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Curtis, Kenneth oral history interview

Don Nicoll

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Interview with Kenneth M. Curtis by Don Nicoll, Stuart O'Brien and Rob Chavira

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee
Curtis, Kenneth M., 1931-

Interviewer
Nicoll, Don
O'Brien, Stuart
Chavira, Rob

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Biographical Note

Kenneth M. Curtis was born in Curtis Corner (Leeds), Maine on February 8, 1931 to Harriet [Turner] and Archie Curtis. His father was the fifth generation to run the family farm at Curtis Corner. He was educated at the area schools, and graduated from Cony High School in Augusta, Maine in 1949. He attended Maine Maritime Academy, graduating in 1952. He then enlisted in the Navy, leaving in 1955 to attend law school at Portland University, known currently as the University of Maine School of Law, and was admitted to the Maine Bar in 1958. He became active in Jim Oliver's campaigns for Congress in 1956 and 1958, becoming campaign manager in 1958, and congressional staff from 1958 to 1960. He then was appointed by President Kennedy as coordinator of the Area Redevelopment Association (ARA), charged with providing development to depressed areas. In 1964, he ran for Congress against Stan Tupper, loosing by a narrow margin. He was then appointed Secretary of State in 1965, serving until 1966 when he ran for Governor of Maine. He was elected, and served two terms. His major legislation included the income tax and environmental legislation. He served as Chairman of the Democratic National Committee from 1977 to 1978, and Ambassador to Canada from 1979 to 1981. At the time of interview, he practiced law in Portland, Maine.

Scope and Content Note

The interview discusses a number of topics, including growing up in rural Maine; Cony High School; the politics of rural Maine; Maine Maritime Academy; Curtis's naval career; enrolling in law school; getting involved in politics; working for Jim Oliver; Jim Oliver's change in political parties; volunteering for the Maine Democratic Party; working in Washington; his appointment to the Area Redevelopment Administration (ARA) and his work there; Republican power in Maine; the bias toward Democrats from the Republicans; attempting to buy a house without a down payment in the 1950s; the success of the ARA; his work with Muskie concerning economic development; golf in Kennebunk; disagreements between Oliver and Muskie over campaign funds; running for Congress in 1964; Virginia Pitts; Stan Tupper as an opponent; becoming Secretary of State; role as Secretary of State; Governor's Council and Governor Reed; creation of the Maine State Archives; success of the Archives; Democratic leadership; his relationship with John Reed; running for Governor against John Reed; problems with Maine state government when Curtis won the election; issues of the first campaign; Maine Action Plan; his first term as Governor; work with the Republican majority; allies and enemies in Augusta; conservation; the need for income tax; running for re-election after passing the unfavorable income tax; Jim Erwin as an opponent; not wanting to drag down Muskie in 1970; winning by a narrow margin in 1970; debating issues with Muskie; disagreements with Muskie; Muskie's chances of winning the Presidency in 1972; becoming chair of the Democratic National Committee (DNC); problems at the DNC; serving as U.S. Ambassador to Canada; and Muskie's impact on Maine and the nation.

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Transcript

TOB: Tuck O'Brien, Rob Chavira and Don Nicoll interviewing Ken Curtis at Curtis, Thaxter Law Offices in downtown Portland, on the 21st of July 1998. Mr. Curtis, if you could, would you please state and spell your full name?

Ken Curtis: Yes, Kenneth M. Curtis, K-E-N-N-E-T-H, M, C-U-R-T-I-S.

TOB: Where were you born and when?

KC: I was born in Curtis Corner, in the dining room, as we were in those days, in 1931, February 8, 1931.

TOB: Did you grow up there?

KC: Yes, I did.

TOB: Was it named after your family?

KC: Yes.

TOB: It was. There were Curtises there for how many generations would you say?

KC: Oh, four, five generations, I think, 16-, mid-sixteen hundreds.

TOB: How many members were there in your family?

KC: My family were two sisters.

TOB: Two sisters, and how old are your sisters?

KC: Let's see, one is seventy-one, and the other is seventy-five.

TOB: Did you go to school in the same school district your whole life?

KC: Grade school. But they were one room schools in those days.

TOB: Where'd you go to high school?

KC: Cony High School in Augusta.

TOB: What were your parents' names?

KC: Harriet Turner Curtis and Archie Curtis.

TOB: What were their political affiliations?

KC: I'm not sure about my mother, my father was a rabid Roosevelt Democrat.

TOB: How was the community you grew up in composed of religiously, economically, farmers, or ...?

KC: Mostly farmers. And ninety nine point five percent Protestant, for those who went to church.

TOB: Growing up, did you have any ambitions about what you wanted to be when you grew up?

KC: Well, growing up in a little town like that, my ambition was to get out. And then the next problem came, what to do when I do get out.

TOB: Did your father try to guide you, in growing up, in the ways of Roosevelt Democrats?

KC: No, he didn't do it with any motive, he did it out of conviction. He didn't need any encouragement to express himself frequently.

DN: What was your dad's occupation, Ken?

KC: He was a farmer.

TOB: What kind of student were you in high school?

KC: I was a lousy student my freshman year and a good student for the last three years. I found it a little overwhelming going to a large high school from a one room grammar school.

TOB: Did you do any extra curricular activities or anything like that?

KC: Oh, yes, yeah, I played football and, played varsity football, varsity track, I played, believe it or not, band and several organizations.

RC: Did you have any political ideals at that point, or were you still pretty green?

KC: No, I think I did, I think I had political ideals. We had a high school wide campaign to be the president of an annual event. I ran for that in my senior year, I just thought it would be interesting to run for something. And, yeah, I think I did notice it by that time.

RC: Would you characterize yourself then as a Democrat?

KC: Oh yes.

TOB: Did your parents have any goals for you? Did they want you to take over the farm, or ...?

KC: No, my one, one of the contributions my father made was that I not even consider taking over the farm. You know, this was a family farm at a time family farms were dying. Beyond that he simply let me pretty much make my own decisions as to what I wanted to do.

TOB: What were you most interested in in high school as far as studies go? Anything?

KC: Sports and girls. Guess I was a typical high school student.

TOB: Was there anything you would say that occurred during, when you were growing up and through your high school years that inclined you, predisposed you towards politics in any way?

KC: I think, you know, there are a lot of things that occur when you're growing up that make an impression on you that at the time you don't necessarily realize it, but I think these impressions build and manifest themselves at a later time. I did not like the town that I was growing up in. I did not like the conservatism, I didn't like the attitudes, which made me think I wanted a different kind of life, another kind of life. And I think that kind of internal almost turmoil growing up sort of leads you down the path to some political action. There's different ways you can go, but I think if you're unhappy with what you see surrounding you that it's not a big leap to think that politics or some kind of public position leads you towards being able to answer or at least combat some of those early impressions.

TOB: Now, the area you were from, was it mainly Republican?

KC: Oh, overwhelmingly Republican.

TOB: So your dad was kind of the exception.

KC: Yes, pretty much the exception.

RC: You say you felt a lot of disdain towards the conservativism. What specifically about it did you not like?

KC: Well, you know, the whole rationalization that this is all you can expect from life. That, as a young kid, high school maybe, and if you went to high school, you went to one or two of the little tiny surrounding high schools, one in Turner and one in Monmouth Center, which were, didn't have a very wide offering. And that, you know, basically what you should strive for is to find a job, you know, graduate from grammar school, maybe go to high school, find a job, get a little piece of land and get married. And slug it out the rest of your life in a less than challenging way.

DN: Why did you decide to go to Cony?

KC: Because it was a bigger high school.

DN: Was that your choice?

KC: Yes, it was absolutely my choice. We had a, the town didn't have a high school so, they had a junior high school, so they had to pay two years anyway to any high school you wished to attend. So I took a vocational course for two years because the little high school in our town didn't have vocational education, so that forced them to pay my tuition when I switched after two years. The only thing in those days you had was college and vocational, or home ed, those were the two courses you took. So I switched to college the last two years.

TOB: How did you get to Cony every morning?

KC: Took a bus, rode a bus. It was not a public, it was private transportation.

RC: Do you remember any teachers' names that were particularly influential?

KC: Well, I can remember the principal very well, fellow by the name of Bill Macomber, and, you know it's, the names of the teachers after all these years have slipped away.

DN: Bill later was in the state department of education, wasn't he?

KC: I think he was later. He was an interesting person. He was a rock ribbed Republican, and I saw him later years after I got elected governor and he told me one day, he said, "We're really proud of you but I didn't vote for you." And I said to him, "Well, how can you say you're proud of me, you didn't vote for me?" He said, "I never voted anything but Republican in my life." And so I said to him, "Well, I always thought you had an open mind." And he said, "See how we fooled all you kids?" But he was very helpful and very encouraging about going on to college and those kinds of things. I don't remember a lot of the other teachers.

TOB: So where did you apply to college?

KC: Maine Maritime Academy, for a couple of reasons. One is, in those days Uncle Sam had career planning in mind for all able bodied people. It was a chance to go to college free, the federal government paid, they paid the entire cost, and so you came out with a degree, a B.S. degree, Naval Reserve Commission and a Merchant Marine license, so, you know, for a free education, and it was a fully accredited college, so, you know, for a free education you solved a lot of problems. I don't think any of us had to be very smart to know if you, when you did your military services, but it was better to do it as an officer than an enlisted man. So that left, that opened up all those opportunities.

TOB: What was your main course of study?

KC: Nautical science.

TOB: Did you, did they have a football team?

KC: Yes.

TOB: Did you play football?

KC: Yes.

TOB: Were you involved in student government at all when you were there?

KC: Not there, no.

RC: Any other extra curricular activities?

KC: Well, when I first went in they found out that I had played in the band in high school, with no talent, but they didn't care because they needed bodies. And so I was in the band and the nice

thing about that was that you used to, in those days it was strictly a military school. So it was, I didn't, I never had to carry a rifle, which was nice, do all that drilling. Nobody cared what the band did.

RC: What did you play?

KC: I didn't play any instrument, I carried the trumpet. That was kind of a sock to my mother who wanted me to take music lessons. So I took them when I was a kid because that gave me a chance to go to Lewiston, take music lessons, and that gave me an opportunity to go to the movies once a week. No real interest in music.

RC: During your time at school you knew you were going to be commissioned as an officer, so you were going to be in the military. But more long term, in college, what were your aspirations?

KC: I think I was very interested in politics in that time, and of course in those times you didn't have any choice anyway about the military, but military was still something that was very important to political aspirations. Because in those days most everybody was a veteran of one war or another and it was important to be a veteran.

DN: Dropping back to 1948, I think you were a senior in high school then?

KC: In '49.

DN: You graduated in '49?

KC: Yes.

DN: So in the fall of '48, the Harry Truman election, do you remember that?

KC: Oh, yes, yes. Remember it well. One of the interesting things about the time frames that we grew up in is, you know, I wasn't quite old enough to serve in WWII, but old enough to be totally aware of the war. And, you know, the things that, you know, we had the sugar ration and gas ration and all of the, you know, Roosevelt's fireside chats and all the news coming out of the war and all of that. So it was really, to be old enough to understand and appreciate all of that. Of course Harry Truman, we were certainly old enough to understand the ending of the war, the dropping of the atomic bomb and a lot of things that, you know, the homespun kind of philosophy that Harry Truman had. Like I say, we were old enough so we could understand and appreciate that, because it was in front of us.

RC: How did your political ideas change by the time you went into the military? You were obviously a Democrat, but were you more right of center, or did you become more left.

KC: I think I was always more left of center. I think if anything, I moderated over the years. I think I started out very left of center. But again the military, thinking back on it, again serving as an officer also gave you a chance to quote, unquote, get leadership training. At least that's what

they told us we were getting. And I guess to a major degree we were because, still, there was a certain amount of behavioral science involved even in the military. You can't get the best out of your people by threatening them, you get the best out of your people by understanding what motivates them. So it's sort of a behavioral, if you look at it that way.

TOB: How did they give you this leadership training? Did you run a boat, or did you ...?

KC: No you, well, you ran a division or divisions, so you had a certain number of people ...

TOB: Of underclassmen, or?

KC: Oh, you mean at the college?

TOB: Yeah.

KC: To some degree, to some degree. But you had classes, leadership classes, all that kind of stuff. And you did have officers, you know, regimental officers. I was never interested in that part of it. Even in those days a lot of the things, military training, I thought it was pretty silly and I wasn't too interested in enforcing that.

RC: Were there a lot of after class ROTC exercises and drills and so forth?

KC: Yeah, marching. Marching mostly, which I never could figure out either, but that trains your thoughts. If you're an officer, you never march. If you're not an officer you don't march either, so I could never figure out why we spent so much time marching. If you can't learn how to march in one afternoon, you're pretty stupid and uncoordinated.

TOB: So you graduated from Castine in what?

KC: Nineteen fifty two.

TOB: And then you went to sea?

KC: Went to sea for awhile on troop ships run by civilian crews, they were Navy ships run by civilian crews, and I did that for probably six months or so and then applied for active duty in the Navy.

TOB: Now, where were you, where were the ships running from? From the United States?

KC: Well, we were running mostly to Europe. We were carrying rotation occupation troops and families back and forth. We'd take one group over to Germany and bring the other group who was, you know, whose time had been fulfilled and back and forth mostly. And sometimes to Panama, but we were always just carrying rotation troops and families back and forth.

TOB: So then you joined active duty?

KC: Yes, yes.

TOB: And where were you stationed?

KC: All over. I started out if Charleston, South Carolina, picked up a mine sweeper there, and then we did time in Norfolk, which all Navy people wind up doing. And then I went to the West coast where a new ship was being built, up in Tacoma, Washington. We commissioned it up there in Seattle and then down to the other place in the United States where all Navy people go, San Diego. And then we wound up in Long Beach so, of course, never did go overseas. The war was over by the time the new ship that we were having built was completed. There wasn't, the Navy in it's great wisdom built fifty ships before they built a prototype because they wanted to get them over to Korea quickly and none of them ever ran. The war was over before they could get two of them to run.

DN: What type ships were they?

KC: Mine sweepers. They made these, it was kind of an interesting experiment because the only thing magnetic in the whole ship was the lobes and the crankshaft. The engines were aluminum and this was a technology that had just not really advanced to the completion stage. So there were all sorts of things would go wrong.

TOB: Did you enjoy life at sea?

KC: Yeah, I did basically. It can be boring.

RC: Lonely, I imagine.

KC: If there's nothing going on, if the weather's, you know, you'd think you'd enjoy it the most when the weather is good and there's nothing going on, but time drags, particularly at night. But if you're in where there's a lot of traffic, running coastwise, then you have, then your four hours would go very fast because you have an awful lot to do.

TOB: When and why did you decide to leave the Merchant Marine?

KC: Well, you know, I guess, again it was, when I left the Navy I went back to sea for a little while and that's when I really started seriously thinking about doing something politically. And so I decided the next step would be law school, so I left the Merchant Marine to go to law school. Which is just, this is another kind of interesting thing about how times have changed. I came back in October, I got off the ship and went to see the dean of the law school in October and told him I wanted to apply, so he says ...

DN: October of when?

KC: Fifty five I think, '55, yes, and I told him I wanted to go to law school, he says, oh, you've got plenty of time to apply. I said, you don't understand, I want to go now. And he let me in, I talked him into letting me start now, but he says, well, you, you know, starting this late, you'll

have a serious problem. I said, seems like that's my problem, isn't it. And I sold him on the idea of letting me in.

TOB: Now, you said you developed, you decided that you wanted to go towards politics in the Merchant Marine. What made that, what happened there, what was the catalyst?

KC: Well, I think I had thought about it even, you know, when I went in the Navy I was thinking about the fact I needed to do this anyway but it was kind of a career track that would be necessary, too, as well. And then I figured law school was also, or further education was also something that I needed to do to further develop as a potential.

TOB: And you see law school as a necessary step to becoming a politician?

KC: Some kind of, I felt, you know, just a Merchant Marine college is not quite enough. And I thought about taking, I thought about getting a master's degree in business administration, and then for one more year you could get a law degree which provided more flexibility, so I opted for the law degree.

TOB: So it didn't really have anything to do with occupation, it wasn't you were inspired necessarily to be a lawyer?

KC: Well, I kind of, I always wanted to, I always, well, I wouldn't have minded being a lawyer, let's put it that way. But every decision I made was sort of directed, I didn't want to make a decision that would take me out of a path towards holding public office. And there were certain jobs that would be, wouldn't direct you in any way or help you in any way, so law school was, not only did I feel a need for more education, but it was also the type of education that would direct you towards, and if you didn't make it politically, it still wasn't a bad career.

TOB: There weren't as many lawyers back then, were there?

KC: No, no.

TOB: When did you meet your wife?

KC: Oh, I met her thanks to Don Nicoll, I think, who got me involved in politics. South Portland level. And so I started working for congressmen who I met at the very first meeting that Don invited me to and then I met my wife somewhere and ...

TOB: So it was after law school?

KC: I met her during, no, no, I met her during law school. Yes. We were working together in fact and so, then she started volunteering for all these political activities and we later got married.

TOB: What law school are you talking about?

KC: University of Maine, it was Portland University at the time and it later merged with the University of Maine.

RC: Did you have a specific interest in the curriculum, like intellectual property...?

KC: No, it was, but in those days, you can understand, it was very general. I mean, you took all the basic courses, you know, contracts and evidence and torts and, you know, nothing advanced much beyond the basic facets of law.

TOB: So you began classes in October of '55, and you started volunteering or working for ...?

KC: For Jim Oliver, was running for Congress.

TOB: In?

KC: In '56, and he lost by something like nine votes. In fact they never, nobody really knew when he ran again in, what, '60, no '58, he didn't know if he was running for re-election or as a challenger. And the House of Representatives I think decided the election about three weeks before the next election, the last election three weeks before the next one, and then he won, he won that particular one.

TOB: Is that, do you view that as a very positive experience, your first introduction to politics?

KC: Oh definitely, definitely. He was a very, Jim Oliver was a cantankerous, very bright, Phi Beta Kappa out of Bowdoin. Never wanted anybody to know that he was that bright, and very cantankerous, argumentative and opinionated, engaged in a lot of demagoguery, but he was really a good politician. He was a good cam-, he was a hard campaigner and, you know, you talk about on the job training, there couldn't have been any person that could, you would learn more from. He was very inclusive, I mean, every high level meeting, whether he was arguing with Muskie about campaign contributions or, I was always included in every meeting he attended. Whether he was going to Washington, meeting with people there, I was always included so I was able to observe all the good things that he did and all the things that I didn't agree with.

TOB: What was your role in that campaign?

KC: I was pretty much his driver in '56, his gopher. I drove him everywhere and passed out brochures and sat in the meetings, and in '58 I was really basically his campaign manager.

RC: Stepping back for a second, did you follow Muskie's campaign in '54?

KC: A little bit.

RC: Were you a Muskie supporter?

KC: Oh sure, yes.

TOB: I read in an interview that you said when you were law school you developed a consuming interest in the early Muskie era Democratic resurgence. Tell us about....

KC: Well, Muskie was, he was a great speaker for young people. He could explain the political process in a way that I think was very inspiring, at least to me and to young people. He was almost like a teacher, wasn't he? His speeches were really teaching, and I learned an awful lot listening to him and I think got inspired even further by those early speeches.

TOB: You might have already answered this, but how did your aspirations going into law school and coming out of law school differ?

KC: They didn't.

TOB: They didn't.

KC: No, I spent more time in the political field than I did in law school.

RC: Because nowadays a lot of folks go into law school with the idea of doing public interest work and they come out and they end up in a corporate office, a lot of times just because of debt. That didn't happen to you at all, you went ...?

KC: No, actually, I had, the other nice thing about it was, I had an accelerated undergraduate degree, which was four years done in three by going year round. And then when I came out of the Navy after the Korean War I had the GI Bill, so I had the GI Bill and then I worked in a law firm locally doing, settling damage claims for insurance companies and that kind of stuff, on ships. And so between the job and the GI Bill, you know, I lived quite well. And then I lost a semester because my bank account was slowly deteriorating and I, so I took a summer job, which was supposed to be a summer job, on a merchant ship which paid big money to go over to Karachi in India and back. It was a tramp freighter so I missed, that's how I missed a semester because I never did get back, but I didn't have any money problems when I did because they paid big money for officers in the Merchant Marine in those days.

TOB: How did you get the job with Oliver in '56?

KC: I volunteered.

TOB: You volunteered. And then you got moved up to a paid position?

KC: I didn't get paid until he got elected, and then I went on staff.

TOB: So, you're wife and yourself were volunteers at the same time?

KC: Yes.

DN: It might be of interest if you talk a little bit, Ken, about how you got involved and what that volunteering meant.

KC: Yeah, well, I decided that I, when I got into law school and I was home for a period of time, that I wanted to start getting involved. And Don Nicoll was the executive secretary of the Maine Democratic Party, so I went to see him, told him that I wanted to volunteer, I wanted to get involved. And he, Don put me in touch with the South Portland Democratic Men's Club, and I went to the first meeting and I met Jim Oliver who was running for Congress on the Democratic ticket and listened to him talk and went up and said, I'd like to help you. Next thing I know I'm driving him everywhere he went. So that's how that all got going. Very simply, you know, one telephone call, one meeting, one invitation to a meeting. One thing that a lot of people should understand, that, if you really are serious about volunteering, it's no problem getting, being allowed to do that.

RC: Did you just approach Jim Oliver and say I'd like to ...?

KC: Yeah, next thing I know I'm his driver.

RC: Fantastic. And you did this until '59, worked with him...?

KC: Well, I worked off and on, he lost of course, through the '56 campaign and then I spent more time, I was trying to make a living, and in '58 we ran again and I went basically full time for him, at no pay. And then after he got elected he offered me, and I'd finished law school by then, he offered me a position as his district representative, which was perfect for future political things. I mean, not only running around for two full campaigns with a congressional candidate, you get to meet a tremendous number of people, and then by being a district representative you meet even more. You have an opportunity to represent the congressman at various political events and do constituents work and go to all of the, represent him at all the county meetings and the, all of the county committee meetings and all of that. So pretty soon in a small area it's pretty easy to get to know everybody pretty well and to also form your, form an opinion in your own mind who the real leaders are, who the real workers are, so that when you do run, you know, you have a, you really have a good idea of who are the best supporters that would do the most work.

RC: When you became district representative, were you content with, I mean at the time, were you, like, this is where I want to be? Or did you see yourself in the future as a...?

KC: Oh, no, this is nothing, I didn't want to be a congressional staffer all my life, because Jim was not an easy guy to work for. I mean, he was very good, he was like a father and there's nothing that he wouldn't do for you, but he was not easy. He'd get very frustrated and take his frustration out on you occasionally, but it was a great experience.

TOB: Now, you were living and working in Portland at the time?

KC: Yes.

TOB: And he had obviously offices in Washington....

KC: And here. His district office was the, there were three congressional districts in those days and his was, his was not that big.

TOB: Did you go to Washington a lot?

KC: Periodically he would call me down, but my basic job was here.

TOB: You left Oliver in '59, went and took the bar exam?

KC: No, I took the bar exam '58.

TOB: Fifty eight. And so you stayed with Oliver until when?

KC: Until he lost the election. He lost in 1960.

TOB: 1960. And then what did you do?

KC: Well, he found a job for me, supposedly, which would be as an attorney for a recount that the House of Representatives was supervising in Indiana, and I was supposed to be the attorney for the House at that recount. And so, they didn't have any money so they stuck me in the Library of Congress, on the Library of Congress payroll, doing legal research and, but I never did get called to go to the recount in Indiana, so I spent a year ...

TOB: Was it a contested election?

KC: Yeah, so I spent a year, I don't even remember all the details of it, so I spent a year doing legal research for members of Congress in the Library of Congress.

TOB: How was that job?

KC: It was very interesting. I mean, it was really extremely interesting because there was so much information available, it made a research job really interesting and challenging because you could do what you felt was a pretty credible job just because of all the information you had at your command.

TOB: Did you enjoy living in Washington?

KC: It was all right, yeah. But I knew, it was hard to really enjoy it because I didn't know how, I didn't expect to be there very long. I expected to be there a month or two and then gone.

TOB: You must have made a lot of good connections, though, doing that researcher job.

KC: Yeah, in fact, I did get to meet quite a few people on the Hill. And of course John Donovan was Senator Muskie's administrative assistant and John and I had become good friends through a previous campaign with him. So I used to see him a lot and through him I'd get up on the Hill and see a lot of people, visit a lot of people. And then it was really John who helped me

on to my next job which was the, Congress created the Area Redevelopment Administration, which was the forerunner of Economic Development Administration and every state had what they called a coordinator for that program. And of course politically what better job can you have than running around the state offering money? So John helped me through all the political maze of being selected to come up here and be the state coordinator of Area Redevelopment Administration.

TOB: Now that was an appointed position, right?

KC: Yes.

TOB: So you had to be appointed by the Kennedy administration.

KC: Yes, it's kind of a round about way. It wasn't a presidential appointment.

TOB: How did you become acquainted with Ed Muskie? Must have been around at that time?

KC: Well it started with campaigning in '56 and '58, and we were all campaigning together in those days, the congressman and the senatorial candidates, you know. So I'm walking around with Oliver brochures in one hand and Muskie brochures in the other and I'm at every dinner and every fund raiser, and so I got to know Senator Muskie very well.

RC: Do you recall your initial impressions of Muskie?

KC: Oh, I was, I'd formed my initial impression way back in '54. I greatly admired him for what he stood for and for his ability to articulate his positions and, you know, like I say, in almost a teaching way which was particularly good for me.

RC: Did you think he'd win in '54?

KC: I didn't really, I can't say in '54 that I was involved enough. I was just coming out of the Navy and back in the Merchant Marine, so I knew what was going on in Maine but not on a constant basis. So I guess I didn't really form, I guess in those days everybody expected that the only people that would win would be Republicans. But from that time on there was never any doubt in my mind that he would win in '56, '58. There was no question that he would win.

TOB: It must have been really exciting, just out of law school, finishing up law school, and experiencing this Democratic revival firsthand. Will you tell us a little bit more about your experiences?

KC: Well, you know, it was like, you first thought, there is hope. I mean, because you know you had, basically most of the time you had overwhelmingly Republican legislatures and the Republican leadership was very, very strong and very, very evident in Maine. The institutions, you know, the utility commissions, the paper companies, banks, all of the structure were still heavily influenced by Republicans and the Republican party, but you could see some hope that you could maybe break, maybe the stranglehold was starting to weaken and give way. And you

know, like years and years of one party rule, it gets awfully tired. There's very few new initiatives that ever come forward and another thing that's very disgusting.... And I think back to when I was going to law school, one of the things that, there were two Demo-, two of us were Democrats in law school and some of my colleagues used to, we used to argue politics and (*unintelligible word*) with some of my classmates, and they used to say, oh I could be a Democrat, but if you want to succeed in Maine you've got to be a Republican and a Mason. And I used to say, who the hell wants to succeed that bad. That was sort of my position. But that was sort of an attitude.

Then there was other attitudes in the state that, when I went to buy my first house, for instance, even though we had the G.I. Bill whereby the mortgage insurance was a hundred percent guaranteed by the federal government, I went to buy a little house for my family, only to have the bank tell me, well, we don't make loans to anybody unless they can put thirty percent down. And so I had a hell of a fight with the bank about, over the federal law, and it was that kind of attitude. And education in Maine was in those days, it was a caste system. If you were in Lewiston working in the Bates Mill, you were not college material. You were a future mill worker, that's what you should aspire to. However, if you were managers family or families of the establishment so to speak, you were college material. And that used to really, really upset me. To think that we in this state had placed, you know, we were minorities really, and you can understand sometimes how minorities feel because that's the way we were looked upon. And, you know, little things like buying a house. I had the income to pay my mortgage, insurance, everything like that, and for somebody in the establishment to tell you, no, we don't care if it's a hundred percent guaranteed, we just don't think you should have it, because unless your father could give you the thirty percent, you had no right to own a house. And I remember another thing that's kind of interesting, too, back in registration. I went to register in Portland as a Democrat when I was in law school and I was married, one child, paying all my way, renting, paying rent for my apartment, my telephone, everything. And I was told I couldn't register because I had to register at the place where my parents lived because I was a student. And you know, here I am, twenty five, twenty six years old, and like I say, with a family, and the attitude is, no, you can't, you're still, you're a student so you're a ward of your parents. I mean, these are just examples of the attitudes that existed everywhere throughout all the institutions. Enough to really upset you.

DN: That was 1955, '56.

KC: Yeah, right around there, yes, '55, '56. And you had to read from a newspaper. I mean, here I am, I'm going to law school and they hand me a newspaper and ask me to read from it, you know, I said you gotta be kidding me. Then we had a poll tax, too.

RC: You talk about the caste system that existed and you also talked about the Democratic minority, that brings something to mind. Do you think that, you used the Bates Mill as an example, do you think there was, it had anything to do with the fact that it was a French contingency ...?

KC: Oh, it had something, to be sure. It was, had a lot to do with it. But I'm talking about in rural Maine, the fact that if you didn't come from the right families you couldn't, you shouldn't aspire for college. And I mean, the right families were middle class at best, I mean, they were ...

TOB: Republican.

KC: Republican based, Republicans, yes. Anybody who had a job above the mill worker was probably a Republican, wouldn't you say, Don?

TOB: When was your first child born?

KC: Nineteen fifty six.

TOB: Nineteen fifty six. You had a lot going on in '56, '57, '58.

TOB: This is jumping back ahead to your role in the ARA. Can you tell us a little bit about exactly what your day to day affairs were, what you were trying to accomplish?

KC: Well, you basically traveled to the areas characterized as chronically depressed areas, which at that time was Aroostook county or Washington county, Biddeford, Biddeford - Saco, Boothbay Harbor. And you went to various meetings of chambers of commerce and business groups to explain the program. And then when individuals were interested in making an application, then you met with them and worked through the application process with them, and then the applications were submitted to Washington. And at that particular point it was pretty much taken over by the Small Business Administration who was the processor for Area Redevelopment Administration.

RC: Was it a successful innovation to improve the counties?

KC: Marginally successful. I can name I think, from way back in those days, I can name one business that's still, two businesses that are still in business that started then. And there were grants, you know, that were made to the communities that actually were successful.

TOB: How would you describe the political scene in Washington in the very early '60s, I mean, when you were appointed to this position? Can you...?

KC: Oh, it was quite accessible. I think, you know after, for instance after you got an application for a good project, you really had to, if you really wanted to see it happen you had to go through the back door and apply some political pressure to get approval. So I wouldn't say that it was, from a public policy standpoint, it was what I would say is a system that should be modeled, but probably continues but only with greater amounts of money involved today. But, you know, it's still, today it's still true. I mean, congressional pressure to get things out of the federal government is still alive and well as it was then.

TOB: Now, do you, how closely did you work with Senator Muskie's office at that time?

KC: In that particular role, or?

TOB: (*Unintelligible phrase.*)

KC: Because he was very interested in economic development and very interested obviously in what was happening in Maine. And obviously being a good Democrat myself, I was always, if we had a success, I was always very interested in making sure that his office was in line to announce it. I think I would tell John or somebody over there when the announcement was coming out so they could just grab it.

TOB: How would you describe him as a person? What was your relationship like with him?

KC: My relationship was okay. I didn't see a lot of him except during campaigns and political meetings and between field days and conventions and that. I dealt mostly with his staff obviously because I was not a very high level young bureaucrat.

RC: So it was purely political, there was no golf playing?

KC: Not then, no, we didn't play golf until Kennebunk. When he bought, because he didn't take up golf until quite late. We always used to laugh because Muskie had a routine every summer. He had his home on the golf course and every summer he would summons, we used to say summons, he would say to three or four of his friends, this is your day to play golf. And we'd go down and we'd have a good time, delightful time, and Jane would make lobster stew and we'd, all of his supporters and friends would do that once a summer, and delightfully as well. That's not being too flip, is it Don? Because Muskie was not the most fun to play golf with.

RC: Did his temper come through?

KC: Oh, yes, he, you know he was a reasonably good golfer and, you know, not a great golfer, but he would get terribly upset when he missed a shot. Like even Tiger Woods misses some, but Muskie couldn't understand why he missed shots. I still remember one hole, it happened every year, I can't remember which it was, but there was a hole that sloped and if you hit the ball on the green, it would roll off down the hill. And Muskie for some reason or other was almost always able to hit the green and he would get furious when they rolled down off. You know, instead of hitting the ball up here and letting it roll down on, he would ...

TOB: Who was the best golfer of the group?

KC: Oh, I don't know. There was no great golfers in the group. You know, people like Al Lessard and, I can't think, a whole crowd of them. I can't, the only good golfer was Ned, his son. Everybody else was in the ninety category I would say.

DN: Can you recall what it was like ...

End of Side One, Tape One

Side Two, Tape One

(Side Two begins with Ken Curtis responding to a question about Jim Oliver)

KC: Most of the disagreement was not over issues as it was over money because Oliver used to think that Muskie should share contributions with him, that he was sopping up all the contributions and that therefore he should share some with the other candidates. That was pretty much the argument. And I think Muskie thought that Jim was a little bit too far left and too much of a demagogue for, to advance the Democratic party in Maine.

DN: You might describe Jim and how he came to be a Democrat.

KC: Yeah, really interesting because Jim Oliver was, back in '41, was an isolationist and a supporter, a Republican, an isolationist and supporter of the Townsend Plan which was kind of at odds with the Republican party. The Townsend Plan was the forerunner of social security. And Jim was elected Republican congressman and served three terms I believe, three terms, and basically the Townsend Plan was what did him in because the Republican party, no way that they could go along with anything as socialistic as that, as something like social security. In fact, I think they thought Jim was a socialist. In fact, some Democrats thought he was a socialist. And so eighteen years later, I mean, he got mad and changed his registration to the, as a Democrat and eighteen years later he came back and defeated Robert Hale, who was the one who defeated him in the Republic primary eighteen years before that.

TOB: Now had Hale been holding the office since then?

KC: No.

TOB: No, he just came ...

KC: He was doing real estate development.

TOB: He came out of the woodwork.

KC: Yeah, making speeches and agitating, all those eighteen years I guess.

TOB: So you worked for the ARA for three years?

KC: Yes.

TOB: And then in 1964 you left the ARA and decided to run for Congress.

KC: Correct, because we redistricted and, we redistricted somebody out and ...

DN: In 1962 it was redistricted ...

KC: Into two districts.

DN: ... two, as a result of the ‘60 year census.

KC: Yes, and in ‘60, that’s right, in ‘64 the, Ronald Kellam, Judge Kellam now, got clobbered by Stan Tupper in ‘62. So along came ‘64 and nobody really wanted to get clobbered except me.

RC: How’d you get clobbered then?

TOB: That was extremely close race.

TOB: Yeah, we talked to Stan yesterday.

KC: Yeah, so Stan was really pretty much at odds with the Republican party. In fact he’s a really nice guy and he was pretty moderate, too moderate for the Republicans in those days. So again looking ahead to future office, you know, it was just an opportunity to get established as a candidate with no expectations of winning, so I ran for Congress. I think I had eighty five hundred dollars or something like that to spend and Virginia Pitts was loaned to me from Muskie’s office.

TOB: That’s funny because yesterday when we ...

KC: Off the record I should probably say, Virginia had a little bit of a drinking problem and made for an interesting person to be a backroomer. She used to tell me, she’d drink and get depressed and tell me how badly I was going to lose. But she was a good help. She was a big help to me. Of course what really happened is that, you know, we can all have great egos and say that outcomes of elections are based on our great abilities, but two things happened in ‘64. Johnson’s coattails were very long in ‘64 and the Republicans were disenchanted with Stan Tupper and, which made it possible for me almost to win. And I didn’t want to go to Congress so I almost screwed up, I really wanted to run for governor, so I almost screwed up my plans by winning that seat.

RC: Needless to say, losing didn’t turn you away from politics at all?

KC: Oh no, no, no, I didn’t expect to win. I did it because I felt that was a way to get established as a candidate. I knew I couldn’t lose as bad as Ron Kellam had; I knew I could lose bad, but not that bad, and if I didn’t lose as bad as he did, people would think I had potential as a candidate.

TOB: What were some of the major issues in that campaign?

KC: I’m trying to think. Of course jobs and economy are always an issue in every campaign in Maine and of course I played up my experience with the Area Redevelopment a great deal. I think I kind of chided Stan Tupper because I was trying to, actually it was kind of a dumb philosophy but I was painting him as a Democrat. He was very good to labor and so I was sort of in a way trying to spell out his support for labor without losing my own, you know. Sort of saying labor will ultimately go with Democrats anyway and therefore if I can paint him very

friendly to labor, this will turn off more and more Republicans. As I recall, those were, I don't remember any other basically strong issues.

TOB: Labor backed, the union backed Tupper in that election. But being a Democrat you had most of the ...?

KC: Well, the rank and file would usually vote for a Democrat given a chance, but you had, what they had is the executive council, executive board of the AFL-CIO who made, they were a narrow group who made the decisions on who to endorse and they would tell the rank and file that this is who they were endorsing. But the rank and file frequently didn't follow the executive council. And the executive council was Republican anyway Ben Dorsky was a Republican, so they were not really what you'd call a liberal group, and they were pragmatic. BecauseThey figured if they had a Republican who was reasonably supportive and flexible that they should support them because the Democrats weren't going to win anyway.

TOB: That election went to recount, didn't it?

KC: Yes, it did.

TOB: And that went on for awhile.

KC: Yeah, it went on until, which was really very helpful to me because it, the media picked up the day to day, it was, you know, it was almost like another election.

TOB: And for awhile, there's an article ...

KC: Went on until New Year's Eve, I conceded New Year's Eve.

TOB: There was a, was it Reed, I guess, that gave, said Tupper had won, although prematurely, before the recount had come in and ...

KC: Oh, I think so, yeah, I think so because I was starting to jab at him already. He was the next target. He was an easy one to jab at. A nice guy, he and I are very friendly these days, but he was a fun person to run against. You could find a lot of holes there.

TOB: So you then became secretary of state almost the next day, after you conceded the election?

KC: Yeah, because, you know, the Johnson coattails brought in a Democratic legislature and, which wasn't anticipated. And the leadership, because of what had happened, the Democratic leadership sort of approached me as to whether I would like to be attorney general. And I thought, I don't think so, I think. So I told them I'd rather be secretary of state, because I was thinking about running for governor. You had nothing but controversy as attorney general. Secretary of state, who can get upset about you running all over the state talking about highway safety? I remember way back, you know, this is back to, you know, the impressions you get. Massachusetts had a registrar of motor vehicles named Rudolph King and his name was all over

the state of Maine [*sic* Massachusettes]. And I got thinking, the number of people that have an automobile, and of course secretary of states register motor vehicles, so I got thinking, jeez, Rudolph King had a good thing going there. So that's what made me think a little bit about getting more name recognition from the secretary of state's office, positive recognition, than you would ever get as attorney general. And plus there's no heavy lifting as secretary of state. Keeper of the great seal.

TOB: Now that position was appointed by the legislature, and what, so you were in charge of vehicle registration, highway safety, what was a typical day like as secretary of state? Very demanding job, was it full time?

KC: Well, when the legislature was in session I always, I was on the floor below the legislative chambers. So I used to always keep coffee on and always made it a point that any legislator, when they needed to get their car registered, we'd do it for them down there so they wouldn't have to run down and stand in line. And they'd come down and talk and we'd do anything that we could to help them. And then, you know, there were endless opportunities to make speeches all over the state. Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis Clubs, Chambers of Commerce, and, you know, you couldn't handle all the invitations that, for these people always hunting for a speaker. So it was usually two or three speeches and then, you know, some initiatives that you good hand out to the press, you know, initiatives for highway safety and vehicle registration and problems of OUIs and all that kind of stuff. So there was, it was an awful lot of things. And at the same time we were putting together, secretary of state had that responsibility, we were starting to put together the archives, the state archives. The building had been approved and so there was a lot to talk about doing that.

TOB: So that building where the state library, the museum, the archives was built in '66, '65?

KC: It was started, it was authorized by the Democratic legislature in '65 and I think the bond issue passed right around that time, and then construction, it opened when I was governor, '67 or '68 it was opened.

TOB: Was that a pet project of yours?

KC: Oh, sure, because as secretary of state we had, you know, we really needed, record management was becoming, the need for record management was becoming very evident, and that was one of the responsibilities. And then we have things like the original Constitution of the state stuck in an elevator shaft, and we had historic documents spread all over the place. And nobody really knew where the hell they were and all of that. And then, you know, the, moving the state library, the whole cultural building was a, it was a nice project. And so it was something that, you know, as secretary of state I could get involved in from the archive side and then as governor get involved in obviously appropriations and other matters for the whole thing.

TOB: So you'd say that being secretary of state really set you up well for running for governor?

KC: Very well.

TOB: Can you tell us about the relationship between the Democratic executive council at this time and the Republican governor?

KC: It was not as strained as the reverse, as the Republican executive council was with me, but, see, as secretary of state, that's the other thing, too. I was secretary to the executive council so I had to be present at all meetings of the governing executive council. So I learned an awful lot over a two year period about how, you know, how they interact and where the soft underbelly was with the council and the governor and it, also we handled pardons so I got to know the whole pardon process. So when I became governor with a new executive council I can say modestly that I knew more about the operation than the new executive council members. It's always good to be one step ahead.

TOB: That switch from Democratic executive council, Republican governor to the flip side, when you were elected, was that based mainly on the individuals running for the offices or was there a general trend that allowed that to happen?

KC: You mean the legislature in electing?

TOB: Yeah, well, when it got switched around, when you got elected governor as a Democrat instead of Republican and the council switched to the opposite, why did that happen?

KC: Well, like I say, '64 was an aberration. It was Johnson's coattails. And then we went back more to business as usual in Maine.

DN: The executive council was a constitutional office elected by the legislature, the majority of the legislature.

KC: It had nothing to do with one man, one vote. It was hundred percent or zero.

RC: Who would you say the ultimate power lay with, the Republicans or the Democrats when you were [Maine] Secretary of State?

KC: Democrats. They did a, they had some real good progressive leadership. The Democrats had been waiting a long, long time and they had a lot of issues and they were popular with the public and John Reed, the Republican governor, was not a strong governor. In fact it's probably good that he wasn't because he went along rather than fight a lot of good initiatives that the Democrats initiated in those two years that they were in power.

TOB: Did you have a good relationship with John Reed when you were secretary of state?

KC: Sure, yes.

TOB: As secretary of state, did you have a lot of interaction with Muskie, or was that kind of dwindled then?

KC: Only from the standpoint of political conventions and political meetings where we would basically wind up in the same place. Until I became a candidate, you know, I was, I was a person that just got introduced, you know, I didn't make any speeches or anything but every convention they would introduce the constitutional officers.

RC: What was your relationship to Governor Reed?

KC: Oh, I got along fine with him. I mean, I had no reason to fight with him as, until I became a candidate. No, as secretary of state I did my job and ...

TOB: You were involved with the Southern Maine Chapter of the National Cystic Fibrosis Research Foundation and the March of Dimes. In both these groups you started as the chief administrator, how did you become involved in these organizations?

KC: Well, just invited to. And of course, with cystic fibrosis I had, let's see, one daughter or two daughters at the time with cystic fibrosis and so, you know, the, I was on their national, I got involved in the national research foundation and so consequently I got involved a little bit state wide, but I didn't do much state wide. I had decided that my children had enough to handle without reading about themselves and me so I sort of broke off my relationships with the state and said I'll do anything I can nationally but I'm not going to become involved where I'm being quoted or anything like that.

TOB: In your announcement of gubernatorial candidacy, you quote Joshua Chamberlain and state that you felt that government should take a more active role in shaping the state. How did you feel that the state government needed to change?

KC: Oh, it was in terrible disarray. It had, there was no accountability, you had over two hundred agencies and boards and terms were not concurrent with the governor. And you couldn't fire anybody or appoint anyone without executive council approval. So, you know, you had, the loyalty of all of your primary department heads were more to the executive council than they were to you as a governor. And you had so many of them there was no real way to bring them together. And then we had biennial sessions of the legislature which were impossible to keep up with the changes that were taking place economically, so, and we still had the executive council. There was almost no accountability whatsoever for the governor, which was, or anybody, which is not a good way for the public to become engaged in governing.

TOB: Tell us a little bit about your first campaign. What were the major issues, did you think you had a strong chance of winning when you started out?

KC: I thought I had a chance because I took a poll in May that showed me winning by two points. Even in the polls, to show me winning by two points as the Democrat was pretty encouraging, even that early. Issues were still jobs and the economy, too much one party rule, that Governor Reed had been in too long. He was kind of a lackluster guy and so he was kind of easy to, and so we developed this slogan, through, you know, through a trick of the Constitution and events he would have been the governor for eleven years and so we concocted this little

thing that said, seven but not eleven. And it kind of fitted because they thought, he's a nice guy but we don't want him for four more years. And that was kind of the underlying issue.

The biggest issue, though, was myself because I was young, thirty five at the time, and people just thought I lacked the substance to be taken seriously and, some people did. I found that out, too, in the early poll, so we started doing a lot of things, you know, all the buzz words that made you sound older and more mature. And then we developed a plan that actually was a very good plan, we had different people write, small groups, write a chapter of what we called The Maine Action Plan which we distributed and, you know, by chapter and white papers. And that was designed to show, add substance to what some perceived as a handshaking campaign. Actually the plan turned out to be so good that, you know, I was able to, when I got elected I was able to introduce every piece of the plan in the legislature and eventually over eight years a great deal of it was enacted, which was ...

TOB: Whose idea was that, the Maine Action Plan?

KC: I used to have a regular interaction with my, with the small campaign staff and I can't remember, but I think, you know, when we analyzed the poll in great depth that somehow or other that idea grew out of it among advisory groups, kitchen cabinet group. And I don't remember exactly when but it was done, again, to put some meat on the campaign, some substance to the campaign.

TOB: Did you cover a lot of the state during the election...?

KC: Oh, sure, yes. All of it. Some places more often than others, though. I tell you, I learned a technique, though, that worked very well in Maine from a media market standpoint. The old style, which again, having been involved in following Muskie's campaign and Oliver's campaign you observe all these things, and kind of the old way of doing things is you'd go to one part of the state and stay there for a couple of days. Well, I worked out a technique of spending, of doing my campaign stops on half days so that I could be in two media markets on the same day, and then double the time that I spent in an area. Because if you went in, you know, went and spent all day, they knew you were there once, but if you were to spend half days there, you were there twice and it worked very well.

TOB: Just double the amount of newspaper articles, and ...

KC: Yeah, and amount of visits and of course a lot of people, you know, a lot of supporters really, one of their gripes is they never see you and this is a way of, this was a way of allevia-, you know, sort of eliminating that, some of that gripe because they'd see you more often.

TOB: Campaigns are obviously getting bigger and bigger and they continue to get larger today. What kind of entourage did you do this campaigning with?

KC: Well, in those days, you'd never get away with it now, but you had, a telephone company gave you an advisor, communications advisor. And you could pick a Democrat who travelled with you constantly, and had a driver, you had to hire a driver, and then you pick up volunteers,

you know, who would travel with you. But then what I did is I had read Jerry Bruno's book about the advance man during the 1960s so I created two advance people. One who went two or three days before and one who went the day before or the same day so that, one that was always just ahead of you so that when you went somewhere to speak. Well, first of all there was work done to organize the event, to get the people out and so on, and then the one who went just before you would go into the hall and put your posters all over the place and give somebody a bag of pins to hand out. And so your opponents would come in and they'd see all of your, and they'd think that the whole town, the whole city was for you, the whole area was for you and they didn't realize it was one of your own people nailing them up on the wall. And it was demoralizing to the opposition and it did to some degree influence the people who came in. But that was all, you know, I got a lot of those, you know one of the best campaign, and it's still pretty true today, was Jerry Bruno's book on advance man and Theodore White's book on making the president of 1960. There were some lessons in there that are still good. You know, things like, you know, you would always have an overflow crowd and you would change the locale if it was going to be empty and, you know, techniques like that that left a stronger impression than otherwise. And other candidates never seem to take the initiative to do those simple things.

TOB: Now was Reed campaigning as actively as you were, or was he, did you kind of overwhelm his campaign?
KC: I think John Reed felt that I wouldn't beat him and so he continued to be governor and continued to do the things he always did and I don't think that he had an extraordinarily active campaign. I know he wasn't getting around half as much as I was.

RC: Come election day, did you feel that you were the underdog still....?

KC: Just thought I had a chance. As a Democrat, that's the most you could hope for in those days. That you had a fighting chance. And of course after, you know, come election day there's nothing more you can do except wait and see. And I'm still a great believer in, I only took one poll that first year and that was in May, to find out how people felt about issues, how people felt about me, what they thought were strengths and weaknesses, and then you develop a game plan and stick to it. I don't think you panic near the end or anything else like that because, I think politicians make a big mistake in thinking that everybody in the public is as engaged as you are and, you know, if you want to create an image, it takes, I mean, there are things you can do that can destroy one quickly. But if you want to build one, it's a long process and that's why I think you start early on, and what you do is to build on that image and you don't try to change it two weeks before the election. If it isn't working, then it's not gonna work, in my opinion.

RC: You mentioned one of the issues involved with you, that you were very young, did the press make a big issue out of that?

KC: Yeah, I think there were negative stories. But on the other hand you've got to remember the times, though. This was a time for young people because Jack Kennedy was president and politics and government were at a high plane and young people were in, so I, any other time probably maybe I wouldn't have had as much of a chance as a young person.

TOB: You were the youngest governor in the United States ...

KC: At that time. But we've had people like Bill Clinton that have come along and shattered that record.

TOB: When you started your administration after your inauguration, what were the top priorities, what was your, what were the planks in your platform, what were the things you wanted to really push?

KC: Well, we put the Maine Action Plan at the forefront, which was education, government reform, I think those were the two earliest. And then of course later on the environment developed, and those issues, but economic development, government reform and reorganization, government reorganization and education were probably the three top topics. But of course then you get into transportation, building airports and roads and all those things that, all the infrastructure that goes to economic development.

TOB: Now did the national political scene at that time have a large influence on your early administration and, or even your election?

KC: Sure, because when Johnson came in you had the great society and there was barrels of federal money kicking around which you could put to good use.

RC: Was there any dissidence within the Democratic party?

KC: Oh, sure. Yeah, there were some who thought I was far too liberal, and there was Louis Jalbert, who unless you conformed to everything, submitted everything he wanted, he'd be your enemy for awhile. But basically we had such a small cadre of Democrats that they were pretty loyal. So what we had to do with, I had veto power by two votes in the House and none in the Senate, so what we had to do was form coalitions. And one of the parts of government reorganization was to build a stronger staff for both the executive and legislature, so we were able to remove a lot of the polarization and effect a lot of the compromises at the staff level. So that by the time we got the bill to the floor of the legislature, that a lot of the compromises had already been made, and a lot of the suspicions had disappeared. And then obviously, if you count votes and you want to get a piece of legislation passed, and the legislative body is overwhelmingly of the opposite political party, you have to have a sponsor from the other political party. So I had different people who were sort of champions. They felt they were champions of education, environment and other matters, so if I really wanted a piece of legislation passed, one of those people would be the sponsor and then in caucus we'd get the Democrats lined up to vote with a coalition. So the Republican sponsor and the Republican leadership were able to peel off enough Republican votes to join the Democratic votes and we were able to get a great deal of legislation enacted that way.

TOB: Who were your main and most important allies in the legislature, and in the Maine government in general at that time?

KC: Well, you know, it was a love-hate relationship, but I would say some of my, one of my greatest allies in getting legislation done was Harrison Richardson who attacked me the most. But on anything to do with the economy or environment, he was a real champion of it and his, my staff and himself and some of his volunteers would put together the legislation. And Bennett Katz always thought he was the czar of education so he'd fight like hell for any education bill that had his hands, his fingerprints on it. Those were two highly supportive ...

TOB: Were they Democrats or Republicans?

KC: All Republicans. The Democratic leadership was good, we had people like Elmer Violette and we had Floyd Harding and Kathy Goodwin. Some of those people were very good in their own right, but here again, when you're outnumbered that badly, you can't pass anything without the opposition votes. So you had to compromise, and the Democrats understood that.

TOB: How important was conservation in your early administration, what kind of priority was it given?

KC: Well it was all part of the reorganization effort to create a department of conservation to place more attention on, because here again it was very fragmented. Fish and Game, Forestry, it was very hard to have a cohesive policy. In fact, one of the worst department heads I had was the commissioner of Fish and Game, and he'd just out and out go out of his way to do anything he could to cause me difficulty. And on the other hand, a guy like Ronny Green, who was commissioner of Sea and Shore Fisheries, and Austin Wilkins, you know, as long as what you were talking about was reasonable, they were highly supportive.

TOB: Ron Green was still Sea and Shore commissioner?

KC: Yes, from Owl's Head.

TOB: Wow, he was there for awhile.

KC: Well, he's been gone a long time.

TOB: No, I know, but ...

KC: Yeah, at that time. He'd been, he stayed on, people like Dave Stevens stayed on, they were very supportive. In fact Dave Stevens was one of the most interesting department heads there when I got elected. Came into my office and gave me an undated letter of resignation, said, I've heard you were somewhat critical of my program and you can use this letter of resignation any time you like. And then as he turned out the door he said I'm really not that sure I want to work for you so I reserve the right to leave whenever I feel like it. And we became, we developed mutual respect. But there were only a handful that really did everything they possibly could to undermine me.

TOB: Dave Stevens was, what was his role?

KC: Highway commissioner.

TOB: Highway commissioner.

KC: With reorganization became transportation commissioner, commissioner of transportation.

TOB: And this reorganization, was this put through during your tenure as governor?

KC: Yes, eventually. Took, almost all of it got done, probably seven years, six, seven years.

TOB: What were the new departments that were created?

KC: Well, see, you had transportation, conservation, mental health and human services, there were about twelve, I don't know if I can remember them all. It's in Allen Pease's book anyway.

TOB: How did you reconcile man's thirst for development, jobs, modernization, with the preservation of Maine's natural resources? That was, Muskie, that was really important for Muskie when he was governor.

KC: Yeah, we, of course thanks to Muskie, you know, there was an opportunity to pass a lot more of environmental legislation which was needed. But we took a middle of the road position, you know, pickerels and payrolls, I think that was in my first inaugural speech, that we have to do both. We had a lot of pollution going on at the time, but, and we created a tremendous amount of environmental legislation. I mean, we mirrored the federal legislation in air quality and water quality, we passed a lot of bond issues, we matched federal money for municipal sewage treatment facilities. We created a type of state wide zoning which we didn't call zoning but was called the Site Selection Law for industry, a subdivision law for subdividing properties, a land use regulation commission for the unorganized territories, coastal zone planning. All that stuff happened during those years which was, you know, there was a national movement and you coupled a national movement with a neglect, it becomes quite easy to bring people together and get it done.

RC: Did Muskie help with your campaign at all?

KC: Sure. Yeah.

RC: Did you interact a lot with him ...?

KC: We campaigned together. I was in a lot of trouble in 1970 because I just enacted an income tax. Muskie told me I was nuts to do it, told me I should go with the sales tax, and I said, yeah, I know, but I think the sales tax is too regressive, I'm gonna go with a positive tax. And so we passed the income tax in the Republican legislature by one vote. But anyway, '70 came along and I was twenty eight points behind in the polls and ...

TOB: Who were you running against?

KC: The attorney general, Jim Erwin. So Muskie, in his own way, he was at the Blaine House and we were having lunch and he, so I said, I don't, he was running, and I said, I don't want to drag the ticket down. I said, I don't need to run for the election, I'm in terrible shape and I'm going to be just a, I'm just going to be a drag on the ticket. And then, Muskie in his own way said, who else is there? He didn't say, you ought to run, please run, no. He said, who else is there? That was the endorsement. It was like when I got to be ambassador I thought... Dick Hatfield was the premier and he called me up to congratulate me and said, at least you know where Canada is. I always remember those two comments in my life. No, but I really was in bad shape.

TOB: Well, how did you get, was it the income tax that hurt you?

KC: Yeah, oh yeah, no question. The only thing that gave me hope that I could win was that you turn the questions around in the poll, you know, I had seventy percent of the people, an unfavorable rating of seventy percent. Turn the question around by four or five categories and ask the same people, who would you prefer to be handling this and this and this and it came just the opposite, seventy percent for me and thirty percent for my opponent. So I knew there was just a little opportunity there to win, and it was just a little opportunity because I only won by five hundred votes.

TOB: Five hundred, wow. How did you turn it around, what was your technique, same as before?

KC: Told the truth. Just said that, you know, we needed a new broad based tax, we had charts and graphs that indicated that we sold a lot of people, that the income tax was far more progressive than property tax. We had taken a lot of initiatives to, had a lot of initiatives in the campaign, ah, to relieve the property tax, so we really made it the income tax versus the property tax. And this, I said, this is the right thing to do and you can vote me out of office, fine, but I'm doing it not to get reelected, I'm doing it because it's the right thing to do, and it worked. And it worked for Brendan Byrne in New Jersey, too. I wound up campaigning for him on the same issues, used the same technique in mine.

TOB: Now, what was the need for the income tax? What caused that?

KC: We needed a broad base tax and, you know, we needed, we were down to what, about thirty three and a third percent of state support for public education K through twelve. And we needed to, we felt we needed to get at least fifty percent or else the property tax was just gonna escalate out of control. Plus the fact, you know, the education itself, quality of education itself was going to diminish. We just had, we had tremendous needs throughout the state and there's no way they were going to be met with the property tax. And if you did it with the sales tax, we had projections that would show it would have to go up, to accomplish what we wanted to accomplish, it would have to go up to like eight, nine, ten, eleven percent. And the income tax was the only stabilizing vehicle for revenue, so we felt it was the right thing to do.

TOB: Besides the income tax, what were the other issues in that campaign? Same as always, or?

KC: Well, it was, that was the basic issue. I think I spent almost all my time just ...

TOB: What was your opponent going to do?

KC: Well, my opponent was not, again, here again, you know ...

TOB: Jim Erwin?

KC: Yeah, Jim Erwin's the attorney, my attorney general, but again, I was going to say... I loved going to political science classes and having them talk about why somebody won and never talking about how much a weak opponent helps. And Jim Erwin was a weak opponent, and he made one very serious mistake: he said that he would cut ten percent taxes without any cut in state services, so we hammered him on that. And there's, of course there was no way he could, he kept saying he had a plan and he could never produce a plan that showed how he was going to do that, so, and he made some, you know, he was not a... He was too much of a tweed sports coat, button down collar type for Maine. And then he made one terrible mistake in Biddeford. He said he'd been, he said, even the Democrats in Biddeford are going to vote for me, I remember that, and somebody said, how did you know they were from Biddeford and he said, I could tell by their accent. Which didn't work too good with the French Canadians down there. So, you know, he was not a very strong candidate, which helped me sneak by. I guess telling the truth and having a weak opponent was my success.

TOB: Tell us about your trip to Pakistan.

KC: Well that was in 1968. There was, Averell Harriman, Ambassador Harriman was on a trip to meet with Marshall Tito, to dedicate a dam in Pakistan. To visit with the king of Afghanistan, the shah of Iran, all that, and as part of the delegation there were half a dozen senators that were going with him. This was a fairly important mission. And then there was a major vote coming up and Johnson didn't want to let his Democratic senators go. So President Johnson in his own way said, they said, Averell Harriman said, well, who am I going to take with the delegation, and Johnson says, I don't know, go get some governors. And so somebody down there, that was charged with that responsibility of digging up over Thanksgiving weekend six governors, was a friend of mine and he called me up, wanted to know if I'd like to go. Otherwise I never would have dedicated the Mangla Dam. Or visited with the king of Afghanistan. We never did get to see the shah, which probably a good thing ...

TOB: Was it Afghanistan or Pakistan?

KC: Well, we were in Pakistan, in Yugoslav-, Belgrade, Yugoslavia and Kabul, Afghanistan, and Tehran.

TOB: Can you talk a little bit more about your relationship with Muskie while you were governor?

KC: We used to argue a little bit and, I mean we worked together for the good of the state. Muskie used to point out my flaws over the telephone and I used to sort of say, well, they're my flaws.

DN: How would you describe the differences between your administration as governor and Ed's, and also your differences in political ...?

KC: Yeah, I, well, you know, I think you'd have to preface that answer with the fact that Muskie was treading some very new ground and, which required him to, if you want to establish the Democratic party, to approach it in a more cautious way. And I think when I came along I was, approached it at least publicly in a much more liberal fashion. And probably a much more, approached unpopular issues in a much more aggressive fashion. But I'm not saying, if Muskie had been governor at the same time I was, his positions might have been much different than those that he had to take in '54. So the quarrel came sometimes in things like telling me that, you know, sales tax would be more acceptable than income tax. And he told me, one day he called me up and told me I was vetoing too many bills, and things like that, you know. And so, you know, I sort of used to tell him, well, you know, I've got my own agenda and I appreciate your advice. And, you know, but we, I think we had, I think we were friends and had mutual respect throughout all of that. Campaign time we worked very closely together and, so, I always thought I had a good relationship with Muskie. In fact I saw him two weeks, I was with him two weeks before he died and we were reminiscing and, you know ...

RC: So it evolved from a political relationship to a personal relationship?

KC: Well, I think it was, it started like back in '54 and, you know, I think, I think we had political disagreements, philosophical disagreements, but mutual respect and never did we not have friendship. But Muskie liked to lecture. He would lecture Don once in awhile and ...

DN: Daily!

KC: And I just felt that, I was very interested in listening to him because I can learn a lot from him, but I felt that I had gotten elected and I had to conduct my office. Ultimately I had to conduct it the way I felt, which was sometimes right and sometimes wrong, but, you know, I felt I had to be intellectually honest with myself. And Muskie was very helpful in many, many things. And he didn't disagree with me on everything, just periodically, issues, and he was probably right. I think he was wrong on the income tax. In fact, he called me up after, the people took the income tax to referendum and people voted two to one to keep it. And I had just squeaked by by five hundred votes, and he called me up and said, how does it feel to know that the tax is more popular than you are? So we, you know, he used to call me up frequently and when he was in Augusta he'd stay at the Blaine House with us and, you know, we would have Campobello meetings at the Blaine House. There was political disagreements at times, but they were never ugly disagreements. Like I say, I think we always remained friends and ...

End of Side Two, Tape One
Side One, Tape Two

TOB: Yeah, John [Bernatovic, law partner of Curtis, Tuck referring to former Governor Curtis' current schedule] was telling me, the other day you had a busy day.

KC: Yeah, we got the three days, three days of these meetings, but I don't need to be at the meetings themselves. I need to be at the post mortem meetings.

DN: On the subject of contrast, if you will, between you and Ed, were there major disagreements on policy, or were there major disagreements on style and strategy tactics?

KC: Mostly style and strategy. I don't think that, like the income tax, I don't think he philosophically disagreed with the income tax, but he felt that politically the sales tax was much more palatable and better because it was a more palatable, better for the Democratic party. But, you know, I was not as articulate a person as Ed Muskie was and my style probably seemed a little impetuous, a little abrasive because I wasn't, you know... Going back to my early days, I wasn't too interested in being patient if I could get something done, and, you know, whatever. Patience sometimes is the better route to take. So I think it was more style. And of course I was young, and I was learning on the job.

DN: Well the intriguing thing to me is the fact that both of you came out of the tradition, family tradition of Democratic affiliation; both of you came from socio-economic groups that were discriminated against, although ethnically very different; and the style and the approach to politics was quite different.

KC: Muskie was more deliberate, he was more deliberate in working through his initiatives than I was. I subscribed a lot more, I guess you could say, to the best of the Lyndon Johnson type philosophy. I would try to leverage human behavior to get off to the best start possible and to continue on the best start possible, and then subscribed if you're two votes short that I wasn't above breaking an arm once in awhile to get those two votes, particularly when they were Republican arms. And Muskie was much more deliberative, built his case slowly and deliberately and sold it. And I was too impatient to quite take that approach, I think. And I, you know, I'd like to say that history will record that we both achieved a certain level of success.

DN: I don't think there's any question about that.

KC: But, you know, when you're dealing with an opposite political party, I mean, it's a real challenge on how to get anything done. Like a chess game I think, you always have to be thinking that when you make your move, what's the next move going to be. You've got to be thinking four moves down the board with a Republican legislature, the way it was in those days, which was very conservative, reactionary. With some good people starting to creep into the party.

TOB: Do you think Muskie had a legitimate shot of winning the presidency in 1972?

KC: In '72? Yes, I thought he had an excellent chance. And then contrary to history, I didn't think, I didn't think, I must say before, I didn't think at the time that Hubert Humphrey had much of a chance until Bobby Kennedy was assassinated. And therefore I didn't think Muskie fitted

into the picture that year. And so there was some disagreement on support. But when he ran as a candidate himself, I thought he had an excellent chance.

RC: How did you become Democratic party chief?

KC: Oh, well, I campaigned for Jimmy Carter. Jimmy Carter and I served together as governors and he was, when he put his cabinet together I kind of shook out. He asked me if I would be chairman of the Democratic National Committee and I told him I had strong reservations about doing that, and being country boy from Maine... He said, I don't, you don't have to do it for long, I just want to put somebody in there I can trust. And then I heard him make that same speech to about five other people he recruited and then I realized I'd been taken. Which is a lousy position, particularly when you're head over heels in debt. And it's an even lousier position today. I think the political parties have, they have really become conduits for soft money and I wouldn't... That's one of the reasons that I left because a lot of things that I wouldn't do when I was chairman.

RC: What were your responsibilities?

KC: Raising money. Getting the committee to vote the way some staff member wanted them to vote, to do every-, to be at the beck and call of White House staffers.

RC: You left after only one year ...

KC: One year.

STU: ... was it because you were entirely disillusioned, or?

KC: No, I laid down four, five conditions of which I would stay and the, Hamilton Jordan wouldn't meet those conditions and so I left. But, you know, little things like money. You know, look at today, we were so cautious about where we took money because I figured I'd be the one testifying, and the people who told me to do this would be long gone. So we were extremely cautious. And, you know, and then staffers would suggest that you do things which was close to being illegal and I would tell them, no. And so after awhile I became sort of, they started, the staffers, they started undermining me because they couldn't control me.

And Carter was a good friend, I used to meet with him every two weeks, but... That's another thing I learned was that there's a lot of matters you don't bring up to a president because you think they've go bigger problems. And then I began to, in retrospect I've learned that a lot of people feel that way and that's how presidents become isolated and insulated, isolated, because there are a lot of things his staff are doing that I thought were wrong. One of them wanted me to rig the rules at the mid term convention to help Carter be renominated and I said, this is silly. If an incumbent president can't be renominated, without screwing up the rules, then there's no way he's going to get reelected. And I got into a lot of trouble over that. And I got into trouble with George Meany. We had twenty five large appointments and George Meany, of course this is when the Blacks had helped Jimmy Carter get elected, and the Hispanics had helped him, women had helped him. And George Meany sent me over twenty five names of fat, old white union

leaders. And so what I did is I went into some of the other unions, the UAW and other unions, and I picked women and Blacks and Hispanics and appointed them. And Meany raised all kinds of hell over at the White House. He informed me that I was persona non grata in the AFL-CIO. But I, the president was, he was caught in between. I mean, all these people were looking to President Carter to recognize what they'd done for him, and along comes an old timer like George Meany who wants business as usual. So I did a lot of stuff like that that led to an early demise. The only thing that I'm, the only regret I have that I was stupid enough to take the job in the first place, not the way I handled it.

TOB: Your ambassadorship in Canada worked out a little better.

KC: Oh yeah, well, he, we, you know, Jimmy, of course he was still very friendly and loyal. In fact when I left the DNC he invited my family over and we had dinner with his mother and Rosalynn, up in the presidential quarters and all that, and, that's where he asked me, he said, "Anything else you'd like to do?" And I said, "I came down here to, just, to try to help you, I'm not looking for anything in particular." And he said, "How would you like to be an ambassador?" and I said, "Well, maybe that's an idea." And he said, "Well, New Zealand is open." And I said, "No, I don't, I couldn't see at my age getting buried in New Zealand," which would have been a lovely place to go. So I said, "Well, if Canada ever comes up," I said, "I'd be interested because, you know, our relationship." So I went home and a year later thesun comes up and says, "You still want to go to Canada?" and so I was appointed. So Jimmy was always very good, very friendly. But I don't know, you know, going, I don't want to get into all of this, but, I don't know how, I don't know how the political parties are going to right themselves. They're role is diminishing substantially. I mean a meaningful role. And it was going downhill, starting downhill pretty fast when I was there, but I feel for Don Fowler. I'm surprised that he's escaped as long as he has as chairman.

TOB: Is he the chairman now?

KC: Not now but he was when all this funny money was flying back and forth. Don was an old pol, he didn't belong in that job at all, he was an old pol. He was on the committee when I was there. And Chris Dodd, the head co-chair, Chris Dodd was the figurehead, Don was running, Don was supposedly running the place. In fact, the only thing that was running the place was the quest for money. And that would make me very nervous to sit on top of all that.

STU: That's a whole other issue.

KC: Yeah, it is. And yet, how do you get elected as a Democrat if you don't match the Republicans?

RC: Well, Mr. Curtis, I have one final question for you. In retrospect, what is it that you think Muskie brought to Maine politics that hadn't been brought before? What do you think he gave people? What was special about Muskie politically?

KC: Well, first of all for Maine, the first, very first thing he did for Maine is he got the hole in the dike to break the stranglehold of a one party system. And then secondly, he became a

national leader which placed him in a position of being able to do a lot more for the constituencies, his constituents in Maine. And he brought a new philosophy into Maine politics and Maine government. He brought a progressive philosophy to the forefront and he did it in a way that was lasting because he was highly respected in his views and what he did. So Maine has substantially changed because of what he started in '54 and what he carried out. And you look at the two senators we have today, and it's hard to see how Maine is going to progress substantially under their leadership like a Muskie, who was a national figure.

In fact, we, Maine's had, Maine's been, you know, it's quite amazing for a small state to have a, people of national influence and international influence. Like Margaret Chase Smith and Ed Muskie and George Mitchell, you know. They rose to where they had, they could bring to bear a tremendous amount of influence on policy and what happens. And, you know, it's not, and as Don knows from being a staffer in those days, it's the position, you know. You can, you know I could go in to talk to John Donovan or I could go in and talk to some of George Mitchell's staff. And all they had to do was bless what we were working on and then carry the water to a certain point, and, in the name of the senator. And you'd get an awful lot done without ever doing, having, the senator have to do anything more than bless it. Say, yeah, that's a good idea, go with it. And so, you know, I think there's a lot of things people don't realize; how much you can accomplish by just having that type of a leader in the office.

DN: And the great lesson was to make use of that power without ever forgetting that it wasn't yours, it was the leader's power.

KC: Yes, absolutely. And that's what the White House staff, all of them, not all of them but great numbers of the White House staff totally forget that. As Andy Young said, you know, a White House staff has never organized a block, never run a business, never run for political office, and, I forget, and what else. And they get down there and they have this heady experience. And you'll get a phone call that will say, the White House is calling, you know, and that used to get me mad. Some third level staffer down there, "It's the White House," and I used to get them mad because I used to say, "Well, you don't say. 'This is the White House.' Do you have a name?" And they'd get all insulted.

End of Interview

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