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Larrabee, Don oral history interview

Don Nicoll

Interview with Don Larrabee by Don Nicoll

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee
Larrabee, Don

Interviewer
Nicoll, Don

Date
May 4, 1999

Place
Washington, DC

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Biographical Note

Donald R. Larrabee was born in Portland, Maine on August 8, 1923 and grew up there. His parents were Henry C. and Marion Larrabee. He attended Syracuse University, and joined the Army Air Corps during World War II. He moved to Washington where he became associated with The Griffin News Bureau, the news bureau where he spent his entire career and that he eventually owned. The bureau covered all the news in Washington and news specific to Maine. He later left the news bureau to work for Governor Longley and subsequent governors.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: newspaper industry and coverage of Muskie; Muskie's environmental protection work; urban planning and development; Campobello Commission; traveling with Muskie; Maine delegation; Maine politicians; and Muskie's temper.

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Transcript

Don Nicoll: This is Tuesday the 4th of May, 1999. We're in Washington, D.C. in the offices of the Edmund S. Muskie Foundation, 1625 K Street Northwest. Don Nicoll is interviewing Don Larrabee. Don, would you state your name, spell it and give us your birth date and place and all the rest?

Donald Larrabee: You have it right: Don Larrabee, L-A-R-R-A-B-E-E. You don't find

Larrabees many places, but there are quite a few in Maine, and none related that I can find out. But I was born in Portland and, 1923, August 8th. Grew up there and went to Deering High School, of course, and my first touch of journalism was writing high school news for the Portland paper. And I founded what is now the school newspaper called *Ramblings*, for the Ram, that's our mascot. And it's still going and I'm very happy about that. But we had a hard time getting it started.

DN: What was your date of birth?

DL: August 8th, '23.

DN: Twenty-three. And what were your parents' names?

DL: Henry C. and Marion. He was with the telephone company, New England Telephone and Telegraph. And he supervised the installation of the first dial telephones all over Maine. And he used to bring home some of those old telephones and he made them into lamps when he was retired, so he had fun with that. I had an older sister and a brother, older brother who are not with us any more, and I have a brother who lives up in New Hampshire now. But I've been in Washington for, since 1946.

DN: Now, you grew up in Portland and you went to Deering High. Did you go to college?

DL: Went on to Syracuse for two years before the war intervened, WWII. I went off and did not return to Syracuse; was in the Army Air Corps and fortunate. . . . even though I took a cryptography course and learned all the secret codes, I didn't use them. So I found that, it was a little newspaper there at the air base in Tucson, Arizona that needed an editor. And I just happened to land there at the right time and at the age of nineteen was putting out a weekly paper on the air base, and loved it, for a long time. And then [I] went on to Okinawa, Japan at the end of the war, after which I came to Washington.

DN: You came directly to Washington then.

DL: Pretty much. I had to get one thing out of my system. I was, I loved the big bands which I guess everybody did in those days, and swing music, and I loved interviewing band leaders and musicians. And I thought I wanted to be associated with a band. So one of the men I met in the service was with the Music Corporation of America in Hollywood and he kept urging me to come out there when the war was over and he said, "I'll get you a band." And, I can't play a musical instrument, but he promised me that he would find a band that I could do publicity for or manage or something, and he did. And these guys were all veterans and we were full of it and I thought they were better than Glen Miller, and we were going to go places. But the big band era ended, you know, it did. People weren't coming out to the ball rooms any more after WWII and they were settling down, and they'd discovered television and other things to do.

So after about five, four, five months, in which I used up all my mustering-out pay on peanut butter sandwiches for the band, they, I got in touch with another man I met in the service who had been an Associated Press correspondent in Washington before the war, for New England;

regional coverage, they used to do that. And his name was Rod Southwick. He urged me to come on here and he said he was going to join forces with another man who had a small New England news bureau and they were going to enlarge it. And they needed a guy with legs who, they needed a cub reporter there, so I was hired. And I came back east and joined them in July of '46 and stayed with that news bureau all my career here and eventually owned it.

DN: This was the Griffin . . .?

DL: The Griffin News Bureau which, a man named Bulkley Griffin owned it . . .

DN: That's Oakley?

DL: Bulk, Bulk, B-U-, it's a strange name, B-U-L-K-L-E-Y from Springfield, Massachusetts. His father was a much revered and respected editor of the Springfield *Union* way back, Springfield *Republican* and *Union* and those were considered very good papers there. He had that paper. He had a lot of other small papers in New England, and we added to them. Southwick left after a year or so to become the first public information officer for the Atomic Energy Commission which had been authorized and organized then. And so I stayed on with Griffin and expanded the bureau and remained with him. And when he died his widow had no interest and I acquired it and ran it and expanded it even more. So we had, at one point about twenty-seven newspapers that we sent news to, including papers in Maine and all over New England and elsewhere.

DN: Now in the early days, in the late '40s with the Griffin News Bureau, did you cover both the Congress and the administrative branch?

DL: We really covered everything in Washington. It was primarily Congress because the papers, the little papers that wanted to pay us something for this service wanted to know what the congressmen are doing. And, but on the other hand there was interest all over government. We got to know. . . . I was at the Pentagon a lot and in government agencies and went down to the White House when the mayor of New Bedford came to Washington. So any time there was a local interest or anything of that sort we got involved. And I was, I really, I went over and interviewed Admiral Byrd for the Boston paper, *Boston Traveler*, because they had a tip that he was going to the South Pole again. You know, it's a wonderful training ground for a reporter; this kind of coverage, which I'm afraid isn't going on as much any more as it used to.

DN: How many of you were there in the Bureau?

DL: Oh just, at that time just myself and Griffin. And then we hired, after Southwick left, we hired another helper. And it was always about three people through the years, very understaffed. But we were underpaid, you know, five bucks a week from one paper and ten bucks from another. You really didn't get paid much for this but if you had enough clients you could make a go of it.

DN: Now, was that, was the rate a flat rate for all the coverage, or was it paid on a basis of a column inch?

DL: Oh well, we, strange you should ask that because I can still remember Mrs. Griffin sitting around and pasting up our output for the *Boston Traveler* in the late '40s and sending it up every month to get ten cents an inch, *The Boston Traveler*. Now the other papers that we represented paid, as I say, from five, ten, fifteen bucks a week. I always encouraged them to ask for stories and come up with ideas, because I felt if they were getting what they wanted, why, they'd pay more. And believe it or not, they did. They, over the years some of them got paying as much as a hundred a week. But in the early days it was very skimpy. And they really didn't need it, as they often told us. They've got the AP and, but it was fun to be able to give them something that nobody else had. And, most papers paid a set rate and, somewhat based on circulation and all of that.

DN: Now how many, what papers in Maine did you represent at that, in the forties?

DL: Just in the beginning, just in the beginning it was the *Bangor News* because May Craig was dominant in Portland with the Gannett papers, and Waterville and Augusta, and she had all of those. We then picked up a radio station in Portland, WCSH I think, early on and gave, a fellow named John Hogan was there as the news director. And he loved it, he thought it was great. We didn't broadcast anything direct, you know, we'd just send him wires of news that they could give out from their Washington bureau, and then once in a while a phone call.

DN: So most of your filings were by telegram?

DL: Tele-, yeah, Western Union. It was this primary way of getting the news up there in those days and we had special press rates, you know, for Western Union coverage. There were operators up in the press gallery standing by all the time, at least two in the House and two in the Senate, and usually a retired gentleman who sat over in the corner. And you snap your fingers and he came running when you had a piece of copy and he took it into the teletype operators. But we did that.

And West-, I think we kept Western Union in business all the time my bureau was operating up there in the press galleries, because of course late into the '70s they began telex, what they called, well, yeah, I guess it was called telex in the beginning, it was a way of sending. And, what amounts to fax now; so we, Western Union couldn't function any more. Yeah, they died, as far as press is concerned. I don't know what they do otherwise.

So we had a lot of good clients at that, finally, and I was there in the gallery, press gallery essentially from, for thirty years back and forth between the House and Senate every day. And then when there was something going on elsewhere in government, I'd go off from there. That's how we did it.

DN: Were you very much aware of what was going on in Maine at the time?

DL: Yes, because we'd get, of course you get the papers, and, the Bangor paper anyway; it was my principal source because- and we'd hear about it from our clients up there if they had an interest in something that we could follow in Washington. I had, I learned a lot more much later

on when I, you know, had more clients up there. In the beginning, of course being from Maine, I knew a little something about the state.

DN: Had you had an interest in politics when you were in high school?

DL: No, no, I hadn't at all. And I can still remember waiting to get out of the Army in Tokyo and we were urged to write our congressman and, petition to get the troops home, you know. I said, "Gee, who is it?" And I said there, "Seems to me there's always been a Hale in Congress from Maine; there must be a congressman Hale." And that's all I knew. I didn't really know who my congressman was. I should have thought of Brewster and White probably, the two senators at that time I think, were they? Yes.

DN: Brewster and White, yes.

DL: Probably, yeah. Wallace White.

DN: Now, but you did have, as a high school student, you did have an interest in journalism?

DL: Oh absolutely, yeah. I wanted to write from the time I saw anything that I'd written in print. It does encourage you to see your own words in print and I did get a lot of copy in the papers, also at ten cents an inch in the Portland paper for news about Deering High School. And that was, that, I've still got an accounting somewhere; I think I earned about six hundred dollars writing for, over the years, just that little ten cents an inch.

DN: In those days that. . . .

DL: I threw all the names in I could. I mean everybody who was on the honor roll and all that stuff, stretch down the column. Though I loved that, and then I got a job on the Portland papers my junior, senior year in high school; copy boy running around doing errands and just being there. Once in a while they'd give me an assignment to write up a movie. I mean, it was not a review of the movie, it was a description of the picture; it was a promotion really, and things like that just to see what I could do. But I loved that, and I was able to come there and work in the summers when I was at Syracuse. So I enjoyed an early taste of journalism and I never got over it.

DN: Did your folks have any interest in politics; did they talk about it. . . .?

DL: No, none at all. It really, my wife, my mother, my mother used to love to write poetry and I've got a whole book of her things. And that was her, I think she was a frustrated writer and, never got anything published of course. And I never heard politics discussed around the house. And I found political science as a course at Syracuse pretty dull, I really did. And I remarked later on there was nothing like being right here, when I got to Washington, and being in the middle of it that really excite me.

DN: Now starting in '46 when you went to work for the Griffin News Bureau, that started to stimulate your interest in politics?

DL: It did, yeah, indeed. And I was the first six months or so getting started and getting familiar with the way Congress operates and Washington worked; getting acquainted with the members that I was writing about. I can still recall having the Congressional Directory in front of me and looking it up as I wrote about some congressman, whether he was a Democrat or a Republican; things like that, you know, just to be sure I was accurate. But I had no grounding, backgrounding. And I, the first six months were really tough.

DN: I would think so.

DL: Yeah, for somebody with no background.

DN: Did you get to know the members of the Maine delegation during that period?

DL: Yes, I did. And, let's see we had, in my early years there Margaret Smith was in the House and then rather quickly ran for the Senate. And I can remember Frank Fellows, a congressman from Bangor that we paid some attention to. And there were three, three seats in the House then from Maine. I remember Charlie Nelson representing the central part of the state, and Hale as I mentioned from Portland. Seems to me those are the guys that I had in the early years there. And of course Senator Smith took Wallace White's seat. Brewster was around a little while, but defeated by Payne as you know, in '52 as I remember. And then, he was only there for one term. And then who, who was there then?

DN: Oh, Frank Coffin was elected in '56.

DL: Oh, Frank Coffin came in, he came in. And of course Ed Muskie in '58.

DN: Had you met Ed before he was elected to the Senate?

DL: I can't recall that I did. Of course his, as a governor he didn't come down here as often as they do now. I don't believe, I don't recall ever seeing him here. So, he may have been, but I didn't interview him. I didn't know him until he arrived on the scene in really the start of '59 and of course I pretty much watched everything he did for thirty years after that.

DN: Now at the time that he was elected to the Senate, was Griffin still serving primarily *The Bangor Daily News* in Maine?

DL: Yes, yeah. We didn't pick up Portland until May Craig retired in 1966. She did not go out easily. She was old enough to leave but she didn't have any intention of leaving. And I remember that there was some pressure on her to retire, and she finally did. But I got a letter in the middle of the year of '65 I guess from one of the editors saying that she was going to retire at the end of the year and wondered if I would have any interest in serving the papers. And of course I pointed out that we had Bangor and that was kind of a problem. I got in touch with Bangor and they said, told them what had been offered and they said they would pay more. But we started a little bidding war there. And after a while I came up with the thought that I could serve both Portland and Bangor, give them the same news, but if either one came up with an idea

for a story, they got it first. So there was a form of competition there. But I found, you know, I honestly don't think either one read the other's paper very much in those days. I would send my, I would send the same column that I did for Portland on Sunday to Bangor and they'd use it on Saturday morning. I never heard anything, any fuss about it whatsoever. But anyway that worked out. I was glad it could because I really had to pay attention to everything all over the state.

DN: What was it like dealing with Ed Muskie when he first came? Do you remember?

DL: You know, he didn't make a big splash in the beginning. I suspect he didn't make much news right off the bat, and he was feeling his way along, I'm sure, and trying to decide what he wanted to do; where he was going to make his mark. I think he took on some pretty lousy committees because, well maybe he didn't have much choice in the matters you know as a freshman. Although I do recall when Lyndon Johnson punished him a bit for not going, towing the mark with the leadership and he got a subordinate committee which he turned into a good thing. But the early years probably he was not so much news at all. I of course found him of great interest and he was always, always had something to say. But I, not until he got going on that legislative field that he was interested in, then we had plenty of news. I must have written thousands of words about him.

DN: What impressed you about him in those days, for good or for ill?

DL: Well, I thought he was a good student of the process, you know; he seemed to be paying attention and listening to what was going on and not diving right in to things that he didn't know anything about. He cultivated friendships and he learned the system there, which is terribly important, and didn't throw his little weight around. But he just seemed to listen and learn. And he, he was, he learned faster than many people. Maybe he paid more attention than some of them who'd come in. I thought that was, he was preparing himself and he did very well; better than most do. And so when the time came that he felt more comfortable there he was ready to go and get into fields he wanted to. But he was a good student of the Senate in the early years I thought. And, I never talked to him about it but I watched him.

DN: Were you in the position mostly of watching from a distance or did you get a chance to interview him?

DL: A chance to interview. You know, we felt with our news bureau that we had to make contact every day with the members that we wrote about. And I know that isn't true any-more, but we'd go call them off the floor of the Senate or the House and chat about anything that's going on to get reaction to some development of the day. Of course we called the office to get help too on stories and the comments. But I tried to touch base with my members every single day at some, for a moment at least, you know. Wouldn't bother them if I didn't have anything to ask them, but we did have a lot of personal contact which I know they don't have any more. I've talked to the reporters; they don't seem to get around the offices any more they way they used to.

DN: Did you cover any of the out-of-town, that is outside Washington, hearings on such issues as pollution control?

DL: No, no, we stuck pretty much here, yeah; no I didn't do anything out of Washington. I did travel, as you know, with Ed Muskie later on when he was interested in the presidency, and I did some of that, but that was a bigger story, you know, then. But hearings I didn't cover out of here; I didn't go to Maine for anything people up there could cover it, you know.

DN: Did you, was there any pattern to the request for news about Ed Muskie from the Maine papers, and any differences in the two papers and what they asked for?

DL: I can't recall that. Of course Portland came much later and, you know, but the early years at Bangor, I didn't think there was a great deal of imagination up there in terms of asking for stories. I didn't get a great deal of that so we just wrote what was going on pretty much. And I didn't get any, anything that you would consider editorial, you know, wanting me to take a certain line or anything like that; get a story that would be harmful or helpful either way. I didn't get that.

DN: How about the Maine delegation?

DL: To deal with?

DN: Yeah, dealing with it as a delegation?

DL: Well, you know, it, they, they tried, I've often thought about it, in the early years they had a delegation meeting every month. I think it tried to have a delegation meeting every month. This became terribly important for some of the members. And I think, I remember Senator Smith wanted to have those meetings, but for partis-, different partisan reasons not much would develop. They could agree on certain things that, helped the fishing industry or something like that, but there were times it got pretty sticky. And I remember standing outside the room (we weren't allowed into those meetings in the beginning), and I remember standing outside with a couple other reporters when the delegation was meeting. We heard some shouting in there and my recollection is that was a spat involving Brewster at that time, and I don't know what it was all about. But I imagine they were rather lively meetings some of them, and policy issues; they had disagreements. Later on I kind of recall that those meetings (they let us sit in on some of them, the reporters who wanted to). . . . And I don't suppose there was anything much that happened there when it was all out in the open.

One time I picked up some kind of a story about a disagreement within the delegation and it was so upsetting that they called me into a meeting of the delegation. This may have been before Ed Muskie was there. And I remember Bob Hale in that meeting and Margaret Smith, and they were trying to find out how I got this information, you know. And I just didn't tell them; I said, "It didn't come from anybody here," you know, and that kind of thing. But it was so sensitive. Now I don't even know what it was but it was very upsetting to the delegation, this story. But my relations were always very good with the members. I felt they played it straight with me and gave me stories. Some were more ambitious politically. Some were more interesting to talk to because they had something to say, they'd give me a good story. And some didn't have much to say about anything.

DN: Did Ed respond pretty well?

DL: Yes, always good, very, very good. He had a comment on it, on anything I asked him. I always thought he was very straightforward and, of course newspaper people in Washington have their favorites in the people that they can talk to for the record or off the record. And I always liked to, at times when I sensed there was a story I would ask Ed Muskie if he could tell me something, you know, for now that I needed to know for background with the thought that someday when it was possible we'd get the story. And that always worked out very well with him and with others, you know, don't violate a trust. And the thing I hoped, always hoped for was that there was a mutual trust in our relationships.

Some members of Congress are very wary of the press, and don't really want to confide in them and there were, I had a lot of those people. Not from Maine so much as Massachusetts delegation and all. I had two members up there who never had anything to say about anything; they had no comment, no matter what it was. But I think you have to try to engender some respect and trust and if. . . . Someday it'll pay off and give you a good story. I used to that. Ed was good.

DN: Now your first real travel with him was in '68, in the vice presidential campaign.

DL: Yeah, but not a great deal. But I remember a couple of trips. What was I doing up in Philadelphia?

DN: There was a trip to Philadelphia.

DL: Yeah, there was one. I remember one following him around to some beer halls and that, whatever they were. You know, American Legion maybe these gatherings and he spoke, yeah. That was a, that was my first exposure to that kind of thing, yeah, when he was on the campaign trail. I remember Philadelphia; I'm trying to remember some others. But those were always good stories, watching him campaign.

DN: What impressed you about the way he campaigned?

DL: Well, his sincerity. He didn't always tell a group what they wanted to hear I guess. But he, he came through as somebody that people understood; that, they trusted him and they felt he was giving them a straight story. And I know one thing that bothered him, not so much those early years; it was later when he was running for president that he worked very, very hard on some thoughts and certain speeches that he was going to give. And [he was] very anxious that the press pay some attention to what he was saying. And as likely as not they would pick up some other thing that had nothing to do with the point he wanted to make, or maybe there's a heckler in the audience, as there were. Something like that made the whole story. And he talked to me about it one time; he said, "How in the world can I get the press to pay attention to what I'm trying to say?" And I said I didn't have the answer to that. But he was bothered by the fact that he didn't get the coverage always that he wanted. Now, that's not unusual for anybody in politics, but I think he fretted over it a lot. And he, I suppose he was fascinated by the press and

the profession. We talked about it several times.

DN: Now in '68 you remember going to Philadelphia. Were you in Washington, Pennsylvania when he had the. . . .?

DL: No, I wasn't for that, for that famous heckler's scene. Talked with him about it afterwards I guess.

DN: The next big trip with him as I recall was in 1971 when you went to the Middle East and Moscow.

DL: Moscow, yeah, that was an exciting trip I felt. You were along I know. I still remember standing outside the mosque in Cairo where we were debating whether to take off our shoes; well we had to take off our shoes to go in. And were you the one who said something about, "Suppose you had a hole in your socks?" And he said, "What's wrong with that? This is a holy place." I think I can, always have quoted that.

Egypt and in Israel. And it was a tremendous learning experience for me. And then going on to Moscow. Relations with all these countries were a little touchy then, it wasn't as easy. . . . I remember the hard time we had getting from Cairo to Moscow, wasn't it? We had to get, had to get out of there. Somebody held up the visas for a long time.

DN: There was a long delay. And we also, our trip from Israel to Egypt had to be by way of Rome.

DL: Rome, that's right. We went to the Rome airport and nowhere else, stayed right there, and back. Yeah, I remember that too. And in, I remember in Russia, oh boy was it cold, zero wasn't it?

DN: It was January.

DL: January, yeah. Averell Harriman briefing us after a meeting with Kosygin was it?

DN: Well, he briefed you I suspect after the meeting with Gromyko and possibly after Kosygin too.

DL: He was very, very helpful. That was a, was memorable.

DN: Do you remember some of the details of how Harriman talked to you about those meetings?

DL: No. You know I had a tape of that once; I don't anymore. I'm sorry, I can't. I haven't played it ever since then.

DN: But how, that trip was not all easy. I remember going in to Israel and getting there late at night and a little controversy with the local press because Ed was very tired. We'd just landed

and we had not scheduled a news conference but somebody in the Israeli government did. Do you remember that incident and reporters' reactions?

DL: No, I don't.

DN: Ed had troubles, as you mentioned, from time to time with the press. And as he, as he got into the presidential campaign that got a little touchier. How did you feel as a reporter covering the campaign about the way the campaign unfolded, particularly in relation to the press?

DL: Well I thought most of the press that hadn't known him, watched him, written about him for years didn't understand him. I always felt that. They didn't know that he was a man who was deliberate in his thinking. He wanted to, once he came to a conclusion and had thought things out he was prepared to say anything and defend it thoroughly, and, as he did often on the Senate floor in debate. But the press was too used to going up to people and demanding an instant answer, you know, a thought on something that he hadn't given thought to and he didn't like that at all, I know. And of course it became more and more prevalent with the involvement of television and microphones in front of your face where you're almost forced to say something. I don't think he was comfortable with that sort of thing. And I don't think the press, I think the press was unreasonable in expecting a quick answer to every question they asked in something that he hadn't given the proper thought to.

So they, I don't think, what, the press problem with Muskie was, one, they probably felt he took too long to make a decision or something like that, and that he, maybe he lacked a sense of humor too. I don't know whether they, his humor ever came through, (which is a wonderful sense of humor, and puns which I shared with him), but I don't think that ever came through the press. He wasn't, you know, he was, they liked what he was doing and saying, but they really didn't pay attention to a lot of the substantive things that he was interested in. And I always felt, when he was working on the budget, for instance, in developing the whole budget process there, and some of those, in the other, in the clean air and clean water things to an extent, that the press; they weren't sexy enough for the press; They didn't care about them enough, didn't think they were of enough interest. And so he didn't get the attention that he should have on some of these great achievements that he had in the Senate.

But I'm blaming my profession not knowing the man very well. I felt I knew him, I felt I understood him, I felt I knew that here was a guy that had to think things through thoroughly and be sure of himself before he shot off his mouth. And maybe the press doesn't want that in a politician but I think it's a good idea. Anyway, I think they misjudged him a lot. Of course we all know about what happened in New Hampshire and that incident there.

DN: Were you present for that?

DL: I wasn't, no, and I remember seeing it on television here. But, in that last conversation I had with him about a variety of things, I remember talking about that. And I said, "Well, David Broder's apologized to you for that; he really feels badly that he made, gave the impression that you were crying there in New Hampshire." And he said, "Yes, but everybody picked it up and everybody. . . ." I said, "I know; that's the pack journalism. And he is very disturbed about it;

he's written about it in his book and he still feels that he did you a disservice." But, he said, "Well he hasn't really apologized." He wasn't, I think it really stuck with him right up to the end, that he didn't think Broder had properly apologized, fully apologized for what he did there. But he did understand what happened. Those are the things that I think rankled with him a little bit with the press. And one guy can write something or say something and everybody picks it up and goes with it.

DN: As you look back over his time in the Senate, do any events stand out in your mind?

DL: Well, I had this image of him, and I don't know which. It all comes, it's a blur as to which, the issue, what the issue was. But I can remember so often his standing up and leading the debate on a bill in which he. . . . I've never seen anybody who was more effective in rough and tumble debate and, I mean answering, responding, having the answer; an effective spokesman for his cause. And he did it better than anybody I've ever seen in the years I was watching the Senate. I thought he, I'm sure he did that in carrying the budget. And I remember that, (what did they call it?) Demonstration Cities bill or something like that . . .

DN: Model Cities.

DL: Model Cities, which. . . .

DN: It was originally Demonstration Cities.

DL: Well, you know, he put that through and it got a lot less attention from the press than it should have. But I thought it was a masterful job there. And of course he carried the environmental legislation. And, I think, he was in his element when he was on the floor and in debate and challenged; he was challenged and got it, and got things done. I don't know whether he'd have made a good majority leader. I've often thought about that. Now here's this young whipper-snapper Mitchell he trained who was a good majority leader: very good at leading the Senate. Ed might have had a little problem with some of the other fellows up there, you know. He might not; you've got to have a certain temperament to deal with those rascals, all of them. And I don't know whether he would have been a good leader, but he was an effective legislator.

DN: What characteristics might have gotten in his way?

DL: I, we all know about the short fuse. His temperament was such that he didn't tolerate things that, you have to really. . . . I guess in the leadership role they have to put up with a lot of nonsense from your colleagues and understand completely what's motivating them I suppose. I don't think that's his cup of tea in that way. I wonder if he wouldn't have, by his own temperament, found it hard to lead; I don't know. I think so.

DN: Did you have a chance to observe him at work in his committees?

DL: I went to quite a few hearings; yes I did. I don't remember anything specific. I thought he was, he handled those very well but I don't . . .

DN: But those were hearings, rather than the committee work sessions.

DL: I don't know, no.

DN: Now, did you have much of a chance to watch him as secretary of state?

DL: No; really pretty much from afar. I was, as a matter of fact at that point, you know Don, I was, I had sold my news bureau to open an office for the governor of Maine here; you know, in seventy (what was it?) '79.

DN: Just before Ed. . . .

End of Side One
Side Two

DL: Yeah, just be-, yes, and so, you know I, Longley, was then the independent governor; came down here one time and I used to interview him. He came here to Washington frequently. He didn't know what was going on. But he said he needed somebody to send him information about what was happening here and he just, he thought that he didn't have anyplace to hang his hat and it would be nice to have a Washington office like all these other governors. So, I thought about it, I said, "Well I've done this reporting long enough in thirty years of it and it would be kind of exciting." And I, Longley of course didn't stay in very long; he didn't run again and he died. But he chose not to run and Joe Brennan came in for eight years and then McKernan for two and I served all of them.

DN: You served through that whole period.

DL: All three of them; twelve years of those members and, those governors. And I went to Ed and to other members of the delegation when I was making that change to alert them to what I was thinking about. And I thought they ought to know because I wanted to work with them for the state of Maine more than anything in the world. And essentially we were. . . . I didn't get involved in anything that the delegation was doing on their own but I let them know what, something. . . .

DN: We're on the second side of the tape interviewing Don Larrabee on the 4th of May 1999. Don, you were just telling about how you let the members of the delegation know that you were leaving your news bureau, selling it, and going to work for Governor Longley.

DL: That's right, and so he said, "Where do you want to have an office?" and I said, "I'd just as soon stay in the press building. And I did. And I dealt, I went to the Hill frequently and dropped in; visited the offices. But I really didn't bother them unless there was something the governor particularly wanted them to know about. Essentially I was sending information back that what, what I, my estimation what was happening in Washington so he'd be aware of it. And I didn't ask the delegation to get involved; they had their own interests and projects and it's often probably what, the same as the governor's.

But it was, it worked out well and I found myself promoting Maine more than anything else; sending out literature and people calling and, when they found out there was a Maine office for travel information and everything else. It was fun, and I did a lot of things like that here, the . . . .

At the same time, because I had that new position, with the approval of the governors, I was able to work with Ed Muskie on the Campobello Commission and, which you're familiar with. I probably moved in there when you left. And, essentially to help with the arrangements and planning of conferences and writing the report and any correspondence that needed doing. And I also kept an eye on the budget process down here for the Campobello, which was awfully touchy at times, you know.

DN: Were there difficulties with administrations or with the Congress?

DL: Both. And if Congress would arbitrarily let's say, that some years they were going to cut the budget ten percent across the board, every agency had to take a ten percent cut or something. Then the Canadians suddenly said, "What's happening here?" (they were supposed to), "We're supposed to have a certain sum here for- we're going to share equally." And the Canadian delegates heard from the home office and they complained that we weren't being forthright with them and we're supposed to share and share alike on this project. So there were some tensions over that. And I had one or two sessions down in the Interior Department and, with members of Congress that were involved, to tell them how sensitive this was with the Canadians; this was "Five hundred thousand apiece," you know, that kind of thing, and "Don't change it." And I think we finally got it straightened out pretty well. There was a time there when nobody paid any attention to that item in the budget as such. Hardly any hearings on it or anything like that.

But I, I did enjoy working with him on that when he was chairman of the Campobello Commission every other year, you know, and the Canadians would take over. I liked that and enjoyed going up there and sitting in the meetings, and particularly in the days, and I think he did too, when Franklin Roosevelt, Jr. and Grace Tully and Jim Rowe were there. [They were] all people who had known something about the Roosevelt White House and, to listen to them in the middle of a discussion up there recall some anecdote story about the White House or something that happened, it was fun. And I know as the years went on and some of those people were lost and drifted away, and. . . . Franklin took over as chairman the year Ed Muskie was Secretary of State; he had to because he couldn't do the two jobs.

But when we lost those types and new people came in, it didn't have the perspective or background or the interest in what had been done up there at Campobello. It ceased to be as much fun for Ed Muskie and to me too; it wasn't quite the same toward the end. And I, it reached a point where he said to me he didn't know whether he wanted to do it any more, you know. But those times up there were delightful. There was often a little tension between the Canadian and American sides. . . .

DN: Do you remember some of the issues that caused the tension?

DL: You know, they seemed to be unimportant. There were often little misunderstandings; not

anything serious at all. I was not there; I heard about the time the Canadians went off in another room somewhere in a pique. But they were sensitive; just national sensitivities that are hard to explain. All of a sudden they would erupt, and we weren't prepared for them particularly.

I think Ed always had to blow off some steam at one of those sessions; often it was early on and whatever provoked him I don't know, it would be something somebody would say and he would sound off for a little bit and then, then cool off as he was wont to do. And he'd go, the rest of the meeting would just go beautifully. And I heard several of the boys up there say that, "Well we've got to have one of those at every session, you know; got to be prepared for that and then we go on and get our business done."

But they were fun times. And they were, the dedication of those people to the development of that park was just wonderful in those days. They didn't get paid for it, you know.

DN: Did you. . . . I can't remember, was Sumner Pike still on the commission?

DL: No, he wasn't.

DN: He had died.

DL: Yeah. I visited him up there when he was still around, but, (and Rad Pike his brother you know), but I didn't. . . . He wasn't on the commission though at that time.

DN: You've mentioned Ed's temper. What's your take on his temper? How much of it was calculated, [and] how much was really a short fuse?

DL: There was some calculation there all right. I, you know in all the years I wrote about him, and I must have written some things at times that he didn't like to see in the paper, he only called me one time to complain. And it was at home at night, well not late at night; he called and I'll be damned if I can remember what it was. It was something he'd just as soon not see in the paper anyway. Maybe it was in a pers-, of a personal nature; I don't know. But he got ups-, he started out by complaining about it, the story. And we talked for ten, fifteen minutes, and the more we talked the more we got to laughing and when we got through it was all happiness and there was, he says, "Well, I just wanted to get it off my chest." And that's the way he was.

But he didn't, he and I never had any arguments and he never was hard on me for anything. I was grateful for that because I know there are others who felt that at times and I don't know why I was so lucky. I got by. I drove him up from Bangor one time to Campobello and we got behind an old farm wagon; we couldn't get around it. Absolutely could not get around that thing and there was no way, and he was, I'm not a easy driver either; I'm very impatient, but he's more so. And he (not that we were late or anything), but he just, "We've got to get around this guy." That went on for quite a while and he was, he was pretty irritated at the fact that we were being held up by this thing. The trouble is, the guy got out of the way just about as we were coming in to Machias, and it turned out he really had to go to the mens' room. And he went in there and emerged from the mens' room and he was laughing. And I said, "What's so funny?" And he said, he says, he says, "There's a guy standing in there," and, he says, "do you know, are

you who I think you look like?" Some fool thing like that. And he thought it was very funny, and he was all calmed down and happy the rest of the trip. That was kind of fun.

DN: Were you ever with him when he ran into trouble on airline schedules; disruptions or cancellations?

DL: No, you probably were closer to that kind of thing. I didn't know of any of it. I suspect, I know he always wanted to get there early, at the airport; be there way ahead of time. He didn't want to be rushed. And so I don't know beyond that particularly. I remember coming home from that foreign trip that was so memorable that, and had a chance to chat with him all the way. And I just got so much out of that by way of copy and understanding of him too. And Jane, she, I asked her a lot of personal questions about what it was like running for president and everything else. And she said, "Well, you know, it was difficult," but she said, "you only go through it once, you know, in life," this life once," and she was relishing it all and enjoying it; it's a once in a lifetime.

DN: Did Ed give you any insights in that conversation on the way back from the trip to the Middle East and Europe on the people he met?

DL: I wish I, you know, it's a few years have passed and I wish I had my stories here to, (of course they're all around), but I can't say that. . . . I wouldn't dare repeat anything that I can't remember here.

DN: But you did write stories at the time so those are. . . .

DL: Those are all there. And I taped, I taped all those press conferences everywhere, and I gave those tapes to Bates.

DN: So they're in the Archives.

DL: They're in the Archives, and I assume they have the stories. And all of my other writing is. . . . All my writing over, from him, about him and other people in Maine, that's at University of Maine in the Fogler Library up there. I sent those up there some years ago, so there's a lot of, they probably have a lot of clips, stories.

DN: You indicated that you had remembered a few other things?

DL: Well someth-, well just the, I think, it was kind of a fun night for me. I had taken over the state of Maine office here, you know. And at the time, let's see, Reagan was elected in '80?

DN: Nineteen eighty, yes.

DL: Eighty, yeah, I guess. And Joe Brennan was the governor then, and of course they had a lot of inaugural activities down here for the governors come down. But the Democratic governors like Brennan didn't have anything to do and that, the night before. And so I said, "Well gee, you know, we'll have a party at home." And I invited Ed Muskie who was then Secretary of State,

on the eve of the release of the hostages. You know, they were, that thing was pending and nobody knew what was going to happen that night. [I] Invited him and invited George Mitchell, the new senator from Maine, to come over, and we had our own private little dinner party on the night before Reagan's inaugural. And I don't know, my dear wife, my late wife, prepared the most wonderful dinner; she cooked it all. And I can still remember the sirens and the Secret Service cars out in front of my house there and everybody in the street must have wondered what was going on. We had the most delightful evening, and Brennan was happy with Muskie there and, you know, I forget who else, but we, George Mitchell had virtually nothing to say. He kept his mouth shut and listened to the others, particularly Muskie, that evening. And it was quite an exciting time for us and I was glad we could do something.

DN: Well, yes, and that's quite an evening to have been with him. Did he seem anxious about the hostage. . . .?

DL: No, he just, no, he was very relaxed; completely relaxed. And Jane was there. He knew he might get a call at any time; might have to go get on a plane, go somewhere and do something. The call never came. And I, I thought he was in an extremely happy mood. And the conversation . . . . I wish it had been recorded but I, it wasn't; we didn't tape anybody in our house. But that's one of those things that, you know, you don't forget right away. I had a little niece staying with us at the time and she'd gone, she'd gone, been up at school or something like that and she came home and got stopped at the door by the Secret Service who wanted to know who she was. And she came on in and she came right in and sat down, and listened to all the conversation, and enjoyed it thoroughly. Great education for her. No, those things you just remember.

I found those years, after, when we did the Campobello thing, I enjoyed those thoroughly. That's a lot of time to get to know somebody, you know, when you're up there meeting like that. Gosh, I just couldn't get over how dedicated he was to that development of that park. You remember up there the, you know, they tried to come in and do a private development sometime in the mid-eighties? You know who was behind it, don't you? It's an Arkansas outfit. Fellow named Jim McDougal. I remember Franklin Roosevelt said, we met, sat down with those guys and I remember Franklin said, he says, "You know I don't know who this guy is. He comes well recommended from Arkansas. I think he's a friend of Fulbright's." And they had lavish plans you know for the park. But Muskie and Franklin Roosevelt were more concerned than anything about protecting the land and the people up there, and the environment, environmental concerns; that was their chief worry and they didn't trust these people at all. Of course the darn thing never came to pass; it just, for other reasons they just, I don't think people needed to go that far to get a place on the coast.

DN: That was the second big environmental protection and community protection issues there, the first one being that proposed oil refinery (*unintelligible phrase*).

DL: That's right, oh gosh. That battle went on for several years and they then, the Campobello Commission stopped it, didn't it? They really did. They got the Justice Department involved as I remember. Gosh, that was a very successful battle. Pittston.

DN: Pittston Oil.

DL: Pittston Refinery, yeah, gosh.

DN: You had an extraordinary career really. Have you ever thought of writing your memoirs?

DL: I did. I put down some things during that time, after I left the news business, and printed up a little book myself. I didn't try to sell to a publisher. So I have some recollections in there of the newspaper days and I wrote a bit about being president of the Press Club, the speakers that I had and things like that. And that was another good experience; that was in '73. And I did do it. It's hardly a best seller, my memoir, but I didn't work at it very seriously. [It was] just for my own pleasure; get it out of my system.

DN: Well sometime we'll have to get you together with some of your confreres in Maine to talk about those years and what it was like covering.

DL: I'd like to do that very much.

DN: And how it looked from the point of view of Washington and how it looked from the point of view of Maine at the same time.

DL: Yes, yeah. Well Washington's changed a lot. Of course in my time it was a small town and, when I came here, and I felt you know I knew everybody and all the press people. Now you know there's a whole press corps that's grown up here with television and there isn't the closeness, and I don't think the relationships with Congress are the same as they used to be. It's, I'm trying now to put on a party at the Press Club to revive something we did years ago called Congressional Night. Members of the Press Club would invite congressmen down to have dinner and the members of Congress would entertain. They'd put on, they would play the piano; a guy had Bobby Byrd [Senator Robert Byrd] playing the fiddle once years ago. And I remember Prescott Bush sang the Whiffenpoof song. Gosh, there was almost a quorum of Congress there. Well there came a time when they just couldn't put it together any more. I don't know, congressmen, either the press wasn't as cozy or the congressmen had too many other demands on their time at night; probably more fund raisers, more build up of the lobbyists and all of that stuff. But to get them down there now for Congress, now you couldn't do it. Although I'm going to put it on on May 12th and I've got three guitar players and a piano player and a stand-up comic, and we're going to have a little fun. And I don't think we're going to have a quorum of Congress but we're trying to revive it.

But that's, that atmosphere has changed a bit. I don't think you have as much comity in Congress of course as you did then. I thought everybody tried to find a way to work things out and get along up there in the days that I covered; I loved that. And the press corps, as I say, you knew just about everybody and you could have fun together, but that's changed. And the city's gotten bigger and the government's gotten bigger and lots of other changes.

DN: Well thank you very much, Don, we. . . .

DL: You're welcome, Don, I enjoyed it.

DN: If you think of anything additional, well let us know.

End of Interview

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