

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

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**Gary Myrick**  
(Interviewer: *Brien Williams*)

**GMOH# 222**  
June 3, 2010

**Brien Williams:** This is an oral history interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College with Gary Myrick, chief of staff to the Senate majority leader, Senator Harry Reid. We are in the majority leader's offices in the U.S. Capitol Building, today is Thursday, June 3, 2010, and I am Brien Williams. Bowdoin asks me to ask everyone to give their full name and spelling.

**Gary Myrick:** Gary Blendon Myrick, G-A-R-Y, Blendon, B-L-E-N-D-O-N, Myrick, M-Y-R-I-C-K.

**BW:** And your date and place of birth?

**GM:** 7/20/67, Dover-Foxcroft, Maine.

**BW:** And your parents' names?

**GM:** Carol Myrick and Warren Myrick.

**BW:** Tell me a little bit about your family background, just to give us some context here.

**GM:** Both parents were teachers, my father taught history at Piscataquis Community High School his whole career, my mother taught fourth grade at various schools in and around Guilford, Maine.

**BW:** And what about your own educational background?

**GM:** I went to the University of Maine and then, after I came down here, I went to law school at the American University at night.

**BW:** And reading about you, I learned that you [took a semester off from] college in your last year, last semester I think. What was the motivation for that?

**GM:** I [took a semester off] to go work in Augusta, Maine, as a page in the legislature, and picked up credits there to graduate.

**BW:** Which house did you work in?

**GM:** I worked in the Senate.

**BW:** And then what steps brought you to Washington?

**GM:** That was a first step. I knew I wanted to go to law school, so I worked as a page in the Maine state Senate and then, in an attempt to boost my chances of getting into law school, I applied for an internship in Washington with Senator Mitchell.

**BW:** And what role did you play during the internship?

**GM:** I was mostly in the mail room, and answered phones, did some letters.

**BW:** The typical.

**GM:** Yes, typical internship. But probably the best part about the internship is, I spent a lot of time with the office manager, there was an archiving project going on, and got to know her pretty well, and spent a lot of time during my internship in the attic of the Russell Building working through boxes and moving things around.

**BW:** Were those Mitchell papers, or were they Muskie?

**GM:** They were Mitchell papers.

**BW:** I guess Muskie was well long gone by then.

**GM:** He was gone, not by a long ways, but he was gone. Some of the staff, early, I won't remember their names, but some worked for Muskie and then continued on with Mitchell.

**BW:** Was it Donna Beck that you were working with?

**GM:** Yes.

**BW:** So you came on board then in '90 as a staff person, how did you get there?

**GM:** I did the internship, I went home at Christmas and worked back in the state legislature again, that time as a committee clerk for the Labor and – whatever the Labor Committee is in the state legislature. The committee system is set up bicameral, so there are House and Senate members, and I was a committee clerk for them when I went back up. And then toward the end of that – that was a short session so I won't get it exactly right, but sometime around Christmas through Easter – and then toward the end of that session there was an opening back here to be a staff assistant for Senator Mitchell and Donna called and asked if I wanted the job.

**BW:** So you must have impressed her.

**GM:** I spent a lot of time in the attic, moving boxes. I think that's really the key, was being willing to do whatever they asked, as an intern. It's a three- or four-month, if you do it for a school semester it was September through Christmas, whatever that is, three-, four-, five-, four-month job interview.

**BW:** Right, and then what was your role when you got back?

**GM:** Answering phones in the front office. I answered phones from April, May, June, July, something like that, I won't get the dates exactly right, so I answered phones over there. Probably the hardest job I've ever had in my life was answering phones for the majority leader in the personal office. I talked to Donna, there was an opening coming up over in the Leader's Office, and I thought I'd like to try something different. I still thought I'd go to law school at some point, so I wanted to do as many things as I could. So sometime around July I moved from the personal office over to the Leader's Office and answered phones over here for, I'm not sure how long, three or four months, four or five months.

**BW:** And was that as hard as answering the phone in the [personal office]?

**GM:** It was much better, you had a much better sense of how the place works, the people that come through, and from that position I met people and when an opening came up over in the Cloakroom, they asked me if I wanted to do that.

**BW:** And so you went there in '90 or '91, I suppose.

**GM:** Something like that, but I wasn't in the front office here for a long time.

**BW:** Well, the dates are not important. Describe the Cloakroom.

**GM:** The Cloakroom's a place off the floor. It's evolved. When I went in there, there were no computers, no Blackberries, maybe one computer that we shared, and it was the place where everybody called to find out what was going on on the floor. It's a little different now that everyone has a Blackberry. Before, if you wanted to know what was going on on the floor, you called the Cloakroom, and through that process you learned floor procedure and you learned the people, and because the Senate schedule is varies so much, the only way that people would find out about what was going on was by calling the Cloakroom. So you learn a lot pretty quickly about how the place works and who the people are, and you develop relationships with different senators on a different level because you're not their employee, you're someone who helps them figure out how to plan their lives, so you develop a little different relationship with them than you do with a direct employee in a personal office.

**BW:** And how many staff people typically are in the Cloakroom?

**GM:** Four people work behind the desk, it's sort of a hazing process because the phones rang

constantly, all the time, and you were at your desk every minute while the Senate was in session. So four people behind the desk, and then there's a floor staff, and then the secretary for the majority or minority sort of runs the Cloakroom and floor staff.

**BW:** And there must have been a fairly steep learning curve for you at the start.

**GM:** Pretty quick, there are four people so you have older people who have been there for a while that teach you the ropes, and you pick up as much as you can. And early on, the assistant secretary for the majority at that point said, "If you pay attention you'll learn the Senate rules," and I took that to heart and paid attention and tried to learn as much as I could while I was there. I'd been there for – I won't get these dates right either – but '91, I think from '91 to '95. In '91 I applied to law school and started going to school at night at American [University], so I spent I want to say a year or so just in the Cloakroom, and then four years going to law school, out of the Cloakroom. So you'd come in and work the day, leave around five or five thirty, go to school, and then come back after school and finish up the day in the Cloakroom.

**BW:** Wow, so what time would you get back?

**GM:** I'd get back when, classes were either six to eight, or six to ten, usually six to eight, four days a week, so I'd come back around eight or eight thirty. And back then more than now, the way the week would develop is, you'd be in Mondays, often you'd be out Fridays and Mondays, and you'd be Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Thursday would be a late night almost every week, so Thursday it was almost guaranteed that you had to come back from school. If there were votes on Tuesday or Wednesday I'd come back, then Thursday night you'd be here till they got done.

**BW:** Was there any particular person that sort of mentored you as you grew into that job, or not?

**GM:** Not really, there were older staff who'd been in the Cloakroom and you work and live within ten feet of three other people, so you get to know them and they get to know you, and there's no hiding back there, you're sort of living wide open.

**BW:** You must have some vivid memories of your time in the Cloakroom.

**GM:** Yes. It was different then, because now everybody has a Blackberry and most of the stuff is done through e-mail and it's a lot less phone center. The phones still ring a lot. But I have some really good close friends that work together in the Cloakroom, because you can't explain it, it's a hard job to explain to people, but the people who have done it, there's sort of a connection.

**BW:** Can you attempt to describe it, or have you described it fully?

**GM:** I think I've described it about as well as I can, but the key though is that you learn how

the Senate works, and it's more of a weather forecasting job than a, it's more feel than science, and after a while you develop a rhythm of how the Senate works and how the interactions are going to happen, and who the people are.

**BW:** And you probably learn to address certain members in different ways based upon their personalities and so forth, would that be true?

**GM:** You do, and you also, like I said, develop a different relationship with them because you're not their staff, you're someone who helps them do stuff, not someone who's asking them for stuff, and it's a big difference, so they are more open. The Cloakroom never gets in the newspaper – what's said in there stays in there, more so then than now. So senators used the Cloakroom to negotiate, to lobby each other on things, and they felt pretty comfortable telling us whatever they wanted because they knew it would never get in the paper. So they were more relaxed in there, and you developed relationships with them that are different than you would if you were working directly for them.

**BW:** This is a side question, but I'm just curious. Have you ever entered the Republican Cloakroom?

**GM:** Yes, the same camaraderie among Democratic Cloakroom is evident with the Republican Cloakroom, and more so then than now, I think. You're doing the same job, just for a different party. And it doesn't really tend to lean toward partisanship at that level, because you're all just trying to survive. So I've developed some of my best friendships in the Senate with people who work in the Republican Cloakroom, because you're doing the same thing and after a while the true believer in you is beaten out, so there's not a lot of that that occurs in the Cloakroom.

**BW:** You mean by true believer, your party politics.

**GM:** Your party politics. I've described it a couple different ways, that it's like the coyote and the sheepdog, where you fight like hell all day, but at five o'clock the whistle blows and you go have a beer or go play golf or something with the Republicans, and they represent their interests, and we represent, more so in the job sense, being in the Cloakroom, but they represent their interests, you represent your interests, and nothing's personal.

*(Pause in taping)*

**BW:** All right, after that break in the interview, I thought I'd ask you, Gary, what was it like to work for George Mitchell in the Cloakroom, or the whole time you worked with him?

**GM:** I was pretty young. I don't know the age exactly, and my relationship with him was a lot different than the relationship I had with Daschle and Reid, so it's more of as a much more distant observer with Mitchell, because I was so young and because my position was so junior. But I did see him from sitting in the Cloakroom, I followed him because I was from Maine so I

knew him through that growing up. When he ran for governor I was very young but, when he ran for governor, and then I'm not sure how old I was when he became a senator, and then I came in '89 I think just after, I think it was '88 when he became leader, so I came just after that, so he'd been here for a while.

I think if you asked me more specific questions I can be more specific, but I watched him as leader and know more about his leadership now that I've been here for another fifteen years watching two other leaders do the same job. He was much more, I think in the model of Byrd, as a transition from Byrd to Daschle and now to Reid. I think he was a transitional figure that came in between Byrd, who – I wasn't here when he was leader but the people that I worked with in the Cloakroom were here under him – who was a much more unitary, I think, leader, where the decision was completely from the top. And then Mitchell as a transition, I think, where more diffuse leadership, and then it became more under Daschle diffuse, and then even more under Reid. But he is sort of the transition between Byrd being unitary to Reid being much more spreading out the leadership responsibilities among members. I'm not sure if I'm saying that in a way that makes any sense to anyone, but he -

**BW:** What was his modus operandi as leader?

**GM:** He always knew more than anybody else about everything that was going on, and I think people saw that in a room. And I think one thing that we've gone back to is a little more, when Mitchell was leader I think there was a lot more power in the chairmanships, and I think that went down some during Daschle, and that has gone up a little bit during Reid, that a lot of the power was held by chairmen. I think there's a balance between that and a transition to message-driven politics that we're in now, than we were ten, fifteen years ago.

**BW:** Did he spend much time in the Cloakroom?

**GM:** Some, not a whole lot. He would be in there negotiating a lot of times with other members, trying to get through agreements to get things on and off the floor. There was a lot more push back then, there was a lot fewer clotures and a lot fewer hand-to-hand combat, it was mostly cooperation to get consent agreements put together in a way that you could get something done late on a Thursday night, that would set you up for Friday, Monday, Tuesday of the next week. Like I said before, the way it worked, and worked well I think back then was, you'd take up a bill and you'd work up to Thursday night, and then you'd keep people here, and in exchange for being out on Friday and/or Monday, you'd get a deal, have a bunch of votes, get something done, put it in the bank and move on to the next week and have Mondays and Fridays off.

After Mitchell left, there was a sort of a transition, and through Trent Lott there were much more even days where you'd be done at six o'clock but you'd more likely be in on a Friday and Monday, and there wasn't that buildup to Thursday night where a lot of action would happen on Thursday night and get out of town. He used the carrot and the stick, much more the carrot than the stick, but the carrot of being out on Fridays and Mondays, to get things done.

I've always felt that with Senate members, the most important thing to them is time, and if they can have time, they'll do almost anything, and Fridays and Mondays are time where they could be either not tied to the floor, be able to do meetings or be back in their home states. I think nobody did that more effectively than Mitchell [ ], give members time in exchange for agreements on getting things done. Reid has done that more recently. There was some time in the middle that we were in five days a week, and if people are going to be here anyway five days a week, they're less likely to cut a deal. As far as the floor goes, it's sort of inside baseball, but I think it's true.

**BW:** If Mitchell wanted to conference with Senator Dole as the minority leader, where would that take place?

**GM:** I was just saying this today, I think sometimes it would happen in the Cloakroom, but Dole has a great quote where he always went to other people's offices to meet no matter what, because then you can leave whenever you want. If the meetings are in your office, you can't finish the meeting until the person who's there leaves. And I always thought that was funny. I've followed that, that whenever I have a meeting I try to go someplace, so when I want to leave I can get up and go. And I think that was the Dole m.o.

**BW:** So Republicans sometimes did come into the Democratic Cloakroom and vice versa.

**GM:** Absolutely, and it goes back to what I said about it being a place where conversations were off the record, and it was the highest level of lobbying where very few staff, only the staff that worked in there were allowed in there, so senators unencumbered by staff could negotiate as senators rather than having to negotiate for the press or for their staffs or other things.

**BW:** Did you sign an agreement when you went to work in the Cloakroom?

**GM:** It was unwritten that you just, you benefitted by the access, by knowing what was going on, and it wasn't in your interest to be in the press. Plus, those jobs are best done by people who want to be behind the scenes, and that's sort of the people that ended up being there for long periods of time, were people who weren't interested in talking to the press. Because as soon as you talk to the press, your value as an information giver is done, because it's always skewed by you looking for something. And that just wasn't the way it was done. That's sort of the model that I found when I went in there, that the people who survive are the ones who are happy to be behind the scenes, and the ones who were show horses quickly realized that wasn't the job for them and moved on.

**BW:** Did you stay in the Cloakroom for the whole time that Mitchell -?

**GM:** Yes, I did, I was in law school, it was '94 when he left, '93 [*sic*: March 1994] I think he made the announcement, so I was in law school, and luckily when a new leader comes in they have enough other things to worry about that they don't worry about [replacing people in] the Cloakroom. So a lot of the staff from Byrd stayed in with Mitchell, I'm pretty sure I was the first

Maine person to go into the Cloakroom, and then when Daschle came in the same crew stayed on. And then there was a transition where people from South Dakota would go into the Cloakroom, and the same thing has happened with Senator Reid, that I was part of, where there are enough other things to worry about when you become a new leader, not to mess with things that the senators feel comfortable with and understand, so you leave the Cloakroom where it is, and just through attrition you can replace people. And that's how I went in there with Mitchell.

**BW:** Describe what you consider Mitchell's strengths as leader, where was he really effective?

**GM:** He was as [great] an off-the-cuff speaker, [debater] on the floor, as anybody I've ever seen through all of the senators who have come through here. Never a show horse. And in my experience, always knew more about every issue than every other senator.

**BW:** Did he have any weaknesses?

**GM:** Let's go back to that. I'd have to think about that for a while.

**BW:** Did you as the -

**GM:** I'll do the weakness part, and I don't think it's a valid criticism but I'll give you a criticism that was made, and it may have just been preening for the new leader. But when Mitchell left, I heard some senators say that – and Daschle reacted to this – say that there was not enough spreading of the leadership responsibilities among the other members. And that goes back to what I said, and I've only thought about this since we started this conversation. There was some criticism of everything being run out of the Leader's Office, that there was a lot of talent in the caucus and it wasn't spread out as much to get the most out of the other members, because things ran out of this office. And I think that goes to maybe a transition in time, where we were as a country, but a transition from Byrd that I think everything ran out of the Leader's Office, to now, with Reid where it's pretty diffuse.

**BW:** Of course, I guess that's a common challenge for a leader in either party at any time, so-called herding cats.

**GM:** Yes.

**BW:** I mean, it's in the nature of the Senate I think for people to be somewhat independent, wouldn't you say?

**GM:** Yes, absolutely, absolutely.

**BW:** Did the staff in the Cloakroom ever then, on a regular basis or ever, meet with the leader to strategize things and whatnot?



**GM:** We were pretty junior, there was not a strategy thing. We would pick up what was going on and make sure other people knew what was going on. There was some transition after I was in the Cloakroom and finished with law school, when Daschle was leader, I went on the floor staff and, not so much as floor staff but as the secretary for the majority, or the minority, our bosses would carry out that strategizing, the floor strategy stuff, and that's where that took place.

**BW:** Do you recall any what you consider major triumphs of Mitchell's as leader?

**GM:** It seems to me like Clean Air was before I came, but I came just in the aftermath of that, but it was clear that that was the transition from old to new. Because Mitchell took on Byrd directly, I think, or at least that's the sense I got, and it was a transition from the old leadership to Mitchell in the new leadership. And I think he would say that that was his legislative accomplishment. The second thing is going, the transition from Bush One to Clinton, and him carrying out President Clinton's first two-year agenda. Not many people talk about this, but there are a lot of different dynamics between the White House, the Senate, and the House, and it all changes when the Senate and House are Republican with a Democratic president, the Senate is Republican, the House is Democratic with a Republican president, all of those dynamics change the nature of the job. And he went from – and it repeats itself – and he went from being the first Bush's opponent in the Senate, and then transitioned into trying to help a first-term Democratic president get things through the Senate in his last two years. And I think he would say that was the most difficult time, was a new Democratic president and being responsible for trying to move his agenda through the Senate.

It's the same transition that Senator Reid has gone through over the last four years. He became leader six years ago, and then for the first two years, deep in the minority with a relatively popular first-term president, and then the last two years, being the opposition to George W. Bush, and then the transition now to having to work through the agenda of a first-term Democratic president. And those two things line up in my mind: I see similarities between Reid and Mitchell in those two things, going from opposing the first and second Bush, to trying to pass the agenda of the first Clinton term and the first two years of the Obama term. Those jobs are, it's the same job through all of this, but they're completely different.

**BW:** What is in the nature of the first two years of a Democratic administration that is at issue here?

**GM:** It's like you said, herding cats, but now you're responsible for passing an agenda of an ambitious first-term president, and it adds a whole new dynamic. The Senate's built for stopping things from getting done, it's not designed for getting things done. And to get things done is an incredible amount of work, just hand-to-hand work. And I saw that in Mitchell. Nobody's happier than when a president of your party is elected, no one has a more difficult job the day after that president is elected than the majority leader of the Senate. And that is something that I've seen two different ways, one when I was young, working in the Cloakroom, under a different dynamic, the 24-hour news cycle. We just had CNN, you didn't have what we have now, so it's a different dynamic, but I've seen it once when Mitchell had to do it under the old

system, transitioning, and then now with Reid doing it at a senior level, with the 24-hour news cycle. And all leaders go through the same things, just at a different level.

**BW:** Is part of the difficulty that a new administration is not very skilled at working with the Congress, or not?

**GM:** I'm not, I can't say with any authority the Clinton White House. I know that this White House has worked very hard to hire people who have legislative experience, and they've been through the wars up here, and have, in my view, I think have a pretty good idea of what it takes. Even if the president was only here for a short time, he was here. Clinton obviously wasn't here, and I think they're better equipped for it I think than the Clinton administration. But I wasn't old enough to really know that, but I think that's probably accurate.

**BW:** Were you surprised when George Mitchell announced his retirement?

**GM:** No, and this is the one story that I thought of when I was asked to do this oral history, because I was in the Cloakroom and going to school at night, I'd come back on Thursday nights, like I said, and this was before 9/11 and before leaders had security details, and so I would always be here late on Thursday nights. And they would send the driver home, and then I would drive Senator Mitchell home one, two nights a week, because I'd stay around afterwards and let everybody else in the Cloakroom go, because I had left for law school. Plus I was from Maine, I didn't mind doing it.

So there was a car, and I would pick up, we'd wait till all of his meetings were done, and then I would drive him the two or three blocks to his house over on C Street. And he knew I was from Maine and we talked a little bit about, not a lot, and neither of us are especially chatty, especially at midnight or whenever it was. But I remember specifically one night, he resigned in April, I'm pretty sure, or announced his resignation in April, and it was before that. And I'm not sure what was going on, but we were here late, and I asked him if he was having any fun and he said, "No, it's really not that much fun." And that was in January, February, March, whatever it was, a few months before he announced his retirement. And I knew he wasn't having any fun, and it was clear that at some point this job just becomes a drag.

And so, anyway, we had that conversation. I've never said that to anybody, I don't think, and then it was April whatever it is, 4th or 5th or something like that, where he announced that he was retiring. And I instantly thought of the, 'it's just not that much fun anymore.' These jobs - I think being a senator could be a great job, I'm not sure being majority leader - it has its great parts but it's also a very, very, very lonely job, where you have all the responsibility and none of the tools to actually get [the job] done except for sheer will and hard work. And after a time, it will drag you down.

**BW:** Were you witness to any episodes or anything in the Cloakroom where he really showed frustration?

**GM:** No, never, not once, and I don't see it, I didn't see it in Senator Daschle that much, although I wasn't as close to him, and I don't see it in the Cloakroom with Senator Reid. They're very similar. I think the job forces you to have similar traits, but I think the people who have the jobs have similar traits, too. They're always accomplished politicians, but they also have a game face; they do what has to [be] done.

**BW:** So explore a little bit more that collection of traits that work well for that office.

**GM:** I don't know if this is by coincidence, but the last four leaders – and I could go back further – but Byrd, Mitchell, Daschle, and Reid all are relatively small-state senators, self-made, not through some kind of political history, they're all self-made, they all worked hard. I think they all have been underestimated throughout their lives, and there's sort of a similarity, I see a huge similarity between Mitchell and Reid in that both of them were never given anything and worked for every scrap that they got. I think that helps them in this job, that they're - It's said about a lot of organizations, but ninety percent of the work is done by ten percent of the people, and I think that's even more so in the Senate where you can be a senator, if you're in a state that's not difficult, it's a pretty easy job, or you can be a senator and take on leadership responsibilities, and it's hard work. And I see that in both, especially both Mitchell and Reid. Mitchell and Daschle too, and then Byrd is his own story, but the same, you know, up from nothing, no one was going to outwork Senator Byrd, no one was going to outwork Mitchell, and I've never seen anybody work as hard as Senator Reid. I don't think I ever will see anybody work as hard as he does.

**BW:** Some people have said that one of the reasons Mitchell was able to be so devoted to the job was because he really didn't have any family life at the time he was leader. I gather that Senator Reid is able to handle both.

**GM:** He is. He has. I've been here for twenty years and I've met probably hundreds of Senate spouses, and I've never met one any – it's the wrong word – but any better than Mrs. Reid, because she's great, doesn't [interfere] with the office, lets him do what he has to do, I've never heard her complain. I think you need someone like that to be able to do this job, because when everybody else is gone home on Thursday after the last vote, he's here for another two hours making phone calls, he's here on Fridays and Mondays, it's an all-consuming job that is twenty hours a day, twenty-four hours a day, and he has been blessed with a wife who allows him to do what has to be done.

Mitchell didn't have that, so he was able to do what had to be done. I know he had a good relationship with his first wife, and had some knowledge of them being friends after he came here, when I was an intern, stuff like that, but didn't have that pressure, so that it was okay for him to be here at eleven o'clock. It's hard to explain these jobs, but I can understand, so I think – that's my answer to that question, but the other thing I would say is, Mitchell would be here working through stuff. Actually when I was answering phones in the front was during the Andrews Air Force Base budget summit stuff, and they'd come back and he was here and back and forth to Andrews, and then over to the speaker's office, and back and forth and was working

harder than I'd ever seen anybody work. I was always amazed, at that age, when I'd see a schedule and it was broken into fifteen or twenty minute blocks all day long. So he was working very hard.

And I remember driving him home and dropping him off at his house and him not having someone to explain what was going on, you know, it seemed lonely, when I'd drop him off and there was no one for him to tell what he had done that day. And I don't know if that's come through in any other interviews, but I had that sense, because even if you have a spouse here these jobs are almost impossible to explain. When I try to explain a day to my wife it's a struggle, but I still try. And he didn't have that outlet, so it seems like a lonely job, and so it didn't surprise me when he announced his retirement.

**BW:** A lot of people have talked about the leader having to spend so much time doing scheduling. Is that something that a leader does pretty much on their own, a little spreadsheet and works things out, or is that a staff function more so?

**GM:** Two different scheduling, one scheduling is what he does day-to-day on his life. The other scheduling that I'm more familiar with is the floor scheduling, where you pick what comes up and how you're going to get it done and what's the next thing, and how you line things up, and how all the airplanes are going to come in for a landing without crashing. That, I think, every leader has to deal with. It's a lot of what the leader does, is lining things up in a way that you think you can get them done, and follow the calendar that you're given, knowing what the Republicans are going to do, that part of scheduling, that's a big part of the leader's job, is floor scheduling. As far as his personal schedule, it's just split between state and national, and a lot of it filters up and then they usually get the final sign off on what they're doing. But I've seen schedules for three different leaders, and they're always ridiculous, and they're always early in the morning till late at night, especially when they're in cycle. And they have to have people that they rely on in each area of their life that they can trust, so that they know that they're not doing things that they don't need to be doing, so that they can focus on what they have to do. They all have to be multitaskers to be able to balance everything.

**BW:** So if a senator knows that he needs to be in his home state on a particular day, but wants to vote on a particular bill, does he communicate that to the leader, or to some staff person to say, you know -?

**GM:** Both, and part of that would be the job of the floor staff and the secretary for the minority and majority, and then if it's important they may communicate that directly to the leader. I'm more familiar with that. We used to do scheduling day by day, where members would be out. When I first started I'm pretty sure that honoraria was still going on, where members would be downtown giving speeches, and that transition happened in the early '90s I think, away from that. But that's another thing, you have to schedule members, not only do they need to be in their states, but they need to be at dinners or at breakfasts or at lunches, or meetings in the administration with the White House, or committee meetings. And all of that scheduling has to happen on a daily basis to make sure that your votes are here when you have votes, and

then each night there's a scheduling, and then the weeks are scheduled and then it's a constant balancing of ninety-nine other members who all have competing [schedules], and you are in a constant state of disappointing someone, which actually is the nature of the job, too.

**BW:** Characterize the nature of the transition, then, from Mitchell to Daschle, was that a smooth, did it involve a lot of different changes and so forth?

**GM:** With Mitchell announcing his retirement in April, or whenever the date was, it seems to be April [*sic*: March], then there was a race for leader that started that next day, and Wendell Ford was the whip at that point, and he relatively quickly decided not to run for leader, but I'm sure he made a dozen phone calls first to test the waters. And then he either stepped down from running, or it played out for a while, and then Jim Sasser was going to win, he was going to run for leader and win. We have a person here who worked for him back then, and I may not get this exactly right but it'll be close enough, he was a Budget chairman, and was the one [whose job it was to get] through the Clinton budget in '93, '92 or '93, by one vote with Gore breaking the tie, and getting that budget through, that some people will argue set up the '94 elections. And so he ran, I think he was the odds-on favorite to become the next leader. And then Bill Frist ran against him and beat him.

So I think there were other people thinking about running, but not aggressively because I think they thought that Sasser had it locked up. And then when Frist beat him and there was a big loss of seats, we went from majority down to the minority. There was a battle between Dodd and Daschle – and I won't get this right either – but I know it's the last time Mitchell had a fight in the Caucus, a real campaign and vote against Senator Inouye for leadership, and then Daschle and Dodd ran and there were two ballots, and Ben Nighthorse Campbell broke the tie and then became a Republican, and so Daschle won in a close fought battle, and then he was leader for ten years.

**BW:** And it was during his ten years that you moved out onto the floor.

**GM:** Right, I was in law school, I graduated law school, and then an opening came up on the floor staff and they offered me the job. I always thought when I was going to law school that: I had been in Washington, I would get my law degree and then go back to Maine and find a job – and I never thought I would stay here. But then one thing leads to another, and a job opened up on the floor and I thought I'd do it for a while, and so I took the floor staff job under Daschle which was good, because that was a job that I got on my own, not because I was from Maine but because I had been in the Cloakroom and people trusted me. So I was on the floor staff until I started with Senator Reid, so I don't how many years that is, four or five, five or six years.

**BW:** According to my notes, you went to join Reid's staff in '03.

**GM:** Is that right? Yes, that's probably right.

**BW:** So you were '95 to '03, you were on the floor.

**GM:** That makes sense.

**BW:** And what motivated you to join Reid's staff?

**GM:** It doesn't get to the Mitchell story, but I was on the floor staff, doing similar to what the, it's sort of a step from the Cloakroom, more interaction and more responsibility on the floor, and Senator Reid was the whip under Daschle the first couple years, I don't know how many years, he was trying to find his role, and he decided that what he was going to do is, he was going to become the floor person who was going to spend a lot of time on the floor and really learn the rules. Sort of the Byrd model, when he was the whip under Mansfield, where he took the responsibility of being on the floor and working through the agreements on the floor among senators and among the floor staff, and Senator Reid was very comfortable being part of the floor, and was good at it and developed relationships on the floor. And so he became Daschle's floor person, and through that I met him and we had a good relationship.

And Daschle was planning to run for president, and it was a Monday night, and I was here, I don't think we were in session, and Senator Reid was here, and he had an office over on the other side of the Capitol as whip, and he called me up and asked me to come meet with him. So I went and met with him and he said, "Senator Daschle is going to run for president, he's going to announce tomorrow, on Tuesday." And he said, "I'm going to be running the Senate through the election anyway, and would like you to come work for me and help me on the floor," to be his person on the floor to help him.

So that was Monday night, and I said, "Sure, absolutely," I was ready to do something a little different. And it was one of those things, and I knew this then, but if a senator asks you to do something and if you don't do it, the next time something comes up it's just not going to be there. And it was a good opportunity, and I liked him, and work on the floor – there's different directions you can go in the Senate, and I liked being on the floor. So I said yes, and then Tuesday morning there was a big meeting in here, and I saw all of Daschle's advisors in here, and he announced on Tuesday that he wasn't running. So it was Monday night that I accepted the job, and Tuesday that Senator Daschle said he wasn't running, but it didn't really matter to me, I was happy to work for Senator Reid and be in the whip's office and learn a new angle to the same job. So I started with him the day before Daschle decided not to run for president.

**BW:** As you were going through these various positions, did you, when you changed position, have to go through a HR process, or were you always the employee of the Senate?

**GM:** I think I've only interviewed twice since I've been here. I interviewed with, I'm not even sure, I interviewed with Donna Beck over the phone for the internship, and I called back a couple times, because my time in Maine as a page was running out and I wanted to figure out what I was going to do in the fall, so I called her a couple times and she said at one point – and I thought this was surprising – she said at one point that, "The Senator needs to look at your resume." And I thought that was crazy, he doesn't look at the resumes of the interns, that can't

be. But it was true, and he did, and he went through the resumes, and so that was my first experience with that.

Another thing – I'll get back to the interview here but – the other thing that I thought was good, and that I've learned and tried to implement in this office, was that he didn't take interns from families that were connected, he did then what he has done with the Mitchell scholarships now. The internships he saw as a way for kids from small towns, that didn't have political backgrounds, that couldn't afford to come here [p/o], and gave them internships with small stipends. And that was remarkable then, and is remarkable now, and is the reason that so many interns for Senator Mitchell were [less advantaged] kids from Maine. And that [affects] everything.

So that was my first interview, and he actually looked at the thing, and I came down and was an intern for him, and then really haven't had interviews since then. Maybe one when John Hilley became his chief of staff and I was in the front office, and I think we interviewed in here for ten minutes, just to see, he wanted to meet the people in the office mostly. I think when John started, I don't think it was more than a few weeks before I went to the Cloakroom, and that was an interview process just like the internship, where I was in the front, they realized I got along with people, and so met the people who worked on the floor and went into the Cloakroom, and then that's an on-the-job interview, and then the floor staff is an on-the-job interview, and then the floor staff is an on-the-job for this. And then I was here for two years, for four years, two years as floor counsel, and then he became leader and I was there for that transition, when he ran for leader, and then two years as deputy chief of staff, which is an on-the-job interview, and then when the chief of staff left after we got the majority back, became chief of staff.

**BW:** Where have you been in terms of payroll through all these transitions?

**GM:** Various payrolls. I was on Mitchell's personal, Mitchell's leadership, the secretary for the majority, secretary for the minority, and then their payroll was pretty limited so the whip took on some of the payroll. And I think we've continued that, too, because the payroll for the secretary for the majority works for a few years, but then if you start getting senior people in the Cloakroom, it didn't work. So to keep people, they would put you part on the whip's payroll, we continued that when Reid was whip, and then went on Reid's whip payroll and then leadership payroll. But you bounce around, a little bit from here, a little bit from there, just to make sure you keep people.

**BW:** I have a few sort of last questions in my mind, and you've already done a lot of answering of the first one here, and that is, having worked for three majority leaders, how did each approach the job in different ways?

**GM:** I'll do two similars, and then – I think that Daschle was the – this is going to sound like a, I wouldn't do this for Daschle's oral history, but Daschle had the benefit of having Senator Reid to do the nuts and bolts floor stuff for him, so that he could focus on other things. So Daschle had that. I don't believe that Mitchell had that, and I know that Reid doesn't have that,

and so I think Daschle's job was a little bit different because he could rely on someone who was not running for leader at all, ever, to do some of the stuff that Mitchell did, Mitchell did some of that through staff but had to do a lot of it himself, and Reid has to do almost all of it himself. So that's a difference in just the way the place works, between the three.

The similarities, I think it's a lonely job, because so much of what has to happen to make this place run comes through this office, and it's unseen but it takes a toll on you. Every senator knows when he or she is being a pain to the leader, but every senator doesn't know [how] every other senator is being a pain to the leader. And the only person who knows every problem that every senator is giving the leader, *is* the leader, and that is something that is - I'll digress a little bit: I think that is something that no one knows unless you've done this job. I think it's the same for the Republican leader, and that's why regardless of everything else that's going on, there's a relationship between the leaders that no one else understands, because they both have the same dynamic of every member of their caucus messing with them. And there are very few sticks in this office. All you have are carrots, and they're only effective if you really work at it.

**BW:** Did Mitchell and does Reid sort of hold power without this help that you mentioned with Daschle because they wanted to keep things close to the chest, or just because there isn't someone -?

**GM:** Because there isn't someone, and that's not my point in what I said before. I think Reid has done a very effective job of spreading out, he understood early in his career that there's not a lot of power in it, but the more you spread responsibility and power, the better it is for you. And I don't think Mitchell was as good at that, or it was a different time, or he was a different person. I was pretty young, so I'm not really a good judge for that, but Reid has tried to spread out as much as he can through his leadership and through the committee chairs, to have them have responsibility. But at the end of the day, it all ends up in this office, every problem you've seen in the newspaper ends up in this office.

**BW:** So just explain then again, I guess, what you meant by the difference with Daschle.

**GM:** I think Daschle had someone that would do part of the job for him, and I don't think Daschle had to worry about it, ever, that Reid would do, it's sort of the part of the job that Reid likes the best, and the part of the job that I do because I'm on the floor, is he enjoys being part of that back and forth on the floor, and he did that for Daschle and Daschle never had to worry about it, so it was one less thing. Reid does that all, plus the other stuff.

**BW:** Isn't it true that a leader has sort of two roles, one which you might call the parliamentarian, working inside the halls of Congress, and then the public voice of the Democrats.

**GM:** Right.

**BW:** Who, among the three that you've worked with, who was best at doing both those roles?



**GM:** Mitchell was, I think without any question. I think Reid is better inside than Mitchell was, but it's a different time. The inside for me includes the caucus stuff, too, and knowing what everybody's - But there was nobody better, like I said before, there was nobody better at mastering, you can hear it in an interview with Mitchell now, today, when you see him on television, there's no question that he is four or five times smarter than anyone who's ever interviewed him, and can tear apart a question and break it down and give it back more concisely than any interviewer he's ever come in contact with. There's nobody better off-the-cuff, since I've been here, than him, on tearing something down and putting it back together.

And that's just not a skill that Reid has. He never has had that. He doesn't do Sunday shows because it's not where he's good. Where he's good is interpersonal, back-and-forth, making the trains run on time, getting deals done to get a piece of legislation off the floor, and there's no one better at that. The agenda that we've done for President Obama these first two years, any one element of that would be more than many congresses have accomplished, and that is because Senator Reid has spent the time doing the inside stuff.

**BW:** So what would you say are some of the biggest ways in which the Senate has changed over your time here?

**GM:** I'd say the Gingrich revolution, or whatever you want to call it, that happened, that sort of snuck up on Democrats in '94, changed the way that the minority works, and killed in a lot of ways the way that the minority and the majority would fight where they had to fight, but work together where they had to work together, unless there's a national tragedy. I think that was the beginning, and then into the impeachment of the president, that started as a continuation of the Contract With America, criminalizing politics thing, where it started as a small snowball and then just built and built until there was a point where the groups that were after Clinton wouldn't accept anything but his head, and it grew through the committee in the House, and then onto the House floor and then over here, and the Senate finally came together and figured out a way to put that behind us. I think those two events changed where we are now.

You add to that the polarization of the electorate, on the left and on the right, and then you throw into that the infotainment, 24-hour gotcha television programming requirement, that every morning four or five news organizations have to find the most controversial thing that's happening and then blow it up as hard as they can to try to keep viewers watching through the day. The combination of those things have all happened over the last twenty years that have put us into a place where Republicans and Democrats, even if they wanted to, can't work together on things. And it sort of started at the end of Mitchell, because the first two years of Clinton there was a push to not let him do anything, to keep him busy doing Whitewater and gays in the military and all of that stuff, so that he couldn't get things done. And then after Mitchell left, you get into the impeachment, that was just an absolute effort to stop him from being able to concentrate on getting things done.

And then their success in that the Republicans lost Congress but it was a push, and then into the

time we're in now where we went from the Republicans thinking they had a permanent majority under Bush, to Democrats having sixty votes in the Senate. And just a whiplash back and forth, where the biggest fear that Republicans have are being primaried from the right, and a big fear that Democrats have are being primaried from the left, and that limits senators' ability to do what has to be done to govern. In a minute-and-a-half, that's where we are.

This will sound corny, but I've grown in the twenty years that I've been here to have a huge respect for the Founding Fathers, to set up a system that, unless there's some big convulsion, is self-regulating, that goes back and forth. It's just that right now we're in a point where it's whipping back and forth much more quickly, where if it moves slowly back and forth then you end up with the good ideas in the middle and that's where the country keeps moving. With this whip saw, where the same anger that elected Obama is now focused against Democrats, when they're doing the things that they were asked to do.

**BW:** From your perspective, what about the filibuster and all of this?

**GM:** I had a writing requirement in law school and I wrote the writing requirement on the filibuster, and have watched it blossom into this tool that the minority uses in a way that it was never really designed to do. But I've also argued both sides of this. We're at an extreme point right now because the Republicans are down to forty-one members, and they don't have responsibility for governing, so filibusters are easy. When they were down 60/40, there was no responsibility for governing, so it was our responsibility to get sixty votes on everything. As soon as it went down to 59/41, some of that responsibility goes back to them. If we're back to 55/45 or 53/47, more of that responsibility will go to them and it'll be much more difficult for them to get all of their members to vote against filibuster. And it's something that you don't read about in the books, but it is the dynamic, that it is a cyclical thing where the pendulum goes back and forth, and we're just in one of those points where it's filibuster all the time. And that's what they said when Mitchell was here, too, but I think it has grown, and it goes back to what I said about members being most fearful of getting a primary from their right or from their left, which makes it more difficult for them to work together on things, so then they fall back on process.

**BW:** One other question about change, how has the floor behavior changed, or has it, over the years that you've been around? Let me say, it was my impression that there was a lot more members on the floor a lot more of the time in an earlier period, and that now you might go up there and see one or two members talking to the cameras and no one else around.

**GM:** That hasn't changed since I've been here. It's about the same. The only time members are on the floor is when they're voting, unless you have a big event like the first Gulf War, or the second Gulf War, or an impeachment, or a Supreme Court nomination. But that really hasn't changed. It may have changed, when I first stated we still had the boxes where you'd have the volume, it was after C-Span but we were still in the transition where you had television but we also had the voice boxes. I think maybe way back, more members were on the floor, but it hasn't changed since I've been here. If you have an amendment up you're over there, but otherwise

you're in your offices, you're doing committee meetings or other things.

**BW:** So there's not very much debate that takes place on the Senate floor anymore – confrontational face-to-face – is that right?

**GM:** I don't know that there's been confrontational face-to-face debates since I've been here. If there's an amendment up, the two people or the managers of the bills or a couple other interested people will be out there. There's some confrontational things that happen still, but it's based on what's on the floor and what the amendment is. I don't think there's been a big change in that since I've been here.

**BW:** Have you had contacts with Senator Mitchell since '95 when he left?

**GM:** Yes, I've talked to him. He's been around. I helped him a little bit with the inauguration stuff, because he was planning to come and his wife coming with their kids, so I talked to him. I've seen him a few times up in Maine when I was up there on vacation and would say hi. And he's been through the office a few times here, meeting with either Daschle or Senator Reid and I've talked to him.

**BW:** How do you think he ought to be remembered by the history books?

**GM:** I think it goes back to, legislatively I think Clean Air, but what I said about the internship and what he's doing with his scholarship program and spreading out the scholarships to the kids not just from the best schools and not just from the parents with money, I think, for me anyway, without any question, giving the opportunity to a kid from Guilford, Maine, from the University of Maine, to get an internship, has brought me and what I knew from growing up in a small mill town in Maine, to work in this office for twenty years. That's something.

**BW:** Do you sometimes sort of pinch yourself and say, wow, this is more than I -?

**GM:** It's hard, because the same grind that gets to majority leaders get to their staffs, and sometimes it's harder. I think I will do that in my next job; I will look back at this job and pinch myself. I do it still sometimes, but it is a grind. The answer to that is yes, obviously. I've had meetings in here with presidents, and I've been able to see a lot of stuff, and all of that is because he gave me an internship twenty years ago.

**BW:** Any other thoughts?

**GM:** No. I wonder for him, what's going on in the Middle East right now has got to be a challenge. And I knew friends of mine that went and worked with him in Ireland, and he has made more, in my view, out of being a former majority leader than anybody else has, and I'm very proud of him for that, but I think [that] what he has taken on here is an incredible challenge at this point in his career.

**BW:** For sure.

**GM:** I think there are days now when he wishes he was back here.

**BW:** Good, thank you.

**GM:** Sure.

End of Interview