

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

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**G. Arnold Roach**  
(Interviewer: *Mike Hastings*)

**GMOH# 042**  
September 27, 2008

**Mike Hastings:** The following is an interview of the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project, an activity of Bowdoin College. The date is September 27, [2008], the interviewer is Michael Hastings, the interviewee is Arnold, actually it's George Arnold Roach, and this interview is taking place at Mr. Roach's residence off of Route 212 in Smyrna Mills, Maine, and the time is three forty-five in the afternoon. Now, good afternoon, Mr. Roach.

**Arnold Roach:** Good afternoon, welcome.

**MH:** We have kind of a formal beginning. If you could please state your full name and to spell your last name.

**AR:** It's George Arnold Roach, and it's spelled R-O-A-C-H.

**MH:** Very good, and could you give me your place and date of birth?

**AR:** The place, I was born in Rockland, Maine, on July 28, 1929.

**MH:** And could you give me your mother's full name and your father's full name?

**AR:** My mother's full name was Nora Nelson Roach, and my father's name was Herbert Ezio Roach.

**MH:** How would you spell Ezio?

**AR:** E-Z-I-O, it's a good Irish name.

**MH:** It's Irish, Ezio? Okay. When you were interviewed ten years ago for the Edmund S. Muskie Oral History Project, the interviewer, Andrea L'Hommedieu, who's also the project manager for this project -

**AR:** That's what I understand, yes.

**MH:** She got a lot of your biographical information so I'm not going to repeat those questions, because it's all on the public record. But that was ten years ago and I wondered if you could kind of update us on what's happened with Arnold Roach and his family in the last ten years.

**AR:** In the last ten years of course, I think I went to work, Ed Muskie, of course I knew Ed Muskie and I went to work and worked with him for years, and then when George Mitchell came in of course I just fell into it because I was in the northern Maine potato business, and George and I hit it off very well. And so when I was serving on the National Potato Promotion Board, which is a national organization based to potato growers, which is an elected board, every state has members on it, and I served on it for a long number of years as the president of the board, of the national board. And Mitchell used to really, I used to get a lot of coverage off that that I used to laugh about, because Mitchell would go to make speeches and he'd be talking to different Democrats where he said, "I only have one president," he said, "my president," he says, "is Arnold Roach, up in northern Maine, he's president of the [National Potato Promotion Board]..." It used to be funny, and I used to pick on him about it quite a bit.

So I served as the chair and president of the Nation Potato Promotion Board in those particular years, and then when the election came along, when Clinton won the election, George Mitchell called me, he was over looking at the transition team in Washington, the Clinton-Gore transition team, and he looked at it and he said, "They don't have any working folks on here, any farm people," and he said, "they need somebody here who knows something, how to get their hands dirty." And I had always kidded with him, I said, "Well, you want me to come down and be secretary of agriculture, do you want me to do something to straighten the mess out?" And he said, "Yup, I do want to call," and by God he did. And he said, "Would you come down," he says, "and serve in the Clinton-Gore transition team?" And I said, "That would be my pleasure."

So I went down to Washington, it was around Thanksgiving time, right after the election, and I worked on the Clinton-Gore transition team, and worked on it until after the inauguration, which I stayed and went through the inauguration. I even had the opportunity to, Clinton was taking a few days off on the West Coast and I had the opportunity to go to the West Coast at the same time and be in the same area, and that was very interesting. Then I -

**MH:** Now tell me, what did you do as a transition team member?

**AR:** Oh, I worked in the transition team, and what we did, we put together is – I spent a long time in the military and I used to refer to it as 'standard operating procedure' – we just put together a book to deliver to the secretary of agriculture so he knew that the problems and things that were taking place at the department, and we were making recommendations to what he should do to make it work better and to have a very smooth functioning team put together when he come in to be the secretary of agriculture.

**MH:** Are there many, when a new president comes in, are there many political appointments in the Agriculture Department?

**AR:** Oh, there's a lot of political appointments in the Agricultural Department, it's full of them. That's what I did, I got down there – of course I knew it anyway because I knew the system pretty well – and when I saw that down there, I said, "Gee, this is an easy way to make a

living, rather than being on the farm.” So I went to work for the Clinton-Gore administration and I worked eight years as head of the Farm Service Agency Directory here in the state of Maine, and then considering things that happened early on that I got to know the secretary of agriculture very well and he was, they were always calling me in on different meetings, so I worked almost as much in Washington as I did here in Maine.

**MH:** Now in the first Clinton term, who was the secretary of agriculture?

**AR:** Espy, Mike Espy.

**MH:** Mike Espy, right.

**AR:** He’s the one that the - He didn’t take our advice. When we had a briefing for Mike Espy, when we knew he was going to be the secretary, they sent Mike Espy in to be interviewed by us and we presented him the book that he had to read and to study so that he was moving up from the congressional office and moving, and there’s quite a difference in the way they operate and what they do. As he found out. And we went into it, I told Steve Hart, who was with -

**MH:** I know Steve.

**AR:** Who became, he was a very, one of my best friends right there. But anyway, I told him I was going to make a card for him and I was going to tell him to take no prisoners, and he said, “That’s a hell of a good idea.” So I took an envelope, I had a big envelope, and I took a marking pencil and I wrote on it, “Take no prisoners.” And when Secretary Espy, when we were giving him the briefing, we were talking to him, I said to him, I said, now, because I had part of the briefing I had to make, it was all designed, there was a team. It was a big team but there was about eight of us that went to the briefing and I was one of the eight, and the reason I was one of the eight was because I represented George Mitchell, that’s why. It wasn’t that I was anybody, but it was George Mitchell’s influence on it.

But anyway, I held up this card, I held it up right there and I said, “Mr. Secretary to-be,” I said, “I want to give you some advice,” I said. “This thing says ‘take no prisoners,’” and I said, “when you come in here, become secretary, you want to get rid of every political appointee that you can in that Department of Agriculture and Forestry, get rid of them. Move them out if you can’t fire them, send them to Kansas City to get rid, get them out of here.” And he said he would and he’d take my advice. But he had a, his chief of staff was with him – I don’t remember what, I can’t remember now what his name was but it was a big guy, he reminded something of Mike Aube, big man – he didn’t take my advice and he left a lot of them there, and they left all kinds of land mines for him and he stepped on them and he got himself in real trouble. So he, my advice was not taken on that particular thing.

But that’s what it was. The Department of Agriculture and Forestry is, and Conservation, is a ton of political appointees, and I advise anybody who wants to, is interested, to get the so-called Plum Book, and most haven’t even heard about it, very few people bother to read it. It lists all

the political appointees in government, and it's a big book, it's a good sized book.

**MH:** Right, I remember when I worked there, which was many years ago, over twenty-five years ago, I think there were about twenty-three hundred positions in the Plum Book.

**AR:** I think something like that.

**MH:** But I suspect it's grown.

**AR:** Oh yeah, it has, under this administration it's grown more than it had before, because Al Gore had his initiative on slimming back government and making it smaller, and the first thing this administration did was hired all the people that Al Gore had eliminated, and more, so they loaded the government with more political appointees.

**MH:** Did you have to get an apartment in D.C.?

**AR:** No, no, I have a daughter down there.

**MH:** Oh, I see, so you stayed with her, I see.

**AR:** It was good, I had a great time.

**MH:** You said you had, you'd been in the military. What did that involve?

**AR:** Oh, I was in the military, I was one of those, I went in, I enlisted, I was going to get drafted back in '51, and I hadn't been married too long and I was going to get drafted, and I said, you birds aren't going to draft me, so I enlisted. And I served, had active duty time, and then I come back and then helping my dad in the farming. And unfortunately I stayed in the National Guard in the Army Reserve program, and I spent thirty-three years in the Guard. And I enlisted, I feel pleased about it, I went in as a PFC, I went through Officers Candidate School and when I finally retired after thirty-three years, I retired as a colonel.

**MH:** And I don't want to repeat too much, but you grew up in this area?

**AR:** Yes, my mother was from Rockland and my father was from up here, and she was a school teacher and she was up here teaching school and dad married her, and so consequently this has been my life up here, I've been here. And my wife and I bought this house when we were married in 1950.

**MH:** And how big was your farm?

**AR:** Well, we had a lot of land, a lot of wood holdings, but we grew about two hundred acres of potatoes.

**MH:** What does two hundred acres yield in potatoes, in most years?

**AR:** Oh, my Lord, most years, that's a lot. In tonnage wise, you got to figure probably three hundred, a hundred and fifty acres, a lot of potatoes. And those warehouses, oh, down below us here are mine. I rent them now to people, but I used to have them full every year.

**MH:** And you were very active in all the organizations?

**AR:** Yeah, I got very active, I got active in the pol-, potato politics early, and I've been a Democrat ever since, well, I can remember. My dad made me a Democrat. I can tell you here because you can always edit it out – I can remember, I was probably about eight or nine years old, driving, and I can show you the spot in the road where I was, and I didn't know what he was talking about for a long time. We're driving along the road and there was a dead skunk in the road, and dad looked out and says, "Yup, another Republican gone to hell." My dad was one of those that was a selectman during the Depression years, and he saw what the Republicans and Herbie Hoover had done to the country and the way they handled it, and watched what the Federal Land Bank and the PAC and those farm organizations did, the way they treated farmers, and how they used them. And he was just very bitter at the way that they used them, and he always, he used to tell my kids, "If you think a Democrat is smelly," he said, "you just hold your nose and vote because any smelly Democrat is better than a Republican any day."

**MH:** I don't think we need to edit that. So, do you remember when you first heard about George Mitchell, or first met him? What were those circumstances?

**AR:** Oh, I met George Mitchell, when I met him he was running for governor.

**MH:** So that would have been probably in '73 to '74.

**AR:** Yeah, he, and Jim Erwin was the Republican, and Jim Longley was running as the Independent, remember that? And we all said, "Don't worry about Longley," and Longley beat the both of them.

**MH:** What do you remember about that campaign here in southern Aroostook?

**AR:** Well, I remember that Longley fooled us all, that's what I remember. And I thought sure that Mitchell was going to take that race, because Jim Erwin wasn't coming over that well and it, he just didn't. And then lo and behold, this thing with Longley come along and he, when the elections were counted, why he beat the both of them.

So that's when I met him, when he was up here campaigning and was through there, and I was helping him, then I met him and then I got to know him a little over the years, and really, really got to know him of course when he stepped into the Senate, that's when I really got to know him, right there.

**MH:** I see a picture on your wall here, and there's a very formal picture with you and your wife and the Senator in the middle, but there's a picture next to it looks like the Senator's fixing a piece of your clothing. Can you describe the picture and tell me what the story is?

**AR:** Yeah, the story on that is that my wife and I were in Washington, and my wife's name was Joyce, Joyce Roach, and she was a very favorite of the Senator, she used to, he'd call her at times when she, something up here that he couldn't make, a speech or something, or something would happen, and she actually would go. Like she went over to the high school here one time and spoke, went up to Houlton, and he'd send her up a, he'd send her up, he'd tell her what he wanted to talk about and she would go speak for the Senator. And he was always so impressed with my wife doing that, he used to call her and do that a lot.

We were down there, to Washington, to a function, I was doing something for the Smithsonian Institute [*sic*: Institution], and it was very funny, we were up in his office and this is when he was the majority leader, and we went up to have a photograph taken, and of course he had to have it under Truman's picture, as you notice in the thing there.

**MH:** The oil painting of President Truman, probably when he was a vice president.

**AR:** I think that's probably correct. I never did know.

**MH:** Yeah, they have vice presidential pictures, because the vice president sits as president of the Senate, and so that's when Truman was vice president.

**AR:** Yeah, it was Truman anyway, but he had [us] standing under that. Well then the Senator noticed that my tie was not quite right, it was off center, it was as right, and he said, "Hey, we got to straighten your tie, we can't have a picture with your tie like that." So he says, "Come here," and I, so he walked over – well, you can see my wife is watching there – and he was straightening my tie. Well out in the majority office, it was full of reporters and cameramen and the first thing I knew, here I was standing there with, he was straightening my tie and everybody was snapping pictures and pictures were going off. And they assumed that because he was straightening my tie, it had to be a dignitary, it had to be somebody very important. Well, they didn't say too much, and the staff, as you know, working there, they don't, they don't tell them much of anything because they're waiting for the Senator to tell them, so see what he wants them to know. And first thing that they get done the picture and turn around and he said, they said something about, 'now your dignitary here, he must be a VIP, somebody, he was straightening your tie,' and they were all wondering who he was. And George introduced me to them, and he said, "I want you to know this guy is a VIP; he's a very important person. He lives up in northern Maine and he votes for me. That's a real VIP to me." And so that's how that, that's the story, that's always been quite a favorite of my wife's and mine, we got quite a kick out of that.

**MH:** Now, so you worked in the Clinton administration for eight years?

**AR:** I worked eight years in the Clinton administration, yes.

**MH:** And so you would have left in 1990 [*sic*: 2000], retired in 1990 [*sic*: 2000].

**AR:** Yes, I worked through the Clinton administration, when was it, in '01, was it, or something like that when they finally, I worked through when Bush come in. I tell people that Bush fired me.

**MH:** Well, they give you a little time, until they get organized.

**AR:** Yeah, just a little bit. Not very long, though.

**MH:** So in Maine, how many positions are there, like the one that you (*unintelligible*)?

**AR:** Well in Maine there's quite a group. There's a U.S. attorney, and then there's a U.S. marshal, and then there's a director of rural development, and then there's a director of the Farmers Service Agency, which I had, and then also there's another bunch of positions that people aren't too familiar with and that's as, in the Farm Service Agency there is a board of producers, farmers, and then, can be farmers or conservationists or anyone, but some of the people that work the land. And there's five of them from the state of Maine that serve on this board, and their job is to advise the director of the Farmers Service Agency of things that they see going on here and have input into decisions made in the Department of Agriculture. And they'll bring them all together, oh, probably about four times a year, from all over the nation, bring all of these Farm Service Agency directors, committeemen, they're called farm committeemen, they bring them in and they'll ask questions and get answers, input into what direction would they take. It gets very interesting, and they get a lot of great input out of it, it's a good program.

**MH:** Do you think that the federal government does a good job in this part of the state providing service to farmers?

**AR:** No, don't do enough. We've always been at a disadvantage up here, to the western growers, because we don't have what they refer to as the basic commodities, the corn, wheat, soybeans, and stuff like that. And so anything, the program that we have up here is always adopted to what they get out west. And potatoes, there's no programs for potatoes, per se.

**MH:** Even in Idaho?

**AR:** No, no, no, there aren't any, no. And it's always, if the disaster program comes in, some program comes in like that for potatoes, it usually comes in as a result of a special disaster or something, and they had a huge overproduction or something. But there are no potato programs at all. What we mostly have up here are conservation programs, your soil conservation, use of the soil. And there's a lot to help dairy and cattle producers, a different kind, and they're good programs, they're good, they don't, but in Maine they don't go far enough and we don't get the advantages of it. Because out west, a lot of those growers out there that grow potatoes also grow

soybeans and wheat and corn, and so they make pretty good money on those. Even the years that we're losing money on potatoes, they'll make money at those, and it works at a disadvantage to us.

**MH:** Do people, are potatoes – this may be a, sound silly, but – do we do anything with potatoes other than eat them?

**AR:** Well, that's interesting, because in the, down in Portland, or I think it's over in Falmouth somewhere, you have an alcohol plant, makes alcohol, vodka.

**MH:** Oh right, in Freeport.

**AR:** Yes, Thibodeau.

**MH:** Cold River or something.

**AR:** Cold River, and it's rated as one of the number one vodkas in the United States, and it's owned by Doctor Thibodeau, Lee Thibodeau, originally comes from Presque Isle, and that's the, he's the main stockholder in that company. So yes, they do make alcohol, it makes great alcohol.

**MH:** I mean, I never would have thought that we would be doing things with corn that we're doing, and I wondered if we were doing anything with potatoes.

**AR:** They are working some on now, some kind of a plastic, making some kind of biodegradable plastic out of potatoes, which would be a wonderful thing if they can get it, develop it, it's in the development stages now and the University of Maine is doing some work with different people on setting up development for it.

**MH:** What is the employment in potatoes in Aroostook County?

**AR:** Oh, my Lord. You know, there used to be, when I started farming with my dad, working for my dad, it was back, well this is when I was in high school, but back in the late '40s, there was a two-hundred thousand acres, a little over two-hundred thousand acres growing in the state of Maine, and now there's only about fifty-eight thousand in the whole state. That shows you the decline; it's been over, just cut right through. And so it doesn't have the economic impact it used to have, but it still is, money wise it brings in a lot of money up here. And it's a lot of work; it's a lot of work. And we got two processing plants in northern Maine that are doing pretty well.

**MH:** Now, where are they?

**AR:** One in Easton, this is the McCain plant, and there's one in Mars Hill which is a sort of a, makes hash browns and stuff like -



**MH:** Who owns that?

**AR:** That's owned by an outfit of Idaho. It was originally started by a group here in Maine and then it got into financial difficulty and the, oh, the family from Portland, Mrs. [Elizabeth B.] Noyce, her foundation stepped in, put management into -

**MH:** Libra Foundation, yeah.

**AR:** Yeah, Libra Foundation stepped into it, and they brought it back up to line and then they finally ended up selling it to them people from Idaho. But it's going very well right now, and they make a lot of hash browns and hash fries and stuff like that. A lot of red potatoes they -

**MH:** Do any Maine potatoes get turned into french fries for McDonald's?

**AR:** Yes, a lot of them do, there's a lot of them. And they make, at Easton, they make them up there out of our Shepody potato, and they supply the east coast.

**MH:** What kind of potato?

**AR:** Shepody.

**MH:** Shepody, okay. How many different kinds of potatoes are made in Maine?

**AR:** Oh, my Lord, there's thirty, forty. There's too many really sometimes. Some of them aren't too good eating, they don't taste so good, but some of them are better than others.

**MH:** How does, you have seed potatoes and you have table stock, right?

**AR:** Well, yes.

**MH:** How does Maine break down that way?

**AR:** Well, I don't know just what the breakdown is now, but a seed potato; any potato can be a seed potato. It's just dependent, a seed potato, it can go either table stock or french fries or seed, but we have so many varieties that sometimes some of them aren't quite as good as the other but they tend to get shipped out in table stock, and it's not a good situation. In the west, Idaho, they just have one variety, and they've had the Idaho russet, which is a very popular and a good eating potato.

**MH:** Now when Senator Mitchell was a senator and you were working with Steve Hart, what were the big issues, potato wise? I mean were they trade issues or were they disease issues, or?

**AR:** Mostly it was trade issues. And then there was issues of, we had some bad years crop

wise; we had some disasters – frost, too much rain – and overproduction. But probably one of the biggest ones that Mitchell worked on was the trade issues that we had, and he worked, he put a lot of work into that. And Steve Hart, of course, was his mainstay on that. He worked, he's a good man, Steve Hart is a good man, now works for the U.S. Forestry Service.

**MH:** So you've kept in contact with him.

**AR:** Oh yeah.

**MH:** Oh, that's great.

**AR:** And he does that, but he, Mitchell worked awful hard on the trade issues. But we couldn't, we just couldn't overcome the opposition to other states against us, the west didn't care, they would dominate the market and here was Maine stuck way up here in a corner, and it was difficult for us to (*unintelligible*).

**MH:** Who do the Maine growers consider to be their primary competition?

**AR:** Canada.

**MH:** Mainly Canada? It's not Idaho, it's, or Long Island, it's Canada.

**AR:** No, Canada. Idaho is somewhat, but Canada is the big one. See Canada, the province of New Brunswick and the province of Prince Edward Island grow huge acres, probably over, about three times what we do in the two provinces. And the government is so heavily involved in agriculture in those provinces that they help the farmers much more than ours. Many years when our growers over here would be taking a bath, they just lose their shirt, and the growers in Canada would all get bailed out by the federal government, it would step in and bail them out. And they were very, the Canadian government was much kinder to their people over there. And they use it, they use the programs such as this, to all different businesses make work. Anything that would make work for growers or anybody over there, they would put a lot of money into it to make work. Better than paying welfare.

**MH:** So were the Aroostook growers seeking an increase tariff on, on the potatoes?

**AR:** Yes.

**MH:** And did they succeed?

**AR:** No, no. And we had the, at that time we had the huge difference in the dollar, and the Canadian dollar was so much lower than ours and it was giving, the buyers could go to Canada and buy them and make money paying in U.S. dollars in Canada. And the potatoes are just the same, they grow the same varieties in Canada.

**MH:** Same disease problems.

**AR:** Same thing, no difference, exactly the same thing, Maine, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island basically all the same. With the exception that on Prince Edward Island they do grow a lot of nice red potatoes over there, bright red.

**MH:** Those are smaller?

**AR:** No, they're about the same, as big as ours, but their soil is bright red, the soil is so red over there, and when the potatoes grow they're red.

**MH:** What do you think the future for Maine agriculture is?

**AR:** Oh, it's going to level off to about where it is now. I don't think it can grow too awful much. And one of the big reasons is the tremendous cost. For example, right now fertilizer's pretty near \$1200 a ton, and back ten, twelve years ago it was probably \$400 a ton. And the costs are so heavily, you know, for everything, machinery.

**MH:** Why is fertilizer going up so?

**AR:** Because it's petroleum based. And the cost of machinery, you know a farm tractor that when I was farming, if I paid twenty thousand or twenty-five thousand for it I said, "Boy, that's expensive." Now it's seventy-five to a hundred thousand. And the potato harvester, you're paying close to a hundred thousand dollars for it. So it's just, it's so expensive now. And building the warehouses, it's difficult for people to get into it, and very difficult to make a profit.

**MH:** Two weeks ago, down near where I live, they held the Common Ground Fair. Has the organic food thing had an effect on the potato industry?

**AR:** No, I don't think it's had any. It wouldn't be anything but a positive effect, because it's made more people aware of the products and if they buy organic, well then it's been good. I think it's a, it's a niche market out there, and we have a lot of people within the state who are making a living at it, and boy, they work, they put their heart and soul into the business. But they do it, and all vegetables, potatoes, all different vegetables, and even some now are getting into the dairy end of it, organic milk, which is, it's just (*unintelligible*) because we was always taught (*sounds like*) milk unless it's pasteurized.

**MH:** I grew up in Maine as a child, in Waldo County, and my family would buy its vegetables from local farmers. I was very surprised to see, when I returned to Maine as an adult in the early '90s, how popular these local, the local market places and anything like that.

**AR:** Oh yes, little farmer markets.

**MH:** Yeah, farmer markets. Is that, will that ever be a -?

**AR:** Oh, that's, they're going to continue to grow.

**MH:** You think so.

**AR:** As more and more people look for the organic and look for more nutritional food. But during the Clinton administration that was a big, Gus Schumacher was one of the assistant secretaries of agriculture, and that was one of his big things. Gus was from Massachusetts, and his big niche there was getting involved in more organic farming and more organic farmers and having farmer markets, and he was a great supporter of that. Fact is, he came to Maine, in the picture over there when I was, I came up, I was with him, and we were holding a meeting, or a rally, down to the University of Maine. And it was a full house there and he was talking to them about the, doing this and organic farming and farming in general, and we spent about two or two-and-a-half hours at that meeting and he took answers, or took questions from the audience and gave them feedback. I moderated it. It was, he and the deputy commissioner were there from Washington, and this was his big push was organic farming.

**MH:** Can you, you said you started farming in the late '40s?

**AR:** Well, I started as a farmer when I was big enough to walk, on the farm, I was doing something on the farm.

**MH:** I guess I'm interested in you kind of reflecting on the differences between the, I mean we've had, Maine has had, well Cliff McIntire was, or John Reed was a potato farmer. Can you reflect on George Mitchell and how he was alike or different from some of the other politicians with regard to agriculture and (*unintelligible*)?

**AR:** George Mitchell was light-years ahead of the rest of those people. The Cliff McIntires and the John's were so ultrally damn conservative. And that was always one of our problems.

**MH:** How would that be expressed?

**AR:** They just didn't want to spend any money, they didn't want to go, push forward, they didn't want to, they couldn't think, everything was what it had been. And George Mitchell was always looking for ideas and trying to push farmers into doing something and thinking on their feet. Sometimes, see, that's one thing, one little problem he did have sometimes with farmers, because he was thinking ahead of them and they couldn't think as fast as he does. And I've been to a lot of meetings up in the County here where he'd, a lot of them, I'd take him to them, and he just, he was just thinking all the time for them to do this and do that, do that. But the other ones, back, Cliff McIntire was a nice man, and I knew Cliff quite well, but he's just an old fuddy-dud, from the day he was in college. And he didn't like to, they just didn't have any push. And they always waited to see, they always waited to see what the people back here were thinking before they said anything. And you know what, a good leader should stimulate ideas and stimulate thinking and get people discussing, and then you can bring them along and then you can do

what's best. But those people didn't, they weren't good leaders, no.

**MH:** So aside from yourself, who did George Mitchell look to for advice on farming issues?

**AR:** Oh, my Lord, he had quite a raft of people in the County up here that he'd go, that he would, he'd chat to. George, he had a lot of Republicans that he, he made sure, like Larry Devereau (*sounds like*), who's now passed away, and in Presque Isle, Paul Leblanc. He had a lot of people, he made sure that he reached out, that was part of his success up here. And he didn't stick to Democrats; he reached out to the Republicans. And I have been to some fund raisers up in Presque Isle, I had a good friend of mine, his name was Dan Greaves, who is now deceased, and he used to set up fund raisers up there for him, for George Mitchell, and bring in all the Republicans and they kicked in a lot of money. And they were very, very high on George Mitchell. But that was his success, he reached out to them, he kept reaching out and making it known that they were wanted, and he listened to them. That was the big thing, he listened. He listened. A lot of politicians don't listen. You know that. They like to talk and they like to hear what they say themselves. But that's not always good policy. George Mitchell could listen, and then he could say things that would, interject things that people wouldn't even realize what he was doing but he could interject things, he was so damned smart that he could interject things that would get people in discussion and would bring things out very quickly. He was a great man.

**MH:** Now he had an office in Presque Isle.

**AR:** Yes.

**MH:** And so he must have had some local staff people.

**AR:** He did, he did.

**MH:** Did you work with any of them?

**AR:** He did. Oh yes, Mary Leblanc up there. She now lives I think in the Augusta area, I believe. And he had a lady by the name of Marcia Gartley. Oh, you'll probably talk to Marcia, will you?

**MH:** I have, yes.

**AR:** And they ran his office there in Presque Isle, did a fantastic job. And then of course he had his office in Bangor and he had Clyde McDonald who, Clyde and I have stayed in pretty close touch too. Fact is, I went to a dinner with him, oh, last fall I guess it was. Nice fella, one of the best.

**MH:** Yeah, Clyde seemed to enjoy his trips with, driving the Senator to Aroostook County.

**AR:** Oh, Clyde used to love that. Several times Clyde has brought him to maybe Island Falls or something like that and I'd pick up, or my wife would and, to take him up. There were several times that the Senator would come to the house and, he'd be between speaking engagements and he'd go up and stay here with us. And my wife would, people would call and she'd be making sure that she got all his messages but nobody bothered him. He'd go up and wash up and rest up and then we'd take him to the next meeting, and probably Mary Leblanc or somebody up there would be taking him from there. But we were kind of an interim mover of him earlier. Used to be a lot of fun to do that.

**MH:** The Senator held many public meetings I guess in Aroostook County, did all around the state.

**AR:** All around the state.

**MH:** Are there any that you remember that are particularly memorable?

**AR:** No, they were all, no, I don't have any real, anything like that. But he had some great meetings, I know that. And as I already said, when it would get quiet and nobody would, he knew how to get things going. He had a mind, God what I wouldn't give to have his mind. But he could reach out and somebody, just say something and get somebody started, and they was just wonderful meetings he had.

**MH:** What do you think of the things that he's done -?

**AR:** He would have made a great president.

**MH:** You think so?

**AR:** Absolutely. I think it was a big mistake, fact is I had a button, that some of us had, that said 'Mitchell for President.'

**MH:** I have one of those as well.

**AR:** You have one too, yeah.

**MH:** A question I have is, what do you think of the things he's done since he left the Senate?

**AR:** It's been very interesting. His deal in Ireland to me was fantastic, what he did, been great. And again, another thing I'm glad he's done, he got out and made some money for himself, which was of primary importance then. He remarried and it seems to be a great marriage, got a couple young kids, and he's making some money, and that's what he needed to do.

**MH:** Well this has been great. Now you had, I think before we turned the tape on you were

telling me you have a connection with Washington even today. What is that?

**AR:** Oh yes, I do. My daughter, Elizabeth.

**MH:** What does she do?

**AR:** She's the director of U.S. Senate Page Program.

**MH:** And how long has she been doing that?

**AR:** She's been doing it now going on, oh, sixteen years. She went down, Mary McAleney brought her down to work in the, just as a staffer to work -

**MH:** The Senator's chief of staff, Mary McAleney.

**AR:** Yes, but just to do anything, and maybe run elevators. She didn't know what she was going to do. But she worked with, she'd worked with Elizabeth on that election, when Carter was elected, Clinton, sorry, when Clinton was elected, and she liked -

**MH:** Your daughter's name is Elizabeth?

**AR:** My daughter's name is Elizabeth, and she worked with Mary McAleney in Portland, when she was at the University of Maine. But anyway, she, and Mary and Elizabeth hit it off great and so when the inauguration was over she brought Elizabeth down, she said, "Why don't you come down? You're not, you haven't got anything particular to do," and she said, "now you'll work in my office for me here." So when she went down there - this is a funny story, I think it is - she went down and went to work for Mary, the Senate Placement Office, you know where that is. Well the first thing that Mary McAleney did, she sent Elizabeth over to the Senate Placement Office to get her all checked in, get her withholdings and all that sort of thing.

Well the lady in charge, I've forgotten now what her name is but, at the time was working there, but anyway she called Mary up and she said, "Mary, you've sent a young lady over here from your office to get, she's going to go to work for you up there." And Mary said, "Yeah, Elizabeth, that's right." She said, "Well, what, do you have plans for her, what are you going to do with her?" And Mary said, "I really don't have anything right at the minute, she's going to work here from my office and she's doing anything I need to do, because if she can do anything she'll do it." And the lady said, "Well would you mind if we left her right here working in the Senate Placement Office?" And Mary was stunned and she said, "Well, my Lord, do you know her father or do you know somebody, is it the Senator?" "No," the woman said, "I don't know any of the family; I don't know anything about them." Then she said, "I just met her and started reading her resume, and she said that she was born and grew up on a potato farm in northern Maine." And she says, "You know, I'm having such a problem in my area here getting people who will really work, I can depend on and will work and not looking at the clock all the time." She said, "I bet if that kid worked on a potato farm she's willing to work, and I need somebody

desperately.”

So Mary said, “Sure, if she’ll go to work for you.” Well, she went to work at the Placement Office and they liked her so well that they said, “Well we’re not going to let her go back to you, Mary,” and they kept her right there and worked in the Senate Placement Office. And then they were doing that new Senate program, the pages, and using what they call Webster Hall, which we were talking about a minute ago, which at one time had been an old funeral home, and building it over and making it a whole school and residence and everything else.

**MH:** Webster Hall is across the street from the Hart Building.

**AR:** The Hart, just up -

**MH:** Right, where the Senate pages live.

**AR:** Yes, that’s where the Senate pages live, and they go to school there, they go to school, and she has a staff of about, oh, ten or twelve I guess, plus some of the pages. But anyway, they asked her if she could put together some sort of a curriculum for the school and what they need to be doing and set it up. She said, “Yup, I will.” So she went to work for them and did that and had it all ready when the building opened and they started putting the pages in. Well they didn’t have anybody then to do it, so they came to Elizabeth, the president of the Senate, and said, “Well can you go do this job? Will you go up and start it?” And Elizabeth said, “Yeah, I’ll go over.” So she went over and implemented the program.

Well they, I guess, are pretty pleased with her because evidently she did such a good job that they asked her to stay as the director of the program. And so she went to work under George Mitchell, she worked under Bob Dole, then she went under Trent Lott, and now she’s there under (*unintelligible*), so she’s had quite an experience.

**MH:** That’s wonderful. It’s a big responsibility having, with all those young people. Do you know how many pages there are now?

**AR:** Around forty. Well see, they have to go to school.

**MH:** And they run it separately from the ones that are on the House side.

**AR:** Oh yes, altogether separate. House has had a lot of problems, but so far the Senate has been great. But they run a tight ship, because you know, you get kids in there, between their junior and senior year, and there’s a thing called hormones, and it’s pretty hard to control hormones when the kids get away from home, I don’t care how good they’re brought up.

**MH:** Let me ask you, speaking of young people and education, does Island Falls have a high school?



**AR:** We have one high school in the area, it's Southern Aroostook, it's between here and Island Falls.

**MH:** So there have been some Mitchell Scholars go through there?

**AR:** Oh yes, there has. And as I say, Mitchell has spoken over there a couple times, and a couple times my wife Joyce has gone over there and spoke in his behalf.

**MH:** Well, you know, at these interviews we always ask if there's any story or any, something you'd like to say about the Senator that I haven't asked a question for. Any thoughts on that line?

**AR:** Just that he was a great senator. You know, I've met a lot of politicians, I've met a lot of them, I'm very privileged to have met many of them. He's probably, is the best politician that we've ever had, and I, geez, I felt so bad when he – but my wife was so happy that she pretty near cried, because she thought it was good for him to get out of the Senate – but I know what Maine's loss was, when we lost George Mitchell from the Senate, because he commanded such power. And Maine was getting its due. Anything he wanted, like even myself, being a Mitchell person in the Department of Agriculture, when I wanted something I'd go up and, boy, it was just like that, it was done. And other people in the government who were from Maine were the same way. It made a big difference with George Mitchell being there. He was a great, great-great man, and it was a big loss when we lost him from the political, representing the state of Maine. But I think that for himself it probably, it's probably been good, because the last time I saw him was at a meeting in Bangor and I know that my wife had – my wife passed away two years ago, it was after that, and George come over, spent quite a bit of time with me talking about my wife, and I thought he looked awful good. I thought he looked better than he did when he was in the Senate.

**MH:** Well thank you very much, this has been great and I, if you have any other stories that you may recall, feel free to let me know or let Andrea know, because we want to make sure that the -

**AR:** They're all in there.

**MH:** The record is complete.

**AR:** I might think of something, but I don't know of any - George was – I worked with Ed Muskie a lot and I traveled with Ed a lot too – but with George, Ed would fool around or joke a little and different things, but George Mitchell was always pretty much all business. And he didn't, he was always, you could see his mind working all the time. And there wasn't much, there wasn't many stories. He didn't drink any or carouse any or anything like that, like some politicians do, and he was just a good man. I remember Ed Muskie, one thing he always used to say, "Well never go by a bathroom because you never know when you're going to need it." Now I've found how true that statement is. The older I get I found the more true it is.

**MH:** Well thank you very much, Mr. Roach, we appreciate you taking this time.

End of Interview