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Mitchell, Libby oral history interview

Nicholas Christie

Interview with Libby Mitchell by Nicholas Christie

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee
Mitchell, Libby

Interviewer
Christie, Nicholas

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Place
Portland, Maine

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Biographical Note

Libby Mitchell was born in Gaffney, South Carolina in 1940. She did her undergraduate studies at Furman University and attended graduate school at the University of North Carolina. She moved to Maine with her husband in 1971 and taught English as a Second Language (ESL). Libby was elected to the Maine House of Representatives in 1974 and served until 1984. From 1986 to 1990 she was Director of the Maine Housing Authority. She returned to the Maine House of Representatives in 1990 and served until 1998, becoming the first woman Speaker of the House in 1996. At the time of this interview, she was a Public Policy Fellow at the Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service in Portland, Maine. In 2007, she was the Majority Leader in the Maine Senate.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: family and educational background; Maine Legislature; women in politics; the League of Women Voters; Equal Rights Amendment; education in Maine; Ken Curtis; “Maine Matters” TV show; and Muskie lobster bakes.

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Transcript

Nick Christie: This is Nick Christie, interviewer for the Edmund S. Muskie Oral History Project, and here with Libby Mitchell on August 3rd, 2001 at her office at the law school of the University of Southern Maine in Portland. Ms. Mitchell, would you please state and spell your full name?

Libby Mitchell: My full name is Elizabeth H. Mitchell, M-I-T-C-H-E-L-L, and just for the record, even though we're in the law school building, this is the Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service and, named after him. And I am a Public Policy Fellow at the Muskie School.

NC: And where and when were you born?

LM: I was born in South Carolina in 1940.

NC: And you grew up there?

LM: I grew up in South Carolina, went to college at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, to graduate school University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. My husband and I came to Maine in 1971, he came to work for then Governor Ken Curtis and we had intended to stay for a year. And that was in 1971, and we still live in the same house that we moved into in '71, we fell in love with Maine.

NC: Now, what was the name of the town in South Carolina you grew up in?

LM: Gaffney, G-A-F-F-N-E-Y.

NC: Was that a large -?

LM: No, a small community right on Interstate 85 near Charlotte, North Carolina, right on Interstate 85.

NC: Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like growing up there?

LM: It was a small textile town, to tell you the truth, and most people worked for the textile mill or in the peach orchards. Not a lot of other industry or business, the nearest large communities were Charlotte, North Carolina, or Greenville-Spartanburg, South Carolina. So it was a farming community as well. It was racially mixed; in fact my sister was a teacher there at the time they did a complete integration and she helped preside over a peaceful integration in most schools.

My father ran a very small grocery store, and my own grandfather was a legislator from South Carolina. But the irony is my mother had never even told me that until I was elected to the Maine State Legislature in 1974, it just never, she never thought that was a very big deal and never talked about it. And of course he was, he died before I was born so I never knew him. But all, my grandfather was the sheriff there, elected position, had relatives who were sheriffs. So quite frankly, as a child, I would go down to the park on election night and wait for the election returns to come in for the sheriff and other city officials. And I thought this was a terrific life, you know, it was quite exciting, you had the cotton candy, the hot dogs, the vote tallies were coming in, they were chalking them up on a board.

So my family was always interested in politics. Only the grandfather that I didn't know about was elected to politics, except for the sheriff; I guess that was elected, too. It was a different kind of politics, they never thought of it as that, and certainly not the women. But I brought that background with me when I moved to Maine, even though, again, I wasn't aware that I would ever exercise that background. It just happened.

NC: Now, what was your family's political background?

LM: My father and mother were both Democratic. My father was an active precinct worker, a poll worker; he liked to help out on Election Day. He would carry the, back then you would cast, they would literally hand carry locked ballot boxes from a voting precinct over to a central counting place, and he would be one of the observers, and loved to be involved in that. In fact was involved in that until the last day of his life. In fact, the last election he participated in, he went into the hospital immediately after that and, very important to him. And yet, it was not what he did for a living. He was a, had a small grocery store and was a salesman, a traveling salesman.

NC: Did you find that the ideals of the Democratic Party were openly discussed in your household, or not really?

LM: Not as such, but more in terms of being responsible for your neighbors. I know that he certainly made sure that people in the community who couldn't pay their grocery bills got food. It was just this sense, and of course they were fans of the New Deal but not of Eleanor Roosevelt, because my parents were born at the time when integration was not easily accepted and so they became very uncomfortable about that. But they always voted Democratic to the point that I remember the, my best friend who was the daughter of the owner of the textile mill, in the fifth grade we were having a Stevenson-Eisenhower debate. And of course I remember wearing that Adlai Stevenson button, didn't know why, but certainly my parents wore those and the owners of the textile mill had the Eisenhower buttons. We began to know early on that there was a little bit of money involved, and which side, so we felt very comfortable with the Democratic working people.

NC: Now, you mentioned both mills and integration. Now coming to Maine, and in some ways I can see why it must have been a very familiar landscape in terms of the mills, but in other ways, in terms of the social issues -

LM: They were different.

NC: Very different. What struck you when you first came to Maine?

LM: I think your insights are excellent. The transition was not as great as had I moved here from New York City. I came from a semi agrarian, rural, small town background and moved to a small town in Maine called Vassalboro. And in terms of the racial issue, I think my husband and I have felt guilty our entire lives because we did not stay to help deal with the problems. That we came rather where there were at least no issues of color that were visible, even though we quickly learned there were other issues that separated people by race and ethnicity. We didn't see that at first because where I lived everybody was white, Anglo-Sa-, sorry, that was the wind blowing the door closed, it was not an exclamation point. But, I mean, I think that that's a burden, I think, that people who grew up in the south among my generation. If you didn't stay and help fix the problem you felt, you know, that you had not done your part. And so I think that's been the down side of it. But as I say, we quickly learned there were other issues here that

people had to deal with. They just weren't as visible, but you came to know them quickly through the political process.

NC: Now, you went to high school all the way up through -?

LM: Yes, I left Gaffney in 1958 to go to Greenville, which was only fifty miles away, to Furman University. And the reason I continually speak about integration for my husband, my husband was a student in Little Rock, Arkansas when the schools were closed. When I was a senior in college, the trustees asked us, would we object to integration of Furman and most of us said, "No, of course not." And of course, that began to happen, they had to break with the Baptist convention to do that. My school was affiliated with the Baptist convention but was never really a fundamentalist approach but rather was moving out toward its social responsibilities. So I think that we had professors in that school who were willing to challenge us. The religious assumptions we had where we grew up, we were very little small town communities where church was so much the fabric of the social life as well as the community. And as I said, I see many similarities that were, made the transition easy to Maine. I loved Maine from the minute we came here. As a matter of fact, my husband was a graduate student, I mean actually he was getting ready to graduate from law school, didn't want to practice law.

And there was a gentleman from China, Maine, who was a law school professor at Yale and had been sending up a whole cadre of Yale graduates to work for Ken Curtis. Peter Bradford, who became a public utilities commissioner, Kermit Lipez who sits on the judicial bench, a whole group of bright young men which Ken Curtis surrounded himself by then. So this professor called my husband one night and said, "Do you have a job yet?" And he said, "No." "Why don't you go up and look this over."

So we had two young children then, my husband had been in the Marines before he went to law school, and we put them in the wagon, hit a snowstorm in Auburn, ended up not able to get to Augusta. We went into, had to stay in a motel. We thought that was the most wonderful thing that ever happened, the snowstorm. And we liked the people; we liked the openness, the sense of integrity, the pride in Maine, and the acceptance of us. I mean, we certainly understood being 'from away' and all the baggage that that brings with you, but nevertheless there was a wonderful acceptance of people who shared Maine values. And I think I came to learn what it meant to be 'from away'.

NC: Now what was your high school experience like?

LM: Very typical, small town fifties. I went to an all white high school and didn't think anything about it, and that has, that bothers me to this day that I didn't see the problem. But we didn't. Only, it was a gradual revelation to us as we began to understand that this was not acceptable. But at that time, there were no sports for me, the only sports I could play, actually when I was a senior we finally started a basketball team, but those were the days when girls were considered too frail to run the full court, you could run half way and pass it over the line to the forwards or vice versa to the guards. So sports were not an option, so my outlet was student government, I was always involved in that. So pretty traditional, small town, southern white high school.

NC: And what made you decide on your higher education, how did you -?

LM: To tell you the truth, I was brought up in a very religious, southern Baptist home, and wanted to become, I wanted to work as a youth minister in a church. And, this is kind of interesting, representative Christina Baker, who serves currently in the Maine legislature, at that time was a student at Furman and her husband, Bill Baker who is a professor at University of Maine, Orono, none of us ever knew we'd be in Maine, came to my church youth group, and Bill as a Christian athlete, and Tina as a very enthusiastic student, and they talked about how wonderful Furman was. And that did it. So these two people, I often, I later served in the legislature here in Maine with Tina, and then of course continue to be friends with both of them. And they had a lot to do with that as well, so in the area of small worlds I thought that was an interesting coincidence.

NC: What did you major in at Furman?

LM: Well, I wanted to be a teacher, but I was so discouraged by the level of the courses they were offering to elementary educators that I quickly got out of that and started majoring in English and political science. I just couldn't do it, so I thought okay, I'll teach high school because at least you have a subject matter as opposed to, and you must remember also, frankly, for most women, and certainly that's not true for everybody, many women always pushed the envelopes but I must say I was fairly traditional. For me it was to be a teacher or a nurse, because you wanted a career that was compatible with raising your family. And so I chose teaching. And I only chose high school, even though I wanted the elementary, just because I couldn't take the course work, it just didn't do it for me.

NC: It wasn't interesting.

LM: It wasn't interesting and it was ridiculous. I'm sorry. Probably still is. It wasn't challenging, and too much pedagogy, not enough knowledge.

NC: So how did you make the switch from teaching elementary school all the way over to political science?

LM: Same thing, politics and teaching are the same thing. I find that teaching has been the best background for anything that I've ever done. I also really liked some of the people who taught in the political science department. Again, you often take professors as opposed to the courses, because if you have a very bright, challenging professor, it can make anything worth your while. And, again, I was always interested in politics but not so much for running for office but rather reading about world events, or reading about what was happening in my state, and it just seemed like a natural extension of that. And it was also more challenging than the education courses.

NC: So what was the decision like between you and your husband to come to Maine, how did that come about? I mean, you said that you got the call -

LM: Yeah, primarily it was my husband's opportunity for a job, and I thought it was an adventure. I had two young children. I really did, I had a two and a one year old, and, when I say young, so I was pretty much involved with them. I had been teaching in New Haven, I taught English as a second language, I taught illiterates to read, I taught in the Winchester gun factory, met a lot of Maine people. They would come down to Connecticut to work because there were no jobs, so I began to get the flavor of that even them. But those were part time because I wanted to be at home, and I was able to fortunately at that time, I didn't have to go out and work every day. But I could arrange some part time work, and I always really, I had the best of all worlds, I was fortunate.

And then when we came to Maine, like I say, we thought it was a short time, and the career path we were on. Well my husband thought he wanted to go back and practice law with his father in Arkansas, and he was the one who wanted to run for office. And it never occurred to me that I would want to run for office, but I certainly liked being a part of it in any way that I could. But I saw myself first and foremost as a mother and a teacher. And when I came to Maine I found another way to teach without leaving my children, which was important to me, and again I was financially able to do that because my husband was working.

I taught English as a second language, and I got to know a lot about Franco Americans. I taught an entire family of Blais from Quebec, from the St. George Valley, and in fact they got to be wonderful friends. So, I taught them, and in fact they're a very successful construction firm in the Augusta area. But they didn't know any English and I learned a lot about their family history, how they came, so it was a wonderful introduction in a very personal way to the Franco American heritage in my community.

NC: Now, Vassalboro is closest to Augusta?

LM: Right, I lived seven miles from the state capital. It's on the Kennebec River between Waterville [***sic*** Rumford], home of Senator Muskie, and the state capital. It really was, I thought, a microcosm of Maine. You had state employees, you had Colby College professors, you had farmers, you had small businessmen. It was just a big, you had the paper mill, at the time there was big paper mill up in Winslow, they commuted to that, they commuted up to the mill in Skowhegan. So almost everything was right there in that community, in terms of a microcosm of Maine opportunities to earn a living.

NC: I'm going to want to get back to the Franco-American issue later, that's interesting, but I want to move on. So, how did you first, when did you first realize that a political career might be viable for you?

LM: I have talked to lots of women who got into politics and I am almost sorry to report that most of us got there as an afterthought. It was not a career projectory, if you will. We had been in Maine in '71, in '74 right after redistricting of the state legislature, I lived in a district that was a Republican seat. You know, after they carved them up, some were heavily Republican, some were heavily Democratic, and the Democrats were not competitive in my seat. It was five to one Republican - Democratic, and you can imagine how few people really wanted to run. And one evening, my husband at the time had been asked to go over and be the director of Maine

State Housing, Finance Agency Authority. Ken Curtis asked him to go over and take that over. So he and a friend were sitting, and they both loved politics, in fact he was getting ready to run for congress himself, and they started talking about this seat and they said, "We don't have a Democratic candidate." They were sitting talking about it, I was painting, painting the living room windows, and they weren't really talking to me, and then all of a sudden, I don't remember which one, looked at me and said, "Well why don't you run for it?" We all laughed heartily.

But I started thinking about it over the night, I said, well why don't I run for it, you know, I'm interested in education, I'm interested in a lot of these issues, well why not? Well then I realized why not, I didn't even know who the Democratic leaders were. I had lived there for three years, as you can see I have a southern accent and it was even more pronounced in 1974, so I thought, well okay. I found out who they were and I invited them, there were three towns, it was Sidney, Vassalboro and Windsor, rural communities around Augusta. Now rural communities in Maine tend to be predominantly Republican. This is not your Biddeford or Portland or whatever. And so they came to my house and they sort of looked me over, and the ones from Sidney decided, well, you haven't been here long enough, and your husband runs the state housing agency, there must be a conflict there. I'm not sure what it was, but nevertheless, so they weren't very thrilled about it, and so they found an opponent for me.

By that time, though, I was pretty determined, and especially when people tell you you can't, you know, it sort of, it's a terrible thing to do. And so they found a Sidney person, a farmer, to run in the Democratic primary. So here I am, a person from away with two young children, taking on a seat in a primary in a Republican district. And the day I filed my papers, April Fool's Day, I also learned that I was expecting my third child. But not to be deterred, I forged ahead, and he was due on Election Day. He currently sits in the Maine legislature, he ran and won the house seat that I gave up because of term limits. So you see what happens, he was just influenced by the womb.

But it was the time of Watergate, this is the history part of it, and there was an attitude, so I had many things working in my favor. There was an attitude toward women, is you can't do worse than men. Many people told me that, you can't do any worse, we might as well. People were very disenchanted with Washington. They were disenchanted with Republicans because of all the revelations that had come out of that Nixon and Watergate. As a matter of fact, Severin Beliveau, who was the Democratic Party chair at the time, had his office bugged and received a financial settlement as compensation from the Watergate break-in issues, and he gave money to candidates. Now it didn't take a lot of money to run for a house seat. I think I must have gotten twenty-five dollars out of Severin's compensation for the Watergate issue.

We also, there was a whole cadre of young, when I say young it has nothing to do with age because we were all ages, who decided we're going to do this the grass roots way. And it was the birth of going door-to-door in Maine in a very serious way. And I did, I think I ruined the springs in several vehicles because these were rural roads. I went to many, many houses in this very rural district, and I think what happened quite honestly is that the people who drew up the district outsmarted themselves. The Republicans, who lived over in Sidney, were separated from Vassalboro and Windsor by the Kennebec River. To get to our towns you had to go up through Winslow or down through Augusta, so there was no natural communication, no joint Lion's

Club, no grange, none of those things that brought you together. So they couldn't get their act together so that made it a possible, too, in terms of an upset.

So I actually managed to win the primary, much to my own surprise, much to everybody's surprise. But again, it was that very personal door-to-door contact and an era of Watergate, and I think being a woman was an advantage in that election. But I ended up running against my next door neighbor, who was a retired state trooper and the husband of the town's most beloved first grade teacher that had taught everybody in town. But, again, he assumed, because I was from away and because he was so well known. He campaigned the traditional ways, he spoke at the local meetings and clubs, but he did not do the doors as I did. And I won. And, again, much to everybody's surprise.

But I do remember lying in the hospital bed with that little baby wondering, 'what have I done?' What I do now, like Robert Redford in Canada, what do I do now? But it all obviously worked out with the support of my husband, who thought it was neat. And he did end up running for congress the next year, and he came in second in a seven way primary, but that was his last opportunity to run for office. We had four kids, sooner or later, and then a young man all of a sudden has to keep working.

I was very fortunate to be in the Maine legislature, living seven miles from the capital, because my husband could support the legislative habit. You don't make any money very much doing that; it's certainly not a way to earn a living. It was enough, and yet I also had, just like a teacher, I had my summers free with my children and I was able to take my children, in fact they don't like beans to this day because they went to so many bean suppers across the state. But they've had wonderful times. My daughter, my oldest daughter was a state legislator, too. They're all very interested in public policy and -

NC: Your daughter is -?

LM: I have a daughter Elizabeth, also. And I'm called Libby, but it did cause for some confusion when we were in the legislature together as you can imagine. But she is now a health policy analyst. I mean she's very interested, they're all interested in public policy so I think that's the trade off for the times that you couldn't be home, that your children were interested in issues of the day. Whether they ran for office or not is immaterial, but rather that they care, they're involved in what's going on around them. So I think both my husband and I love that, and as you see my husband did as well, so we certainly enjoyed it together. It's a family sport, I think.

NC: Your son Charles -

LM: My son Charles is currently a legislator, and a law student. I think, he says the same thing his father did, he doesn't want to practice law, so we'll see.

NC: Now, you mentioned Ken Curtis, and you mentioned him a couple times (*unintelligible phrase*)?

LM: Yes, and Ken Curtis is the one who brought us here. Ken Curtis, I served in the

legislature from '74 until four years ago. I served under two independents, I served under two Democrats, and I served under a Republican. Ken Curtis is the model, to me, and I know that sometimes things get romanticized over time but what I would say in terms of general memories, and he still does this to this day, he treats everyone with the most genuine respect. You could be the head of the biggest company in Maine, or you could be the janitor in that same company, Ken Curtis would treat you the same. "Come on in," he would say to his office, and he would mean it, he really, truly had a good sense of the people of Maine. And he also seemed to be the last, maybe not the last, but certainly one of those people who didn't depend on polls to tell him what was the right thing to do. I think that's sorely missing sometimes as everybody tries to look like they're in the center right now.

In fact, a wonderful story he tells of himself is that, and we had come here after this happened so we were not part of that election unfortunately. The income tax, he had led the charge to create an income tax in the state of Maine, thinking it a fairer way, to tax people, more progressive. Well, it got put on the ballot, the referendum to repeal it, and he was on the ballot, too, for reelection. And he makes fun of himself by saying that the income, people voted more favorably to keep the income tax than they voted for him, it got more votes than he did, and he thought that was a terrible, terrible thing.

But I'm saying that, if you think of the environmental things that he did, the coastal conveyance law, oil issues, the kinds of people he surrounded himself with. Ken Curtis himself, had not been to an Ivy League, and sometimes when people don't go to an Ivy League, they're intimidated, but, "No, bring me the best." And when he didn't like what they'd say, he'd tell them so. He listened to what they had to say, and then his skills, his instincts with people, he made his decisions based on that. He wanted to get all the information, and then sort of followed his gut. And I think that he was an extraordinary governor and we're very, very grateful for his having brought us here, and having the time to be around him and to be around the people that were in his administration.

NC: Sounds like he would have been quite an inspiration.

LM: You know, he was, he really was. And, again, Jim was the politician at the time, for a while, so, but he treated me as if I were equally important and so I never felt that he didn't respect my opinion on things.

NC: And this naturally all leads into a question of the fact that you are a woman dealing with a traditionally male, especially when you came into politics -

LM: Yes.

NC: And I can't imagine that it was much different in Maine than it might have been in South Carolina.

LM: I don't think I could have been elected in South Carolina. I think Maine was much more progressive about accepting women. And also I think that some of the views of my community, the tolerance for other people's lifestyle, that's a big difference in Maine and South Carolina. It's

much more fundamentalist in the area where I was from, and I, well people don't like to use the word any more, but I was somewhat liberal. I opposed the death penalty for heaven's sakes, and I was pro choice, and I was a mother who was in politics as opposed to being at home with the children. All of those things were very negative things in South Carolina.

And there are people in Maine who also didn't like it. As a matter of fact, the head of the National Right to Life Movement lived in my district. We were, there were a cadre of us, and it was nonpartisan, of women who fought a lot of those pro-choice issues before it was so popular to do so and I can tell you it was very difficult, very lonely. I almost dropped out once because of that issue.

NC: Really.

LM: The man who ran against me on one of those reelection terms used it as a major thing. And the final blow to me is, I was sitting in my little local church, it was down a few blocks from my house, I was in there with my young children, and they leafleted the church. And I came outside and they had the story of my entire voting record, it had to do with parental notification, there are no black and white. For example, there was a law, which said that no minor could have an abortion unless their parents gave permission. And there were those of us who said everybody doesn't live in a Dick-and-Jane household, sometimes it's the parent who's perpetrated the crime. There has to be a safety valve, a judge or a counselor. Yes, there should be an adult, but it can't always be the parent. And so, and they wouldn't let us have that compromise, so a lot of us voted against the bill. And of course you can imagine what the leaflet said, thinks parents should not know when their child has an abortion. Which was not the truth but that's very much politics on the hot button issues, as you can imagine. And it was so hard. And then the newspaper headlines, abortion center of this debate, blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. And I remember thinking, 'this isn't worth it'. I have young children, I have a life, I don't have to put up with this. And again, I think I told you, that I was bombarded with mail because Senator Foucher who was the national Right to Life head lived in my legislative district.

I had part of Augusta too, by the way, which really confused things. It was just a sliver of rural Augusta, and so you had to be conscious of both urban, as much as Augusta can be called urban, compared to Vassalboro it was, and the different schools. But anyway, that made it more high profile, to have her living in the district and to sort of target, help target me. But we got through it. And I remember thinking, I took my phone off the hook, I wasn't going to take any more calls, I went out and sat in the yard and one of my friends, a man, who's still one of my best friends, came over and he says, "Get up, hang up the phone and go back to work." But, you have to have people like that who come to you when you get down. I don't think there is a politician in the world who has skin thick enough that it never gets to you. I would be surprised. Even if you're Ed Muskie or Ken Curtis, I'm sure, they don't tell the public, but I'm sure there have been many a time when it's been very painful and you wonder why.

NC: Now can you tell me a little bit about the Equal Rights Amendment?

LM: Actually I'm not in much of a chronological order here for you, but that was the other thing that sort of cut my teeth on politics in Maine because, I wanted to be involved in politics, I

didn’t mean run, and so what there? I started out going to a few League of Women Voters meetings, I didn't like that because they spent so much time getting to a consensus. I'm, I guess I'm not an academic, even though I'm sitting here as a policy fellow. I like to do the stuff, and I wanted to be involved with the issues while they were still ripe, while they were still pending, and to be on the cutting edge.

And, but there was a group who was lobbying the legislature to ratify Maine's version of the Equal Rights Amendment. So this had to be between '71 when I came and '74 when I ran, so you'll have to find out when that was because I'm not really sure, somewhere between '71 and '74. And I remember going to the legislature, wow, you can't call a legislator said I. And you know the books they have with everybody's names in it, and we'd go to these strategy meetings and the names and the faces would be there, and you were supposed to call this person and tell him you'd like him to vote that. I was absolutely appalled that you could actually call up one of these very important people.

Unfortunately, you observe them for a while and then you think, well wait minute, I can do that. And especially when you watch some of them asleep and reading the newspaper during the debates. But the closer you got to it, one, the more you wanted to do it and you wanted your voice heard, and the more you felt, well, I could do that, too. Because I must admit, like many people, and especially like many women, what did we say? “I'm not qualified.” And in fact, I love to tell this story. Sissy Farenthal, I believe she was a former congressman from Texas, was up speaking to a group of women. And I went, and I tell everybody I went one day because I just wanted to get out of the house for a while, I left the kids with my husband, went to this women's meeting at the Holiday Inn in Augusta and she spoke. And all these women, she's trying to get women to run for office. And she didn't care what office, school board, planning board, whatever. And she said, I'm waiting for all the unqualified Blacks, all the unqualified Franco Americans, all the unqualified Hispanics, to join all the, and all the unqualified women, to join all those unqualified men running the government. And so, I mean she just brought it home, that we're all unqualified. We do the best we can. But there is this strong sense that I'm not qualified.

NC: Do you feel that that sentiment has -?

LM: I hear it today.

NC: - truly changed, or not?

LM: No, I don't, I think many people feel that they're not qualified. Obviously there are more women running than ever, and part of that is because there's been a heavy recruitment campaign in the Maine legislature because they're good candidates. They work hard, they do everything, they do the doors, they do all the stuff, and they're very good candidates. And they've often had local experience because they've been on the school boards or the town councils, and they know how to network a lot. So they're heavily recruited by both parties as they gear up for each campaign.

But I know that I have, even now I'm called on sometimes, “Would you please talk to so-and-

so." She's a mom, she thinks she can't do it all and she's not qualified. And so there needs to be this network of support saying, 'hey, wait a minute, you know, look what I did'. If I can do it, you can do it. And so I think that's still there unfortunately. Not, maybe not as strong, but it's certainly still there. There have been more role models, but until I became speaker of the house, all you had to do as a young woman is walk into the house and there's a wall of speakers, there were ninety-two men up there, ninety-two. Then mine got up there. Of course the two after me are men.

And so I'm just saying that, where's my place at this table, and I note with great sorrow that in the House of Representatives in this session there's not a single woman in house leadership. When I was the speaker, my majority leader was also a woman. But, so it comes and goes. It's a constant, constant fight, and I think that frankly the Maine legislature may be suffering from the same thing that other women's niches are, like nursing and teaching. Because women now, the same women who ran for politics are now lawyers, corporate presidents, and doctors. So there are a lot more options for women now, and so I don't know but I think, I am concerned. There are a lot of women in the Maine senate, but a lot of them went over from the house because of term limits, but at any rate.

NC: You've mentioned that one of the major obstacles in overcoming this gender issue has been in convincing women that they, too, have not just an opportunity but the skills to do the job. What about the other side of the coin where you have men already entrenched politically who truly feel women don't. Have you found that within the private sphere of politicians that that's a common way of thinking?

LM: On the state legislative session, structure, it's much easier to break into because it doesn't take as much money. If you want to run for Congress, the U.S. Senate, or governor, you have to be able to break into that power structure of fund raising. Even with clean elections. No matter what anybody tells you, the money that is being raised as you and I sit here to go to the parties, to support the candidates who are going to win their party's nominations, is phenomenal. Fund raising has not stopped. The networking that happens among men, it's not bad or good, it's just that they're together in a more natural setting.

I think women have to learn that skill. We currently have, there are no women running in the Democratic primary for governor. The woman who was a credible candidate for governor moved over to run for the Senate. Part of the reason for that is that the financial doors were closing on her for the governor because they'd lined up behind an incumbent Democratic congressman. That is not meant to criticize either of them, but it's more talking about the system as we see it. Now she is raising a lot of money as a Senate candidate because, first, there's no gender issue, the two women, and in addition to that they're a Democratic list on the national level that are supportive. And as you know, running for national office, you've got to create the aura of, you have to look like a winner before anybody's going to give you any money. Even the endless list of the world like to know you've got a chance, they don't like to bet on horses that are going to limp around the track.

NC: Right.

LM: But, I mean, as you can see, the book that our senators, our own senators were part of writing, Nine and Counting is already out of date, there are thirteen. When I ran in '84 there was not one Democratic woman in the United States Senate, which is one reason I decided well why not. Yes, I'm going to lose this race, but the issues are important, and besides I might, I mean you never know. When you get into a race, you know the odds are so stacked against you, but gee, you never know, you never know; especially when you're young.

NC: Right, and at the very least you're bringing issues to the table.

LM: And it happens. And that was important to me, that was important to me.

NC: Now I'm going to go through a few of the things, some of the topics that are attached to your name and I want to see what you can tell me about them. Expanded access to education.

LM: I think I told you when I started that education was one of my most important issues because I had young children going through the school system and I was very interested in quality education. Only in my later years did I work, maybe that followed my own family patterns, access to higher education. As we tried to look at economic development issues in Maine, it doesn't take a rocket scientist, when you look at those charts that correlate income with levels of education. Come on, we're not doing anything about it. And so I began to see that. I worked closely with the University of Maine Augusta, which took a lot of non-traditional students, that was in my legislative district, I mean it served a lot of my students. The president who came in five years ago was the president who sort of said, the emperor has no clothes. We're not funding these students fairly. They get less money than a high school student in Augusta, so even the university wasn't being fair. And guess who a lot of those people were? Non-traditional students were women going back to school.

So, I mean everything I learned, and then I became focused on the fact that its, our per capita, we change our per capita income and create livable wages and jobs, and it's all, I don't know how you do that. You can't do it with higher education alone, because you always hear about our young people having to leave to use those skills. But hey, some of those will get those skills and they'll create the jobs. And I don't want us just to be an exclusive tourism (*unintelligible word*), I mean those are not living wages for everybody. And Maine also treasures and values its environment and so you don't want to exploit every square inch of soil and coastline for that.

But at any rate, I got all exc-, as I worked with UMA and I saw what was going on, I began, and then some studies came out, Finance Authority of Maine, did a study to talk about what were some of the barriers. Maine people traditionally, what I've learned through my experience, don't like to borrow money if they can help it. They borrow for highways, I mean they vote for some bond issues and they don't for others, but they'd rather not. They're just very proud, and they pay their bills. And borrowing money for college, if you come from a tradition of families who haven't done that, well how do they know you're going to succeed, and they're going to have all these loans, and how are you going to get a job that pays them back. I mean, the sardine factory just closed in Cal-, you know, that sort of thing.

So, I had read about Zel Miller's proposal in Georgia, and it wasn't just the financial issue that I

was trying to address; it was a cultural issue. And I thought okay, twelve years is no longer enough for anybody. I mean, it was fine when we had the textile mills to go to, but they're gone here, they're gone in South Carolina, too. You need computer skills, you need the ability to work, even if you're working in one of those textile mills that they still exist, you have to operate computers. And so twelve years, that was from a different world and so how do you, why don't we start thinking of the thirteenth year, the fourteenth year. So I knew I couldn't do what Georgia did.

In Georgia, every student who has a B average gets a voucher to go to the public institution in Georgia. I thought, okay, we don't have the money they do but we can at least give students, we can match whatever they were able to raise and borrow, or not borrow so they won't go into debt, but just match it, whatever scholarships they could get would be the difference, would be the gap filler. So that every student in Maine, if they went to a university, a public university in Maine, would go and tuition would be done. Because even the Hope scholarship on the federal level, did not cover the need. Our institutions, even though they try admirably, are still high per capita, the cost is high. And we have wonderful private colleges who have almost better scholarship moneys available because they're better endowed, than do our public schools. But certainly they're not even considered by a lot of Maine students because they're deemed, you know, out of their league.

So I thought, okay, we'll just pass this bill, we will make sure there's, we called it The Thirteenth Year. And I found out how deeply ingrained that culture was. There were superintendents in the legislature who told me, we already know who should go to college and they're going, the ones, there's plenty of money out there for people who want to go, which wasn't the point. There might have been plenty of money, but it wasn't for everybody. The private colleges, I didn't make it for the privates because I was trying to husband my resources.

Georgia started out with public and then included the privates, and then the private schools disliked that so much that they fought against the bill under the table. They couldn't do it publicly because everybody's for higher education. The governor felt that we couldn't afford it, that it would create down the road a structural gap. Even if I said, it's just a pilot program to see how it works, create expectations, blah-blah-blah, and you'd have to follow these people through, which would be my intention anyway. But I also thought, naively perhaps, if you got people through the door, then you'd find a way, they and their families would find a way because they would know they could do it.

So, I was unsuccessful in getting that bill passed. What I got instead was I doubled the amount of money that goes into what's called the Maine Student Incentive Scholarship Program, which goes to students, and that's the first time that it had had an increase. But you know, if you knew you were going to be speaker one term, you had to pick a few things that you championed and that was the one that to me held the most promise for the most people for the future of the state. And it's a problem that's always there, so if you want to run for politics you can still go work on it. But that's the way with most public policy issues. There's no silver bullet, it's just a constant trying over and over again different things that work. Same reason the governor was pushing his laptop computers. He was trying to get people to think in a new way about how we educate ourselves and our young people. But change is very hard to come by, well you know. In fact, in

my district, a lot of times people would say, well we didn't have that. It was good enough for us, it's good enough for our kids. And that's an attitude that's going to hold us back.

NC: How do you think Maine compares to other states in the nation when it comes to the willingness to progress?

LM: I think Maine folks have made the most extraordinary effort. And that's why you'll read sometimes that our tax burden is really high for our per capita income. If you look, well just yesterday, fourth and eighth graders top of the nation in math, I don't know if you heard that or not. And it said that we were one of seven states, or a few states, that had both grades scoring at the top. So we've done a fabulous job, and those are reasons we're willing to invest in education. We have tried to do research and development, but we also take care, look at the health care progress. Everything that they've just enacted in Washington is nothing to us in Maine because we've already done all that. And they, look at all the children who are insured with Cub Care. And we just have made extraordinary efforts for, there's never enough, you're always going to find people that are falling through the cracks, but the effort. And frankly, by both parties and the governor, whoever they are, they haven't been able to turn their backs on the neediest folks. And so I think their willingness, but they want you to be willing to meet your responsibilities halfway.

Our welfare reform's a good example. Maine did not put the arbitrary time lines, Maine made sure that when we wanted, and it was a work with dignity issue, had transportation, childcare, health care. See, that was the biggest barrier to many women, and look at how much they exerted themselves this year to put an end to domestic violence, put that right at the top. And those are very, children don't vote, abused women aren't exactly a strong political voice, and having said all that, I mean like every other state, our corporations wield a lot of influence. Insurance companies, pharmaceutical companies wield influence here in Maine like everywhere else, but you still have a very feisty, progressive group I think that really care deeply about Maine.

That's the one thing that I would tell you about the Maine legislature. Having been speaker and having been floor leader, I went to every district in the state and you sort of learn where people are coming from. And Portland is not Calais, and yet you have the same common interest and you try to figure out, 'how do we get there together?' And they all, whether they're Republicans or Democrats, or women or men, I think they really do care. There's no reason to spend your time in Augusta if you don't care. It's not for the glory, it's certainly not for the money, but there's sort of this sense of public service. And I think, again going back to Muskie one second -

End of Side A
Side B

NC: So, now I've got a few questions going back a little ways. I want to talk about referendum. Have you seen that become a big issue in Maine, about whether or not we're going to use -?

LM: We say that it is, and there was a lot of legislation on ways to curb it, but every time that

legislation comes up it's always defeated because there's also this strong independent streak in Maine. It's very populist to have the referendum process, so, I haven't seen it tempered or curtailed at all. And if you think about it, there really aren't that many. The things that were on the ballot the last election were bond issues and a few things. Obviously if you're on the losing side of an issue, you think it's too much. I hate term limits, I think that they've done a grave disservice to our legislative institution. Obviously that would never have been enacted by the legislature, and that was the safety valve to those people who thought it was a good idea. And the repeal effort of the gay rights law, the prohibition against discrimination, that was another initiated measure. But I think people have the right to do that. I don't, I think, and I think that they're very smart, they're very smart.

I'll tell you a wonderful story, and I won't tell you the person's name, but she was a Maine woman and I always looked to her for a real pulse on how real Maine people… People who were born here as opposed to people who moved here and loved it and adopted it. I think the Christian Civic League had a referendum out about censorship, pornography, and she hated that stuff. She was an older woman, and she didn't want those kinds of books around her grandchildren and that sort of thing. And I got very concerned about that because this was very restrictive. But in the end, you know, after the election she came up to me, she says, you know I voted against that, I don't want anybody telling me what to read. And so it had nothing to do, I mean people sort it out, and so I have a lot of confidence in people sorting things out. They may not the first time agree with what you think is right, they may never agree with what you think is right, but sooner or later I think they get it right. And I think that's why you'll find the legislature very reluctant, even when they disagree, to tamper with a vote that has been publicly held.

NC: Now I've also got here, the creation of a district court family division.

LM: Yes.

NC: Can you give me some details on that?

LM: Well, I was privileged to be the water carrier, if you will, on behalf of Chief Justice Dan Wathen, and I'm one of his bigger fans. I think that he has done so much to bring our courts into modern times, trying to make them user friendly, if you will. And one of the clearest examples, I remember when he told me about this family court, was it's like being in a building when there's no lights turned on, and the stairs, you can't find your way up the stairs. And he was talking about how, again, how many women who, in divorce court or whatever else, it's like turning the light on and providing an escalator. And so that was the point of the family court. And everything that people said that it wouldn't do, it's done it. It's attracted qualified judges, it seems to be working. But I wish I could tell you that I had thought of it. I did not, I believed in it, but it was really the creature of Dan Wathen and other judges who sat down and figured out what's a better way to deliver justice. And it was really an honor. I did fight for it, very hard to get it funded. It had to compete like everything else, and I had the privilege of being in the right place at the right time. And if you're in leadership, sometimes you can carry the water a little more carefully.

NC: Now going back to the Franco-American influence and heritage in Maine, you mentioned

that you worked with teaching English, but can you give me your general over all impressions of first when you got here, and also where you stand now of how that plays a part in Maine politics?

LM: When I got here, I could not comprehend why there was an issue. I thought it was fabulous to be able to speak two languages, and I felt inferior because I could only speak English and not very well that. I didn't understand it; I just could not understand why there was an issue. The same reason that I think sometimes there's a different understanding about race relations that I grew up with. Where I grew up, there were no Catholics, that was a new thing to me. You have no idea how many Catholic funerals and weddings, the legislature's like a big family. I went to all their functions and I felt very at home there, I don't mean it that way, but I'd never been to a Catholic church, we didn't have any. We finally got one when I was in high school because a family moved there from New Jersey to run a peach orchard, and because they had no church they built one.

And so, but I'm just saying that all of these things were new and exciting to me and, but then I got to know certain people who would tell their stories. And I mentioned to you off tape, but I'll say it again, Speaker Martin always, always fought for people of Franco American heritage. And he would give you the history, and every session there would some bill, or someone would make a remark that would raise his ire. A lack of understanding, a note or prejudice. He would always, the speaker usually does not speak on the floor. You come down only on rare occasions, and when you do people listen. And he at least once a session would come down, assume the majority leader's chair, and make a speech about Franco American history. Sometimes he'd do it in French, to make you get what it felt like not to be able to understand what was being said, particularly when you were talking about children not being allowed to speak French in kindergarten and they didn't understand English, they were punished for doing that. I mean, I began to learn the story about how they were discriminated against.

Another representative, Toni Martin, Antoinette Martin, from Brunswick, Maine talked about living on the wrong side of the tracks in Brunswick. And of course her name was 'Martine', not Martin, and she lived in the, her parents worked in the mills and she worked very hard from the time she was a young girl, and how she couldn't do things with her classmates from the other side of the tracks. Literally, there was this division in town among the Franco American community. By the time I came, of course, many of these things were not as overt. But the scars were on my friends, like Toni Martin, Senator Judy Paradis who is wonderful about helping you to understand the value of the Franco American culture. It's such a rich part of Maine, but I've watched it go from hearing their stories about when you couldn't speak French, to celebrating la Kermis and the Franco American Festival, it was a big thing in Augusta for a number of years. I think it's like any festival there, the leadership sort of got older and tired of it and it stopped, but I mean, I know La Kermesse still goes. And I used to love to go to those things.

NC: We just had ours in Lewiston two days ago.

LM: Yeah, I mean it's just wonderful, absolutely wonderful, but to be able to celebrate this diversity and this cultural heritage as part of Maine has been wonderful for me to watch over the past thirty years. And again, I didn't ex-, I never experienced what a Franco American had to

experience, the stories that they told us, but their history sort of helped me, and knowing all these people. They shared their lives with me. Again, the legislature's like a big family, you'd go to people's homes, you'd talk to them about the things that were nearest and dearest to them. And I really loved being included in their discussions and being a part of that. But again, as I said, as I came here I didn't get it, I didn't understand it, I didn't understand how that could be, because I was envious of their bilingualism.

NC: Now, you were involved with a program, a transitional residential program for adolescent girls?

LM: I at one time was a director of Maine State Housing Authority and -

NC: Can you tell me more about, I guess about that part of it?

LM: Yeah, okay. After I ran against Bill Cohen, I had been in the legislature for ten years, I had been the assistant majority leader, and when I ran I was the current majority leader. The first woman majority leader, I might add. I don't know why, why there weren't any before, and, but anyway, I was the first one of those. And that was in '84, can you believe that? First woman majority leader. And so at any rate, I was over, I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I had been in politics for ten years, it had been my life. And I was sort of at a loss for what was challenging, what did I really want to do when I grew up. I didn't think I was ever going to grow up anyway.

Joe Brennan, the governor of Maine, had this opening at the housing agency and it was important to him, and this was at the end of his term so, and it's not co termus, it's a four year appointment and it's designed to be that way because you're responsible for issuing a lot of bonds and they wanted to keep it as, you are appointed by the governor but you are really autonomous in a way. And so he asked me would I like to do that. I had been working in his office a bit as a liaison, was hanging out with all his friends, and David Flanagan was there as his chief counsel, and Peter Danton and Robert Gibbons. And they knew that I would like to be in state government. I sort of wanted to be the commissioner of education. That's been my number, I love education. Well, there was no opening in education. And so, and it was near the end of his term where there are often turnovers, and this housing authority thing came open. And guess what I said first? I'm not qualified to do that. I wasn't on paper. And I will never forget my confirmation hearing, because you had to be confirmed. Real estate experience? No. Banking experience? No, none of those things.

But there was a wonderful man named Clyde Hichborn who at the time was a Republican, and he was called into the Republican minority office and told, you can't vote for her, we're near the end of the administration, let's just keep this open until the new governor comes. And he says, I like the woman. And so he voted with them and so I had a majority vote going into the senate, and it takes, you know, a big vote to overturn the committee vote in Maine. So thanks to him, I went in with a majority vote from the state and local government committee, got confirmed and got sworn in, and actually loved it. I've loved everything I've ever done, that's part of my problem.

But it was a four year term, and went to Maine State Housing, which is a housing finance

agency, and it is the Housing Authority for those cities in the state that don't have their own. Lewiston-Auburn, for example, has a housing authority of its own, so we could never do anything in Lewiston-Auburn without their permission. But we were the housing authority for projects that were outside city boundaries. We were also the issuer of the tax credit for building multi family housing that George Mitchell helped create. As a matter of fact, he asked me to chair that task force. He wanted someone that he trusted as we put that together, so I traveled to Washington and worked with a whole coalition of people to help craft that. Which is the one remaining thing, one of the few remaining things we have left to spur the production of multi-family housing.

We managed a lot of housing projects, but there had been a report as far as I can remember, about homeless and so, I know in Lewiston-Auburn we did a transitional housing program for kids, the teens, they were throwaway kids. Their families didn't want them, they weren't in foster care, they were too old to make stay home, and they were too young to just be on the street. So we didn't do programs, we were the bricks and mortar, so we always worked with non-profit groups, churches or non-profits to put this together. So, it was a great lesson in learning about public-private partnerships. And there was not a thing, as I said, that we could do frankly without, to make it even happen without partnerships.

And they issued a lot of bonds, you had to deal with the stuff on Wall Street. But I learned very quickly there, as I'm sure a lot of these leaders do, you surround yourself with bright people to complement your skills. And I inherited a fabulous treasurer who's still there, and when he leaves I am quite concerned about the Housing Authority. He'll be hard to replace.

NC: When you say dealing with Washington, meaning HUD or -?

LM: Yes, the Housing Authority is the conduit for a lot of HUD programs and we had to deal with them on that level, even more so now I think. I think there's a requirement that you create a housing strategic plan around homelessness, submit that to HUD. There are HUD funds that flow through the Housing Authority. Some of those old housing projects with expiring use that were built in the old days, the Housing Authority was involved in trying to extend the life of those because at the end of a certain period of time they belong to the developer. And we worked with things like the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as they would, as elderly people would begin to see their aging in place, they went into these senior citizens high risers but then all of a sudden they're going to need nursing home care, other things, so we began that process as well. It was just an interesting time.

We were at the height, very much like it is now, at the height of the housing market where housing was so expensive in places like Portland, at a premium, and on the island, people couldn't find a place to live close to their work, and you'll see that a lot again. And then of course the bottom fell out right after that. But it's a very cyclical market and you have to try to stay ahead of it as best you can to make sure there's enough housing on the market to try to keep those rents down.

We partnered with Farmer's Home, because we found in rural Maine that, even if you gave a one percent mortgage rate to a developer, it was hard to drop the rents down enough for an elderly

couple living in Mars Hill, for example. It was just a constant, we had some failures obviously. We tried to work with the non-profit community, some weren't up to speed, some were great. Some are still here, like CEI is a terrific one, Coaster Economic Interprises. They're out doing economic development as well as housing. York Cumberland Housing, lots of good things going on the state, and the Housing Authority is just one piece of a big housing puzzle.

NC: Tell me a little bit about Women's Recognition Week. Were you involved with getting that in the legislature as a, within the Maine school system?

LM: Oh, I know what that was about. I'm sorry, I had to stop and think about that. I don't even know if we called it that. There was a class, a seventh grade class at Carl B. Lord School in North Vassalboro, Maine who had a woman teacher, and they'd been studying about Women's History Month. Well they thought we should do the same thing in Maine. So as you know, in Maine, only a legislator can introduce a bill for citizens, and a lot of the bills come not only from departments but from any citizen who's aggrieved about something or who thinks there ought to be a law. Well, they said, "Well would you sponsor this bill for us?" And so we did, I did, and the young people came and they testified on behalf of it and it passed. But it was truly initiated by these young women in the seventh grade in Vassalboro, Maine. Unlike the lobster -

NC: Wow, by the children?

LM: By the children. I mean, their teacher I'm sure got them thinking about it, but it was a, I know you can't create laws every year to educate every class, but I happened to agree with what they were trying to do. And they had a chance to follow it through the entire legislative process as well.

NC: Great experience. You were mentioning the lobstermen?

LM: Oh, I was going to say, the license plate that so many people in Maine love to hate, that is just now going away. It was the red lobster on the license plate. Many people tried to white over it, and they hated it. They'd buy the loon plates so they didn't have to wear that. That was a school class that created that. And that's why I was joking about that, you have to be careful. You can't adopt every idea that the school classes have. I think Women's Recognition Week, or History Week, was a little more accepted than the lobster plates.

NC: Now, so now you have a, Maine Matters, the TV show?

LM: Yes.

NC: Can you tell me about how you became involved with this project?

LM: When I came here as a public policy fellow, first of all it's a major step for the, I've worked a lot with the chancellor and I think he thought, he saw the importance of the university being part of the community and in policy. Not politics with a big 'P' but a little 'p' like making things happen. And there's no tradition of that. In Massachusetts former speakers of the house become presidents of colleges. In Maine, they're sort of like a pox, you know, if you're political

that's bad for the university. But if you follow that to its ultimate step, who funds the university but people who sit in the legislature. Well, the chancellor certainly understood that. He also understood the need for community outreach. And so he talked to the folks here at the Muskie School and they created a position of public policy fellow, and I became the first one, which was important because you had a practicing politician, if you will, who could interact with the students who were studying about it. I team taught a course with Dean Bart Wexler about the legislative process, and he would give them the academic side and I would give them some practical side, and we'd bring in panels of different people. But, so it was a combination of those things: you had the academic, the theoretical, and you had well this is what really happened. And so it was very, it's been very interesting.

But one of the other things I wanted to do was to make the Muskie School, and this is not a put down for the Muskie School, the Harvard of Maine, that we have so much here and so few people know about it. It's just an extraordinary school. Talented faculty, research that's national in scope. But do people know it very much, I don't think so because the legislature didn't even know it very much. I learned so much more about Muskie after I came here than I ever took advantage of when I was a policy maker. So it seemed like a very natural thing to do, so I thought okay, we should do a public policy television show. Serendipity, I went over to Time-Warner and the woman who had this show called Maine Matters was being promoted to vice president one hour later. She says, "Take my show." I said, "I'd love to." And so I've tried to feature Muskie faculty when I can, but it isn't just them. I have had everything from domestic violence to homeless youth, higher education access issues, everything that we do here. Aging in America. In fact we did, their show got an award because I had many debates on those bond issue questions. When they were debating gay rights I had the Christian Civic League and the Maine Won't Discriminate, Death with Dignity, those things, I mean every single -

NC: Touchy issues.

LM: Touchy, yeah, so it's not a debate show, it's not one of those crossfire things. Sometimes I'll just take an issue and look at it from three different lenses. And so, those are some of our tapes up there, it just keeps going. We tape every other month. Clean elections, you see up there, we did that. A little bit of everything. And I also host, I don't host but I put it together, I get the speakers, they host themselves, I introduce them, the Muskie Forum, and it's a monthly radio program. And we have a brown bag lunch here at the Muskie School, and one of our most recent very good speakers was Trish Riley from the National Academy of State Health Policy. He gave us a fabulous discussion on health policy. And then we have Q and A, and you can imagine what that must be like when you have this health teaching group to ask the questions. It wasn't a 'got you' kind of thing, but a challenging thing. Tom Allen came and did his prescription drugs and, but any topic. In fact, starting out this fall we're going to have someone talk about transportation and rail and stuff like that. So any public policy issues. And they air it on Fridays in, along with the Speaking in Maine Forum, like when they do the Cambridge Forum sometimes or whatever.

NC: Is this Maine Public Radio?

LM: Maine Public Radio.

NC: What time?

LM: One o'clock on Fridays, but not every Friday. We have a monthly, a monthly. This cable thing is local access cable, but they will allow us to take the cable and anybody who's on the show can shop it around, they can take it to their own local cable and if they're willing to show it Time-Warner doesn't care. They're quite happy to share their stuff. So those are the two real big outreach things that I do.

We also partner with Maine Municipal, and we run a leadership program for municipal officials and it meets four times a year, four weekends a year, and it's in its second year. It's been very popular in terms of helping them deal with leadership issues and solving problems that they must deal with on the local level.

NC: This held in Portland?

LM: All over the system. We've had one in Port-, the last one will be at Portland at the Stone House, the USM, but we've had it at Machias, we've had it at University of Maine. We were going to Presque Isle but they chose to go to Belfast, the campus down in Belfast. But all over the system, we, Orono, it usually starts at -

NC: But northern Maine does get involved.

LM: Oh, absolutely, because the municipal officials are from all over the state. And I've also tried to work a lot with Deirdre Mageean who runs the Margaret Chase Smith Center at Orono, that's another thing. I think this is one university, and I don't believe in the turf issues and neither does Deirdre, and we've done some legislative education type things in partnership using the resources of the entire system. So, it's hard to describe what I, sometimes, I told the dean, I've had two and a half deans while I've been here, too, they keep passing through. We had an interim dean, Bob Woodbury, the former chancellor of the university is the current dean, but he's leaving and a new dean is coming in the fall. But I said, it's like throwing spaghetti against the wall, what sticks is done, what sticks is worth doing. So I've tried things that I did once and they weren't very good, but some of these things like the radio and the television have been very good I think for the university.

NC: You just mentioned Margaret Chase Smith. I was wondering if you can tell me, what's your perception of her career in Maine politics, and national politics as well?

LM: There is no one who could have anything but praise for her declaration of conscience speech. That is the main thing that I know, and most people know about her, but say, if that's all people could say about you that's quite a bit. And how in the tradition of Maine people, again, to stand up to something that they thought was wrong. And I think the fact that Maine has had people like Margaret Chase Smith, Bill Cohen, George Mitchell, and, it's just phenomenal. And Muskie. I mean these, this is a little state of a million people and look how many people I've just ticked off who were senators with national name recognition. And that's not true of many states, is it? So I think she's certainly in that tradition, and I know you hear both Senator Collins and

Senator Snowe talking about what an important role model she was. And I will say this, even though I was running against Bill Cohen, don't misunderstand, she supported Bill Cohen, but I remember going to her home and she was gracious to talk to me about what it was like to be a woman running for office. I mean, I never asked her for anything, but just having that time with her. I mean, you can't help but revere someone like that, and I think she was one of those wonderful people who the longer she was around as the elder states woman, the more this, you realize and appreciate what a marvelous thing that she had done.

NC: Now, you mentioned before we started this interview that you didn't have deep personal connections with Ed Muskie himself, and I was wondering if you could tell me wha-.

LM: I would like to have.

NC: Yeah, but can you tell me what you did know about him?

LM: I'll tell you, I mean I had a few times when I would sit at the table with Ed Muskie. I was a very lowly legislator, don't misunderstand. So, I mean, it wasn't that he wouldn't talk to you, it was just that he was surrounded by important and busy people all the time. And you also, and I also frankly didn't want to bother him. I mean, he was very important, and he was cleaning up my air.

He was, the thing that I remember really most about him is when we were having the state split over the Maine Indian Lands Claim settlement. He came to the Maine legislature and addressed the chambers in joint session and spoke to us about the importance of resolving this issue, and keeping our state together and respecting the Native Americans and all this other stuff. It was the most statesmanlike speech that you could ever have heard. It was, I mean, and when he said it, of course, it's above politics. He appealed, as my husband would say, to your best angels. That he made you try to be more than you were and to get beyond prejudice and fear, and to "Let's get on with this." And I, again, I can't tell you his words but they weren't important. It was the tone that he set for resolving this most contentious debate about who owned Maine. And he was extraordinary.

Of course, we all went to the Muskie lobster bakes, even the lowliest of Democrats could pay their fifty dollars and go to his home in Kennebunk. And they set up tents in the back yard and he came. And in fact, this isn't for your taping because it won't show, but the picture up there where we're all so informally dressed, that's at his home, at one of those famous Democratic National Committee lobster bakes. And you can see that Governor Brennan, George Mitchell and Ed Muskie, and legislators, and just plain people who worked in the fields could come, shake hands with Ed Muskie, he'd talk to you. So it was pretty extraordinary. If you think about living in Maine and just being remotely involved in politics, that you could rub shoulders with such greatness. It's pretty extraordinary.

NC: Now, it sounds as if what you're saying in some ways is that there was a bipartisan agreement that Ed Muskie was somebody to be respected.

LM: Absolutely, absolutely. I'm sure, when he ran for office, that that dissipated a bit, because

if you were supporting a Republican candidate running against him, you would. So I don't want to gloss over, there are differences, but at the same time I think people come together after that, particularly for someone of his character and stature, and rally behind him.

NC: What do you think Maine is today, politically speaking?

LM: I think the entire loss, northeast is, has lost some clout. Not because of the people, but simply because we're losing numbers of people and the power has shifted to the Sun Belt and to the mid west. I mean, this next redistricting we're going to hang on to our two. But, hey, Nevada's gaining quite a few, and Arizona and California. I mean, we're small potatoes in terms of the big population shifts and changes, and our economy is not as strong here as it once was. We're trying to adjust from being the old manufacturing economy to the new high tech, and there are pockets of it obviously. Boston is a success story. But drive through Hartford, Connecticut and you'll see a lot of problems. So I think the positions of leadership have shifted away a bit from the northeast to other parts of the country; the seniority issues. But at the same time, Olympia Snowe, for example, certainly is well known as one of the dean of the women. People know her. She, I served with Olympia as well, she was in the house with me and then she went over to the senate. I mean, she certainly paid her dues everywhere. And so she really has a grasp of all of it, and she's very good, she's very, very good. And she has also done a good job in being a spokesperson for the moderates as they're trying to build coalitions in a split senate. The whole country is sort of trying to figure out where we're going, if you want to know the truth.

So Maine is no different I think from anybody else right now in this period of transition, and I think politics right now are very volatile. We don't have an Ed Muskie, if that's what you mean, or George Mitchell. George Mitchell went on, I mean good heavens, George Mitchell's an institution. And he will tell you, he was a protégé of Muskie and tried to live up to those lessons, if you will. And, I mean we send him to make peace in the most volatile places in the country, and he is using his time to do that, and he's trying to raise funds for education. I mean, he's still an extraordinarily valuable presence wherever he goes in Maine.

And, you know, Jane Muskie is still very involved. And when they're doing things here she comes, and she's just delightful. We had an event here to introduce people to the Muskie School, at Elliott Cutler's home who had been a staff person years ago for Muskie. And she was there, she was right there and still, she looks wonderful, and was doing her thing about that. A couple years ago we were trying to raise money for the Muskie School. I had the honor of going to the legislature and introducing Ned Muskie to legislators, because he was there speaking on behalf of his father's legacy and asking for money. He was very good, we got three point five million. We're still, we're having to raise the match to build us a building so that it won't be in the law school. They'd like for us to leave and vacate the space, and we also need a space, we're scattered everywhere. But the point is, walking around the halls in the leg-, I knew everybody, I'd just left, don't misunderstand, it was fun for me to go back and see old friends. There wasn't a person, Republican or Democratic, young or old, and particularly the older ones who spoke to Ned, they all had a story. I remember when your father did this, I remember when your father was at my house. And Ned was so gracious, for hours he stood there and listened to all these 'your dad' stories. He was just wonderful. And then, so, and I thought, that told me so much about how Muskie is still revered by Maine people.

NC: Well that seems like a great note to leave it on.

LM: Okay. I hope I didn't tell you more than you wanted to know.

NC: Oh, not at all. Thank you very much.

LM: You're very welcome.

End of Interview