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Lavoie, Estelle oral history interview

Marisa Burnham-Bestor

Interview with Estelle Lavoie by Marisa Burnham-Bestor

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee
Lavoie, Estelle

Interviewer
Burnham-Bestor, Marisa

Date
March 22, 1999

Place
Portland, Maine

ID Number
MOH 074

Biographical Note

Estelle Lavoie was born in Lewiston, Maine on November 23, 1949 and grew up in Lewiston, the youngest of three children. Her father worked as a building contractor until his death in 1964, after which, her mother worked part-time as a bank teller. She attended St. Peter's elementary school, Jordan Junior High School, Lewiston High School. She attended Bates College (class of 1971) while living at home, spending her junior year studying in Switzerland. At the end of 1972, she went to work for Governor Ken Curtis. By September of 1973, she had been hired as part of Ed Muskie's staff, working as a caseworker, and eventual his Legislative Assistant. She attended law school at American University from 1978 to 1981, and remained on staff when Mitchell took over until the fall of 1983. She joined the law firm of Preti, Flaherty, Beliveau & Pachios, in June 1984. Her practice has evolved from health law to other political practice issues. She served on the Democratic State Committee from 1986 to 1990, and was a 1988 delegate to the National Convention.

Scope and Content Note

The interview includes discussions of: Muskie's 1972 Presidential campaign; Muskie's 1976 Senate campaign; Muskie's years as Secretary of State; the Budget Act of 1976, the Budget Committee, 1976-1980; environmental protection; the Intergovernmental Relations

Subcommittee; housing, including the rehabilitation and subsidization of public housing; her Senate legislative work; Muskie's sincerity, dedication and temper; Sunshine Government; the Sunset Act which makes legislation periodically expire to see if it is worth having; Maine getting an extra million dollars from Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare in 1973; Muskie's late career, his 80th birthday party in Washington and Lewiston at the Ramada Inn, and his funeral two years later; Social Security benefits for college students with a deceased parent and surviving parent only working part time; French-Canadian migration to industrial centers of Maine; lack of interest in higher education among Franco-Americans of previous generations; depression as contributing to previous generations' view of the importance of college; changing social mores of high school; first surgeon general's warning about smoking in 1963; Nixon's freeze on government hiring; rebuilding Muskie's staff in 1976 with Maine people; acquiring Gov. Curtis job through contact with Georgette Berube and Bob Couturier (judge of probate); working on projects in Muskie's office; her impression of pre-Indian Land Claims Settlement Act of 1980; Washington lobbyists as supplicates; transition to Mitchell from Muskie in the Senate, and Mitchell asking staff to stay until Election of 1982; her impression of differences in partisanship between time of Watergate and Clinton impeachment; Democratic control of both houses of Congress and presidency between 1976 and 1980; Reagan's landslide win and Congressional shifts; the reauthorization of the Clean Water Act; Mitchell's gubernatorial bid in 1974; U. S. attorney, 1978; Federal judge, 1979; Emery challenge 1982; her impression of decrease in political involvement and increase in those unenrolled in political party as a byproduct of partisanship in politics; the 1986 election in which Democrats retook the U. S. Congress, Mitchell as majority leader; in 1984, Deputy President Pro Temp created for Mitchell in the Senate; the impeachment of Clinton; the Maine State legislature as part-time, under funded, and under staffed; "citizen legislature" as obsolete because of complexity of legislation; political term limits; the Libra Foundation; and the Dinner for Women Lawyers in Maine with Gloria Steinem as speaker.

Indexed Names

Fantz, Elsie
Ford, Gerald R., 1913-
Hastings, Mike
Jacobs, Charlie
Jensen, Anita
Lavoie, Estelle
Lewinsky, Monica
MacDonald, Clyde
Micoleau, Charlie
Mitchell, George J. (George John), 1933-
Muskie, Edmund S., 1914-1996
Muskie, Jane Gray
Nixon, Richard M. (Richard Milhous), 1913-1994
Noyce, Elizabeth B.
Reagan, Ronald
Reff, Grace
Snowe, Olympia J. (Olympia Jean), 1947-
Steinem, Gloria
Tardiff, Maria Lavoie
Toll, Maynard
Welch, Janet
Wilkes, Deborah

Transcript

Marisa Burnham-Bestor: Here we are at the- in downtown Portland at . . .

Estelle Lavoie: One City Center.

MB: . . . . One City Center at the law office of Preti, Flaherty, Beliveau and Pachios.

EL: Well, it, actually there's, we've added another name to our firm as of March 1st, it's Preti, Flaherty, Beliveau, Pachios and Haley, L.L.C.

MB: Okay. And the date is the twenty- . . .

EL: Second of March.

MB: Twenty-second of March, 1999. Present are Estelle Lavoie and Marisa Burnham-Bestor. Could you please state your full name and spell it?

EL: Yes. My first name is Estelle, E-S-T-E-L-L-E, middle name is Annette, A-N-N-E-T-T-E, and last name is Lavoie, L-A-V, as in Victor, -O-I-E.

MB: Thank you. Where and when were you born?

EL: I was born in Lewiston, Maine on November 23, 1949.

MB: Were you raised in Lewiston as well?

EL: Yes.

MB: What are the names of your parents and siblings?

EL: My late father was named E. Ormond Lavoie. He died in 1964. My mother is Maria Lavoie Tardiff. She has married a second time, and she continues to live in Lewiston.

MB: What is your place in the family in terms of age and responsibilities?

EL: I'm the youngest of three children. I didn't mention the names of my brothers, I have two older brothers. My oldest brother Paul Lavoie is an engineer in aerospace in Manhattan Beach, California. And my brother Normand Lavoie is an agent with Metropolitan Life Insurance in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. So I'm the youngest of three. And I don't really have very many responsibilities toward my mother. Although, because I live in Maine and my brothers live away, I end up doing lots of little things for her and helping her out and, you know, that works out fine.

MB: Growing up, what was it like to be the youngest and the only girl, as far as your responsibilities at home?

EL: Well, I will say my brothers picked on me because I was younger than them. They used to pull my pony tail. Our responsibilities at home tended to be divided along gender lines and I think that was typical for the day. Where my brothers would help with outdoor things such as shoveling snow and mowing the lawn and putting on and removing the storm windows in the fall and spring, whereas I would help my mother only to a minor extent in the house with washing, with drying dishes and a few other things. She always wanted to spare me from household tasks because I always studied very hard. It wasn't that I wasn't willing to do it. She would always say, "Well, that's fine. You can go study." But I did not do any of the outdoor things, you know, except with, rare occasion, maybe occasionally snow shoveling.

MB: What were your parents' occupations and your financial situation?

EL: My father was a building contractor. He did some commercial and residential construction and repair and renovation. And he took over the company that his father had founded. And my mother was a housewife and stayed home to raise the three of us. I was fourteen when my father died, and the company really went out of business at that point. And it turns out that he had not done well from a business perspective, and neither of my brothers had an interest in construction. So the company went out of business. And right after my father's death, my mother became a bank teller on a part-time basis. She couldn't work on a full-time basis because I received student benefits under the Social Security program at the time. I don't think those benefits exist today, but I received benefits as long as I was in college because of my father's death. And in

order for me to receive those benefits, my mother could not work full-time. So that's how, that's how it worked.

MB: Were your brothers already finished with college at that time?

EL: Well, my brother Normand is four years older, and my brother Paul nine years older. So certainly by the, well, by the time I was ready to enter college, my brother Paul was off on his own. My brother Normand, in fact, never went to college. So I was really the only one.

MB: So, was your family, or, I mean was your mother able to support your education with the additional Social Security?

EL: Well, what helped me afford my education at Bates College is the fact that I received a half tuition scholarship. And the combination of the scholarship and the Social Security benefits, and my living at home and not having room and board to pay, allowed me to get through school debt-free. And it was only the last semester when I needed five hundred dollars to pay for the last semester. And my brother Paul, who had been working for six years, gave me the money.

MB: What were your parents' religious and political beliefs, and how were they involved in the community based on those beliefs?

EL: My parents were Democrats, were life-long Democrats, although they really had nothing but disdain for politicians, and politics was not a matter usually discussed in my household. So that my later working for two U.S. senators would have not been predictable. And they were Roman Catholic. They were very, very devout as were both sides of the family.

MB: How were they involved socially in the community?

EL: They had a number of friends who were all Franco-Americans, and I remember during my father's life-time they used to go out every Saturday. There were a group of several couples. One was a large building contractor, one was a doctor, people in different disciplines. And they used to enjoy each other's company and sort of rotate where they would go every weekend.

MB: What was the community of Lewiston like from the perspective of the Franco-Americans?

EL: Well, I have to give two perspectives, because I respect the past injustices that many Franco-Americans had to endure. I knew from word-of-mouth that there were many years when Franco-Americans were disparaged. They were people large- who had immigrated from Canada, most of whom had little or no education. And so they all worked as blue-collar workers in the shoe and textile factories, and they made, they had very little for wages. And because they didn't have education, they didn't enter the professions. And so they were often put down by other ethnic groups who had greater prominence, social and financial. However, in my lifetime, I do not remember being discriminated against, and I never felt like a second-class citizen because I was Franco-American. I felt treated the same as anyone else. And also, I went to a parochial school for eight years where we were all Franco-American, where we spoke French either all morning or all afternoon for eight years. And so since we were all of the same

heritage, we didn't particularly put each other down because of that heritage, we were all of the same stripe. And so I respect the kind of discrimination that Francos have endured. But I guess I feel fortunate in the sense that I did not experience it myself, nor do I believe members of my immediate family did.

MB: When did your parents come to, or when did your family line come to Maine?

EL: Well, in the 1800s and, I suppose around the 1870s, my two great-grandfathers came from different parts of Quebec province. My great grandfather Lavoie came from Kamaraska (*?*) which is on the eastern shore of the St. Lawrence River, northeast of Quebec City. And that might have been around the 1860s, '70s, '80s, around there. And my great grand-father Poirier on my mother's side came from St. Marie, which is southwest, southeast of Quebec City, and he came probably about that time [1860's-80's]. And their sons, my grandfathers, were born in Maine. And both of my grandmothers were both from different parts of Quebec province. They met their respective husbands-to-be, corresponded for a while, and then moved to Maine. So I can really trace my ancestry in the state back to about the 1870s I'd say, so about a hundred and twenty-five years.

MB: Is that, was that common for Franco-Americans who were now living in Maine to marry within their own community instead of . . .?

EL: Yes, it was very common. And in those days, French was much more prevalent in certain towns and cities in Maine; in Lewiston, Biddeford, to a certain degree probably Augusta, Waterville, where people spoke French all the time. Where there were French language newspapers, radio stations, etcetera. They were very large populations and they really wanted to speak their own language. And so many French-Canadians emigrated to Maine in search of a better life because there were few jobs, few good paying jobs [in Canada]. And so they came to Maine in order to work and were able to make a good living, and therefore wanted to stay there. So it was largely economic.

MB: Were your parents able to get the education that you talked, that most Franco-Americans didn't have when they were textile workers and so forth?

EL: Well, my parents went to high school; did not go beyond. And there were other Franco-Americans who never made it to high school. For example, we had a close family friend who quit school at age thirteen in order to go to work in the factories to help out his family. That was not unheard of in those days, and there were not child labor laws as there are today. And my maternal grandfather worked in the shoe factory and he had five daughters, of which my mother is the youngest. And he wanted all of his daughters not to go to high school but instead to work in the factory to help out the family because, really neither side of the family had much money. They were relatively poor, I think still lived reasonably well, but were still quite poor. And I always remember my mother telling me how when she was a child, they would get oranges and walnuts for Christmas. That was their Christmas present, and she and her sisters were delighted and that was considered a big Christmas.

At any rate, my grandmother, my maternal grandmother told her husband, my grandfather, that

under no circumstances would her daughters go to work in the factory. She insisted they go to high school, and they all did. And so at the time, I would imagine that probably fewer than ten percent of Americans went on to college. It was nowhere near as prevalent as it is today. And so they did what was very [un] common. And it was only wealthy people, I think, who went to college. It was much less common than it is today. So they at least were able to do that. And it really took another generation for I think many, those of the Franco-American community to go to college.

And there's another interesting phenomenon too. Because Franco-Americans have often been disparaged by other ethnic groups, the phrase, "Dumb Frenchman," you know, was very common. The Franco-Americans would put themselves down and would not have high aspirations. And I'll give you an illustration, it's interesting, for both my father and my stepfather. My father, who was working with his father in the construction company, wanted to go to college when he graduated from high school. And his mother said, "Well, why would you do that? You know, we pay you well." He was getting two dollars a week in those days, "We pay you well and you would have nothing at the end of it." My stepfather, who is, will be ninety this June, and was born two years before my father, my stepfather tells the story that when he graduated from high school, he asked his parents to go to college, that he had all of the money in hand that it would have taken to pay for four years of college at Bates. And his father said, "Well why would you want to do that? At the end of four years, you would have spent all that money and you would have nothing." So both my father and my stepfather would have liked to go to college, but were actively discouraged by their parents. It was not believed that you should try to better yourself, that what you had, the living wage that you had, was important and was fine.

MB: Do you feel that that changed with your generation?

EL: Absolutely, absolutely. There was no question that my oldest brother Paul was going to go to college. And indeed he majored in engineering physics at the University of Maine at Orono, which is about the hardest course that they had at the time and he's been in engineering ever since. He graduated in 1962, I believe, and he's going to retire next year after thirty-five years in the aerospace industry. My brother Normand didn't go to college only because he didn't want to go. He, unlike my brother Paul and unlike me, would have had all the money necessary to go to college, because he had an uncle who was ready to pay for it all. But he refused to go because he never liked to study. He was as smart as Paul and me, but just never wanted to study. And when I went to school, I was always an achiever in grade school and in high school, and there was no question that I would not have gone to college.

And so the philosophy and the outlook changed a lot, but I think we also were moved by the times. Because, again, in the days when my parents were young, and you figure if my mother was born in 1915, then, you know, or let's say, my father was born in 1911, he would have been eighteen in 1929, right around the time of the stock market crash and then the Depression. From the perspective of that generation, my father and my stepfather and my mother, the Depression was not the time to go to college. People were struggling to just put food on the table. Today it's very different. And today there's a lot of financial aid, and the expectations of high school students are very different. And it is believed, and certainly studies back this up, that if you go

to college you will earn a whole lot more in your life time, etcetera, etcetera, and that the key to advancement is higher education. And I think that is something, for example, that Senator Mitchell has always talked about, that by going to Bowdoin and then later going to law school, he was able to lift himself up from real poverty.

MB: You spoke about how the community, how the community viewed the Franco-Americans. How did the Franco-Americans view the others, the other people in the community?

EL: Well, of course the Franco-American community was very large and predominated in terms of numbers, I would say. But there was some resentment toward other ethnic groups because of the belief that, at least in past years, that they had been put down, that there had not been promotional opportunities for them, or professional opportunities for them. And so one still hears of the kind of complaints that they had. But I think most of those have been resolved in this day and age when Franco-Americans have risen to prominence, I think, in all aspects of Maine life.

MB: How do you feel that your family and your community affected you as you grew up?

EL: Well, I think that I was very fortunate in being part of a loving family, in what we call today an intact family, having a mother and father. There was never any discord. They were very stable, they were very loving, and they were very consistent in the kinds of things that they taught. And I think stability and consistency of message in terms of the values you give your children help to raise solid, stable citizens.

MB: Do you feel that you are similar or different from your parents in their political attitudes, social outlooks and religious beliefs?

EL: I would say that I am similar in many respects because I am a Democrat, I am a practicing Roman Catholic, and probably similar in my social outlook. Although I don't think I'm as devout a Catholic, I think I am a more passionate Democrat. And I think, I try to practice great tolerance in my life because I think we see great intolerance in society today, and it's important to do that.

MB: You spoke of where you got your elementary and secondary education, at the private school?

EL: Elementary education was at St. Peter and St. Paul parochial school, which still exists today, although the number of students is much diminished than when I was there. And I went to what was then Jordan Jr. High School, which was the ninth grade, which was a public school, and then to Lewiston High School for three years.

MB: What of that was the private school?

EL: St. Peter's, from the first to the eighth grade.

MB: Was that typical, for people from the Franco-American community to go to that private

school?

EL: Yes. There were other private schools, too, there were several other private schools. There was St. Patrick, I think, St. Joseph, Holy Cross, Holy Family; there were easily a half dozen. And I think in those days people practiced their religion very fervently and wanted their children to attend parochial school so they would be fervent Catholics. And I think that, that the nuns in the Catholic schools really brought about a great discipline. And we had to wear uniforms, and they were very strict in terms of the behavior that was allowed. And while I think a lot of kids are by nature somewhat rebellious and we thought it was a bit confining, and being in the same school for eight years seemed like an eternity, I think in hindsight, I learned a great deal about self-discipline, about patience, and about the importance of good behavior from that religious order.

MB: You spoke about how your experiences in the parochial school, when you were very young, you spoke French and so forth. How did that change when you went on to the Lewiston public high school?

EL: Well, of course the social attitude was somewhat different, because it was a much larger school and you didn't have the, sort of the strict discipline that was expected in a parochial school. And what was especially different for me is that the high school was not segregated by gender. At the parochial school, the girls were physically on one wing of the building, and the boys were on the other wing, and we never saw each other. Even the schoolyard was divided in half with the boys on one side and the girls on the other. And even our graduation in the church was segregated, where they had all the girls walk in church two by two and sit on one side, and then after they had filed in, then all the boys did. And part of the reason I went to a public high school is that, at the age of fourteen, I came to feel that, even though I had older brothers of course, that boys were a natural part of life and that it would, even though perhaps they could be troublesome, I probably should learn to live with them and know what they were about. And so it was, you know, getting to learn to live with boys, and dating and all of that.

So it was somewhat different, and a little freer from a social perspective, although I remember, for example, as I compare my experience in high school to what I read about today, the social mores have changed a lot over the years. For example, when I was probably a sophomore in high school, in terms of dress, the girls were not allowed to wear a new kind of garment that were called culottes, which was like a skirt that really was slit down the middle into pants. But it looked like a skirt because the pants were billowed out, and it came to the knees. And the rule was, if a girl wore culottes to school, she was sent home, period. No discussion. And I don't have to tell you that jeans were not allowed. Now, people did not wear jeans in those days as they do today where everyone from age two to age ninety wear jeans. But jeans were not accepted. But I got a job in January of my sophomore year in high school because my father had just passed away and I worked in the nice ladies clothing store in Lewiston. And so very quickly I came to like nice clothing, so I used to buy fairly nice clothing and dress appropriately.

And when I was in high school, you know, I was always in the top classes. And, you know, there were certain kinds of people who were in those classes who were very bright and very outstanding in many ways. And while there were students from many different backgrounds in

the high schools, in the high school, the students I associated with were, you know, fine, upstanding citizens. And so that I did not, I do, I guess I felt instinctively by the time I was fourteen or fifteen how I wanted to live my life. And I used to feel that if, for example, someone tried to pressure me into smoking in order to be their friend, I would never have agreed, because I, the first surgeon general's warning about smoking came out in 1963, that it might be hazardous to your health. And while both my parents smoked, my mother felt there was nothing good about it, so I resolved never to smoke. And I thought, "I will never give in to peer pressure." If someone ever says, "If you want to be my friend you have to smoke," I would figure they really weren't interested in me, having me as a friend. They were just trying to pressure me and I would never have submitted to that. As it turns out, no one ever, no one I knew ever came anywhere near doing that kind of thing. And I never engaged in any conduct in high school that I felt was risky or risqué. I guess I always, I've always lived by kind of a straight and narrow path and maybe that's what parochial school did for me.

MB: In high school, what were your aspirations?

EL: Well, I wanted to go to college, and I didn't know what I wanted to do. And in my senior year of high school I applied to Bates College, the University of Maine at Orono, and Clark University in Massachusetts. And I don't know to this day why I applied at Clark; I was turned down. I was approved at UMO, but with no money. And I was approved at Bates with a half tuition scholarship. And it turns out that it was only Bates I could afford to go to because, with my father having passed away and my mother not really having any money, I didn't have much choice, so.

MB: Was the Maine University at Orono, was that considered a better school than Bates, or?

EL: No, I don't. . . . Well, judging from what I know today, I don't think it, I don't think it's perhaps the equal of Bates, but my brother had graduated from there and I certainly had confidence in it. I felt I could get a good education.

MB: How did college, how did your college experience shape your beliefs, attitudes and interests?

EL: Well, it was a time for maturing, but the real maturing came not so much when I was on campus, but in my junior year of college which I spent in Switzerland. And that proved to be a very broadening year in many respects. I had never left home when I decided to go to Switzerland. And again, I didn't live on campus, so I was not used to being on my own. But I had two classmates at Bates who decided to go to Switzerland and asked me to join them. We all took French together. And I thought about it and in fairly short order I said, "Yes." And Bates would continue to give me the scholarship for that year, and rather than simply applying the money toward my tuition, they gave me a check each semester which I could apply toward my expenses in Switzerland. And it was very broadening.

When I left, I left in September of '69, and I flew to Paris to spend a week with a friend. He was a Bates student who had just graduated. And he had lived in Paris his junior year and he was doing a master's program I think. So I spent a week with him in Paris and he showed me all

around. And from the moment I set foot in Paris until ten months later when I returned, I was never bored and I was never homesick for an instant because it was an opportunity to discover. And I learned about art and music and painting and architecture, things that I had never known about. And because my parents had not really had an acquaintance with those things, they were not able to teach me. I don't blame them, because they simply didn't have the education. But they were wonderful things that I feel have made my life enriching.

And so I traveled, at, that Christmas time I had a Eurail Pass, and I traveled in many countries for three weeks, and at spring break I traveled for four weeks, each time with a different friend. And I went as far north as Stockholm, as far east as Vienna, as far south as Rome and Madrid, and as far east as Paris [sic]. And I went to museums and churches and art galleries, and was able to travel and live very inexpensively. And it was a wonderfully broadening experience, as I said.

And it was then, that year that I decided that I'd like to work in Washington, D.C. after I got out of college, and I don't know why, but that became my aspiration. And I think, having lived in a big city, suddenly my horizons were having lived in Europe, having lived on my own, figured that I could fend for myself, I felt I wanted to be in the big city. So I felt that year was the most enriching year of my life, of my young life. And even though I did not, to my regret, participate in campus life and live in a dormitory and have friends like you have friends, I felt that year in Europe contributed a lot to my knowledge and understanding about life.

MB: Did you decide to go to law school after graduating from college, or?

EL: No, only some years later. After graduating from Bates, I couldn't get a job. I wanted to get a job with the federal government actually, around Baltimore at the time. But those were the years of the Nixon administration, and President Nixon had imposed a freeze on government hiring. And so I was unable to get the job that I wanted and I was on a temporary basis rehired by the department store I used to work at, and I was there for about nine months. And then I got a job working for the then governor of Maine, Governor Ken Curtis and was there for about ten months. And then I got a job commencing in September of '73, so it was two years out of Bates, with Senator Muskie. So I went to Washington, and I only began law school in the fall of '78. So I knew when I graduated from Bates, I felt when I graduated from Bates that I would want an advanced degree, but I didn't know what it was. And I was tired mentally and I wanted to see if I could make it in the world of work. And it was important to me to embark on that process and I thought that my ideas about further education would develop over the years, and they did.

MB: What was your major coming out of Bates?

EL: I majored in French.

MB: After graduating from Bates, what attracted you to work in the senatorial office down with Muskie?

EL: Well, it was a real opportunity. It was a chance to work in Washington, D.C., which I had wanted since my senior year at Bates. And so about three years had elapsed. I had been

disappointing in not getting a job in Baltimore. And the job with Senator Muskie came about in a quite unexpected way. At the time I was working for Governor Curtis, and the wife of a man who worked across the hall called me one day, I had met her casually, called me one day and said, I guess she said, "There is an opening in Senator Muskie's office and I think you'd be great for it. Why don't we have lunch?" And I remember thinking, "She must be out of her mind." So I went to have lunch with her and she said, "I think you'd be great." And I thought, "How can she know me, we've met once." And I guess I must have impressed her, and so she recommended me for the job. They were looking for someone from Maine, and mind you, '73 was a year after Senator Mitchell had run- Senator Muskie had run unsuccessfully for President. And he was going to be up for reelection in Maine in 1976, and they felt they had to rebuild the staff and they wanted people from Maine. So they started looking around and putting out feelers. And this one person recommended me, and then a woman who later became my shorthand teacher in Augusta also recommended me, independently, that I had been in her class. And many of the students who were in that shorthand class were young single mothers who had small children, who, you know, they didn't have any money and that sort of thing. And I had been to college, and so my educational level was certainly a lot higher.

But anyway, I guess I'd made an impression, and unbeknownst to me she had recommended me privately. And I had an interview with other candidates and to my great surprise they chose me. And I did not think I was qualified for the job, but they offered me the job, they thought I was the one. And so I said "Yes," just like that. And I went home and told my mother, and she was just shocked out of her mind. But because I was going to work for Senator Muskie, who was clearly larger than life in Maine, it was definitely a step up, and she supported me. But in a way, in a small way, I was sorry to go, because it meant my mother would be living alone and she was a widow. She had been a widow at that time for nine years. And I know that when my father died her social life died with it, because they all traveled in couples. And once you become widowed, virtually everyone drops you. I mean, it's a, probably a fairly, I don't know if it's still as common today but in those days, you know, I think social life tends to revolve in couples, and she was going to be alone. But, I had to make my own life, and so I went.

MB: How had you gotten involved in politics in the first place, with working for Governor Curtis?

EL: Well, that job came along by circumstance as well, I was not looking for it. In 1972, there was an ad in the, there was an article in the paper, in the newspaper, the Lewiston newspaper that said that Governor Curtis had appointed a special assistant in Canadian affairs. And I don't remember if it said there was an assistant's position or not, but someone called my mother and said, "See that? She ought to enquire whether there's a job." And so, and that family friend said, "And she ought to talk to Georgette Berube," who was then in the House of Representatives from Lewiston, "And Robert Couturier," who is an attorney, who is today the judge of probate, and who at that time may have been a state senator, I think he was in the legislature as well. So I contacted each of them to see if they could find out if there was a job, or if there was a job if they could check. And they looked into it for me and I ended up applying for the job and I got it. Although ironically, as a condition, I was part of the, considered part of the governor's office, although physically my office was located across the street in a different building; I was not in the State House.

As part of the, as part, a condition of the offer of the position is that I agree to take shorthand. And I remembered feeling rather put down by that because I had graduated from Bates College, Phi Beta Kappa. Why did I have to take shorthand? This was a secretary-assistant position. However, I wasn't going to say no because I felt they would- ideas about feminism I guess were not all that developed, I don't know that they would ever have asked a man to do that, but at any rate. I never put down the opportunity to learn something because I think the more you learn in life, the more you are worth, and that you never know when that particular knowledge may come in handy. And as it is, I still use some of that shorthand today; today, twenty-five years later. So I agreed to take the course and I took it for two semesters. And, you know, I did very well in it. And then after ten months I got the job with Senator Muskie. So I said goodbye, and I think some people in the governor's office who hadn't paid much attention to me were a little surprised when I wrote Governor Curtis a letter and tendered my resignation and said that I was going to work for Senator Muskie. Then everybody sort of said, "Gee, you know, she, I guess she wasn't so bad."

MB: What were your responsibilities down in the office with Senator Muskie, and how did they compare with what you did for Governor Curtis?

EL: Well, through no fault of Governor Curtis, I really wasn't very busy. I was a secretary-assistant, but there was not a lot of business in that office. So there was a lot of down time and I found that very boring, because I like to be very busy. And when I went to work for Senator Muskie, oh, talk about a contrast of feast or famine. It was unbelievable the amount of work that there was and the backlog. And I was told when I first started that there was more work to do than there were hours in the day, that my predecessors had not been able to keep up, that my work in, was, involved doing what you call, "Projects." I had to solve the problems in certain subject areas that individuals or entities such as companies or municipalities had. And often it involved trying to get grants from the federal government, it involved trying to solve the problems that individuals could have.

And one example would be, a couple from Rumford wanted to go on a trip, an elderly couple from Rumford wanted to go on a trip to Spain, but the husband couldn't get a passport because he didn't have the proper birth certificate. And the reason he didn't have a proper birth certificate is that he had actually been born an illegitimate child. But the birth certificate issued listed him as his grandmother's child, and not as his mother's child. And so, at any rate, the passport office wouldn't give him a passport and I had to resolve the birth certificate question. So that was an example of something that I had to do. And people, you know, housing developers wanted subsidized housing that they could build in Maine or rehabilitate; they wanted money. People had any of a variety of problems.

And the subject areas that I handled over the six years I worked for Senator Muskie varied from health, education, welfare, housing, arts and humanities. And I also did Indians who later came to be known as, or called Native Americans. And in those days, that was before the, Maine's Native American population had won the, gotten federal legislation through in 1980 for the Indian Land Claims Settlement Act. But before then, in particular, they were always trying to get grants piecemeal from several different government agencies. And I would, I was the

person, in Senator Mitchell's [sic] office who was designated to try to help them. And I always did the best that I could, recognizing I think that poverty has been endemic. I think, I reflected sadly on how poverty was endemic on so many Indian reservations; and they still are today across the country and it's a very sad fact of life.

But anyway, I had a number of different subject areas. And then, I did that from '73 to '78. And then in '78 legislative responsibilities were added to my plate, which was fine, and I did those, too, along with projects. And I did that until Senator Mitchell- Senator Muskie left for the State Department on either, it was either May 7 or May 9 of 1980.

MB: Who were, do you remember who the people were who interviewed you for the job with Senator Muskie?

EL: Oh, yes. It was Charlie Micoleau and his secretary, Debbie Wilkes.

MB: And did they work in the . . .?

EL: They worked together. They worked together as, you know, he was the executive assistant in Washington to Senator Muskie and Debbie was his secretary.

MB: What did you think of Muskie's political views and his actions before you knew him personally, and how did your views change?

EL: Well, to be honest, I really didn't know very much about his political views, because in college it was rather like living in a fishbowl world. I think The Fishbowl at Coram was appropriately named. And, I knew he was big on the environment and he was a Democrat. But remember that I never had much political cognizance until about a year before I started to work for Senator Muskie and so I didn't know all that much about him. But I came to know him and his views of course much better when I came to work for him. I knew that I respected him, because I wouldn't have gone to work for him. And I felt it was a great opportunity to go to Washington and to work for him at that time.

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

MB: How well did you know the Muskies, Jane and Ed, personally?

EL: I didn't know them at all personally, had never met either of them before I went to work for the senator.

MB: And then once you did go to work for him?

EL: Well, I didn't have very much personal contact with them outside the office. There was a woman on the staff by the name of Gayle Cory, who passed away a couple years ago, who was very close to them and used to help Mrs. Muskie with any number of things, but that was not my job. Now, sometimes there would be a party at the senator's house, or maybe an event in Maine

where I would see them both in sort of the less formal setting of the office in the Senate office building. And I think I probably, I was very shy in those years, and I gradually came out of it. But I guess I kept my distance a little bit maybe because I felt that that was the proper thing to do, not because I didn't like them. And I think that I maybe became a little more friendly with them in the years after he had left the Senate and after I had left the Senate, where, you know, we were both a little more relaxed. But that's not to say that, you know, I was always very fond of them and respectful of them. But obviously they were older and they walked in very prominent circles that I did not walk in and I never presumed to step in a sphere that I did not belong to, shall we say.

MB: Can you think of any stories that define their characters? It might just be Muskie in the office if. . . .

EL: I suppose any number of us former staff could probably think of a number of stories and I don't know that I can think of a particular one. I always felt that the senator was very dedicated to his job. People would make much of his temper, and I felt that, well, I think he may have had some of a temper. I felt there were times he used it with a specific goal in mind, which was to achieve something for his constituents, or perhaps it was to intimidate the opposition so he could get the upper hand in legislation. And I didn't see him as sort of the very angry man that he was sometimes portrayed to be. I think there was a very gentle man under that big, gruff exterior. He was six foot four, so he was a big man, and I'm five foot three, so you look up a lot; you would look up a lot when you would be with him. I mean, I viewed them very favorably. I felt that both he and his wife, you know, were very generous in spirit and genuinely cared about the party and genuinely cared about helping people. And while no individual is perfect, I admired him enormously and felt he made an enormous contribution to the state and to the Senate and to federal legislation.

MB: Who were some of the other people in the office that you got to know working there?

EL: All of them, all of them. There were just so many. I mean, I knew everyone on the personal staff. And when you work there six years, there were a lot of people who came and went; and so I knew everyone. It wasn't that large a staff, maybe we were thirty. And also because Muskie had a lot of seniority and the Democrats were in power those years that I was with him, he had a lot of staff. He had the Senate Budget Committee from 1976 onward, and I knew the key people there, the people at the top. And he had the Environmental Pollution Subcommittee, and I knew all of them, and the people at the Intergovernmental Relations Subcommittee, and I knew all of them. And so, you know, there's no one I didn't know, I don't think. I worked most closely from '73 until '78 with Charlie Micoleau, who is the one who hired me and to whom I remain very grateful to this day. Debbie Wilkes I saw a couple of years ago, she's working as a legal secretary in a Washington law firm. And I still have some friends from the Muskie and Mitchell years whom I see to this day. Anita Jensen[1] used to do legislative correspondence, and I am still close to her today. Janie O'Connor was a receptionist in the latter years of the Muskie years, I think, and then for Senator Mitchell, and I still see Janie from time

1 Anita Jensen, Mitchell legislative aide, specialized in legal and judicial issues.

to time. Grace Reef worked for Senator Mitchell, not for Senator Muskie, and I still correspond with Grace. She has three small children, so you're pretty busy when you have three children and you also work.

And I usually inquire about, you know, other people if I'm in Washington, or, I see former staff in Maine. Charlie Jacobs works in Augusta, he works for state government. Every once in a while I'll see Mike Hastings who works I think at the University of Orono in a non-profit that they have in Orono. Oh, no wait, Mike Hastings worked for Mitchell, he didn't work for Muskie, because he worked for Senator Cohen and then he came to work for a Democrat. And there are a number, a number, the people who worked in the field offices, Judy Catarat worked in the Biddeford office for Senator Muskie, and she works in Congressman Baldacci's Lewiston office. Janet Welch worked in Senator Muskie's Lewiston office, and today she's employed in the private sector. Clyde McDonald worked in the Bangor office for Senator Muskie and then Senator Mitchell. Periodically I'll see him sometimes if I go to a Democratic State Convention. Or sometimes there may be an event, a political event that I will go to, that I will see these people. So I, we were all on very good terms and still are, although we don't see each other as often of course.

MB: What was the overall feeling in the office? Were people happy with their jobs, or were they . . .?

EL: Oh, absolutely. People felt very dedicated to the senator and to advancing his cause.

MB: As far as getting close to people, versus not getting close to people, you said that you felt that Muskie and Jane were kind of in an upper, older social circle. Were the people that you're mentioning in the younger . . .?

EL: Yes. We were closer in age and I would say we were in the same social circle. I mean, I didn't go out a whole lot with staff, with other staff people, but I didn't shrink from it either. And I know, for example, Anita Jensen was always very kind and gracious in those early years when I didn't have a lot of friends. She and her husband would have large parties at their house, and they would always invite me, and it was always very nice.

MB: How did your social life develop when you were living in Washington?

EL: Well, I guess I've never considered that I've had a very extremely active social life. I always worked very long hours on the Hill, and from 1978 to the end of '81 I went to law school at night, so in those years I had no social life. But I did in those early years, you know, I dated some, and I would go out dancing, and I would attend events at the Smithsonian, and I would go to the ballet, and the symphony, and different things at the Kennedy Center, drama. And I would do them, you know, somewhat sparingly but they were wonderful opportunities. And I remember for the first two years that I was in Washington, I felt like a newcomer, because there were many things I hadn't seen. And I had a guide book on Washington, and I would just methodically go through each of them until I had seen virtually everything there was to see in the city. So it was, it was, felt new to me for a long time.

MB: You mentioned night law school. How did you come to decide to do that and when did you decide to do that?

EL: Well, I decided in 1977 that I would like to go to law school. And I had had a roommate who wanted to go to G.W. and get an MBA. And I decided that it was probably about time. I had been out of college six years, and I felt that if I was going to go on to some form of graduate school it was time to do it. Because after having been in Senator Muskie's office for about two years, I came to feel that my work was well appreciated. Actually, it didn't take long for me to be recognized, to my surprise. And I felt that I could make it on my own, but that I needed something else if I was going to support myself. And so the idea of law school came upon me. And I didn't get accepted to law school in '77, but I took paralegal courses for a year at the University of Maryland College Park campus, and that solidified my interest in the law. And it must be said as well that I dealt with lawyers every day and that my job for Senator Muskie consisted of being an advocate for people and I felt there would be corresponding virtues in the legal profession.

So, in 1978 I was accepted, and because I felt I had to earn my way through law school, I continued to work during the day and I went to school at night. And it was a very grueling schedule. After about the first two months, I became really ill with a middle ear inflammation that caused me to lose my balance and I was out of work for about three weeks. But I, typically, I would, you know, get up about, oh, I don't know if it would be nine in the morning. I'd go to work until five, I would leave for class, I would have class until- I went to American University, I would have class until, oh, nine, ten o'clock at night. One year, my third year of law school, I had trial practice and I'd get home about eleven. Then I would study until two in the morning, every morning, and I would get up about, you know, eight-thirty, nine. And I just did that for three and a half years. And I borrowed, I never got a student loan, I never got any government help; I never applied for it. I guess it didn't occur to me to apply for it because I knew it was a large debt and I knew that when I finished law school I would be in my early to mid-thirties, in my early thirties, and that I would want to buy a house, buy a car, you know, another car. I would have big things to buy and I didn't want a debt. So that is why, and it would never have occurred to me to ask my mother for help, never. So that is why I went to school on my own. I had savings in the Senate Credit Union, and I borrowed against my savings each semester. Because I borrowed against my savings, I had a lower rate of interest. And I started school in August of '78 and made the first loan payment in September of '78. And I made those payments consistently; I paid down my law school every month. Through the end of law school I, my last exam was in December of '81 and I made my last loan payment in December of '84, so it only took three years out of law school for me to have paid it all. And I know today, many students get a guaranteed student loan, and in that case the loan is deferred until you get out of law school, and then you have like ten years to pay it. Well, of course a lot of interest accrues during the deferral period and I just didn't want to do that. I wanted to pay off the debt as soon as I could and I felt that I only had myself to rely on, and I did it myself.

MB: What did you see happening to you after you graduated from law school?

EL: Well, my views changed over time. When I first started law school, I wanted to remain on Capitol Hill. I felt for the rest of my professional life that I felt I would use the law degree to

work on a subcommittee to do something. But, I guess by the time I got to my third year of law school, unbeknownst to me, and it was pointed out by a constituent, many constituents in Maine were very sympathetic to what I was doing because they knew I was working long hours and going to school at night. And one of them pointed out to me that I had changed my mind. He said, "Well, when I talked to you two years ago, you wanted to stay on Capitol Hill, now you're saying you want to practice law." And I said, "Well, gee, I guess that's right."

And when I finished law school in December of '81, I felt I wanted to practice law either in Maine or in Washington, although I didn't want to lobby in Washington. I didn't want to do that because when you are a lobbyist in Washington, except for the biggest lobbyists, you are a supplicant. And I, if I had to work on legislation, I preferred to do it from the inside than from the outside; I didn't want to be a supplicant. And so I decided I wanted to practice law, but I had to defer that because Senator Mitchell was appointed to the Senate by Governor Brennan in May of 1980, and he was filling out Senator Muskie's unexpired term. Senator Mitchell was going to be up for his own first election in November of '82, which was ten months after I finished law school. And when Senator Mitchell had, was appointed to the Senate, he had asked all of us on Senator Muskie's staff if we would stay with him until November of '82. And I had known George Mitchell from my years in the Senate. In those days he was a lawyer, just a lawyer, as I am today. And I absolutely believed in him because there was a star quality about him.

And I did not look for a job in the private sector until the fall of '83, so I went past the election. And part of the reason I didn't look is, I was so busy working in the Senate, it, you know, it was just unbelievable. I just had no time or energy to look. But eventually I came to feel that if I allowed the law degree to get too old and stale, it would never be of any use to me. Because I felt that in order to really use the degree, I had to practice law in a firm; that that was how I would really learn to be a lawyer and to use that degree. And that, although I admired Senator Mitchell enormously and I hated to leave him, I also understood instinctively that if he ever left the Senate for any reason, I would be out of a job. And if I had a ten-year-old law degree, I couldn't use it perhaps. And that, I only had myself for support and that I had to get on with my career. So I left him with a heavy heart, but he and I have remained friends over the years.

And in hindsight now, it will be fifteen years in June of this year that I have been with this firm and I feel that my instincts at the time about using the law degree in a private firm were absolutely right. I would not be the professional person that I am if I had stayed on the Hill and I think the degree would be virtually worthless if I had stayed there. This is not in any way to cast aspersions on Senator Mitchell, but merely to say that when you practice law in a firm, you develop your legal skills in a way that you do not if you, for example, stay on Capitol Hill. Because by and large you don't need a law degree to be on Capitol Hill, at least I don't think.

MB: What did you mean when you said that it didn't take long to be recognized for your skills?

EL: Well, I guess in those days, in those early years, I mentioned that I was very shy and I didn't have much confidence in my ability. And indeed I said that when I was offered the job, I did not feel qualified for it. So I began working, and there was a mountain of work to do. And not only did I have to do the work to solve people's problems, I had to type all of my own letters, because I had no secretarial help. So it was, it was, I would work nights until eight and, you

know, I'd just be so concerned as to whether I was doing it right. So, I remember this like yesterday- six months after being hired, Charlie Micoleau called me out into the hallway. And I thought, "This is it, I'm going to get the axe. I know it, I just, I've tried so hard." You know, in those few seconds I felt such terror; you cannot know. I saw my life going before my hands [sic]. And instead he said to me, "Estelle, you have really developed so much in the last six months. You have worked so hard and you have done great work," he said. "We're giving you a raise." Well, you could have knocked me over with a feather. I was just so shocked. I mean, shocked out of my mind. And you know, in fact, you don't really know if people don't tell you anything.

And I remember, in those days, in the early days, I used to dr- he'd say, "Draft me a letter that I, you know, for my signature, that I'll send to a constituent." So I would draft these letters and he'd inevitably rewrite them all. So that used to say to me that, you know, I was hopeless. I mean, I thought it was decent. It turns out it was more stylistic I think than substantive, and I was learning. But I couldn't know that, that he was very satisfied, until he told me that. And so, you know, I had just a series of raises. And a lot of people, I guess, a lot of constituents for whom I did work would compliment me to Charlie and to others, and, or would write letters saying, "You just did a wonderful job." And so, you know, I came to feel appreciated.

MB: What were some of your observations, working in the Senate office?

EL: Well, from what perspective?

MB: Any: political, or the way the office functioned?

EL: By and large I felt the office functioned very well. You know, I felt, on the personal staff, you know, that we were all fairly close and fairly dedicated to the senator and dedicated to Maine people. I guess it was very interesting to learn about how the Senate worked and about how the executive branch worked because I got to understand both the legislative branch and the executive branch. Things were partisan in those days, but not partisan as they are today, where I feel that there is much more name-calling today. The politics is more bare-knuckled, raw and bare-knuckled, and that personal attacks and political blackmail are so much more common today than they were then. And I think it's much more difficult to run for office because of that, and because of the need to raise so much money for campaigns. It makes it difficult for members to concentrate on their responsibilities. And I think you see more retirements today because of that, that people just really do get fed up. And I think it's too bad.

And, you know, as I've seen Washington in the last year, it's been fairly horrifying and I can imagine how hard all those staffers worked, you know, on those committees that were looking at the impeachment charges, and so forth. I'm glad I had the opportunity to work there, but I'll bet it's even more difficult today, even more difficult and more partisan and rancorous. So I think I've seen somewhat of an evolution over time. And you have to understand, too, that the politics changed somewhat. Because when I started working for Senator Muskie, it was September 17 of 1973. President Nixon was in office, but he was already under a cloud over Watergate, and the impeachment hearings started. And so I sort of was a distant witness to those impeachment hearings because they went on every day in the caucus room in the office building where I was.

And so I witnessed that, but of course there were, it was less partisan than the impeachment hearings were for President Clinton, I feel. The impeachment hearings were going on in the House then of course, but there were hearings that were going on in the Senate as well. In 197- in 19-, see, Gerald Ford succeeded, President Nixon resigned in August of '74 and Gerald Ford succeeded him until '76. In November of '76 President Carter was elected, a Democrat. A Democrat President, both houses of Congress controlled by Democrats; from '76 to '80 was a great time: the Democrats controlled everything. That doesn't mean there weren't differences of opinion, but it was a heck of a lot easier than the White House being one party and Congress the other, then the gridlock is a lot worse.

Senator Mitchell came to the Senate on May 19 or 1980; he was a junior member of the majority party. In November of that year, Ronald Reagan was elected in a landslide election and took the Senate with him; the Senate changed from Democrat control to Republican control. I'll never forget that; the day after the election I walked through the Senate cafeteria and there were all these grins that were about a mile wide on the faces of Republican staffers. Because now all of the Democrat staffers who were the, you know, staff director and this and that of every committee on the Senate, were going to get ousted and all the Republican staff would get elevated. It was going to be very different, very different. And so very quickly Senator Mitchell became a junior member of the minority party.

So that his power and influence in those first few years were radically different from those of Senator Muskie who had had seniority, who was chairman of a full committee, chairman of two subcommittees, with a Democratic White House. So with the Reagan revolution, the politics changed dramatically, because with a Republican Senate and Reagan having said, "I have a mandate," suddenly Congress did, in that first year, in '81, Congress did whatever he wanted because he had won a huge election. So the politics certainly changed over time.

MB: You had asked me from what perspective I was asking the question. What perspective would you answer the question, do you think?

EL: Well, I guess I felt that you may have been asking the question in a political sense, and I guess that would be my answer from a political sense. I think that's much more significant than the office, which didn't change significantly from year to year or from senator to senator.

MB: Oh really? It didn't change from senator to senator?

EL: Not significantly. Although, it has to be said that because Senator Mitchell was a new senator and a junior member, he didn't have all the committee staff that Senator Muskie had. Senator Muskie at one time I think had over a hundred people under his control when you included the committee and the subcommittees. With Senator Mitchell, he only had a personal staff. So, you know, the number of people he had working for him was significantly smaller, down by at least two-thirds.

MB: When you were going to law school, what specific area of the law were you interested in?

EL: I didn't, I didn't think I wanted to do litigation, but I took trial practice. I took trial practice, I took evidence which was a required course, I took civil and criminal procedure, because that was part of the law school curriculum. But I also took business transactions. No, I took business, it was a business law course and I took two courses in commercial transactions, and I took bankruptcy. I tried to get as balanced a view of the different kinds of legal courses that there were, because, again, when I first started I didn't think I'd go to private practice, and then toward the end I decided I did. But I just wanted to have as well-rounded a background as possible in preparation for the Bar exam and I figured I could learn more later.

MB: Why did you feel that you'd be out of a job if Senator Mitchell was no longer in office? Why wouldn't you just move to the next senator like you did?

EL: Well, because there would have been no guarantee that his successor would have been a Democratic, or that his successor would have said, "I want you to stay." When Senator Muskie was appointed to, as Secretary of State, in that transition process he had told Joe Brennan, who was going to appoint the successor, "Please ask whomever you appoint to keep my staff on for the next two years." And George Mitchell wanted to do that, but he knew most of us anyway, the senior staff, and he also wanted us independently of Senator Muskie's request, because he wanted seasoned staff to help him learn the ropes and to guide him through the next couple of years and his own first election. But, you know, a Republican, if he, if Senator, let's say Senator Mitchell had not been elected in his own right in November of '82 and it had been a Republican, David Emery had run against him, I would have been out of a job. And I might have looked for another job on the Hill, but quite frankly after working for Senator Muskie and Senator Mitchell, anything else would have been a drop. And as I looked around Capitol Hill, there were few members of Congress I respected in the way that I respected them. And if you will, it caused me to feel very privileged to have worked for two such fine men, and I didn't think there were many others like them.

MB: You mentioned that you respected them very much as people. What were they like to have as bosses and as, how did you see them as political leaders?

EL: They were both very good political leaders and had very fine political instincts in their own respects. I know that Senator Mitchell has always felt that Senator Muskie was his mentor, and indeed Senator Muskie helped to advance George Mitchell over the years. They were obviously somewhat different in personality, but as I say, their political instincts were about equally as good. You know, they both could read the tea leaves very well and I think they understood how to, how and when to move politically and when it was to their advantage. And, you know, they were not just out to keep the seat warm, they genuinely wanted to help people. And I could see that on a day-to-day basis, that it was genuine.

And they wanted to make their mark on federal legislation. Senator Muskie of course wrote the environmental laws and in order to do that he had to persevere enormously in the face of unyielding opposition by the auto makers and by many large companies which polluted rivers and the air. And he single handedly created the environmental movement by holding hearings around the country, in the late '60s and early '70s, in order to try to develop public support for this notion that we had to clean up the air and water, else we would choke on the pollution. And

so he was really very courageous and single minded in his purpose. And, but his legacy is not only environmental because he is the one who wrote the Budget Act of '76 and he also authored some other laws, the Sunshine Government and the Sunshine having open meetings, and the Sunset Act that legislation should expire periodically so that Congress could see if it was worth having around. And I can't think of all of his other accomplishments, but he did, he did so much. And then he cared a lot about foreign policy when he was Secretary of State. Senator Mitchell followed in his environmental footsteps, to be sure. And to show the patience of the man, he had to work ten years as I recall to reauthorize the Clean Water Act, because he had industry opposition throughout the years that he tried to get reauthorized. And then, after ten years, when he finally got a bill through Congress, I remember seeing Senator Mitchell on television. Of course, I had long since left his staff. I think it was in 1990 and someone interviewed him and had said, "Well, Senator, what are you going to do now that you finally got the Clean Air Act reauthorized?" And he grinned and said, "Get a good night's sleep." And I thought that was vintage George Mitchell, who was characteristically modest about his accomplishments, but who had worked enormously hard in order to get that done. I mean, it was really, they each had a passionate commitment to the environment that caused them to overcome all obstacles and to pursue their goal against all odds. And so you have to give them great credit for that.

MB: What were some of your memorable events or circumstances from your experiences in politics down in Washington?

EL: Well, you know, I've thought about that. And I could probably, you know, with the passage of time, think about a number of instances, but, instances or events. But I think that probably the most memorable events were the elections that each man had. In 1976, after having been defeated for President in 1972, and Maine people saying in the wake of that defeat, "He doesn't care about us, he only wants national office." That's what they said at the time that they hired me, that Senator Muskie won his reelection with over fifty-five percent of the vote I think. I'm sure the figures at the Muskie Archives would tell you what it is, but it was a fairly high percentage.

And then when Senator, oh, I'll just tell you this one anecdote. I remember on election night in 1976 we were in Waterville, which was shall we say Muskie's adopted hometown, because his wife was from Waterville. And we were at the hotel on Main Street. And I was in a large ballroom just hobnobbing with people, and I happened to notice that a lot of the Muskie staff were not there. I didn't know where they were and it didn't, you know, it didn't matter to me. So I was just talking with, you know, rank and file Democrats who had come to celebrate what they felt would be a victory. So all of a sudden, during the course of the evening, someone came to me and said, "Estelle, the senator wants to see you." So I went, I followed that person, and I went in to what was the Senator's suite, and it was full of staff. And he said to me in the presence of all those people, "Well, Estelle, don't you have any work to do?" And I said, "Yes I do, but not until tomorrow morning. I have a meeting in Biddeford with someone at University of New England." And he was just teasing me because he knew how hard I worked, I guess. So I saw that as my cue, his face softened and I saw that as my cue that I should stay in the room and relax with everyone, which it made me feel good.

So then you fast forward a few years and when Senator Mitchell was appointed to the Senate, he had never been in elective office. He had run for governor in 1974 unsuccessfully, and had then been appointed as U.S. attorney I think in '78 and then as federal judge in '79. So he only had been appointed to jobs and the Republicans smelled blood; they felt that he was very vulnerable. So we worked very hard. And David Emery, who was then a Republican congressman, challenged him for the Senate. And I think David felt that because he had, was an incumbent congressman that he could knock over this guy without any difficulty.

Well, he seriously underestimated George Mitchell because George Mitchell is one of the smartest men I have ever met. And George was very smart in his politics, but in addition, David Emery did some gaffes that haunted him throughout the campaign. For example, in something like May of '82, David said that Senator Mitchell had a zero rating from the veterans on veterans' issues. Well, come to find out, the zero rating was based in 1980, in the first part of 1980 when Senator Mitchell was not in the Senate, so he could not have voted, and so he got a zero rating, because he wasn't a member of the Senate. So when the press got a hold of that-, it was an unsubstantiated allegation, when the Maine press got a hold of that they tore David Emery to shreds. And all during the summer they kept bringing it, "Oh, he's the one who accused Mitchell when Mitchell wasn't even in the Senate," on and on. So he did some gaffes that haunted him, and Mitchell just cruised to victory, had sixty-one percent of the vote. It was an incredible, incredible election; I mean, it was a wonderful moment.

MB: After Muskie's term in office, did you remain close to him or his family, or did you become closer?

EL: Well, of course I never really had much contact. And they lived in Washington and I lived here, and while they came up summers in Kennebunkport, I never really spent any time there. I might see them at the Democratic lobster bake in the summer time. But I, after he left the Senate, I engaged in the practice of sending him a birthday card every year. His birthday was March 20th and I would get a card and I would write him a long note telling him what my political observations were at the time. Sometimes he'd answer me, sometimes not. But sometimes he would say, you know, "I always enjoy getting your letters." And that's all I would do. I didn't, again, I didn't want to intrude in his life, but I still considered him very kindly.

And in, let's see, I don't remember the year he was born but probably about four years ago there was an eightieth birthday party for him in Washington and, my friends told me, and believe me, I was going. And I went down and it was a wonderful staff reunion. People from all over the country, people I hadn't seen in years. And it was a wonderful party. I just, I had the best time. And, you know, I think that, you know, Jane, Jane also undoubtedly would read my letters and I think they, you know, felt that I was a friend, although again, I never imposed my presence. So it was wonderful. And then they had another party in Maine for him. I'm trying to remember, I don't know, I don't remember if he could come. Did he come? I don't remember, but I went to the one in Maine, it was in Lewiston. It was a very nice party, it was at the Ramada in Lewiston, and it was really great to do that.

And then two years later he died. He died on March 27th. And I went to his funeral, no question. And I said to Leon Billings, who was staff director of the Environmental Pollution

Subcommittee, I said, no, he said to me, you know, "Aren't we glad?" I said, no, I said, I said to him, I said, "Aren't we glad we did that party two years ago?" And he said, "Absolutely." And it was, you know, a way for us to just show tribute to the man and everything he stood for. And I know that the people who organized that party spent months working on the staff list. What were the names of all the people, and then tracking them down and getting their addresses. It was a huge job that they did. Because from, he was appointed to the Senate in '58, over all those years how many people worked for him? So it was a huge job. And it was a wonderful time. So, I don't know if I've answered your question, I'm afraid I got of on a frolicking detour here.

MB: You did.

EL: Okay.

MB: As far as any stories that you can think of about him, what would some be?
EL: What would stories be? I don't know that I have any really funny stories to tell. You know, I think, I didn't have a whole lot of contact with him, but he was always respectful toward me and I think he respected my work. And I didn't have the kind of interaction with him that the subcommittee and committee staff directors did, for example. But I don't think that meant, I don't think that meant he didn't know my name. And I use that phrase because some people used to say, some people used to argue with me that Senator Muskie never knew certain people. People would work for him and he never knew their name. And so one time someone said to me, "Well, Estelle, he doesn't even know your name." And I said, "Well yes he does." They said, "Well, how do you know he knows your name?" "Because," I said, "he calls me by my name. "He's asks for me by name." And, you know, I never had a doubt he remembered my name from the first day.

Ironically enough, I must have made an impression on him. I had been on the job four days. I'd not met him yet, and I was called in to his office; the administrative assistant came to get me. I was on the phone and he said, "Estelle, the Senator wants to see you right now." So I, you know, I was talking to someone so I had to hurry up and finish this conversation. As it turns out, it was a propitious moment for me to be introduced, because I had just solved a big problem for someone. That, it was about September 20th of '73 and I had received a call or a letter from the Maine Department of Human Services. The fiscal year ended, no there hadn't been the transition yet. It was about September 20th and there was some extra federal money available that had to be given out by September 30 or it would lapse. And the Maine Department of Human Services wanted some of that money so that they could use it in Maine. So I had, when Maynard Toll came to get me to say the Senator wants to meet you, I was just hanging up with the then Department of Health, Education and Welfare, now Health and Human Services, HEW, and they had just agreed to give Maine over a million dollars of that money.

So, here's Maynard yelling in my ear to come meet the Senator. So I finish the call, I hang up the phone, I go meet the Senator. And Maynard, so he takes me into this big office, you know, here we're all cramped like. The Senate office, I don't know if you've ever been there, are very crowded for staff, you would never meet OSHA standards. But the Senator always has this huge office all to himself. So I'm ushered into his chambers, and this big desk and this big imposing man, you know, he's six-foot-four. And here I am twenty-three years old and what do I know?

Nothing compared to him. So Maynard says, you know, "I'd like you to meet Senator Mitchell-, Senator Muskie."

So I sat down and, you know, he asked me where I was from. And then I said, "Well, Senator, do you know what I just did? I was just able to do something." And I told him the story of how I had been called by DHS, how they wanted this extra federal money and that the feds had just called me to tell me that they were going to give an extra million dollars to the state of Maine. Now of course for me a million dollars was an incredible sum, a million dollars to the state. And he and Maynard had smiles that were about inches, they were inches long. Maynard couldn't believe it, he couldn't believe it when I said that. And the Senator said, well, he said, "We were looking for a successor to Elsie Fantz (*?*) and I see that we have found a good one." It was just a really nice way to be introduced.

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

EL: . . . said, well, "We were looking for a successor for Elsie Fantz and I see that we've found one." And he had a broad smile, and I, it was a wonderful moment, I felt that I had scored a hit, you know, just at the right time. And I felt from that moment on he never forgot me and he never forgot my name. So I remember feeling so happy that in my own small way I could make a difference in people's lives. Not because, I mean, I was invoking his name and I never forgot that, and I was never looking for any self-aggrandizement in any of this, but I was doing it in his name because that was my job. But it was wonderful when there were results like that, so.

MB: How did you come to your position here at the law firm?

EL: Well, as I think I mentioned, in 1983, well after Senator Mitchell had been elected to the Senate in his own right, I began to look around for a job. And, as I recall, I, before I had made any contact with this firm, and I knew several of the members here, I received a call from John [P.] Doyle [Jr.], who heads up the health law practice, the health practice group here. And he said to me, if I remember correctly, "Well, Estelle, I understand you're looking for a job." And I hadn't really started in earnest yet, so I wondered how the word had gotten around. And he said, "You know, we wondered if you'd consider our firm." So I interviewed. I don't know if that fall. I interviewed with a few other firms and I had decided that if I practiced law in Maine, I only wanted to practice law in Portland. Because after having been in Washington for so many years, I felt that I needed some sophistication, that the size of the city was important, and I felt that Lewiston was a little small. So that if I didn't get a job in Portland, I would stay in Washington and practice law there. So, ultimately I was offered a job here; I was offered a job by John Doyle who wanted me to work with him in the health practice. There were no practice groups in those days, but he was doing health law. And because I had worked on the Senate Finance Committee with Senator Mitchell and I did Medicare and Medicaid law, he wanted me to do that. And I knew all the hospital and nursing home people in Maine and he felt that, you know, it would be an advantage for the firm. So that's how I came here, in June of 1984.

MB: And how has your career developed here?

EL: Well, I have progressed beyond health care, although I still do health care. And I am in the corporate commercial practice group, and I do primarily transactions, not litigation. And it's interesting how my initial view in law school, that I did not want to do litigation, has proven true with time. Litigation has never particularly had an appeal for me. And what I like about transactions is, you're putting two parties together toward the same goal. With litigation it's always very adversarial and the nature of the work I think is quite a bit different. But I enjoy trying to put people together. When I worked on Capitol Hill, I worked in solving people's problems, so it's not entirely dissimilar. And I have done a variety of things; I've done a little litigation but not much. But I've done corporate, commercial, real estate, I've done work-outs representing lenders, I've represented municipalities. I've also represented developers before municipalities, in front of planning boards and boards of appeal. I do estate trust and probate work, and I still do health law. I sometimes do commercial transactions for hospitals and nursing homes, and I know the area of health care fraud and abuse. And I also represent nursing homes who are cited for deficiencies by the state, you know, to try to get the deficiencies rectified and that sort of thing. So, I've really had a range of responsibilities here, generally in non-litigation.

MB: Did you stay involved with Maine's political scene while you were working here?

EL: In the early years of my practice, I did. I came to Maine in June of '84, as I said. And in 1986 I was elected to the Democratic State Committee where I served for four years. And in 1988 I attended the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta. That was a great, great experience. But since 1980 [sic] I have been less involved. I sometimes go to city and county committee meetings, but I have been less involved because I don't feel I have much time; I really have to work very long hours into the night the year round, and weekends and holidays, so I don't give the time that I used to.

And I will admit that I have seen participation in party politics decline over the years, I think, quite a bit. Today, about one-third of the voters are unenrolled, are not enrolled in either the Republican or the Democratic Parties, whereas when I was, twenty years ago, it was mostly, independents, so-called independents were rare. People were Democrats or Republicans. And today people don't want those labels. And, I think because there's so much partisanship in Washington, people don't want to associate with a political party. It's, you know, something dirty for them, and they tend to stay away. And so the people I would like to see, you know, my peers professionally perhaps, don't really, seldom participate in politics. And I think that's too bad. And I don't know if there's a way to reverse the trend, but I, it's one of my long-standing concerns.

MB: What was the Maine political scene like compared to the scene down in Washington?

EL: When?

MB: When you were active during the '80s up here.

EL: In the late '80s? I think people still participated in politics more than they do today. In 1986, in November of '86 with Senator Mitchell's help, the Democrats regained control of the

Senate. And so that was a big thing, but then they lost it again some years later, I don't remember which year. But Senator Mitchell was always a beacon, if you will. He was a star and a role model in the way that Senator Muskie had been. And Senator Mitchell of course acquired great stature early on because he became majority leader as I recall in '86, having only arrived in the Senate in 1980. And in something like '85 or '84, I think it was right after I left the Senate, they created a job for him in the Senate; they made him Deputy President Pro Temp. The job didn't exist, but they made it for him because people said, "You look at, you watch that guy. He shows great promise." And only two years after I left the Senate as I recall, he was elected majority leader which I thought was a singular achievement.

So, today we have Congressman Allen and Congressman Baldacci, who do a very fine job, both of whom I admire very much. But of course, they don't have the stature or the longevity that Senators Muskie or Mitchell had. And, as I say, I think a greater force is that a lot of people are turned off to politics because of the high degree of partisanship. And I think that the poll results throughout the impeachment proceedings and all of the, this, you know, the Monica Lewinsky revelations since January of 1998, show that most people believed Clinton had done something wrong, but didn't want him impeached. . . . and the results stayed the same throughout that fifteen-month period no matter what came up. Even when he admitted that he had engaged in this inappropriate relationship, his poll numbers went up and they stayed up. And that's because people said, "We know the guy, you know, is flawed personally, and we know he did the wrong thing. We don't condone his behavior, but we don't want him impeached." And the Republicans went ahead and did all of that and people were disgusted.

So I think the attitude of the average citizen is, toward politicians, "A pox on all of your houses, we don't like any of you." And so I think that hurts party politics altogether. And I have a friend in our Augusta office who is a Republican, and sometimes we compare notes, and he has told me how, in the Republican Party, participation has dropped a lot. And what happens, too, is with moderate people not participating in politics, the ones who gravitate are the extremists in both parties. And so what you have is issues that are polarizing and candidates who are polarizing because those who are on the far right or the far left have their small group of supporters, and some of them tend to run. Now, we'll say in the Republican Party, the conservatives don't win in Maine, because if you see Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, they are both moderates. And yesterday's paper showed that while the conservatives in the Republican Party in Maine have complained about their votes against impeachment, they're not in a position to do very much because they don't have the numbers.

But, on a national level, the participation by extremists in party politics does have an effect. Because in other states extremist candidates win elections, and they're the ones who care more about making a statement than about enacting legislation. And that's why you get, you know, we'll say Republicans who want to send legislation to Clinton that they know will veto, he will veto, because they can use it to run against the Democrats in the next election, as opposed to crafting legislation that will benefit the American public, like Clean Air and Clean Water, all right? So with time, the increasing, or shall I say, the decreasing participation of average people in politics, I think, has a negative effect on partisan politics in Washington; that it only gets worse, the gridlock only gets worse, the political blackmail, the name-calling, because you have more and more extremists in office, as opposed to moderates in office who want to get the job

done.

MB: Were these the things, the sorts of things that you would write in your birthday cards to Muskie, these sort of reflections?

EL: Well, not necessarily. I mean, I would comment on the political scene here as I saw it. For example, I remember writing to him that one person to watch in Maine politics was Tom Andrews. He was in the Maine legislature, and I said, "He's very ambitious and he's going to run for Congress some day, you watch." And the senator wrote me back and he said, "Gee, you know, I never noticed Tom Allen-, Tom Andrews." Two years later he was in the Congress. And so, I could tell that Tom Andrews was ambitious enough and had the or- sufficient oratorical skills to gather enough of a following that he would run, that was his intention. And I was not wrong. I mean, I'm not going to tell you my notes to him were long notes. It was a particular greeting card where I'd write, you know, on one half of a side or maybe two sides, I don't know. But I would just tell him what I observed.

MB: How did working at the law form relate to legislative work in Washington?

EL: Not at all.

MB: No?

EL: No. I thought, erroneously, that some of my work in Washington would carry over here, and virtually none of it did. And I came to feel, after maybe six months or a year, that when I started practicing law I was beginning an entirely new career. And I would make this analogy: if you could compare writing, if you could compare working on Capitol Hill to filling several pages on a legal pad, practicing law was like tearing all of those sheets out and putting it in the waste basket and starting with a blank slate. That's what it was like. And I did a little bit of lobbying at the Maine legislature, but even that was totally dissimilar to Capitol Hill because there is very little staff in the Maine legislature. And the degree of sophistication between a state legislature, any state legislature I think, and Congress is night and day, because state legislatures are part-time. They only run for part of the year, they are under-funded, seriously under-funded, and under-staffed. So you're not going to get the level of sophistication that you get on Capitol Hill.

And whenever you talk about, there is public discussion here about the size of the legislature or something, you always have those who talk about the citizen legislature, that, you know, at the dawn of the Republic, that was the ideal. And I just think that for today that has, that notion of a citizen legislature, has very little relevance because the laws today are very, very complicated and you need an institutional memory. And I think that this term limit law has seriously weakened the legislature because you have turned out the institutional memory. And what term limits does is, it empowers the executive branch, who has a permanent memory, and it empowers lobbyists, who have a very good memory, including coincidentally my firm, all right, who with a greater body of knowledge as to given areas of the law, are much more able to influence members of the legislature who have very little knowledge. How do they know that you're wrong if they don't have the facts themselves?

So, I don't believe in term limits at all. But when term limits was proposed through a referendum, there was, it was a one-sided debate, not a two-sided debate, for this reason. Betty Noyce [Elizabeth B. Noyce] of the, whose Libra Foundation is, you know, supporting all of these developments around Portland, is the one who paid the companies who did all of the publicity for this, because she believed in term limits. Well, the people who would naturally have opposed the term limits would have been the members of the legislature, but they were all disabled from speaking against it because it would have been seen as self-serving, "You just want to protect your job." So almost nobody spoke against it publicly. And why would a lobbyist speak against it? It helps a lobbyist do his job, so the lobbyists aren't going to complain. But it weakens the legislature and it empowers the lobbyists and the executive branch.

And I told that once to, I was at a dinner someplace, and there was a man from New Hampshire sitting opposite me. And we were talking about term limits because he favored that. And he thought he knew all the answers and I told him just what I told you. And he went, "Huh, I never thought of that." And I thought, "That's because you're only listening to like minded people who say the same thing, you haven't listened to the other side." Well the other side was never able to articulate its message very well because they would have come mostly from legislators. So. . . .

MB: Tell me a bit about your experiences working for a big law firm and how you feel those experiences are unique as a woman.

EL: Well, when I started practicing law, in 1984, there were few women lawyers. When I came to this firm in 1984, there were twenty-five lawyers, and there were three women at the time, four, let's say four. Two of them left in October of that year and then a few others began to be hired. There were not many experienced women practitioners in the field of law back then. Women were starting, and in my law school class we were about fifty-fifty men and women, so I knew that it would change. But change takes time; change is incremental. Today we're sixty-two lawyers and we're, I haven't counted them, I suppose about a dozen women.

But it is also to be said that there are many women lawyers practicing law in Maine today. In fact, a couple of years ago there was a dinner for women lawyers at which Gloria Steinem2 was the speaker, and it attracted everyone. And we found that in the same room there were five hundred women lawyers from Maine. And we all looked at each other sort of surprised at the numbers, that there were that many of us. And so I think that with the years more and more women have practiced.

And I don't know that the professional or promotional opportunities are always equal for women today, but I do think you have to keep your hand in there and keep plugging away. And I feel on balance that getting a law degree was one of the best decisions of my life, because it has enabled me to become a professional, to think and act like a professional, to earn a very decent living, far

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2 Gloria Steinem (1934-) cofounder, New York Magazine, 1968. Cofounder, MS, 1971. National Women's Political Caucus, 1982. Founding member, Coalition of Labor Union Women. Authored: Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions (1983); Revolution from Within: A Book of Self-Esteem (1992). (www.greatwomen.org/profs/steinem).

above what is the median income in Maine today, and hopefully to assure my future so that when I retire, I don't have to rely on Social Security, which may not be there. And so while I always worked very hard on Capitol Hill, and especially hard in the years I went to school at night, I have found that I continue to work very hard as a lawyer.

But then my observation is that most lawyers work very hard as well. And I think that those who are in law school today may be under the misimpression that you can earn a lot of money without working very hard, and I don't think that's true. I think you really do earn it. And today, lawyers are the favorite whipping boy of society, and I take all comments and jokes with laughter. But I try to do as good a job as I can for my clients because, just as when I started working on Capitol Hill, and in those days there were polls about public cynicism toward government. I have always felt that I can only make my contribution as an individual toward either restoring public confidence in government in the days when I worked on Capitol Hill, or trying to give my clients confidence today in the legal profession, just on a day-to-day basis.

MB: Have I missed anything important from your experience that you want others to know about you or your times?

EL: Not that I can think of.

MB: Thank you very much.

End of Interview