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Interview with John H. Reed by Don Nicoll

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Reed, John H. (John Hathaway), 1921-

Interviewer

Nicoll, Don

Date

January 27, 2003

Place

Washington, D.C.

ID Number

MOH 394

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Biographical Note

John Hathaway Reed was born at home on January 5, 1921 in Fort Fairfield, Maine, where he grew up. His father, Walter M. Reed, one of nine children, was a “seed” potato farmer as was his uncle, George W. Reed. John’s grandfather was also a potato farmer, coming from Madison, Maine. John farmed alongside his father and brother, Walter Reed, Jr. He attended the University of Maine, Orono and taught school in Hodgdon, Maine until his enlistment in the Navy in 1942. Before Reed was elected to the Maine House in 1954, the same year Muskie became governor, he was president of the Hospital Association and director of the bank in Fort Fairfield. In the Maine Legislature, he served on both the Taxation and Agriculture Committees. In 1956 he ran for the state senate and won in a multiple seat election, then became president of the senate. He became governor of Maine in 1959 to finish the term of Clinton “Doc” Clauson, who died unexpectedly mid-term, and won reelection in 1960 against Frank Coffin and in 1962 against Maynard Dolloff. In 1966 he was appointed to the National Transportation and Safety Board by Lyndon B. Johnson. In 1974 he became Ambassador to Sri Lanka under Gerald Ford. In 1976, he became Director of Government Relations with the Associated Builders and Contractors. In 1981 he was appointed by Ronald Reagan as Ambassador of Sri Lanka again, staying for four years. At the time of this interview he was living in Washington, D.C.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Maine political history, 1952 to 1966; Floyd Nute; Edmund S. Muskie; John Reed's political career; Ambassador to Sri Lanka; Jim Briggs; King Harvey; Aroostook County politics and community; Bob Haskell; and Maury Williams.

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Transcript

Don Nicoll: It is Monday afternoon, the 27th of January 2003. We are at the offices of the Muskie Foundation in Washington, D.C., and Don Nicoll is interviewing former governor John

Reed of Maine. Could you state your full name and spell it, Governor Reed, and also give us the date, place of birth, and your parents' names?

John Reed: Glad to, Don. My name is John Hathaway Reed, that's J-O-H-N, H-A-T-H-A-W-A-Y, Reed, R-E-E-D. I was born on January 5, 1921 in Fort Fairfield, Maine. My parents were, my father was Walter Reed, Sr.; my mother was Eva Sealy Reed, both of the town of Fort Fairfield. I was born at home. In those days there was a lot of that, I was born right at home at that time.

DN: What were your parents' occupations?

JR: Well, father was in the potato business. Grandfather Reed had come up from Madison, Maine and got into the potato business in the early years, and he established a number of farms and developed a seed potato business, and he built a big home up there. In fact, it's a historic building now, site. And so, he had nine children. And my father was Walter M. Reed as I've indicated, and he joined forces with my Uncle George W. Reed and they formed Reed Bros. and operated a number of farms over the years in Fort Fairfield. At one time during the war we had up to thirteen hundred acres of potatoes in production.

DN: Were they mostly table potatoes or were they seed potatoes?

JR: Mostly seed, Don, yeah, they were specialized in seed potato production.

DN: Is the family still operating farms there?

JR: No, George sold and left, and dad and my brother Walter Reed, Jr. were in partnership, and when he stepped out of the business, why, we had Reed Farms, Inc. My brother, and my brother passed away in 1997 suddenly and so we disposed of the farms at that time, so we're not in the business now.

DN: Now, did you farm with your father before you got into politics?

JR: Oh yes, I was farming along. As a matter of fact, Don, I didn't really expect to get full time in politics. History and government were my favorite subjects. I always thought it would be great to serve a term in the legislature, of course I was fully engaged in farming. I didn't want it to take away from the business, but father and my brother felt that the legislature meets in the winter and they could spare my time then, and so that's when I decided to run.

And the local representative, Dwight Dorsey, had been in office for a number of years and he decided to step down. And so I ran for the House in 1954, and I won that election and commenced my career at that point. Before that I had, Governor Cross at that time, he was kind of my mentor, he come up and recruited me to work in his campaign back in '52, so I helped him. And he put me on the Water Improvement Commission, the forerunner of a lot of the environmental improvements, as you know, Don. And he thought that I should run, and that's why I decided to do it, and kind of launched my career at that point. Never at any time envisioned that I wanted to spend full time. I was very happy in Aroostook County and in the

potato business.

DN: Had you served in town government up to that -?

JR: No, no, I never served in town government. I was very active in a number of groups, president of the Hospital Association, a director of the bank, but I had not, at that point I hadn't run for local office.

DN: Had you gotten your education in Fort Fairfield?

JR: Yes, elementary education there, graduated from high school in 1938, and then went to the University of Maine. I took Agriculture, Economics, and also teaching, and so my first job, that was in 1942, I signed to be agriculture teacher in Hodgdon, Maine, a little town outside of Houlton, so that's where I was until August of 1942 [*sic* 1942], in which I enlisted in the Navy and went into the service at that point.

DN: 1942.

JR: '42. What did I say? '42, yeah, right '42.

DN: And you enlisted in the Navy.

JR: Yes, as a storekeeper, 3rd class, and then I went to Newport, Rhode Island where I trained recruits. After I went through boot camp, I trained recruits there for a number of companies for years, and then I applied for a commission and got a commission as an ensign in the supply corps, and then went to Harvard for my training there, and then moved on to various assignments. I was down in Florida, and then I was a supply officer over in Okinawa during the tail end of the war.

DN: An interesting parallel with your opponent in 1960. You both had business training at Harvard as Navy supply officers.

JR: Yes, that is an unusual parallel, it certainly is, yeah.

DN: Now Judge Frank Coffin.

JR: Yes, yes, Frank, a very able man, a very fine man.

DN: And so you ran for the legislature in 1954, and served in 1955, the first legislature over which, well he didn't preside obviously as governor, but during the first term of Governor Muskie.

JR: Yes, yes, right, I first came, I had not met him of course before that, but I was very impressed with him. I'll always remember, Don, one thing in particular. Secretary [Ezra Taft] Benson the, then in the Eisenhower administration, Secretary of Agriculture, and he was going to make an appearance in my home town of Fort Fairfield, and it was a bitter cold period, I think in

January or February. And Governor Muskie invited me to fly up with him, and I always thought that was a very nice gesture. I certainly appreciated it. And that was really the start of a long and very pleasant relationship with the senator.

DN: Had you encountered him, or do you recall your father or brothers talking about encountering him when he was director of OPS in Maine in 1950-51?

JR: I don't recall any contact during that period, no, I do not. If there was, I wasn't aware of it.

DN: Now, what were some of the issues that you were involved in in the legislature in '55? Were you, which committee were you serving on?

JR: I was on the Taxation Committee and I think the Agricultural Committee, too, a couple of those committees, and so spent a lot of time on those particular issues. Of course, there was interest in the environment, and water pollution was a big issue at that time. Governor Muskie was a champion for eliminating pollution, as we all know, and so I had to interface with his office in regard to those issues.

DN: Do you recall what the major issues around water pollution were in that year?

JR: It was about cleaning up the rivers. That was the time in which James Briggs from Caribou came down also to the legislature, and he was one of the real early champions. I give Jim Briggs, I don't know if you recall him or not, but he was a great champion for cleaning up the rivers. And in those days it wasn't a popular issue, but I certainly have a great admiration as I remember Jim as one of the real champions, and then of course the senator, that was one of his number one projects, and it moved forward. In those days my attitude, AOh well, it wasn't polluted in a year or two, and it's not going to be cleaned up in a year, but let's get some progress started." That was my general feeling, after I was on the Water Improvement Commission. And so we needed to get, to move forward in this very important field.

DN: You might recall for our listeners what Jim Briggs was like. He was a bit of a character.

JR: Yeah, Jim was, he was, he was single-minded on pollution. And he didn't mince words. He was really outspoken. We needed a champion like Jim. Not many, he was almost like a one issue thing, but you needed someone like him, and I remember him very well, his passion for this. You mentioned, when we were talking informally, of my interest in harness race horses. And I always remember I'd been to the sale in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and bought some horses, and I was at the track in Fort Fairfield, and Jim was campaigning. He came down when I was trying to break this colt, and he wasn't really interested in horses, he wanted to talk about pollution.

But we had a great time. He was outspoken and he was really a forerunner, if you will, in moving forward in this. He was a precursor of a lot of anti-pollution, and of course it dovetailed very nicely with Senator Muskie's great crusade to clean up the rivers. And it was needed badly; those rivers were in terrible shape. Because I was really, we lived right on the banks of the Aroostook River, and it was polluted in those days. You couldn't swim in it; it was really a very

polluted river in so many words.

DN: Now, you say it wasn't a very popular issue in some ways. Did you run into difficulties with some of your neighbors in Aroostook County dealing with the issue?

JR: No, not so much. Some of the, I guess the starch producers were somewhat concerned. It was more from industries on the big rivers like the Androscoggin where they'd been polluting for years. I ran into some there, but it never impinged really on my desire. I felt we should clean up, we should get started.

DN: What was your impression of Ed Muskie and how he dealt with some of the opponents on issues like water pollution in those days? He was, after all, a governor with a very small Democratic membership in the legislature and a large Republican majority. How did he deal with you and your colleagues?

JR: Well, I thought that he had a great interface with us, that he believed in that and you couldn't argue against it because it needed to be done. And I think he was very adroit in the way he dealt with the legislature, I remember respecting him. I think of Bob Haskell, who actually succeeded the governor for a short period, you know. He got along with people very, very well. He had a genius for being reasonable and having a common sense approach. So I never felt that there was an estrangement there, indeed I feel that people began to galvanize over the need to get this done. As I look back on it, he did a masterful job, and it was difficult for him with a small majority in those days, a small minority in the legislature. But my impression was that he was going to get this done, and I was seeing the first movement in this direction. It was needed, he recognized it, and he was going to see it through.

DN: Now you moved from the House to the Senate. Was that in the '56 election?

JR: Yes, yes it was. As I look back on it, that was the time that Senator Muskie ran against Fred Payne, right?

DN: No, he didn't run against Fred Payne until '58. '56 was Willis Trafton.

JR: Oh well, that's right, he had the reelection. Now I get it, that's right. Well, at that time I ran for the Senate for that particular time and he, who was his opponent, I'm trying to remember?

DN: That was Willis Trafton.

JR: Oh, Willis Trafton, of course, Bill Trafton, very able man. Could have been a good governor, too, but he just, timing is an awful important issue in politics, as we all know. And so Bill Trafton put up the best race he could, but Senator Muskie had really galvanized the support and the state. I remember traveling around, why, so many people on the main street in Fort Fairfield, I think of a couple of merchants who were brothers running a store, and Ed Muskie was young guy who'd come back and had these ideas, and it was just, he developed a great corps of supporters over the years. And he did, especially, in that election, I remember talking and so forth that it appeared that he was going to win, and he did, quite handily as I recall. But I won,

there were four of us running for three seats. A very fine man in Bridgewater was the one who got aced out. But I led the ticket during that race, and then went back for my, first term in the Senate.

DN: That's when you had multiple seat senate districts.

JR: Yes, yes, Aroostook County had three, yeah, at that time.

DN: Speaking of Fort Fairfield, one of the most prominent figures in that town in those days was Kingdon Harvey.

JR: Oh, Kingdon Harvey, he certainly was. Yes, he was a great admirer of Ed Muskie, yes he was, King Harvey, it's a little hard to describe him. He had a lot of power with his paper, a small paper but nevertheless, and he had very strong likes and dislikes. And so all politicians had to be very careful how they dealt with King. He was indeed quite a character. He was dedicated to good government, and he was very positive in his views. Oh yes, everybody knew him. But he was a great admirer of Senator Muskie. Didn't he always use it, Edward [*sic* Edmund] Sixtus Muskie, he never printed his name without the middle name, I remember that about King. You never forgot King Harvey; he was a character you'd never forget.

DN: What was the secret of King Harvey's success in Fort Fairfield? He didn't, he didn't reflect the community in many ways.

JR: No, he didn't. But, they always called it the AFort Fairfield revenge", you were very careful how you dealt with King Harvey. Oh yeah, I always, I would come in and see him and we got along reasonably well. Yeah, he was a big factor in everything that took place in that town. He was a controversial figure, but politicians always dealt with him very deftly, tried to at least. Yeah, he was quite a character, unforgettable character.

DN: Now you served the second term in the, your second term was your first term in the senate, and at that time, was Bob Haskell the president of the senate at that time?

JR: Yes, he was. And this is another way the thing fell into place, Don. Bob Haskell was a very able man and we all respected Bob immensely. In fact when we talked about running for governor, I said, ABob, you ought to run." AOh no, no, no, you should run for governor." I said, ANo, I'm not about to run for governor." But Bob, he had a strong coterie of followers, I can think of a lot of them there, and so he was a very effective, extremely able man. I knew him very well. If you want me, I'll move on to the election part of it? And of course there was always some who were not really in favor of Bob, Bob probably rubbed some people the wrong way. And one of my close friends, it was Senator Earl Hillman from Bangor, and he and two or three others were anxious to get a candidate to run against Bob. And I wasn't particularly anxious to do it, but they felt they could develop support enough. So actually, Governor Muskie, this is the year he ran against Fred Payne, is that correct?

DN: Right.

JR: Yeah. And he was so popular and did so well that in the election, a number of the senior senators were defeated. There was six or eight of them were defeated, and this was kind of his co-supporters. And so my friend Earl Hillman wanted me to run, and so I said, all right, if we can get the support then I will run. So we went all over the state, and the fact that Bob Haskell lost a lot of his supporters at that time, I was able to develop enough support to finally get the piece that put it all together and that was senator, in Bangor, Allen Woodcock, and he came over and then we had votes enough. So Bob decided to resign and retired busy with his Bangor Hydro.

DN: So he resigned from the Senate?

JR: He resigned from the Senate, yes. And so looking back on it, Senator Muskie's popularity impacted on my particular election, because if these other senators had been elected I don't think there would have been a chance I would have become president of the Senate. But fate plays a hand here, and Senator Muskie's great success actually impinged on that particular race, and so.

DN: Now, was the contest at that point in the state Senate one between different ideological factions, if you will, conservatives, liberals in the Republican Party, or was it a matter of personality in dealing with Bob Haskell?

JR: I would think probably it was more a matter of personality. Bob was a very positive guy and very able, they all respected him. But as it developed, there were some who were that supportive of Bob, and if he hadn't lost that core, those core supporters, I doubt if I would have been elected. But, yeah, he was very able. It was more, I think on personality than anything else. They felt that he should move on and run for higher office, too. He was a very capable man, could have done anything. But he didn't want to take the plunge. I don't know now whether he felt he couldn't win or didn't really want to do it. We were always good friends. Last time I ever I saw him he was eighty-four years old and he came, I went and visited him and we had a good talk. Never saw him after that, but able man, very able man. I'm sure Senator Muskie had a great admiration for him, too, otherwise he wouldn't have resigned early to let Bob become governor. It was very fitting, very appropriate thing for the senator to do.

DN: Yeah, they were good friends.

JR: Yes, yes they were, right.

DN: And I remember particularly when we were doing some work on the economic development legislation and Jim Reid was the majority leader in the Senate at the time, and he was vehemently opposed to the legislation that the senator, that Governor Muskie had advanced, and it was Bob Haskell who stepped in and turned it around.

JR: Yeah, Bob could do it. Bob, he was a major figure, and Bob was a powerful influence. He enjoyed being president of the Senate, he loved to preside, and extremely effective. Jim Reid, now I remember him, yeah.

DN: Now, you were president of the Senate, and Governor Clauson was Governor Muskie's

successor. And how were your relationships with Doc Clauson, as he was known?

JR: Oh, couldn't have been better. A warm, wonderful man. I thoroughly enjoyed him. I met with him a number of times during that one year, you know, I was president of the Senate so we had a reason to have a lot of contact with each other, and I liked him very much. And he was a man who enjoyed going out, I remember Maury Williams talking about it, that he would go open up a hotdog stand; he just loved to get and do those things. So I remember telling him one time, you know, Governor, you don't want to strain or stretch yourself too much. Oh, he was enjoying life. But I had great relations with Governor Clauson.

DN: Now, you mentioned Maury Williams who was Governor Muskie's administrative assistant, and you had known him before the governor. Or no, you probably didn't know Maury before.

JR: No, I really didn't know Maury before that, no.

DN: Because you came to Augusta at the same time.

JR: Yeah, right, but I got to know Maury when he was Governor Clauson's AA and I was president of the Senate, so we dealt on legislation.

DN: Can you describe Maury?

JR: Well, Maury was a very adroit fellow. We always considered he was a, had an encyclopedic knowledge of the finances of the State, and great instincts on how to maneuver legislation; more of a person who could pull things together and a great knowledge of State history, and how things were done.

DN: The other person you dealt with some when you were a member of the House, and also in the Senate, was Floyd Nute who was Governor Muskie's press secretary.

JR: Yes, yeah.

DN: And can you recall Floyd for us?

JR: Well, he was an interesting fellow. One thing, he would write a number of things. I always remember one thing he wrote about me after I'd won an election; he called it "The Unsinkable Molly Brown". I thought that was, in other words, this guy's going to get beat, but he doesn't, he's unsinkable. I always remember that about Floyd, the unsinkable Molly Brown. Yeah, he was an interesting guy. Always had good relations with him, but not an awful lot of contact, but I particularly remember that.

DN: Now, Governor Clauson died in December of 1959, and you succeeded as governor under the constitution. What did it feel like?

JR: Well, I must say, it's vivid in my mind now, that Jeb Byrne was his press secretary. And

everything was going on smoothly; I enjoyed being a legislator and presiding at the Senate. And it was one, it was like December 28 or 29 I got a telephone call, the telephone rang at about 4:30 in the morning. And I was going to get up early that morning anyway, we were getting ready to load a carload of potatoes, I had to get out early. And he says, "John, this is Jeb Byrne." I knew right then what the problem was, I could just tell, but I know I could see my whole world changing completely, and Jeb telling me the governor had died.

He'd been to Lewiston I believe, some sort of meeting, and died very suddenly. So it was a great emotional impact upon me and my family, because I never did envision to get into full time politics at all, but I could see my whole life changing. And when something like this happens you try to do the best you can and move forward. And so I went down that very next day to take the oath of office from Harold I. Goss, Secretary of State. He was an institution, as you know, in the early years. And it was a very sad occasion because I thought a lot of Governor Clauson, and I remember in particular in the bitter cold going to the cemetery in Waterville for the burial, and Mrs. Clauson, a nice person. We felt very bad about, so it wasn't the kind of thing we certainly wanted to have happen. But fate plays a hand and you move forward and do the best you can.

DN: I was interested in just a little note in your comment, you were prepared to get up early that morning that Jeb called you, because you were going to work on -

JR: Oh, we were going to load a car of potatoes, we had to get the crews started early. So, when the, I had the alarm set for like 5:30, the telephone rang at 4:30, and he said, well, "This is Jeb Byrne," I knew right then exactly what had happened.

DN: So even while you were working as president of the Senate of the state, you were busy with the family potato business.

JR: Oh absolutely, that was a part time job down in the Senate, absolutely.

DN: And then all of a sudden you were deeply involved in governing the State.

JR: Right, yes.

DN: And you were, your first term, or your first year as governor was in the midst of a major national election campaign, and you had to turn immediately to the question of your own election.

JR: Right, yes, one year by accession and I had to run for the balance of the two years, yes. So that of course occupied, it took a great deal of time and effort to move forward on that. Once you're in it, you got to run and do the best you can. I was a long shot in a sense because Frank Coffin, extremely able man, but there again you never know. And there was the national campaign going on, and Vice President Nixon came into the State a number of times, I remember him. It was a very active campaign, a lot going on, those were busy years. I'm glad it was when I was young so I had enough vitality and energy to do it!

DN: Did you find campaigning for governor much different from campaigning for the House

or Senate?

JR: Oh, a lot different, a lot different, yeah, right, yes, absolutely. Because campaigning in Aroostook County was relaxed, and you went around some. When I was running for the legislature, the House seat, that was pretty minor, and running for the Senate I spent quite a lot of time campaigning.

I got a lot over the years, Don, watching other people. Fred Payne was a tremendous campaigner. I used to travel around with him; he had a great way with people, get out, and. I took a page out of a lot of people's books, how they operated and how they functioned and they interfaced with the public, and you learn a lot about that. But that was a busy time. All the various candidate meetings, and you work all day at factories and so forth, at night you got to have a meeting of your party constituents, and it's very demanding physically. Nobody knows unless they've been through a campaign.

DN: Did you do much with television and radio in that campaign?

JR: Not much in those days, no, no. I believe we had one televised debate, that you probably remember, with Frank Coffin. So other than that, no. Well, I suppose we appeared some, yeah, there were some, but not really of any great extent in those days, I don't remember that much about it.

DN: And that was the first Maine election in November.

JR: Yes, that's right, that's right, it was. I forgot about that, you're right, it was.

DN: Your next campaign in 1960, you ran for the remaining two years of that term. And then in '62 you ran for reelection. Between '60 and '62, did you have many dealings with Senator Muskie?

JR: Well yes, on issues that impacted the state. By that time I'd developed a very warm working relationship with him, and yes, we were in touch, and I think we were pretty much in concert with what he was doing. I don't recall any contentious issues. I remember him coming once or twice to Portland in which we appeared on joint programs. And I remember he said that he admired what I was doing, and certainly supported what he was doing, I remember that particular, a meeting in Portland on one occasion. So we got along very well, and we interfaced a considerable time during that period, as well we should, governor and senator.

DN: Now, during that period you, in '62, you ran for reelection and your opponent in that campaign was Maynard Dolloff who had been the Master of the State Grange. Now, that was also the year of the Cuban Missile Crisis, as I recall.

JR: Yeah, I believe it was, yeah.

DN: And that had a very substantial effect as I recall on the campaigning.

JR: Yeah, that's right; it was a very tense period.

DN: Was that the first time you started dealing with some national issues as well?

JR: I guess probably you might say that, yes. Yes, we were all very concerned about it, and as I say I did have to deal with that particular issue, and it was an emotional thing and very disturbing thing on the international scene. Yeah, no question about that, it was.

DN: And after you were elected, not too long into that second term, full term, the president was assassinated and President Johnson became the president. And at that point as I recall, with the controversy over the KorB, Vietnam War building up, you got drawn in to the question of support for the president and Vietnam. Was that . . . ?

JR: Your memory is correct, it was very accurate on that. Just talking, back just a bit Don, I remember the assassination, I believe it was late fall of, oh, what was it?

DN: Sixty-three, November of '63.

JR: Right, yeah, but President Kennedy came to the University of Maine, the senator was there, I've got some great photos, and it didn't seem possible all this would unfold. But I met him from there, and it was as you say a very, very big issue. And what were you -?

DN: Well, I was moving beyond that.

JR: Oh, the Johnson, yes, yes, okay, yeah, right. Well, I'm a great believer in supporting the president, and we were involved in the war. And at the Governor's Conference, why, I spoke up there as the governor of Maine supporting the president. There was a great, there were some dissidents there at that particular time, but you know, I was a supporter of President Johnson, got to know him real well actually at the Governor's Conference in Hawaii. Why he came there, this was of course, President Kennedy was president at that time, he was the vice president. I remember going out to the U.S.S. Ranger and meeting with him. There was a lot of them didn't go out, but I went out and we hit it off very well, because he's rancher from Texas and I was a Maine farmer, and we hit it off very well.

And I remember particularly that he wanted to get some Maine deer to upgrade the stature of the deer in Texas, and I did ship him a couple of buck deer to go down there. I don't know whatever happened but, it's unusual, but I became very friendly with President Johnson. In fact, we had a Governor's, and then I became chairman of the National Governor's Conference, we had a conference in Texas with John Connally and the University of Maine had a, one of those football games, or bowl games in Florida, and I was going to go there. And the president heard about it, he says, you're going to stay here overnight and then we're going to fly you down there. So I became very friendly with Lyndon Johnson, we hit it off very well.

DN: And after the your term was up as governor, which would have been 1966, you then were appointed.

JR: Yes, that is right, I was appointed to the National Transportation Safety Board, and he offered me that position on there. I was the only Republican at that time, five members, a brand new board, and it sounded like a great challenge, and I was looking for another opportunity and everything worked very, very well. I came down and was there, and that was the year that uh, after one year Nixon won I believe, at that time.

DN: That's right, '67.

JR: That's right '67, yes, right. And then I became chairman. I liked them very well, I was a member at the time, I didn't need to be chairman. I enjoyed it greatly, traveled all over the country, all over the world investigating these major air crashes, or indeed accidents, major accidents of any kind of transportation. So I thoroughly enjoyed it. It was a great change of pace from being governor. There's no job like being governor, but it was a lot less fewer headaches. But I enjoyed that greatly, traveled all over the world, and all the hearings. And I stayed there for nine years and became chairman under Nixon, and I was chairman for eight years, stayed on the board for nine. Then President Ford offered me an ambassadorship and that's when I had that first tour in Sri Lanka, as ambassador to Sri Lanka.

DN: And now, you were ambassador there, and then what did you do?

JR: Well, okay, Jimmy Carter won the next election, as you remember, and I came back here to Washington and we, by that time we liked it very well, enjoyed it, and I took a job as Director of Government Relations with the Associated Builders and Contractors. We had a number of members in Maine, and so I did some lobbying, and there again I met Senator Muskie many times and he always graciously had me to the office. I always remember him saying one thing is, "Well, the big issue with this group is the Davis-Bacon Act." Well, he says, "John," he says, "if we eliminate that you may not have a job." *(Laughter)* I thought that was a good one. He was always very generous and I enjoyed my contacts with him.

In fact, during those years we were in Washington we saw a lot of Ed and Jane because they attended a number of the Maine State Society meetings, and so we got to see them really more than we ever had before. Very friendly, and my wife particularly enjoyed Jane and Ed, have great memories of our contacts with them over the years. And about his genius for hypnotizing lobsters, you must have known that. He tried to show me how to do it, but I never could do it the way he did it, he was great at that.

DN: Not a skill you learned in the potato fields.

JR: No, not, oh no, I did my best; of course we were way inland.

DN: Did you teach him anything about potatoes?

JR: Well, I tried to do that, but I think he knew pretty well about potatoes anyway, he was a good meat and potatoes man. Of course, another thing that came on at that time, during his term as governor I believe, was the sugar beet. I remember the sugar beets in Maine, he went up there.

DN: That was when he was senator.

JR: When he was senator, right, so I remember going to eastern Maine, and the Vahlsing people being up there with the senator and everybody when that project started. We all hoped it would work, everybody give it their best try. Sadly, it didn't. But it's like a lot of things, you attempt to do something you think is right, and if you fail, you fail. But it was an honest attempt to get it started. But I had many contacts with Senator Muskie over that particular issue.

DN: Well, it's a long way from Fort Fairfield to Sri Lanka and the many other places you traveled over the years. You must have looked back and wondered about what politics did for you, and to you, in a sense.

JR: I certainly did, Don, no question about it. And after we had our four years here during the Carter administration, the group I work for is a very conservative type and I did a lot of work for Ronald Reagan in that particular election. And so in 1981 he gave me a call and offered me an ambassadorship. And I thought, what's he going to say? He called me on a Labor Day weekend, I remember. And he says, "I'd like to have you be in my administration as ambassador to Sri Lanka." So I went back again, and that time spent four years, so I had a total of five years over there. It was a great experience. I enjoyed that immensely. As a matter of fact, I still have a number of contacts who are Sri Lankan people, and we have a support group in the city here helping them out, their ambassador. So I keep in close contact with the country. But it was a great change from Aroostook County, no question about it. So we enjoyed the life.

DN: Had the trouble with the Tamil Tigers [*also known as: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*] started while you were ambassador?

JR: Yes, it did, Don, during my second tour, after one year. The first tour I was there, in '76-'77, I went to the north and there was no problem, everything was all right. I went back there in '82, start of '82, and I said, "Well things have changed." And I made only one trip in that four years to the north, and you could see the resentment of the Tamils was building up. And then it broke out in 1983, in which they had the riots in Colombo and a number of people were killed and a lot of buildings were burned, and it was a real problem. And I always remember President, (*sounds like: Jy Wardner*) was the president and I had great relations with him, I went to see him, I said, "Mr. President, you are attempting . . . A He was, he was trying to get a program to integrate the Tamils into society. He says, "Yes, but I didn't start soon enough." It was like famous last words, and so it's gone on now for nineteen years. However, there does appear, as you and I talk now, as if there's light at the end of the tunnel. It appears that they are going to the peace table and hopefully they'll find peace in that country; great little country. Sad to see it torn apart and think of fifty thousand lives lost during those nineteen years.

DN: As you look back on your years in public life and your experiences with Senator Muskie, Governor Muskie, are there any particular recollections that we haven't talked about so far that you think are important in understanding him, and also understanding the times?

JR: Well, I really interfaced with him many times over those years and we always had a very

pleasant and friendly relationship and rapport, and I have nothing but a highest regard for him and for what his career. He was a real giant of my times and will always be remembered as just a great leader. He would have been a great president, in my opinion, absolutely would have been a great president. I know Maine people felt that way, and I know I did. But fate plays a hand in life, in politics, you never know. But our relationship was excellent, and I have nothing but fond memories of my association, contacts with Ed Muskie; just a good friend and a great leader.

I remember the last time I think I saw him; he was speaking at a health program for Alzheimer's. I think Don Larrabee who you and I know well, was chairing at that time. And when I came in, I wanted to go over and say hello to Ed, he was seated, and his legs were not, he said he didn't feel good about standing. And that surprised, the first time, and I think that might have been the last time I saw him. But over the years, I have nothing but admiration for him and consider him a good friend, and one of the people I've certainly been privileged to have known over the years, what a great job he's done.

DN: Thank you very much.

JR: You're welcome. I hope I've covered the things.

DN: You did.

End of Interview