6-30-2003

Berg, Larry oral history interview

Don Nicoll

Interview with Larry Berg by Don Nicoll

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee
Berg, Larry

Interviewer
Nicoll, Don

Date
June 30, 2003

Place
Santa Monica, California

ID Number
MOH 403

Biographical Note

Larry Berg was born July 30, 1939 to Carl and Zene Berg and raised in Fort Dodge, Iowa. He has lived in California for almost forty years, teaching political science at the University of Southern California and speaking throughout the country on environmental issues. He serves on the Air Quality Management District Board, South Coast. He is an outspoken proponent of environmental initiatives, public health issues and Democratic philosophy.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: family background/growing up; early experiences campaigning; leaving politics; forming an institute; environmental work; meeting Muskie; Hubert Humphrey; Santa Barbara oil spill; party differences; anecdote about Muskie and Leon Billings; Muskie visiting the University of Southern California; Muskie leaving the secretary of state's office; interview with reporter from the *New York Times*; the political system; campaign finance; influential industries; speech writing; Muskie's major contributions; public healthcare; and Clean Air legislation.

Indexed Names

Baker, Howard H. (Howard Henry), 1925-
Bandstra, Bert Andrew
Berg, Carl
Berg, Larry
Berg, Zene
Bertleson, Bruce
Billings, Leon
Bradley, Tom
Brown, Edmund G. “Pat”
Brown, Edmund Gerald “Jerry”
Brown, Willy
Bush, George W. (George Walker), 1946-
Bush, George, 1924-
Chafee, John H., 1922-1999
Chavez, Cesar, 1927-1993
Cooper, John Sherman, 1901-
Culver, John
Dean, Howard
Freeman, Orville
Greigg, Stanley Lloyd
Hatch, Orrin, 1934-
Hughes, Harold
Humphrey, Hubert H. (Hubert Horatio), 1911-1978
Iacocca, Lee A.
Johnson, Lyndon B. (Lyndon Baines), 1908-1973
Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963
McGovern, George S. (George Stanley), 1922-
Moore, Curtis
Muskie, Edmund S., 1914-1996
Muskie, Jane Gray
Nixon, Richard M. (Richard Milhous), 1913-1994
Reagan, Ronald
Sarbanes, Paul S.
Schmidhauser, John R.
Smith, Hedrick
Smith, Neil
Unruh, Jesse Marvin
Ziffren, Paul

Transcript

Don Nicoll: It is Monday, the 30th day of June, 2003. We are at the Fairmont Inn in Santa Monica, California overlooking Palisades Park and Santa Monica Bay. And our narrator today is Larry Berg. Larry, would you state your name and date and place of birth?

Larry Berg: Yes, my name is Larry Berg, and that's Larry, not Lawrence. I was born in Fort Dodge, Iowa on July 30th, 1939, and my parents were Carl and Zene Berg. My parents rented a farm in Calhoun County, Iowa and spent their entire life there. They're both gone now, but we still go back periodically. As a matter of fact, we're going back to Iowa next week for a family reunion, so even though I've been in California since 1963, with the exception of two years in Washington, D.C., we still go back to where we came from.

DN: Did you grow up in Fort Dodge?

LB: No, I grew up on a farm about twenty-five miles west of Fort Dodge near Rockwell City, and graduated from Rockwell City High School in 1957. And from there I went to Iowa State University in the wake of Sputnik and was going to be an engineer, and engineering and I found out in the first quarter that we didn't agree. In '59 went to the University of Iowa at Iowa City where I earned a bachelor's degree in history and political science in 1962, and a master's degree in 1963. I continued graduate studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara as one of the two first National Defense Education Act [of 1958] fellows in a newly established graduate program I ultimately received my Ph.D. from UC Santa Barbara in 1972, after stints in politics both in D.C. and in Sacramento.

DN: How did you get involved in politics?

LB: In 1962 as a graduate student with two of my colleagues we did the research on the, what turned out to be probably the second most significant reapportionment case involving one person - one vote at the time. We did the academic side of the case for the AFL-CIO with the Democratic county chairman at that time, Dr.John R. Schmidhauser, who was a distinguished professor at the University of Iowa. But more importantly for this subject, John was the Democratic county chairman and was a very aggressive, active Democrat and he got me involved. And in 1962 I ran the campaigns of an incumbent state senator and a candidate for member of the lower house in the Iowa legislature. And once I did that, I was involved in politics the rest of my adult life to this day.

I came back to Iowa in '64 in the summer to work in Schmidhauser's campaign for Congress; he was elected. I hurried up and took my doctoral exams in early January of '65 and hopped onto my first cross country airplane flight, went to District of Columbia, was John's Executive Assistant for two years, '65 and '66, which is where I met the then Senator Muskie. And after that election I went back to Santa Barbara in '67, taught a year, and got involved managing the campaign of the California Assembly Majority Caucus Leader, Winfield Shoemaker, who was with Speaker Jesse M Unruh.

[I] ran campaigns in Santa Barbara for the assembly majority caucus leader, who was doing fine until the Kennedy assassination. I was elected a Kennedy delegate in June of '64. Winfield was the author of the gun control legislation after the Kennedy assassination, and became the target of what I will still call the gun nuts of California, and frankly lost the election quite badly on that issue. The rural areas and the uptown areas in the mid sixties, or late sixties, were not places where one talked about gun control. We had state guards in the campaign and there were life

threats. And that sort of got me into the activist age once again.

DN: Now, during this time you were still working on your Ph.D.?

LB: Yeah, I was trying to finish my dissertation And I was spending full time in politics and also teaching. I had a wife who was teaching and a daughter born in Washington, D.C., trying to survive financially, I took a teaching job in 1969 at the University of Southern California, got involved in politics again in Los Angeles when Jesse Unruh ran for governor, then he ran for mayor. And off and on [I] was in politics until the post '72 election I pretty much dropped out and became disillusioned with politics, let's put it that way. I wrote a book on corruption among other things, and generally was soured on what was going on. I saw Senator Muskie a few times during this period, while at the university where I was teaching courses on poverty and criminal justice and so forth, and becoming more interested in the environmental area.

DN: And you formed an institute.

LB: Yes and I decided that I couldn't drop out; I was putting a lot of students into politics as interns. And in a metropolitan area this large you have an enormous opportunity to put them everywhere from presidential campaigns to the smallest community, and we were placing hundreds of interns. In '75, I took a position with Governor] Jerry Brown as the chief investigator on the Agricultural Labor Relations Act during the fights over Cesar Chavez, spent a week doing that, got mad at Jerry Brown because he kept wanting to put press releases out rather than solve problems, which didn't contribute much to my feeling about the good nature of politics. So I went back to teaching.

And in 1977 we were running four hundred, three and four hundred interns a semester in practical politics courses, hiring people from the private sector, then public sector. People such as former speaker Unruh and I taught courses on what we called ‘the practical side of American politics’. And we formerly institutionalized that setting in 1978. And Senator Muskie came out to kick off the beginning of what was then called the Institute of Politics and Government. In 1981 we opened a program in Washington, D.C. Leon Billings was hired by my institute to run that program, which he did for a decade before the program ended.

Times change, universities aren't really that interested in practical politics. And in the meantime in 1983, I was the first appointee of the Speaker of the Assembly, Willy Brown, Jr., to the South Coast Air Quality Management District. Senator Muskie wrote a letter of recommendation to the Speaker and I spent almost eleven years trying to implement the California exception rule of the Clean Air Act. I Stayed there from I think it was January of '83, and left in September of 1993, so a little short of eleven years. I was involved as I guess one of the more outspoken promoters of aggressive regulation of what was the most successful air quality program probably in the world. That gave me an appreciation for what had gone on in Washington, and it also gave me an appreciation of the down and dirty of trying to implement something called the Clean Air Act.

I left there in '93 convinced that technology had to change; I'd been deeply involved with the Technology Advancement Committee and had authored a program, first program anywhere for thirty-five million people, to develop new technology for primarily transportation, but also other

areas. So when I left the District I joined the board of directors of the leading fuel cell manufacturing company, Ballard Power Systems in Vancouver, British Columbia, and served on that board until the purchase by Daimler-Benz of I think, what, about twenty, twenty-one percent of Ballard in '97 or '98. Figured it was time to move on as the automobile companies joined the board of directors.

During that period, I had also represented them wherever they sent me, but primarily the United States and Europe on regulatory matters and promoting the fuel cells, and continue to represent them to this day, which is the only client I still have. So I went from the regulatory agency convinced would never meet the health standards, even the federal standards let alone the state standards which are much more rigorous, with the existing technology, and I have been involved in new technology companies ever since.

DN: So in spite of yourself you returned to a connection with engineering.

LB: That's right, and my critics, particularly the oil companies and the utilities used to attack me, that you know, what the hell is a political scientist Ph.D. and a university professor know about this kind of stuff. And I then would reflect back on some of the things that I heard the senator say and had read about and had heard Leon talk about. And that is, it isn't very damn complicated and the whole notion that this is too complicated for anybody other than us folks in the industry to understand, is a smoke screen. And I always found it interesting and great fun to get into public debates with them.

I did a television program here in Los Angeles for almost two years on environmental commentary, which gave me once a week the opportunity to point out I guess, shall we say, the lack of knowledge of those who claim knowledge. I did debates all over this basin for many years and so when at the heat of it, it was such fun. I guess the most I did was four hundred plus interviews one year, virtually all on politics and the environment in the press and television all over the country. So it really was a full-time effort, and I would never have been able to have done it if I hadn't been at the university because they gave me the freedom . I had people go to the president of that university asking to fire me for almost seven or eight years regularly. I would get calls from the board of trustees and so forth, and they did not do it. And I think we had some modest success in this basin.

DN: Tell me, did your father and mother have any active interest in politics?

LB: Not really. My father was a renter on a farm of a person who was very active in the Republican Party, one of the wealthiest people in the state of Iowa. He never really exerted any influence on my parents. But being born in 1915 and growing up in the Depression of immigrant parents, his view was ‘one is seen and not heard’ when it comes to political matters, because he was always afraid he would lose his farm. And so they were, I guess the best way of putting it was “closet Democrats” all of their life.

Until my mother lost her job when I went to work in Washington, D.C., and it made a lasting impression on me. She was working for the county Agricultural Stabilization Service in rural

Iowa, and I was working for one of six liberal Democratic congressmen from the State of Iowa, The head of the Iowa Democratic delegation , Neal Smith, was certainly one of the ranking members, and it was a setup, to get at these young members. They couldn't believe that the state of Iowa actually had Democrats representing them with a Democratic governor and senator, so they fired her in December of 1965.

As a matter of fact, I consulted with the senator's office at that time, Leon, and what it was they assumed, correctly, that my boss John Schmidhauser would not care what the REPUBLICANS said, which he didn't. Anybody who voted to eliminate the House Un-American Activities Committee in his first public vote in D.C. probably wasn't going to be too concerned about what some Republican said about him in the Agriculture Committee. And I spoke with the congressman, and we sat down with Neil Smith and then Congressman John Culver, and Neil, [Bert Andrew] Bandstra, I forget, and [Stanley Lloyd] Stan Greigg who was my mother's congressman, all young Democrats.

And their view was this was a political action on the part of the local Republican party, and the chairman of the Republican party was, if I recall correctly, the brother of my mother's boss. And she and her sister were both working there. She had started working while I started going to college, for money. And Congressman Smith and Schmidhauser, of course agreed to help, said that if you want the job I will get you the job back. And there was a transition period had set in in the Agriculture Department, Orville Freeman was the secretary then, and it was clearly a case that today would have been a lawsuit.

In those days, it was my mother and father's decision, and all this did to them was convince them what Republicans are like in small towns, which we already knew. And I went home before Christmas to see them, and my mother said no, that she would not fight it and that they were going to get Congressman Schmidhauser and Neil Smith and that just wasn't worth what was going on. And I guess my attitude toward politics at that point in time was what I think to be very real and very practical, and certainly not Ph.D. ideological, or idealism. So that was really a seminal event and I think my attitude toward politics, and it's continued, it's a hard business, it's a tough business, the stakes are big, and I found that the other side will do whatever they have to do to win, and they've been doing it ever since.

And their feeling, what it did to them is, they loved Hubert Humphrey and they loved Ed Muskie, and it just, that's just the way they were, they went to the grave, both of them. My mother was almost thrown out of the nursing home because of her opposition to George Bush, Sr. and this young whatever, I can't say what she called him. I got a call from the administrator saying, “You got to tone your mother down.” And I said, “I'm not going to tone her down. She was toned down all of her life and we'll pay the rent and she can say whatever she wants to. If the Republicans there don't like it, screw them.” She stayed that way until she died last year. So we, it’s a very practical life in the world of partisan politics.

DN: Now, when did you first meet Senator Muskie?

LB: Oh, I met Senator Muskie, I remember very clearly, it was in the fall, I can't remember the date, of 1965. The lobbyist for the American Public Power Association, Leon Billings, came by

to see me on behalf of a dam project in the state of Maine, Dickey-Lincoln, which had been knocking around for quite a while and knocked around quite a while after that, to see if my boss would be supportive of the project on the House Public Works Committee. And we had sort of a mixed feeling on it because of a couple of other dam projects that, being early conservationist types, we didn't like. Namely, those in the Grand Canyon. And that was just in the heat of the time.

But John, in the case of Dickey-Lincoln, took what I believe is a very practical approach, and that, if it was important to Maine, and more importantly if it was important to Senator Muskie and his position on the Senate Public Works Committee, that perhaps he would be interested. And by the way we would also like to see if the senator wouldn't be interested in supporting construction of a new bridge across the Mississippi River in Muscatine, Iowa. And that began a relationship that in Leon's case continues to this day. That's how I became first exposed to Muskie.

I knew of him before, obviously, and not on the environmental site so much, but on the Intergovernmental Affairs side. As a political science graduate student, I was familiar with the work of the Intergovernmental Affairs Committee, some of their publications, and I was aware of that in addition to the early things that were being done on, particularly clean water and clean air later came out. So that's how I met Senator Muskie. And Senator Muskie campaigned for Schmidhauser in the 1966 election, and they remained friends throughout his life.

DN: Did you have many direct dealings with Senator Muskie during that period?

LB: It was limited. As a junior staff person to a freshman member of the House, see, you know, I met him and I attended meetings, and he was always very kind and very, I thought, considerate of someone so junior and still in those days quite young. And it continued after that in association with Billings, and I would go to Washington periodically. And then I spent time with Senator Muskie during the oil spill in Santa Barbara, I believe it was '68, 1968, I can't remember, maybe '67, I just don't recall the dates.

DN: I think it actually was '67.

LB: Is that when it was? And he came out to Santa Barbara with the committee and his staff, and I recall flying along the coast in a plane with him and had the opportunity there to know him in a somewhere different setting than had been the case before. We continued to communicate. I saw him in Chicago in 1968; I had been a Kennedy delegate and went back to the convention as an alternate. The member of the legislature I was working for took my position, and I became an alternate and went back with the Unruh delegation and I saw the senator then, and several staff people. And we had some spirited discussions on the issue of the Vietnam War; I had gotten very active in the anti-war movement in California.

DN: Do you remember any details about those discussions?

LB: Well yes, it, I think that the, for me and a lot of people like me, particularly around the universities, and in California politics it was, ‘you got to get out now,’ you know, the war is

wrong. I don't recall him ever disagreeing with that. I think it was, our disagreement was, in my opinion it should have been sort of like his fellow New Englander from Vermont, pass a resolution and say you want to quit. That was basically my position, and I thought it was doing terrible damage to the country, I'm convinced to this day I was right on that issue, and we had some spirited discussions as to how best to do that. And I was beyond the discussion point after the Kennedy assassination, which I think and still do to this day was not as simple as it has been presented.

And for me there was no real compromise. I was a strong supporter of Senator Humphrey, of Vice President Humphrey, and that goes back to the days in Iowa when Humphrey campaigned and I had the opportunity to spend some time with him and had admired him. The other issue that I'd been involved in all of my life was civil rights, and Hubert Humphrey was one of the real heroes of, my heroes, he was also the hero of my parents.

On the agricultural issues and his representation of what they considered to be the mid west, and they really felt he, I suspect they were closer to Humphrey than they were to then Senator [Harold] Hughes of Iowa. I mean, he was a person who spoke the language. And I had my parents come to a campaign rally in the spring of 1965 at the largest rural electric coop in the mid west, which was in Cedar County, Iowa, over in Wilton Junction, Iowa as a matter of fact, is where it was headquartered, and there were over a hundred thousand people there that day. And Humphrey was campaigning for the Democrats there, and one of them of course was my boss, and my father had the opportunity to get at least a brief handshake and he never forgot that until he died in 1995.

And when I was going through his papers, he saved everything, I think, his entire eighty years, but there were things there from both clippings, you know, they had clippings of Senator Muskie and Senator Humphrey. And there was one involving a prayer, I sent it back to Leon, it was a prayer thing that the senator had been involved in, in the seventies. So, Humphrey, to me, I just blamed Lyndon Johnson, and it was easy for me to move over to Humphrey. It was not easy to accept some of what he did, but it was, you know, once it was over, it was over. But Senator Muskie was much more restrained on that issue than I was, and to me it was, it just had to be done and there was no compromise.

DN: How did he respond to your response?

LB: Oh, basically, really that I'm really a misguided, that things are always more complicated than this and that, and my view, which I still own to this day, is that on some issues it's not more complicated. So we had a difference of opinion, and we had that difference of opinion for, well, forever, but it never really affected my view of him. I just viewed it as a person out of another era, and that we were in a political transition period in the sixties, and he was part of that transition. Ultimately, I knew George McGovern as well. I did not think George McGovern would have been a particularly good president, and I think Ed Muskie would have. But on the issue of the war George McGovern, from my opinion, was right.

DN: So did you support George McGovern in the '72 campaign?

LB: Yes, yes. And I was not that active in it, I sent a number of students to Miami, young Latinos primarily, the USC being located near downtown. And the bulk of my students in those days were black and brown, and more radical white students. There were hundreds of them involved in all aspects of politics - something that we could use again.

DN: Now in the, at the time of the Santa Barbara oil spill and your encounters with Senator Muskie and staff at that time, did you have much of a chance to talk about what should happen?

LB: Well, they had to do something. And the question was, "what do you do with what's there?", and the second question is, there probably shouldn't be any more. And I recall one observation he made, which I think says a lot about him, when we were down in the harbor there, in the marina in Santa Barbara, and you know, there was just a couple of staff people, the senator and I, and he's looking at the boats which were covered with oil.

And as you know, in that marina there and elsewhere, there are million dollar boats and then there's family Jones' fishing boat, which may not even have more than an outboard motor on it. And the senator's there looking at these hundreds of boats that are virtually all destroyed, or would be ultimately, particularly those made out of fiberglass because the oil, the oil would eat through them. And he says, "It is interesting how this oil spill is very democratic, big boats, little boats, expensive boats, cheap boats, they're all going to be gone."

And I think the other thing I recall is that, the government didn't function very well in that oil spill, and he was very upset with, for example, the Coast Guard, and to be more aggressive in trying to mitigate the damages. The community obviously had been opposed to the oil wells before, long time before, and I had visited, on those very same platforms with the assemblymen. It was still an issue. But the senator was very upset about it.

I think that one thing that we were not able to find then that we did find later is that the maintenance on some of them was very bad. We still had the sort of B.S. nonsense that there's oil seepage there. Yeah, there's oil seepage there, I mean I was in graduate school there and, there was oil on the beach regularly, the natural seepage. But not hundreds of thousands of barrels of natural seepage, let's put it that way.

I was on the Texaco platform at Gaviota, which is just up the coast from where the leak was, and we're standing up there and the corporate affairs people are giving their "we're so clean" and whatever. And Winfield and I are looking around and it's rusty, it was dirty, and didn't look to us like it was particularly . . . . And the assemblyman looked over the edge of the platform in the water and he could see oil, there's a slick going out. And, you know, "What is that?" "Oh, that's just sort of the natural leakage coming up from where it goes in." And it looked like it was quite a bit to us. Then he wanted to go down, because you can go down beneath and you could see there where the pipes were. And we did; there's a hole in the pipe big enough you can put your fist through it where it had rusted through, and every time the thing came up it was going out. And I think that the, and of course then the senator became aware of that. That was a year later, after the spill.

And in the case of Texaco, I mean, it was just a total maintenance disaster. And part of the

reason was is that, and we found this out later, it all started when they were there looking at it during the oil spill. There's a big difference in the way these companies in those days approached--- Texaco was a highly centralized corporation, headquarters in New York--- and when you got to talk to the people who actually ran those wells they couldn't do anything without getting some hotshot in New York City to give them the okay.

So we found an outgrowth of what he saw, and if we could have seen that in '67, if we could have seen that, it probably wasn't there then, but that was the kind of thing that, just judging from what he was saying at the time, would have driven him up the wall. And this fight has gone on to this day; we're fighting over it now. California, this president has not exempted California from drilling, the way he has Florida. So if they ever try to put a well in out here, I would not like to be the drilling company because it will be the equivalent of World War Three in a political sense in this state. About eighty-five percent of the people live within probably thirty, forty miles of this coast, and this is not going to be tolerated.

DN: And at this point does it cross party lines?

LB: Absolutely. And it did at that time. And one of the things that always impressed me about Senator Muskie was his ability to get people in the other party to support environmental issues because, as he used to say, 'this is not just a partisan issue, this is really a national issue, it's something that everybody ought to be concerned about'. And I think that philosophy prevailed in Washington, D.C., and it certainly did out here.

We haven't had Republicans run on drilling oil for twenty years. Reagan, he was kind of tough on it. But what happened is that gradually began to break down, and I think it broke down because of the change in the Republicans on the committee that Senator Muskie was working with. I recall riding into the Capital with the senator and Leon driving, and having conversations related to the change in the partisanship of the United States Senate and Congress and politics in general. And when Reagan came in, in my opinion, that ended it. This was no longer a Howard Baker type Republican; this was somebody who wanted to get rid of all of this "nonsense" as he used to call it. And, you know, just like business (*unintelligible phrase*) see what they want to do, and we've been in a partisan spirit on the environment I think ever since that time.

Chafee was a bit like that, but not really. When I was on the south coast, I was back at Brown as a lecturer for a week, in Rhode Island, and got into a big debate. It was a public debate sponsored by one of the newspapers for a week, and one of the guys they brought in to debate me was an oil person. And we were trying to get the Clean Air Act renewed, it was 1990, I think it was 1990 I was there, it was '89, '90 or '91 before it was passed. And Chafee was, I had met with him as a member of the SCAQMD and we couldn't get what we were needing out of him.

And Pete Wilson was the senator from here. He was doing pretty well for a Republican, and that tells you something about the state because Wilson could not have been elected if he had been against the environment. And I attacked Senator Chafee for not standing up for a strong Clean Air Act, and he just went ballistic, wanted to know who the hell I was and, I mean, it was something else. So even with the, I recall him and then Senator Wilson, probably the best of the Republican senators at that time on the environment. It was a long way from Senator Muskie,

and of course it's only got worse since then.

So partisanship, bipartisanship of Senator Baker and others, and Senator Muskie. I think the House is always much more partisan, but on the Senate side you could get things done, and that was his [Muskie's] leadership, his understanding of the relationship between state and local government and the federal government, which I don't think anybody out there today does. That is a real legacy, and it's a tragedy that it didn't survive his departure from the Senate, and I don't think it did. And that tells me that the only reason it simply was there in the first place was because of his leadership, otherwise I don't think we ever would have had that. Because there were too many other partisan issues that broke down.

And I used to periodically find that, you know, I'm not so sure that bipartisanship is a good thing. And I am convinced to this day that the biggest problem we had in the world of foreign affairs and still do to this day, is that we have "bipartisan" which means shut up and agree, and we don't have debate. We don't have the kind of give and take that we need to debate issues, big issues, in this country. And if anybody takes an issue, even the environment, is accused of being partisan, somehow that's bad. In my opinion, bipartisanship is a cloak so that the same corporate thieves who have been stealing from the public since the country was founded, can do a little more of it with the support of the Republicans.

DN: How would you distinguish the kind of across-partisan-lines work that Senator Muskie, Baker, John Sherman Cooper, etcetera undertook from the bipartisanship you're criticizing now?

LB: I think the difference is in the, with all due respect to many if not most of the Democratic senators today, the difference between someone with Ed Muskie's vision and his beliefs about what needed to be done and should be done, and those who are more interested in getting elected and staying in Washington, D.C., than they are saying anything else about what's going on.

There are damn few senators in Washington today that would exhibit an independent streak that Ed Muskie had on certain issues. And it didn't matter whether it would be taking a view differently from a Democratic president or a Republican president. You would never have had the nonsense in those days that we have now of calling somebody unpatriotic because they question whether or not you should go to war. I mean, it is, and I think that the biggest disappointment I have with the present candidates, I went to a presidential forum here last week, last Thursday night, is that they do not have the ability, if they believe it, to say no or ask why, and to probe. And the one thing that stands out with Senator Muskie, he had that ability in any setting.

And he also had another ability, and that is to get angry. There's nothing wrong with getting angry about what you see, and there's nothing wrong about getting angry. What's wrong is to have people shut you up because of it. So we could use a little indignation here and there. And now, if somebody's indignant about something, my God, you're a traitor to the country. It's a disgrace.

DN: Did you see any examples of his indignance?

LB: Absolutely. I think the best one I've used repeatedly when I was on the south coast, is Lee Iacocca telling him that he couldn't do any of the things on automobiles that the Clean Air Act was going to require, and that everybody was going to be driving around in golf carts if you pass this bill. And I've recalled the senator's comments, I paraphrase, I used to quote him is that, "My job is not to tell you how to build automobiles and run your company, my job is to protect the public health. And in order to protect the public health you're going to have to do something different." Well, today, "Well, now, Mr. President of Ford, we need to talk or to sit down and reach a consensus." Bullshit on the consensus; some things are right and wrong, if you believe in them, and there might not be a consensus.

And you do periodically have to live in a world of, if it's a committee of eleven, it's called six votes. And sometimes you're better off with six votes. We saw that during the Johnson administration when he thought he had to have ninety percent on anything that came through on the domestic side, it used to irritate us to no end. And my boss was one of the more progressive people, and he got mad at Johnson and refused to do what he said. He would water something down to the point, well, in order to get more Republican votes. What do you need more Republican votes for? They didn't win the election, you did. So, I think that there are limits on this, and on the question of bipartisanship, it's a good thing on certain areas, but, and I think Muskie was a strong believer in it, but there came a time when it may not be the highest priority.

And I think today, with the exception of, let's just take for example the vote on the drug care program, or Medicare. There were eleven Democratic senators (*unintelligible phrase*), it needed to be voted no. I mean, my wife is on Medicare, and we have a drug plan I got from the university, I'll have it in another year. These guys are going to screw it up. You know, there is a time when it's not better to do something rather than nothing, and I think the senator knew that. I think he knew those times and was able to make that distinction. Some people in Washington today are, but most do not have that ability, and that's true both in the House and Senate but more true in the Senate.

And I think that the senior senator from Delaware [ ], in my opinion, epitomizes what's wrong with politics in Washington, D.C.; he's never met a Republican he didn't like to work for, work with. And there are times, senator, when it just isn't what you ought to be doing, and it certainly is not the way it started. It's very nice to have everybody get along, and the Republicans are very good at it; Democrats are not very good at getting along and then still say, no, in this case I think Ted Kennedy is wrong, but on the other hand, what the hell, he's been saying no for a long time. I mean, I can live with him doing what he's doing, but he's one of the few historically that's been able to say no, and do it pleasantly. I can't imagine anybody liking Orrin Hatch, but I guess Kennedy does.

Paul Sarbanes I guess is the person I'm most close to today; we have been close since the seventies, and he and Christine and my wife and I communicate, we stay at their house, we go back there. Paul is, the frustrations that I see there lead me to believe Washington is not a place I want to be in. As a matter of fact, I have declined to go back since George Bush was there, and I will not go back as long as he is there. I'll go to Baltimore and stay with Paul, but I won't go to Washington D.C. And I have former students of mine who are, live abroad who are not American, particularly one very close and he will not come to this country. I just think that this

is a good illustration of what's happening to this country, and Muskie would have been very upset about it, not in a partisan sense but in a, 'this is not right'.

DN: After the oil spill in Santa Barbara, your attention turned largely to the Clean Air Act.

LB: Yes, and when I went back, it was a great opportunity for an academic because when I was going back regularly I would be, I always stayed with Leon. And periodically, well not periodically, frequently, the senator, he'd pick the senator up and drive him into the office. I'll never forget it, because he had that pick up, which I gather he's still got, (*unintelligible word*) rusting away somewhere. And the conversations in that, those drives into town were most revealing. I mean, I recall one, I think it was the year -

DN: Let me interrupt you so I can turn this over.

End of Side A
Side B

DN: We are now on the second side of the taped interview with Larry Berg in Santa Monica, California on the 30th of June, 2003. The interviewer is Don Nicoll. Larry, you were just starting to talk about conversations between you and the Senator and Leon Billings.

LB: Yes, and we would drive in in the morning, and one of the things I always admired about Senator Muskie is, is that he didn't, not only didn't have to agree with him on stuff, I always thought he'd kind of be upset if you agreed with him all the time. And of course Leon and he would banter back and forth about this, that and the other thing, and it was kind of catching. And even our conversation, I mean I was reluctant to criticize a distinguished United States senator but, you know, periodically they'd argue, we'd argue going down.

And I remember one time, I believe it was the year his daughter was going to be cherry blossom queen, or in the court or something, and we stopped there by the cherry blossoms in the basin. And on the way down there he kept getting more upset and more upset. There was a United States senator, who shall remain nameless, that just was absolutely driving him up the wall: "He was the most miserable person who ever existed and he was making my life awful and I can't stand being in the Senate and on and on and on," and what he was talking about then was kind of what we're talking about now. It was the change in tone that, you know, with Howard Baker you could disagree with him and, yeah, but you might share a cigar. I don't know what the situation was, but a cigar or a drink or whatever; it wasn't this nasty, just biting relationship. And he was complaining about it.

And it was one of the biggest, I think it was one of the things that disturbed him the most about the Senate, the direction the Senate was going. And who am I to say, I'm not that close, but I think it was one of the things that really led him to leave the United States Senate is this nasty, you can't get anything done, there's no ability to do anything, all you do is fight all the time and people are not, they're not good colleagues. My own personal opinion is that when the secretary of state's opportunity came along it was a really good way to get out of what was a deteriorating situation in terms of the Senate. Of course, it really flipped after that election in 1980 and we

saw what then emerged. But I think he saw that coming. I think he would have been very, I didn't discuss it with him, much later we continued to see each other, it really was more on different things than that.

DN: During the eighties, as a matter of fact it was in the late seventies you said that he had come and spoken at (*unintelligible phrase*).

LB: Yes, he came regularly to the University of Southern California. He was very popular there, the administrators knew him, the faculty knew him. He helped me raise money. We raised money for kids in the institute. I recall one we did at a very famous restaurant, it's no longer here. We had the upstairs room and he and Pat Brown co-chaired a fund raiser. And they called their friends around town, and there must have been, I don't know, twenty-five, thirty of these people, paid quite a bit of money to come there and have dinner with Ed and the governor.

And the thing that made it interesting was, because in another private room Tom Bradley was meeting with what the press used to call the downtown group that " ran" the city of Los Angeles with the mayor, and in that group were a couple of Hollywood people that Senator Muskie knew, one was Paul Ziffren. And so what happened was they came, they got into this big argument, you know, it was Pat Brown and Muskie and Unruh was there and they were all arguing, and in comes Tom Bradley whom as you know is a very imposing large, tall person, and he brought his group in. So here we were in that one room. There must have been the power structure of California sitting there. And he always enjoyed that.

So I would think almost every year, I may be wrong but it's certainly quite frequently during that period of time he would come out and speak at the university, he would do some public events there. Always went to classes and seemed to really enjoy that. And we would go over to the athletic department and he knew people there from our earlier exposure. And as a matter of fact, his son Ned came out with him one time and USC tried to recruit him to the golf team. We had a national championship golf team at the time, in that period, and Ned was very interested. And he ended up going to Duke, I believe it was Duke, and I always kind of thought that maybe Mrs. [Jane] Muskie had a little more to say in that matter. But anyway, the senator brought him out on campus and he met with the coach with us and all of this kind of stuff.

And he [Muskie] enjoyed athletics, university athletics, particularly football. The last public event he had as a secretary of state was at USC in December of 1980. But many of, almost all of his close staff in the secretary's office, we all went to the Notre Dame Football game.

So yes, we did see each other over this period of time. The conversations then were different, they were I would call more philosophical, and many more personal ones in some respects like, how's Ned doing, how are your kids. My kids would go see him when they were in Washington, and I have all these pictures of, literally with my girls growing up, pictures with Ed Muskie. And it was less, I wasn't there asking for anything and he wasn't asking me for anything, it was just a nice, nice relationship with someone whom you respected. And we went back to, I went back to when he was sworn in as secretary of state at the White House, I was there the day he left the secretary's office, which is something I think we might want to comment on in a bit, and continued to see him over a period of years.

DN: Could you describe that last day in the secretary of state's office?

LB: Yes, I had a program back there a year after, but we were getting ready to set it up and I spent a lot of time there and was asked if I wanted to observe the, meet before leaving office period in the secretary of state's office, as an academic, which I did. And this was during the negotiations over the hostages in Iran. I remember it very vividly because it was around the clock, and I wasn't there all the time, I spent some time sleeping which Leon [Billings] didn't get to do very much; neither I gather the secretary or anybody else. But it was a rollercoaster week of up: "yes, it's going to be successful," down: "no, it's not." And I remember we left the secretary's office one night to go clean up and it was supposed to have been resolved and it wasn't very much later it was not, it was over financial issues among other things. I always thought the Republicans were sandbagging it myself, but who am I to know, I didn't know anything.

But I did observe that and watched him during that period and I think he just did a phenomenal job. And he was an example of what I like to call the maturity and statesmanship that comes with a long career. When I was really young I didn't think there was much to that, but over the years, there's a lot of value to that and that was a good example of it. I think he was far more experienced than the president was, and all of this sort of thing, and it showed. I think that what happened was it got caught up into the partisanship of a newly elected president, and that was very clearly revealed on the morning of the inauguration.

I don't recall who it was who came, but there was, a group came from the transition committee from the Reagan administration and basically told him to leave. I don't remember the time, but it was somewhere between probably ten and eleven, and they wanted to get an early start. You could hear them, they were already remodeling offices around and there were all kinds of people who weren't supposed to be there were there, you could see that going on. And they got very offensive about it, I thought nasty, just as an outsider sitting there watching what was really kind of a farewell party of a lot of well wishers, both who had been around Secretary Muskie for many, many years, and those who had come to know him while he was secretary of state and who worked with him, liked him, whatever.

And these people came in, I guess you could call them the party spoilers, and they couldn't wait ninety minutes, which leads me to suspect these are the same people who I like to call them the Kissinger group, who I think delayed and sabotaged the negotiations until they could take over. And Secretary Muskie did what I thought really was a kind of independence I don't see today, that, you know, "I am the secretary of state, I don't know what the hell you're doing here, and I will be the secretary of state until the time my term ends and the transition begins and you take over. So until that time I will remain secretary of state, we will stay here until exactly twelve o'clock, at which time we will leave. Now, get out." And that was kind of a reaction.

And I was just appalled that on, you know, the myths of this country is we have this orderly transition and people accept elections. My experience with the Republicans has been they don't, they don't accept elections, they tolerate them, up until the last one, until you come to Nixon. And their behavior there as the most, I would call it, Banana Republic behavior that I've ever

seen. And it should have been, I should have written it, I should have said it, and you know, we didn't, let's stop this. Well, that was wrong. Today, if that happened to me today it would be an Op Ed piece about this not only boorish behavior but undemocratic behavior.

And they took, for example, a number of us had suitcases, we were there from out of town, and they were taken in an elevator down into the garage in the State Department building and dumped, down in the garage. We had to go down there and find them after this was over. Twelve o'clock, the secretary and staff got into the elevators and went down. I don't recall whether they were accompanying us there, but I suspect they did. And we got down to the bottom and he, of course, and his family, left, I gather they let them out the door. He later flew off with the delegation; I guess he went to Germany.

However, staff and those of us who had been there as guests, we had a different problem - - we couldn't get out of the damn building and the doors were, the gate, the doors were all shut. We drove around down there in the bottom of that damn building trying to get out, Leon and I, and I assume others had the same problem. And finally we got to the one door that was open. I mean, it was the most incredible Kafkaesque experience one could have, and it was like today. If that would have happened today under this bunch, I would have assumed we were going to be arrested, that's what I would have assumed. In those days, no, we didn't, it was just boorish bad behavior.

But I don't think it was. I think it symbolized the beginning of what is the political environment we have today, which is take no prisoners. We win, we are the ones who should rule, and we're going to use government to keep you, one: shut up and two: to keep us apart. And I think that started, that day was one of the first times that we were able to see that. And I'll give you one more example of that.

The, in 1982, late '81 of that same year, I was diagnosed as having cancer of the vocal cords and I went to San Francisco to be treated. And I'll never forget it. Jesse Unruh was still treasurer then and was close to us, and he got me a room in San Francisco in the assemblyman's house over there. He had a young family so he was there in, he was in Sacramento during the week. I was there in the week getting treated and then fly home on the weekend.

And I got a very strange phone call during that period - - this would have been in early February, probably, or mid-February of, no, it would have been '83. No, '82, '82. And it was Hedrick Smith, then with the *New York Times*, and he was then writing about politics. I'll never forget it, he called me up and we had talked before, I was doing a lot of interviews in those days. And he said, "I'm coming out there to visit my daughter. I'd like to spend a day with you in San Francisco." I remember he was at the Clift Hotel, up on the top, I guess, where *New York Times* reporters stay. And he said, "I have one question I want you to think about before I get there: I can't understand these people in Washington, these Californians. The president is saying things that can't be true; they can't be what he plans to do. What he was saying is, these people say they're here to basically destroy government. That can't be true, Republicans don't do that. This is the east coast talking, with all due respect."

He couldn't understand the group that Reagan brought in there, and they weren't all from here,

but they all had the same goal in mind: We're going to put an end to this government the way you knew it. We're going to whittle it down and we're going to do it. Reagan never made any bones about it, he ran on that platform for five, seven years before he ever was elected. And Smith is, was and is, a very good reporter, but this was beyond his 'we are all democrats', small 'd', view of life. And I kept telling him, you gotta understand, these people don't believe in democracy the way you do. Their idea of democracy is not liberal, democratic small 'd' theory of democracy; their idea of democracy is to starve government because then you can prove it's ineffective. And they're going to do it until the day they succeed in destroying it or the public succeeds in figuring out this is what they're there to do.

He would view a George Bush, Sr., as his kind of Republican, sort of conservative but, you know, he's not going to destroy the institutions, he's not going to starve kids and all this. I spent a whole day with him telling him that that's exactly what they're going to do, this is the first time, and they're going to control the Republican Party. And it'll be damned lucky, we will be, if anybody in the Republican Party can wrestle that away from these guys, because after eight years of Reagan you'll never be able to do it, because he will make it the institution. Well, he never believed it. And I would bet you to this day he's still sitting there thinking that, you know, somebody on a white horse is going to come along and everything will be okay. And in my opinion, what we saw that day in the State Department was what really was a beginning of the new world.

DN: Did you ever have a chance to ask Senator Muskie about that after?

LB: Yes, I think that we did, yeah. I think that his view was, he didn't disagree with what I was saying, but I think that here was a difference between him and me, in that I think he had a suspicion I might be right but he wasn't alone to say it, let's put it that way. But he was very, very concerned about these people were going to do.

DN: When you were having the discussions with him, conversations with him, where you said he had become quite philosophical in the later years, do you remember any of the themes that he struck?

LB: Well I think the theme, some of the themes were consistent and, you know, we really only have one political system and we've got to be able to keep this thing functioning and (*unintelligible word*). And of course I was still churning out all these kids and so forth, and a lot of them were going on to be elected officials. Unfortunately, too many of them Republicans. But nevertheless, I think he really believed that, you know, you needed party competition and if you could, if we would just kind of get back and do those kind of sorts of things that, you know, we needed to keep the political system going.

And I think he just became, got to the point where it was, he was very concerned about all these issues, campaign finance bothered him to no end. And I was very upset by what was going on in campaign finance; we spent a lot of time talking about that. And the question was, what can we do about it? And my feeling was a bit more absolutist, I guess, is you'll never be able to deal with this issue as long as you commit private money to run politics. And public financing may not be the answer, but by god I can't think of any other right now. And that no amount of

tinkering with these laws is going to clean it up. And that's based on being out here where we spend, hell, we spend five, seven, eight million dollars for a state senate race. It's not uncommon. We probably spent two hundred million in the senatorial race.

So, you know, I just felt that, and I did then too, the numbers were different, but you had to do that. And I think he was very pragmatic on we need to do something but I'm not sure that he felt that was going to be the way, I don't think he did. And I don't know that it's the way either. So that's kind of the level of what I'm talking about.

On the environment there were, it was clear he always had an interest, from the day that I recall the electric car that didn't work but he was going to take them up the hill, and always had an interest in those kinds of things and we spent a lot of time talking about that, those kinds. And then when I got on the AQMD [Air Quality Management District], then it was just fight all the time. Every day was a battle. I rem---- . . . . and he was one of the people I think very responsible for me being on the south coast board. I saw the letter that he sent to Willy Brown, the speaker showed it to me later. And it was a very strong letter about, you know, the experience in politics but also a strong belief in the environment and so forth. And I am convinced to this day that that overrode some of the objections that I had from people who knew me from the more liberal side of the party.

The utilities and the oil companies knew who I was, and the car guys. And the car people, the other thing we talked about is the car people in California were never as powerful here as they were out there. And I argued, I always argued that one of the reasons is they don't give campaign money out here. And I'm convinced to this day. And then of course they went around and shut down all the manufacturing plants, the only one left is GM and Toyota up in the Bay area. Although the, I think that I saw, Daimler-Benz when we were looking at them, they had about thirteen, fourteen thousand employees in California but they're not union auto workers, okay? So they never had the power. And so we would talk about that and I would tell him that the real power out here were oil companies. And they are to this day, much more powerful than the automobile people. So we would have discussions about those kinds of things when I was on the south coast.

And the utilities, they as a group in California, were very powerful because they could suck in all of the small businesses. And that was something he understood from chairing the committee on the Clean Air Acts, the utilities, the coal people and how all of this fit together. So, I'm afraid that once I got on the south coast, after the first couple of years when I didn't know very much, we'll talk about that more.

And then it became clear to me, and I, he didn't really say this, but it's very important as a policy maker that you know enough yourself to don't just rely on staff. And I took that to heart and made it my business to know more than the staff, and I found that to be very good advice. Now that doesn't mean that you don't have a Nicolls or a Billings or whoever, who may know a lot about this other thing, but you as a policy maker, you need to know something, too. And he and Unruh would have conversations, I remember one in particular and Unruh says, "Well, I don't use staff to write speeches. I always figured if you don't know enough about a subject to talk about it, you should shut up." And he and Muskie would talk back and forth on those kinds of

things, and it was like -

DN: What did Muskie say to that?

LB: Well, you know, he says, "Yeah, but what if you say something maybe that's, you're off base a little bit." "Oh, screw it," you know, that would be an Unruh reaction. It reminds me a little bit of what Howard Dean said the other day with *Meet the Press*. "Well, if I say something that's incorrect and I try, then I'll be happy to say I made a mistake." You know, I always took that approach. So I didn't see him too much after the, you know, we did the first NOx control measures out here, anywhere in the world except for Tokyo, and I had a communication then. And a lot of the people who were lobbying me pro NOx were people who had been around Muskie. Not Leon, but other people Bruce Bertleson and Curtis Moore and a bunch of those, and we were successful in writing the still toughest bill, but it wasn't as tough as the one we did the oil companies. And to this day the oil companies in this state, in this district, have the toughest NOx controls in the world, far tougher than the utilities. If we had those controls on utilities today, we wouldn't have the problem up in your home area that you do. So it was, I was all into that kind of thing.

DN: As you look back, what from your point of view are Senator Muskie's major contributions?

LB: I think, I would say that, one's initial reaction is to say the Clean Air and Clean Water laws. I would say, yeah, those illustrate his major contribution. His major contribution was being able to legislate, and being able to take the toughest issues of the day, translate that into effective legislation. I don't see a lot of that ability today. There are very few people in the legislative bodies today who know how to legislate. Ed Muskie knew how to legislate. He also knew how to get people around him who would have a similar objective and who would be willing to sacrifice and to work and to pursue that. And I think if you looked at some of his staff people who have been around, and they were still around until the day he died, as a testimony to that. So his ability to get, to do public policy that was good public policy in a national setting, and not just for Maine or just for, you know, if he'd been here just for California, but national. And more importantly, have a vision of the implications of that for the broader world, which I think is also, so that's number one. And that's not number one in order of priority, it's number one as I see it.

The second thing, and I think it's affected, it had an impact on that, and that comes from his experience of being governor in Maine and his background there, and then being involved in Intergovernmental Relations. And that is that he had a really good grasp of this, the republican form of government that we have in this country is a mish mash of this. Since the day it was formed it's been a conflict between democratic, small 'd' democracy folks, i.e., the French, and the Republican side, i.e., the representative government, British (*unintelligible word*), and I think our whole history has been the democracy side fighting the other side to move in the direction of democracy, more of a majoritorian type rule.

He understood the interplay of these various pieces. The relationship between governors and the Congress and the state legislatures, and the interaction of how state and local governments fit

into that picture. I think that is a legacy that, looking at it today, I don't know of anyone in the United States Senate that has that sort of bigger view, larger view of, not only in this country, but I think it also had an impact in the way he saw countries abroad. That he understood this.

I think the other legacy had an impact on a lot of people - - it certainly did on me - - and that's what I would call his personality, a very dominant. He was a big person, an imposing person, and he had a good temper, which I liked. They used to talk about something wrong with his temper; Jesus, it would be nice to have somebody show a little emotion today. I mean, the only emotion they show today is when they slit your throat, you know, so to speak, policy wise. And saying things that needed to be said, and the things that he said on the Clean Air Act, particularly on the Clean Air Act, needed to be said. And there weren't many people in those days willing to say that, "You Lee Iacocca or General Motors or whoever, you are wrong," and "our job is to protect the public health." His biggest contribution out of all of this.

And the other things are means is to protect the public health, and that is a word that is not used very much by enough people today. For God's sake, if government can't protect the public health, what the hell reason does it have to be around? And it would seem to me that he would have liked what the French did a week ago. And I suppose the president now in the White House would have been, something he would have disliked enormously if he could ever read it, is that the French . . . . There's a recommendation that their, basically, their Constitution be amended to establish along with equal rights and civil liberties and civil rights and so forth, the right to a clean environment, a healthy environment.

And we used to talk about that, and Leon and I have been pushing that for thirty years. Everybody thinks you're crazy. How in the hell can you have a Constitutional right to a healthy environment? My response in the public has always been, for forty years, if you can't, in government, with policy making, continue to work to establish the right to a healthy environment for every citizen or every resident in the country, and even the bigger question of around the world today, then you got your priorities all wrong. Because if you don't have a healthy environment and protect the public health, all the rest of this stuff really doesn't get you there. And I think that's his greatest legacy, his concept, that the public health comes first.

Now, you can attack the acts as they have and they are today, but if you were to (*sounds like: plick*) a poll every year for twenty, thirty years, you ask the public which they want most, and it's a question of the economy, jobs and health, and they'll go health every time. The biggest mistake that the pro-environment people have made, ever since Muskie, is they don't focus on the health, they don't focus on the big issues.

I found arguing with the AQMD, there's no quicker way to disarm your opponent than to accuse him of damaging the public health of seniors, like me, and kids. And, boy, if you can get them nailed and if you can put that label on them, George Bush, Jr., you are damaging the health of the people of this country, you change the debate. And we get into this, what are we going to do with coal, what are we going to do with, you gotta get back to the basics, and his real legacy is protecting the public health. And there are too damn few people today interested in doing that, because in order to protect the public health, Ed Muskie knew, and sure all of his life, that you had to deal with those who are damaging public health. And the people who are damaging

public health are the powerful people, mainly the users of fossil fuels and internal combustion engines.

We figured out in the south coast over ninety percent of the pollution this country is related to one single item - petroleum. Not only in terms of oil and so forth, but all of the stuff made out of it. Plastics, all plastics. I think he understood that. And the sooner we get back to, this was a League of Conservation's voters forum the other night and, hour and a half, five Democratic candidates, with the press there. I don't think the word health came up on the environmental side more than three or four times in the whole period. If I had been one of those candidates, or I was working for one of them, I would have started on public health in my opening statement, my opening mouth. We didn't, I used to use the term, and I got it from, we didn't enact all of these regulations and so forth so I can see the goddamn Hollywood sign; we enacted all those regulations so the air can be clean enough, and when you did see the Hollywood sign (*unintelligible phrase*) poisoned. Those are the issues, and that's his real legacy.

DN: Thank you very much, Larry.

LB: My pleasure.

End of Interview