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Nicoll, Don oral history interview

Andrea L'Hommedieu

Interview with Don Nicoll by Andrea L'Hommedieu

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Nicoll, Don

Interviewer

L'Hommedieu, Andrea

Date

April 9, 2004

Place

Lewiston, Maine

ID Number

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Biographical Note

Donald Eugene "Don" Nicoll was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on August 4, 1927, and grew up in the West Roxbury section of the city. He is the son of George and Mary Nicoll. He attended Robert Gould Shaw Junior High School and Boston English High School and graduated from Colby College in Waterville, Maine in 1949, majoring in History with a minor in Government. Don met his future wife, Hilda Farnum, also a Colby student, when they worked in the resort town of Ocean Park, Maine, in the summer of 1944. Nicoll began his graduate work at Pennsylvania State College in 1949, where he received a teaching fellowship in the Department of History. His graduate studies concentrated on American history, specifically the period from the Revolutionary War to the Civil War. His M.A. (1952) thesis was on the Alien and Sedition Acts.

Starting in 1951, Nicoll and his family settled in Buckfield, Maine where he picked apples and taught part time at Stephen's High School, located in Rumford. Nicoll began working as an announcer for WLAM radio in Lewiston, Maine. He became a reporter and then news editor for WLAM and WLAM-TV. In June 1954, Nicoll left WLAM to become Executive Secretary of the Democratic State Committee at the request of Frank M. Coffin, who has just become chairman. Mr. Coffin was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Maine's Second Congressional

District in 1956 and Nicoll went to Washington, DC, as his administrative assistant, continuing in that post until December 1960, the end of Congressman Coffin's second term. Mr. Coffin ran for governor in 1960 and was defeated. After the election Senator Edmund S. Muskie asked Nicoll to join his staff as legislative assistant and news secretary. Nicoll served in that position until 1962, when he became administrative assistant. He continued in that post until 1971, when he became personal advisor to Senator Muskie. He left the senate office in mid-1972.

From 1972 until his retirement in 2005 Nicoll worked as a program and policy planner, first as a consultant (1972-73), then as chairman and chief executive officer of the New England Land Grant Universities Joint Operations Committee (1973-1975), then as coordinator of planning and vice president for planning and public affairs for the Maine Medical Center (1975-1986), then as a consultant (1986-2005). His clients were primarily in the non-profit sector and included universities, libraries, education associations, health care organizations and social service agencies. He also worked as a volunteer, heading a variety of public policy projects, including the Maine Task Force on Government Reorganization, the Maine State Compensation Commission, the Maine (Mental Health) Systems Assessment Commission, the Maine Consortium for Health Professions Education, the Southern Maine Community Television Consortium, the Maine Special Commission on Government Reorganization (co-chair), the Board of Visitors of the University of Southern Maine's Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service, the Maine-Aomori Sister-State Advisory Council and the Governor's Allagash Wilderness Waterway Working Group.

From 1998-2005, Don Nicoll was the Director of the Edmund S. Muskie Oral History Project at Bates College.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Don's first trips to Washington, DC with Frank Coffin; Coffin's history and relationship with then Senator Fred Payne of Maine; Congressman Coffin's House office staff; story about the bust of Thomas Brackett Reed; 1958 elections in Maine; 1960 campaigns; Maine electoral reforms in 1958 and 1960; 1960 anti-Catholic vote; Muskie-Lyndon B. Johnson story and the ramifications for Muskie's committee assignments; and the political make-up of the Public Works Committee and changes to it in 1962.

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Transcript

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview with Donald E. Nicoll on April 9th, the year 2004, at the Muskie Archives at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Don, we last left off where you and Frank and your families were heading to Washington, D.C. just after the election in which Frank Coffin became a Democratic congressman for Maine. What was it like when you arrived in Washington?

Don Nicoll: We had been in Washington earlier. Matter of fact, I probably should have talked about our early trips to Washington after the 1954 election when we went to talk to people at the Democratic National Committee, and also at the Congressional Campaign Committee about possible assistance in 1956 when Governor Muskie would be up for reelection and we would be seeking to win additional seats in the House, or seek seats in the House since we had none at the time.

And I My vivid memory of that, because it was my first time in Washington, D.C., and it was my first experience therefore in getting around the Capitol, walking through the halls of the old House office building, as it was known in those days, it later became the Cannon Office Building, and Frank getting more and more tired and more and more worn out by those hard marble floors. They were just terrible on your feet. And I had been pressing him still to run for Congress at some time because I thought that that was a natural place for him to serve. And at the end of that trip he looked at me, after he had been wearing himself out walking on those corridors, and said, "You'll never get me to come here."

We also went to the House of Representatives and observed the debate, and I put that debate in quotes, because it was during a slack time in the House. There were very few people on the floor and members were delivering little five minute speeches for the record. And we looked down from the gallery and there sat Robert Hale, the representative from the first district of Maine, and actually a former partner in the firm Verrill, Dana, Walker, Philbrick and Whitehouse of Portland that Frank had been in, was still in at the time. And Robert Hale was clearly asleep a good bit of the time during this desultory debate, and we shook our heads about the way business was

apparently done in the United States House of Representatives.

But that was the introduction to the city. And we then returned, Hilda and I had gone to Washington, as Frank and Ruth had, in the fall of the September-October period of the, oh, it would have been later than that. We went after the fall election, because Hilda had delivered our older daughter Melissa on the 25th of September and the soonest we could get away really was in November, early November. And we went house hunting. And for a young couple then living in Buckfield, Maine on the edge of the woods, in the village but on the edge of the woods, trying to decide what made the most sense economically and in terms of our two boys, who had up to that point grown up in Buckfield. Hugh was five years old and Jonathan was three years old at the time, and all they had known was small town Maine and here we were facing a move to a large metropolitan area.

We finally decided that we could afford a rent in Bethesda very near the National Institutes of Health in a very attractive dead-end street which ended in a public recreation area. But we soon discovered that in trying to avoid big city center and not wanting to live too far out, we ended up with the disadvantages of both the city and the country and the advantages of neither because we were forced to commute wherever we went, for shopping or church or work, and it was still quite crowded. So we decided in 1961, which is getting a little ahead of the story, to move into the District of Columbia where we lived after that.

But We arrived and the first place we went after the election when we were in Washington, this is after the November election, excuse me, it was after the September election, when Frank and I were together in Washington. The first place we went was to Senator [Frederick] Payne's office. Senator Payne had been Frank's client in 1952 when Frank was the counsel in the liquor scandal investigation by the Joint Standing Committee, I forget which one it was, but Governor Payne had been accused by Herman Sahagian, S-A-G-A-H-A-G-I-A-N [*sic* S-A-H-A-G-I-A-N], Herman Sahagian was the owner of the Fairview Wine Company, which sold wine in the state liquor stores.

At that time, wine was sold only in the liquor stores along with distilled beverages, and getting a contract to sell the wine in the state liquor stores was a major undertaking and there was intense competition, and probably over the years a lot of shenanigans. And Sahagian had lost out at some level, although he was still selling his wine in the state liquor stores, lost out at some level and accused the Payne administration and Governor Payne in particular, of having been involved in undercutting. Now, this wine I should note was California wine that was shipped from California to Maine in tank cars and then bottled, so it was not vintage wine at all. Frank had represented Governor Payne in that investigation and had pretty much demonstrated that Governor Payne was innocent of the charges levied against him by Sahagian and they, Frank, and now *Senator* Payne, who'd been elected in 1952 to the U.S. Senate, were good friends. So if we were looking for advice on how to set up an office in the House of Representatives, the first place we'd go would be to Frank's upcoming colleague in the Senate, Senator Payne. We did not go to see Senator Smith at that time, although Frank, I believe, paid a courtesy call on her at some point.

The people we met were Senator Payne and his administrative assistant Bill Williamson, and his legislative assistant Merton Henry. And Mert became a longtime friend of mine. And we worked together in the two-year period between 1957-58 on a number of bills of mutual interest and cases that we both got involved in, serving constituents in the second district of Maine.

The other thing I remember about that visit was that at that time, I believe, Senator Payne had something like two or three offices, that is rooms in his suite of offices, very crowded even though the staff was much smaller than it is today. And Bill Williamson, I believe, had his desk in the senator's office. So they, they really did not have plush quarters at all.

Frank also paid courtesy calls on the Speaker of the House, Mr. Sam, Sam Rayburn, and we talked with the campaign committee. The staff members at that time were Ken Harding, H-A-R-D-I-N-G, whose father Cap Harding had run the Democratic House Congressional Campaign Committee for years; and the other staff member in that office was Ted Henshaw, H-E-N-S-H-A-W. They were very friendly, had been in the period leading up to the '56 campaign, and had made some donations to Frank's campaign, and then when we came to town in the fall after the election, were very helpful in terms of giving us guidance on setting up a House staff. At that time Frank had decided to hire Mignonne, M-I-G-N-O-N-N-E, Bouvier, B-O-U-V-I-E-R, of Lewiston, as his principal secretary, and Elizabeth Donahue, D-O-N-A-H-U-E, of Washington, formerly from Portland and Cape Elizabeth, was hired as a legislative assistant. And we hired, initially, a couple of women from the D.C. area. Later we hired Elaine Swanholm Clinton who was from Thomaston originally; her father and mother's name was Swanholm and she had married a fellow from Texas named Clinton, divorced him later, and married a Navy liaison officer named Shortall, Keith Shortall, S-H-O-R-T-H-A-L-L [*sic* S-H-O-R-T-A-L-L]. And they had a son named Keith who later became the news director for Maine Public Radio. But -

AL: I'll just note in here that her current last name is Storer.

DN: Storer, yes, Elaine has had a long series of marriages. Wonderfully bright, witty young woman with a fascinating family story. In fact, it's worth pausing to tell that story here.

Her father was a native of Sweden and he had been apprenticed to a bank as a boy. And he, as he told the story later, he walked into the bank one day, looked around, and realized that among the older men working in that bank, where they sat on stools apparently, every backside looked like every other backside, and he decided that he did not want to spend his life in that environment. So he left the bank and emigrated to Canada, and then sneaked across the St. Croix River and into Maine. So he was a wetback, literally, an illegal immigrant who became a cabinetmaker and was highly respected as a cabinetmaker in the Thomaston area. And then his daughter Elaine came to work for us and was a marvelous secretary and assistant.

Well, we came into D.C., we had to get used to working in a very large institution. The House is enormous, even in those days before it expanded so much in staff, it was very large. Frank had sufficiently impressed the speaker that he got his first choice in a committee assignment. He went on the Foreign Affairs committee where he soon distinguished himself, and really, in my view, had he wished to stay in the House would have emerged ultimately as one of the House leaders,

particularly in the arena of foreign policy. We busied ourselves with a combination of legislation dealing with Maine problems and problems related particularly to the Foreign Affairs Committee.

I should pause here to refer back to Elizabeth Donahue, who's nickname was Libby, and say that Libby was the daughter of Helen Donahue, the postmistress at one time, during the Roosevelt years, for the city of Portland post office, and from an old family in the Portland area that is an old Irish family. The uh . . . Mrs. Donahue's father was a contractor, Cunningham, and he built the Lafayette Hotel, now the Lafayette House. And that family was very active in Democratic politics. Libby herself had gone to Washington and was actively engaged in the Americans for Democratic Action and other liberal groups in Washington. She was a freelance writer, a friend of Herb Block, Herbert Block and others in the *Washington Post* world. So she was a great asset in terms of connections with Washington society and she also had enough links to Maine to understand that environment.

One of the first ventures we had after the session started in 1957, was the famous escapade with the bust of Thomas Brackett Reed of Maine. Thomas Brackett Reed had been a speaker of the House during the last years of the 19th century and the first of the 20th. He, I think I may have extended that too long, I think he left before the end of the 19th century. He was known as Czar Reed because he was such a dominant force in the House, and he initiated very substantial reforms in the way the House operated; reforms that have stood the test of time and many of which are still in place. He also was opposed to the Spanish American War, very critical of President McKinley even though he and McKinley were in the same party. And he decided not to run for reelection because of his disaffection. And his statute stands, for those who want to see it, in the park on the Western Promenade in Portland not far from the Maine Medical Center.

But in the Cannon Office Building, that is the old House office building, there is a rotunda and in 1957 there were a number of busts of former speakers of the House. The busts were very similar, carved in marble. Their pedestals, however, were slightly different one to the other, but practically all in grey stone, either marble or in some cases granite, but very pale granite. The bust of Thomas Brackett Reed, however, unlike all of the rest, sat on a pedestal of wood painted to look like stone.

[Elisabeth] May [Adams] Craig, who was the Washington correspondent for the Portland papers, well as a matter of fact all of the Gannett papers in Maine, had been outraged by this arrangement in which Thomas Brackett Reed sat on an inferior pedestal and had been after the members of the congressional delegation for years to get it changed; nothing had happened.

Well, she came to Frank, got him to go to the rotunda and see this desecration, and asked that he get it changed. Frank said he agreed with her and he would do what he could to do that. At which point we got in touch with the McGuire brothers, that's M-C-G-U-I-R-E, of Deer Isle, Maine, in the town of Stonington. They owned a quarry, several quarries, on Deer Isle and nearby islets, and had been supplying granite for structures for a long time all over the east coast of the United States at least. And at the time they were providing granite for the Taft Memorial just below the Capitol in Washington. Frank described the problem and they said, well, they

would be glad to donate a granite pedestal and cut it, they'd cut it to the measurements of the present pedestal, and they would donate it and they would ship it to Washington at no cost to the government as part of the shipment of granite for the Taft Memorial.

So armed with this information, Frank went to the architect of the Capitol and said he wanted to make a change, and this is the arrangement, that would not cost the government anything. The architect, who was a crusty old man, said, "Absolutely not." He was not an architect, by the way, he was simply an "old pol" who had been picked up somewhere along the line, and declared that it could not change. Well Frank then went to Speaker Rayburn and explained the situation, and Speaker Rayburn got in touch, or had his staff get in touch with the architect and informed him that there would be a change. And the architect grumbled and grouched and said okay, but we'd have to guarantee that the granite looked like the other granite pedestals in this rotunda. And we said, "Of course." And so the bust of Thomas Brackett Reed was put in storage, the pedestal that had been used was boxed up and shipped by parcel post, in those days, the limitations on size were not as strict as they are now, and of course as a shipment by a member of Congress it was franked so there was no postal charge, shipped to the McGuires in Stonington.

(Phone interruption)

DN: So the pedestal was shipped off and in due course we got a call from the McGuires saying it was on its way back to Washington, and then the arrangements were made to deliver it to the old House office building and a date was set for the unveiling. On the evening before the unveiling, where we were going to have a ceremony with Speaker Rayburn and some other dignitaries, Frank and I went up to the rotunda to look at it. It was covered in a sheet, and we peeked under the sheet and there was Thomas Brackett Reed's bust on the handsomest piece of dark rose Stonington granite, or Deer Isle granite as it's called, that you've ever seen; absolutely beautiful. They picked out a special piece but not at all like the other granite or stone pedestals in the rotunda. We said, "It can't be helped."

And the next day the unveiling took place. Speaker Rayburn spoke, Frank spoke, and so far as I know the speaker was pleased with it, the architect was not, and the pedestal remains in the rotunda of the Cannon Office Building.

AL: As of today.

DN: As of today. But that was our, one of our early adventures and an example of how sometimes things are done by virtue of persuasion and political considerations that rise above the limitations of the bureaucrats in this case.

So we continued laboring through those first two years, learning about how the House runs and dealing with the working relationships within the Maine delegation. Had very cordial relationships with both Congressman Hale from the first district and Congressman [Cliff] McIntire from the third district, and with Senator Payne's office, and a reasonable, but distant relationship with Senator Smith's office largely because of her, the style of her office, which I

believe was the result of her administrative assistant's attitudes, Bill Lewis.

As we got to, toward 1958, which came very rapidly - unless you're in that environment you don't realize how very soon after one election, you're thinking about the next one. We were looking at the reelection campaign for Frank in 1958, of the interest in getting a change in the first district, and beginning to build strength, or continuing to build strength in the third district, and Senator Payne's first term was up and he'd indicated that he was a candidate for reelection. Governor Muskie decided that he would run for that Senate seat. And there was an impending primary in the campaign for Congress, excuse me, for governor, to replace Governor Muskie.

The campaign in the spring of 1958, the primary, I can't remember whether there was a primary campaign in the first district but Jim Oliver was the nominee, Frank in the second district, and I'm trying to remember, I don't, I think maybe We'd have to look this up, but I think it was a professor from the University of Maine who ran in that campaign.

In the gubernatorial race, Clinton Clauson, the mayor of Waterville, former Internal Revenue Service director for the state of Maine, that is federal Internal Revenue Service director for Maine, and a chiropractor who came from Iowa, was running, and Maynard Dolloff, who was the master of the State Grange, was also a candidate. And in that race, Ed Muskie refused to endorse a candidate. Frank supported Maynard Dolloff, and Doc Clauson won the primary. And interestingly enough, Doc's people blamed Ed Muskie for, and were very critical of him, for not coming out for Doc and accused him of being for Dolloff behind the scenes, and he took a lot of political flack for it. And Frank came out of it without any hard feelings on Doc's part or Doc's allies' part. Somehow the fact that he'd been open in his position sat well them, where Senat-, Governor Muskie's did not.

And Doc ran in the fall, we were still with the September election. And Ed Muskie ran a very strong campaign. Senator Payne had been tagged in the famous Goldfein scandal of the Eisenhower administration that also affected Sherman Adams, the president's chief of staff, and that tarnished Senator Payne and I think that was one of the factors that contributed to his loss.

There was also a growing Democratic sentiment in the state. Governor Clauson won, and Jim Oliver won in the first district, and Ed Muskie made preparations to come to Washington. He made a decision that was very difficult, personally. He decided that he would not take Maurice Williams who had been his administrative assistant with him to Washington as his administrative assistant, but would take John Donovan, professor of government at Bates College and a former chairman of the Democratic State Committee; and Bob Huse, who was executive secretary of the State Committee at the time, I believe, and he went as his news secretary and executive assistant essentially.

AL: And would you spell his last name?

DN: H-U-S-E, excuse me. Bob was from Bath. And he was Carlton Day ["Bud"] Reed's brother-in-law. And they, that was his principal team, and his secretary at the time was Joanne

Amnott, A-M-N-O-T-T [Hoffmann], whose father had been the chief of police in Lewiston. She had grown up in Lewiston. And most of the staff were from Maine. The senator-elect's secretary, long time secretary, Marjorie Hutchinson, became the director of his Maine office in Waterville, and at the time there was only one office in the state, quite unlike the arrangements they have today.

(Pause)

AL: We are now on Side B of the interview with Don Nicoll on April 9th. Don, you were going to relate a story to me involving Doc Clauson and John Jabar?

DN: Yes. In the 1958 campaign, while I was in Maine working on Frank's reelection campaign, I did some work for Doc Clauson in the general election, mostly writing radio talks for him. We had started a practice in the 1954 campaign of scheduling, toward the end of the campaign, a series of five minute radio talks by each of the major candidates, and rotating those in a morning, midday and early evening showing over a three week period and it gave us good saturation. And the five minute format actually allowed candidates to discuss issues in a fair amount of detail, certainly much more than the one minute and thirty second spots that go on television today.

John [Jabar] had asked me if I could help him out by writing some of those for Doc. I did so, and at the end of the campaign John gave me what I regarded as either the greatest compliment or the biggest insult for my writing that I ever heard. He told me that I was the only person who could write so that Doc could read what was written. Doc was not noted as a very skilled public speaker, and that was my major contribution to that part of the campaign.

Well, at the end of the 1958 general election campaign in September, Ed Muskie had been elected to the U.S. Senate, Frank was reelected to the House from Maine's second district, and Jim Oliver was elected to the first district seat, and Governor Clauson was elected governor of the state. The Democratic majorities were continuing to expand.

We went back to Washington and were busily engaged in legislation in 1959, and of course everyone was looking forward to the 1960 presidential campaign and the pressures were building on the subject of the nomination. Now the Kennedy family, and their allies from Massachusetts, were putting considerable pressure on Senator Muskie, on Governor Clauson, and on Frank Coffin to come out and endorse Jack Kennedy in the nomination race, and that went on through the year. And there's much more detail on the final decision to support Jack Kennedy, in an interview we conducted with John Byrne, B-Y-R-N-E, who was press secretary to Governor Clauson. And I won't try to repeat that because he was much more on the inside of an important conference between Governor Clauson and John Bailey from the state of Connecticut, the Democratic state chairman in Connecticut, who was one of the leading political figures in the drive for John Kennedy's nomination. I'll simply observe that both Senator Muskie and Congressman Coffin had held back from open endorsements early on and felt that we shouldn't get too publicly involved in the presidential race too early.

The one thing I should note about the period between the election of '58 and January of '59, when Senator Muskie took office as a member from Maine, is that we received from Senator Payne's office a request to take care of a number of open constituent cases that they were working on, and deal with the problems that wouldn't be solved before Senator Payne left office. And I remember one of those cases which illustrates the kind of work congressional offices frequently do that don't get much public attention, but are terribly important to people who have difficulties with one or another parts of the federal government.

One of the cases involved a man who had been drafted into the Army in WWI, was accused of desertion and court-martialed and given a dishonorable discharge from the Army. He had for years been claiming that it was a case of mistaken identity and that he was not guilty and his record should be cleaned up. Senator Payne's office had been working on this, had not resolved it. They were moving it up through the appeals process at the Pentagon, when we got the case.

Well, on the surface this was a case that looked like an instance where the constituent was really either deluded or falsifying history, and it was not a very sympathetic case when you looked at the Army's record. Well, it turned out that the young man, when he was young during WWI, had indeed been drafted and had been stationed at Fort Williams, I believe, but one of the forts around Portland Harbor and Casco Bay. And it appeared that he actually had deserted at some point. But we felt that he deserved a day in court, and so we did some work on his record. And finally, I went over to the Pentagon to plow through his files and there discovered that he was an individual who had been born with several congenital abnormalities. He had some peculiar hand and foot malformations. And it was obvious that he had deep-seated psychological problems that dated back to that period. And the more one read, the more one realized that this was a person who never should have been drafted in the first place, and his troubles in the Army were really the consequence of a psychologically, psychiatrically disturbed individual and he should have gotten a medical discharge.

So we started to pursue this with the Department of the Army and the Board of Appeals, I forget the full title of the board. And in the end, the Army Defense Department agreed that his discharge should be corrected and he should receive a medical discharge. And I told the secretary in the office, when we got the word and it was official, to send the gentleman a note and let him know that it had been taken care of and the discharge, the dishonorable discharge, had been wiped out and that he had an honorable discharge. And my intent was that he should get a simple letter that was vague on the kind of discharge, because I didn't want to stir him up again with the suggestion that he had a psychiatric problem that was substituted in the discharge papers.

Well unfortunately, the secretary simply sent a letter stating what I had asked her to do, but she included a copy of the papers from the Army. And the next thing we had was an irate constituent, who was declaring that he was indeed not a person with a mental health problem. Finally I think the case just drifted away into nothing before the end of the year, but it was a good illustration of correcting an injustice, and then botching the execution so that the constituent didn't get satisfaction.

But we, we handled a number of those cases, and then were involved in working with Senator Muskie's office in 1959 and with Congressman Oliver's office, as we ramped up to the 1960 campaign. Then just before the end of the year, virtually the end of the year, all of the thinking about the 1960 campaign got knocked into a cocked hat because Governor Clauson died suddenly and there was the open governor's seat. The president of the senate, John Reed succeeded Governor Clauson under the constitution, but it would be necessary to hold a general election for the completion of his term in 1960, in the general election.

I should note here that two electoral reforms went into effect as of the 1958 and 1960 campaigns. The first reform was the extension of the governor's term to four years. And the second reform, which was to start in 1960, was the switch of the Maine election from September to November to coincide with the federal election. And pressure started to build on Frank Coffin to run for governor rather than to run for reelection to the House. He would have preferred to stay in the House, because he was building seniority and playing an increasingly prominent role in the House Foreign Affairs Committee. But there was no one else in the party with his stature in Maine, and so the pressures became too strong to resist and he agreed to run for governor in the 1960 campaign, and we were immediately thrown into preparations for that campaign.

Governor Reed was a fairly bland candidate. He had become governor, in fact in large part, because he didn't tend to offend people. And he had moved from the house to the senate, he was from Fort Fairfield in Aroostook County, he had moved from the house to the senate and had been elected the president of the senate largely because he was a non-controversial character. And the other prospective presidents of the senate were parts of small groups and had managed to alienate, in one way or another, substantial segments of the Republican Party, and particularly Republicans in the senate. So you had a candidate who was not particularly strong in some respects, not regarded as a great leader, but still not objectionable from the point of view of a lot of people. And Frank was coming back to Maine, in a sense, to campaign against him.

The national campaign was a tight fought campaign. And one of the issues in that campaign was the issue of whether or not it was a good idea to elect a Catholic as president, and conservative Protestants, in particular, were campaigning very hard against a quote, papist, end quote, candidate. Frank did very well in his campaigning but in the end, as president-elect Kennedy said just after the election, "Well, Frank, I guess my coattails dragged you down." Frank lost to John Reed by about twenty thousand votes, and John Kennedy lost the state by about sixty thousand votes. And it seemed quite apparent that that forty thousand vote difference represented the anti-Catholic vote that came out in the campaign against John Kennedy. I should say anti-Catholic, anti-Massachusetts Catholic, he had two things against him in that campaign.

And so Frank lost the race and the next question was, what would he do? And also, what would I do? And that issue occupied us pretty intensively in the months of November and December. And Frank was appointed by the President to be in the AID Program, U.S. A-I-D Program, and was a deputy administrator there. And I had suggested that in light of the fact that we lost not only the governorship, but the second district seat and the first district seat in that campaign, that it would make sense, since there was some talk about my going to work for Senator Muskie, it

would make sense perhaps for me to go back to Maine and to work out of the senator's state office and thus be able to work with people on rebuilding the party fortunes in the state.

And I carried that proposal to Senator Muskie and he told me in no uncertain terms that he had other problems that he wanted to solve. He was, at the time, not happy with what he was doing in the Senate. He felt that his legislative role was not adequate, and that he needed someone who was strong in that department, and also he needed strength in his public relations operation, and he wanted me to go to work for him as his legislative assistant and news secretary. So I agreed to do that and we moved back to Washington.

I chuckle in thinking back about the fact that I had to move back because we, during that campaign we had left our house in Bethesda on the assumption that Well, we hadn't moved out of it, we'd simply sort of moved back to Maine in the summer and planned to stay in Maine hoping that Frank would be elected governor. We had planned to go back to the home in Buckfield. It was still available. It belonged to Hilda's parents, but her sister and brother-in-law who were slated to go to Burma, as American Baptist missionaries, were prevented from doing that in the summer of 1960 by illness in the family. And so we said, well They were betwixt and between, they'd given up their home in preparation for leaving for Burma, when Cliff came down with a very serious medical problem. And we said, "Well, why don't you come to Buckfield and use the house and we'll simply stay at our place where we are for the summer." And, I guess we had moved out of the house in Bethesda, we'd given that up and put our things in storage.

And we were at camp, a summer cottage on Pocasset Lake in Wayne. We stayed there into the fall. And in the fall we were joined by the Donovans, John Donovan was running for the house of representatives at the time, he had, was then Senator Muskie's administrative assistant. And so the Donovans and the Nicolls lived in cottages on the shores of Pocasset Lake into November. Cool weather, and the children who were old enough went to the Wayne elementary school which was a two-room school house. The car that our wives shared was a Morris Minor that Frank and Ruth Coffin owned, and how they got all their kids into that car we'll never know - probably don't want to ask - as they used it for shopping and so forth.

AL: How many kids did they have?

DN: We had between us, at that point we had seven, seven between us. We had, we had four and John and Bea had three. Later they had a total of four. And our car, a Plymouth, large Plymouth station wagon, had become the campaign car for the candidate, because it was big enough to rattle around the state and could carry lots of stuff. And John was using his family car for campaigning. Campaigning was still on a shoestring in 1960.

And, so after the campaign we came back to Washington. We found a house in the District which we bought, and the Donovans returned, I believe, to the house where they'd been before. John was administrative assistant in Muskie's office. Bob Huse, as I mentioned earlier, was the executive assistant, number two. And I came in as number three, legislative assistant and news

secretary. At that time we divided the work in the office so that much of the legislative work was grouped by casework categories, and people who did casework also did legislative work, and I was responsible for coordinating much of that. John of course handled the over all coordination, and Bob was responsible primarily for post office matters and a few other areas of legislation, plus day-to-day office management.

Late in 1961, in November of 1961, I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. Fortunately the tumor was encapsulated and they were able to remove the thyroid and do the follow-up radiation treatment, and then I went on thyroid substitute medication. About as soon as I was out of the hospital, and apparently on the road to recovery, John Donovan came to see me and told me that he had been offered a job by Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz to be his assistant, and that he had decided to do that, had talked with Senator Muskie. And Senator Muskie had indicated that he wanted me to become the administration assistant, but he didn't want to do anything about that until they knew how I was going to do, because obviously if somebody has cancer then there are all sorts of questions as to what the survival will be.

And so in late, in December of 1961, I talked with Senator Muskie, after that conversation with John, and agreed to move into the office as the administrative assistant. And not too long after that Bob Huse decided that he did not want to stay in the senator's office, under those circumstances, and he left. And at that point we started the move that ultimately led to hiring first Chapman Stockford, better known as Chip, and a little later George Mitchell. And others on the staff changed over time. So my general responsibility in the senator's office started in January of 1962, as administrative assistant.

And at that time we were still struggling with the consequences of Senator Muskie's early clash with Lyndon Johnson. And that story's been told many times but I'll simply repeat it here. Others can get more detail from some of Senator Muskie's own writings on the subject and other biographical sketches.

When Senator Muskie was elected to the Senate, came to Washington, he was part of the class of '68 [*sic* >58] which included a number of liberal northern Democrats, people like Gaylord Nelson, Eugene McCarthy, Phil Hart of Michigan, Gale McGee of Wyoming, Ted Moss of Utah, several others. And the Senate was in turmoil over the subject of Senate Rules and cloture on filibusters. And the liberals, and particularly the young Turks in the class of '58, were pushing to liberalize those rules to make it easier to deal with the filibuster problem, particularly in connection with civil rights, and Hubert Humphrey was leading the fight for this.

Lyndon Johnson, on the other hand, was trying to maintain some unity among the Democrats as the majority leader and then as the, he was majority leader at the time, and had come up with a compromise that he was pushing, a compromise that would enable him to hold on to the southern Democrats.

When Ed Muskie went to pay a courtesy call on the majority leader soon after arriving in Washington, one of the pieces of advice Lyndon Johnson gave him was that, as the story's been

told he said, “Ed, people are going to want to find out how you plan to vote on a lot of issues. And my advice is don't tell 'em how you plan to vote, just tell 'em that you haven't made up your mind yet and you probably won't until they get to the M's in the alphabet on the roll call.” Ed thanked him for his advice. And when they got into the Rules fight the majority leader called Ed into his office and pressed him on the fight between the liberals and himself and pressed his argument for the compromise. At the conclusion of his lecture on that subject, asked Senator Muskie how he planned to vote. And Senator Muskie, in fairly typical Muskie style said, “Well, Mr. Leader, I haven't made up my mind yet, and I don't expect I will until they get to the M's.” Well, Lyndon Johnson was not amused, and he was even less amused when the vote came up and Ed voted against him.

As a consequence, he punished Muskie by not giving him his prime request for committee assignment, that is the Foreign Relations Committee, and gave him assignments to the Banking and Currency Committee, the Government Operations Committee, and the Public Works. And one has to remember that in 1959 the Banking and Currency Committee was chaired by John Sparkman of Alabama, and dominated by other senators including Willis Robertson of Virginia, [*sic* Senator Willis Robertson (D-VA) chaired the Senate Banking and Currency Committee; Senator John Sparkman (D-AL) chaired the Banking and Currency Committee's Housing Subcommittee] the father of Pat Robertson the evangelist, very different from his son but still a conservative southern member of Congress, and torn a bit by conflicts between the conservatives on the committee and Paul Douglas of Illinois, who was a very liberal senator. I should say Senator Sparkman was a liberal by comparison in southern terms. He was a strong supporter of very good social legislation and a moderate on civil rights, again in southern terms, at the time.

The Government Operations Committee was chaired by John McClellan of Arkansas who was a very conservative Democrat. As close to, probably as close to Joe McCarthy and others like him as anybody on the Democratic side; and Scoop Jackson who was a liberal but also a cold warrior, a very strong cold warrior, and an ardent defender of the western view on water rights and on other legislation, and a keen defender of the Boeing Company which becomes important later in the story, when we get into the famous TFX controversy, but

And the third committee, Public Works, was chaired by Dennis Chavez of New Mexico. And the number two Democrat on the committee was Robert Kerr of Oklahoma, a very powerful man out of the oil industry who really dominated that committee. Senator Chavez was older, not terribly well, and not very strong as a committee leader.

There were very few opportunities in any of those three committees, with the possible exception of Banking and Currency, for Senator Muskie to shine in those early days. Well, by 1962 he had been pretty restive and was seeking ways to become much more effective. We went to, I took on responsibility, essentially, for all three committees, that is liaison with all three of those major committees, for starters. And the first place that opened up for the senator to play a major role was Public Works, because late in the fall of 1962 Dennis Chavez died and shortly thereafter Senator Kerr died, and they were succeeded by Senator McNamara of Michigan who was a liberal northern Democrat. I hasten to add, a liberal northern Democrat who was very tight-fisted when

it came to spending committee money, and that had consequences for the development of the special subcommittee on air and water pollution. Should we pause here?

AL: Sure, we can stop here today and pick it up again.

DN: Probably would be well to stop there because the next steps will be fairly detailed discussion of what happened with those committee assignments.

AL: Okay, thank you again.

End of Interview