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Interview with Raymond J. “Ray” Rasenberger by Don Nicoll

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Rasenberger, Raymond J. “Ray”

Interviewer

Nicoll, Don

Date

April 10, 2001

Place

Bethesda, Maryland

ID Number

MOH 264

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Biographical Note

Raymond “Ray” Rasenberger was born on September 30, 1927 in Brooklyn, New York. He graduated from Dartmouth College and received his law degree from George Washington University. He worked on Muskie’s 1972 presidential campaign. Raymond J. Rasenberger has been practicing law since 1957, and is a founding partner of Zuckert, Scutt & Rasenberger when it was formed in 1964. He is married to Nancy Rasenberger.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: family background; meeting Muskie; campaign work; cultural revolution; 1972 convention; Vietnam War; Pan Am; Nestle; budget resolution; Freddy Vahlsing investigation; Berl Bernhard; and Dartmouth College.

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Transcript

Don Nicoll: It is Tuesday, the 10th of April, 2001. We are at 7417 Haddington Place, Bethesda, Maryland. Don Nicoll is interviewing Ray Rasenberger. Ray, would you give us your full name and spell it, and then your date and place of birth.

Raymond Rasenberger: Raymond J. Rasenberger, and Rasenberger is spelled R-A-S-E-N-B-E-R-G-E-R. And I was born on September 30th, 1927 in New York City, actually Brooklyn, some hospital in Brooklyn, New York.

DN: So you're a native of Brooklyn.

RR: Yes.

DN: And what were your parents' occupations?

RR: My father was, for most of his career, a health inspector for the city of New York, and ultimately became chief inspector for each of the boroughs, I think, except perhaps the Bronx. But that was his job. I don't know that he intended to make that his career, but he got that job just before the Depression hit. And the main good thing about it, it was a job, and by the time

the Depression was over he had enough invested in it so he made that his career.

DN: Did your mother have a profession or was she a homemaker?

RR: No, she was a homemaker. She did actually, no, let me correct that. When I got to high school age she had been, she went back to work as a comptometer operator for I think it was then Esso in New York City. That had been what she'd done before she graduated, before she got married, and she picked that up again and did work a while, that's true.

DN: And did you have brothers or sisters?

RR: I have one sister who's three and a half years younger than me.

DN: As you were growing up did you think of a career in law, or is that something that came later?

RR: Well, both in a sense. I know that I had thoughts about law during my early educa-, I'd say high school education. And I know that when I got to college I thought seriously enough about it to send for the applications from Yale Law School, I knew that's the school I wanted to go to. I got the applications and then I took stock of my financial condition and realized that there was no way I could afford to go. My parents couldn't help me at all, and while that was okay in college it was pretty, it would be pretty hard looking at law school. So I didn't go to Yale, I went instead to graduate school in public administration at the Maxwell School at Syracuse University. I had, my degree at Dartmouth had been in a multi disciplined major called public administration, which was basically a lot of social sciences, whatever you wanted to take.

And so when it came time to get out of Dartmouth I applied to the Maxwell School, they gave me a scholarship, and Dartmouth also had a scholarship that they gave me. So between the two I had enough money to go to graduate school, and that's what I did. But, and then that was followed by a job in what was then called the Bureau of the Budget, a great job. I loved working there, but realized after a few years that it was not a place I wanted to spend my life and that I did want to be a lawyer. And about that time, this was 1953, I married my wife Nancy, and two weeks later, with her consent and support, started law school at night at George Washington University.

DN: While you were still at the Bureau of the Budget?

RR: Yes, and so I, it took three and a half years to get through law school. We took a half a summer off, we had babies in each of those summers. And in 1957 I finally finished night law school and went looking for a job and got one as a lawyer, and started work as a lawyer on my thirtieth birthday, September 30th, 1957.

DN: And were you with the same law firm that you stayed with?

RR: I got a job with a two-man law firm who had an aviation regulatory practice, Bone & Scout it was called, and I enjoyed that very much. I liked law when it was mixed with policy,

not just law. I don't think I would have been a lawyer if I was doing wills or estates or things like that, but in Washington the kind of law you practice has got a lot of interesting policy overtones. So I got into this field, I got to know it. Harry Bowen, who was the head of the firm, was not really that much interested in practicing law as he was in cultivating clients which was, so he gave me a lot of responsibility. Jerry Scoutt, who was his younger partner, moved out to another firm. And I got a lot of good experience practicing law before the Civil Aeronautics Board mostly, and sometimes in the courts.

Then in 1963 Jerry's partner, law partner died, Jerry Scoutt this is. He asked me to join him starting another law firm, which we did as of January 1, 1964. It was called, at that time, Lear, Scoutt, & Rasenberger, with Lear being the partner of Jerry's who had died. And, but basically it was Jerry and I, everything fifty-fifty, and it's been that way ever since. That same law firm still goes today, it's called Zuckert, Scoutt & Rasenberger now, with about thirty-five lawyers. Practice has broadened somewhat, as you might imagine. But I've had a very rich and interesting law career, I'd have to say. And now I'm having a rich and interesting retirement.

DN: It sounds as if you're keeping very busy.

RR: I am, yeah, I love it.

DN: How did you first get involved with Ed Muskie?

RR: I think it was Berl Bernhard who drew me in. I had known Berl at Dartmouth, he was the class of '51 there, I was the class of '49. But I went back after graduate school at Syracuse to serve as an instructor in the "Great Issues" course, which was a course all seniors had to take. And Berl's class was then the seniors, so I got to know a lot of those seniors. I was more their age than I was the age of my faculty colleagues, and I had known Berl I guess before I graduated, but, and we'd had similar records at Dartmouth. I mean in an extracurricular, since both of us had been head of the student government at one time or other. So anyway as, I don't know when Berl got involved with Ed in terms of the serious effort to get the nomination in 1972. But I think Berl asked me if I would be willing to help on a part-time basis, without giving up my job, sometime before the 1970 election, although I can't remember just when it was. And so I began to get drawn into the various things that needed to be done to mount a candidacy, first for the nomination and then the election.

DN: Were you at all involved in the '68 campaign?

RR: No. I had been in other presidential campaigns as an advance man. Jack Kennedy notably, and also as an advance man when he was president. A little bit in the '64 campaign for, an advance, worked for Hubert Humphrey, and I did not particularly want to do any for Lyndon Johnson, and then for Bob Kennedy, who was then running for senator from New York. I did some speech writing and sort of general 'whatever was needed to be done' kind of stuff. So I had, that's one nice thing about a law practice, you can take your time to do these things, a week or two at a time, and go back to your practice. And I had been doing that, so when Berl came along I said, "Sure I'd like to help." I knew something about Muskie and he was obviously an appealing candidate, at least I thought so, and so it was a very easy decision for me.

DN: What did you know about him then and where had you learned it?

RR: Well, I can't give you anything specific about that. I, you know, as you know of course, he ran in '68 and got a reputation, or his reputation was enhanced by that race even though it wasn't won. I remember, you know, once I got going with Muskie millions, not millions, but lots of people would say if the ticket had been turned around the other way in '68 we might have won. So he came out of that campaign with his reputation enhanced, I think, and I'm sure that was part of the information that generated my interest and willingness to work for him.

DN: Had, when did you, do you remember when you first met him?

RR: I remember the first time I was with him for any length of time, and that was shortly after I sort of signed on with Berl to do whatever the campaign required. He said, "The first thing you need to do is to get to know the senator, because you're going to be seeing a lot of him." So he said, "He's going this week, or in a few days, to make a speech before the Economic Club of Detroit, flying out on a private plane. Why don't you go with him? Just go with him, talk to him and come back with him and get sort of a little rapport established." So we did that and I remember that trip very well.

DN: What did you do on that trip?

RR: Well, we talked. I can't remember the subjects, except I remember being very impressed. I remember we had a discussion about the astronauts and my concern was that these astronauts were getting too much publicity and it was all blown out of proportion. And Ed asked me, he didn't agree, he asked me, "Well how many can you name?" And I don't recall I could name more than one or two. Point made. He was very sharp, and a very appealing person in every way. I won't repeat all the other things I'm sure others have said about him, but his mental shrewdness and acuity, his integrity, all of those things kind of came through to me personally in that conversation.

And I remember, after he made the speech, we were driven back to the airport by some of the automobile people in Detroit. And Ed was in the back seat, I was in the front seat, and sitting next to Ed was somebody who had obviously been selected by some automobile company to give him a little talk about environmental matters that were bothering them. And he listened but that's all. But I think the whole thing was, I mean, the Economic Club of Detroit in those days was a stop that all potential candidates made, as you may recall, and I think that it's, and the automobile industry of course was heavily involved in that. And I'm sure I hadn't thought about it, but Ed had expected that we would get lobbied by the auto industry, and he was.

DN: When you got involved in the campaign, what sorts of things did you do?

RR: Well, you know, I've thought back and I did almost everything. It was a wonderful role in a way. I ended up as the manager of convention arrangements, but prior to that time I can remember being in meetings where we were writing speeches with people like Doris Kearns and Tony Lake and other people like that. He drew a lot of people to him. I can remember being at a

lot of money raising meetings with, involving Arnold Picker and others, the Tisch brothers. I can remember meetings involving Cy Vance.

Ed, as you know, had attracted almost every prominent Democrat to his cause about that time, and everybody wanted to be associated with him. So we had a really stellar collection of supporters in policy areas and in every area including, I recall Clark Clifford attached himself to Ed very early and I can remember going to a dinner at Clark Clifford's house with Ed and maybe three or four of the other people in the campaign. Now in retrospect I see that as Clifford seeing Muskie as the next president and attempting, as many did, to be involved with him beforehand. There was no shortage of volunteers with experience, as you may remember.

DN: And through that period there were the highs of anticipation, and then the campaign got into trouble and, what do you think was happening?

RR: Well I should add to the last answer which I didn't, that one job that took a lot of my time was, I was assigned to recruit state coordinators. These would be mostly people from Washington, mostly Washington lawyers, who would be assigned to be the contact person between the state Muskie organization and the state Democrats, generally, and the Muskie campaign organization. And I spent a lot of time going out recruiting my friends and people I didn't know, people like Tommy Boggs and Jim Holden and people like that, to take a state and be our guy. And it wasn't that hard to do, but it was fairly time consuming for me. That's a digression. Your question was about the campaign?

DN: Yeah, but before we go back to that, how much time had you anticipated giving to the campaign when you started, and how much time did you finally give to it?

RR: Well, you know, I didn't keep any time records. I'm sure that I spent at least two or three weeks a month at my law practice, except when we got to the convention. But probably I would say, I'm just guessing here, but it couldn't have been more than a quarter of my time that I took off for whatever it was I was doing. I had an office in wherever it was we all had offices, and I can recall Jack English had an office and George Mitchell and Mark Shields and two or three other political operatives like that were there; and of course Berl. And then it migrated, towards, well you know what happened in New Hampshire, the campaign lost momentum for various reasons even though he won that primary.

But at some point before that Berl had asked me if I would take charge of the convention arrangements. And somewhere, as we moved along towards the convention, I began to spend all my time recruiting people to help us in Miami in various capacities. First of all trying to educate myself as to what the job was, and it had a lot of different elements as I'm sure you know. I mean, communications was big and was, we were just getting into the trailers in those days. Security was a big issue, scheduling, housing all the staff, just a gillion things needed to be done to be ready. Now as you know, the campaign went on and our chances looked dimmer and dimmer, but we never thought of not going to the convention and not putting on the best show we could. And so we did. And I, before the convention I must have spent a week in Miami full time. That was probably the biggest single block of time I gave to the campaign.

DN: What do you think happened to the campaign from before the New Hampshire problem and on through?

RR: Well, my own analysis is that we were caught in a sort of a cultural revolution that we did not tap into as successfully as people like George McGovern did. That the impact of the Vietnam War was, I don't think sensed. I don't know about Ed Muskie personally, but it didn't show up in terms of collecting the kind of enthusiastic adherents that Gene McCarthy had collected, and George McGovern. And there was also a lot of pressure for reforms, liberalizations within the party, as you may know. I remember there were, for example, there was a question about candidates disclosing their financial condition. Something that had not been proposed before, and which Ed sort of instinctively resisted as I recall, and McGovern instinctively or otherwise embraced. And that sort of illustrates the fact.

I think McGovern was somewhat more in tune with the activist, liberal wing of the party that had sort of moved ahead of Ed Muskie, although he was certainly a great liberal in every sense of the word and a much more effective one, in my opinion, than George McGovern ever was. But the enthusiasm of the moment, or at least the conventional wisdom, was to move the party quickly into an aggressive liberal anti-war mode, and my feeling was that that had a lot to do with McGovern's relative success in New Hampshire and the momentum that he picked up after that.

DN: Did, how did the campaign deal with the almost certain defeat in the convention and putting on a class act while you were there?

RR: Well, to some extent we simply pretended that we were a viable, we had a viable candidate. You couldn't really be there and not do everything that a candidate would do. We had the money, we had to have the communications set up. And of course you never know what can happen in a convention even though the odds were very long. You never know what might happen, so we had to be ready in the same way that we would be ready if we were the leading contender, in terms of all the details. And I think of that period as one of just a thousand details.

DN: As you headed into that, you mentioned earlier the number of volunteers who were available when you started, and when you got into the convention and you were assembling people to take on tasks. Were you getting responses from some of the people who had been involved, or had they started to fall off?

RR: No, I didn't notice any lack of people willing to help. I mean, there were people who were, had already been involved with Ed who were not going to jump ship. And in the course of my working with Ed earlier I had spotted some people who I thought would be, particularly Mike Barnes, who I thought would be terrific as a helper on the convention, and he had worked in the Muskie office at, on K Street. No, I didn't notice any flagging. And many people came, like Madeleine Albright, who just wanted to be involved in the convention, and they picked up whatever jobs there were that needed to be done. But I did not sense any lack of interest, people "falling off the boat" so to speak, because our chances had declined.

There was one incident I will mention in that respect, and that was when two young men came out of the blue to me to volunteer to help on the campaign, to help on the convention. There was

something about them that didn't feel right or sound right. And I said, "No thanks," and that was the end of it. I thought though many times since that there was a very good likelihood that those were going to be Nixon plants in our campaign. I have nothing to support that except the fact that their stories were so improbable and their whole manner just did not fit, you know, my own gut sense of what a person who really wanted to help Ed Muskie would talk like or sound like. So I guess they were not good enough actors anyway, they didn't get the job.

DN: Had you had an inkling of plants up to that point?

RR: No, that was the only time. It wasn't, I believe Harold Hughes was running the campaign then as I recall, in the latter stages of it, and he was a, he was good and he was, I think, a real encouragement to all the rest of us. I mean, there was nothing that was flagging in his own energy and enthusiasm for the campaign. So we just went straight ahead and hoped a miracle would happen. If it was going to happen, we were going to be ready for it.

DN: Were you involved in the effort to break the California winner-take-all?

RR: No, I was not. I'll give you one memory from the Miami convention, though, that sticks with me very much. And that was the night that McGovern was actually nominated at the convention. Ed and Jane had a suite in the hotel we were in, I can't remember which one it was, and several of us were in the room watching the convention on television. Nancy, my wife, was there and she said, we had run into Gene McCarthy somewhere around. He was there with one delegate, he said, but that was all he needed. She said, "Why don't we ask Gene to come up?" And Ed said, "Yeah, that's a good idea." So he did. Sitting in the same room and watching these giants in my opinion, Muskie and McCarthy, watch McGovern get nominated in total silence, really sticks with me in a way a lot of events in that campaign don't.

DN: Now Gene McCarthy and Ed had split, in a sense, during the 1968 campaign. What was your observation of their relationship in that '69, '70, '71, '72 period?

RR: Well, I don't think they had much to do with each other during that period. Gene McCarthy's quite, you know, quite a character in his own right. And he was, I mean to my knowledge, not making any overtures to Ed, and Ed was busy with the campaign. But they had a kind of mutual respect, so, you know. The kind of things, when we suggested, when my wife actually was the one who suggested that we invite Gene up, that Ed said, "Yeah, fine." I mean he, the ways senators who disagree still respect each other, I think there was a lot of respect both ways there, even though on issues they were apart. And they certainly weren't hand-in-hand on any part of the campaign.

DN: As you mentioned earlier, you felt that the Muskie campaign didn't quite grasp, as it were, the changes that were taking place in the society and in the party. Were the impressions of liberal vs. conservative more a matter of symbol or were, did they indeed reflect different kinds of commitments during that period?

RR: I don't know how much substance there was to those differences as distinguished in style or, of course there was Vietnam and it was pretty hard to get further to the left shall we say, or

more dovish than George McGovern, so there were some differences there. But as you know, Ed Muskie's liberal credentials were gold plated, and he had really done something in terms of making liberal, good liberal things happen. And of course we still have those today, particularly in the environmental area. But, no, I didn't, to the extent that I focused on it at the time or can remember what I thought at the time, I don't think of it as a wide divide except possibly for this one consuming issue that seemed to divide America, the war.

DN: What was your impression of Ed Muskie's position on the war?

RR: Well, I think he was, as I recall he was anti war. I could be wrong about this, I haven't really thought about this. But I have the, and this is just a sense, that he just wasn't as vocal and wasn't perceived to be as much a critic of the war as, say, McCarthy and McGovern had been. But I confess I could be wrong about that. I think he was on the side of the angels so to speak, in terms of the ultimate futility of the Vietnam war, but I don't think that public perceptions were, would equate him with some of the really hard line, if that's the word, doves that were attracting the, particularly the younger people in the party.

DN: Now, you continued to be a friend to Ed Muskie after that campaign.

RR: Right.

DN: And I understand from friends that you saw quite a bit of him over the years quite steadily.

RR: Well, I did want to keep up with him. I admired and liked him immensely, felt badly about the outcome. But he was a person that anyone who knew would want to see and talk to because he had insights on things. So I would periodically have lunch with him in the years that followed that. Not all that often, but we had, I'd say over the course of how ever many years it was, many lunches. Not when he was secretary of state, but this is when he was either in the Senate or in private law practice later on. We talked a lot and I enjoyed those sessions.

The only thing I would say, I've heard others say that the loss in 1972 was something that he shook off and was able to move on to the rest of his career with. I didn't have, he certainly moved on in terms of it not disabling him from the kind of active career he did have after that, but I felt that it left a deep wound with him. He would periodically refer to it in a way that you, you just knew he had not shaken it off.

DN: What was the nature of the wound?

RR: Well, I mean just the whole, the whole experience of that campaign when he had been sort of the chosen instrument of all the leading Democrats to lead their party, and so it seemed to me. The prospects for success which were so high early on. And then the sudden turnaround that took place. That was, you know, if you had been the candidate you would never stop asking yourself, "What did I do wrong?" I don't know that he did that much wrong, I think maybe it was events that turned the campaign towards McGovern. But whatever it was, I'm sure he had things that he thought he would have done differently. I think there were some things he could have done differently to get the nomination. Frankly, I've felt since then that Nixon was going

to be, was more difficult to defeat than I thought at that time. And even though, even if we had gotten the nomination, this is just me speculating, it would have been a very tough race against Nixon. I mean it was a pushover for him against McGovern, I think Muskie would have done much better. But I'm not sure we would have won that race.

I think, with what I know about him, I've never known anybody in national politics who I thought more able and capable of being president of the United States than Ed Muskie, by a long shot. I haven't known them all, needless to say, but I've seen them all and read the papers and I'm witness to the last, you know, years of presidents and presidential candidates, and there is nobody in a league with Ed Muskie. And I think Ed himself knew he was a class act, I mean knew that he deserved that job. Not just because of his integrity and all of this, he was right about so many things, policy things, he was smart and he was politically very shrewd. Time and again I was impressed with how acute his political antenna were on issues. I can't give you an example. You were going to ask me for an example but I, I can't think of a specific one now.

But I can remember, as I said, frequently being party to or listening to a conversation with, between him and one of the other aides or whatever, and hearing a reaction from him that I thought, "God, that's right. That's what we ought to do first." It was a, in terms of looking after some matter or talking to some other person, or not doing something that seemed to make sense because of a down side politically. He was not naive at all in the world of politics, and of course he couldn't have gotten where he did had he been, but he combined that shrewdness with a kind of generosity that doesn't, that I don't always combine in my mind, if you know what I mean. He was not just a politician, though the politician was part of his make up, an impressive part, just like the rest of him.

DN: What, in addition to his political shrewdness and skill, do you think made him stand head and shoulders over other presidential candidates or presidents during that period?

RR: Well, I would say he was able to del-, he was great at delivering a speech. He was great at writing speeches actually. As you probably know, he was great at correcting speeches written by other people. And he was great at delivering a speech at a level that both connected with people and yet had the kind of rhetorical qualities that a lot of candidates lack. And I think there was something about him, something that he projected, that a lot of people related to in terms of personal honesty and integrity. I don't know how to be more specific about that, but there was nobody, nobody ever said anything negative about, that I heard, about Ed in terms of those qualities. I mean they may have argued with him about this, that or the other thing, but not about the basic quality of the man.

And then, of course, he had successfully guided the environmental legislation to the Senate which was no small accomplishment, and then the Budget Act, which I think was a real major accomplishment, and a lasting accomplishment. Things that only a person who had the respect of his colleagues and knew how to manage things in the Senate and in public, and with the public generally, could have accomplished.

DN: What, in addition to the budget issue and the environmental issues, what are some of the issues that you felt he was right on at the time?

RR: Those are the ones that stick in my mind, Don. I don't have any others specifically to talk about unless you, I'm sure you know what they were, but nothing else comes to mind. Those two, I think those two were his major achievements, the environmental legislation and the Budget Act. And as far as other legislation was concerned, I don't have much to add.

DN: In the years after 1972 when you had lunch with him, saw him, talked with him, what sorts of concerns were on his mind in public policy arena or politics?

RR: Well, you're asking me to recall what we talked about at those lunches. And I, my, all I can say is that we sort of talked about everything, whatever was going on on the Hill or in Congress or in the country at large we talked about. That's what I loved about the lunches. I was talking to a man who understood the issues and had thought about them and had something to say about them. I felt like a student in a seminar with one, you know, one student and he was my professor. It was just everything, that's all, that's the only answer I can really give you.

DN: Was it mostly public policy, or were there other things that he talked about?

RR: There was one, at one point after he had been secretary of state and was back with the Chadbourne firm, or was with them maybe for the first time, I persuaded him to collaborate with me and our firm in an effort to get the State Department to hire us as a team to represent the United States in an arbitration that was coming up between the U.S. and the U.K. concerning aviation charges of some kind. I think they were probably landing fees at Heathrow. Pan American had paid for many years, fees they thought were outrageous. The U.S. government had supported them in that; Pan Am in those days was, there were only one or two transatlantic carriers, and there had built up this history of complaints between, from our country to the U.K. We finally managed to get it to international arbitration. It was a field in which our firm had a lot of expertise, aviation, but we felt that we couldn't mount a successful effort to get the business so to speak without someone with Muskie's standing.

He and I, I remember going over to the office, explaining the project to him. He at that time was not, I didn't have the impression he was that busy as a lawyer. He was doing other projects for other people and he was useful I think, to his law firm, in terms of attracting clients or impressing clients, but he was, I don't think was not all that interested in practicing law. But he sounded interested and I think he was interested in this project. And so we put together a proposal, presented it to the State Department, and then found out that the other competing proposal was from Rogers & Wells, the law firm which was headed by Bill Rogers, who was also a former secretary of state. And we were then in a Republican administration and so it was a team headed by a Democratic secretary of state against a team headed by a Republican one, and it was no contest. But we did go over there, we made a pitch. He was right there with us, he got very involved in it, and I think he enjoyed it even though we didn't ultimately end up doing it. And I don't know as, with the benefit of hindsight, that arbitration went on for years and years and ended I think unsatisfactorily for everybody so perhaps it's just as well we didn't get the business.

DN: Some things we shouldn't get in your own interest.

RR: That's right.

DN: When you went to the State Department with that proposal, was Ed Muskie there as an advocate for you, speaking for you?

RR: Yeah, he was part of our team. And we didn't have a chance of being seriously considered unless we presented a team that had somebody of his stature. I knew that. But he got involved in it, he learned, he didn't just show up and listen while the rest of us talked and, you know, present himself. We did a lot of prep for those meetings, at least one meeting, maybe there were more, I can't recall. And that was an experience I actually enjoyed just working with him at an entirely different level. And I had one younger partner who was working with me who was, who clearly thought that was a great experience. Anything you did with Ed in many ways was a great experience. You got something out of it I thought, a lot more than you put into it.

DN: How did he feel about his experience at the State Department? Did he talk about that?

RR: No, at least I never talked to him about that. I think he liked it, I think he loved being secretary of state. First of all he had, he gave up his Senate seat to do it, and even though he knew that the Carter administration wasn't necessarily going to be around for eight years he went for it. And I think he was, and I was not drawn into that at all, but my impression is from Berl and others that he liked it and never regretted it.

DN: In those years following his time as secretary of state, he was actively involved as you said, in several projects, including the Cambodian study, the Nestle -

RR: The Nestle thing I remember, yes, that was a big project.

DN: Did you talk much about that?

RR: Well he, those trips, those assignments, he talked about the Nestle [NIFAC] project some because it involved, as I recall, a lot of travel and I was interested in it. It was not what you'd call mainstream lawyering by any means, but it was a useful project in terms of the human interest, the human benefits to it. And I think he was very happy to do that. As I said, I don't think he was ever interested in the regular practice of law, and I can totally understand, that having first of all been away from it for a long time, and then secondly having had a lot more interesting jobs in public life and things to do than lawyers have. So when people came to him as they did for these kind of special projects, sort of outside of the mainstream, I think he was pleased and gave his best to them. I don't know what they all were. I do remember the Nestle project, though. I don't remember the Cambodian one specifically, and you would know about the others.

DN: During the 1972 to 1980 period, he was actively involved in a number of legislative initiatives. You mentioned one, there was the continuation of the environmental legislation, there was the establishment of the budget process. Did he give you any insights into his thinking on those subjects when you met for lunch during those periods?

End of Side A
Side B

DN: We are now on the second side of the interview with Ray Rasenberger. I've just asked Ray about the conversations between 1972 and 1980 regarding legislation, and you were talking about the budget resolution.

RR: Yeah, all I was saying was that I had a sense that he thought that was a major accomplishment that had not been easy, and the record will show that. I think his guiding that legislation through was in a way something that absorbed him in the way he wanted to be. He wanted to have something, I think, that really absorbed him, and that was as big a challenge as I could think any senator would take. I mean that was a real long shot. It took a while as I recall, to get it done, but it had to be done. And I don't know anybody else who could have done it except Ed Muskie. So he would talk about that, and that's, I don't remember any specific exchanges on the subject, except I remember him being very absorbed in it and me being fascinated by the whole process of getting this budget process into place. And I still think that was, I don't know whether you'd rank it with his environmental legislation, I guess I wouldn't. I think that's the major accomplishment of his senatorial career, but it's right up there in terms of its historic importance.

DN: As you look back on your associations with Ed Muskie over, it was twenty five years about, what did you carry away from those associations that have been most important to you?

RR: Well, first of all the collection of experiences I think in which my own life and understanding of life in Washington and the political world. But I think also having known a man of quality in the world of politics, real quality, I think is something that I've appreciated more and more as time has gone on as I have met other people in the political realm. No one has ever impressed me as much as Ed Muskie did. And I think there, I haven't hobnobbed with all the high ranking officials in government on either party in these years, but I know there are people, it is possible to have a presidential candidate and maybe a president who has the qualities of Ed Muskie. I haven't seen very many people that had that particular unique collection, but those, that coincidence of qualities that he represents I think gives me hope that he wasn't the last of his kind. And that even though we've seen some pretty shabby examples of the practice of presidential politics, there is hope for the system. I just, I don't know where the person's going to come from who is going to be the next Ed Muskie and make it all the way, but at least we've got the hope that there is somebody out there, and one of these days we'll have the kind of leadership that I think, inspirational leadership, that I think we missed when we didn't get Ed Muskie as our president.

DN: Thank you very much, Ray. We'll end on that note.

RR: Thank you.

End of Interview

Addendum:

DN: Ray has just recalled an additional item and I'm going to ask him to tell us about it. This involves a request for an investigative job.

RR: Yeah, it was one of the many sort of odd jobs that I got in the campaign, but fairly early on I remember being asked by I can't recall who, perhaps Berl, perhaps George Mitchell or both of them at a meeting, if I would conduct an investigation into a matter which some press stories had suggested involved improper behavior by George and I guess Ed Muskie, in terms of getting an SBA loan for a sugar beet farmer in Presque Isle, Maine named Freddie Vahlsing. And there had been I guess stories in the Maine press or someplace alluding to this and suggesting that there was some impropriety in the fact that Vahlsing did get this government loan and was represented by George Mitchell and was aided in some way I don't recall, if at all, by Ed Muskie. But they said, "Look, here's what these stories are saying and we hope, you know, we don't think there's anything to them ourselves, but we want somebody independent to look into this whole story and report back to us in what you find. So, would you go up to Maine and just on your own, talk to Vahlsing and anybody else you want to talk to and come back and give us a report," (I may have even done a written report actually) "on what you found and whether you personally think that there was anything improper that any of us did in connection with this loan?" So I did go to Presque Isle. I can remember very distinctly the long plane ride from, I guess it was booked from Portland or Augusta to Presque Isle. I had never been that far north in Maine, and it's about as far up to Presque Isle as it is from, say, Boston [*sic* Washington] to Portland. It's a long way.

DN: It's longer than that.

RR: It's longer than that, yeah. And the ride certainly seemed longer than that and it was, the view was interesting in that it was totally trees, as you know, Don. But anyway, I did talk to Vahlsing. I did, I can't remember what else I did, but I interviewed other people and came back. I found nothing wrong, there was absolutely nothing. The fact is that he wanted a loan, he got constituent help as any constituent would from Ed, and he got legal help as anyone would from George Mitchell, but it was all totally, totally proper. And what I remember most about this was the fact that they asked me to do it. It wasn't as though they said, go up and figure out how to take care of this or kill this story. I had no instructions to tilt this in a way that was favorable to anybody. They wanted an outside party's independent opinion. I'm sure they viewed it quite properly as something that they had not done that involved any impropriety. But they just wanted another person to confirm that if he could, or tell them what was wrong if he found anything wrong, and that was my assignment. And I made the trip, did the interviews, and I came back and told them that, fine, there was just nothing in there that I thought couldn't be fully defended. And I don't know who the press people in Maine were who were raising this as an issue, but they shouldn't worry about it. And as it turned out the issue just, the whole question just went away. I assume the reporters or whoever was stirring it up reached the same conclusion I did: there was nothing there. I was impressed, however, by the fact that they didn't, did ask me to do it independently and try to maintain an independent view, rather than go up there in an effort to cover up anything or find anything to cover up.

DN: Thank you very much, Ray.

End of Interview