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Hanson, John oral history interview

Greg Beam

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Interview with John Hanson by Greg Beam

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Hanson, John

Interviewer

Beam, Greg

Date

July 6, 2000

Place

Orono, Maine

ID Number

MOH 202

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Biographical Note

John R. Hanson was born in Newark, New Jersey April 5, 1941 to Norma Virginia (Rice) and John W. Hanson. He grew up in Springfield, Massachusetts. He attended the Technical High School in Springfield, the American International College of Springfield for one semester, and then enlisted in the Air Force. He did some electrical work after the service and became involved in politics and organized labor. He came to Maine to convince labor to back Curtis for governor in 1966. In 1968 he was offered a job by Ben Dorsky on Maine State Federated Labor Council as editor of the *Labor News* and as education director. He eventually became Dorsky's assistant. In 1972 he took a position as Director of Labor Education at the University of Maine, Orono. At the time of the interview in 2000, he still held that position.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: 1968 vice presidential campaign; 1969-1972 presidential campaign; Republican party in Maine; Democratic party in Maine; community history of Springfield, Massachusetts; escalation of involvement in Vietnam in the early 1960s; Ben Dorsky; Maine AFL-CIO; John Reed vs. Ken Curtis gubernatorial race; Jimmy Hoffa visit and meeting with Ben Dorsky; campaign contributions before restrictions; COPE, the Committee on Political Education; labor education; process for AFL-CIO endorsement; condition of workers'

rights in Maine vs. nation; Muskie knowing his name; Ed Muskie as an impressive figure; Muskie being very comfortable at labor gatherings; relationship between Ben Dorsky and Ed Muskie; AFL-CIO membership over the years; production vs. service economy; Muskie in labor archives; Higher Education Act; Muskie sponsored Intergovernmental Personnel Act; George Mitchell also being liked by labor; two Muskie stories; Dickey-Lincoln Dam; and the Passamaquoddy Tidal Project.

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Transcript

Greg Beam: This is Greg Beam, and I am here at Chadbourne Hall on the campus of the University of Maine in Orono. It's about 11:00 A.M. on June [sic] the 6th, 2000 and I am here with John Hanson. To begin, could you please state your full name and spell it?

John Hanson: My name is John R., middle initial is R, Hanson, and it's spelled H-A-N-S-O-N.

GB: When and where were you born?

JH: Newark, New Jersey on April 5th, 1941.

GB: Did you grow up there?

JH: No, I moved out at a very young age. I'm not even sure how old I was to tell you the truth, but I was pretty young. I don't have any recollections of being in Newark. We moved, my dad took a position in Springfield, Massachusetts, and by and large that's pretty much where I did my growing up.

GB: And what were your parents' names?

JH: My mother's name was Norma Virginia Rice, was her maiden name, and my dad's name was John W. Hanson.

GB: And what was the position that he took in Sp--, that brought you to Springfield, Massachusetts?

JH: Well, he was a self taught mechanical engineer, and he went to work- I was born in '41 and right after that he took a position, I think it was associated with the Springfield armory because of the war effort. I know it had something to do with the war effort, and there was a major armory located in Springfield, and my understanding is that's why he went there. In fact he may have already had some connections with the Springfield armory before we moved because my mother was actually from Springfield, so, they lived for a while in Newark after they were married. They were married in 1938, I do recall that because they talked about a storm during their honeymoon, the famous hurricane of 1938 or something like that, and so I did remember that. And they settled in New Jersey where my dad was from and then in, sometime shortly after I was born and I'm not sure when that was but they moved to the Springfield area.

GB: What are your memories from your childhood of the Springfield community? How was your family involved in the community?

JH: You know, I don't really have any real firsthand knowledge of that except for the fact that both my parents have since passed away. My mother died in '84, and my dad passed away in '87, and in, I was the executor of my dad's will and in doing all of that it meant, you know,

taking care of a lot of personal property and records and all that stuff. So I did come across a lot of stuff, and I know that the first place that they lived in the Springfield area was a place called Long Meadow. It's really a bedroom community. It's kind of a ritzy area now, but back then it was just a nice bedroom community to Springfield, which, you know. And it's just south of Springfield; it's right on the border of Springfield. And that's, I remember going to school there, Congress Street School.

And I do know that my, both my parents were pretty involved in community activities and a lot of church activities. And back in those days I guess there were a lot of things, community plays and shows and, you know, these events that either the church or the community would sponsor, and my folks were involved in that. In fact I have a program somewhere at home now, but it's the program for like a musical theatrical production, not a play but more like a musical variety show that ran several years, and the program I have is just for one year. But my dad was like master of ceremonies, and my mom was in the chorus line or something like that, you know. So, yeah, I think they were reasonably involved. But all of that, you know, I was pretty young then, I was probably like three or four years old, if even that.

GB: And you mentioned they were involved in the church; what church was that? What religion were you?

JH: It was Old First Church in, Old First Church in Springfield and I think it's a Congregational church.

GB: Are you still religious, or did you -?

JH: Well, not very, but I did convert. When I was in the service I met a Catholic priest and the circumstances of my military career. I didn't have a very strong religious upbringing. I think my parents were active but more in the social aspects of the church rather than the religious aspects, so I wouldn't characterize my parents as being very religious either, so. But I did meet this priest, and I sort of got interested intellectually in the Catholic Church. And while I was in the service, I was, I underwent conversion and became a Catholic, so that still is my official religion, Catholic.

GB: Do you remember your parents being particularly politically minded? Do you remember any of their political beliefs?

JH: They, to the best of my knowledge they always registered as independents. I know that they, they always voted. I can't say that they were really involved in like political parties. What I know of my parents from a lot of the discussions that occurred around the dinner table was that they were Democrats; I mean their thinking was more like Democrats. My father had this thing about not letting people know what party you were in. I mean he just, he was, you know, he was just very concerned with that. And I think the community of Long Meadow, being a bedroom community, was probably more Republican, and I think that he saw wearing labels like being a Democrat or being, you know, being a Democrat in that particular town was just, you know, not. He used to say it was just no one's business what he was, and he would always vote for the man. But I do know just from the conversations that my mom was probably more liberal than my

father, but I think they were both by and large voted Democrat. I think they both voted for Eisenhower, however. My mother used to speak disparagingly about Tom Dewey. And so that's just my sense of it, you know, and I do know that they weren't all that active. But voting for them was very important, and I know that they always voted.

GB: What sort of values would you say that your parents tried to instill in you? Social, religious, political or just personal values?

JH: That's a very good question actually, and I mentioned the religious connection already. I, they were not regular church goers, and if they were active in the church, it was, you know, like we would go to church from time to time on certain holidays, you know, Easter, Christmas and that kind of thing. But I don't recall that they had these, you know, deeply held strong religious beliefs. I think they just felt that it was appropriate to have some kind of connection with a church, and it was their church. My mother was, she was a very tolerant person, maybe a bit maternalistic. I should say paternalistic, but in my mother's case maybe maternalistic because she would always talk just very supportive about black people, and I think discrimination bothered her. She grew up in a neighborhood in Springfield that was predominantly Italian and, you know, like back in the thirties and, the twenties and the thirties and the forties. Most cities in the country were settled by immigrants. I mean, most of us are, unless you're a Native American, you know, your heritage came from some other place, so.

Springfield had neighborhoods that were like predominantly Greek, predominantly Irish, predominantly Italian, and the south end of Springfield was predominantly Italian. And for reasons beyond my knowledge my grandparents on my mother's side settled on the south end of Springfield. They were surrounded by Italians, and they were by and large Irish. My grand-, my dad was, or my grandfather was Irish, and my grandmother was part Irish and part Navaho Indian, and that's another whole story. But, so it was kind of an odd situation being there. I mean, she didn't necessarily look like a Native American. She wasn't dark-complected. She did have jet black eyes, and she was a very beautiful woman, and when I remember her, she had white hair. And so as she got older I think she took on certain characteristics that we would think of as being Native American. She was a very striking woman, however, and very intense. So how my, how my mother came to just have this inner sense that somehow discrimination was wrong I think was because she grew up in a neighborhood that was predominantly Italian but saw enough about discrimination against Italians so that, you know, somehow or another it just didn't seem quite right to her, so.

My dad on the other hand wasn't, he was probably liberal in some things, liberal or maybe centrist, probably more socially conservative than my mother. In fact I, you know, I think that is true. But he still kind of supported the Democratic tradition I think, you know. But we're talking about the 1940s and into the early fifties, you know, and so a lot of these things weren't exactly popular, you know. In this day and age we seem to have a better sense of what all that is about, but back then neighborhoods were organized along ethnic lines. It was not uncommon to see, you know, whole neighborhoods being pretty much all Italian or all Irish or whatever. And I have reason to believe that that was true in Maine.

I didn't come to Maine until, well, I moved here in 1966. I had actually been here earlier. When

I graduated from high school I went to college for a short while and realized I had no clue what I wanted to do or where I wanted to go. So I did enlist, and I went in, I enlisted so I could sort of have my pick and not necessarily get drafted. I thought I wanted to at least learn something in the service, so I enlisted into the Air Force, and for a while I was stationed at Loring Air Force Base in the early, early 1960s. From about 1960 to, I'm going to say maybe '63 or so, so I was familiar with Maine. And then I left, and I did some other service here and there and everywhere. Finally went back home and worked in the western Massachusetts area for a while, and I ended up coming back to Maine in 1966. And we'll probably come back to that because I've been here ever since.

GB: Sure, all right, back track, I have a couple of question to backtrack. Do you remember what the ethnic breakdown of Springfield was when you were growing up?

JH: Well, I mentioned some of the ethnic groups, I mean the ones that I was aware of. I went to high school there and I knew for example, Hungry Hill was predominantly Greek. I knew that the south end was mostly Italian. I knew that the north end was largely Hispanic. And that sort of grew in very short order. I mean, I remember people talking about the Puerto Ricans coming into the north end and expressing some concern about what they might do. There was this idea that somehow or another they'd ruin the neighborhood now, but those are the kinds of things that you, that you just grew up with. I mean you know, it was, there were a lot of changes going on. People were coming in and moving into the area. There was an Irish community; that was up by Winchester Square. Although, African-Americans were at this point starting to come into the area. I went to Buckingham Junior High School, and there were some young, black, African-American students. As a matter of fact one of my best friends through junior high school was a guy named Skippy Thompson who was black. And there was a lot of what was called block busting in those days. I don't know if you know what that is, but -

GB: No, I don't.

JH: Well, see, people were concerned about the effect of black people moving into neighborhoods, and so there were these unwritten rules about how if you, if people needed to sell their house or wanted to sell their house or were taking a job someplace else or just moving for whatever reason, that they sort of understood that they would not sell their home to a black family, period. In other words, no, you know, it was obviously against the law, but, I mean, the idea was you can sell your home to whomever you want. And my uncle, again on my mother's side, had a house, in fact I think he may have had several not apartment buildings but like two family homes. Like they were two or three story homes and each family had, you know, so it was kind of more like a private home than you think of a big apartment house. They weren't apartment houses, these were really just two family houses, built that way, I mean not converted single-family homes. And he and his wife my aunt lived in the Winchester Square area, and it was my uncle who was the first person to be a blockbuster in my neighborhood. And of course he was Irish, and he just didn't think it was right, so he and some other people sort of decided that they would do that. Of course it was very risky because, I mean, you'd be ostracized for doing that, you know, and people really got very upset with Fred Rice, that was my uncle's name, for arranging or being a part of selling to a black family, you know.

But see, a lot of people weren't really sure that it was him either because a lot of times in the effort, the over all effort to get neighborhoods integrated, the fact of the matter was there was more, it just wasn't an individual decision. What used to happen is there were black organizations, just for example, that would work with like white people who were very supportive of integration. And, you know, most homes go on sale and it's a realtor who handles the deal, so somebody would be an agent for, say, a black family and buy a house. Well, the realtor wouldn't realize that the real owner was going to be black, see, they just knew that they were dealing with somebody who might be an attorney or whatever and was buying a house on behalf of somebody. So no one could really be sure if my uncle did this intentionally or whether, you know, he was just kind of hoodwinked into doing it. But the reality is he did it intentionally. He just, you know, just had this feeling. And of course he came, he was my mom's brother, so you could see the connection there. I mean, you know, being Irish and being in an Irish neighborhood when I was a kid. And my uncle of course grew up in the south end, but he moved to the Winchester Square area at some point in his life, probably shortly after he was married. And I think that all played into it, you know. They just had these deeply held beliefs, and my uncle just really didn't care too much about what people thought. He was going to do what was right. And I guess he did by and large.

GB: That's great. Were those racial tensions, did you see those in high school? I mean, there must have been, you must have all gone to high school together, right?

JH: Yeah, yeah, by the time I was in high school, I graduated in 1959, and it was a three year high school, but Springfield, you'd have to know a little bit about Springfield. Springfield, Massachusetts had five high schools, and it was considered to be one of the most progressive educational systems in the country. You know, I don't know what the story is now. I know they don't have the same system; they have a central high school now in Springfield. But back then the five high schools were classical, for people who were largely going on to college in the liberal arts; commerce, largely for people that were thinking of going directly into business or maybe going to college but, you know, with an emphasis in business or business related issues; technical, which was for people that would likely go on to college and become engineers and, you know, scientists and, you know, that kind of thing; there was trade school, for people likely not to go on to college by wanted to learn a trade; and then there was Cathedral. And so when you were in junior high school for three years, you were deciding what you wanted to be in life. And you pretty much picked your high school based on, you know, what your interests were and where you thought you likely would end up, you know, either in college in liberal arts or whatever. And so it wasn't, the high schools were not organized along geographic lines, you know. If you lived in a particular neighborhood, you went to this high school, no. It didn't matter what neighborhood you lived in. If you were anticipating getting into sciences or going on to college for engineering or, you know, any of those kind of hard, hard studies, you went to Tech. I mean that was just the logical choice because it was heavy in math, it was heavy in physics and, you know, all the things that you would need in a school like MIT or, you know, that kind of thing. Same was true with Classical, I mean if you just thought you wanted to go on to be a teacher or a historian or something, you went to Classical, prepared yourself for going on to college. And it didn't make any difference what part of the city you lived in, you just picked. So you're right, Technical High School had a very diverse population, and, you know, I think all the high schools did. Maybe not as, maybe it was not as true at Cathedral as in some of the other

schools, but the schools that I'm talking about, you know, we had quite a population of African American kids and Greeks and, you know, and it was a real melting pot so to speak.

GB: I'm sorry, which one did you attend?

JH: I went to Tech.

GB: You went to Tech.

JH: Yeah.

GB: Sounds almost like a European system, I know they do that in some European countries, they break off going into high school.

JH: That was great if young people, that system works well if young people really know what they wanted to do. But, you know, at that time I thought I wanted to become an electrical engineer and, you know, that did not happen. I mean, that's what I thought, but by the time I started college I had some other ideas and wasn't really sure. And then when I did go into the service, I already had kind, I guess what they call an aptitude or an inclination towards electronic kinds of things. So I became an electronics guidance specialist, and I learned a lot about it, but I learned enough to know that that's not what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. So, you know, I think having specialized schools like that works very well if people have a good sense of what it is they want to do, but I don't think it's very helpful if you have no clue. And in my case I thought I had a clue, but obviously I didn't because I never worked outside of my career in the service and a brief stint doing electrical work in construction after I got out of the service, you know. I'm certainly not an electrical engineer.

GB: Besides your academics in the technical, your technical studies, what were your activities or interests in high school?

JH: Well, I wasn't a jock. I like sports but I wasn't really into sports. I was into dating. I liked that. I liked music; I played in a band, you know, not a school band, I mean a rock and roll band.

GB: What did you play?

JH: I play drums.

GB: Oh, really?

JH: Yeah, and I was into cars. Of course this is the fifties we're talking about now, so cars were a really big thing. I mean, and if you've ever seen the films like American Graffiti, which actually the film is set in a little different era, but cars were still a big thing.

GB: Same idea.

JH: Yeah, yeah, you know, drag racing, souping up cars, customizing cars. I was into that. And all of us that hung out together, of course being techies, you know, sort of had, there again, had an aptitude towards anything mechanical and physical, you know. So we were always tinkering with our cars. And so I guess you'd say music. I, I might have played sports, but I worked after school. I worked at a hardware store the whole time I was in high school. I worked after school, and then during summer months I worked during the summer full time. And I liked it, I liked working, I mean I enjoyed it, it gave me money to spend. While all the jocks were having a good time being chased after by the girls, because they played sports they didn't have any money, and they didn't have cars, so. I had money and I had cars, so, you know. When it came time for the school dances and proms and things, girls tended to go out with the guys who had the money. Of course back in those days we're not talking about a lot of money, but nonetheless, you know, you get the idea.

GB: Now, so after graduating from high school you did immediately go into college?

JH: Yeah, I started at American International College in Springfield as a what they called a day op. I mean it wasn't a residential school, AIC, it's still there as a matter of fact. But my plan was to live at home and work because my family was really working class, and in the neighborhood I grew up in. So we moved out of Long Meadow, I told you about Long Meadow, and then we moved into Springfield also at Winchester Square because of my uncle's, my uncle having some property in Winchester Square. So that's how we got to, right into Springfield. I'm trying to think of what I should say about the last part of that question.

GB: Well, how long were you actually there? How long did you actually attend college?

JH: Well, I was nine when we moved to Springfield.

GB: Oh, I'm sorry, in college, how long did you actually attend college?

JH: Oh, just a little bit more than a semester.

GB: Oh, really, and then went right into the service?

JH: Yeah, my semester was just, it was frivolous, it was, I really, I really wasn't concentrating. I was doing a lot of partying. I was working too, so, you know, I had a little different perspective than some of the other people that I was going to college with, and I just, I really didn't know what I wanted to do. And so I, it was a big waste of time, and I sensed that I was wasting my time, and I sensed that I was wasting everybody else's time. So I enlisted. I decided that the Air Force was probably the best place for me to be where I could probably, you know, learn something and sleep in a clean bed every night, you know. The idea of going into the infantry for example, getting drafted, didn't appeal to me because you'd probably end up in a muddy foxhole someplace, so I enlisted and figured I can learn some. You know, and at that time I was still interested in electronics, I mean I hadn't given up on that or anything. So I thought, gee, you know, the Air Force may be a good place for me to at least get kind of a head start. And then at the, my intention was at some point to settle down and figure out what I really wanted to do and maybe when I got out of the service go to college.

I was aware of the G.I. Bill, too, so you know, that's a consideration. My parents were working class, so it, it was, I did not grow up in a situation where I knew, you know, that they were going to be in a position to really help me with college. I was going to have to pretty much do it on my own. And my dad wasn't all that supportive of going to college anyway. He, I don't want to say that he was anti-college, but I mentioned to you earlier that he was a self made engineer. He started out as a machinist; he learned that stuff himself. I mean, he did graduate from high school, he loved shop, he just had an affinity for these kinds of things, and so he became a machinist. I think he learned the machinist trade from other people, you know, like he might have been an apprentice or something, and just little by little progressed so that besides, you know, being a machinist he became like a tool and die maker. And then he started learning about drafting and designing these things, and so over some period of time he became a mechanical engineer.

I think it was probably more possible, easier to maybe do that back then than it ever would be today I mean. You might be a brilliant mechanical engineer and self taught but, you know, if you don't have the credentials, you're not even going to get in the door. I think back then it was probably easier in part because of the war, you know, the desperate need to find people that had those kinds of skills and they almost didn't care if you'd gone to college or not. So he thought if you really worked hard and applied yourself, you could make it without going to college, and so he wasn't exactly supportive of my going to college. I mean he thought that was okay if that's what I really wanted to do but my dad said, you know, "If you really want something bad enough, just work hard and you can achieve it." That was his feeling about that.

GB: But in spite of that did you have it in your mind that you would eventually go to college?

JH: Yeah, I think so, yeah. Largely because most of the people I went to school with, you know, were, we always talked about going to college and I just didn't know where I wanted to go. AIC was affordable, it was close by, meant I could live at home. I got okay grades when I was in school, high school, but they weren't like great grades, so I wasn't, no colleges weren't clamoring for me, you know, to enroll in their school. But AIC took me as a day op and, you know, I just thought it was a matter of time, you know, kind of getting settled in and finding the resources to be able to afford to go. And certainly one of the considerations about joining the service was my knowledge that, you know, likely when I came out the G.I. Bill would still be there and still apply, and that would be a big help to me because working and going to school at the same time is, it's not easy. I know a lot of people that do it, and it's just, you know, it's really a lot of work.

GB: So did your time in the service help you figure some things out?

JH: Yeah, as I mentioned to you I learned that I did not want to be an electrical engineer, you know. And probably a lot of other things. I got very interested in politics when I was in the service.

GB: Oh really, how'd that happen?

JH: Well, I think largely because of the beginnings of the war in Southeast Asia. I was in the service when that whole thing in Southeast Asia was just starting to come about. I'm not sure I really understood it. In fact I know I didn't fully understand it, but there was just a lot of things about it. And, you know, we didn't really escalate the war until 1965, but I could see that happening in my role in the Air Force. I mean little by little more and more energy and effort was going in there, and it was always under the guise that we were training these people to be able to handle their own affairs. But, you know, you'd meet up with people who had just gotten back from being advisors in Southeast Asia, in Vietnam, and they weren't advising, they were fighting, you know. And they, you know, just talking to those people and seeing a bit of it myself, and then, you know, when I was transferred over there, I realized that, you know, we, I spent a lot of time protecting Coca Cola trucks for example. That didn't make a lot of sense to me. So there was politicization, politicalization process that occurred. I'm not pronouncing that right.

But it just came from meeting people and then, see I was in the service when John Kennedy, was killed and that had a profound effect on me. I mean, I think, I think, like so many other people, I mean everybody in my generation probably says the same thing. I think John Kennedy's presidency had a really profound impact on me, you know, from the time he was elected. Somewhere in my personal stuff there's a picture of me, I was in the service at the time, but I was on leave, and I campaigned for John Kennedy in Boston. Of course I was from Springfield, so Boston was just a short hop. And my job was to drive a Model T Ford around Boston, and it was all painted up with, you know, Kennedy and Johnson, and the signage that was painted directly on the car said, "Kennedy-Johnson suits me to a T," and that was the whole idea of driving this Model T around. So, you know, it was an era I think when a lot of people just got very excited about politics. So I was politicized, that's, I finally said it right, politicized in the military because of Kennedy and that whole presidency and because of what was going on in foreign policy.

GB: Did you have strong political affiliations or ties at this point? Were you registered in a party?

JH: See, I think when John Kennedy was running in 1960, I wasn't even twenty-one yet.

GB: Oh yeah, that's right, the voting age was -

JH: The voting age was twenty-one, so I don't think I voted f-, well I know, I know I couldn't have voted. He ran in 1960, so, but I did, you know, I did campaign for him and that kind of stuff, yeah.

GB: So you voted for the first time in '64?

JH: It would have been, it would have been '62, non-presidential election. That would have been the first time I voted. And I know I voted absentee, and that was easy to do when you were in the service, I mean there was no hassle about voting absentee and everything. But I know I voted and largely because, you know, my parents had, I mean I just grew up in this thing where you absolutely had to vote, you know. So I took care of making the arrangements so an absentee

ballot was sent to me in the service.

GB: And how'd you vote?

JH: Democrat.

GB: Democrat. And have you, have you been a member of the Democratic Party from- ?

JH: Yes, yeah, I actually enrolled as a Democrat even though I mentioned to you my parents would always enroll as, well, they wouldn't enroll. Or in Massachusetts maybe you could enroll as an independent, but they always talked about being independents and for all those reasons that I mentioned before. But I saw no point to being an independent. I mean, you know, John Kennedy was a Democrat, you know, people that I knew and kind of respected were all Democrats. I knew my parents by and large with only a couple of minor exceptions voted Democrat, and so I, you know, when I went to register, it just made sense, you know, register and enroll at the same time. I didn't even think about it, it wasn't, it was just a natural kind of thing to do I think.

GB: Okay, so what path did your life take after the service?

JH: When I was finally discharged, I kicked around for a while, worked in western Massachusetts and got connected with some labor organizations because of my work. I was working in construction doing electrical work, kind of got active in politics again. In 1966, early 1966, I was a single guy. I was, you know, fooling around with politics, dabbling and supporting campaigns. I was asked by a union if I would be interested in coming, going up to Maine. They were going to send me up to Maine, I would get paid. And there was this young guy, Democrat, running for governor and the labor movement here in Maine was divided on who to support. There was a Republican governor by the name of John Reed, and he was running for reelection, and there was this young upstart Democrat by the name of Ken Curtis.

And the labor movement in Maine was headed by a man by the name of Ben Dorsky, Benjamin Dorsky, and Don [Nicoll] would remember Ben Dorsky. He's a legend, he really is. Ben Dorsky was the president. Ben was actually a Republican although he regularly supported Democrats, but Ben had been a labor person for a long time. He was a legislative agent for the, what they then called the Maine Federation of Labor, which meant AFL-CIO, but it was before the merger. See, the AF of L and the CIO did not merge until 1955, and in Maine even they merged they retained the older terms that they used to use. And so Ben was the president, he was the legislative agent for the Maine Federation of Labor going back into the thirties. I think from '36 to '38 or something, he'd served as legislative agent, and then he was elected president of the Maine Federation of Labor. And then in 1955 the AF of L and the CIO merged, so they changed the name of the organization to be the Maine State Federation of Labor AFL-CIO. And he stayed on as president, and he was president right up until January of 1979, so he was a long time president.

And even though he tended to support Democrats almost without exception, you have to understand that the legislature was a lot different then than it is now. There were, you know,

first of all it was mostly Republican dominated, and there were Republicans who were more like the Rockefeller nature of Republicans, moderate Republicans, who would support things like increasing minimum wage because these were business people, and they had an intuitive sense that if, you know, working class people were making a little bit more money. Well, in fact I can tell you just a brief story to illustrate what I'm talking about. There was a man named Aaron Levine who served in the Maine legislature, you could verify this, I'm almost sure Aaron was in the Maine senate. I'm positive he was, Aaron Levine. He was from Waterville and he owned Alco Meat Packing, and he was a Republican. Now the Maine senate sometime around the late sixties, he was an ardent supporter of increasing minimum wage. And his reason was, and the reason that he gave his fellow Republicans was that he wanted people to be able to eat meat, and if they weren't making enough money, they wouldn't be buying meat, you know. They might be buying chicken or something. They wouldn't be buying meat, and he wanted them to buy meat. So he could see that it was in his own economic self-interest that people have enough money to buy meat once in a while, and so he would support minimum wage. And that's the way Republicans were. Not all Republicans, but there were a lot more moderate Republicans, who on some of these issues would really, would really be a lot closer to Democrats than one might think.

The other thing about the legislature back then, and I can't really speak directly to it, but I know it was certainly true when I got here in 1966, was that legislators would work out compromises, you know, "I've got this bill, I really need your support, will you help me with it?" You'd shake hands and you could count on that person's help. There really was a contract. Well, you shook hands with somebody playing cards over in the Augusta House late in the evening drinking scotch or whatever, and these deals would be worked out, and people shook hands on it. You could take that to the bank, you know, whether it was Democrats or Republican. I mean, your political success depended on how good your word was, and so people didn't renege on agreements. They wouldn't tell you that they'd support your bill and vote for your bill if they really didn't mean it, and so there was a lot of that.

So Ben was a Republican, he got a lot of Republican support, and obviously a lot of Democratic support, for many, many issues that really helped working people in this state. Maine was not a bad state. In fact, looking back on it, Maine was a very progressive state for a whole host of issues, and we can talk more about that as we come up through the years. But, for example worker's compensation, then called workmen's compensation, a sexist term (*unintelligible phrase*), but back then in was workmen's compensation, and Maine's program was very beneficial to workers. It was really designed to do what the notion of worker's compensation was supposed to do to begin with. A form of no fault insurance to really protect the interests of people who were injured on the job through no fault of their own. So very progressive in that area as, you know, as you'll find out. You move up through the years and you see that the legislature passed landmark pieces of legislation. Progressive income tax, that got through in part because it was supported by a Republican, Harrison Richardson in the Maine senate.

GB: I'll be interviewing him in a couple weeks actually.

JH: Okay, well yeah, he was one of the architects of that. It was important to have that kind of bipartisan support because these issues, you know, wouldn't have gotten through. The Oil

Conveyance Act, the Site Selection Law, I mean, we're talking about laws that came about in the 1960s but nonetheless made possible because of a lot of people who regardless of their party saw that it was a good thing to do. So you ended up with a lot of Republicans, moderate Republicans, voting with Democrats, a lot of Democrats voting on moderate Republican propositions. I think we see less of that today, you know. There's still some of it, but it's, I think it's less prevalent today.

GB: Perhaps more partisanship today do you, are you thinking?

JH: Yeah, for a lot of the wrong reasons actually, but that's another, that's another story.

GB: One second, let me flip the tape over.

JH: Sure.

End of Side A, Tape One

Side B, Tape One

GB: This is side B of the interview with John Hanson. All right, you were mentioning, you were mentioning that you came to work for the Maine Federation of Labor in the 1960s, is that right?

JH: Yeah, well, my reason for coming here was to work on this campaign, and we started to talk about how there was concern that the labor movement in Maine was divided. Ben Dorsky, the Republican, felt that John Reed had really been a good governor. In fact he had. If you look at labor issues, John Reed vetoed a so-called Right To Work Bill that actually passed the Maine legislature. He vetoed it at great peril to himself because Republicans genuinely, genuinely now, supported "Right To Work". It's, "Right To Work" is an anti-union piece of legislation, and it's allowed under Taft-Hartley Act, Section 14B of the Taft-Hartley Act. And each state can enact a law that essentially says labor and management are prohibited from negotiating union security. It's a big issue, it really is a big issue. And it passed the legislature, and John Reed vetoed it. You know, that might not happen today, I mean, George W. Bush could very well say, this is great. In fact I think Texas is a Right To Work state. It is a Right To Work state. So John Reed had vetoed it, and Ben Dorsky being the kind of person he was felt that John Reed had been a good governor for working people, that when somebody has been good to you, and somebody has, you know, defended working people's issues as John Reed had clearly done, that he should, he deserved his support. And so Ben Dorsky was supporting the reelection of John Reed.

I should also point out that John Reed supported collective bargaining of public employees. There's a lot of interesting stories here. I interviewed John Reed one time, and John Reed supported having public employees have collective bargaining, and Jimmy Hoffa from the Teamster's Union came to Maine. He actually stayed, I think it was the Eastland, the old Eastland; it might have been the Portlander, but I think it was the Eastland Hotel. Jimmy Hoffa came because he was going to put in an appearance and testify on behalf of a bill that would grant public employees collective bargaining rights. And the story is, and it was affirmed by John Reed himself after he, years after he was governor, that he heard that Jimmy Hoffa was

going to testify on behalf of the bill, and he was concerned that Hoffa's showing up and testifying in support of it would probably ring the death knell for this bill. I mean if Hoffa's for it, it's got to be bad, you know, it was that kind of mentality. And so the story is that very quietly John Reed went to Portland and met with Jimmy Hoffa and asked him not to speak on the bill, it stood a better chance of passage if he did not speak on it. And Jimmy Hoffa never did speak on the bill, I mean I guess he left town without actually, you know, publicly saying one thing or another.

And Ben was aware of those things, you know, John Reed just had a sense, I think maybe because of his upbringing in Fort Fairfield, Maine, being kind of a, you know, person who knew something about hard work and struggle with the farms up there and all that stuff. But whatever his reason Ben Dorsky just felt that John Reed had been a good governor and had not opposed positive labor legislation, and so he wanted to support him.

Part of the labor movement, though, was made up of a lot of other people who by and large were Democrats, and they were Kennedy Democrats. And here was this guy Ken Curtis running, and they wanted to support Ken Curtis. So my job in being sent up here was to help those forces within the labor movement, because I was a labor person, to come up and work with the local unions in Maine that were supporting Ken Curtis and try to broaden that base of support, you know. So in some ways I was working counter to Ben Dorsky's efforts to work on behalf of John Reed. But as it turned out a lot of people in Ken Curtis' campaign didn't even believe he was going to win. I was, I first came to Maine in 1966, I stayed in Waterville at I think it was called the Elm Hotel or the Elms Hotel. Almost got arrested my first night in town because Main Street was one way, and I drove in the wrong way, and I was going up the street the wrong way, but that's another story.

Yeah, I met the next day with a lot of people most of whom I don't even remember. I mean, I remember that they were campaign workers, boy, a lot of names come immediately to mind, but I don't, I can't remember if they were at that meeting or not. The Pease husband and wife team [Al and Vi], Neil Rolde was another one, but I can't remember which of those folks were actually at this meeting that I was asked to participate in. And the whole thrust of the meeting was, well, you know, we're probably not going to win this election, but we're going to work hard to get a lot of name recognition for Ken Curtis. I mean, he's running against an incumbent, he's running against an incumbent who's well liked and well known. And I just couldn't believe it, coming from Massachusetts where politics is really knock-down- drag-out, and had been, I mean that's the kind of environment that I understood, you know. You don't run any election without being absolutely determined to win. And so hearing anybody inside a campaign suggest that there was a possibility we were going to lose was kind of foreign to me, you know. But I had that meeting and my job was just basically, as I said, to work with the local unions and see if we couldn't broaden the base of support from organized labor for Ken Curtis.

Ken eventually, my recollection, now, is that Ken Curtis eventually did get the endorsement of the Maine State Federated Labor Council. And I think, my recollection is that the convention, there was a COPE convention, COPE is Committee on Political Education, and it is the political action arm of the AFL-CIO, and they were in convention, and I think they debated the endorsement up until, you know, something like two o'clock in the morning. It was really very,

very tense and very exciting, you know, with a lot of very passionate debate and discussion. But eventually my recollection is that Ken Curtis did get labor's endorsement, and so it worked out all right.

And then of course he did get elected much to the surprise of many, many people, and for a whole lot of reasons I just stayed on and Ben asked me to, eventually, to come to work for him. And so in 1968 I went to work for the Maine State Federated Labor Council. I became the editor of the *Labor News*, which was a monthly publication, and he also asked me to be the education director, and so we did a lot of education programs directly with the sixty-five some odd thousand AFL-CIO members in the state of Maine, and little by little I kind of became Ben's assistant.

GB: I see. Now, education for the laborers in Maine, what would that entail? What kind of education?

JH: Well, things like contract negotiations, how to negotiate, steward's training, how to file grievances, not just the mechanical things of how you do grievances but, you know, how you go into a grievance meeting and how you work out with the people on the other side of the table how you're going to adjudicate this grievance, how you're going to resolve it. You know, you've got a problem and how are you going to resolve it. You know, do you take off your shoe and bang it on the table did like Krushchev did, or do you, do you look for ways of problem solving. So the education activities of the AFL-CIO were economics, contract negotiation, grievance administration or contract administration, the political process. I mean, Ben was always pushing people to very, very involved in the political process. By the way, in both parties. He knew, he knew that a lot of card carrying union members were not Democrats. He himself was not, but he was not for a whole host of other more historical and traditional reasons, but younger people were not always Democrats. And he understood that a lot of paper workers, ship builders, people who were card carrying union members in the state of Maine, many were Republicans, you know. Their parents before them were Republicans, and they would always be Republicans. Walter Birt served in the Maine legislature. He was a paper maker from either Millinocket or East Millinocket, a union person, a union man who was always thought of as Walter Birt, the union man. And, but he was a Republican and he, you know, if Walter's still alive today, and I don't believe he is, he would be a Republican. And if he's dead he died a Republican. There were a lot of people like that, and Ben understood that.

So Ben constantly pushed the importance of political action whether people were Democrats or Republicans. Now obviously he wanted pro-labor people elected to the legislature, and Walter Birt was very pro-labor. And I've mentioned some other people who were very supportive of labor's agenda, you know, for public education, for a fair tax system, for collective bargaining rights for public employees and other employees. Ben used to say to people it was important to be involved in the political process because what benefits were won at the negotiating table, you know, when you sat with management and negotiated a contract that gave you a raise or gave you another extra holiday or gave you, you know, another week's vacation or something. He used to say all that you'd negotiate at the contract and got into the contract could be easily lost in the halls of the legislature. And he was right, you know, the legislature could pass a law and just all of a sudden eliminate all that stuff, so he said it was important to be good negotiators, sit

down and negotiate fairly in good faith with management, but it was also important to be part of the political process. And so he would encourage people, even Republicans, to be involved in their parties and don't let people take your party away from you.

GB: Do you remember other candidates that the AFL-CIO endorsed over the years?

JH: You know, not right off the top of my head. The process for endorsement was for, you know, major things like congressional seats, the senate and governors. There was an endorsement process for legislative seats, but it wasn't, it wasn't quite as open. And that was because this was a state wide organization and the feeling was that the local people could, would know better about how somebody was in their own legislative district, in their own senate district. And so there was an endorsement process, but it was more, it was more like having the people from Millinocket say whether or not they really wanted to get behind Walter Birt as an example. And even though everyone voted on that they, the vote was kind of a rubber stamp. People in the southern part of the state would say, well okay, you know, Walter Birt, you guys want to back him, and if you want to do that, that's okay with us, you know. Or we want you guys to endorse the guy that we're backing down here in Portland, you know, that kind of thing. So that's the way it worked, but on the larger, the higher public offices there was more debate, more discussion about the endorsement process.

And you didn't have a lot of campaign finance laws, so, you know, Ben used to just run around and do what he could. He would, this sounds like telling tales out of school but the truth of the matter was that there were no campaign finance laws. The AFL-CIO through COPE got voluntary dollars, and Ben would just run around, and, several days before an election or several weeks before elections, and you know, if somebody was a supporter of labor measures, Ben would slip them, you know, fifty bucks and that would be a campaign contribution. And folks did not have to report that back then, you know. But that's the way it was, businesses were doing the same thing. I mean it sounds kind of rough and tumble, but interestingly enough we didn't have all the corruption we seem to have nowadays, you know, with campaigns costing millions and millions of dollars. Even legislative campaigns now are up in the, you know, hundreds of thousands of dollars, so. I don't know, people say, well, that old system was not very good and, you know, I think there were some good things about it. People were people of their word, too, that was another thing. I mean, if you got a campaign contribution from somebody, you knew who gave it to you, they knew that they gave it to you and, you know, it, and it wasn't big. I mean fifty bucks, you know, or whatever it happened to be. Seems like not much money now but back in the sixties, fifty dollars, a hundred dollars is probably more like five hundred dollars or a thousand dollars would be today, and now we're talking about, you know, a pretty sizeable contribution to somebody running a legislative campaign.

GB: Okay, you mentioned steward's training as something you taught, what is that?

JH: Steward's training in local unions, like take the paper mill, it's a typical example in this state. You have, the local union sets up a committee, a negotiating committee, they sit down with management, they hammer out a contract that calls for, you know, wage increases, holiday pay, health insurance, pension programs and all of that, and a lot of working conditions like who's going to get promoted if there's a new position that opens up or an advanced position, who's

going to get that position. And the contract usually spells out that, you know, it's going to be somebody who's qualified to do the job, but it's going to be based on seniority. So if you've been on the job longer than I have and you're qualified for the job, then you're going to get it because you've got more seniority. And the steward is somebody elected within the union, within the local union, whose job it is to sort of make sure that the contract is enforced. So if you have a problem or you think that somehow or another the company hasn't been fair to you, or that you should have been the one who got the overtime and you weren't picked for it, or you should have gotten a promotion and you didn't get it, or a supervisor's been unfair to you and put a letter of reprimand in your file and you think it's unjust, you're the one who goes to the steward, the union steward. And you explain that this has happened and I don't think it's right, and the steward is the one who represents you kind of like a lawyer would out in the real world—well, work is a real world, but in the civil world. The steward is the one who then goes to management and maybe the foreman or the supervisor and tries to work this out, saying, you know, listen, this isn't right, you know, this person should have gotten the job and everything. So the steward's job is like that of an attorney or a representative in making sure that you're treated fairly, and that the terms and conditions of the contract are strictly adhered to.

GB: I see. And now, what industries were or are part of the Maine AFL-CIO?

JH: Well, almost every industry imaginable. When I first came to Maine, paper industry employed literally thousands of people. I'm told that for example in Millinocket, East Millinocket, those two mills combined employed well over twelve thousand people. That's nowhere near the case today, I think they probably total, employ a total of maybe three to four thousand if even that. So a lot of these jobs like in the paper industry we've lost because of automation, because of bigger machines, faster machines and so on. The shipbuilding industry is unionized, textile, textile industry was unionized. In Biddeford, Saco area, Lewiston-Auburn, all those mills down there, all unionized. Shoe industry was significantly unionized. There were some shoe plants that were not unionized, but many of the larger ones were, were union plants. Building and construction trades, heavily unionized. Metal working shops, machine shops, significantly unionized in this state.

And nowadays a lot of those industries have left or have gotten smaller. Shipbuilding, shipbuilding used to have well over ten thousand employees; I think it's down somewhere around five thousand now at Bath Iron Works. Paper industry we've already talked about, textile industry is almost, almost nonexistent in this state now. I mean, we have little remnants of the textile industry left but nowhere near those mills down in your part of the woods, in Lewiston and Auburn, you know, they, where, they're empty, gone. So we've lost a lot of those. In the meantime, you know, we've picked up a lot more service industry kinds of jobs, which, you know, that's another whole question, but I'm not sure you can build a sustainable strong economy by having people selling pizzas to one another. It's kind of like everybody taking in everybody else's wash, you know, I mean that's not what you do. I think we need to think very hard and seriously about, you know, investing in, in, not, maybe not traditional industrial jobs the way we think of them, but we ought to think about ways in which, and you hear this occasionally but we just pay lip service to it, looking for jobs that take Maine's natural resources in a sustainable fashion, not exploiting them but using them in a way that we add value to them and we can export them out. And even though we pay lip service to that, I'm not sure that we

really put our money where our mouth is, you know. We seem to settle back and think that if we just get one more telemarketing company in we'll be all set. Those are not really good paying jobs, they don't have the generally accepted array of benefits, and when the economy takes a nose dive, those are going to be the first jobs that go, you know, that's just it. So, anyway, that's another matter, that's current events and not so much labor history or labor-

GB: Well, have those service industries joined into the AFL-CIO?

JH: No, by and large they haven't. There's a few isolated incidences of people being interested in the benefits of unionization in those industries, but they're very few and far between. Largely because people who work in those industries do not see that as their career path. They take those jobs, and in this day and age they just see it as a temporary thing until something better comes along. So the whole time they're working for, you know, say an MBNA of, on telemarketing, their real thought is I'm just staying here until I can finish school or find something better, you know. They do not look at that as being their career path at all, and because they don't see it as a career path, they're just interested in doing what they have to do to get through whatever period of time. They do see it as being very transitory, and so they're less interested in the benefits of say a pension program, you know, because they throw their hands up and say, "I'm not even going to be here long enough for that."

GB: I see. All right, so, could you give me a, sort of I guess a chronology of your employment in the AFL-CIO? You said you started out as an educator and moved on to eventually become Ben Dorsky's assistant?

JH: Yeah, I was assistant to Ben, I retained being the director of education for the Maine AFL-CIO, and I did that from 1968 until 1972, late in '72. A position opened up here at the University of Maine in this department that we're sitting in here called the Bureau of Labor Education, and my office in the AFL-CIO worked very closely with the university because more and more we had developed programs where working people during the summer months would come on campus and actually take regular courses, short courses to be sure but, you know, there was a symbiotic relationship between the Maine AFL-CIO that strongly believed in education, and the University of Maine. In fact historically the Maine labor movement has been an unwavering supporter of education generally and higher education specifically, publicly funded higher education. So a position opened up here, it did look intriguing to me, I was interested, I knew a lot about it having worked with the people that were up here, and it was Ben Dorsky who said that he thought I should apply for the position. And I really liked working for Ben, I liked working for the AFL-CIO. I was not really inclined to do so, but Ben Dorsky was the kind of person who looked right at me, and he said, "You know, you can just go so far here. We're just not a big operation. You're going to be limited here. If you go to work for the university, you know, it's going to open up a whole new avenue of opportunity for you." And he really made me think long and hard about it, and I applied, and I was successful, with the help of, you know, a lot of people who thought I would probably do a good job. And I've been here since December 1st, 1972.

GB: So, could you tell me a little bit about Ben Dorsky? What was he like personally?

JH: Ben was a Russian Jew who came to this country and to Bangor as I understand it at a very young age. His family left Russia and came here, and he was just a small child at the time. Grew up in Bangor, went to Bangor High School. His father died at some point, I think either late in Ben's high school years or maybe shortly after he started at the University of Maine. I'm not real clear on this, but I think Ben may have started at the university and, when his father died. And back then it was customary, especially in immigrant families, for the oldest son to take over if a father, excuse me, if a father passed away, the older son sort of had this, assumed the responsibility of taking care of the mother and his brothers and sisters and that's what Ben did. And he may have had some other jobs, but at some point fairly early on in his career he became a motion picture projectionist in Bangor at one of the theaters. And that was his job, and he supported his family. So he was not able to go to the university or finish his studies at the university, and it's interesting because he, everyone he would meet, all the people that were my contemporaries, he would encourage them to take courses and to go to college and get their degrees. And it's all because he was never able to do that himself, I mean he really did have a sense of how important education really was.

As a motion picture projectionist, that was an industry that was unionized. It's kind of hard to believe, why would motion picture projectionists be unionized? And the answer is it was a very hazardous job back when Ben was a movie projectionist, and it was dangerous because film was made of acetate, and acetate is highly flammable. And the projectors themselves didn't use bulbs back then, they used to have two carbon arc rods that electricity ran through, and the projectionist's job, it really took, it was a skill, the projectionist's job was to maintain exactly the right distance so that the spark was constantly jumping across the two carbon rods. And you had to do it in such a way that the spark wasn't too big so that it would catch on to the film because acetate film was so highly flammable that it would just flare up, and, you know, in a movie house it was very, very dangerous. In fact the projectionist's booths were all insulated with asbestos so that if there was a flash fire it, you know, wouldn't, I mean the whole theater wouldn't, presumably wouldn't burn down instantaneously. And because it was such a hazardous job, projectionists back then were early to unionize and, you know, negotiate benefits like the survivor's pay and, you know, those kinds of things. So that's how Ben Dorsky got so active in the labor movement back when he was just a young man. You know, if you're interested in specific details about his age and everything we do have records on that, it's just, right off the top of my head, I can't remember what years those were.

GB: Did you see him in action when he was in the AFL-CIO?

JH: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, I did.

GB: What are your memories of that, do you remember him, any encounters he had with politicians or anything that would kind of give us an idea of what sort of activities, you know, he participated in as the head of the AFL-CIO?

JH: Ben was an enormously effective lobbyist, and I think it's because he had the ability to get along with everyone. He made an effort to get along with everyone, he made an effort to understand other people's point of view and to try to work with them in such a way that they could understand his point of view. He could be cantankerous, he could be gruff, in fact a lot of

people just thought he was gruff, but people who really knew referred to him as “Gentle Ben” because of his demeanor. He was just very quiet, he never bragged or issued threats, he would question the wisdom of someone doing something from time to time but he would never admonish you that you absolutely should not do that. He would say things like, “You may want to think about that for a little bit,” you know, which was a signal that maybe you weren’t about to make the right decision. And he was a man of his word, I mean I learned a lot from Ben Dorsky. He was quite a mentor. And I think, you know, if you encounter other people, well, certainly Don would recall Ben, and he would probably say the same thing.

Ben had a very, very close working relationship with Ed Muskie. I’m not sure that anybody outside of kind of an immediate close circle would know that, but Ed Muskie would regularly call Ben on the phone. I mean, not necessarily going through his secretary, I mean just call Ben directly, and they would huddle together and talk about things and plans and things that they wanted to do and things that they thought they ought to do. And I think, I think based on what I watched the senator do when he was listening to Ben, I think, I think he took Ben Dorsky’s advice very, very seriously. And I think Ben Dorsky had enormous respect for Ed Muskie. And they were, you know, they were just very, very close.

GB: So Muskie was friendly with organized labor you’d say?

JH: I would say so, I don’t think there’s any question about that. Ed Muskie could walk into a convention hall of labor people, take off his jacket and just start talking. He didn’t have to prepare a speech. Of course I know that that was kind of the senator’s style to begin with, but he would speak just extemporaneously knowing that he was among friends with labor people.

GB: Was he officially endorsed by the group in his campaigns?

JH: Yeah, and I don’t know, that, you know, I don’t know going back to Ed Muskie’s gubernatorial campaign, I think that was what, in ‘54, and that was before my time. So I don’t know what arrangements were then; I don’t know who was endorsed. Somebody else, you know, I’m sure that’s a matter of record someplace. And I probably should know, just a matter of Maine labor history, but I’m not real clear on that. But I think at some point it became real clear that Ed Muskie was just a very pro, not so much pro- union, although I think that was true. I think he believed in the importance of having, in a free and democratic society, having free, a free press and a free trade union movement, you know, I think he really did philosophically believe that. But I think Ed Muskie was a real working person’s politician, you know, I think he, I think he thought that government, the role of government was to take care of people who were not necessarily able to take care of themselves, that the role of government was to watch out for people and make sure that they, you know, weren’t cheated or weren’t gyped or, you know, victimized or exploited and so that made him a friend not just of organized labor but I think of working men and women in the state.

GB: Did anyone in organized labor have a problem with Muskie’s environmental legislation, which, you know, because environmental legislation in the past at some points had kind of come into conflict with labor interests. Was that ever a problem?

JH: You know, that's a very, very interesting question because I remember only too well, in fact there was a hearing in Searsport one time about an oil refinery down on the coast of Maine; was it Searsport or maybe Machiasport? There were so many hearings, you know, there was a period of time in the early and mid 1970s where there was lots of talk about oil refineries. I think this particular one was Machias or Machiasport. And actually it was the senator's, one of the senator's senate committees that was holding hearings down there, and I was asked to testify by Ben Dorsky. I mean he wanted me to go down, talk about the need for jobs particularly in Washington County. We were very, very interested in, the organization now, I'm speaking as a, you know, an employee of this organization, I'm a staff person of the Maine AFL-CIO, and my job was to explain the need for meaningful economic development. We, the AFL-CIO didn't really come right out forcefully as a proponent of this oil refinery. I think the senator was also interested in economic development but his concerns about some environmental issues I think made it a natural for him to somehow be involved.

Now, why am I saying it in exactly that way? Well, I think the AFL-CIO might have taken a much stronger pro-active, pro-refinery stance were it not for Ed Muskie. In other words I think, what I'm saying here is my testimony, which somewhere is a matter of record in speaking as the spokesperson at this particular hearing for the Maine AFL-CIO, then called the Maine State Federated Labor Council, was tempered by the recognition that, you know, we just didn't want to open the doors to this damn refinery, that there were legitimate concerns about how it would be run, who would be running it, whether or not it would pose potentially a threat to the environment. And yes we were interested in the jobs; oil refinery jobs paid very good money. They tend to be unionized. They tend to, you know, be significant kinds of jobs paying really very, very good wages to highly skilled labor. And so for Washington County that might have been a wonderful thing as years earlier the Passamaquoddy Tidal Project during the administration of FDR might have been down in Eastport. They talked about a hydro-electric title project that would have generated huge amounts of power, and, you know, little by little that kind of fell by the wayside, but a lot of people pushed for that knowing that it would mean really good jobs and a source of cheap electric power.

So we were looking at the same kinds of things, and I think that in many, many ways the AFL-CIO's position was yes, supportive, but moderately so. I mean, saying, we think this is worthy of consideration, we think that we really ought to entertain the idea of building an oil refinery in Machias or Machiasport because it might be a source of lower cost home heating oil for people in Maine. It will certainly be the source of high paying jobs, but there are these other questions. And I do recall vividly that my testimony included some of these things, same things. And I'm willing to bet that had it not been for Ed Muskie and his close relationship with Ben and their understanding one another, that the Maine AFL-CIO's position might have been more vociferous, you know, more, you know, damn the torpedoes, let's build the thing and get these jobs, and it was not that way.

There was another proposal for an oil refinery in Searsport and that was by the Pittston Company and if you know anything about the Pittston Company, you know that there was a coal, it was originally a coal company that kind of expanded into oil, oil drilling and oil refining. And Pittston had a not very good record in the areas of their mining operations and environmental issues and even the way they treated people, there was a Pittston dam that broke and a lot of

people died as a result of a dam. So they wanted to locate a refinery in Searsport, maybe even on Sears Island, and, you know, once again that was a big political issue. And the AFL-CIO's position on that was again kind of supportive, I mean saying, you know, we ought to seriously look at this. I mean, we had lots of data about income levels and how poor Waldo county was. We knew a lot about the need for jobs. The sardine industry had gone, the fishing industry was kind of on its last legs, there was, the lime operations in Rockland were all but defunct. I mean a lot of traditional industries connected to the Maine coast were either dying or had died out. And so again the AFL-CIO's position was, well, it's something that we really ought to consider. I mean this, it could be something that would help the people of the state of Maine. But again there was this, included this little caveat, you know, yes we want jobs, we want good jobs. Yes, we want jobs, we want safe jobs. Yes, we want industry but industry that's not going to despoil our beautiful state. And I'm absolutely convinced that a good part of that came with Ben Dorsky and the Maine AFL-CIO not wanting to do anything that would seemingly embarrass the distinguished senator, but at the same time recognizing that he was on the cutting edge of something that wasn't really widespread. I mean, the environmental movement was fairly new at this point and there wasn't a whole lot of recognition of the, Rachel Carson's book had started to, you know, build a little fire under people and looking out over the Penobscot River that was so thick with stuff that the paper companies had thrown into it. I think people were realizing that it really was an issue and needed to be, but they were also concerned about jobs. Probably gave you more than what you wanted.

GB: Oh no, that's wonderful, that's wonderful, the more the better. Beyond the oil refineries you've already mentioned some others, and you mentioned that Maine had as you put it a progressive approach to labor. What were some other big issues back in, you know, the late sixties, early seventies?

JH: Well, there is one that I've mentioned before, and I'll just go over briefly because as we speak today in the year 2000 there are still states that we think of as being significantly unionized states, you know. Like West Virginia for example that still does not have collective bargaining rights for public employees. And when I say collective bargaining, I'm talking about the right of labor management to sit down and negotiate a contract that spells out the terms and conditions of how they're going to work together, you know, what the pay rates are going to be, vacation days, all that kind of thing. And West Virginia does not have, there's probably half the states in this nation that do not have collective bargaining laws. Maybe not quite as many as half but certainly about twenty states that still do not have that. And Maine does have collective bargaining for just about all employees imaginable: public employees, university employees, turnpike employees, county employees, water district employees, did I mention university employees? Maine Maritime Academy employees. So all these public employees that we have in the state have access to exercise their right to engage in collective bargaining, to join an employee organization or a union of their own choosing, and to enter into collective bargaining. And most employees, unless they happen to be in very unique positions like, some people hold confidential positions where because of their position they have access to certain kinds of information that might be, you know, prejudicial or could unduly influence one thing or another so they're exempted from the law, but it's only on an individual basis. So you have all of these employees that I've mentioned that are enjoying collective bargaining rights and have going back to the late 1960s when Maine first passed, I guess it was about the mid 1960s, maybe '64,

the, what was called the Firefighters Arbitration Act. And then I mentioned the state employees, I think it was the municipal employees labor relations act came after that, and over a period of about eight or ten years you had virtually all these public employees, paid for by tax dollars, now covered by collective bargaining.

GB: I got a little off track, I meant to ask you something and I forgot to.

JH: Sure.

GB: You talked quite a bit about Ed Muskie's relationship with Ben Dorsky. Did you know Ed Muskie yourself?

JH: Yes, I did.

GB: How'd you meet him?

JH: I, I, I'm a little foggy about this, I can't remember exactly. My sense of it is that we met for the very first time during the beginnings of a campaign season, and I don't even know if it was Ed Muskie's campaign, you know, for reelection, or whether it was just that he was in the state and, you know, out on the stump on behalf of other candidates. I just, I really, I really don't know. It was probably right around 1966, and, let's see, he got elected to the senate, I'm trying to figure all these, when the years came up. Sixty-eight he ran for vice president, yeah, that was '68. And then in '70 was he up for, he was up for election in '70? Reelection, I think he was up for reelection in 1970.

GB: It's very, very possible, I believe you're right, yeah.

JH: And Neil Bishop ran against him. Have you encountered Neil Bishop's name? Neil Bishop was a Republican.

GB: I've heard the name, I don't -

JH: Well, you may want to make a note of that. I could have the dates a little mixed up, and I apologize for that. Sixty-eight was the vice presidential, he ran with Hubert Humphrey. He spoke in down town Bangor in '68 as a president-, vice presidential candidate, and he spoke directly to the war, too. Somewhere I have that tape, I don't know, I mean I'm sure that somewhere in the archives there must be a tape of it. But -

GB: He must have run in '70 because I know that he ran in '76 for the senate, so he must have run in '70 as well.

JH: Okay, so '70, and I'm pretty sure that 19-, yeah, 1970 would have been when Neil Bishop challenged him as a Republican. So that, we worked very, you know, everybody in the AFL-CIO worked very hard for Ed Muskie's reelection. Worked hard in 1968, by the way, for the ticket -

GB: Oh really.

JH: Across the board, yeah. So my guess would be that I probably met Ed Muskie somewhere in the campaign of 1966, and of course he would not have been, he would not have been running himself at that point, but he was here in the state supporting other candidates. Bill Hathaway? Let me think now, Bill Hathaway was in the congress right around that same time, I think he was the congressman in '66.

GB: And was at some point -

JH: Yeah, it wasn't until later that he ran, that Bill Hathaway ran against Margaret Chase Smith and beat her. So yeah, my guess is it was someplace on the campaign trail that I met Ed Muskie.

GB: I see. What were your personal impressions of him, first impressions of him?

JH: Well, I think I was a little, in some ways kind of a little awestruck of Ed Muskie. One of the things that I remember distinctly, whenever it was that I first met him, he already somehow knew my name. Now I later on caught on to a trick that, I think you might call it a trick, but Ed Muskie would always have somebody kind of preceding him at various meetings and everything, and they would very quietly whisper in his ear who they were, or they would-

*End of Side B, Tape One
Side A, Tape Two*

JH: kind of awed by the senator. And whenever, whenever the time was that I met him the thing that really kind of overwhelmed me was that he knew my name. And I figured out some time later on that the way he did that was there was always people ahead of him, and in this case it was somebody whose name escapes me, but they preceded the senator and he came over and said, "Hi John," and said it loud enough so that he was able to pick up on that. And when he came over, he addressed me by my name, and I just thought, wow, how does he know who I am? You know, this is really something. And it made me feel very good, but it also made me feel just, you know, almost in the presence of somebody just enormously omnipotent, you know, my God, he knows my name, and it was quite a thing, so. He had quite a presence about him, too. Did you know the senator, you're probably, probably too young.

GB: I never met him, yeah, I was a little too young.

JH: Yeah, Ed Muskie had presence, you know, just his stature. I mean, some people can walk in a room and you just right away notice it, you know. People talk about John Kennedy that way. I think it's true with Ted Kennedy personally. I think Ted Kennedy's the kind of person that walks into a room and just immediately. I mean it's not just his physical size, although Ted Kennedy's a big man, I mean, not just big around, but even before he got big in the middle, I mean Ted Kennedy's just, he's a sizeable kind of guy. Ed Muskie was like that, he kind of just attracted attention, I mean he was notable, you know, he was striking, and so people did notice it.

GB: I noticed actually this, that's got to be Ted Kennedy for president poster that you've got up there. That's the first Ted Kennedy for president poster I've ever seen. When was, when was that?

JH: Nineteen eighty.

GB: That was 1980.

JH: He ran against Jimmy Carter in the primary.

GB: Yeah, I remember hearing at some point (*unintelligible phrase*) sidetracked it, yeah.

JH: He was very controversial, yeah.

GB: All right, so getting back, I was asking you before about different times that you encountered Ed Muskie through the years and, well, could you continue with what you were saying about that?

JH: I don't remember what I said.

GB: You were talking about, you were talking about Chick O'Leary.

JH: Oh yeah, yeah, I want you to see that picture, actually take a copy of it. Yeah, we spent, see there were a lot of interrelationships I think between the Maine AFL-CIO, certainly this office, I mean there's always been a very close relationship between the Bureau of Labor Education and the Maine AFL-CIO in part because Ben Dorsky was one of the architects of creating a labor studies center at the University of Maine. That was also in 1966. And so there's always been this very close relationship. And I can remember on one occasion after I was already here at the university, and hopefully we didn't get this on the tape otherwise it's going to be redundant. But Ed Muskie came up, he was, Ed Muskie was a big supporter of the Higher Education Act, he was I think a major sponsor and certainly very, very interested in the Intergovernmental Personnel Act, which provided money for training people and human resources in the public sector. Higher education of course to provide educational opportunities for working adults; it's kind of what they call life long learning now, it used to be called continuing education.

And the senator came up and spent time in our office, which was on College Avenue, it was the old log cabin building. It had been a restaurant, and then it was taken over by the Catholic church and became the college's, the university's Newman Center, and then they put up a new facility, a larger facility for the Newman Center, and somehow or another the Bureau of Labor Education ended up in this building, which has since been torn down unfortunately. But the senator came up and we spent a good part of the day, we had lunch together, we talked about a whole host of issues including, and this may be, this pertains less to Maine I think than the national picture, but I think it's indicative of the senator's interest in the bigger picture. I mean, he was the senator from Maine, but he saw himself as representing a lot more than just Maine. And, you know, the Higher Education Act was to make educational opportunities available to working men. It

covered a lot of stuff, you know, and we talked at that, on that particular day, of which I do have photographs, of his sponsorship of a labor education extension act, a bill that would have some appropriation attached to it and would be very similar to education, the Higher Education Act. In fact he talked about it as being a possible amendment to the HEA or maybe even an amendment to the intergovernmental Personnel Act, but the idea was to set aside, appropriate some, some actually quite small, to me it was a large sum of money, but you know, a small appropriation to make it possible for working men and women to take advantage of centers like this at the University of Maine, you know, labor studies centers, worker education centers. There are about fifty-five colleges and universities around the country that do have labor-ed centers, so the uni--, it's just typical of a university reaching out and serving not only the agricultural interests and the business interests and the financial interests but worker's interests as well. And so the idea was that the senator might sponsor some legislation that would put some seed money in there and get something started so there'd be a national commitment to the whole idea of labor education for working men and women.

GB: And where did that go? How'd that end up?

JH: Well, you know, I'm not sure. I know it went so far as drafting some legislation, or possible language for legislation. This was in the early 1970s, and when was it he was, he was named secretary of state in, what, '76?

GB: No, no, that was in 1980.

JH: Oh, 1980.

GB: Yes, 1980 because he only served for seven months before Reagan came in.

JH: Oh, okay, well that's a good question, I mean the issue kept coming up, and I'm not sure, I'm not sure where it ever, you know, how it was ever resolved. I did find the letter which I'll go back and dig out here, make a copy for you, in which Ed Muskie wrote to Ben Dorsky talking about exactly this thing, labor education and how it might more appropriately fit as an amendment to the Intergovernmental Personnel Act. So I don't think it was anything that was aggressively pursued. I think there was a lot of strategizing going on and exactly what is the best way to proceed. It probably wasn't very high up on the senator's agenda, I mean in the big scheme of things it likely was not. But the existence of the letter and some other materials that went to Ben which are in the labor archives clearly show that the senator was interested in doing something with this. And we still don't have a labor education extension act, so.

GB: I see, right. Do you recall any other, any other meetings or encounters you had with him or anything he did, anything you remember him doing as a senator that was of interest to you?

JH: Well, you know there are so many, there's really a lot of little things, and I don't mean to suggest that they're little, but in the case with labor people and putting aside his relationship, his very close relationship with Ben Dorsky, I mean in 1977 and then again in 1979 I know there were some testimonials held for Ben Dorsky, and Ed Muskie took time out of his busy schedule to be at those testimonials. The one in 1979 was when Ben was actually retiring. That was in

January of '79, and I think it was, my recollection is that it was hard for the senator even getting to Bangor, but, you know, it was the kind of thing where he, he really felt it important to say good things about Ben Dorsky, and he did. So there was always that relationship, you know.

The, Senator Muskie really never needed an invitation to come to anything that organized labor was having or sponsoring. You know, it could have been a summer school here on campus, I mentioned that for a lot of years we did these residential schools during the summer. They lasted less than a week. People would come in from all over the state, working men and women, local union leaders, members of local executive boards, full time union people. They would stay in the dorms up at Hilltop, they would attend classes on economics, labor history, parliamentary procedure, you know, all of these kinds of things. It was really like kind of a leadership development academy if you will. And at night they would sit around and have a few beers and talk amongst themselves and, you know. It was very catalytic in nature, I mean having different union people from a shipyard talking with people from the textile workers union or paper workers from some other union.

And see, Ed Muskie would feel very, very comfortable just dropping in, and I can remember a few occasions when he did. It wasn't anything where everybody dropped anything, it's just that he was always welcomed, he, I think he, I believe he always felt at home. And he certainly looked like he always felt at home, you know, just being around people and talking about various issues, you know. During one campaign he was assailed publicly for supporting some legislation, I think it was during a recession, it may have been during Richard Nixon's term in office, such as it was. But there was some kind of a recession going on, there was a lot of talk about public works programs to get, to get, you know, something fashioned along the idea of what we did with Works Progress Administration during the Depression, public works programs to get people working again, you know. And somebody accused the senator of supporting leaf raking legislation, and he, you know, he just railed at that. I can remember his giving this literally impromptu speech, I mean he was like offended, this was like an insult because he thought that putting people to work was just so important, you know. Don't just give them like welfare or handouts or unemployment insurance, I mean, any job including leaf raking was a job, and it was all stuff that was purposeful, it was important, you know, it was work. And by people working they could feel good about themselves and not feel as though they were just, you know, taking on the dole so to speak, you know.

And, not that he thought that people who out of the necessity of having to take care of their kids and everything were on welfare were, there was something wrong for them, that's not what he was saying at all. But he was just offended that anybody would talk about creating a jobs program at a time when the economy was really slow and almost, in fact I think it was in a recession, he took it personally and he really lashed out. And of course he could do that with labor groups because we were all about jobs, we were all about having people have the opportunity to work and that everybody who wanted a job should be able to have a job and it should be a decent job and a job that paid, you know, a dignified wage and that kind of thing. So when he would speak about these things, he knew he could be very passionate about it with labor people and there was a, it was like talking to kindred souls, you know.

And so when you talk about specific things, now I'm hard pressed. I mean, I just gave you that

one example, but it was that kind of thing, I mean, you know, he could come into a room, and people would just start chatting with him. He was not standoffish, and labor people, it's very interesting because they were not the least bit bashful about just going up to him and telling him about how they didn't like this bill, and they didn't like that bill or, you know, it wasn't, it was never taken as a personal attack, it was just free exchange of ideas and thoughts. And some people can articulate themselves exceedingly well and other people are a little rough around the edges, but it never seemed to bother the senator and it certainly never seemed to bother, you know, the working people that were members of unions and would show up at things like the summer school or committee on political education convention or Maine State Federated Labor council convention or whatever it happened to be, you know, they just get along. I mean, I think Ed truly felt very, very comfortable with labor people because they're kind of down to earth.

GB: Do you recall at all if he drew a lot of support from labor in his 1972 presidential campaign?

JH: Yeah, I do remember that. I remember a lot of small details about that. Of course you know a national campaign is pretty much out of the, if you understand how the organi--, how organized labor is structured you know that there's very little that the Maine AFL-CIO could do to make sure like, for example, he got the nomination. I mean that's, that's a decision made by the national AFL-CIO. Buy I do know that the Maine AFL-CIO, working people everywhere were just very, very, well I think I can safely use the term proud that it was Ed Muskie, the senator from Maine, who was making this bid for the presidency. And I think by and large most people in the ranks of labor supported him. There was some criticism that came from some quarters, and it might have been harbored by some labor people as well although I'm not sure of this, and I never heard it uttered in, certainly in my presence.

There were some people that thought that the senator ought to just, you know, get rid of these high hopes about getting to be president, you know. They wanted him to be the senator from Maine and never mind these other things, you know. But I think labor people, because of their knowledge and understanding about how important politics is, that by and large they saw that Maine could really do well. If we could well with a very influential senator like Ed Muskie, and by the way I have to say that I know a lot of labor people that didn't agree with Margaret Chase Smith on a lot of issues, but they certainly knew that she was well respected and an influential senator from Maine, and they were very proud of her as well. We seem to have had the ability in Maine by and large, couple of exceptions, to elect very notable people to the congress of the United States, in both houses, you know. And I think by and large Maine people sort of take pride in that. As I said, there are a couple of exceptions and we'll just skip over those, but you know, you know what I mean, and I think people understood that if it was possible for Ed Muskie, the senator from Maine, to exude and exert as much influence as he was able to do by virtue of his position in the U.S. senate, just think of how much more he could do if he was president of the United States. And so I think by and large people were very supportive of it, knowing that ultimately it would be, you know, up to that whole, the whole primary race, the weeding out of candidates.

And you know, if that whole episode over in New Hampshire had occurred in this day and age rather than then it would have been a non-issue, I mean, in fact he probably would have been

applauded, you know. I don't know if it was melting snow on his face or truly a tear, and we may never know, and maybe he's spoken about it, I don't know about that. But the fact of the matter is back then, see, that was kind of considered a sign of weakness I guess. And today that would be considered a sign of strength, so we are making progress. You know, when you see people display emotions, I mean, we consider that a good thing now. Back then it was not a good thing.

GB: How have people within labor viewed other senators and congressmen from Maine since Muskie, you know, in the past couple of decades, the eighties and nineties? Do you have a sense of that? Have any of them been as popular as Muskie?

JH: Well, certainly George Mitchell, no question. I think George Mitchell is right in that long line of very distinguished people, you know, people who maybe nationally were not very well known when they went into the congress of the United States but somehow did things that just distinguished themselves, brought credit to themselves, brought credit to the state that elected them, the people that elected them. And somehow it made people kind of stand back and take notice, you know. And I'm not sure exactly sure when George Mitchell did that; it may have been when he confronted Ollie North, I don't know, you know. You could, maybe it wasn't one event, maybe it was a whole circumstance, and I just don't know the answer to that, but I know that George Mitchell is highly regarded even now by labor people.

Charlie O'Leary retired a year ago, well, it'll be two years this coming February, and last November of 1999 they had at the convention a special tribute to Charlie, it was kind of a post retirement tribute. And we did one for Ben Dorsky by the way in which Ed Muskie's voice is on the soundtrack, but in that one when George Mitchell realized that he could not personally be on hand last November at the Samoset for this tribute to Charlie O'Leary, Senator Mitchell and I talked on the phone and we arranged for him to do an interview with me over the phone in which we taped the comments. And we integrated it into a multi-media presentation in fact. And it was very well received, and you would expect that because George Mitchell himself is very well received by, well, once again, people who know and understand, you know.

And I think labor people, the AFL-CIO card carrying union people, it's not that they're somehow different than anybody else, they're not. But I think that they are just a little bit more sophisticated in their understanding of the political process. Now that doesn't mean every individual card carrying union member is, but on whole if you look at voting patterns and the turnout, the participation among union households is significantly greater than just the population at large. If you look at union Democratic households, the turnout and the participation in the political process is significantly higher than in households that are not unionized. And I think it's because of the work that unions do to sort of impress upon the membership that the political process is important, you know. If you want to have, if you want to have an occupational safety and health act that's strong and protects people from injury or death at work you've got to make sure you got politicians that are willing to make sure that it's funded and supported and that it's going to have an enforcement component.

When you talk about minimum wage, raising, you know, raising the tide so that all ships are carried, labor people understand that, they, for the most part they're making more than minimum

wage themselves, but they understand that if you're making pie plates at Chinette and, in Waterville area at the Keyes Fiber plant, you know, when people go to the store if they don't have much money, they're not going to buy Chinette because Chinette's a little better quality, well, quite a bit better quality actually, and, but it does cost a little bit more but it's a much sturdier plate, you know, picnic plate or paper ware. Now paper workers understand that if people are just making, you know, five fifty an hour, when they go to the store they're going to be kind of looking for the cheapest plates and they understand that if you raise the minimum wage so that people are earning a little bit more they spend every bit of it. When you're at that lower rung of the economic ladder, you don't, you don't put aside whatever raise you get, you end up spending it. And they know that we're all better off when you have more money in the pockets of people who desperately need it, who are in the lower rungs of that ladder because they do spend that money and there is that multiplier effect, and so they support those things like that, and they understand that that's a function of the political process. So that's why I think that when you talk about labor people, I think their role in elections and in the political process is, I believe it's far greater than what's generally acknowledged.

I only hear it acknowledged when it gets close to campaign time. In other words a lot of politicians, you know, want to get the labor vote, but they're hard to find any other time, and that's one of the things that distinguish them of the people we're talking about, including Ed Muskie because he was around even when it wasn't just, you know, time to run for reelection. He was there. If you wanted Ed to do something, to join you at a reception, to do a, help do a fund raiser, Ed Muskie would do everything he possibly could. My experience is, I don't know of any experience in which he said he couldn't do something. I'm sure there were, you know, when his schedule just didn't permit it, but when he was asked by the Maine State Federated Labor Council or by Ben Dorsky to help out with something or put in an appearance, he would do it. And I know of no time when he said, "I, you know, I just don't want to," or, "I can't make it."

Now there were a few times when he was late for things, and I do remember some of those. We had a rally one time in Madawaska, Maine of labor people. Of course Madawaska's the home of Frazier Paper, and back then they had several thousand workers at Frazier Paper, and this was to kind of rally the troops. It was on the eve of an election, and again I don't know if it was the senator's election or whether it was, see, because he was very good about campaigning for other candidates when, even when he himself wasn't up for reelection. And he was going to be like the keynote speaker in this, I think it was the gymnasium at the high school in Madawaska, but I could be mistaken about that. But it was a big gym type place, and the place was full, we had some other speakers, maybe some local candidates running for legislative seats and that kind of thing. Ben spoke. We had, we did have, my job as education director was to put together a multi-media presentation, and it included scenes of Ed Muskie at Kennedy Park in, is it Lewiston?

GB: That's in Lewiston.

JH: Yeah, yeah, and words, it included words of Ed Muskie. See, the senator was very good too about, he knew that we would be doing these things, and so he would let me interview him and just, you know, I mean not an interview like this, short interviews, you know. Senator,

what's the key issue for labor people this year? And he'd just give me a, you know, short piece that I could, or sound bite that I could put in this multi-media presentation. And so we did that, and, you know, the whole time we're trying to drag this out because the senator still wasn't there and I don't know where he was flying into, Eagle Lake or Frenchville, or, I don't know, but he was late, and it was tough keeping people there. I mean, Ben sent out for more soda, more doughnuts, you know, anything that, anything to just keep people there. And unfortunately the senator was quite late, and we lost about half the audience. We kept saying he was on his way and, but it was still a good turnout and, you know, these things happen, I mean it's Maine after all.

So, there was another time at Pilot's Grill, and again I apologize for not recalling the exact year. It had to be prior to '72 because it was when I was on the staff of the Maine AFL-CIO, and it was at a COPE convention, which was held at Pilot's Grill in their back room. And all the delegates were there, and it was going to be an evening reception, and Ed Muskie was going to be the, like the guest of honor, the keynote speaker or whatever. It was an informal event, but at some point, you know, Ben was going to kind of get everybody's attention, and Ed Muskie was going to say a few words about the importance of whatever election it was, whether it was his election or somebody else's. And we were waiting for the senator to arrive, the convention had recessed, and the business of the convention was all done for that day. People went to wherever they were staying; there was a hotel, still is a hotel right next door. It's not quite as nice as it once was, but a lot of people, a lot of the delegates were staying at that hotel. They went and got changed and came back. Those were in the days when you had receptions, and people wore ties, men wore ties and women wore dresses. We're a lot more casual now than we used to be.

And people showed up at the reception thinking that Ed Muskie was going to be there. Well, he was running late and I had sound equipment set up for, you know, the PA system, the microphones and all that kind of thing. And we had also done some kind of a media presentation at that convention. But the upshot of it was the senator was late, Ben asked the people at Pilot's Grill to just open up the bar. Ben's idea was, you know, if people were going to, it was a cash bar and the senator was running late and Ben was worried that people would start to get antsy and think, oh my God, we've got to go to dinner. It was an open night, you know, people could do whatever they wanted. And so he said to me, "Go tell Bill Zoidis," who owned Pilot's Grill, "to just, we're going to, we're just going to open the bar, you know. Just keep track of what people are drinking," but Ben thought, rightfully so I think, especially back then, in those days you open up the bar and people will stay, free drinks, gee, why would they leave.

Well, the senator was running considerably behind once again, I mean, it happened. I think he had to stay for a vote in the senate and didn't get out of Washington and quite late, whatever the reason was, and the upshot of it was, you know, we're now starting to run out of steam and people have had quite a bit to drink, and Ben didn't want them to go out to eat at this point. So he wanted to know if we had any music. I lived in Hamden at the time; Hamden's not that far from here if you're not familiar with the area. From Pilot's Grill it was like maybe ten minutes to get to my house, so I said, "Well I got some music at home, like cassette tapes." It's before the days of CDs. And so he said, "If we get some music going, you know, maybe people will start dancing and that'll keep them here." So I ran home, drove home, got some tapes, brought them back to Pilot's Grill, and we plugged them into the sound system that we had set up for the

convention and for the multi-media presentation and we just started playing, you know, this music that I had of, you know, it was good danceable music. And sure enough people just started dancing, you know, I mean they had drinks, Ben had gotten Bill Zoidis to put together like appetizers so that people, you know, were at least getting some munchies to eat. And at some point, now considerably delayed, maybe as much as a couple of hours, Ed Muskie came in. But he ended up not speaking that time, and it was because people had just enough to drink that they were, and they were so relaxed and they were having such a good time between the drinking and the dancing that Ed Muskie assessed the situation and decided that it would probably be better if he just went around the room very informally, you know, and said hello to people, and he did that. He did that for a good part of the rest of the evening, and, you know, it went over very well. I don't know if he had had a speech to give or some, I mean he wasn't much one for preparing speeches for labor groups. I mean he'd just speak off the cuff, but if he had something specifically he wanted to say he never got to address the entire group all at the same time because of that.

But I think it just, I think that story and the other one I've told you is simply illustrative of the kind of relationship that these people, working men and women in the state of Maine represented by unions, had with Ed Muskie. I think it was a good relationship, I think it was a close relationship. There may have been times when they weren't entirely happy with maybe a position he had taken, but the interesting thing to me was that nobody was afraid to just take him to task for it, and he was not the least bit embarrassed to defend his position. That didn't happen very often but, you know, once in a while he may not have voted exactly the way somebody thought he should and so it was almost like a family feud, you know, never went outside, there was never any disagreement publicly about taking exception to Ed Muskie or anything he'd done but just, you know, "Listen Ed, what are you going to do about this kind of thing or that kind of thing." So it was very interesting.

GB: That's fantastic. All right. I think I'll change directions here.

JH: Sure.

GB: Your position here, you're director of labor education?

JH: I'm the director, yeah.

GB: The director, all right. First off, what does labor education entail?

JH: Well, university based labor education is the carrying out of educational activities geared to meet the needs of working men and women on work related issues. For example, teaching people about the Occupational Safety and Health Act, teaching people about employment law, workplace discrimination and what to do about it, what agencies of government exist to address those kinds of issues. It includes issues like leadership development for union organizations, labor organizations, employee organizations. It includes doing a lot of research on labor issues in our state and in our country. So, for example, this office, through the instrumentality of Charlie Scontras who's on our staff, he's sort of semi-retired now, Charlie is an historian, labor historian, we so far have published I think we're on our, coming up on our fifth book about

Maine labor history. Most people don't think of Maine as being a particularly unionized, particularly labor oriented state, but as you and I have talked during this interview the fact is it's been very, very highly unionized. It's only been in recent years where we've lost a lot of those heavy industries like paper and shipbuilding and textile and shoes manufacturing that we've seen a decline in the percentage of people unionized. We've lost a lot of good paying jobs in those sectors.

But Maine's labor history is really rich, very, very rich. Going back to those textile mills when it was Franco Americans in Lewiston-Auburn and Saco-Biddeford, you know, when it was shipbuilders in the early days of Bath Ironworks, and those paper mills over in Rumford and Millinocket, East Millinocket. So our job is to do a lot of research on work related issues, safety and health issues, anything to do with the workplace. Public policies focusing around those issues, you know. We get calls from the legislature. When they're entertaining a bill, they frequently will call us, regularly call us, wanting to know if we have any documentation or any information that will help them decide what they want to do to address in a public policy way questions of, you know, well I'll say workplace discrimination or poverty or those kinds of things.

GB: I see. Now are your courses open to the regular matriculated students at the university?

JH: We do, we do have, we don't run them, the colleges, the colleges that actually, you know, like business administration, colleges of liberal studies, and so on. They actually run the courses. We go in and teach them, and we've designed the curriculum for it. Our historian, Charlie Scontras, the fellow I mentioned before, he's the one that teaches most of those courses. Valerie Carter is a sociologist, she's on our staff, she teaches the sociology of work. So I'm less involved with the actual teaching on campus; I'm more involved with the conduct and carrying out of seminars, conferences off campus for legislators, for working people, for full time union officials, you know, that kind of thing.

GB: All right, well I'm done with my questions, so I won't keep you any longer unless, do you have anything else you'd like to add or emphasize, any final remarks?

JH: Well, you know one of your first questions, maybe the first question, had to do with any tension between labor people and Senator Muskie on environmental issues, and I used two illustrations that I was familiar with, both of them happened to involve refineries. But since I responded to that question I thought too about things like the Dickey-Lincoln dam, which, you know, was an interesting project. A lot of labor people were for that, and of course it never did come to pass. I suspect there were people who might have taken exception to Senator Muskie's seemingly tough stance on environmental questions, but maybe you've picked up on the fact from other things that I've said that even with those dichotomies, even with those tensions, there was always the forum for verbally fighting it out. Not that Senator Muskie would necessarily change his mind or not that, you know, a couple people that were fearful for their jobs for example in the paper industry would lose their jobs, but I think it was just the relationship, the nature of the relationship that made it possible for people to vent themselves directly to the senator, and he would listen patiently, you know, and explain his position. And I think just probably the fact that they could communicate with one another, even if they ended up not

necessarily agreeing totally on how to resolve an issue, it was the opportunity to just have those kinds of discussions in an informal setting with there being no hard feelings afterwards and people being willing to, you know, get out there and put out bumper stickers and lick envelopes and make phone calls and do all those kinds of things.

I mean, they just believed in it, and they figured, you know, if the senator, and I speak now not just of Ed Muskie but George Mitchell on strike breaker legislation, very similar kind of thing. George Mitchell ended up supporting strike breaker legislation, but early on in that process he played it very close to the vest. I do not know the reason for that. At one point he claimed he was still studying the issue, and I, you know, I take him at his word. For whatever reason, though, he was not real clear with labor people about how he was going to come down on that particular issue, and it was a major issue in this state because of the strike in Jay over at International Paper Company. But people always felt that they would have an audience with George and they could argue with him and, you know, almost fight with him and tell him, you know, sometimes not so diplomatically, that he really needed to help us out because we needed his vote on something. And, you know, he did come around on that.

I think with Ed Muskie it was a similar kind of thing. I don't know of any case in which Ed Muskie kind of suggested he didn't know how he was going to vote on something, but he knew that people didn't always, always necessarily agree with him on every vote. But just having an opportunity for, you know, the exchange I think was healthy. I'm not sure we see as much of it today as I, I'm not, I'm convinced that we don't see as much of it today as we once did. I think the media, the necessity of being on television, has pretty much obviated the opportunities for people to really get to know one another, like voters and candidates.

You know, it's, it's just not, when Bill Hathaway decided to run for the senate against Margaret Chase Smith, the first people I think he met with, he may have met with others that I did not know about, was an executive board meeting in Bangor of the Maine AFL-CIO in their conference room. And Bill Hathaway, Congressman Hathaway, asked Ben if he could attend the meeting because he wanted to talk something over with the board. And there was no mention anywhere of Bill Hathaway running against Margaret Chase Smith. I mean, I think if it had even been uttered people would have said, "What are you, crazy? Margaret Chase Smith is like an institution in this state." And Bill Hathaway came to that meeting; I was there because I was on staff, and Ben introduced Bill, of course everyone knew Bill Hathaway, and Ben said that Bill Hathaway had asked if he could have a few minutes of their time, and he was going to just turn the meeting over to Bill Hathaway. And Bill Hathaway, without notes or anything just talked like you and I are talking about how he had been thinking about this for a long time and he was giving serious thought to running against Margaret Chase Smith and he wanted to know how labor people would feel about that. He didn't tell them he was going to run. He said, "I am thinking about running against Margaret Chase Smith, and I want to know what you think about that." And they went around the room, you know, and not everybody spoke, but those who spoke, some said, "Bill, you got a good seat, you got a good congressional seat, you're a shoo-in for reelection. Why would you do this? You're going to give it up, you're going to lose, she's going to blow your doors up." And other people said, "You know, it's time for Maggie to go." And so, you know, he picked up on all of that and ultimately we know he decided to go for it, and ultimately he did knock her off, he beat Margaret Chase Smith. And labor worked very hard

for Bill Hathaway to do that.

But that's the same kind of relationship I'm talking about. Not one where, you know, Ed Muskie always went to labor saying, "Here's what I'm going to do," but he would go to labor and say, "You know, here's where we're at, here's what I'm doing, you know, what do you think we should do?" I mean, he was a very powerful man, very strong in terms of his convictions and that kind of thing, but for whatever reason, diplomacy, respect, wisdom, whatever the reason was, he would always couch things in terms of what do you think we should do and I think that's in part because he kind of respected the views of working people. I think he particularly respected Ben Dorsky.

GB: Great, well I think that's a good place to stop.

JH: All right.

GB: Well, thank you very much.

JH: Well, you're entirely welcome. I'm glad you didn't -

End of Interview