of the full committee, Senator [Jennings] Randolph, had said we could all stay until December – this was May of 1980 – and so we all needed to look for jobs. And I had no idea what I was going to do, I was thinking of maybe looking at the Justice Department. I wasn't going to leave government, I really wanted to stay in government. And when Senator Mitchell came down to the Senate I just got a phone call and someone, Jim Case – do you remember Jim Case? – who was his administrative assistant at the time, asked me to come over and meet with Senator Mitchell. And I had no idea why I was being asked but, so I came over and he asked me if I would work for him and do his work on the Senate Environment Committee. And so I eventually decided, "Sure, it sounds great." So I started in June of 1980, working for him.

BW: The assumption was that Senator Gravel would bring his own people in, is that it?

CS: Yes, that was the assumption.

BW: So contrast the Mitchell office as you began with the subcommittee, Environment, were they very different places?

CS: Well, they were very different. In fact, Senate committees in general are very different than personal offices of senators. The activity level in a personal office is always frenetic, the activity on a committee or subcommittee is more measured, with a lot of ups and downs in terms of activity, depending on what phase of a piece of legislation you're in. In the personal office you're working on other things besides just legislation; you're dealing with constituents, you're looking at the Maine aspect of any issue, whereas on a committee or subcommittee you're focused a lot more on just the legislation, sort of on a national level, federal level.

What else? The hours are a lot more irregular in a personal office than on the legislative side. When you work in a personal office, essentially you're there whenever the Senate is in session because you're advising your senator on legislation, so you really need to be there. So in the time that I worked for Senator Mitchell there were a lot of long nights, probably many more late nights than early nights, but that was part of the excitement of it, being really part of the legislative process, and I never, ever regretted it.

BW: Did you feel that you thrived in both environments, the subcommittee and the off- , personal?

CS: I did, I did, I think in more normal progression, more regular progression for people on

the Hill is you work in a personal office, and then you go to a committee, and people in personal offices look to committee life as a lot more sane. And I did it the reverse way, just because that's the way it unfolded, but I really just saw two completely, or very different parts of the Senate, and they were different but neither one was better, really, just very, very different.

BW: And when you came to work for Senator Mitchell, was there some burning issue that you got right down to work on right away?

CS: There was actually, there was a bill on the Senate floor that mandated that power plants convert from coal to natural gas, and there were no environmental protections in that bill. And we had been gearing up on the subcommittee for a major legislative fight to require all of the power plants that were going to burn coal to put scrubbers on them, to clean up their emissions. So Muskie was going to lead that fight – he was gone. And so I told Senator Mitchell about this issue and he jumped in, and I think within a week of being in the Senate he and Senator Stafford of Vermont, who was his Republican counterpart on this bill, on its amendment, led this floor fight.

Now I don't, this is really amazing, I don't remember whether we won or not, unfortunately, but it was a major effort. And in the context of that debate Senator Mitchell was introduced to the issue of acid rain, because part of the power plant emissions were converted to acid rain. And it became, obviously, a major issue for him, but that was his first exposure to the issue, at least in a legislative context. He might have read about it in the press before he became a senator, but I doubt it. Just because it wasn't very much in the literature, it was just beginning to develop into a federal and national issue.

And so from there, I continued to give him information on acid rain and how it was believed to be impacting the northeast more than other parts of the country. And as they say, eventually the rest was history and we eventually, not me personally, but after I left, a major acid rain program was enacted into law in 1990. But that was how it began, in 1980 at least, with Senator Mitchell.

BW: When you had that initial meeting with Senator Mitchell, did he say to you anything along the lines of, 'I'm kind of new to these environmental issues, and Senator Muskie had such renown for these matters, I need your help, can you sort of instruct me or lead me, a pathfinder?'

CS: He did, he talked about how he really wanted to focus on environmental issues, and he wanted someone to work for him who had a background. And that was appealing to me, and I think it worked out as a great partnership, if you will, because he had such an interest in those issues, and he obviously was a very fast learner and he did his homework, and so he was always so well prepared for whatever the environmental issue was, and usually very persuasive to his colleagues.

BW: Just moving ahead here, just briefly, in '82 when he ran for election, did he campaign a lot on environmental issues?

CS: He did, he did. Acid rain, at that point, had become a major issue, thanks to his talking about it. We put together the very first acid rain bill and introduced it in either late '81 or early '82, and that was the beginning of what became the provision in the Clean Air Act that was enacted in 1990, with a lot more complication. But the basic structure of it was the bill that we first introduced in the early eighties, and part of the reason for introducing it was to have it be a part of the campaign, just to demonstrate that, in fact, he was working on these issues; he was in Washington trying to get things done.

And he talked, he had an acid rain speech that he gave, I think, all over Maine, and he really elevated that issue. And of course the people in Maine were naturals in terms of being interested, because of the environmental ethic in Maine. So yes, and I like to think it played some part in his election which, as you know, ended up being a landslide, even though it did not look that way.

BW: One other story that I've already heard in the Bates interview but I'd like you to tell again here is how you got him into a ranking position on the subcommittee.

CS: Oh, yes, yes. Well when he came to the Senate he was number one hundred in seniority. The Democrats still controlled the Senate in 1980, but in 1981 control went back to the Republicans, and so the chairmanships of the subcommittees were going to go to the Republicans. And on every subcommittee there is a ranking member, the most senior member of the party in the minority, and even though that position does not have *real* authority like the chairman does, it's more senior among equals in terms of the minority members, and you do get to participate in the decisions about the subcommittee's agenda, and you have a much better platform on the subcommittee's issues.

So when it came time to switch to the Republicans, there wasn't as much interest among the Democrats in who was going to be the ranking member as there would have been if they had still been in the majority and been the chairman. So I saw this as a perfect opening for Senator Mitchell to have a good platform, to have much more of a role in the subcommittee and in our legislation, so I talked to the staff director of the full committee, who's name was John Yago at the time, and I told him Senator Mitchell absolutely needed this, he was going to be in a tough reelection and he needed a platform, he was really interested in environmental issues, he'd be a great ranking member, and John was not that sold on the idea; he was skeptical. He said, "But, you know, he's so junior." I said, "John, we really need this, he needs to be elected, and this is going to be an important part of it." And so eventually he was appointed the ranking minority member, even though he was the most junior member of the subcommittee.

BW: And that didn't frost the other Democrats on the subcommittee?

CS: I don't literally know. It might have, but it didn't seem to. I didn't hear anything about it, and because it was ranking minority member slot, you didn't get any additional staff positions, which is always something that you want in the Senate, so that may have been why there wasn't as much of a ruckus. But in any event, it worked.

BW: So did the chief of staff take that to Senator Randolph?

CS: I believe he had to, yes.

BW: And then he, Senator Randolph made the decision. Right. Who became the Republican chair of the subcommittee?

CS: Senator [John] Chafee, of Rhode Island. And they worked so well together; they were both New Englanders and they both had the same perspective on environmental issues. Chafee was a moderate-to-liberal Republican in Rhode Island.

BW: And he was a good chair in as far as Republicans were concerned, despite his liberal tendencies?

CS: Well the whole committee was kind of skewed in that direction, but yes. I believe he had been the ranking Republican member when Senator Muskie was the chairman of the subcommittee. Yes, I think that is right. So he was a natural to become the chairman of the subcommittee.

BW: Right. Now after a pretty short period of time working for Senator Mitchell, you became the legislative director, is that correct?

CS: Right.

BW: How did that happen?

CS: I don't really know. I have no idea. The chief of staff, who was Jim Case, just asked me if I would do that. And I was actually a lot more interested in just doing what I had been doing, which was handling the issues on the environment committee for Senator Mitchell, but I agreed to do it if I could also continue to do the environment committee issues, which is the way it worked. The legislative director job was demanding but interesting because it really gave me a much broader view of what the Senate was doing, and what Senator Mitchell needed to do as well.

BW: So what were your duties, so to speak?

CS: Basically, I don't remember exactly how many legislative assistants we had, but we had a number of legislative assistants, each of whom had a portfolio of issues that they handled, and so my job was to make sure that Senator Mitchell was briefed on every issue that each one of the legislative assistants handled, both for committee hearings if he was on a committee that dealt with those issues, and for votes on legislation on the Senate floor. And that was most of it, making sure that the positions we were taking, as I understood them, were consistent with his Maine constituents' views, or at least consistent with Maine's needs, because obviously people

in Maine disagree about issues. So it was an oversight sort of function.

BW: And as LD, did you work primarily one-on-one with the LAs, or did you have periodic meetings where everyone came together and thrashed things out, or how did that work?

CS: We did both. We had a weekly meeting where we talked about what people were going to be working on in the upcoming week, and what issues might come up that Senator Mitchell was going to have to participate in, and sometimes what their recommendations were going to be to him if it was an important issue. And then one-on-one just on an ongoing basis.

BW: What day of the week did those weekly meetings occur?

CS: They happened on Monday mornings, which was timely because the Senate generally is not in session on Monday mornings, and Senator Mitchell generally was not in the office on Monday mornings because he went to Maine every weekend and he would be coming back on Monday afternoons generally, unless there was a vote on Monday morning, but there rarely was.

BW: Did you have contact with him over the course of the weekend in preparation for this meeting, or was that unnecessary?

CS: Generally, no, I did not have meetings with him over the weekend in preparation for a staff meeting. Occasionally an issue would come up over the weekend and he would call me and ask me about it, but that was not that common.

BW: Hmm-hmm. Was Jim Case there for quite a long period of time, or not?

CS: He was Senator Mitchell's first chief of staff, and, no, I don't think he was there very long. I think David Johnson came in maybe 1982, does that sound right to you?

BW: I think so. I'm not sure, but I think so.

CS: And I knew David because, as you probably know, David had worked for Senator Muskie also, on a different subcommittee. So we were friends when he came to Mitchell's office, so it was great.

BW: Did he set a new style, or were there real differences between the office under Case and Johnson?

CS: David was a very good chief of staff in the sense that he related to people very well, and he was very easygoing in a setting that was really frenetic, especially given the situation of having an election come up so soon after someone came to the Senate, and two years to establish a record. So he was sort of inspirational in the sense that he got us to work hard, not that we didn't want to, but I mean it was a very collegial effort, and it was fun. And I think that came from the top, from David, and so – with Case there hadn't been that much time really, to see

what he was like as a boss, as a leader. So it felt different, but I just don't remember that much about Jim Case's leadership.

BW: Where did Case go after -?

CS: He moved back to Maine and practiced law, and he probably is still practicing law in Maine, unless he's retired.

BW: And how was your relationship with Johnson as LD?

CS: Oh, it was good, he was very supportive of me, and I like to think I was supportive of him in terms of what he needed to get to Senator Mitchell. So we had a very good working relationship. And it helped that we knew each other going in.

BW: Was he the chief of staff the whole time then, the whole rest of the time you were there, or did Rich Arenberg come in?

CS: No, Rich Arenberg was there for maybe a year while I was there. I don't remember exactly, but I think David left maybe in 1984 or thereabouts. So yes, I worked a little bit under Rich Arenberg, who I also had known because he had worked for Senator Tsongas for a number of years, and I knew him in the Senate, as you get to know people in different Senate offices.

BW: Over the years that you were there, did you see big changes in the way the office operated, or how Senator Mitchell structured things? Was it pretty consistent?

CS: I didn't see any changes. I think probably the biggest changes came after I left, after he became Senate majority leader and there were a lot more staff and a lot more responsibilities. But from 1980 to 1985 it essentially functioned the same way the whole time.

BW: And how was George Mitchell as sort of CEO in this little operation?

CS: He was, I think, a true CEO, in the sense that he made the decisions but he relied on staff to provide him with as much information as possible, and he discussed issues with staff, he wanted to discuss things, wanted to make sure he understood them. And staff made recommendations to him, but he was ultimately the one who made the decisions on votes, other issues, like strategy, when to introduce a bill, what to do on a major issue in a piece of legislation, after he had all of the information at hand.

BW: Was he inclined to get the information from you and then let you know what his vote was going to be, or what his take on a particular issue was? Or did he just take the information from you and the others and go off with it?

CS: On big issues, of which there were a lot, he discussed it generally with me or whoever the other legislative assistant was that was handling it. On more minor votes, he would have a

memo on pretty much every vote that was coming up in the Senate, and he would read the memo and then go vote, and generally vote the way the LA recommended, because we got to know him and understand his point of view and were able to reflect it in our recommendations, I mean that's part of our job. And so it was a combination of both discussion and just going and voting, if it wasn't a very major issue.

BW: But I can see in this process that you as LAs would become somewhat invested in these issues that you were looking at, and particular point of view on the issues. So he took advantage of that investment, would you say?

CS: I'm not sure I would put it that way. I think it was more of a collaboration where we understood the issues well because we handled them on a daily basis, and we also understood his philosophy, as well as the Maine perspective on given issues. So I think that it wasn't a question of him taking advantage of our investment in the issues, it was more that it was our job to understand and to give him the benefit of that understanding.

BW: Were you ever disappointed that he took a position that was not what you had recommended?

CS: There was one issue that just dogged people, and it was on a water project. It really wasn't an environmental issue, except it had become a cause for the environmental community. I think it was the Tennessee-Tombigbee [Waterway] project – I could have that wrong, I'm pretty sure I'm right though – and it was sort of a cause célèbre for the southern senators. It was diverting the Mississippi River; it was not a small project. And it had been around for years, and so every year since mid-'70s, there had been votes to try to cut off the funding for this, but there was always so much pressure on senators to vote with the southerners. And I think that one time Senator Mitchell did vote with them, and so I was disappointed about that. But on the other hand, I knew that there was a good reason for it, and that probably down the line one of those southern senators was going to help us with something. And it was just pure politics. I was never disappointed in any vote on an environmental issue that Senator Mitchell took.

BW: What was the power structure of the office like, I mean where did it lie and how was it dispersed and so forth, can you look at it like -?

CS: Well I think that the power structure was, that the power at the staff level resided in the chief of staff, and in Larry Benoit, who was up in Maine – I don't know if you know him. He ran the Portland field office, he also had worked for Senator Muskie in the same capacity, and he was first among equals as far as the people who ran the Maine field offices – we had seven field offices I think. And Larry and David, I think, were really at the top of the power structure. They really, with Senator Mitchell, took care of the politics. And David, being in Washington, also could have the overlay of the legislative agenda that helped.

So I think it was really kind of top-down. I don't think power was really dispersed. I don't think that I had any power, per se, I think I had a job, and beyond that I never considered that I had

power. Although I did supervise people, so that's a different kind of power.

BW: Did you spend much time in Maine yourself?

CS: I did not spend very much time in Maine. I went up occasionally, when we would have a field hearing. That's another thing you could do as a ranking minority member of a subcommittee, you could have field hearings, request them, and the chairman would generally agree. Now any subcommittee member could ask for a field hearing, but we could ask for more.

So I would go up and staff field hearings in Maine. Occasionally I went up if there was an environmental issue and I needed to attend a meeting of concerned citizens, that sort of thing, I would do that. But generally Senator Mitchell really was up there more than any of us. The Washington staff didn't go up to Maine a lot, because we had a very sufficient field staff in all of the field offices as well.

BW: How would you compare Senator Mitchell's office to what you were aware of Ed Muskie as a CEO of his operation?

CS: Hmm-hmm. I think that Senator Mitchell was a lot more hands-on, in a sense. By the time I came to work on the Muskie subcommittee, he had so many staff, I mean he had probably a hundred staff people, when you combine his personal office with his two subcommittees, and then he was chairman of the full Budget Committee, so there *was* a lot of dispersion of power in the Muskie organization, as opposed to the Mitchell organization, which was just his personal office, so it was maybe twenty people all told, from receptionist up to chief of staff.

So Mitchell was actually a lot more available as well; he didn't have as many demands on his time, and he was also more approachable in a sense – not in a sense, he *was* more approachable, and so there was a lot more interaction with him, I think, with *everyone* in the office, from the receptionist on up.

BW: You talked in that prior interview so much about Clean Air and Superfund; what were George Mitchell's other big legislative issues, things that really meant something to him?

CS: One of the issues that he spent a lot of time on was tax, because he was a member of the Senate Finance Committee. I don't know that it *meant* a lot to him, but he spent a lot of time on that, because at that point in time there were major tax bills, there were probably two while I was there, and they involved the Reagan tax cuts, which were burning issues, and – I'm trying to think of other issues.

He spent a lot of time on Maine issues, like trade, shoes. . . .

[*Outside interruption*]

BW: I'll pause...

[Pause in taping]

CS: . . . imports that were hurting the Maine industry. And trade issues also were part of the Senate Finance Committee portfolio, and so being a member of the committee, he was in a position to be more active on those issues.

Really, he dived into any issue that was of interest, either on a federal level, a national basis, or if it was something that affected Maine, he was always into that issue. So he really didn't limit himself to a specific portfolio, like environmental issues and tax issues. If a legislative assistant had an issue that he or she thought was appropriate for Senator Mitchell to be involved in, he generally got involved.

BW: I know some senators have been associated with one particular issue that becomes sort of their hobby horse, so to speak, and so every year they introduce an amendment or something to further that particular cause, and I could see some of their colleagues saying, "Oh there Senator so-and-so goes again." Did Mitchell have anything like that kind of a reputation for some issues, or not?

CS: I think in a positive sense, not as in, 'Oh there he goes again.' I think people did come to associate him with acid rain, which really was probably, aside from Superfund, the biggest environmental issue in the 1980s, culminating in 1990, as a new regulatory program. It was the first new regulatory program in Clean Air since the act had been written really. So I know that people talked to me about Mitchell being the guru of acid rain. I can't think of another issue like that, but there probably were others as he stayed in the Senate. But in my first five years, that's the one that really, really stands out among others.

BW: And you kept the environmental portfolio right 'til you left, is that correct?

CS: I did, I did.

BW: Hmm-hmm. And was it, that was okay, balancing those two responsibilities, you were able to incorporate the environment into your -?

CS: Yes. It was time consuming, but it was my choice, and I never would have walked away from the environmental issues. But actually, as it turned out, I enjoyed being legislative director because it expanded my horizons, as I said, and it was something that I hadn't done before so, like a lot of people in the Senate, we just learn these things by doing them, no one tells you how to supervise, how to manage, you just do it and hope that it works.

BW: So you kept contact with that subcommittee right the way through.

CS: I did.

BW: And I notice that there were some real interesting senatorial personalities on that committee from time to time, like Daniel Patrick Moynihan and so forth.

CS: Yes.

BW: Talk a little bit about the other senators.

CS: Well Senator Moynihan was always interesting, not necessarily always a contributor to advancing debate, but his comments were always interesting. He was fond of saying, "I am not a legislator," which is kind of curious, since he was in the Senate. But he had big thoughts and he liked to express them, and it was always interesting. As I say, it didn't necessarily advance the legislative ball on a particular bill.

Bob Stafford was the chairman of the full Environment Committee during that time. He and Mitchell were also great cohorts, Stafford having come from Vermont, and he was a real New Englander. He presided with a gentle hand, but he was confronted with the Reagan administration's efforts to dismantle EPA, and so in his own way he stood up to them, which was not easy for him to do as a Republican. And in 1980 a lot of conservative Republicans had been elected and so he was going against what a lot of his colleagues also wanted to do, his new colleagues. Stafford was a true New Englander who told these jokes that were not funny, but you were supposed to laugh. In the committee meetings he would tell these jokes and everyone had to laugh, but they were so, I don't know if it was just that his humor was so wry that we didn't get it – I just think they weren't funny, actually.

There was Lloyd Bentsen from Texas, Democrat, who was very patrician in bearing, so he brought a different feel to, he was very remote, he brought a different kind of element to the committee.

BW: What role did Dole play, carrying the Reagan administration's wishes to the committee?

CS: I'm trying to remember. I think he kind of carried the Reagan administration's water. Now, I don't remember if he was majority leader then, was he?

BW: I think he was.

CS: Okay, Howard Baker was first.

BW: No, right, right, right.

CS: But I don't know when Dole did become majority leader.

BW: 'Eighty-five, so he was not at that point. I noticed Alan Simpson on the list, too.

CS: Yes, Alan Simpson really added a lot. He was a very thoughtful Republican, generally

conservative but also a good legislator. He would become engaged in an issue and would be willing to work out compromises, he and Mitchell worked out compromises on the Nuclear Waste Policy Act in the early '80s, which were important. And Alan Simpson was chairman of that subcommittee. Senator Mitchell cared because at the time there was a nuclear power plant operating in Maine – Maine Yankee, which is not operating now – and so Mitchell paid a lot of attention to nuclear waste issues, and he and Alan Simpson were able to work really well together. And Alan Simpson really was, or could be, a very nice man. He could kind of lighten a subcommittee meeting when it was getting a little too heavy. So he was a good member, and Mitchell worked well with him.

BW: Who were Mitchell's closest allies in the Senate, do you think?

CS: Hmm, well, I'm trying to think and I'm not sure I have a good answer for that. What always stands out to me is the Republicans that he worked with, like John Chafee and Bob Stafford. The Democrats were hanging together a lot in those years, as a natural kind of coalition, and it was the Republicans who he really needed to get things done, because they were in the majority. So I'm not sure I have a good answer for who the Democrats were that Mitchell worked with most, they just don't stand out in my mind.

BW: What about his quote/unquote 'buddies' in the Senate? Did he have someone there?

CS: You know, I don't know.

BW: What about his relations with the Reagan administration?

CS: I don't think they were very good. I mean he was generally voting against them, and he was very concerned about what the Reagan administration was trying to do to the Environmental Protection Agency. He was really one of the first to ask Senator Stafford to start an investigation of what EPA was doing with their Superfund program and whether they were handing funds out on a political basis, depending on whether there was a Republican involved or not. And he made a number of enquiries to the Justice Department asking them to start investigations, which they never did that I recall. Our committee, the Environment Committee did hold a series of investigative hearings on that particular issue. So no, Mitchell was not, I don't think, a favorite of the Reagan administration.

BW: And you didn't see much interaction with the Carter administration probably because that was such a short period of time, is that correct?

CS: Right, right, it was only six months.

BW: When, what motivated your leaving?

CS: What motivated my leaving was that I was burnt out. I really would have loved to have stayed longer, but I had been in the Senate for eight years when I started working for Senator

Mitchell, and so after another five I just wanted more time for myself. Otherwise, I would have stayed in the Senate as a career, but I was burnt out. I guess the other thing was, I thought, "Well, if I'm going to practice law, I need to maybe go and do it before I'm so old that firms don't want to hire me as an associate." So that was the only reason I left. I just felt like I needed to get recharged.

BW: Did you talk to Senator Mitchell about this before you made your decision, or did you just tell him?

CS: I told him when I decided that I wanted to look for jobs outside his office, that I was going to do that. And then when I did get offered a job at a law firm, I went and told him that I had gotten an offer that I was going to take, and he asked me to stay for a few more months to get through a piece of legislation so I did, I stayed, I think, an extra three or four months, and then I just eventually had to go, even though the piece of legislation, which I believe was Superfund amendments, hadn't been completed. We thought they were going to be but they just didn't cooperate.

BW: So he didn't try to pressure you to stay around beyond that little extra time?

CS: No, he really didn't. I explained to him exactly why I wanted to leave and that it had absolutely nothing to do with him and that I wished that I had started working for him earlier in my career, but he wasn't there.

BW: Who took over then the environmental issues for him?

CS: Martha Pope took over as legislative director, and did some of the environmental issues, kind of the same job that I did. And that was when Rich Arenberg was the chief of staff, and then Rich went to some other part of the Mitchell organization. Oh, I think he went to staff the Iran-Contra Committee maybe, and Martha became chief of staff.

BW: When did Jeff Peterson come to work in the office, do you recall?

CS: Jeff Peterson came in, while I was there, in the early '80s, as a congressional Fellow, from EPA. I actually was the one who brought him from EPA, and he had been in the Clean Water office at EPA, and so those were the issues that he handled for Senator Mitchell, at least initially, there was a Clean Water bill that was moving through our committee. And then when the Senate, as I recall, went back to being Democratic, he was hired on as a staffer. But I think up until then, he had just been a congressional Fellow, which is always great for offices because you don't have to pay for them.

BW: So he worked water and you worked air, was that correct?

CS: Uh-huh.

BW: I'm sure there's a line in Shakespeare, something about -

CS: There must be.

BW: But we won't remember it. Was the transition between you and Martha seamless, do you think?

CS: It was, because she had been on the Environment Committee staff, and so she had worked with Senator Mitchell when he'd been participating in subcommittee issues that related to wildlife – we always called it 'bugs and bunnies' – sort of fish, wildlife, endangered species, and so she had handled those issues for the Environment Committee, so she had interacted with him as a subcommittee member, when he was a subcommittee member, so I think it was seamless.

BW: Hmm-hmm. Jumping ahead here a little bit, what were your thoughts when you learned that George Mitchell was leaving the Senate?

CS: I had mixed emotions. I thought it was really just terrible, a terrible loss for the Senate, a just immeasurable loss for the Senate. But I thought it was terrific that he was going to have more of a personal life, and that's what it appeared was the motivation for him leaving. So as I say, I had mixed emotions.

BW: How did you learn about it?

CS: I think I learned about it in the news. I didn't know about it ahead of the announcement.

BW: And have you had contact since with the Senator?

CS: Oh not really. I saw him at the unveiling of his portrait, and that may be it.

BW: Are there any stories you tell friends about some particularly interesting or whatever episode with the Senator?

CS: Oh, I'm trying to think. You know, none really come to mind. I should have tried to think about this ahead of time.

BW: Something where his personality sort of shone through?

CS: I just can't think of anything offhand. You've caught me unawares.

BW: I should probably prompt people with that beforehand so that they think about that a little bit. Just a few other things. When you were asked by Don Nicoll why you chose to go to law school, one of the comments you made was, "Because of the sexism that existed on the Hill." You said most women were secretaries.

CS: Right.

BW: And that you had a problem because when people called to talk to someone in the office, if they got a woman, they didn't like it.

CS: Right, right.

BW: Like lobbyists and so forth. Did that begin to dissipate the further along you got on the Hill, or not?

CS: Yes, it's very interesting how quickly it seemed to change. Now I think also part of it is, as you do a job for a longer period of time, people get to know you and probably they recognize that you can help them. But I think it was that the Senate really started to change, I think that there were more female professionals on the Hill, and people got used to dealing with them. In fact, it was amazing how quickly it did change, and I think that's true in society in general, in terms of the number of women being in positions of responsibility. So I think by at least the mid-1980s, there didn't seem to be any of that left; it was not overt, it wasn't acceptable. There probably was some of it still, but it wasn't apparent.

BW: And how was gender, just in general, handled in Muskie's offices and in Mitchell's?

CS: In Muskie's office as well as Mitchell's, there really was no distinction in terms of who got hired, it really wasn't relevant. And Muskie was one who did that at an early point, you know, he had the first female chief counsel in the Senate, Karen Hastie Williams, who was chief counsel of the Budget Committee, the Senate Budget Committee, and he had Madeleine Albright as a legislative assistant in the early 70s.

BW: Gayle Cory's name hasn't come up until now, what was her role primarily?

CS: Well, she had more than one role. She was the person who knew everyone in Maine, and had relationships with at least half of them, you know, could call up anyone and ask them a question about something, ask them a favor. She knew the politics of Maine, she was from Maine and she also had worked for Muskie so over the years she had gotten to know a lot of the political operatives in Maine. And so she was just so critical to Mitchell, coming in as a new senator, facing such a short election cycle. But she was also kind of like a den mother to the office. She was just salt of the earth.

BW: And she was personal secretary -?

CS: No, she wasn't personal secretary, she was more of, I guess you could call her a scheduler, Mitchell had a personal secretary, I mean or always had *a* personal secretary, he had a number of them over the years just as they moved on, but Gayle was in a slot more of advisor and scheduler for important events. Although Mitchell also *had* a scheduler, so she had sort of

an indeterminate portfolio, it was sort of whatever [was needed].

BW: My impression, and I might be quite wrong, would be that in a lot of Senate offices, there was typically a woman in that kind of role, or am I wrong?

CS: Well there was always a woman, or not always, but there was typically what used to be called a personal secretary to a senator. And I think in those early days, yes, there was a scheduler who was generally female. I don't think that's the case any more, I think it could be a man just as easily.

BW: Would you say, in terms of just going back to gender here for a moment, that with George Mitchell, he was essentially blind to gender, or was he compensating in some way for catching up in time?

CS: Oh, no compensation whatsoever, I think he was completely gender blind. I mean he might not notice what your sex was, except that maybe you were wearing a skirt, if he was really involved in an issue.

BW: In 1978 Nancy Kassebaum became kind of a pathfinder in that she was the first senator since Margaret Chase Smith, I think, to be elected on her own, and she was followed fairly quickly by Barbara Mikulski and Dianne Feinstein and [Barbara] Boxer. Did you, as a woman working with the Senate, see a big change of any sort that came with the influx of women to the Senate floor?

CS: You know I didn't, I really didn't. And I don't know whether this is because of the influx of women or not, but in the early '70s, when we first went to the Senate, women were not allowed to wear pants on the Senate floor. And that changed at some point, but I don't know if it's connected to having more women senators.

BW: What about other changes in the culture of the Senate from '72 to '85, were there big changes that you saw?

CS: Changes in the culture...? During that period I think the culture stayed the same in a lot of ways, in the sense that there were professional staffers who made the Senate a career, or at least stayed for a long enough period of time that they became experts in their field and knew their colleagues. And the difference that I began to see after I left the Senate and dealt with the Senate from the outside, is that the age was so much younger, and people were doing it just as an entry for their resumes. They didn't stay long, they just wanted to punch their tickets and move on, and that there was a lot less dedication to the institution, and knowledge of the institution. And I find that to be continuing, and I find it really discouraging.

People don't go to the Senate to work in the Senate per se, they do it to go do something else, like go downtown and be a lobbyist. So, but that was not the case in the whole time I was there. Even in 1985, people were still taking the Senate as a serious career. And I do still run into

people who have worked in the Senate for a long time, but it's unusual.

BW: Does pay scale have anything to do with that, do you think?

CS: It probably does, I mean the pay is not very good; it's not even as good as the pay in executive branch agencies, for the most part, except maybe a chief of staff or a committee staff director. And it may also have to do with the pace; people get weary.

BW: What about the behaviors of the senators themselves, did you see a change over the period of time that you were working there?

CS: I began to see a change, which I think persists today, which is that I don't see senators getting as immersed in issues, I don't see the legislative process being played out as it was in the '70s with real markups, where people debate issues and listen to their colleagues and eventually take votes, and on the Senate floor as well, there used to be real Senate debates. Occasionally there still are, but beginning I think with that 1980 election where so many new senators were elected and they defeated really seasoned senators, they came in and they were part of the Reagan revolution and they weren't necessarily interested in legislating, and I just saw that evolve into more of the norm.

And now it's very rare that you have actual committee markups where things are decided. Everything has been pre-decided, and the committees meet to bless a bill. And sometimes, a lot of times, there are not even committee reports written, there are not conference reports written, so there's very little legislative history, so the whole process has become skewed, I think, and I did see it starting to happen in 1980.

BW: And Democrats are guilty as well as Republicans?

CS: I think so. I think you're losing institutional memory every time a senior senator retires who has been a legislator, who will sit down and compromise and knows the art of compromise. And that goes for the staff level as well.

BW: Explain that.

CS: Well, I think staff take their lead from their member, and a member that wants to legislate has to have a staff to actually accomplish that, on the nuts and bolts of the piece of legislation. And if your senator is more into sound bites than legislating, then you're not going to learn how to do it.

BW: What bearing did your service with Senators Muskie and Mitchell have on your later career?

CS: Well, I got into the environmental field initially because I happened to get a job on the Senate Environment Subcommittee, and that became my career. And then in terms of working

for Senator Mitchell, I got really deeply immersed in a few issues, which then became issues that I ended up working on as a lawyer. So I think my service for both of them has actually dictated my career. And the other part of it is that I really wanted to come back to federal service. I didn't know I was going to take twenty years off, I really intended to come back sooner but life intervenes and you get caught up and years pass. But I always knew I was going to come back, and so I did come back to the executive branch five years ago.

BW: And what are your duties here?

CS: I am the senior lawyer who deals with the drafting of bills here, review of bills, energy bills. I review comments that others in this building have on legislation and make sure they're okay to send up to the Hill. So I am the senior legislative lawyer for the Department of Energy. I don't, coincidentally, have a lot of direct interaction with the Hill. There's an Office of Congressional Affairs here that really is the interface with the Hill, which makes sense because you have to know who's saying what to whom, and that's a way that they can keep control of that. But I get all of the requests for drafting of legislation.

We actually have an interesting policy, which is administration-wide and it's from one administration to the next, which is that anyone on the Hill can ask an executive agency to draft them something, even if it's not consistent with the administration's views, and we do it. So I've been doing lots and lots of that for the Hill, but I don't actually deal with the people on the Hill who request the legislation. I just do it, I provide the work product, and then if they have questions I deal with them. But they rarely do, they just want their legislation.

BW: What would you want people to remember most about George Mitchell?

CS: I hope people realize what a contribution he made to the Senate, particularly in the environmental field. I think his thoughtfulness and his abilities to understand the issues and persuade others really made a difference in the laws that we now are implementing. I think that's his legacy.

BW: Are we leaving things unsaid here, or have we pretty well covered the -?

CS: I think, except for the fact that I couldn't provide you with an anecdote, I think you've covered it.

BW: Okay, very good, and thank you so much.

CS: Thank you.

End of Interview