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Katz, Bennett oral history interview

Jeremy Robitaille

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Interview with Bennett Katz by Jeremy Robitaille

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Katz, Bennett

Interviewer

Robitaille, Jeremy

Date

July 13, 2001

Place

Augusta, Maine

ID Number

MOH 305

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Biographical Note

Bennett Katz was born in Springfield, Massachusetts and grew up mostly in Boston. He was president of his high school class at Roxbury Memorial High School. His mother was Frances Wolk Katz. His father was Samuel Katz, a salesman for Rival Foods. Bennett Katz attended Tufts University as a commuter student while working fulltime. After graduating in 1940, he joined the Army Air Corps for five years as a military pilot. He married his childhood friend Edith Coombs during the war. After service, he joined American Overseas Airlines and after being laid off he spent the summer in Maine with his family. He moved to Maine because his wife's family had two branches of the jewelry store Nicholson & Ryan. He joined the city council to represent his neighborhood, advocating for weekly trash pick-up. He ran for mayor, but lost to an independent Republican. He then ran for Maine Legislature and served in the House of Representatives. Finding it too large, he ran for the Senate and won. He served in the Maine Legislature for 17 years.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Army Air Corps during World War II; working for American Overseas Airlines; politics in Augusta, Maine; how Maine got the income tax; Louis Jalbert; education legislation; Education for the Handicapped Bill; Lynch Katz Committee; Ken Curtis;

rivalry between Augusta and Waterville; discussion over the potential Sydney Airport (especially with relation to Muskie's stance on the issue); Katz's affiliation with University of Maine at Augusta; and the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE).

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Transcript

Jeremy Robitaille: We are here at the Bennett Katz Library at the University of Maine in Augusta on July 13th, 2001 at about 10:30 a.m., and we're here with Bennett Katz, and interviewing is Jeremy Robitaille. Mr. Katz, to start out, could you please state your name and spell it.

Bennett Katz: Bennett Katz, B-E-N-N-E-T-T, K-A-T-Z.

JR: Thank you. And when and where were you born and raised?

BK: I was born in Springfield, Mass and raised mostly in Boston.

JR: And what can you tell me about your experiences in Boston growing up?

BK: In Boston?

JR: Yes.

BK: Well, I remember one day I got two black eyes in high school, in the school building. That was mostly my fault, I should never have gotten up when he knocked me down the first time. It was an “all boys” school. There were six hundred in my class in my junior year, and by my senior year it had dwindled down to five hundred, which gives you an idea that not everybody necessarily graduated. The school was about forty percent Catholic, and about forty percent Jewish, and two percent, and the rest was Black. And there were presumably a couple of WASPs in the class but they were undercover and we never did know who they were. I was president, and it was a very happy experience for me.

JR: Okay. Did you have much sense of the politics of Boston, maybe like through your parents' involvement?

BK: None.

JR: No, okay. And what were your parents' names?

BK: My mother's name was Frances, and she was a remarkable girl for her time. She graduated from high school. That may not sound much sitting here, but for a woman to graduate was something then. She was in Rose Kennedy's class and, but that didn't rub off on politics at all. And, matter of fact, this business of running for class president might indicate an interest in politics but it really wasn't.

JR: And what was her maiden name?

BK: Wolk, W-O-L-K.

JR: And how about your father?

BK: Father's name was Samuel. He was a salesman for Rival Foods, which was a reason we didn't go hungry at all, because he had lots of salesman samples of the, but I must confess that I, to this day I don't like herring packed in tomato sauce.

JR: And where were they from originally, your parents?

BK: They were both immigrants, or their parents were immigrants I should say. My mother's folks came from Odessa, and my father's folks came from Latvia. And my parents were born here.

JR: Okay, and what were their political and religious and social views?

BK: None.

JR: None.

BK: None.

JR: Okay, just, did, were they at all involved in the community, or pretty much restricted to just working?

BK: No.

JR: Okay.

BK: It's hard to picture in this day and age, but they didn't really know anything about anybody who had anything to do with the city council or anything at all.

JR: Okay. And where did you go to school?

BK: In Boston, and then to Tufts. I went to Tufts because Sam Kostic went to Tufts.

JR: And who's that?

BK: He was a friend. I was an English major because Sam Kostic was an English major. I had absolutely no help at all in making any decisions, or understanding what the alternatives were, actually. The entire guidance department of the city of Boston was one man named Taylor. I know that there was a Mr. Taylor because I met him once, but that was it. I might have gone to Boston Latin School because I was a good scholar, but nobody suggested I go to Boston Latin School. I might have gone to Harvard because I was a good student, but nobody suggested that I, I just was adrift in an uncharted sea.

JR: So did you end up going to Boston English High School?

BK: Hmm?

JR: Your high school, did you end up going to Boston, to the English High School, or was that, because you didn't go to Latin. Which high school did you go to?

BK: My what?

JR: Which high school did you attend?

BK: Oh, Roxbury Memorial. It was a brand new school, a block long, big oblong. And right down the middle was a double brick wall, and half of it was women and half was men. And I grew up in a house with, we were three boys, so you might say that, and my mother always preached that you'd better treat girls like little angels, so you might say that my bringing up was a kind of a warped experience. I really didn't have any experience with girls until I'd gotten well into college.

JR: So you were an English major at Tufts?

BK: Yes.

JR: And did you involve yourself in extracurricular activities at all at Tufts?

BK: No. I joined a fraternity, but I was a commuter student and that pretty much cut me out of, oh yes, and I was working. I used to try to plan my classes to be off campus by noontime because I had what amounted to essentially a full time job. So I didn't really get the flavor of college life at all. In all the years I was on the Board of Trustees of the university, I really didn't, couldn't identify too much.

JR: Okay, and what year did you graduate from Tufts?

BK: Forty.

JR: And what did you do after that?

BK: Well, the 'after that' part of my life started on graduation day. I was walking in line with Roy Baxter, cap and gown, and said, "What are you going to do now, Roy?" And he said, "I'm going in the Army Air Corps." And I was confused because he was a kid from Roxbury. I said, "Gee, Roy, you worked so hard to get here. Why are you throwing it all away?" And he said, "I don't think I am," he said, "the Army has a new program and you sign up for seven and a half months. At the end of seven and a half months of pilot-training, they pin wings on you, and you're a second lieutenant and a military pilot. And for every year of active duty you put in, they, aside from the lavish pay, you get a five hundred dollar a year bonus." Well, my ears perked up because five hundred dollars was, what I really wanted to do was go to Harvard Business School and the coincidence was that Harvard Business School graduation was five hundred dollars. And there's another coincidence that was exactly five hundred dollars more than I had. So within the week, I had taken two physicals, I waltzed down to the Navy and took a Navy physical, and took the Army Air Corps physical. And I decided, I was more interested in the Army because I didn't want to fly over water, and naturally over the next five years most of my flying was over water. And that brings you up to date as what I did after graduation.

JR: And how long did you serve in the Army Air Corps?

BK: I got in the year before Pearl Harbor, in summer of 1940, and I stayed until after the war.

JR: And where were you stationed during that time? Probably all over, right?

BK: This gets a little confusing because most people said, "Well, who'd you fly with and so forth, the 8th Air Force or,---" I wasn't assigned to any one organization for very long. They kept moving me around. It's unclear to me whether I was so valuable that they wanted me all over the place, or I was a goof up and they kept shipping me out. But by the time the war, by the time of Pearl Harbor, of Midway, which was May of '42, those months, everything from Pearl Harbor to Midway, to understand the war in the Pacific, was a disastrous defeat. Everything, the

Japanese won at every turn of the game. But by the time of Midway I had been on every, already served on every continent.

And if you ask me what kind of planes I flew, it gets a little sticky because I was qualified on twenty-four different aircraft. Here again, you can say I was so much in demand. But I'll tell you how hectic life was. I was at Hamilton Field in San Francisco, it was a Sunday, and I was sitting reading the funny parts. To this day I always read the funny parts first. Colonel Tousdale came in and he saw me sitting there all alone in the pilot's ready room, he looked around and I was the only one he could see. He said, "What are you doing this afternoon?" I didn't know the colonel and he didn't know me. I said, "Nothing, sir," I said. "You're going to Australia with Captain Kidd." And later that afternoon I was on my way to Australia. You remember; we won the war. It's a little hard to understand how we did, but we did. And I was a ferry pilot. We took a brand new B-17 which was a four engine bomber to deliver it to MacArthur's forces, which were so much in need. And that started a pretty extensive career of ferrying aircraft. I might go to Australia today, and when I come back there might be a B-24 that had to go to North Africa, or India, or anyplace.

And we left out the fact that I got married and I was briefly stationed in Memphis, and flying from Memphis overseas. And I married Edith Coombs, whom I had known since she was thirteen. And I proposed by mail and she answered by telegram. She made me wait for a day and a half, and I always tell her she almost blew it. And, but got married in July, and in August I crashed in a B-24, taking off from Topeka, Kansas on my way to India. B-24 is a four-engine bomber, and this was a grand old aircraft. Two defective propellers, it's a four engine, and when I took off I just couldn't keep it in the air. And the only possible place for me to crash land was an open soybean field which was right in front of me, and God was watching for me and I landed in the soybean field, and the escape hatch jammed and the other end of the plane ripped apart. And right at my right elbow the whole plane had ripped open, so it was almost an emergency exit for me. And the only injury I got was my engineer scratched me up a little bit when he was trying to climb over me to get the hell out of there. And that brings us up to another area.

JR: How did you come to live in Maine?

BK: After the war, I was looking for a job. I decided I had so much really useful multi-engine time, so I decided I wanted to work for the airlines. And I was coming in from a flight at LaGuardia, a fellow sitting next to me had a round circle around one of his ears which indicated that he was a pilot, the headset, and he only had one circle on one ear and I could tell that he was a co-pilot because of where the circle was. I was very smart.

I asked him who he was flying for and he said, "American Overseas Airlines," I said, "I'm looking for a job," he said they're hiring. And we were just passing their hangar, so I went to work for American Overseas Airlines for three hundred and fifty dollars a month, which was, but don't worry because we're in contract negotiations and it's going to be a reasonable sum. Well, it was three years later I voted for and went out on strike because they were still paying me, I had two children and I was very bitter then and I still am bitter now. During my, the rest of my career people looked upon me as a boss, as a management type, and didn't realize that my background with labor was not very good. And I got, when the strike was settled, they decided

to merge with Pan American and laid me off. You don't lay off pilots, you furlough them, that's a nice word that means layoff. And when they called me back I had just come to Maine.

My wife's family was in the jewelry business and my father-in-law and his brother had six jewelry stores in New England. And they decided to break up their partnership, which left six jewelry stores to split up. My brother-in-law, who was a long time friend, high school classmate, was just starting a small manufacturing business to make women's coats and suits, and I had this recall to go back to flying with Pan American. And we had a family conference and we decided that he'd give up his little burgeoning business and I would forget about any more flying for American Overseas Airlines. And one of the stores, or two of the stores, were in Maine, one in Augusta and one in Waterville, and so we came here for the summer and by the time the summer ended, that dragged out until, we stayed here, no intention of staying here, but I made an offer on a home and, outside of Boston, but one thing led to another and I stayed here through Christmas, and we liked it, and that's how I came to Maine. It's interesting that with all the stores on Water Street in Augusta. Do you know Augusta at all?

JR: A little bit, not too much.

BK: Well all the stores that existed in 1950, which was when this happened, they've all gone out of business except Nicholson & Ryan. All. Shoe stores, jewelry stores, everything. And Nicholson & Ryan, I can say, although I don't have any financial interest, is the finest jewelry store in the state. That's gospel.

JR: Great. All right, so you moved to Maine about 1950. When did you become politically active?

BK: We found a little home on Westwood Road, all new houses, little houses, and the garbage was, or the trash was picked up every second week. But down at the foot of the hill, the established neighborhood, was picked up every week. And my neighbors, we all felt that that was wrong, that we ought to get picked up every week. So they got nowhere trying to convince the city people, so it was decided that one of us would run for city council. And I ran for city council on a single, just, the single issue of having our garbage picked up every week. And I was very successful. And I spent one more week-, year on the city council, and then I decided, hell, I'll run for mayor. And I ran for mayor and I won the Republican nomination, and one of the fellows I beat in the primary decided that people deserved a better choice, so he ran as an independent Republican and siphoned off just enough votes, so blessedly I didn't, was not elected to mayor.

JR: Who was that?

BK: He was postmaster, and I was a new kid. But, so there I was working at Nicholson & Ryan and I guess I had the bug. And I decided to run for legislature. Well, I lived only ten, twelve minutes from the State House, and Nicholson & Ryan's only about ten minutes from the State House, so it was just a good fit. And I was successful. I remember that I was finishing out an unexpired term, and I decided to run for one more term for the house and I won a full term. I decided that I really didn't like the House of Representatives, it was big and, so I ran for the

Senate. And I ran a very good campaign, had learned a little bit about marketing from Nicholson & Ryan, and advertising, and I won handily against the local, hometown people. And from then on I kept getting about seventy percent of the vote. And my colleagues in the Republican senate chose me as their majority leader and -

JR: In what year did that happen?

BK: Well, I was in for seventeen years total.

JR: Oh, in the house and senate?

BK: Three, so fourteen in the house, fourteen in the senate.

JR: Okay, and the first three in the house.

BK: And the last four were as majority leader. Then I decided that maybe I'd run for governor, and I had served as chair of a education committee for twelve years. Well nobody, nobody did dumb things like that. You had to be a masochist. They wanted me to be appropriations. That was a much sought after job; that controlled the money. But I told the senate president why I did not want to be appropriations, I wanted to be chairman of education. And I became one of the- this many legislators in the United States who had chosen to make education a specialty. And so I got to know it, and I got to know what the issues were, and I got to know where the answers were. And I thought that I had a statewide job, a state wide following because of the schools, the systems. There was a period where I was, am I going to do it or am I not going to do it. Well, I rented an office, I hired, do you know George Smith?

JR: George Smith? I do not.

BK: He, I hired George Smith and gave him a hundred dollars for one week's pay, and sat down and began to write my announcement speech. Something didn't feel right, it didn't, you've heard the expression 'fire in your belly'? So I went up to Togus to have a physical with my friend Jack Danner, and I sat and I talked to Jack for a couple of hours. I never did get a physical, although I was in good health, but by the time I finished chatting with Jack for a couple of hours I realized that it was not the right goal for me to spend the next four years of my life, or is it six years, I can't remember. So I called a press conference, you might read yesterday's *KJ*, somebody wrote a column, Jim Brunnell wrote a column about sometimes non-announcements are far more interesting than announcements. Senator Bennett just announced that he would not, that's what brought the column on. There was something going on in the State House or at the Blaine House, because any newsman from within a zillion counties was in the State House when I called my first conference. And the, every television camera, every TV station, it was mobbed, expecting my announcement. And so it was quite a thing when I said I wanted to announce that I was not going to be a candidate. And so they didn't have anything else to write about, so they asked a bunch of questions on what kind of support I had identified. And I said, "Well the state may have lost a fifty-five year old sex symbol," because my polling told me that over sixty percent of my support came from women. So that was something to write about. And whether or not I would have been a good candidate or not, well. Where does that bring us out? So now

I'm out, out of politics, and never really considered Congress at all. And

JR: Okay. Well, kind of going back to your time in the legislature, what sense did you have of partisan politics in the time that you were there? Like how it, how the dynamics between Democrats and Republicans worked?

BK: Partisan politics was very much part of the Maine legislature. And within the Republican Party it wasn't partisan politics, but there was a very great division between conservative and moderate. Pretty much, if you're familiar with what's going on with Olympia Snowe and Sue Collins pretty much. It's amazing that I was chosen majority leader because I was not reflective of the majority. I remember considering the presidency, and I went up to one of my friends, and he was a friend, and he was conservative, and I knew that I created some real problems in his mind. And I remember saying, "Tom, can you think of any situation where you might be inclined to vote for me for president?" And he said, "No." And that's pretty much what you're seeing today. People who are conservative have deep feelings, which they do not push aside very lightly. I used to sit on my caucus, and the majority leader runs the caucus, and feel very uncomfortable looking around at some of the people I was working with. But then I would take a look at the Democratic caucus and I thought I'd feel a lot more uncomfortable with the Democratic caucus. To get major legislation passed required bipartisan effort. How'd you like to hear how we got the income tax?

JR: I'd love to.

BK: Well, it was a very close vote. And my responsibility in supporting the income tax, I looked around the senate and it occurred to me that I got, I already had every possible Republican vote I was going to get, unless I used a gun. And I looked around and my eyes lit upon Carroll Minkowsky from Lewiston. A nice guy, we got along very, a Democrat, we got along very well. So I said, "Carroll, it's open." So I sent a message to the president to recess the chamber and to keep it in recess until I gave him a high sign. So I looked at Carroll, and I said, "Carroll, let's go sit for a while." So we went in the office and started talking. And Carroll's background was Russian, and so we had some kind of an ethnic background that we shared. And we talked about why he ran for the senate, why he ran for the legislature, what his aspirations were, what his successes had been, and about his family. We talked about everything except taxes. And he knew what he was doing. Finally he leaned over and he squeezed my knee and he said, "Now let's go in and vote." So we went in and waved to the president and voted. Oh, poor Carroll, he was creamed by people. I remember Louis Jalbert, Louis Jalbert said that I had promised him everything, the moon, a trip to Hollywood every hour on the hour. I hadn't promised him anything. But he was just a good guy who wanted to do the right thing, and I helped him make up his own mind what he felt was the right thing for him to do. That's how we got the income tax. To this day, there's a special relationship we have, I have with Carroll Minkowsky. He still stays in touch.

JR: What were your overall impressions of Louis Jalbert?

BK: Louis was a delight; had a big ego. My name is pronounced, I pronounce my name Katz [long 'a'] because that's how I grew up. Most Katz's are pronounced Katz [short 'a']. When

Louis was not pleased with me, he would turn his chair right around and put his back to me and call me Katz [*short 'a'*]. He was a hard working guy. I wouldn't pick him to be my favorite legislator. I'd pick John Martin, who everybody, so many people despised. I thought John was the most important legislator of the century.

JR: Really? Why?

BK: Well, what else are we going to do?

JR: Well, I was going to next ask you if, besides the income tax, what other important legislation were you involved with, or perhaps something that -?

BK: Is this about me, or about -?

JR: It's about you, but it's also going to be about your connection with Ed Muskie.

BK: Well, I guess my finger was on every important piece of education legislation during that whole period. And that was a period when all the legislation that was important was being considered. Education finance in particular, LD 1994 was how do you divide up the available tax money and distribute it between the state and the local community, and about the local communities in general, and then in particular. We're talking about a lot of money. It's been so long.

LD 1994 was the, I still remember, was the major legislation of that, that took that big pie and established a formula to break it up community by community. And you can imagine that there wasn't much room for altruism because the more money you could squeeze out of the formula for my schools, the easier it would be on the property tax because schools determine the property tax. It was very, very complicated because those big yellow busses cost money, education to the handicapped was a very, very important, I'm very, very proud of the fact that Maine was the first state in the nation to pass an education for the handicapped bill. And a fellow named David Ault, A-U-L-T, was the principal sponsor, and I always assign a real medal to him. That one man can make a difference, and David made a difference. So I decided, how when I brought my new committee in for first, for that session, I said, "Sit wherever you want to. It used to be the Republicans sat here and the Democrats sat here, the senate was over here and the house was over here." I said, "But would ask that the person who sits next to you is not a member of your party," which turned out to be a very valuable first step. Then we brought in the teacher's union, we brought in the school superintendents' group, we brought in the State Department of Education, and what we were attempting to do, rather than write a bill, although we didn't say this, was we were attempting to understand how many policy questions were facing us.

Policy question number one, does the state have a role in transporting students? That's a policy question. No sense trying to write legislation if you don't know what the answer is. What if the school is isolated? It's all by itself, and it only has a limited number of students? Is there a policy question that, you might call it geographic isolation. Is there a policy question that faces you if a city like Augusta or Portland has to offer services to outlying communities because it's a hub. I think I called it a municipal overburden, things that Augusta has to do because the little

communities around don't have programs that can take care of a handicapped child. So we finally got it down to, one day it suddenly became clear to us that we had knocked this big, unfathomable question down into twelve parts, or ten parts, I can't remember. And then we just dealt with them one at a time. And -

*End of Side A,
Side B*

JR: Please continue.

BK: We were just in the period where we could run a computer and know what these decisions we were making meant in dollars and cents, community by community. And that is the good news. The bad news was that everybody had access to these numbers, so we obscured it as much as we could and we got people remarkably to accept the implications of the policy questions that we were making. And all I can tell you about LD 1994, the U.S. Department of Education called it the most important education finance in the country. The state of New Hampshire still hasn't succeeded in duplicating what we did after all these years later. And I take great pleasure in that because I have no respect for what New Hampshire has and has not done in the field of taxes.

So we did some very, we created the University of Maine system, which was nationally admired as how to put together a group of campuses. A lot of people were trying, a lot of people did, but the Maine system, Ken Curtis was governor and he, whenever I see him these days he says, signing that bill was the stupidest thing I ever did. We created the technical college system. Everything important in education came to fruition in the seventies at that time. It was exciting watching a committee successfully function. My house chairman was a fellow name Arthur Lynch, so our detractors called it the Lynch Katz Committee. We told the legislature that if they voted for this, an increase in the income tax would be necessary. Conveniently, the next session a lot of people forgot what we had told them so we had an interesting little session. But Joyce Lewis, who worshiped at the shrine of Attila the Hun, and Arthur, not Arthur, the legislator from Portland, you look into his eyes and you see the compassion he feels for every problem in the state. He's what you might call a real liberal. And the two of them sat side by side in the committee, and somehow we got them to vote, and create positive legislation. So it was a very, very successful committee.

JR: Great. What can you tell me about Ken Curtis and how he interacted with the legislature when he was governor?

BK: We used to fight like cats and dogs with Ken Curtis.

JR: Really?

BK: Yup. We were at a meeting within the last few years and I said, "I have, Ken was there." I said, "I have a statement to make that will come as a surprise to you." I said, "Of all the governors with whom I served, Ken Curtis was easily the most successful." He couldn't believe his ears. And he handled his, and continues to handle his tragedy so courageously.

JR: All right, let's switch gears a little bit and let's talk a little about Ed Muskie. When was the first time you met him?

BK: I don't know.

JR: Oh. Okay. Did you interact with him a lot while you were in the legislature, or, was there much contact with him?

BK: As I recall it, I can't recall being in the legislature with Muskie.

JR: Well, yeah, I know, I think, yeah, he was in the Senate, he was in the U.S. Senate when you were in the legislature, but I didn't know if there was any time where you had contact with him.

BK: The only two things that might be helpful for you to understand, to try to understand the airport situation, and the result. My sister-in-law was at a meeting in Washington, and he was in the receiving line. And she didn't, she's not from Maine so she didn't know the ins and outs, but she puffed up to the receiving line and stood in front of the senator, and she said, "Senator Muskie, Bennett Katz is my brother-in-law." And he looked down and said, "Madame, that's your problem."

JR: Well, then,-

BK: That give you a clue?

JR: That gives me a clue.

BK: How did we get there? Augusta and Waterville have always been rivals. There was a time that Waterville was the retailing center, and over the years that changed and Augusta doing most of the business. Augusta had a state airport, the only one in the state. And it was a busier airport than Waterville, had a better fixed base operator, and along came a basic policy question as to whether we continue supporting our individual airports or whether or not we get behind a regional airport, that was the word that everybody started to us, a regional airport, and build up the regional airport so we could get jets and all kinds of. I had, I must say that I think I was the only one with any background in understanding air transportation, and Governor Cross had a ten thousand dollar study made that indicated that we ought to have a regional airport. I didn't believe the study. The study presumed that somebody from Augusta would drive fifty miles north in order to fly south to Boston. And there were a lot of presumptions that on the face of it I did not accept.

And it looked like things were swinging our way, in Augusta. And Peter Bluin, who was a captain with Delta and a long time Augusta friend and neighbor, decided that we would go to Washington and speak to a congressional delegation. And Peter, an airline captain, felt that to spend a significant amount of tax money to create an airport in an open field in Sydney would be a shocking misuse of tax funds. So, I can't remember who the congressmen were at the time; we got a good reception until we went to Senator Muskie.

And Don Nicoll was his, and a very, very frosty reception, and he said, "I'll tell you what I tell everybody, that I will," how did he say it? He will support whatever the FAA says is the right direction to go. So, I guess I knew what that meant. So I said to Don Nicoll, I said, "I'd better get out of here while he's taking a neutral position." And Don said, "If you think you just heard a neutral position," he said, "you weren't listening." So I went home with Peter, and we reported the fact that the congressional delegation was in support, but Muskie was not in support. He got back with a letter or phone or, that I had come home and told lies about his position. And I hadn't, I had been meticulous (*unintelligible phrase*), and I was in the position where I didn't, I really didn't give a good goddamn about Ed Muskie, as though I didn't think a Sydney airport would ever be built and if expansion of the Augusta airport were to take place some day, well it would take place some day. And I didn't feel very good about Don Nicoll either. And I never had any relationship with Ed since then, and my attitude was pretty much, you know, the hell with it. I mean, a United States Senator may be a big shot but he doesn't cause me to go to sleep worrying about it every night. He's the only legislator I did not have a good feeling about. Hathaway, who beat Margaret Chase Smith, was my idol, but I had a good relationship with him, whatever it was. I enjoyed Jane Muskie when they were in the Blaine House. And she was a fun person. Jane would be the kind of a gal who would come and sit down on the floor with her back up against the wall and have a drink with you. I always respected his stature, I always thought Margaret Chase Smith was the role model that I would want my kids to follow.

JR: All right. Back to that airport issue: how did it ultimately get defeated?

BK: How did it -?

JR: But, like, at the end of the...

BK: Well there were several votes. But Augusta airport had a rise in the middle, so when you were down here you couldn't see the end down here. Or if you were about to take off here, you couldn't see whether somebody was just landing in the opposite direction. I succeeded in, not I, but we succeeded in getting an appropriation to take the hump out of the center of the airport, and used it to fill, to extend the airport to five thousand feet. And there was never a question, the whole thing was about getting jet, regular jet flights in. There wasn't enough traffic. There isn't today. And people who, even today, criticize the service because they want jets, you don't get jets on twenty-two thousand people. So there was really never any face-to-face resolution. It just never happened. And to this day when I drive to Waterville, I look off to this beautiful open field in Sydney, make a beautiful airport, anybody was crazy enough to spend the millions of dollars necessary to build it presuming that it was going to be used to that extent.

JR: So you just didn't think that there was enough of a need to have one there?

BK: People, there weren't enough people. I tried very hard in the legislature not to make, not to get too involved in issues that I didn't know anything about. And I think he got involved in an issue that he didn't know much about on, and for which there was no possible sensible answer. If we had ever built that airport up, it would be sitting there, it wouldn't have, I don't know what would have happened. You never would have gotten jets, never would have gotten frequency of

flight because of the people. With the Waterville people, who sooner or later said, "Let's close down our airport." I don't think so. So it would be an issue that continued on and on.

JR: Okay. Did you think at all that, considering that the FAA proposal probably wasn't all that practical, that Muskie supported it, like do you think he had some ulterior motives in supporting it, trying to -?

BK: No, Muskie felt a real devotion, dedication to his hometown. And I think when I've said that, I've said it all.

JR: Okay. To change gears a little bit, what has been the extent of your involvement with the University of Maine here in Augusta?

BK: The extent of my involvement?

JR: Yeah.

BK: Well, I look upon this as one of the, my more skillful political involvements. I got lots and lots of partners involved before I was ready to move. I never did put a bill into the legislature to open, to create this. On the other hand, I had the support of the governor and his support came in the most effective way possible. He had a supplemental budget, which really usually doesn't get the attention this big budget gets, and in the supplemental budget there was one or two lines that said, 'to create a night time commuter college', something like that, so Orono didn't get nervous. Orono got nervous anyway. Thirty thousand dollars, that was it.

JR: That's all he gave you.

BK: So this community, little community here, started with thirty thousand dollars. And there was a hearing before the appropriations committee and I selected the people I wanted to speak, including Father Curran. He was the, who was a priest from St. Augustine's church. St. Augustine's. And the chairman of the appropriations committee was a French Catholic from Lewiston, Senator Duquette, Armand Duquette, and I used very few of the big shots, but I wanted, I wanted numbers there. So the hearing was on a Thursday and I got the Augusta Kiwanis Club to meet in the Augusta House to adjourn this meeting and walk en masse down to the public hearing, which was a very impressive thing. And then Father Duquette, Father, the father from St. Augustine's, stood up before Senator Duquette and he said, "I'm just a simple parish priest from Augusta and I'm here today speaking on behalf of my people." He says, "What's Frenchmen talk about?" Well, he knew and I knew, and Father Duquette [*sic*] knew that the most under served ethnic population in central Maine was the French community. And it turned out exactly that way, that the French people flocked to UMA.

I was very, very proud of the success in getting the correct support of the governor, and approaching the legislature in just the right way. There wasn't an awful lot that the, that Orono could do to kill a thirty thousand dollar nighttime commuter college appropriation. And, oh yes, and I named it. I got the governor to actually put in his budget University of Maine at Augusta.

JR: What can you tell me about your involvement with the Board of Maine Education Services and the New England Board of Higher Education?

BK: I spent, my relationship with NEBHE has just come to an end, within the last few days. I think twenty-seven years, I was former chairman, former treasurer, former everything else. I thought it was time well spent. Are you familiar with The Apple Book?

JR: No.

BK: A regional student program where Maine kids who want to study pharmacy, and we don't have pharmacy in Maine, under the regional student program can go to pharmacy in Connecticut. Connecticut kids who want to study forestry can come to Orono. About seven thousand students a year cross state lines. Big, big savings, because they can come at a hundred and fifty percent of in-state tuition. Maine Education Services, I feel very, very proud of my involvement in MES. And I feel outraged at the misinformation that has been used politically to attempt to downgrade the value of the institution. Dick Pierce, do you know Dick?

JR: No.

BK: Dick has been president. I got him his first job many years ago as, he sat next to me in the senate and he was the assistant majority leader, and he was bright, knowledgeable, created the lowest priced student loan program in the country. So Maine kids using, can't remember what we called the loan. Anyway, FAME -

JR: Yeah, I got my loan through them.

BK: In the treasurer, I have no respect for FAME. They awarded me big, beautiful plaque for, oh, life time contribution to higher education in Maine. So once they gave that to me, they couldn't say mean things about me, so they picked on Dick. Dick should have had that award a million times over. They wouldn't give it to him. I put in nominations with three governors' names on them, with U.S. senators names and all these people. They wouldn't give it to him. Dale McCormick is the treasurer. I've known Dale, been a friend of Dale's up until his, what I consider to be a, her outrageously inappropriate involvement in what was a political issue. The *Lewiston Sun-Journal*, if you read it, was the only paper in the state that picked up a vendetta on MES. The others stood along the sidelines and, but they don't agree with all the garbage their putting out and they won't pick it up. I was never aware of any impropriety. Well, it gets a little complicated, but I feel very proud of my involvement.

JR: Okay. What are your impressions of how the Republican Party has changed in Maine?

BK: Has changed?

JR: Has changed, yeah, how has it evolved, since you've been involved?

BK: Well, I was at a party recently and a big, old Republican friend said, "When are you going to get us some candidates." I said, "Sammy, we've done pretty well." He said, "Real

Republicans.” And obviously Olympia's not a real Republican, and Collins isn't a real Republican. I served with her mother on the board of trustees, she was a chair of the board, she was Phi Beta Kappa. So one day I saw Olympia, I served with her father in the Senate, Don Collins, and one day I saw Susan, I said, “Susan,” I said, “give my best wishes to my favorite Phi Beta Kappa.” She said, “Bennett,” she said, “do you mean my mother, or my father, or me?” All three of them, Phi Beta Kappa. I think I put her down by saying, I would have been Phi Beta except for my marks. Susan Collins is a gutsy, I just came back from Havana a couple of months ago and I'm very, very disappointed at our policy towards Cuba. I think it's wrong, wrong, wrong. I wrote to Collins, she wrote back to me, or she must have had a staff person, a bunch of gobbledygook that if somebody, if somebody raises this issue I will consider supporting it. So I wrote back to her and said, “I've just had a hair cut at Duke's and I can tell you that your position is not supported at Duke's twelve to one.” Maine people are ill-served by following the path led by Miami Republicans, or the interests of Governor, he's coming up for election this year, too, Bush, Jeb Bush.” I said, “That's ill-served.” And I got a phone call last week, I wasn't home, but it was Collins saying that I had been very persuasive and you have won me over to your point of view, which means that she is now supporting a softening of the embargo. She's responsive. And I feel more comfortable with her than I would with, well I'm obviously not a conservative. And Maine Republicans do not vote for conservatives. We tend to, Olympia Snowe, Collins. If you go to a Republican state convention, you will get a misunderstanding of where our hearts lie. The people who are active in party leadership tend to be not the kind of Republicans we elect.

JR: What are your impressions of the Augusta community and how it's evolved?

BK: What?

JR: What are your impressions of Augusta and how it's evolved, like its relation to the state, and just, maybe even like the Republican Party?

BK: We're in the midst of a river front development commission. I served on it for the first year, and then I resigned. I think good things are happening. A couple of things should have been done a long time ago. There was a federal restriction on the weight of trucks on Maine roads. No, I guess it's a Maine restriction. So consequently, when a big heavy trailer truck comes off the Interstate, it comes off the Maine Turnpike, it's not permitted to go onto the Interstate. Not on the Interstate, and it ends up going on, through Augusta on Augusta streets, city streets. That's stupid. It should have been taken care of a long time ago. We need a new bridge, and the state is just, is well along the process of designing and locating and building a new bridge. The river front development could make into a wonderful recreation facility using the river. That's well on the way. My son, Roger, and his family just put canoes in up around Brewer and paddled all the way down to Augusta. I almost killed him. But fishing in the river is wonderful now. I'm very please with how Augusta is evolving.

JR: Okay, I think I'm just about done. I'll just ask, you know, your final thoughts, just about Maine, maybe like a final impression of Muskie, or your own career, anything -

BK: Say again?

JR: Oh, just if you have any final thoughts. Maybe like a general impression of Ed Muskie? I know you're probably not all that favorable, but (*unintelligible word*) -

BK: You have to admire what he accomplished in his lifetime. And I do. Nope, no final thoughts.

JR: Okay, -

BK: Two hours on the button.

JR: Two hours on the button, look at that. Well, I thank you very much.

BK: What do you think of the (*tape break*). . . . it's commencement. And usually part of the platform group. And as I'm walking down the cap and gown, and walk up on my stage, not, they didn't say a blessed thing to me that they were going to give me an honorary degree.

JR: Really? Sprung it on you.

BK: So now you may call me Dr. Katz. But I do prefer that you be informal and just call me sir.

JR: Okay, thank you.

End of Interview