

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Audrey Sheppard
(Interviewer: *Brien Williams*)

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Brien Williams: This is an oral history interview with Audrey Sheppard for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College in Maine. We are in the Sheppards' home in Chevy Chase, Maryland, and today is Friday, May 8, 2009, and I am Brien Williams. Let's start out by your giving me a little bit of your own background. Can you tell me the date and place of your birth, for example?

Audrey Sheppard: I was born in the Newton-Wellesley, Massachusetts line, at the Newton-Wellesley Hospital. I guess date means year as well as birthday: July 31, 1948.

BW: And where did you grow up, and where were your parents living?

AS: I grew up in that area for a few years, and then we moved to Westchester County, New York, where I lived for a number of years [], kindergarten through fifth grade or so. And then there was a death in the family, my father passed away, and we went back to the same area of Newton, Massachusetts, and I was in that general vicinity through high school.

BW: And give me your parents' names?

AS: Well, they're Annabelle and Jack Sheppard, Jr.; my mom remarried quite quickly and married Jack Sheppard, Jr.

BW: So after high school?

AS: I went to Syracuse University and studied journalism and political science. And after that I spent a couple of years in two different jobs in Boston, one at Brandeis University and one as a paralegal with a Boston law firm. And then the political bug bit in a very large way and I joined the McGovern campaign and was on the national staff, traveling advance, and landed here on election night, 1972.

BW: Here being Washington, D.C.

AS: Here being Washington. There's only [one] exception or two where I've left for any significant period actually, [] when I married my current husband and moved to Chicago for three years in the early '90s. But other than that [I] have lived in Washington ever since, and haven't disliked it or regretted it for a moment.

BW: Did you, was your family highly politicized?

AS: No, not at all, it's really interesting to me because they were not, but my brother, who's a few years younger, followed me – maybe not followed me as in 'I led him,' but he got involved in politics in a significant way as well. He worked on the Hill, he had a best friend who became a congressman from Massachusetts and then attorney general [of the commonwealth], and then [my brother] became counsel to the chairman of the DNC, so I don't know where it came from.

BW: But you both were definitely leaning Democratic.

AS: Oh, definitely. We've brought our family along; we've converted them.

BW: So when you landed here and after the, for you, disappointing results of the election, what happened?

AS: Oh, my first job was on Capitol Hill for a House member, and then I went to a political consulting firm, and that's actually what led me to first meet Senator Mitchell. At the time he was not a judge, he was a very senior, well thought of political operative and aide to, or advisor to, Ed Muskie. And the firm I was with, Rothstein/Buckley, handled campaigns of Democrats running often against entrenched incumbents, so we were particularly good at knowing how to help an incumbent. And so we were hired that year to do Ed Muskie's overall message strategy, to advise on his television media spots, and to produce his radio spots.

And so I traveled one day with Madeleine Albright, who was on [Senator Muskie's] Senate staff at the time, to New York to the office of the television media producer, whose name may come to me, it's sort of ancient history, [] his name was Lee Bobker – and had a really lovely time meeting George Mitchell for the first time, another man by the name of Phil Merrill, who was a big shot in Maine Democratic politics, and I think a third man was there, he was in this group who I came to know, named Dick Spencer, and the person who was really our client was [Muskie]'s chief of staff at the time, Charlie Micoleau.

My impression of Mitchell that day [has endured]. He was soft-spoken, he didn't throw his weight around, there was no screaming. As I recall, we liked the spots, Madeleine and I, and they did as well, and it integrated well with what we were trying to do for Senator Muskie. So that's when I first met George Mitchell, and felt an affinity to him when he came to the Senate and then when I eventually worked for him directly.

BW: Was Muskie there, was he actually recording at that time? Or they were editing the -?

AS: No, [he was not there]. They had produced one wave of spots, the Maine wave, I guess, of spots, this was in the summer of '76, and it was the only time that I went, and I don't know if the principals in the firm went any other time. This may have been it. It was largely a radio campaign and it was done, as I say, we were experts on knowing how to make somebody who'd

become somewhat distant very much anchored to time and place in their home constituency. So the radio spots we produced were about each town; we literally did them about many, many, many towns, [about] how he brought home money for a bridge here or a road there. And so they were more important, and I trust that a lot more of the resources went into that than into the television. But the television was very lush, and had him looking very senatorial and all the things he could.

BW: Was he considered to be an easy candidate? This was not going to be a hard election?

AS: No, it was going to be hard, that was the whole point. People came to this firm, Rothstein/Buckley, not because they made the most beautiful pictures. Lee [R.] Bobker was somebody who made the most beautiful pictures, but [our firm, Rothstein/Buckley,] really knew how to – not necessarily street fight, but to do whatever it took, not in terms of going over the top, but just knowing what would be a very appropriate [and effective] strategy based on data. And the data showed that people no longer thought that Ed Muskie was really close to them. I may be overstating it, but that's the bottom line. So we brought him back into their homes and living rooms.

And this is, you can certainly shut me off, this is about Muskie, who I know was very, very close to Mitchell and vice versa, but the other thing I remember very vividly about this is, I went with Jill Buckley, one of the two principals in the firm, one day to record Ed Muskie doing his own voice on radio spots. So the question that day, we were talking to him and she said, "Now tell me, you chair the Senate Budget Committee, what does the Senate Budget Committee do? Tell us in human terms, what does it mean for the people of Maine?" And he said, "Well, you know, it's just like a homemaker who has to say, 'Can I afford steak tonight or do we have macaroni and cheese?'" He sat, not munching on, but crunching his eyeglasses, and Jill had to tell him to stop that. So anyway, I digress.

BW: So that was unscripted.

AS: That, yes, it was to get him to talk in his own voice, unscripted.

BW: This will be a footnote, but I think it's interesting; how different is political campaigning today, compared with '76?

AS: Both different and the same. People are the same, some of the technology is quite different, but in the end I guess if I had to come down on which side, I'd say it's more the same than different.

BW: Even with the introduction of negative campaigning.

AS: Oh that, I mean that was there, I honestly forget who was running against Muskie at the time – I could have Googled it – but it wasn't because somebody really strong ran against him, it was because he was perceived as distant and so that was what it was all about, raising his

numbers, boosting his popularity. And it certainly was always a possibility that his opponent would attack him for being distant, it was done then.

BW: Good point. Okay, so then later on in '76 and '77, what were you doing?

AS: I actually started my own political consulting operation. After having been for two-and-a-half years with Rothstein/Buckley, in '77 I went out on my own as a political consultant. In that firm I did a study of the women who'd run for high office in '76, after the election. They'd all lost, and it was a particular interest of mine, and I did the study and got quite a bit of press on the findings and so forth, and then went out on my own and didn't do exclusively women candidates but thought there was beginning to be a real niche to work for women candidates. And I did that for a while, I guess until I went to the Kennedy campaign in '79-'80 against Jimmy Carter, Ted Kennedy, and then in 1981 I went to the DSCC.

BW: And who invited you there and how did that happen?

AS: Oh, that's so interesting that you ask. Somehow, okay, well I'm picturing Ted Kaufman, he was in the loop but he's the new senator replacing Joe Biden from Delaware. He didn't make it happen. A man named Mike Berman, who is a real influential man-about-town, he was very close to Walter Mondale, he knew me, and there was a new executive director of the DSCC who came in after so many seats had been lost in the '80 election, and he was close to Alan Cranston, this man, his name was Ted Waller, and I'm pretty sure that Mike Berman suggested me to Ted Waller.

BW: And was one of the reasons why they wanted you was because of your work with women candidates, or was that -?

AS: No, definitely not, that had nothing to do with it. A woman did not come to the U.S. Senate as a Democrat in her own right until Barbara Mikulski in '86. And all the men were, just didn't get it, that a short, stocky woman like Barbara Mikulski would have any appeal, even then. So no, that was not one bit of interest. I'd been a real mainstream political operative, who'd done political consulting and political work on the Hill and all that. So no, it was as more of a mainstream Democratic person with those skills.

BW: So what was your role there, and did it change over time?

AS: It did. I was hired to be the 'number two,' so I was I think thirty-two years old or so, and I was hired to be, I think my title was assistant executive director to this significantly older gentleman; he was a peer of Alan Cranston. And he knew very little about politics. Cranston brought him in because he'd had a publishing background in New York – they were boyhood friends – but it was at a time when a lot of direct mail, money was raised through direct mail, and they thought that Ted would be good at that, 'they' really [being] Cranston. And Ted really wasn't successful – I mean that's awkward to say – so he was replaced six or so months later by somebody else who was close to, coincidentally, close to Muskie, had been mainly a Muskie

person, and close to Mitchell, a man named Leon Billings.

So that was the beginning of me being the institutional memory and the 'number two' through thick and thin for six years. And that was the spring of an election year, so I stayed the 'number two' but really played a significant role in helping grow the place. Leon had never done anything just like that either, so he looked to me, and then at the end of that cycle we'd elected a couple of new senators and were starting to put a dent in the Republican majority. And then in '83/4, Lloyd Bentsen became our chairman, a man named [J.] Brian Atwood became the executive director, and we went out and got a former congressman named Floyd Fithian, who was known well to Brian, and so we became sort of a senior management triumvirate and we grew the place a good bit, in part through recruits of interns and volunteers. Because we didn't have much money, we were getting more sophisticated about raising it. And so that was '83/4, we elected a lot of new senators, I guess a net gain of a couple but five new senators, and then that set us up for '85-'86, the Mitchell tenure.

BW: And you left in?

AS: 'Eighty-seven.

BW: In '87, okay.

AS: So I stayed through the Mitchell tenure, and John Kerry took over and was starting to put in his new people. I met with him – I was out the door. So I left in March, I think, of '87.

BW: And why were you out the door?

AS: I was burnt out. Six years is a very long time at something like that.

BW: I'm going to pause for just a moment here.

(Taping paused.)

BW: One of the things I'm curious to learn about is what was, well first of all I should ask you, what was the mission of the DSCC, just in a few words?

AS: To gain the majority, to keep electing Democrats such that we would be in the majority and control the agenda.

BW: And was it mainly strategic planning and things like that, or was it primarily fund-raising?

AS: Well, it's a very, very important question, because when I went to the DSCC it was strictly an incumbent's committee, and it was strictly a low-level of fund-raising. So without getting too technical, there's a part of the law where you can just, even in the primary period,

give \$17,500 to every senator, or Senate candidate. And that's really the extent of what was done by the DSCC in those days, through '80.

Then we lost eleven senators and lost the Senate majority to the Reaganites, and that's when – Wendell Ford remained the chairman, but that's when Alan Cranston, who loved to raise money and came from California, a light bulb went off and he knew there was this other part of the law that said that we could give up to four cents per eligible voter – and stop me if this is too detailed, but it's terribly important – we could give four cents per eligible voter, so that came to something like \$87,500 in the tiniest states, and one million-something in the largest states.

So that's when people thought, 'Aha, the DSCC is not doing what it needs to do.' So it really, we lucked in these two areas, one was raising and giving away big money, and the other was technical assistance of all kinds. And I was the technical assistant side, starting in '83/4 and into '85/6, really everything that wasn't fund-raising, really the most fun parts clearly. We'd have meetings all the time with the senators themselves and bring in speakers, we had meetings all the time and briefings and retreats and all with their staffs, and meanwhile we developed a big fund-raising operation. So by '85-'86 we had two very, well in '83/4 we did as well, but by '85-'86 it was really humming, to have these two different sides of the operation, and of course they were carefully integrated. And I guess the one other point I wanted to make is that I played the biggest role working with the [other] two top people in the recommendations on how to allocate the money, and that went to the chairman and to the senators. So if we had brought in three million dollars in the last two weeks right before the election, we'd have to say who's up and who's down in the polls, and my staff and I would make recommendations.

I'm jumping way ahead, but to a conclusion of all this, which is that George Mitchell was absolutely phenomenal to work for in that way. We all have worked for people who really want to micromanage the staff people's jobs, and others who just knew that you knew what you were doing and those were good recommendations. And he really, really let us lead this effort, and he didn't make deals where we would find out that a lot of money was going to somebody for the wrong reasons and so forth, so that's something I wanted to make sure [to] share.

BW: Good. I'm going to pause here just for a second.

(Taping paused.)

BW: A couple more questions about the structure of the DSCC. How does, how is a chair appointed?

AS: The chair was appointed, as opposed to elected, and it was a process that was, I think, like making sausage or something; it was behind the scenes and I'm not sure you always wanted to know what went into it. After each election there were always a lot of rumors about who was wanted, as opposed to who wanted it, and that sort of thing. Bentsen was a very good, strong chairman, and, I was trying to recall this, I guess the Senate leader at the time was Robert Byrd, and so there were discussions and I assume Byrd took people's temperature, and I think those of

us who were there for the '83-'84 cycle, it was always assumed the executive director would leave and the rest of us might stay.

We hoped, as we started hearing it might be Mitchell that he might take it and all, we hoped that it would be Mitchell, and he was ultimately appointed.

BW: And that position was seen as part of the leadership of the party.

AS: Definitely, yes, but it was also very obviously a steppingstone to real leadership, and it was, I'm sure you're talking to others about how this was, he was still a freshman, he was still a new senator who just leapt over tall buildings in doing this job, and then jumped over everybody [*an aside*] to become the Senate majority leader. It was an act of believing in himself and his own abilities.

BW: And then who appointed the director, was that the chairman?

AS: Yes, and David Johnson was somebody that he had worked with before; David had worked for Muskie. And, I guess, I'm a little unclear as to whether David was actually on his Senate staff, but they knew each other. And so that's who he wanted, he didn't want anyone else, he wanted David.

BW: Did the DSCC have any particular relationship with other of the Democratic organizations, like the National Committee?

AS: Yes, by '85 we were in the same building. There was by then a Democratic headquarters building, we were on the first floor, the DNC was on the third. The formula that I mentioned of the four cents per eligible voter, it actually is written in the law as two cents for the DNC and two cents for the party committee for the Senate or House, and so we had to negotiate, but they're happy to give it up because they don't ever have the money. So yes, there was always a relationship, and there was a staff relationship, so I, for example, I think it was '85-'86, would have the political directors of the DNC and the D-triple C, we, the three of us met in my office every week and we coordinated.

BW: So the D-triple C [DCCC] is the congressional [campaign arm?]

AS: Exactly.

BW: Right, and you would think that there was a lot of competition between the DSCC and the D-triple C [DCCC].

AS: For money, yes, but the missions were really clear, the DNC was having the party convention every four years, and the DNC had to build state parties. I just thought of something else that you might find interesting about all this. The House was done by the House Committee, and we did the Senate, so there was a lot in the news the last cycle about, you know, Howard

Dean got along hideously with Rahm Emanuel and all – that can happen – but it didn't happen in these years.

I wanted to mention also that the House and Senate committees took turns taking the lead on the State of the Union response, when the president was a Republican, and we collaborated on that always. Like Chris Matthews represented the House, because he worked for Tip O'Neill, so it was with the leadership representatives but also the party committee, we convened it, and we paid for it I guess, so that's something of interest, too.

And I'm having this feeling that we put Mitchell on earlier than '86, like maybe he was part of a response early on when he first came to the Senate. I would have to think about that, and maybe somebody else touches on it.

BW: I have that factoid somewhere.

AS: You do?

BW: But I don't think it's with me today.

AS: Okay.

BW: You mean when he gave the response.

AS: When he actually gave the response. I'm blanking on it, but I was at the table every other year for my six years there, and actually Jill Buckley of Rothstein/Buckley, who I had worked for, we had her do the response one year. I mean, produce it.

BW: Right, right. What about your presence from time to time with the Democratic Senate Caucus?

AS: Not the caucus itself in that form. We had a, well, let me think about that. I guess we probably had a committee, I mean this DSCC, the campaign committee, wasn't every Democratic senator, it was fifteen, I'm guessing. And like when we were making these allocation decisions, we would have a meeting, maybe even once a week near the end of an election cycle, with the committee. We also would invite all the Democratic senators who were up to hear a pollster or somebody [] interesting []. But I wasn't directly involved in liaising or doing anything with the official Senate Caucus.

BW: And the only other group that occurred to me to ask you about was the Democratic Policy Committee.

AS: We worked together. I've run into somebody who, you know, I knew a lot of the people who worked for Byrd and the Policy Committee, because he chaired that maybe at times when he wasn't the leader, or even when he was the leader. We worked with them, because we also,

under my side of things, we had an opposition research operation, and we put out lots of policy information for our candidates, and so they would supply a lot of it, within what was appropriate and legal.

BW: What was the term you just used for opposition?

AS: Opposition research.

BW: Was that something new, or when you came on board that was already in force?

AS: Well, we probably taught people how to do it in the '81/2 cycle. I mean yeah, it already existed.

BW: But now, that's when there were only three of you on staff, right?

AS: Well, there were never – did I say? Well, no, three of us were the senior management team, when I said that for '83/4, not that we had hordes of people to manage. But no, [when] I went to the DSCC, we may have had five or six people total, and the next cycle more than that, and growing, because under Bentsen we could raise bigger money; he had much more credibility with business than [] – and we got some good fund-raising going under Cranston. But it just kept growing, every cycle, everybody wanted to raise more than the cycle before and so forth. So by '85/6 we had a good sized operation, the fund-raising side may have had seven or eight people, and I probably had seven or eight people, mine were probably maybe a few volunteers or whatever.

BW: And you had the opposition research under your -

AS: Under me, I had a research shop. A guy who had been on John Kerry's Senate campaign in '84 headed that on my staff in '86. And we taught people [the senators' research staff members] how to do it, as well as doing some of it for them and spoon-feeding them.

BW: The committee members, they were also appointed by the leader and whatever, is that right?

AS: Yeah. I don't have a strong recollection, but my guess would be that it was somewhat geographical, it was somewhat who was willing to do it, because then they took on some commitment to raise money, so it wasn't a huge honor that people fought for.

BW: In going back and doing some research on the chairs, I found that Wendell Ford had been there for quite a few years, six years I think.

AS: Presiding over this maintenance operation, that then lost all those seats. And then he just stayed in '81/2, again sort of a maintenance operation, but Alan Cranston came in saying, "I'm going to" – interesting – Cranston asserted himself and put in Ted Waller, [] but then it was

really Ford and more the regular senators, not the liberal or West Coast senators, who reasserted themselves and put in Leon on March 31st, he started April 1st, 1982.

BW: So Cranston was never chair, he just was a mover and a doer.

AS: He created something called the Democratic Senate Leadership Circle, and he got the idea that he would get people to give \$15,000, which was really a lot of money at the time, to hobnob with senators a lot, and he got labor in, and he got business in, and he got a lot of liberal individuals, wealthy, wealthy individuals. And there were a lot of events, and that was sort of a beginning for the DSCC of the way things are done in a much bigger way, but some of the same techniques.

BW: You mentioned Bentsen a bit, and you said he brought in some new qualities, so that was quite a change from Ford to Bentsen.

AS: Yes, and also Cranston receded when Bentsen came in, as I recall it. And Bentsen chaired the Senate Finance Committee; that obviously gave him a lot of pull, clout. He had all his Texas buddies, he had a very regal way of doing things, and he had smart operatives around him, so we reported directly to his chief of staff as well as to him. We had a lot of access to these senators, a lot. And so yes, each one puts their own imprint on it, but I have to say I didn't deal much with Ford, and he didn't play a big role, I don't think. We saw more of Cranston in '81-'82. Then Bentsen played a very big role, and then Mitchell did, but it was probably the best job I've ever had, because we were treated so well by these senators who really treated us as professionals who knew what we were doing.

BW: After Wendell Ford's six years, then Bentsen, Mitchell and Kerry all were just two years. So that became sort of the standard modus operandi?

AS: Yes, and I think there's a reason, because Ford didn't really do much [], relatively. It's so much easier to give each Democratic senator 17,500 and some never even ask for it. And when it started being a really heavy lift financially, fund-raising-wise, I think people had a much higher burnout factor.

BW: So what was the transition like then from Bentsen to Mitchell?

AS: Well it was pretty smooth I think. You know, I don't remember exactly, I think Mitchell was appointed earlier. I mean, Bentsen came in actually two years earlier, and then he had a false start or two because he wanted a Texan named Jack Martin to be his executive director, and Jack Martin didn't want to do it, and so Bentsen didn't have anyone to do it for a while. Then they went out, actually through Leon Billings, Brian Atwood was suggested and located, so we had a period of treading water, and I guess I dealt with Joe O'Neill who was chief of staff to Bentsen, but it was kind of a rocky start.

Mitchell, came, was appointed, he wanted David. Pretty quickly I guess we found out that it was

David. I vaguely remember maybe going to see Mitchell without there being a David yet, but then David started pretty quickly. There was a little bit of awkwardness because, I think, for some reason Brian Atwood stayed on the payroll for a little while and kept an office, and nobody really likes somebody old hanging around. And so I remember a brief period when Brian was there, down the hall, and David had taken Brian's office.

But it was no big deal, and everybody came from the same wing of the party or whatever. Brian Atwood had been assistant secretary of state [for legislative affairs] under Muskie, and they all knew each other and so that passed. And then we got geared up. And Floyd Fithian, who'd been number two in the '83-'84 cycle, he moved over to become Paul Simon's chief of staff. Simon was elected in '84 and so [Floyd's] right hand, a man by the name of Keith Abbott, whose name I would assume somebody may have [] (he now lives in Indiana,) because he eventually went to Mitchell's personal staff after the '86 election. Anyway, so the senior management team became David Johnson, Keith Abbott on the raising-it side, and again, me on the spending-it side.

BW: And what was David Johnson like as executive director?

AS: Very cool, very nice, very honest, a straight shooter. That's the most important thing you can ask for in leadership, is somebody who will deal with you straight. And he was a doll. Brian Atwood was like that, David Johnson was like that and it does start at the top, and Mitchell was a terrific role model and person, and David was just very, very terrific. He didn't micromanage; he made it really clear on day one that he needed me, and so I was a real player, and that's what I wanted to be. I didn't want to regress in terms of what I'd done. And so we worked very well together, and we had tons of access to Mitchell and I think the three of us went to see him every week.

BW: This would be in the Russell Building.

AS: [Russell]. And as I mentioned to you, I also headed recruitment.

BW: I want to get into that in a minute.

AS: Okay, okay, okay.

BW: The candidate recruitment, you're talking about.

AS: Yes.

BW: Right. Was there a "Cranston for Mitchell," as there'd been a "Cranston for Ford?" No.

AS: No, no.

BW: Mitchell was in charge.

AS: Yes.

BW: And were there any standouts among the other committee members who you had particularly a great deal of contact with and whatnot, or not?

AS: Well, this recruitment committee was especially active, and I told you who was on that. Do you want me to hold off still?

BW: Just for a moment, yeah.

AS: Okay. We got people active, but no, it was really a Mitchell show.

BW: So everything is geared, when Mitchell comes in, towards the '86 Senate election. So what time of the year in '85 did he come in?

AS: Oh early, at the beginning.

BW: So right after the '84 -

AS: Yes, I think probably we geared up in January or so.

BW: And did he bring in a new game plan, or did he pretty much just accept what was already the way you were operating?

AS: Well I'm sure he thought it through the same way we did, and he would definitely meet with David alone at times, although not that much. I don't think. I may be forgetting. I'm sure he knew what we knew, and we would brief him too that, "Okay, we have to pick up this many seats to regain the majority, so it can't be just about holding the line, we have to be very, very proactive." And that's where recruitment came in. So no, if he came in with his own game plan it might have been in subtle conversations with David, that they might have said: 'this is going to be good for me too if it [works] out.' I don't know if they ever had that conversation. It was all about picking up seats.

BW: So your role didn't shift dramatically under new leadership.

AS: No. The major change, I think, for me is that Diane Dewhirst was hired by David, and I had been quite involved in doing interviews and that sort of thing, and David wanted to hire a good press person who, he would get some press and Mitchell would get quite a lot of press. Bentsen I don't think really cared about getting press, in conjunction with this. I don't know that Mitchell wanted to get a lot, but it was something that - So in terms of did my role change? The one thing that I did much less of was speak to the press.

BW: So talk about candidate recruitment.

AS: Recruitment. Well, I'm guessing maybe some senators said to Mitchell, "Recruitment's the name of the game," or Mitchell said it to them, "I'll help you." So however exactly that happened, it ended up that Jim Sasser, Bill Bradley, Max Baucus, and George Mitchell became the recruitment committee, and Mitchell asked Senator Baucus to chair it. And I think Senator Baucus has probably become much more on point and astute in the many years since, but in those days, at least when it came to recruitment, he wasn't somebody who took a lot of leadership, or leadership that we really had a huge amount of confidence in.

And so this sounds very egotistical, but I basically ran it and suggested what Senator Baucus should do, and then Baucus just became a member and I would meet with the four senators once a week, I think at the same time [each week]. Sometimes the time changed because we would have a potential candidate, somebody we wanted to recruit or someone who wanted to see us, so we'd meet a second time or something like that.

But it was a very proactive effort to go after candidates. It was based on my little staff's intelligence and reading the press clips and all that, you know, "In Washington state Brock Adams is a possibility, we should get him in here and talk to him," or maybe he asked or so forth and so on. So it wasn't brain surgery, it was taking the measure of people, if they had polls, if there was press about them, and then meeting with them.

BW: That kind of a selection process ends up with winners and losers.

AS: Yes, and that's where I mention Maryland. You know, in 1986 in Maryland, Mike Barnes was looking at running, and Harry Hughes was, and Barbara Mikulski, and I think there was a fourth person who I'm not thinking of now, I have a feeling it might have been an African American even back then. And the men all thought that, you know, Hughes or Barnes was the cat's meow. And Mikulski had to kind of go out and do it herself and prove it.

So in cases like that, nobody was deluded enough to think that we could really narrow the field when there were real people of stature. If there was a real person of stature and a nobody, then maybe there'd be a way to get the nobody out.

BW: So you didn't try to play a role -

AS: Broker it? We recruited more proactively/affirmatively. When somebody would come, nobody running and somebody would come to town and they're who we thought we wanted and they were the big fish, we would try and say, "There's this authority where we can give you big bucks if we raise it and we'll help you, we can help you find a staff, train a staff and do all these other things."

BW: A campaign staff.

AS: Hmm-hmm. And some of these people that were running were House members, and they were right under our nose, and we'd also talk to other House members. So if the seat was in

Wisconsin, “What do the Wisconsin members think?” In South Dakota we started meeting with top people for Daschle very early. I’m sure I couldn’t remember what the seats all were, a lot of the people have moved on.

BW: It’s interesting you mention Daschle, because of course of his close association with Mitchell.

AS: Hmm-hmm.

BW: Was Mitchell particularly invested in that selection?

AS: The selection of him -?

BW: Of Daschle to be the candidate for Senate?

AS: Oh, I don’t think there was a selection, I think Daschle was the obvious person to run. There’s only one House seat there – guess at one point there were two – but I think by then there was only one House seat, and so there was no competition. And Daschle and his people I think started currying favor and getting to know us maybe even late [in the] ‘84 cycle, knowing that that’s what he’d be doing.

BW: Was much travel involved?

AS: For me? Yes, some. It was such a demanding job that I tried not to travel that much, either to spend the money, but also just to not sap my strength. But yes, I went in, like Harry Reid was elected in that cycle, and I went in with my peers in the House committee and the DNC, we went in to do a, ‘Who’s here?’ We went to Las Vegas in Nevada, sort of the lay of the land, we did things like that. And I traveled sometimes on some of the fund-raising trips as well. We took six senators to California on a fund-raising swing, we took six senators to Cape Cod for a fund-raising weekend, and I would go. But I didn’t travel that much into individual states. Everybody came through, we read their press, we saw them, we knew their people, we talked to their people all the time. Probably more travel would have been smart, but it just wasn’t humanly possible.

BW: And what about the senators, Baucus, Bradley, and Sasser, did they do a lot of traveling?

AS: They didn’t, no, I think again, senators lead such busy lives. More for money than to go sniff things out.

BW: Any particular outstanding anecdotes or memories that you have of this process of sniffing things out?

AS: No, I can’t say that I have specific ones of that. Let’s see where else this goes, and then I’ll see if [there] are things that I want to include.

BW: Okay, okay. So at some point you must have been getting the inkling that things were going well.

AS: Hmm-hmm.

BW: And that the election of '86 was going to look pretty good for Democrats, is that right?

AS: Hmm-hmm.

BW: When did that start to happen?

AS: Oh, well Congress stayed in quite late, quite late, so you always think they're going to leave, in an election year, the first of October or so, and they were around and around and around some more. And we were, you know, you can tell, everything's a poll, so we were raising money well, and the polls all looked good and all, so it was clearly in the fall, September and October, things were just wild, absolutely wild.

BW: And election night you were in Washington?

AS: Well, a little footnote to all this is that it was so stressful on me that I became ill. And I guess one thing we haven't mentioned is that Louisiana has its election, its nonpartisan election, in early September, and that was a heavily contested race with John Breaux running. And a lot of pressure was put on us, we put it on ourselves, that we needed to win that seat to make it that much more possible that we would regain the majority, and so the pressure really mounted starting, we had an election day in early September, and I remember that pretty vividly.

Anyway, right around then I had some symptoms of some neurological problems and I ended up getting sick and missing a few weeks right at the end, and ended up being diagnosed with a demyelinating condition, or at that time it was diagnosed as mild MS. And so I was still taking time off and just came back, I actually went to Boston for a little while – I didn't intend to get into all this – but I came back to Washington in time for election night. And Ron Rosenblith and Page Gardner, she was on my staff, he came in afterwards with Kerry, they were [a] married [couple], and they picked me up and took me to election night at the office, but I'd been ill for a few weeks.

BW: But that was a celebratory night.

AS: Oh, it clearly was. I remember being on the phone with people, but in '83/4 I also sensed that we would do what I thought we would, which was, we elected five new senators. I mean, you can just sort of tell, you can feel it.

BW: So in '86 it was eight new senators, new Democrats.

AS: I think it was eleven.

BW: Hmm.

AS: A net gain of eight, maybe?

BW: Yeah, right.

AS: I will show you something on my wall in here, if you'd like to see it, when we finish with this. It's something from the victory party we had.

BW: Great. And was George Mitchell there?

AS: Yes. I'll show you, it's a picture of all of us.

BW: Great, great. So tell me what George Mitchell's leadership style was like during these years, just give me a portrait of how he operated.

AS: I think it was soft-spoken, he didn't need to raise his voice, you knew that he was thoughtful, and that things he was advocating or asking for were well thought out, and so it was just that, it was being a straight shooter, being honest, just having all the integrity in the world. There's a side of him that I wanted to mention though, too, which was that he, if others haven't mentioned it, he told the same jokes over and over and over, particularly. I mean not if two or three people were sitting around, but when he would do public speaking, he told the same jokes for years, such that some of us wanted to duck. Or he'd come in to an event where one of us was sort of advancing it 'til he got there, whatever, and he'd say, "Well now I haven't spoken to this group, so I can tell my Elizabeth Taylor story again, can't I?" And he'd use the same material a lot, and he would get sort of a devilish look and he'd tell these stories.

I remember two stories especially, one was this semi-joke about when he first came to the Senate – and stop me if you've heard it – the Elizabeth Taylor and -

BW: Senator [John W.] Warner.

AS: "If Senator Warner can be in the Senate, and he's not home with Elizabeth Taylor and we're pulling these all nighters, so can I." And the other thing, which was not a joke, it I think told a lot about him, was talking about when he was a federal judge and how probably the thing he liked to do most was swearing-in new citizens, on the 4th of July or other times.

BW: Yeah, I've heard both those stories and I know how important they are to him and so forth. Is there a third story that comes to mind?

AS: I wish, well a third story that I'll tell that – I was not there, but I know this absolutely to be true, and I can't tell you what he thought of it or what he did, but I know he was there – is that

he took a bunch of senators to Maine in the '86 cycle, and we did a whole, you know, span the country with senators who'd take us to their states, and he particularly wanted a lot of effort to go into Maine. And there wasn't going to be as much money as a lot of other places, but it was really important to him that it be done and be done right.

And it was a daytime event, and it was somewhere on the ocean, and it was at a lobster restaurant or something. And one of the senators he took up was Ted Kennedy, and a few cars worth of senators and aides and all, and they pulled up, and there was about a half hour to go until the event; people were beginning to gather. Ted Kennedy went out and stripped, on the beach down to his undershorts, and went swimming. I can picture what I think it would look like, with the restaurant back a ways and this expansive beach. And so he left all his clothes sitting in the sand, shoes and everything, and he came back and he saw a towel, somebody's towel sitting there while they were in the water, he put it around him, and took off his wet drawers and dried off and put everything on, walked back into this event, to start getting ready to attend the event, and handed someone his wet drawers. And this was of course the talk of everybody when they got back, that that happened to Mitchell. Whether it got any press, any of that, I don't know, but that's pretty astounding.

BW: That leads me to this question. How important was protocol and neatness and so forth to George Mitchell, was that a big thing for him?

AS: I can't exactly relate to it. I mean it was a big thing for me. I remember a conversation in which I said to David Johnson, "You know, I like to do everything perfectly." And he said, "Well I don't aspire to be perfect, I just want to do it really well." So I had to get my staff to follow, if we were doing memos for Mitchell [], we had a format and that sort of thing. But I can never remember it coming back that 'Senator Mitchell wants something different.'

We had a good relationship with his staff. I don't know if you're interviewing Regina Sullivan? She was his personal scheduler, and she's a lovely person, she's here in town, she has her own little lobbying operation now. And there were others, the name Gayle Cory, she's passed away and so forth.

BW: In those days, had the institution of dress-down Fridays occurred?

AS: No, I don't think so.

BW: That was a long way off?

AS: I [] think so.

BW: And how would Mitchell, would he have gone along with that, do you think?

AS: Oh, I don't know. I don't know. I don't think of him as an overly formal person.
(*Aside: I just should tell you that I have a four o'clock call.*)

BW: *Oh, okay.*

AS: *I know I've sort of gone on and on, but, and I'm enjoying this a lot.)*

BW: Right, so have you had contacts with Mitchell since then?

AS: I have had some. I actually have a picture too that I've put away, but I was at the dedication of his portrait in the Old Senate [Chamber]. I've seen him over the years. I have a little bit of a lead, in terms of another period in his life, which is that I ran into him once right around the time when he was being rumored to possibly be secretary of state, when Albright was chosen, and they'd known each other through Muskie and all. And I said, "I hope it's you" – I don't know if I said, "Not her" – I think I just said, "I hope it's you." And he said, "I hope it's me too." And then she was named. I used to live on Capitol Hill and I'd run into him all those years ago, and I don't see him a lot but I've seen him.

(Phone ringing)

BW: Good. Should we stop here, is this your call, do you think? Let me pause here.

(Pause in taping.)

BW: We've probably left a few things unsaid here, but this has been a great interview and I really appreciate your time and so forth.

AS: Good, good. It's been fun for me.

BW: Good. Thank you.

End of Interview