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Interview with George J. Mitchell by Don Nicoll

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Mitchell, George J. (George John), 1933-

Interviewer

Nicoll, Don

Date

August 9, 2002

Place

Northeast Harbor, Maine

ID Number

MOH 359

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Biographical Note

George John Mitchell, Jr. was born in Waterville, Maine on August 20, 1933 to George J. Sr. and Mary Saad Mitchell. His mother was a factory worker, and his father a laborer. He graduated from Waterville High School at the age of sixteen and attended Bowdoin College, graduating in 1954 with a degree in European History. He then served as an officer in the U.S. Army Counter Intelligence Corps until 1956. In 1960 he received a law degree from Georgetown University, and worked for two years in the Justice Department. Mitchell's political career began in 1962, when he joined Edmund Muskie's Senate staff as an executive assistant. In 1965 he returned to Maine to practice law. He was the state chairman of the Maine Democratic Party from 1966 to 1968, and was National Committeeman from 1969 to 1977. He was staff to Senator Muskie's 1968 vice-presidential and 1972 presidential campaign bids. In 1974, he made an unsuccessful run for Governor in Maine, losing to James Longley. Mitchell served as U.S. Attorney in Maine from 1977 to 1979 before being appointed to fill the remainder of the Senate term vacated by Ed Muskie's appointment to Secretary of State. He went on to win the 1982 and 1988 elections for Senate. He was chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee in 1984, and served as Senate Majority Leader until retirement in 1994. In that year, Mitchell was offered a seat on the Supreme Court by Bill Clinton. However, he declined. Since that time Mitchell has been active in international affairs, most notably for his role in the Northern Ireland Peace Accords. He has also been involved in Israeli peace negotiations, served as Chairman of

the Walt Disney Company and has been active in the investigation of past steroid use of major league baseball players.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Mitchell's role as a young staffer in Senator Muskie's office; impressions of Muskie; Dick Dubord and Dick McMahon; close political friends of Edmund Muskie; the Baldacci family; speech writing; 1964 Senate campaign; getting a job out of law school; working at Jensen & Baird; 1966 campaigns of Ken Curtis and Elmer Violette; Muskie's 1968 vice presidential campaign; relationship between Ed Muskie and Hubert Humphrey; and being elected to the Democratic National Committee.

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Transcript

Don Nicoll: It is Friday, the 9th day of August in the year 2002. We are in Northeast Harbor at the summer home of Senator George Mitchell, and he is being interviewed by Don Nicoll. It's about 9:20 in the morning. Welcome back to our interviews.

George Mitchell: Thank you. Thank you, Don.

DN: When you and I finished our last discussion, you were talking about your arrival in Senator Muskie's office as a young staffer. What was your role then in the office when you started work?

GM: The Senate offices then were much smaller than they are now, as you will recall better than I, Don. My recollection is that there were fewer than twenty people on the staff, and you were the administrative assistant, I was executive assistant. There were perhaps one or two other persons at that level, and then a number of secretarial and case work assistants. So the work was much more diffuse in the sense that people did more different things. And I recall that I handled a variety of assignments which you gave to me. They involved driving Senator Muskie around Maine when he returned to Maine, and traveling through the State visiting various community things. Back then, senators of the party that controlled the White House also named, appointed postmasters, that's what was called the spoils system as opposed to now where it's purely civil service. And you will recall, you and I spent a lot of time together going over those lists of applicants to the Post Office. And with respect to what Senator Muskie once said, that for every appointment he made, he made one friend and ten enemies.

DN: Or sometimes ten enemies and one ingrate.

GM: I did some research on legislation, some speech writing, just a wide range of things. There's a, from my own service in the Senate later, I saw how the demands that were time consuming became more intense, the time consumption greater and the staffs larger, and a much higher degree of specialization which didn't exist back in the early sixties when I worked with Senator Muskie's office.

DN: Do you recall the areas that you tended to focus on as a staff member?

GM: I don't recall any particular legislative area. I think there were only a handful of us who worked on legislation.

DN: I recall particularly your work on economic development, area redevelopment legislation and associated issues in Maine.

GM: Yes, what I think now they call project work, which is trying to encourage economic development in the State through a combination of what legislation is available and using the Senator and his resources and prestige to try to attract business to the State. And you're correct, there was at the time, I think it was probably part of the Kennedy administration program that became effective in 1960, although I don't recall that specifically, to create, to enact legislation called The Area Redevelopment Administration, correct, ARA, which attempted to encourage economic development in areas of high unemployment around the country. And Maine had several such areas. And you and I and I think others on Senator Muskie's staff worked in the area of getting the legislation enacted and then getting the ARA to support, financially and through technical assistance, businesses that wanted to locate in Maine, or expand in Maine, those businesses which already existed here.

DN: I was trying to recall, did the airport closings issues arise during your time on the staff, or was that later?

GM: Well, Dow Air Force Base closed when, before I joined Senator Muskie's staff. I think that was in the mid to late fifties, so, I joined the Senator's staff, as you recall, in 1960, I'm sorry, 1962 and stayed until 1965. So I don't think there were any major airport closings when I was there. Later, when I was in the Senator myself, Limestone Air Force Base closed. I recall that much more clearly since it occurred more recently.

DN: You must have had lots of opportunities to meet and work with people in the state.

GM: I did, yes, it was a great chance for me to meet people. And from my perspective more importantly, to observe Senator Muskie performing his duties. Just about everything I've learned about public service I learned from him through that experience, then in later years. We used to travel around the state, I drove him quite a bit, and I have a recollection that he frequently, with me, he stayed in private homes. Many times in small motels in rural parts of Maine, we shared a room. It's kind of unthinkable now, but there would be twin beds in the room and Senator Muskie and I would share a room. And he talked a lot to me, and I listened, and I observed him going about the task of being a senator.

And, of course, I was in awe of him at the time; really still am. I've said many times I think he was the greatest public figure in Maine's history, and as you know, he was extremely impressive, physically imposing at six feet four and a lanky frame, with a powerful intellect. He could be tough on staff at times, as you know, very demanding, but it brought out what I think is the best in everyone around him. So for me to see him interacting with constituents, to see how he dealt

with problems, how he handled them and how he could be very tough in negotiating, very stubborn at times but also always had a good sense of the larger picture, what his real objectives were, was instructive. Now, at the time of course, I had absolutely no thought, no conception that I might ever serve in the Senate myself. So what I was learning, I didn't realize at the time, would be so useful to me in later life.

DN: What were some of the things that he demonstrated in interacting with constituents that stuck with you over the years?

GM: Well, first and most important, Senator Muskie didn't rely on slogans or bumper stickers. He had a rather complete grasp of issues, and he dealt with the constituents' questions, claims, demands, requests in a very serious way. He didn't treat people casually or offhandedly, and he didn't respond in bumper sticker quotes. Now, there's a downside to that, and he's frequently criticized for going on too long about issues. Someone once said he saw all seven sides of every issue.

But I think that the vast majority of his constituents were impressed with the fact that he was interested enough in them to take the time to explain and discuss in a serious and thoughtful way, never condescending. Whatever the level or social status of the person with whom he was discussing, Senator Muskie was never condescending. He always, I think because of his own background, he came from, as you know, a rather poor family background, he always treated people, made them have a sense of feeling equal and important. And that was a lesson that always stuck with me, and I always found him to be a very impressive man.

Of course, in the end, as you know, intelligence is very important and it tends to offset and it conceals any other defects that you might have. The converse of it was Senator Muskie was on occasion short-tempered; he might get angry or upset. Not just with staff, not just you and me, but sometimes with people, but it was really more than outweighed and offset by his vast and superior intelligence and his capacity for understanding, deal with issues, and reducing complex issues to understandable terms. Not that he oversimplified them, but that he was able to explain them in plain English and understandable terms, in a way that I think appealed to his constituents, and that I found later in life, at first not consciously, but later when I was in the Senate I subconsciously tried to emulate that. I often thought to myself when I was in the Senate, when I was confronted with a situation: How would Senator Muskie have handled this? What would he have said and done? Am I doing it the right way? Is this the right way to handle this person or this issue?

DN: In your travels in Maine with him, and on work for the Senate office, you met a number of people including folks who were closely associated with him, and it would be helpful to have your recollections of a couple, particularly, you may have more, but Dick McMahon and Dick Dubord.

GM: Senator Muskie, like all of us, had close friends, and others who you might term acquaintances, less close. Among his closest were two friends from his Waterville days. He'd come to Waterville after the Second World War, married Jane who was from Waterville, and began a law practice in Waterville, ran for mayor of Waterville, which I think was his only

election defeat, then was elected to the legislature from Waterville. And in the course of that, he became quite friendly with Dick McMahon, who I think by profession was an accountant, and Dick Dubord who was a very prominent lawyer in Waterville from a very prominent family. I think Dick Dubord's father [F. Harold Dubord] was a lawyer and a judge, and Dick himself became the Attorney General of Maine, and his sons to this day still practice law in Waterville. They became quite friendly.

They were contrasts in personality; Dick McMahon was a fun loving, outgoing, joke cracking Irish American; Dick Dubord was of French extraction, was very sophisticated, a very smart, able lawyer. Also, though, with a great sense of humor, but of a different style, sort of a great raconteur and storyteller. And they were quite friendly with Senator Muskie. They were somewhat older than I was, and so I never regarded myself as an equal to them. I think they would be equals of Senator Muskie. They were very close to him, Dick McMahon especially, was very close to Senator Muskie, worked with him for a long time. And I know that Senator Muskie always was very relaxed, I think you could say totally at ease in their presence, particularly Dick McMahon.

I can recall several occasions when, as you recall, Don, during the time that I was on Senator Muskie's staff, he owned a summer cottage on China Lake, which is just a few miles outside of Waterville, between Waterville and Augusta. And Senator Muskie liked to go there when we were traveling around Maine. And so many evenings he and I would go there and meet friends, usually Dick McMahon, less often but still frequently Dick Dubord and others, and they would cook a meal and talk and joke. And I was kind of like a kid then, a bystander who was what we would now call a "go-for", go get this and go get that. But it was very interesting and instructive to me, and I formed a personal friendship with both Dick McMahon and Dick Dubord which survived until their deaths.

But they were very good to Senator Muskie, they were good for him. He relaxed with them. They knew him well enough to be candid in their advice to him, they weren't afraid of him or in awe of him and they spoke quite frankly to him, really as equals which I think they all felt they were although, of course, they were aware of Senator Muskie's stature. And the time I was there, this is now 1962 to 1965, he was still in his first term in the Senate, but even then was recognized as a rising national figure.

DN: Were there others in addition to the two Dicks who were much in evidence?

GM: There were. The postmaster of Ellsworth was a man named Roland Guite, who you will recall, the Senator was very friendly with him. He'd known him, of course long before, and I think Roland became postmaster because of Senator Muskie. In Brewer, there was Madeleine Kiah, who you will recall also became, she became postmistress through Senator Muskie. I remember particularly one day we were traveling, it was I think in 1964 and we were in Brewer, and Madeleine, who was a wonderful, warm person but very excitable, she was excited when Senator Muskie came to visit. And one day President Johnson called Senator Muskie while he was visiting Madeleine, so she was really excited that the president was on her phone calling the Senator who was in her home. She was a devoted supporter of the Senator, really a devoted Democrat and a really very nice person.

Julian Davis lived in Machias, and Julian was a wonderful man, a successful businessman in a small community, very active and I would say very outspoken person. Julian had a strong opinion on about everything and he was not shy about conveying his opinion to Senator Muskie. Particularly with Julian, I became quite friendly personally, and so later when I entered the Senate I used to make the same circuit and stop and Julian's home. And as you recall, his daughter Julia at that time, or later, married a man named Mark Nault who was just a, he was a wonderful guy, a wonderful guy, Mark died unfortunately in his early years. But Julian's house was a favorite stop for Senator Muskie in Washington County. And what he did was to rely upon these friends for what you and I would think of as intelligence or information about local issues, what people are thinking, what problems he might have, what he should address in terms of issues, and who he should go and see. So those were among the others.

In Presque Isle, a man named Joe Freeman, who was a very successful businessman, (*sounds like: a french-american who did*) extremely well, he had a Pepsi Cola distributorship. His son Greg still has that business and followed his father's footsteps (*unintelligible phrase*). But Joe was quite friendly with Senator Muskie, performed the same kind of, I'd call it intelligence services.

In Houlton, a man named George McGillicuddy, who later became a postmaster, wonderful guy. In fact, to show you what a small world it is, right up beyond that row of trees, pointing now just about a hundred yards away, is a beautiful home owned by a guy named Clem McGillicuddy, he's George's nephew. Left Houlton, did very well (*unintelligible phrase*) the most beautiful (*unintelligible phrase*). There were plenty of others, those are the ones that come immediately to mind.

DN: Among his friends and intelligence gatherers were one of the folks who worked with him in the OPS, or for him in the OPS, including Perry Furbush.

GM: Yes, Perry Furbush and Milt Wheeler from Portland would fall in that category. I did not get to know Perry Furbush very well. It just happened that I recall quite clearly on a couple of trips Perry was away or not available and so I missed him. I did meet him on a few occasions, but not with the frequency that I saw some of those I just mentioned. Milt Wheeler was a lawyer from Portland who was a good friend of Senator Muskie's and performed much of the same service. I got to know Milt very well in later life. His wife Milly ran for and was elected to the Maine legislature where she served several terms, and I just remember campaigning with her on several occasions. And Milt lived to be I think in his late eighties, perhaps into his nineties, retired to Florida in later life and was very successful and good, another, he was Muskie's kind of guy, he liked to tell stories and sit around and gab and talk a combination of issues, personalities, gossip, that sort of thing. And Senator Muskie enjoyed doing that at the end of a long day campaigning in Maine.

DN: You were talking before we started this interview about some of the campaign appearances you were making this summer, including for John Baldacci. And the Baldacci family was quite prominent in Bangor, and not always on easy terms with Senator Muskie. I don't know whether you had any encounters with them or not.

GM: Just a few occasions, but I never was involved in or aware of what the differences were. I was aware that they existed, but to this day I don't know what the background or reasoning was. There were two Baldacci brothers, John, the current candidate for governor, who will hopefully be elected governor in November. His father was Bob Baldacci, very politically active in Bangor, elected the Bangor City Council, and then Bob's brother Vasco who with Bob ran a succession of family restaurants in the Bangor area. Vasco himself was very active politically. As you know I'm related to the Baldaccis. Bob Baldacci married a woman named Mary [Rosemary] Karam [Baldacci], who's mother Rose [Saad] Karam and my mother [Mary Saad Mitchell] were sisters who emigrated from Lebanon to the United States in the 1920s. And I was aware that for some periods of time, I think it was somewhat later, that the relationship between them and Senator Muskie was strained, but I honestly don't know. I still to this day don't know what it was, or what the problem was.

DN: It was mostly local Bangor difficulties within the community that spilled over on Senator Muskie. He was seldom the center of the problem, and neither was Bob who was the more active of the brothers in the Party, but it's a good illustration of what can happen in a community where there are lots of tensions, and how he got caught in the middle.

GM: Yeah, all politics is local. The Baldaccis have been a terrific political family and very staunch Democrats. John himself served in the State senate for several years, then in the Congress. I was in Bangor just last night and Peter was there, he's the county commissioner, Joe is a member of the City Council, so they've been tremendous contributors to the community. And as I said, I repeat, John looks like he has a very good chance of being elected governor, and I think would do a very good job. So, for me it's kind of heartwarming to see them doing so well and making a good bit of political progress in serving the state so well.

DN: During this period, you were working on legislation, you were also driving with the Senator with all of the attendant demands that that made. You were also doing some speech writing. What was it like to write speeches for him?

GM: Oh boy, that was a real test. I've said often, Senator Muskie is the most intelligent person I've ever met, in or out of politics, and he really was. He had a penetrating insight and (*unintelligible phrase*) people to use a cliché, a mind like a steel trap. And as you know, because you went through this for more years and more often than I did, he grilled you on everything. You couldn't write a careless sentence in a speech, you had to be sure of every fact, be absolutely positive that it was right.

I, to this day, recall the very first speech I wrote for him, because it was such an indelible experience. Senator Muskie gave a speech to the Sons of Italy organization in Rumford, his home town, and he was aware that he would know every person in the audience because he grew up there, and he wanted this to be just perfect. So I put in what we might now consider a disproportionate amount of time preparing for this speech. I must have read a half dozen books and got the Library of Congress to do research. I later joked to Italian Americans, who are friends of mine, that I knew ten times more about Italian-American history than they did, which I really did. Well, I was very nervous, I did a lot of work on it. But, of course, the Senator

immediately found every flaw that there was in it and pointed it out to me in what I might call rather clear, direct terms. And so I went back and labored at it. But it's what I said earlier, he brought out the best in you, and in the end he was quite pleased with his speech and it went over pretty well.

But what he did was, and I think this, I'm so much in awe of him and I think so highly of him that we tend to emphasize only the good side and not the down sides. He was human, and he had his failings like everybody else, and that was on evidence that night. He had a prepared text, which he gave, and when he finished the crowd was enraptured, they thought it was great, but Senator Muskie I think had the feeling he hadn't talked quite long enough so he kind of repeated the speech extemporaneously, no longer paying attention but kind of repeating some of the parts that most appealed to him, and he went on really way much too long and by then the crowd, the audience was kind of shifting uneasily.

And I've told this story a few times, and it really is a true story. I remember we went from Rumford to Newport and the Senator met Perry Furbush the next day, and I can't recall the occasion but he gave a, he did a day of traveling around and he spoke in Newport that evening. Then we went from Newport, a short trip to Bangor where he spent a day, and then we went to Calais. And he kind of repeated the same pattern; he gave a terrific speech that roused and moved the audience, and then he kind of negated part of the effect of it by repeating it and going on a little too long. And we were driving back from Calais to Bangor, very late at night, after the Calais appearance. This was eleven or twelve o'clock at night along the airline route, which you know, Don, even now is relatively deserted. At that time, this is thirty years ago, forty years ago, there were very few buildings or establishments; it's a long drive through the woods.

DN: And a great debate as to whether it was called the airline because it went straight through the woods, or because you were seldom on the ground.

GM: Yeah, to this day I don't know the reason, but that's what, but anyway it's Route 9 between Brewer and Calais because I've driven it often, then and since.

But it was kind of quiet, it was raining, and the Senator said to me, he said, "Well, what did you think about my speeches on this trip?" And I was driving, and I really debated whether to say, tell him the truth or not, because I was, I really was in awe of him, you might say frightened of him. Well, I finally screwed up my courage and I said, "Well, you know, I think your speeches were terrific and people really liked them," I said, "but they went on a little too long." I said, "A couple of times I noticed you had a tendency to just sort of repeat the speech, although in condensed form, picking, giving the comprehensive speech first and repeating the highlights a couple of times. And I think by the end of it people were getting a little restless in the audience."

There's a very long silence as we drive down the airline, the sound of the windshield wipers, thump-thump-thump. Now I'm thinking, 'have I lost my job? Is he going to throw me out of the car? What's he going to say?' Then finally after, it really was several minutes, he said to me, "Well," he said, "someday I think you might be in public office." And he said, "When you do, you'll find that there's nothing in the world quite like the sound of your own voice." And there was another pause, and then he started laughing. And many years later, when I went on and on

and I repeated a speech two or three times and I could sense the audience shifting uneasily, those, those words from Senator Muskie came into my mind, there really isn't anything quite like the sound of your own voice.

DN: Did he get criticism of the speeches from Dick and Dick?

GM: They told him the same thing, basically. Yes, you went on too long, you covered too much of it. And Senator Muskie was so smart and he knew so much that he tended to try to convey too much of it in each address to the audience. And as you know, he later heard that from a lot of sources, and like everything else he adapted to it. He, when the occasion demanded he could be precise and concise, and limit himself both in time and subject matter.

DN: Now, you were there as you said, starting in '62, and had done work with him on political trips as well as constituent service trips through that period. Then came the campaign of '64 and you were deeply involved in that reelection campaign. How did it feel, as someone who hadn't been really attuned to politics, to suddenly be involved in a Senate reelection campaign, plus the presidential campaign of '64?

GM: It was very exciting. Senator Muskie was a brilliant campaigner, and there was never really any doubt about his reelection, although he had a formidable opponent, a member of the House of Representatives, Cliff McIntire who was from Aroostook County, who had a very engaging folksy manner, and who was quite popular in his home area of Aroostook County. But in the debates, Senator Muskie (*unintelligible word*), I want to tell a story about that that stands out in my mind in just a moment, and couple of stories. But it was very exciting.

As you recall, Don, President Johnson visited Maine a couple times during that campaign. Those were very exciting visits. It was obvious that, although Senator Muskie was just completing his first term, he was held in very high esteem by the President, by everybody in the administration, and by other members of the Senate. So for me, I had been involved at Senator Muskie's request, you may recall this, in the 1962 campaign, there was a gubernatorial campaign in Maine. Dick Dubord had run in the primary, and was defeated by Maynard Dolloff who was the president of the Maine Grange, who was a wonderful guy, a very nice man, who just narrowly lost in the general election. And you said to me that, I don't know if you remember this, that the Senator wanted me to come up and help out in Maine. And so I came up to Maine for part of that campaign and worked, helping the gubernatorial race and the house races, mostly by driving Senator Muskie around and helping, because he participated in the campaign actively. So most of my work was supporting him in his efforts in the campaign.

But '64 was the first real campaign in which I was directly involved with a candidate, and it was extremely exciting. Now, I have a very clear recollection of something that shows the Senator's stubbornness and how skillful he was politically, and it involved you. And I think you remember this, although maybe not all of it. He had a series of debates with Cliff McIntire, and during the campaign a textile mill in Maine had closed, the Worumbo Mill. You remember that, it's an unusual word, W-O-R-U-M-B-O. Senator Muskie had voted on legislation in the Senate called the Peril Point legislation, [*Definition: A hypothetical limit beyond which a reduction in tariff protection would cause serious injury to a domestic industry. U.S. legislation in 1949 that*

extended the Trade Agreements Act of 1934 required the Tariff Commission to establish such "peril points" for U.S. industries. This requirement, which was a constraint on U.S. negotiating positions in early GATT Rounds, was eliminated by the Trade Expansion Act of 1962.] which had to do with adverse effects of trade and imports. And Representative McIntire made the charge that this mill had closed as a consequence of the enactment of this legislation which Senator Muskie had voted for.

And the Senator was very angry about that, because there really wasn't a direct cause and effect, but particularly by modern standards it was a rather mild charge, you wouldn't think of it as being unfair in any way, but it really made Senator Muskie mad. So he insisted that the subject of one of the debates was, "Did the enactment of the Peril Point legislation cause the closing of the Worumbo Mill?" Well, when you think about it, it was an unusually narrow subject to have for a full fledged televised debate in a Senate campaign. I was driving with Senator Muskie, you were meeting with Representative McIntire's representatives -

DN: Yes, one of whom was a later law partner of the other, Mert Henry.

GM: Mert Henry, well, I didn't know that at the time. And I remember we were driving along the coast and Senator Muskie was making a series of appearances in Camden, Rockland, Waldoboro, Bath. And several times during the day we'd stop and I would call you up and relay instructions from the Senator, and you would say to me, "Well that's ridiculous, I can't say that." And I'd say, "Don, I'm inclined to agree with you but Senator Muskie insists on it." And I said to him, "Senator, Don says, and I agree, you can't ask someone in the Senate campaign to have a full debate on this subject." "Oh yes," he said, he was, he said it more emphatically than that, he said, "you tell Don that's what I want and that's the position he's going to take." And by gosh, that was the subject of the debate. His view prevailed, to my amazement and I think to yours. You were in the uncomfortable position at the table of advancing this subject.

DN: Well, there was the other part of this which was even more difficult than narrowing the subject. We would come to an agreement based on his instructions, and I'd report that back to him, and by then he'd moved to another point and he insisted that I go back and tell him that wasn't good enough.

GM: But you know, it worked, because neither Representative McIntire nor anyone else could make the specific causal connection between the legislation and the closing of the mill. I mean it just wasn't there, and so Senator Muskie was able to focus on that in a way that he prevailed in the debate.

But I also recall another instance of his temper. They had agreed to a certain number of debates, I don't remember whether it was two or three. And I was with the Senator at the debate, I drove him to them and we went through what then passed for preparation. I mean, he knew so much more than I did, or anybody else around, that we weren't able to really prepare him very much, just suggest questions that might be asked. And although they had agreed to a specific number of debates, that's what you had negotiated, at the very end of the last debate, and I think it was in Poland Spring, Representative McIntire suddenly, live on air, proposed more debates. And again, it really was not an unreasonable thing to do, particularly since he was behind in the

campaign and felt that more debates would give him some chance to come back.

And Senator Muskie got very angry, as you recall, right on the air, and accused Representative McIntire of violating their agreement. The agreement was there was a certain number of debates and Senator Muskie regarded a proposal to change that number, particularly made in those circumstances, to be a violation of the agreement, and he really was angry. Now, that occurred in about the last, I can't remember for sure, but minute or two of the debate, right at the very end. But then, when they walked out, I was with Senator Muskie and we got in the car. And he fussed and fumed and kind of yelled at me and at the passing cars and everything else, oh boy, he regarded it as this inappropriate suggestion.

But of course, he was brilliant in the debates, he was a born debater and he honed his skills by debating in college, and he was very effective. He had all the elements for a good debater, a complete mastery of the details of the issues, and a great facility with language, good rhetorical skills. And in those debates contexts was one example of how he could be concise and precise when he needed to be. You couldn't talk for fifty-five minutes on a subject giving all seven sides of the debate, you had to be precise and to the point, and he was, and I thought very skillful and successful. But it was, seeing you here reminded me of that incident.

It's funny how you can remember things from forty years ago. I remember stopping, I stopped in Camden and called you, I stopped, we didn't have cell phones in those days, I stopped in Rockland and called you, I stopped in Waldoboro, I stopped in Bath, probably a half a dozen calls during the day. But in the end he got his way and he prevailed in the debate and in the election.

DN: I remember those vividly. One of the, one of the observations I had during the period, and I wanted to check it with you, was that when he was way ahead of his opponent, as he was in that campaign, he was much less comfortable with campaigning than when it was a close contest. He almost seemed to get more irritable and uneasy about the campaign. Of all the campaigns that I was in with him, except for the difficulties of the '72 campaign, that was the one where he was least happy.

GM: The '64 campaign.

DN: Sixty-four.

GM: Well, I don't, I'm not able to assess that because that was my first campaign with him, and the only campaign I really spent full time with him until '72. My sense was that he was very good with people when he was in a campaign setting, that he was able to limit whatever outbursts of temper he had to very narrow circumstances, staff people and so forth, and that, although he was a personally shy person, he didn't exhibit that in group discussions or meetings, meetings with constituents. And as I said at the beginning of these, my remarks in this interview, he made people feel that he was not being condescending to them, that he treated them respectfully, and talked to them. And as I said, people were really (*unintelligible phrase*) that he would take five to seven minutes to explain his position on an issue in a casual conversation, four people in a variety store, in a small crossroads rural town in Maine. That if they asked him a

question, he didn't just brush it off, he gave them a thoughtful answer, statement of his position on it. So I guess I don't recall the differences in the campaign because I didn't spend that many with him, as many as you did.

DN: Well, most of the unhappiness was reflected in his relationship with the staff during the campaign, from moods. Well, '64 marked the major campaign, and in '65 you decided to return to Maine and fulfill a commitment I guess you'd made to the law firm, when you came to work for Senator Muskie.

GM: Yes, it's an interesting story of what a great role chance plays in life. I graduated from law school in 1960, at Georgetown, I had no money so I'd worked full time and gone in what was called the evening sessions, night law school we'd call it. There was still a stigma in those days with going to law school at night, and I remember my goal in life was to return to Maine and practice law. I really had had no prior exposure to or interest in politics. And I wrote to fifteen Maine law firms, I just went to a law directory, Martindale Hubble it's called, and picked out the fifteen firms I thought made the most sense. Thirteen didn't answer, only two answered. I got two interviews and no job offers.

Because I'd done really well in law school, out of the clear blue sky I got a letter from the Department of Justice saying that I qualified under a program that they called the Honors Graduate Program. And the Department of Justice offered me a job which I accepted, since it was the only job offer I received, and that was in 1960. And then two years later you called. I had never met you or Senator Muskie, and you contacted me and I ended up on Senator Muskie's staff. But I told both the Senator and you that my goal was to get back to Maine and practice law and I would stay through the next election, but I wanted to be free then.

Well, two years of trying to get a job, I couldn't, I didn't have an offer. One week after I joined Senator Muskie's staff, in the door walked Professor Albert Abrahamson from Bowdoin College, a professor of economics who happened to be a good friend of Senator Muskie, and who knew me from my undergraduate days at Bowdoin. And I recall him walking into the office and saying to me, "What are you doing here?" And I said, "Well, I work here." And he said, "For how long?" And I said, "Just one week." And we started talking, he was quite friendly. And you know better than I his relationship with Senator Muskie, but my impression was he had a good relation with Senator Muskie. And I explained to him that my goal was to get back to Maine and practice law. And he said, "You know, I have friends in a law firm in Portland," he was friends with Mert Henry and others. He said, "I think they may be looking for someone and so I'll tell them about it." And a week later I got a call from Ken Baird, who was in the law firm of Jensen & Baird, later Jensen, Baird, Gardner & Henry. And Ken came down to Washington and met with me. And he said, "Well, we'd like to offer you a job." I said, "Well, I've only been on Senator Muskie's staff for a few weeks and I told him I would stay through the next election, so I can't leave"

End of Side A
Side B

DN: We are now on Side B of the August 9, 2002 interview with Senator Mitchell at Northeast

Harbor.

GM: So, I've often thought of how fortuitous it was that I joined Senator Muskie's staff, because had I not I probably would still be a career Justice Department lawyer, I'd probably just retired as a career Justice Department lawyer in Washington. But it enabled me both to meet Senator Muskie and gain exposure to the life of politics and government, and also to fulfill what then was my ambition, which was to come back to Maine and practice law. By the time I came back to Maine, obviously I was very much interested in politics through my association with you and Senator Muskie, and so I continued in that once I came back.

DN: Now, when you came to Jensen & Baird, what was the nature of the practice that you did?

GM: It was a very general practice. I was the sixth lawyer in the firm, there were four partners and two associates, I was the second of the associates. I did everything. Back in those days, lawyers searched titles in the registry of deeds, and I went to the registry and learned how to search titles, did that, that was a, both Ken Baird and Ray Jensen, the senior partners, each represented a savings and loan association, so there was a fair amount of that work. I did deal with some trusts and commercial disputes. Gradually I became involved in trying cases, and increasingly that became more and more a part of my practice, so that toward the end I did primarily trial work. That happened over a period; I was there twelve years and that happened over a period of those years.

DN: Now, was it your trial work that led you to serve in the county attorney's office?

GM: It was a desire for more trial experience. I joined Jensen & Baird in the spring of 1965, and by 1970 had begun doing some trial work but not a great deal, and wanted to broaden my experience. Joe Brennan, later governor and congressman, and really a wonderful friend to me, and in fact later appointed me to the Senate to complete Senator Muskie's term, Joe was elected County Attorney for Cumberland county. And I'd known Joe for some time and he asked me whether I would become an assistant county attorney.

I didn't want to leave the firm, and so we worked out an arrangement where I spent a couple of days a week as an assistant county attorney and that income was paid to the firm to reimburse them for my absence. And basically, I tried cases two days a week for about ten months. This was in '71, he was elected in 1970 and took office in '71, until October of 1971 by which time Senator Muskie was running for president. And I left Jensen & Baird and the county attorney's office to go to Washington and become involved with you and Senator Muskie in that campaign.

So for ten months, I tried cases two or three days a week, and I didn't really do anything else. It was a good arrangement for me because I didn't have to get involved in any administration. Now, it was difficult to do because I didn't have (*unintelligible phrase*) full time to prepare cases, but I can remember going into the office five o'clock in the morning, spending four or five hours preparing, immersing myself in a case, interviewing witnesses, I remember witnesses used to get upset when I'd ask them to meet me at six o'clock in the morning, seven o'clock in the morning. But it was, for me it was a great experience and a wonderful opportunity, and I was always grateful to Joe, not just for asking me to do it in the first place, but being accommodating enough

to make an arrangement that I could continue with Jensen & Baird.

DN: Now, during that period, you carried over some of your experience in work you'd done with the Senator into some of your law practice, that is commercial practice. For example, in the sugar beet industry.

GM: Oh yes, part of the ARA development work we'd done was to try to bring the sugar beet industry to Aroostook county to supplement the potato crop, which then was considered to be a boom or bust, they either did very well or not well at all. And after I left the Senator's office I was approached by the developer of the sugar beet plant, Fred Vahlsing, Jr., and asked if I would be involved in representing him, which I did for a few years and then left. Freddy was an unusual guy -

DN: I was going to say, that must have been an adventure.

GM: It was more than an adventure, it was very exciting. I did it for a few years, but it became increasingly difficult. For one thing, he made demands without any prior notice. He'd call you up at nine o'clock at night and ask you to be someplace at ten the next morning, as though you had nothing else to do in your life, and would be very unhappy if I'd say, "Well I can't because I've got a trial starting tomorrow morning. Give me a little more notice." And so, he was a very interesting guy, well meaning in many respects. Unfortunately, the project ended in failure and he died tragically at an early age. But it was again an interesting experience to work with him.

It was through him [Fred Vahlsing, Jr.] that I first met Armand Hammer, remember the prominent American businessman? Dr. Hammer, as he was called, "Doc," everybody called him who knew him. I'm not sure what his relationship was; I think he may have probably been an investor in some of Freddy's projects, or vice versa, and he visited on a couple of occasions that I was there and we chatted with him. And of course Dr. Hammer was quite a fan of Senator Muskie, a friend with Senator Muskie, and later became involved with Senator Muskie through the donation of the Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt Homestead in Campobello to the national park, the international park that exists there.

DN: And you worked on the legislation creating the park.

GM: I did, yes, and then later had the pleasure of serving as a member of the commission, which I did for a couple of years and then left because I couldn't make many of the meetings, it was just difficult for me to do that because of the demands on my time. But it was wonderful, I enjoyed it, and one of the nicest things I ever had the pleasure of doing was to, asked to read words that had been spoken by Senator Muskie for the video which is played for visitors to the national park, in that international park. As you come in, there's a visitor's center, and there's a video of Franklin Roosevelt, and it includes words spoken by Senator Muskie about Franklin Roosevelt. The fellow who made the video was (*name sounds like: Sid Aronson*), as you know, Don, later through Senator Muskie and through you, asked me if I would record those words, and so it was truly a thrill for me to actually say words that had been spoken by the Senator.

DN: They weren't words you wrote, were they?

GM: No, no they weren't. No, they were his I think, all the way.

DN: Now, during the period of your law practice, we had the 1966 campaign in Maine with Ken Curtis running for governor, and Elmer Violette running for the Senate. Were you involved in those campaigns at all?

GM: I was very deeply involved in those campaigns. I was elected chairman of the Maine Democratic Party in 1966, I served one two-year term, I think the election was in the spring because the State conventions were generally held in May, so it would have been around then that I was elected. It was a difficult time, but I enjoyed it a lot, and I was very active in Ken Curtis's campaign. Ken Curtis was a really natural politician, just a wonderful, warm, generous, open personality that people tended to like right away. And, he ran against an incumbent; he had a very difficult race, won the election, and I was very deeply involved in the campaign in every respect as State chairman. And also that of then State Senator Elmer Violette, who ran for the U.S. Senate against Margaret Chase Smith. That was a tough race. Margaret Chase Smith was a legendary figure, very popular. Elmer was one of the nicest, most able persons I've ever met, but she was a tough candidate and she won quite handily. But it was good to get to know Elmer and his whole family. We remained good friends until his death (*unintelligible phrase*).

DN: That was the campaign also when Peter Kyros, Sr. won the first district race.

GM: I think he'd been elected before that.

DN: Was he elected, oh, he was elected in '64, that's right, yeah.

GM: That was his second.

DN: Who was the third district candidate? Was it Dave Roberts that year?

GM: I can't recall. No, there was no third district then, because the redistricting went from three to two I think in 1960 or '62.

DN: As a result of the '60 census, that's right.

GM: I can't recall.

DN: And then came '68 and you were back working for Senator Muskie on his vice presidential campaign.

GM: Yes, I remember I went to Chicago to the convention. I was, by then I'd been elected National Committeeman, I'd completed my term as State Chairman in the spring of that year. There was some controversy, as you recall. The '66 second district candidate was Bill Hathaway, who later went on to serve in the Senate. And there was, Robert Kennedy was running against Hubert Humphrey, and there was a substantial minority at the convention, our

State convention, in favor of, that Senator Muskie was supporting Hubert Humphrey, I was (*unintelligible phrase*), at least in part, in the hope and expectation that Hubert would select Senator Muskie as his running mate, which he did when we got to Chicago. And you will recall, I think it was you who spoke to me and said after Senator Muskie was chosen, could I come aboard and help out. And the first task that you and Senator Muskie assigned to me was to go to Washington and try to build an organization, review, go through all of the requests for people who volunteered their assistance and to match that against some kind of a structure. So I spent, my recollection is, much of the first few weeks after the convention in Washington going through lists of people who offered to help and working with you and the Senator in building an organization.

DN: And you were essentially the manager of our Washington operation.

GM: I was for much of that time, and then later in the campaign you and the Senator asked me to go on the plane and travel with him. (*Brief break in taping.*) I don't remember when it was, but at some point during the campaign, this is just a guess, around the first of October or so, you asked me to go on the plane and travel with the Senator and work from that end. So I did part of it organizing and running the Washington office, and then traveling with the Senator.

DN: What was that campaign, well let me back up and ask you first, your image, recollection, of Chicago and Senator Humphrey, or Vice President Humphrey's decision to ask Ed Muskie to be his running mate.

GM: Well, it was an unusual feeling because, as you know and I need not repeat here, the convention itself was extremely controversial with a lot of action on the streets. But I, and I think the overwhelming majority of delegates, saw none of it. We were inside the convention hall. And then when we'd go back to our hotels at night we would turn on the television and saw all of these scenes of these dramatic controversial events occurring outside, none of which we had any personal knowledge or observation of. So it kind of felt like, we thought we came here, and that we were involved in the center of action in the convention, but in fact the center of action was elsewhere and we're kind of bystanders to the whole process.

But it was very exciting, of course, when he chose Senator Muskie. We were all very happy and thrilled about it, and naturally felt and believed, events indicated to me that Humphrey made a great choice and that Senator Muskie would lend a good deal of strength to the ticket. At that, at that time, we felt that there was I think a reasonably good chance to win. Later the campaign went down for a while, there was a lot of controversy over Humphrey's relationship with Lyndon Johnson, the Vietnam War, some major issues. And still later in the campaign, Humphrey made a real surge, the Humphrey-Muskie ticket as you'll recall toward the end, it ended up losing by I think just a couple of percentage points, less than 2 percentage points if my recollection is correct. That was very dramatic and exciting to be involved with the real surge, particularly to be with Senator Muskie because it was by then, in the latter part of the campaign, widely acknowledged that he was a very strong part of the ticket and that his presence on the ticket was helping. And, that we were doing something that (*unintelligible phrase*) person from Maine, and involved deeply and directly in a national campaign that seemed to be positive and had a real chance to win. And so it was very exciting and, of course, all the more disappointing when it

just fell through on Election Day.

DN: What about the relationship between Vice President Humphrey and Senator Muskie, and also how the two campaigns worked together?

GM: Most of that was above my level, but to the extent I had direct personal observation, there was a good working relationship which I think was characterized by a growing sense of confidence by Vice President Humphrey in Senator Muskie and in his campaign, and therefore a greater and greater sense of independence in the Muskie campaign. I've now been involved in different ways with campaigns since then, and I think they all begin with the presidential campaign staff wanting to exert total control over the campaign, including the vice presidential candidate and his staff. And I think it began that way, but I think gradually as Senator Muskie's performance demonstrated what a good candidate he was and what a good choice it was, that there was a gradual I guess you'd call it emancipation and a sense of independence, and by the end of the campaign I think Senator Muskie was really doing pretty much what we felt was positive. But they had a good relationship. I can recall from the years previous when I'd worked in the Senate, Senators Humphrey and Muskie had gotten along well, and I think Humphrey genuinely admired Senator Muskie and liked him. I'm sure there was friction. I can't recall much of it at this point.

DN: Speaking of friction, you referred to the State convention in the spring and the controversy around the Kennedy campaign versus the Humphrey campaign versus the Ed Muskie (*unintelligible phrase*). You were caught in the middle of that in the sense that you were stepping down as State chairman and being elected to the National Committee.

GM: I was caught in the middle, but it was rather clear in my mind that Maine, and the Maine Democratic Party specifically, would be best served by support for Vice President Humphrey's campaign. Both on its own, that he had the best chance to win of all, despite the problems involved in the Vietnam War, and secondly because it offered the best opportunity for Senator Muskie to be chosen. It was highly unlikely, really not at all likely, that if Robert Kennedy were chosen that he would select Senator Muskie as his running mate. And so I was influenced by that.

And I recall very clearly, we had what for then was a rather dramatic convention. Bill Hathaway spoke in behalf of Robert Kennedy, and I delivered the response in behalf of what I felt was Senator Muskie and Vice President Humphrey. But Bill and I were and remain good friends forever, but I just felt strongly that if Senator Muskie were to be elected vice president, that would be by far the best thing for Maine and the Maine Democratic Party. And besides, he was the best candidate, and so it's one of those things where we weren't doing a political act, we weren't advancing a lousy candidate for a good cause. We were advancing a great candidate for a good cause, so I felt pretty comfortable. I took a lot of flak for that, you know, there were some who felt that I shouldn't get involved in the dispute, but my view was that, 'yeah, I was state chairman, but I was also a delegate'. And in fact, I argued that a State chairman had a special responsibility to take what I felt was a leadership position. But it was a very dramatic convention. Senator Muskie spoke, as you'll recall, gave a very powerful, powerful speech. And in the end that delegation was predominantly, not unanimously, for Vice President Humphrey.

But once Senator Muskie was chosen, of course, everybody united very strongly behind the ticket.

DN: Thank you George. This will be continued.

End of Interview