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Interview with Maureen Steinbruner by Don Nicoll

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Steinbruner, Maureen

Interviewer

Nicoll, Don

Date

May 2, 2000

Place

Washington, DC

ID Number

MOH 188

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Biographical Note

Maureen Steinbruner was born on April 16, 1941 in San Francisco, California. Her mother was a California native and her father immigrated from Ireland. She attended Stanford, majoring in journalism, then became interested in the public policy curriculum at the Kennedy School in Boston. She got to know Muskie through the Center for National Policy and was acting Vice president while Muskie was acting president. She later became president of the Center.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Steinbruner's family background; the Center for National Policy; a distinguished public service award named for Muskie; and Cambodia.

Indexed Names

Albright, Madeleine Korbelt

Allison, Graham T.

Bradley, Bill, 1943-

Champion, Hale

Christopher, Warren
Craig, Greg
Gonzalez, Elian
Humphrey, Hubert H. (Hubert Horatio), 1911-1978
McGrory, Mary
Moe, Dick
Mondale, Walter F., 1928-
Neustadt, Richard "Dick"
Nicoll, Don
Nixon, Richard M. (Richard Milhous), 1913-1994
O'Donnell, Kirk
Paneritis, Andrea
Parmelee, Carole
Reagan, Ronald
Reynolds, Christopher
Samphan, Khieu
Sanford, Terry
Sen, Hun
Steinbruner, Maureen S.
Vallely, Tom
Van Dyke, Ted
Vance, Cyrus R. (Cyrus Roberts), 1917-2002
Williams, Karen Hastie

Transcript

Don Nicoll: It is Tuesday, May 2nd, 2000, about one thirty in the afternoon. We are at One Massachusetts Avenue N.W., Washington, D.C. in the offices of the Center for National Policy interviewing Maureen Steinbruner. And would you give me your full name, spell it, and your date and place of birth.

Maureen Steinbruner: My name is Maureen Strain Steinbruner, I use the middle initial 'S', it's my maiden name. It's M-A-U-R-E-E-N, S-T-R-A-I-N, S-T-E-I-N-B-R-U-N-E-R, Steinbruner. My date of birth was April 16th, 1941, in San Francisco, California.

DN: Did you grow up in California?

MS: I did, and I grew up in a family of Californians. My mother was born in California also, and I think her mother was born in California, which is very unusual.

DN: Very extraordinary.

MS: And I have sisters, a sister who has next generation California children and next-next generation, so that's pretty amazing.

DN: Was your father from California also?

MS: No, my father was from Ireland. He emigrated as a young man of about eighteen and came to this country, first to Philadelphia, then to Alaska, and then ended up in California.

DN: Had he left for economic reasons?

MS: Yes, he was from Ireland and kind of an Angela's Ashes sort of story.

DN: Now, what kind of political environment was the family?

MS: Well, my parents were Democrats. My father, though, had a very interesting if you will anti-government, anti-politics attitude. I believe a combination, created by a combination of his growing up in a state, Irish state ruled by Britain and absorbing the anti-regime attitudes of that. But also, interestingly, when he was in Alaska, he was working on a project, railroad construction crew for a lot of Norwegians and Swedes and he was given some Karl Marx to read, and it's kind of comported in some ways with his view of the world.

He was self-educated; he had a third grade formal education, but very bootstrap. He was always going to school as long as I knew him. And something about the, you know, the government is for the big guys, not the little guys and all of that he absorbed in a very non-radical, non-aggressive way. It just made him very skeptical about things that political people said.

DN: Were either he or your mother active in politics?

MS: No, not at all, and again I think my mother certainly was of the plain variety person who didn't have any particular interest in politics, any background or reason to be interested in it, but ended up having some fairly strong, what you would call progressive views, I think. She, she was very ahead of her time and culture I think with respect to roles for women. Again, not in a radical or aggressive way. Tolerance of gays, that kind of thing, you know, so she was socially progressive but didn't ever see it in political terms.

And my father was almost anti-political. We were brought up, though, not cross picket lines. I mean, he was, he had been in a union in earlier years as a plasterer. And I think very, they were very representative of a certain part of the traditional, you know, forties, fifties Democrats with great respect for and appreciation for Franklin Roosevelt and what he'd done for the country and the country itself, but not much interest in political engagement as activists of any kind. They just, they would not have seen that as a reasonable thing to do.

DN: Was there heavy emphasis on education, however?

MS: There was. As I said, my father was real bootstrap. My mother completed high school but was a great appreciator of furthering education. They raised seven children, four not their own, nephews and nieces adopted, nephews and a niece adopted when I was seven. And all of us went through some form of higher education with I think one exception. But they also, I think, didn't, they didn't see it as, how shall I say this? There's a sort of professional family you

can grow up in that sees education as very integral to getting, you know, getting ahead financially in life. They didn't really see it that way; it was just something that you did to be the best that you could be, to go as far you could in education.

DN: And so you went to Stanford? And what did you study there?

MS: I studied a lot of different things. I decided when, it was a very broad general studies program, and beyond that I decided to major in journalism because I wasn't really ready to pick a major. And the design of the journalism major was kept going with the general studies program. So, in a sense, I didn't really major in a specific subject other than journalism. I did concentrate on the social sciences but was very interested in the humanities also and did a fair amount in sciences; very broad.

DN: And what led you to the Kennedy School?

MS: I was in Boston and had been working, I first got a job in Boston working in the public relations department at Boston University, and that decided me against a career in public relations. There were certain aspects of it I just knew I wouldn't be good at and wouldn't like particularly. But it was great training, and I was trying to think about what to do with my life, career wise. Tried urban planning, I was always very interested in cities and what they're like and how they get to be what they are. But I took some courses at MIT in that and in the political science department and wasn't quite sitting right as far as where I really wanted to go. And I happened to find out about the Kennedy School starting this new prog-, starting, the Kennedy School itself starting and starting a public policy program, and as I learned more about it I thought, gee, that's just the right thing, so I did that.

DN: Who were some of your instructors in the, were you in the joint urban studies, that Harvard-MIT program?

MS: No, I took some urban planning courses at MIT and some of the people there were probably in the joint center, but that wasn't anything I did directly. At the Kennedy School, my professors were Dick Neustadt, Richard Neustadt, Graham Allison, who subsequently became the dean, Howard Raifa from the business school, Tom Shelling. It was actually an incredible faculty first beginnings of that program, and subsequently.

DN: And your primary focus was domestic policy, I think.

MS: It was, I had at that point in addition to having a child I'd changed jobs, had done a research project in juvenile delinquency at Boston University and then gone to work for the state government in health planning. And that was the logical path, was domestic policy.

DN: And after you graduated from the Kennedy School, where did you go?

MS: I had another child, and I went back to work in health planning for the state. And I did that for, I can't remember, a little while, and left that to run a state commission on conversion of the old military bases. Richard Nixon decided to close a lot of bases in Massachusetts and

Rhode Island in 1973. People thought it wasn't accidental that he kind of picked on, or seemed to be picking on Massachusetts, as they hadn't voted for him. I don't know that that was the case, but in any event they closed five major facilities in one sweep. And the state put together a bipartisan, in effect, bicameral, local, state task force to come up with some reuse proposals, and I was the staff director and we created a permanent state agency to acquire property and help redevelop it. It was a lot of fun really; there was a great deal of political support for doing something constructive. I learned a lot.

DN: And did you go from there to Connecticut and the -?

MS: I did, I, my former husband, my then husband left a job he had teaching at Harvard and went to the School of Organization and Management at Yale when it was getting started, and so we were there for two years. I wanted to go on and do local economic development or state economic development, but they had actually a good team in Connecticut at the time, and there wasn't a slot. And I ended up taking a job with the state education department in Hartford to develop a planning program for them.

DN: And what led you to Washington?

MS: Again, my former husband, my then husband came here to become the head of foreign policy studies at the Brookings Institution. So we came down here, our family moved here at the end of '78 I guess, yeah.

DN: And did, you did not go to work for the center until 1981.

MS: The center wasn't in existence, and I was leaving the government and joined with some other folks who were, in a sense, the organizing group to start the center.

DN: What led you into that group?

MS: It's interesting. The specific person who led me into that group was Greg Craig who is now representing Elian Gonzalez, it's a funny moment to be mentioning his name in that history. But I had been working at HEW first for the undersecretary and then in the planning office. It was HHS at that point. I was there just as the split off of the education department was taking place. I actually, I had a great view of what was then the Carter administration's social welfare domestic policy agenda because I was working directly for the undersecretary and -

DN: And that was?

MS: It was Hale Champion. And he managed much of the legislative coordination for the department with the White House, so all of the welfare reform then, national health insurance then, it was a really interesting time to be doing that. But, as I observed, the Carter administration and its debates about policy, it, I had spent a lot of time in my career and in my practice, public policy practice if you will, thinking about the economy in one way or the other. And specifically on that issue it seemed to me that the, the country in a sense was losing its sense of consensus about economic policy. And it seemed to me a combination of a substantive

argument and some political issues, very different points of view about, you see it in the China debate today really, China permanent trade normalization.

And I came to the conclusion that the country needed a good new kind of think tank I guess. I didn't know where it should be or what that really meant in a sense, but one that would focus on some rethinking of some key policy areas. And so I was running around talking to everybody I could find that I knew to talk about this. I was much more of a substantive than a political person at that point. And so I randomly picked people I thought, like Richard Neustadt, who would have some sense of the political process. The group that was forming the center got together at the end of 1980, and one of the people I had talked to was Greg Craig, and he told me about this meeting, and he said, "I think you might be interested in this." So I went.

DN: And then you ultimately, when it was formed, you became a research director.

MS: Yes, you know, I started out going to the post office and doing things like that and then became in effect the deputy research director. We didn't have a research director, and the then president didn't think I was senior enough for the job, which I wouldn't have been, you know, in a sense, absolutely. But we were pretty small and pretty under-funded, so by force of circumstance I got the job.

DN: And was Senator Muskie involved with the center at that time?

MS: He was, he was invited to be on the first board if I'm recalling correctly. I had not been a Muskie person, although many of the people, I hadn't been anybody's person, I hadn't had that kind of political engagement. Many of the people who were around at the beginning were in some way or another, Madeleine Albright for example, was at one of the first meetings. And when the board was put together it was, you know, kind of a panoply of famous formers and I think former, then former Secretary Muskie at that point, was invited to be on the board very early on.

I don't remember seeing much of him in the early days, although we did, we started this fund raising event and gave a distinguished public service award, and he was actually the recipient of the first award, which is interesting. We've now named the award in his honor, his memory. He became active, really active, when Cyrus Vance decided to step down in 1984.

DN: Cy was the first chairman?

MS: He was actually the second. Terry Sanford, former Governor Sanford, former Senator Sanford, he was then former governor and had been back to run for the senate. And he did it for a year, a year and a half, and I don't know why he decided to leave at that point but he did and Cy then took over the chairmanship. And he continued until, I want to say '84, maybe the end of '84, and they recruited Muskie to step up and become the chairman.

DN: So you had a chance to work with Cy Vance and then Ed Muskie.

MS: Yes, I did, yeah, yeah. Warren Christopher was actually on the board at the time, too.

We have a great track record with particularly Democratic secretaries of state, you know.

DN: Now, there's a fairly heavy involvement by foreign policy people. Has this been the emphasis of the center?

MS: The center's emphasis has shifted a bit over the years, but there's always been a foreign policy component to it. It didn't really, it was never the central focus, I think that's fair to say, even when Madeleine Albright was president, and that was certainly an area of interest to her. But it's always been a component.

DN: And do you remember your first encounter with Senator, Secretary Muskie?

MS: I think I do. Setting aside that dinner in which we honored him because I did not actually, I don't think I said a word to him. And I don't remember him being at a board meeting. But the thing I remember specifically, there must have been encounters before this, but my first real personal interaction that I recall came, it sort of, two thirds of the way through 1985 if I'm remembering this correctly, when the then president of the center, Ted van Dyke was leaving. And he left a little bit precipitously, he decided to go, he was kind of, a bit of an impulsive guy, and went. And we didn't have a new president.

DN: Was he the first president?

MS: He was the first president, and he was very instrumental in getting the center organized, and he knew Muskie among others.

DN: Oh, this is the Ted van Dyke who used to work for Hubert Humphrey.

MS: Exactly, yeah, yeah. So we were very tiny and very fragile and, you know, and at that point I was still the research director, and what had happened is we'd actually shrunk a bit in terms of staff. So I decided to go talk to the chairman, and I did. I talked to him privately, and I said, "You know, this is a serious situation and it needs some hands on help is my view." We didn't have an endowment or anything, you know in it, so having a CEO gone out the door was serious.

And I, as I recall, I said to him, you know, I think what we should think about is that you become acting president in your role as chairman, and I will be acting executive vice president, a job that wasn't filled at that point. In effect, run the place while we find a new chair. And he agreed to do that. I guess he thought that was a reasonable option. I didn't put two options on the table, so.

DN: He didn't insist on others?

MS: He didn't. And, you know, I was, I had had experience staffing people and dealing with political people and everything, but I did not know this man really, and I didn't have a sense of the drill on what he, you know, what style of approach he would be most happy with. And so I just bowled on in there, no prep, no memo ahead of time, you know. And really it was, there

were things about it that I thought probably didn't want to go on paper anyway, you know, sort of inside business. So I'm sure he was, I can't say for sure, but I think he was probably a little taken aback.

DN: But how did he handle it?

MS: He handled it very, in a very Muskie-like way. He, first of all I think, if I'm recalling correctly, I think when I went to talk to him I'm not sure if he actually knew yet that Ted was definitely leaving because I remember him being a little, and maybe I didn't know that he didn't know. It just, I can see the scene in his office at General Park. He was brusque and a little uncomfortable, which was characteristic of him when he was caught off unawares, in my later experience. But very able to come to a decision, which in some ways was not characteristic. I mean, when I saw him later he agonized a lot about things that he thought mattered.

And I think what I saw in this instance was different from later because it was something that was immediate, and he felt a certain kind of responsibility that is very different from when you're dealing with a policy area and you're deciding what recommendation to make. You know, you're not the decision maker, you're not the accountable person, particularly in his later career. So this was a different, a side of him that I saw more at the beginning when we were engaged over what to do with this little organization, than later when I got involved in foreign policy with him. I was scared to death, I think that's the fair thing to say. Very intimidated, you know.

DN: Did he agree on the spot to your recommendation?

MS: My recollection is that he did. Now, you know, I may have then put it in a memo for him or something to him, I can't, I can no longer remember that. I may have some papers somewhere on this. But my recollection is that there wasn't a lot of hemming and hawing, you know, in the event. That he kind of saw it as a way to move forward.

DN: Did he deal with Ted van Dyke at that point?

MS: To be honest with you, I don't remember. It got very muddled because there was a trip to China that Ted had organized as a fund raising tool for the center that Ed Muskie was leading for us that took place. Carole [Parmelee] probably would remember this probably, the dates, but I think it took place I want to say like August of '85. And as I recall what happened, that it was one of these things where, you know, he had one sort of vision about what was supposed to be happening and it didn't quite get there and it kind of disorganized a little bit at the end. But it happened, it came off and we got, you know, a couple of people came on our board who are still on our board who came on that trip, terrific people.

But as I recall the sequence, basically Ted only let Senator Muskie know that he was definitely resigning as the trip was kind of going off. And it was like, we're coming back, I'm taking some vacation and I'm leaving. It kind of burned in my brain, you know, that statement. So, again, as I recall what happened, they go off to China, I did not go on the trip, and Muskie probably was dealing with this issue in his own mind on the trip. You know, what to do when he came back.

So I really don't know what the interaction between them was. And actually I never felt it was my business to ask him, you know, later.

DN: Did, in the months following, I assume you worked very closely with him.

MS: I did. I did not work closely with him on the issue of recruiting, not terribly closely on the issue of recruiting a new president. He worked with some other board members on that. The one who was particularly responsible for getting the next president was Dick Moe, who had been a Walter Mondale staffer and at that point was out in law practice, now runs the National Trust for Historic Preservation. And Dick was a friend of Kirk O'Donnell's who they recruited, whom they recruited to be our next president. And I had a little bit of interaction over that but not a whole lot. But over the running of the center on a day to day basis, you know, he was my, my base to touch.

DN: What was it like dealing with him about the management of the center?

MS: It was a challenge because, I think, first of all, reasonably so, he didn't take on the chairmanship to become involved in the day to day management and wasn't particularly interested in doing that sort of thing. But he always, again, when he needed to make a decision, that was my impression, and I got, as we got into it I did the right paper thing as I recall anyway. So I wasn't walking in the door and just presenting him with wild suggestions after that.

He would respond, you know. He might want to talk about it, he might want to beat you up a little bit over it. You know, wasn't there a better option. That was very characteristic. But in the end, again, with this very practical, this has to be decided, he would decide it. So that didn't last too long because as I recall the trip was already, oh dear, I've forgotten when. We had some, we had one very difficult issue which I can only say a little bit about on the record. And it had to do with our finances, and some issues relating to how the board was responding to that in particular one board member. And there's no way for me to say because I don't want to say exactly what was going on, but it was very tricky and difficult. And he handled that well, he essentially let me put some information on the table for people to see that he knew needed to be on the table, when it needed to be on the table if I can put it that way. And didn't duck it, which is important.

And it was a very critical thing because it was necessary for the new president to sort of know what exactly the situation was that he was walking into, and he would not necessarily have known that if we hadn't sort of gone through this exercise. So, again, that was somebody who, you know, saw his responsibilities and was stepping up to the plate. That's the way I would characterize it.

DN: How did he relate on a personal level with his fellow board members in a situation like that?

MS: He always had an air of, a combination of, you know, he has a, had a friendly sort of manner, liked to tell jokes. You know, many of them pretty, uh, what's the right word, barn-yardy. But to tell you the truth I think there was a certain distance there, that would be my

perception of it anyway. That he liked many of these people and liked the fact that he was on the board and had, you know, the leadership role there. But I did not see with most of them anyway a great deal of personal closeness, would be the way I would say it. It might have been there, and I didn't observe it, but I didn't see it. Yeah.

DN: How did he deal with you as a key staff member over the months?

MS: It's really interesting, my experience with him I would bet Madeleine Albright and Karen Hastie Williams and people, women like that, I would be surprised if there wasn't a similar version of this which is, he, I think he always treated me like a staff member, which is to say as a person, first and foremost. And was perfectly happy to beat up on me when he felt like beating up on someone, which that was part of his style was to either, you know, kill the messenger or kill the message and figure out what he thought through that process. I mean, I didn't learn until much later to watch it from that perspective, but I'm saying that because I don't get the sense that there was ever a time when he said to himself, you know, this is a female person and so she can't be in this job or in this role, or I can't, you know, I can't have her doing this. I never got that sense.

He was awkward about the role of women in his own sort of conscious way. He, you know, something about the way he would make jokes and things. I think he was, he is very smart, that's the thing about Ed Muskie, very smart. And I think he completely realized that while we have differences that are to do with gender in terms of style and ability and things like that, that, you know, in the end people are people and you look at them as people, and that's the right thing to do to get a product out, get a result. And that was at one level.

The other level was his acculturation, you know, he came from a very traditional family, he had a very traditional marriage and, you know, he had both sons and daughters. I mean he, you know, I think all of that he was wrestling with. But not in a, not in a way that seemed to me to get in his way, you know. He did, when I decided to, I decided to get in the race for president of the Center for National Policy twice. The first time I did it not because, neither time I would say I desperately wanted the job, but the first time I didn't even really want to be a candidate seriously, but it was at a point when I was becoming more, I had to figure out how to be more political, and I realized I had to get into the process, you know, I needed for the sake of continuity here, I wanted to get into the process. And the way I decided to do that, rightly or wrongly, was to say I want to talk about whether I should be a candidate.

The second time, which is the time I ended up being president, I, and he was still chairman, I had decided at that point that I wasn't sure given the state the Center was in that there would be an appropriate candidate, so I'd better step up to the plate. And both times, certainly the first time, he decided that I could not do the job and believed I was actually presenting myself to be a candidate. This was my not being very good at this that led to that, not, all the board didn't understand what I was trying to do because I couldn't communicate it appropriately. And I don't think that judgment had, I mean it may have had to do with my being female, but I don't think so. I think it was about me, okay, and I think he, I think that was the right judgment. I mean I shared it, you know.

The second time, again I think he was, it was really interesting. I think he wanted me to be able to do it. He didn't want to lobby me into position to do it and he didn't want to push me to do it, and I don't think he even wanted to decide that I should be the person to do it. But at some level I think he was, he meant, his instincts were that I should be able to do it, if you know what I mean. He'd changed his view. I'd changed, and he adjusted his view.

DN: But you found his social relationship with staff members who were women awkward.

MS: I guess I wouldn't so much, well maybe awkward is the word to describe it. He was always, he always seemed to be operating on two levels, okay? On one level, at the same time, on one level there was the business, and you were doing it, and it was no problem. On another level it was like he was watching himself saying, how could I possibly be, you know, sitting here with this female person in this role? And it always seemed to me that 'A' was more important than 'B' in the event, but 'B' was there. I thought so anyway, you know.

DN: Do you remember any of those instances where he was beating up on you?

MS: Yes, I do. How could one forget. I was thinking about this. There were lots. I primarily saw it or remember it anyway having to do with the foreign policy things we did. And I worked for much of the time that he and I worked together on issues related to Vietnam and Cambodia, U.S. policy. I worked together with two other people, neither of whom worked at the Center but both of whom were involved in the projects that we were doing. One is a woman named Andrea Paneritis who is the executive director of the Christopher Reynolds Foundation, and, they funded what we did. And the other is a guy named Tom Vallely who is with the Harvard Institute for International Development, who had been a Marine in Vietnam. Great guy, both terrific people, wonderful, smart people. And they really brought the project to the Center and then worked very closely. They knew a lot about the current situation in, then current situation in Vietnam and Cambodia and took, organized the trips, the first trips that Muskie took, and we were kind of co-staffers. They worked, we worked together on speech drafts, and, you know, it was a real staff team.

DN: What was the object of the project?

MS: The object was to try to get a more objective, or at least a more open view of U.S. policy in the late eighties, early nineties. You know, we were basically on a anti-Vietnam at all costs track and, in many respects. And there were things going on to try to bring the political system to a different view of what should happen, and this was part of it. And much of the work that we did together, we would be in these situations in which we'd be preparing, you know, either thoughts for Senator Muskie to decide what he, what his views were, you know, options and things like that, or speech drafts. And he would beat the living daylights out of not only the material but us. He had a tendency, which I found got pretty wearing, didn't get in the way of your respect or your fondness for him I would say. And perhaps others didn't find it as difficult in the moment, but I just found it, I'm a person who likes to debate and discuss, but he had a way of personalizing it, you know, he really wanted to beat you back personally into a corner. It's, you know, attorney with a hostile witness or something like that.

DN: Did you have a sense of why he seemed to want to do that?

MS: Well, I developed some theories about it; I don't know whether they're any good or not. But I came to believe that he was very insecure in effect, in his political role, remarkably so. I mean, and I don't think, I shouldn't say, I have no reason to be terribly interpretive here, but it didn't strike me as it was, as I saw him, that this was necessarily simply a product of what happened in the presidential election or anything like that. It seemed to me to come, he made some comments at various times about he never would have thought to run for president if he hadn't been selected as Humphrey's vice presidential candidate because he came from a small state.

And I think he felt very self conscious in a sense in Washington as being, you know, not one of the big guys in the big state sense, and not very sure of himself, actually. And it, I think that it, it was both a way of testing his own ideas, this kind of very argumentative, personalized argumentative style. But it also I think, you know, was a way, it was an emotional reaction to reinforce his sense of himself and that he was in charge. That's what I came to think it was about.

DN: Did those episodes or kinds of handling of the issues vary according to the issue? Were some less important, therefore less tense than others? Or was -?

MS: Well, I'll tell you, the only issues that I dealt with him on directly were ones that were inevitably tension provoking because he was putting. Inherently he was a very conservative man in the sense of, you know, not wanting to be out there shouting, flame throwing, things like that. And he was also brave, and he was walking out on some policy limbs in these areas, and, you know, it made him, I think, anxious. He always did it, I mean he took, I think he always took what he thought was the right, he came to the place that he believed he should be, and he said that, devil take the hindmost at that point, you know. And again, he wasn't, wasn't out there carrying picket signs or anything, but he was putting his then considerable reputation on the line, so.

DN: Can you remember some of those specific issues?

MS: Well, the issue of what he would say about Cambodia when we came back the first time was really the most intense, and we went, you know, that sort of, everything evolved from that. And the United States government at that point was, this is very much underappreciated in the public domain here, but we were basically on the side of the team that the Khmer Rouge was on. We were, we the country, the United States government was supporting the posture of the so-called coalition of which the Khmer Rouge was a part.

We had, in fact when Senator Muskie was secretary of state was part of the time that we did this, the United States voted to keep the Khmer Rouge in the seat at the United Nations even though the Vietnamese had thrown them out. They had taken over the government, not with a democratic election, terrible, you know, not a happy chapter in our history. The feelings on Vietnam as you know run deep to this day, and he was basically saying, "You got to let it go, the Vietnamese are out of here." We were saying, part of this so-called road map of Vietnam's

normalization at that point, the United States was saying we have to have verified information that you actually have pulled out of Cambodia, but we will not send anyone in to verify. I mean, we were getting deeper and deeper into a really peculiar posture.

So he called on the United States to verify the Vietnamese withdrawal. He said, "I've been there; they're out of there. You know, go in and look, as best as I can tell." He called on the United States government to deal directly with the Vietnamese government and with the Cambodian government and not to do everything through the surrogacy of the Soviet Union. And, most important really, although people wouldn't have realized why, he said we should not be doing anything to support the Khmer Rouge.

And he came to those three positions, you know, over, and he came to them and won (*unintelligible word*) soon, but he stuck with it, and he scrolled it out. And I was in meetings in that time period with senior American policy makers that made it clear that, you know, he still had a lot to, I don't want to say fear, but there was going to be a cost to be extracted for taking this position, okay. And what did he need that for, you know? But he did it.

DN: What kind of a cost?

MS: Oh, political tarnishing. There was one incredibly amazing meeting we were in where somebody, a senior person, was saying to him, "You know, you are one of those Democrats who betrayed the country, one of those senate Democrats who betrayed the country by being against the Vietnam War at a certain stage." Not early on but, I mean in effect that's what was being said to him. And that whole era hung around the necks of all of those people who were involved, and he felt that and, you know, that was on the one hand. On the other hand, people like Mary McGrory, he wasn't going far enough fast enough or, I mean she was very appreciative when he finally clearly said he was for normalization with Vietnam which was a later step in our process. He was one of the first senior American political leaders to say that.

Probably the first former secretary of state to say that, and you know, that was, sticks and stones, you know, won't break my bones but that's politics and people who are in politics, that's what they pay attention to is, you know, who says what, because that's what they live and die on. So he was very sensitive to that.

DN: Was the senior person who made what certainly sounds like an implied threat a foreign service officer, or a political figure, and if so a Democrat or a Republican?

MS: I think that I shouldn't say that because I don't want to pin this person to the wall. I think in the circumstances that it was not actually an implied threat from that person. I think it was meant to be sure that he understood what he was taking on here to tell you the truth. I think it was a warning, as it was delivered at the time. So, and I don't want to, that's why I don't want to say anything more about who that was, but it was in a context in which. I was in that meeting and another one with another senior policy maker and in both instances, this is where the guy's courage came to the fore, you know, he rode right through that. He rode right through it in both cases. There was another instance in which

End of Side A
Side B

DN: This is the second side of the May 2nd interview with Maureen Steinbruner at the Center for National Policy. We have been talking about the Center for National Policy and Ed Muskie's role, and some of the roles he was playing in the foreign policy field. What is the way in which the Center functions, and how does it carry out its objectives?

MS: The Center is in some respects essentially a platform for the assembly of alternatives for public policy. And by that I mean we function with a very small core staff. And when we either are approached by someone from the outside world or within our own, from our own research, decide that there is a policy arena in which organizing in effect a very current and potentially new view of the problem is a useful thing to do, then we reach out and bring people together to either on paper or in person in effect to do that.

And people who associate with us either as members of our board or in some other way have a relationship here, and we maintain a broad network of relationships, will play roles in and around these policy projects as appropriate bringing their backgrounds and expertise to the situation.

In this case, we had the help as I mentioned before of some people who knew a lot about what was happening in Vietnam and Cambodia in a time period in which really very, very few Americans had the opportunity to go there and to make any kind of on the scene judgment at all. So we were very fortunate to get a network of people who actually had some experience. They were all, by and large, pretty pro-normalization people. So we made a determined effort to reach out to some people who were not pro normalization and be sure that, as this book I just brought you called Exploring Cambodia, which we produced as a record of Senator Muskie's activities on the Cambodia issue. You will see in there an interview with Mr. Khieu Samphan who was the representative of the Khmer Rouge at the United Nations, so not only the spectrum in the United States but really outside that. You know, he wanted to talk to everybody and that's, we try at a certain level to do that, to be broad in our outreach.

We typically try to work with people who have background and experience in the political process on issues. They bring to that something that you can't hire, frankly, so the role that he took here was that steering, guiding role. He chaired a task force we had on a transition project in '88, and we had a terrific group of people. Paul Volker was involved, Senator Bill Bradley was involved in it for a while, Bobby Inmann, really great, you know, six or seven or eight folk. And it was a similar thing, we did some staff work, we rounded up a lot of people who wrote staff papers about what should happen and published that in a book called, Senator Muskie and I had a lot of debates about the title as I recall. We ended up calling it his title, which is America Tomorrow, the Choices We Face, and if you want to see a good precis of what eventually happened in budget policy actually, you would do worse than to read that book. I'm very, you know, proud of what we able to do there.

So that was his role. He didn't, you know, he didn't write the papers, but he, when we would do a speech that he was going to deliver, he knew what he wanted, and you worked at it until you

got it. And he took suggestions, I mean he was very open to--- I ended up doing a lot of drafting of speeches for a while there for him and I loved it because first of all he had a very, he always had a very sensible view, but in addition to that he wanted to inspire. And so together, you know, we crafted some I think really nice language, and he delivered it just incredibly effectively, and it was really fun.

DN: Did he influence the choice of areas of focus for the Center?

MS: He influenced it in a very light touch way. He, at board meetings he would make suggestions, he would stir the discussion when there was, you know, a set of, when there was a conversation about what areas we should be going into. He really cared about budget policy, and he wanted to be sure we were doing some things in that area, which we did. And other than that it was, you know, it was more, I mean he did not walk into the room every time with a very specific agenda, which is good because for an organization like this you can't have one person thinking that they're still, you know, running their senate shop and thinking up things to do. It's not like that. So he was very good in that way, really.

DN: Do you remember any specific instances where you were working hard on a speech with him and he pushed you?

MS: I can think of two instances, and neither one is actually a speech, but the scene reminds me of, I think the speeches actually ended up being less, somewhat less this way. We were going to do, well let me start with the first one. We were in Phnom Penh. It was our first trip, and we had started out and done briefings in Thailand and briefings in Hanoi and gone to Saigon and driven from Saigon to Phnom Penh; that was really an incredible adventure, 1979, '89, '79, no, '89, sorry, I'm losing my grip here.

And it was getting to be the end of the trip and it was, the next, we were scheduled, he had insisted that we go to Angkor Wat, really insisted, and there was no way to get there. And, you know, the war was still going on. It wasn't going on right in Phnom Penh but. So the prime minister Hun Sen, and, being pressed by Senator Muskie, agreed to get a military helicopter to take us up there and we were to get up and go to the airport at the crack of dawn.

In the meantime it was getting close the end of the trip and we knew when we came out, he had to do a press conference in Bangkok and say something. And so he was wanting an options paper. And he was really wrestling. I mean, I think, you know, it was that hard, we all ran into this, you're at the hard point when you have to decide what do you really think, you know. And so we worked late into the night. I remember I must have had a typewriter or something, typing on Andrea's bed. We didn't have any facilities; there wasn't any computer, and got it to him late at night but enough time for him to read it, okay? I guess we stayed up late one night and then got it to him the next night.

And so we get up the next morning and we get in the car, and nothing is said, okay. And we get out to the airport and this is a, there's nobody at the air-, this is not a functioning airport in any serious way at the time. And we're sitting out there on this little ledge waiting for our military guys to turn up, and finally I, you know, we're kind of looking at each other, and so I kind of

sidled over and, “So, senator,” which is what I called him, “did you get a chance to look at your options memo?” And I’m telling you, we had agonized about this, strategized and agonized, and we just thought it was a killer options paper. And he looks at me, looks at the other two and says in this tone of voice something like, “Well, nothing new there.” You know, just like squelched.

So, I mean it was just, it was hopeless because there was no guidance, you know, nothing about what was wrong with it. I just, you know, I think now it’s possible he hadn’t even read it. I, you know, playing this video back in my head, I don’t know because. But, or he had read it, and he just couldn’t cope with it. I mean whatever we’d offered up didn’t work for him, you know.

DN: From your point of view, was there anything new in the memo?

MS: Yeah, we thought so. I mean he eventually came out with basically this approach, there was, it was incremental, but it was-, I think the thing that I found hardest about working with him, and I don’t know that anyone else had this experience, it might have been my limitation here. I found it very difficult to get into a political discussion with him. I don’t mean, you know, big public politics but little ‘p,’ operational politics. He didn’t, it’s almost as if strategy and maneuvering and all those things that you have to do, and, you know, if we do this, who will do what, that he didn’t really want to be thought to be doing that. Do you know what I mean? Does that make sense?

DN: It’s absolutely consistent.

MS: And it made it very damned, excuse me, very damn difficult to strategize, you know. So how, so what’s wrong with these options, is the substance, is it the politics, is it the way they’re framed? “No, just bring me something else.” So we got there, but that was a real crusher.

The other time was when we were trying to draft a potential article for, to submit to *Foreign Affairs* or something like that about Vietnam, and, this was later, and we’d done another trip, or we were heading for another trip. I think we were just planning to do another trip to Vietnam to deal directly with the Vietnam piece of this. And I just researched up a storm. I really worked hard on putting some background. And we were, and we wrote the article to try to point up some of the ambiguities if you will in the U.S. policy line, one of which was how the bombing of Cambodia was treated at the time, and then how the, in the negotiations in Paris, what was really going on, and then how we ended up supporting the Khmer Rouge as a way of sticking it to the Vietnamese basically.

You know, there was a lot of things in there that I think he agreed with, but in the end he was not prepared to put his name on that piece of paper. And we had some really difficult discussions about that, and they were difficult because they were not, it was not so much he was saying, “This is wrong, I don’t agree with this, okay?” That was not what was being said. It’s that, “I’m not going to, this is not something I am going to put my name on,” you know? Well, why not?

DN: Did he articulate why?

MS: No, that was the, I mean it was always, you know, it was always turned around as beating

up on you for some little inconsistency or quibbling or argument which you couldn't, you know, on the spot. I'm a writer, not a debater, you know, I could never think of the right comeback.

But he would get pretty heated, and, you know, when he got heated and started yelling at people, then we sort of backed off. I will say one other thing, I'm going to say this, I want to say this on the record. A couple of times, he took off after my compatriots in this exercise in a very nasty and personal way in the heat of the moment in some situation in which I'm sure from his perspective, you know, we had staffed him into some impossible corner that he couldn't see a way out of. I completely can understand what was going on in his mind. But, for whatever reason he wasn't able to articulate it in a way that would allow us to get out of the situation, and he would get very frustrated, and more frustrated and angry, and he said some very personally hurtful things to people. Not to me, actually, that I remember anyway.

And that's the one thing that I'm sorry about, you know. I wish he hadn't done that. I wish, I wish, I guess what I mean is I wish he hadn't felt the impulse to do that, for his sake as much as for the people who were the targets of this because it was a lessening, you know, of the really outsized personality that he was. You know, nobody's perfect, I mean, that was kind of in a way one of his -

DN: Did he apologize to them afterwards?

MS: Not in so many words. He obviously felt bad and, you know, wanted to. I mean one time I actually, I had forgotten about this but he said something, and I can't remember what it was, but it was, Andrea and Tom will remember, and I'll probably recall eventually. But he, we were sitting over a meal in this government guest establishment at Phnom Pen in this same original trip, and he said something to Tom Vallely, and I cannot remember what it was. But I felt I had to defend this former Marine, and I can remember sort of leaping in and saying, "You can't say that to him," or something along those lines. And I thought, I heard what I was saying and kind of fell back, you know. But -

DN: How did he react to that?

MS: He heard me. It was very interesting. I mean, it was clear he realized he had gone over the line, he let go, you know. I mean, we all need to let go. I mean you get stressed, and that just was his ventilation, you know, had to have a target. Plus it, you know, it wasn't a lot but it was a part of it, yeah.

DN: As he got older did he change at all?

MS: Yeah, now I didn't see him early, you know, but even over the time I knew him he mellowed, sure. He mellowed in the sense that he found it easier to let you know that he really thought you were great, you know, which he was a little parsimonious about in the earlier years. I think he, for whatever reason, you know, he wasn't great at sort of patting people on the back. But he would get, later with various people I knew that he cared about and respected.

Madeleine's one, the people I worked with on this project. He would say very nice things about

them, not necessarily when they were there, you know, but knowing they'd get the message back. And it, they were very nice things because they took account of the qualities of these people and their abilities I guess is a better word that registered, you know, a respect that he was paying to them. And it came across that way. And he meant it, too, I think.

DN: Did he express in any way, any specific ways, what he found important or valuable in the Center?

MS: Hmm, I've never thought about that. I would say not with words but with actions. He, you know, he managed to carry on as chairman of this place for twelve years and through more thin than thick as far as funding, and always was there, you know, when you needed him to be there. And it was clear that he had other outlets for this, but this was one good place for him to feel that he was pursuing the kind of, not cause exactly, but the public interest and to do it in a way that supported an organization that was aimed at that as well.

DN: As you think about him and your working relationship with him, and your observations of his involvement in public policy, what are the characteristics and qualities that come through to you as most important, positive and negative?

MS: Well, first of all he was just, I said, is he's smart, he was smart. He was very intelligent and wise in some way, some important ways I think in the sense that he, and he thought a lot about the country. I mean, he was of his generation; he had no problem thinking about the country, you know, and positively thinking about his service to it. He always cared about Maine, and he was always very loyal to Maine, but on the other hand, you know, he had a really strong sense of himself as a participant in the United States government. So I think intelligence would be very high.

And a sense of perspective, in a sense, you know. He had a good, I think, practical view of politics, things come, they go, he was not very ideological at all, very practical, but a committed Democrat certainly. And he liked it, you know, he liked his role. He liked getting a result, he liked being able to figure out where the right place was and, you know, right in a sense for the, correct for the country, and organizing himself to be there in that place, you know. That's a very useful political instinct and skill.

I just, I think the limitation is again that he sensed always that he was from, that somehow he was from this small state, and he was kind of, you know, nobody was in the end, going to take him all that seriously, in a way, in a funny way, even though they did. I'm not sure he ever believed it. So it kind of limited him a little bit in what he decided to do. And this is, I mean this is, know whether this is a strength or a weakness, but he really was, he always wanted to see what he was doing in the kind of great civic minded spirit, you know. He really didn't like talking, at least with me, about the nitty-gritty of the things that have to be done to get a political result.

And I think as time went on and we got into the eighties, he admired and indeed I think tried to emulate Ronald Reagan's inspirational abilities and style. But I think he, Muskie felt very put off by the disintegration of the political dialogue into ever more, into ever narrower partisan

channels, you know. Everything about spin, everything about the game, that just was not his cup of tea.

DN: One final question. Did your father, is your father still living?

MS: No, a long time dead.

DN: Did he live long enough to see you in this position?

MS: No, he didn't.

DN: My guess is he'd be very happy with what you're doing.

MS: He'd think it was a kick, probably, yeah, yeah. He'd, it's interesting because we, good training for Ed Muskie, we grew up with me being his in the house debate partner. He and I would debate late at night, anything. No one else in the family interested in listening to us having the debate. And I think we would have ended up having some incredibly provocative and entertaining debates about public life, public service, and politics, you know.

DN: And you're not in government.

MS: Right.

DN: Thank you very much.

MS: You're very welcome. Happy to do it.

End of Interview