

7-18-2008

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

July 18, 2008

Place

Portland, Maine

ID Number

MOH 448

Use Restrictions

© Bates College. This transcript is provided for individual **Research Purposes Only**; for all other uses, including publication, reproduction and quotation beyond fair use, permission must be obtained in writing from: The Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library, Bates College, 70 Campus Avenue, Lewiston, Maine 04240-6018.

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: 1968 Democratic National Convention, Chicago; 1968 vice presidential campaign; Paul Brontas; Eliot Cutler fear of flying story; J. Kenneth Galbraith story; George Mitchell and debate negotiation story; campaign airplane description; Hubert Humphrey; Ted Kennedy; Evolution of the Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution and the 1970 U.S. Senate reelection campaign.

Indexed Names

Agnew, Spiro
Bernhard, Berl
Billings, Leon
Boggs, James Caleb, 1909-
Brontas, Paul
Curtis, Kenneth M., 1931-
Cutler, Eliot
Daley, Richard J., 1902-1976

Dubord, Dick
Fenderson, Jane
Galbraith, John
Goldstein, Joel
Hathaway, Bill
Hildenbrand, William F. "Bill"
Humphrey, Hubert H. (Hubert Horatio), 1911-1978
Inouye, Daniel
Jackson, Henry M. (Henry Martin), 1912-1983
Johnson, Lyndon B. (Lyndon Baines), 1908-1973
Kampelman, Max
Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963
Kennedy, Robert F., 1925-1968
Kennedy, Edward Moore, 1932-
Kerr, Robert Samuel, 1896-1963
Keup, Kathy
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968
Kyros, Peter N., Jr.
Lander, Charlie
Linton, Ron M.
Marden, Robert M.
Martin, John
McCarthy, Eugene J., 1916-2005
McGovern, George S. (George Stanley), 1922-
McIntire, Clifford
McNamara, Pat
Micoleau, Charlie
Milazzo, Paul Charles
Mitchell, George J. (George John), 1933-
Muskie, Edmund S., 1914-1996
Nicholas, Susie
Nicoll, Don
Nicoll, Hilda
Nicoll, Hugh
Nixon, Richard M. (Richard Milhous), 1913-1994
Pitts, Virginia
Ransome, Lorelei (Williams)
Sheive, Doreen
Shepherd, Bob
Van Dyke, Ted
Welsh, William "Bill"
Whitelaw, John

Transcript

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the Edmund S. Muskie Oral History Project at Bates College. The date is July 18th, 2008, I'm at the home of Donald E. Nicoll in Portland, Maine, and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Don, it's been a few years since we added an interview to this, to your series of interviews, and I think we left off talking about issues you were dealing with in the Senate office in the mid to late sixties, and we were coming up on the 1968 vice presidential run of Edmund S. Muskie. And did you want to start by telling me a little bit about what your responsibilities were in the office at that point, and maybe how that changed, or where your focus went as that election approached.

Don Nicoll: I was still the senator's administrative assistant and that role, which is now labeled chief of staff, as time goes on, people inflate titles, I've noticed, but I was the senior staff person generally responsible for the overall operation of the office. And as we divided the workload, responsible directly for a number of issue areas on legislation and constituent service and, generally speaking, this fell into the areas of Housing and Urban Development, and through the Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution, the environmental legislation, through the Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Relations, the whole field of the federal system, plus a few other items. And generally work on the political responsibilities one had in an elective office. And we had an executive assistant who supervised the direct day-to-day operations and the staff work.

As we approached the 1968 Democratic National Convention, Senator Muskie was not up for reelection, and in the spring of 1968, there was a great furor because the president had decided, that is President Johnson, had decided that he would not – well, let me back up.

Now, in February, in the New Hampshire primary, Senator Gene McCarthy, who had run against the president for the Democratic nomination, did not win the primary but gained a substantial vote, and it was clear to President Johnson that the primary effort, the drive for the nomination, was going to be a very tough fight, very divisive, and so he announced his withdrawal. This was before the Democratic state convention, and everything was thrown into an uproar. Gene McCarthy was a candidate, Robert Kennedy, Senator Kennedy of New York, jumped into the race, and Vice President Humphrey was a candidate. And there were a few others, I believe.

But by the Democratic state convention, there was a lot of pressure in support of the several candidates, and Senator Muskie and others decided that it would be smart to keep Maine's options open. And so he agreed to be a favorite son candidate, not intending to run for the presidential nomination, or any other nomination at that point, but simply holding on to Maine's votes. And after a rather spirited debate, and some divisions between Senator William Hathaway and Governor Curtis and Senator Muskie, the convention endorsed Senator Muskie as the favorite son.

So we were caught up in the whole furor around the Democratic National Convention, and rumors started to float that Senator Muskie would be a good candidate for vice president on a

ticket headed by Vice President Humphrey. And that was in the background, and there were people who supported that and pushed him, and I don't remember the details of the individuals who were engaged in that, but a number of them approached us through that period. And increasingly, during that 1968 period, my attention was drawn to the whole question of the November election and inevitably the national convention in Chicago in late August.

We were also engaged at the time, and I forget the details of this, but Senator Muskie was active, I don't think he was chairman of the Senate, he may have been chairman of the Senate, Democratic Senate Campaign Committee, and we'd have to check that, and I know that on the day that Martin Luther King was assassinated, he was acting, he was on the podium at the banquet, which was at the big hotel in Washington – I can see it, but I can't remember the name of it at the moment – but he was on the podium, Vice President Humphrey had spoken, and a Texan, not a member of Congress but a big fund raiser, was the, he was the moderator or the master of ceremonies for the event, and when word came in of Martin Luther King's assassination, he simply continued with his partisan rant, if you will, totally insensitive to the impact of that news. And I remember Senator Muskie getting up and moving to the podium and almost literally shoving the man aside and saying, in brief, this is a terrible tragedy, and this program is ended, and that was the end of the banquet.

After the banquet, Senator Muskie and Vice President Humphrey and their wives went to the Humphrey's to spend some hours together, and I suspect there was considerable discussion at that time about the campaign. And it was a short time after that of course that Robert Kennedy was shot, on the night of the California primary, and once more the whole character of the campaign changed.

As we got closer to the Democratic convention in Chicago, it was clear that Senator Muskie was on the short list of potential vice presidential candidates, and so we made plans to go to the convention, and a number of staff members went. And when we arrived, we were booked into the hotel overlooking the mobs outside and the turmoil, and I can remember that first afternoon, the tear gas fumes drifting up and literally into the hotel on the upper floors where we were located. And sometime during the day, it was during the afternoon of that day, Senator Muskie was summoned to go and meet with Vice President Humphrey and some others to, as it turned out, to talk about the vice presidential nomination. And it was clear in that session that Vice President Humphrey had made up his mind and wanted Senator Muskie to be the candidate, and they discussed the issues and some of the concerns Senator Muskie had.

People in the room included . . . I should have said specifically, I went to the meeting with Senator Muskie. People in the room included Mayor Daley, and Max Kampelman, who was a close advisor to Vice President Humphrey, and a couple of his staffers, I forget which of the staffers was present at that meeting.

AL: But you were the only Muskie staffer?

DN: I was the only Muskie staffer there. And at the end of that session, we left and the first

assignment of course was to prepare the acceptance speech for Senator Muskie. And we went back to his suite and talked principally at that session – the people involved were Leon Billings, Ron Linton, the staff director for the Public Works Committee, and I think Berl Bernhard was there, and Bob Shepherd I believe was there, the press secretary. And we talked about it and then staffers did some work on a draft, all of us pitching in on that, and then Senator Muskie went over it, with his usual acerbic response to drafts from the staff, and refined it considerably and changed it, and then I did some final editing on it and it was prepared.

And I think it was that evening, yes, it was that evening, because we had very little time in which to get this done, we were driven to the convention site in the Stockyards, and he delivered the speech there. And I remember going with Senator Muskie to the platform area and meeting Senator Inouye – these are the little things that come back to you – and he was congratulating Senator Muskie and said something to me about, ‘we got our work cut out for us’. And I said jokingly, “Well of course we want to be sure to spend some time in Hawaii.” And he looked at me and in his usual fashion said, “You stay here. We’ll take care of Hawaii, you don’t need to make that long trip.” And then Senator Muskie went to the platform, and I went to the room where I saw the speech on the television screen.

And it was one of his more remarkable speeches in that this was speaking to a turbulent group of people, and a very large group of people, in the hall. Not an easy audience. And he was also speaking to a national audience on the television. And he understood very well that the important audience was the audience out watching television, and he delivered that speech, which was a fairly quiet speech, very effectively, managed to do it in a way that caught the attention of the crowd, I think partially because it was not a tub thumper. And also was very effective in reaching out to the American people and that, in a sense, set the tone for the campaign.

After, in those, after the vice president was nominated and gave his acceptance speech, the next step was to start work on the campaign itself. Now this is toward the end of August, I forget the exact date. I think it was around the 26th, 28th of August, and the election is literally just a little more than two months away.

AL: Now before we leave the convention, you mention, when you arrived in Chicago, the tear gas. Did you experience anything else on the ride to the convention that night, regarding the turbulence in the city?

DN: I guess the two things, I don’t remember anything directly in terms of the turbulence and us, because we were pretty much shielded and the police had pretty much confined the protestors. And the way they did it, of course, was part of the problem in Chicago. But in terms of our direct experience, we were aware of the protest, we were aware of the conflict and the confrontations from television and from that sense of the police actions and tear gas in the hotel. I remember heavy security on the way to the Stockyards, and I remember that the Stockyards area was pretty isolated. It’s like, it was like going into, I guess the closest thing here in Portland would be the old Bayside area down by the scrap yards, with not many people around, and then

you're whisked into the building.

And the rest of it is really a matter of hasty phone calls, conversations with Humphrey staffers, and then the preparations to go to the vice president's home in Waverly, Minnesota, and that we did within, I think it was the day after the convention, we went directly from Chicago there. And I remember driving to the airport from the hotel, on our way to go to Waverly, and it was the one time in my life and in that campaign when there was a certain level of fear, because coming out of the convention, there was so much anger on the streets, and the presence of the police was so heavy, and so much emphasis on guarding against potential sniper fire, etcetera, there was a palpable threat.

And we went and, were driven to the airport, then took off, and went to Waverly and met with the vice president there, and with staff, and pretty much at that meeting settled on the approach to the campaign, not the details but the approach. And basically, we came, the vice president made it clear that he had every confidence in Senator Muskie and his people, that the senator would, that the two candidates would have coordinated schedules, but what Senator Muskie did within his assigned schedule in terms of the text of his speech, etcetera, was up to him, and there would not be an elaborate set of clearances for his speeches, etcetera, and we would have a chartered plane for our travel and would have whatever necessary support, financial support through the campaign for all of our travel arrangements, etcetera. And then we would, oh, and we would have a Washington office that was in the same location with the vice president's presidential campaign office, so that there'd be the two offices together but the Muskie office would be a distinct office functioning within that framework.

And it was, we, or I knew most of the Humphrey staffers, I'd known them on Capitol Hill, and in the Johnson administration years had dealt with them on a number of occasions on substantive policy issues, legislative issues. [William] Bill Welch was one, Ted Van Dyke was another, I don't remember some of the other staff members, those are the two that come to mind most immediately. And so it was an easy working relationship with them.

Then we flew back to Washington and started organizing for the campaign, and at that point the operation of the Senate office was pretty much in the hands of the executive assistant, Jack Whitelaw, and Jack was a person who had come to us an intern out of the Civil Service, and was apolitical and so he was there to manage things through the fall months. Bob Shepherd, our press secretary, would be going on the campaign. Eliot Cutler, who had come to us earlier as an intern, we took on the staff at this point as assistant press secretary, and the rest of the staffing, Lori Williams [Ransome], who was my secretary, and Jane Fenderson, Kathy Keup, Susie Nicholas, Doreen

AL: Sheive

DN: Yes, Doreen Sheive, Virginia Pitts, all of these staffers really started working on the campaign. And we should note that in those days, the laws and the rules governing staff operations in the political arena were much looser than they are today. It was literally okay for

me to be managing the campaign, and okay for these staffers to be on the campaign trail working on campaign operations. Some of the staff sort of rotated through the Washington office and on the road.

George Mitchell, who had been in Maine practicing law, came to Washington for the campaign and headed up the Washington office for the campaign, and John Martin, who at that point, well he wasn't speaker at that point, he was a member of the legislature, came and he was the office manager in that Washington office, he ran that, and John stayed at our house for the duration of the campaign. And we'll get back to John's role and relationship to the family. In fact, you may want to ask Hilda about that.

But the division of labor roughly was that Nicoll would manage the campaign, but would do so literally from the plane, traveling with the Senator, and George Mitchell would handle the liaison with the Humphrey campaign in Washington, and John Martin would handle the day-to-day business, negotiating with, working with Eastern Airlines, which provided the staff, the plane. And we were off and running, as it were, almost literally, and I don't, I can't give you the daily sequence, I can give you impressions from the campaign and some anecdotes, but the itinerary is in the archives and anyone can go there and correct my recollections and get the details straight.

Let's start with the question of the plane. We leased a 727, Boeing 727 from Eastern Airlines. They reconfigured it so that in the front of the plane, in what would normally be first class, there were first class seats and tables. There were three tables with seats on either side of them, facing each other. It had four seats for each table, and these were work tables and were always in place. They weren't your drop-down tables; they were anchored to the floor. And there was a very long bed and a curtain for it, and that was for Senator Muskie.

The rest of the plane was economy class, if you will, and I think there was a fair, there were fewer seats than in a usual passenger service configuration, so there was more room than you'd have had as an economy passenger. And as a matter of fact, I think they were two seats on a side, not the three and two. And there were three, I think there were probably three tables, these in-place tables, one of which was assigned to the reporters – this is where they had their card games. So the staff, general staff and the reporters were in the second part of the plane, and Senator Muskie and traveling guests and I, and staffers as needed, were up front.

And we had, our traveling staff, I've mentioned Lori Williams, who was my secretary, and the others, and we had both Bob Shepherd and Eliot Cutler, and then we had a volunteer, Paul Brontas, B-R-O-U-N-T-A-S, a lawyer from Boston who originally came from Bangor. Paul was a contemporary of George Mitchell's at Bowdoin, was a Fulbright Scholar, and had gone to Cambridge as a Fulbright Scholar. A brilliant lawyer, he became a managing partner of Hale and Dorr in Boston, which is the, one of the preeminent law firms in Boston. And Paul was, had gotten in touch with George as soon as the nomination was set and said that he wanted to volunteer for the campaign, and George referred him to me. And I talked to Paul, who said he wanted to come on the campaign as a speech writer. And I said, "Paul, we have more speech writers than we know what to do with, and the way the senator operates, I don't think as a

general rule, you want to spend the next two months trying to be a speech writer. But what we really need is somebody who can manage the plane, the day-to-day business of staffing, dealing with the flight crews, the details, the logistics, while we're traveling. And there's going to be enough time in the campaign so that, one, you can participate, and I'd want you to participate in the discussions of speeches, and to have a chance to do some writing and editing as we go." He said, "Fine, I'll do it."

And Paul, being a highly ethical person, took leave from Hale and Dorr for that two-month period, and took no compensation from the firm during the two months. So he was completely cut loose, there was no way Hale and Dorr was going to contribute to the campaign, it was a voluntary commitment. And Paul was a wonderful companion and great manager, and he was assisted by Peter Kyros, Jr., the late son of the former congressman from Maine's first district, who was, Peter, Sr. was then congressman, as a matter of fact, he'd been elected in '66. And Peter, Jr. was one of the, not just one, he was the lead campaign staffer, campaign director for his father's campaign when Peter was sixteen. So in 1968 he was eighteen, and he was our baggage master. A very important role, because you were flying from city to city, getting off the plane, and you had everybody's baggage, from the senator's to the press people, to worry about. And that was essentially our crew.

Now the Eastern Airlines crew was made up of company supervisors. They, the pilots were supervising and instructor pilots in their regular work for the airline, and the cabin crew, including a steward and the stewardesses, as they were called in those days, the flight attendants, were supervisors and instructors. And they were assigned to us for that two-month period. There was some rotation, particularly for the pilots because of restrictions on the amount of time they could put in, and they took elegant care of us through the campaign. And the pilots and the attendants were just perfect in their jobs.

Though I remember one anecdote about the early part of the campaign that illustrates both the nature of the support service we got from the Eastern Airline folks, and a funny little bit of personal history about Eliot Cutler. I learned very shortly after we made all of these decisions and Eliot had agreed to come on the campaign as assistant press secretary, that Eliot was terrified of flying, and I wasn't sure how we could deal with this. So I said, maybe if he got a chance to ride up in the cockpit and saw how the pilots handle the plane, it would give him some more confidence about flying. So I asked the flight captain if we could arrange this, having sat up there myself at their request on a couple of flights in connection with communications, and they said, "Sure." So I said, "Eliot, this next flight, you can sit in the jump seat in the cockpit and get a sense --"

(Telephone interruption)
End of Side A, Tape One
Side B, Tape One

AL: We are now on Side B, and you were telling the story about Eliot.

DN: Oh yeah, I talked to Eliot and said I wanted him to take a ride in the cockpit and see if that didn't ease his concerns. Well Eliot went, sat in the jump seat for that flight, and had such a wonderful time, I had a terrible time getting him out of the cockpit for the rest of the campaign. He would have ridden there every flight if I'd allowed it.

But the amusing part of that in turn is that Eliot subsequently studied law and did work on environmental issues in the Senate Public Works Committee for a few years in the seventies. And in private practice, when he left the Senate and left the Carter administration where he worked in the Bureau of the Budget in charge of environmental issues, he developed a practice that included, among other things, land use and airport development, and during that work was flying all over the place. And still, he's now in China, he's still involved in long range flying and an expert on airports. But that was, and the pilots were accommodating, and very helpful in terms of personnel.

We had a sort of general plan in terms of the vice president's schedule and Senator Muskie's schedule that took them into different areas of the country, so that they were in different television markets when they were making their speeches and public appearances, which increased our coverage. And we planned the itinerary so that there was roughly two hours flying time between one stop and the next, which again meant that even for the individual candidate, there was an opportunity to hit two different television markets in a day, at least two and sometimes three.

The only problem with the scheduling was that sometimes Senator Muskie was in one time zone and the vice president was in another time zone. And they talked to each other, not every day but certainly three to four times a week. And we soon discovered that whereas Senator Muskie was a morning person who liked to get up early in the morning and get started, and if he wasn't at an event that went late in the evening, liked to call it quits at about nine o'clock and get a good night's sleep. Vice President Humphrey on the other hand was a night person. He would go until two, three in the morning, and then he wasn't really ready to roll until about noon the next day. So getting those two in sync with their different biological clocks was sometimes stressful, shall we say.

And I can remember one occasion that illustrated the differences perfectly. We were in Cleveland and Vice President Humphrey was on the west coast, and we had finished the evening event and gone back to the hotel, because we were going to be there overnight before going to the next day's schedule. And about two o'clock in the morning, the phone in my room rang. Now, the arrangement on the road was that we would book a suite and Senator Muskie would be in the part of the suite that had a bedroom and living room, and I was in the next bedroom so that I was adjacent and there was access to his room without going out in the corridor, and all of the phones were patched through the Secret Service room. And so about two o'clock in the morning the phone rang and I woke from a deep sleep and heard the Secret Service agent on duty saying, "Mr. Nicoll, the vice president wishes to speak to Senator Muskie." And I said, "Okay, just a minute, I'll go get him." At which point I heard a chipper voice on the other end of the line saying, "Don, is that you?" "Yes, Mr. Vice President, I'll get Senator Muskie." "Well, what

kind of a day have you had?" "A very good one, Mr. Vice President, just a minute and I'll get Senator Muskie." "Well, we've been having a terrific time out here." And he was ready to go on talking into the night, but I managed to extract myself and go get Senator Muskie, who wasn't terribly happy to be woken up.

They also had a little bit of tension when we did some recordings for television commercials, and were scheduled, in deference to the vice president's patterns, at about noon. Senator Muskie was there, ready to go at twelve o'clock. One o'clock, one-thirty, the vice president finally dragged in and really wasn't ready to go then.

But this, the business of the phone reminds me that one other key person on the campaign, and particularly on the road, was Charlie Lander, a long time good friend of Senator Muskie's who was an employee of the telephone company and had worked on our campaigns before, handling telephone communications. And in fact, in the old days the telephone company, particularly in the days when it was a virtual monopoly nationwide of AT&T, would assign telephone employees to the two campaigns in statewide races, such as the governor or Senate race, or a national campaign, so now there'd be more of them of course, and Charlie had been assigned to Senator Muskie in his '74 campaign, or excuse me, his '64 campaign, and again in, and then in '68. And so he was always making sure that we had the right amount and quality of telephone service on the road.

But the major effort was to get Senator Muskie out to build up, I guess, I'm reluctant in some ways to review in general the campaign, because it's been written about so much better by a third party, that is Joel Goldstein who, the professor of law at St. Louis University, who has been studying vice presidents and vice presidential campaigns, and he has done a superb job of looking at that campaign and the nature of Senator Muskie's contribution. So I think I'll back off of giving you a blow-by-blow of the whole campaign.

AL: Can I ask a question?

DN: But you're going to ask me questions.

AL: You were talking about Vice President Humphrey and Senator Muskie speaking several times a week over the time of that campaign. What was the substance of their conversations? Was it purely strategy, or was it support, or was it personal, you know, some personal thrown in there, or?

DN: I didn't hear all the conversations, but mostly it was being brought up-to-date on what was going on in their respective campaigns, what voter reactions were, what they were hearing from local political figures, what they were hearing from members of the press, and then the question of strategy and how you dealt with issues. Now, the conversation that I remember most vividly took place some time in early to mid September, when Vice President Humphrey was under great pressure to break with President Johnson on the Vietnam War issue, and the anti-war partisans, if you will, in the Democratic Party particularly wanted him to repudiate the Vietnam

policies. And he was struggling with how to deal with this, because he and Senator Muskie both wanted to end the war and wanted the country to start focusing on what you did after the war. But Humphrey was not, in the first place, he wasn't much in a position of being able to do that, since he was part of the administration. And second, he didn't really want to be in the position of repudiating Lyndon Johnson, whose policies on domestic policy, on the domestic front, he supported and felt had been a great contribution to the country.

We had a meeting in the old executive office building, next to the White House, and people at that meeting included the vice president, Senator Muskie, vice president's staff members, and I was there, and I can't remember if there was anybody else from our campaign there. And I remember this agonizing review of this, and trying to figure out how to move to the next stage. And it literally took until the middle of October I believe, before Senator Muskie, taking the lead, was able to push the discussion to talking about withdrawal and really focusing on the peace negotiations, which Johnson had launched but hadn't gotten very far. So they talked about those kinds of questions, and that was true in the phone conversations that I heard, and also certainly true in that major discussion in the executive office.

AL: Now we were going to try to skip the big picture of the '68 campaign.

DN: I'm trying to think if there's anything else from the campaign that I can add to at this point. Well, I'll give you one, yeah, a couple of anecdotes from the end of the campaign that were revealing about people. At the very end of the campaign, things looked as if we might pull it off, and California was a key to the campaign and if we could carry California, the feeling was we could win the election. So arrangements were made for rallies in California on election eve with a television show broadcast from there. And there were arrangements for a big pre-program buffet supper with a number of supporters, and then as soon as the program was over the Muskie party would go to their plane and fly east to Maine so that Senator Muskie and company could vote on Election Day in Maine.

And at that election eve broadcast, one of the figures present was – I'm drawing a blank, oh – Kenneth Galbraith, J. Kenneth Galbraith, and Galbraith was a very tall man and was an iconic figure in the Democratic Party at that time, had held several senior positions, including being ambassador to India, was at the event, had come there with Vice President Humphrey. But he wanted to get back to New England, so they asked if he could hitch a ride with us on the way back.

Another part of this story is that our son Hugh, our eldest son, had been working in the campaign, and for that flight to the west coast and then back to Maine, I suggested that Hilda and Hugh go with us, because it wasn't going to cost anybody anything for them to get on the plane. And so off we went for that trip out to the west coast, and then back, stopping for refueling in St. Louis on the way back.

And Senator Muskie at some point got out of his bed and was, and Mrs. Muskie was with him, they got out of the bed and were at their table. And Galbraith, who had been sitting up in first

class decided he needed to stretch out, so without so much as a by-your-leave, he went and took the bed and slept there for several hours. And I think that would have been, yes, that was when we were leaving St. Louis for the last leg of the journey.

And before we arrived in Maine, Galbraith arose and was hungry, and breakfast was being served. Hugh and Hilda had been seated with me at my table, and I had gone back to talk to some staff people, and the flight attendants brought breakfast to Hilda and Hugh and my plate and put it down on my table. And Galbraith came, saw the breakfast, sat down, and promptly ate it. And I still remember our son's outrage that that man would come and take his father's breakfast. It was really typical of Mr. Galbraith.

And we arrived back in Maine and landed in Portland, and somehow they got Galbraith back to Cambridge and the rest of us scattered to our respective polling places. We went to Buckfield, which was our legal residence, and voted, and then went to Waterville where there was an election night party at the Waterville Armory. And we stayed that night in the, what was then the Howard Johnson Motel, right next to the Interstate, on upper Main Street. It's now Governor's, is there. And the whole Muskie family was there, including Senator Muskie's mother and I think one or two of her sisters. And it may have been one or two of the sisters and a brother-in-law. And then we all went to the Armory for watching the returns.

And from that evening, the most vivid memory is Dick Dubord, who was a very good friend of ours, that is the whole crew, who had been by then attorney general of the state and a lawyer, his father had been a judge on the [Maine] Supreme Judicial Court. Dick was multi-talented, including being a superb clarinetist. And he and his contemporary and law partner, Bob Marden, and one or two other people had a jazz combo that played at various events. And I remember that night their playing wonderful jazz, and Dick playing Benny Goodman pieces, and then doing a marvelous imitation of Louis Armstrong, singing. It made what otherwise was a sad night, an entertaining and wonderful event.

And we went back to the hotel after the, it was clear that we were losing by a very narrow margin but losing, and then the next day went off and took a few days off. And I believe, I forget, I think Senator and Mrs. Muskie and the kids took some time and I think they actually spent some time at that point with Vice President Humphrey. And then it was back to the Senate and Senate duties and focus on the next round of legislative challenges, and of course hovering in the background the 1972 campaign.

AL: What did you feel that Senator Muskie's feeling was about losing, in terms of how did he take it?

DN: Oh, I think it was a combination of philosophical acceptance of the fact that this was an uphill fight from the beginning, because of the fact that the country was so split on the war. There were so many splits in the society over social issues. This was the time of youth, of Woodstock, Haight-Ashbury, all the bitter and intergenerational antagonisms, plus the war. And the, well the anger, the anger that remained in the black community and the anger in the racist

elements of the white community. And Nixon and company were able to exploit that. And the odds, from the beginning, the odds against winning were substantial, and I think there was, well I know there was in my case, and I always felt there was in Senator Muskie's case, the constant business of going over the campaign and saying, 'what might we have done that would have made a bigger difference'. But that wasn't a devastating review, because you knew you were working at the margins anyway.

And that was also overlaid by a sense of satisfaction, because he came out of the campaign as a hero in the Democratic Party, and he had done a substantial amount of very good work, if you will, as a candidate. And as Joel Goldstein has pointed out in his work, he lifted the tone and the focus of the campaign debate and presented a marked contrast to the Republican candidate, Spiro Agnew. And I think that he was less self-satisfied with the contrast with Agnew than he was very glad that he was able to bring to the campaign some serious discussion of important issues about governance and the society and public policy. And he had influenced the debate, in the end, on Vietnam.

But, and it's interesting, in retrospect, to realize that none of that really counted when it came to the '72 campaign because he was then tagged as the anti, well, tagged as being not sufficiently anti-war. You have to be purer than the pure.

AL: So anyways, going into the period after that campaign you said, getting back to the legislative work that was ahead, can you talk about some of those issues that he really got back into? I mean he must have had to suspended it for some period of time. And I'd like to get a sense of what kind of time period we're really talking about before he really started working on the next campaign.

DN: Well in 1968, after the election, the focus was immediately on the question of the legislative agenda, and the most important issue was really a combination of the air and water pollution and environmental protection legislation. The other issues faded a bit, although intergovernmental relations [IGR] in the federal system continued to be important. And that involved some, well all of that, the environmental legislation and the intergovernmental relations, or federal system, legislation all involved an element of competition with the Nixon administration.

Muskie was tagged after the election as the front runner for the Democratic nomination in '72, and therefore was viewed by the Nixon administration as the principal opponent. The situation in the Senate legislative work had shifted starting in '66, when Leon Billings was hired, not long before Pat McNamara died. Senator McNamara had been chairman of the Public Works Committee starting in '63, and as we've talked about earlier in the interviews, not this one but earlier times, when Senator McNamara became chairman of the Public Works Committee, he was faced with the question of who was going to chair the Rivers and Harbors Committee, which is the, would be classified today as the big pork barrel committee. It was the committee that oversaw authorization for all the big investments in rivers and harbors projects, dams and the like.

And at that time he decided that, number one, he would retain the chairmanship of Rivers and Harbors Committee, or he would take it on. And number two, he would create the Air and Water Pollution Subcommittee, but he would not provide any additional funding for staff, so there was no formal staff for the Air and Water Pollution Subcommittee. As a consequence, from 1963 until 1966, the, what one might call the professional staff of that subcommittee consisted of Ron Linton, the staff director for the, chief clerk of the full committee, and Bill Hildenbrand, who was legislative assistant to Senator Caleb Boggs, the ranking Republican member of the subcommittee, and I, Senator Muskie's administrative assistant, and Senator Muskie was the chair of the committee, of the subcommittee rather.

And in 1966, when Senator McNamara was very sick and obviously was not going to live, Ron Linton managed to arrange with him that there be a staff position for the subcommittee, and Leon Billings was hired to take the director's position for the Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution. And at that point, my involvement shifted from direct work on the legislation to a kind of supervisory role, if you will, representing Senator Muskie's interests, which was the way Senator Muskie tended to operate.

Leon and I have talked about this in subsequent years, and in his interview, when he talked about his wife, his late wife, and her antagonism toward me, it was rooted in the fact that Leon complained because he wasn't getting the access to Senator Muskie that he wanted and felt he should have – this is in '66, '67. And he laughingly said then, and says now, he did not realize until he became Senator Muskie's administrative assistant much later, in the late seventies, that Nicoll was doing exactly what Muskie wanted him to do, and that that was the way Muskie wanted to operate.

Well through that period, between '66 and '68, the campaign of '68, I still served as a kind of buffer and liaison with the committee, and starting with the '68 campaign and then increasingly '69, '70, '71, had less and less time to deal with those issues. I did continue to interact with Leon and with others on environmental legislation, but it wasn't in the same way and it wasn't the same hands on work that I'd done before.

So my, at the end of '68 and into '69, I would have to go back and look at the legislative record to give you the chapter and verse, but it was largely a focus on those issues that we could manage in a new kind of relationship with the administration, and it was a matter of increasing focus on the presidential campaign of '72. And 1969 was a period of frustration for Senator Muskie on the political front, because although he had come out of the '68 campaign as the putative front runner, the attention, the political attention was on Senator Ted Kennedy as the member of the Kennedy family, in fact the remaining male member of the Kennedy family, who was the presumptive heir to Jack and Bobby Kennedy, and therefore the champion of the, much of the liberal wing of the party, people who had supported George McGovern, Bobby Kennedy. Well no, excuse me, I'm jumping ahead of myself on George McGovern. But had supported both Gene McCarthy and Bobby Kennedy.

And so Muskie was frustrated, he wasn't getting the kind of attention he thought he deserved,

and he was right. But then Chappaquiddick came and at that point Senator Ted Kennedy was, for all practical purposes, out of the picture.

AL: I'm going to stop you right there and switch tapes.

End of Side B, Tape One

Side A, Tape Two

AL: We are now on the second tape of the interview with Don Nicoll on July 18th, 2008. And you were just talking about the incident that occurred at Chappaquiddick.

DN: After the Chappaquiddick incident, attention shifted back to Senator Muskie and so there were more demands for his appearance, and more pressure for him to organize a campaign for the presidential nomination. And my attention was directed more and more to the political front at that point, and that evolved over the next two years, '70, '71 and into '72 – and again, I can't give you a timetable right now because I would have to go back and look at diaries, etcetera, not diaries but schedules. The challenge was that Senator Muskie was deeply involved and felt primary obligation to his Senate duties and legislation, and in 1969 and '70 there were major discussions going on, on the Clean Air, what became the Clean Air Act. And you had the shift, well 1970 you had Earth Day, and for the first time really, with changes taking place nationally in perceptions of the environmental issues, you had the environmental groups and the conservation groups taking an interest in the anti-pollution legislation.

Conservationists for the most part, up until the middle of the sixties, had focused on the questions of conserving wilderness areas and the parks, etcetera, and had not played much of a role in environmental legislation. There's a wonderful book published a year and a half ago by, it's the University of Kansas Press, but the author is Paul Charles Milazzo, M-I-L-A-Z-Z-O, who's a professor of history at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. The title is Unlikely Environmentalists, and it is a study of water pollution legislation between 1945 and 1972. His primary thesis is that the major shift in legislation on water pollution was driven by the Congress, not by the executive branch, and the principal figures in that shift, starting in 1945, '46, were people you might not expect to be championing environmental protection. And he cites, among others, Senator Robert Kerr, the late senator from Oklahoma, who had been chairman of the Rivers and Harbors Subcommittee of the Public Works Committee, and had actually been the driving force in the Public Works Committee up until his death and the death of Dennis Chavez, who was chair of the committee, but always deferential to Senator Kerr.

But Kerr is one of those who, in his own way, drove the agenda. John Blatnick of Minnesota, who held a similar position in the House, chairman of the Public Works Subcommittee on Rivers and Harbors, and Senator Muskie, who came from a small state, whose principal focus up to that point in his legislative career, that is '73, excuse me, '63, when he took over the committee, had not been as a front and center environmental protection person. And I have some disagreements with Milazzo's interpretation of his evolution as a leader, but the point of the book was that the locus of the changes in environmental legislation came not from the environmental protection

community, that is the conservationists, but from people with other items on their agenda, notably water supply and economic development, etcetera.

But in the late sixties, and particularly around the time of the 1970 Earth Day observances, there was a notable shift and a push from the conservationists, and what became an environmental protection community pushing on the legislation. And over the next several years, essentially from 1969 through 1972, Senator Muskie was preoccupied with the legislation concerning air and water pollution, and the NEPA, National Environmental Protection Act that Senator Jackson had championed. And there were increasing conflicting pressures on his time and attention as the pressures for him to run for president, and pressures for him generated largely internally to take care of his agenda in the Senate.

AL: How did that play out in his mood and working relationships?

DN: Well, there was a bit of it that used to crop up, particularly in the vice presidential campaign, and became more and more intense in the subsequent years when he referred to what we labeled as the FB's, the faceless bastards, he called them, who scheduled him and didn't pay attention to his needs, which from his point of view were largely the need to have time to work on legislation.

And I think it's fair to say that he had no burning ambition to be president, and had no burning career plan. In fact, this was characteristic of him from his early days, he did not have a career plan, he did what he thought was important to be done in ways where he could make a difference. And in the late sixties and into 1970, or 1969, he was torn between his commitments for legislation, his views on national issues which put him in conflict with Richard Nixon in particular, and his feeling of, it was a combination of recognizing that he had status and standing as a candidate, or potential candidate, and resentment when his abilities weren't fully recognized or were buried by people who were focused more on Ted Kennedy.

And it's an aside here: I'm fascinated these days to see all of the attention being given to Senator Kennedy as a great legislator, and I think that it's a good example of how someone over time finds and makes good use of his real niche and his talents. And I suspect that Ted Kennedy might not have been a great president, but he's been a great legislator, and he's a great legislator in a very different way from Senator Muskie .

AL: And how is he different?

DN: Senator Kennedy is someone who knows how to build coalitions and encourage people to open up and relax and work with people they might otherwise push aside. His attention to personal detail, his affability, his ability to schmooz, if you will, have been a great tool in pushing legislation. And he's had a set of very important commitments, mostly around education and social welfare. Senator Muskie on the other hand, although he could be affable and he knew how to build coalitions, was principally a person who became so well informed and so knowledgeable about legislative issues, and the master of the legislation, that he was able to

persuade and lead the debate, and as a consequence the legislation you see, particularly on the environment, that has stood the test of time reflects his craftsmanship as a legislator and as a legislative leader. Senator Kennedy on the other hand will be known for his ability to move the Senate and not the details of specific legislation. But each of them found his niche, and Senator Muskie was still, as happens to politicians, still trying to find that niche in 1969, '70, '71.

And the long and the short of it is, in terms of my role and activities, my focus was also torn between a combination of responsibilities in Maine, and this is the other thing I didn't mention, Senator Muskie's feeling of his responsibilities to the citizens of Maine was always on his mind. And he had a campaign in 1970, and that was a campaign that I played a minimal role in because I felt that, well I had reached the point, it is now sixteen years since my first involvement in a political campaign, and I had been involved in every campaign from '54 through 1968, so that's '54, that's eight campaigns that I'd been involved in. And I was, I'd reached a point where I felt that I could do the work with one hand tied behind my back, but that's a dangerous point to reach because you begin to lose your edge and you become impatient and -

AL: And things change in the way campaigns work?

DN: Things change and issues change, and you don't have either the energy or the fresh perspective that you need. So in '70 I stayed out of it, and George Mitchell was the campaign manager essentially for that, and Charlie Micoleau was doing most of the ground work in that campaign.

And since we're on the '70 campaign, my one involvement that I remember from that campaign was negotiating the debate rules and arrangements between Senator Muskie and Congressman McIntire. And it was a very funny routine, some of it didn't seem funny to me at the time, but it was amusing in retrospect, and it involved Senator Muskie and George Mitchell and I. And the long and the short of it was that, Senator [sic] McIntire and his campaign folks wanted to have a debate, and if possible more than one debate, to get him attention and television time. And also I think they felt that if they could get Senator Muskie and Congressman McIntire on the tube that Muskie's sometimes acerbic temper might, with Congressman McIntire, who was a very low key, down home fellow, might show him up to advantage.

And so they were pushing for it, and Muskie had no desire to get into the debate but knew he had to do it, and I got the assignment to do the negotiating. And after the first session, what seemed to me a very reasonable agreement, I brought it back. No, that was unsatisfactory and it had to be changed to do this, this, this and this. I said, "Okay" and went back and started the next round of discussions with the McIntire folks and we, they accepted the, virtually, yes, in fact they accepted every one of the changes that Muskie wanted. And at that point I went back, and no, that wasn't satisfactory, he had other changes he wanted. So I went back and they accepted virtually everything again.

And I went back, and at this point Senator Muskie was on the road with George Mitchell, and we were getting toward a deadline so things had to be decided. George was the driver, and they

stopped in a town, this is before cell phones, they stopped in a town and George found a phone and called me, as prearranged. And I told him what had transpired, and he went back to the senator and the senator said, "No, it's not satisfactory, I want this, this and this." And George came back and told me what Senator Muskie had said. And I said, "George, I am not going to go back another time. You tell the senator that as far as I'm concerned, we're done with this and I'm not going to tell them it's changed again."

And George said, ooh, sort of gulped, and he went back. And as he's told me the story, they resumed their trip and Senator Muskie asked him what happened, and George sort of gulped and told him that "Don said he isn't going to negotiate any more, any further changes." Dead silence. And apparently they drove some miles before he finally said, "Okay." But that was my one -

AL: How were you feeling after you gave that message to George? With your experience with the senator over the years, what -?

DN: Yeah, he and I understood each other, and it really didn't bother me any. I was, I respected him but I wasn't afraid of him, in that sense.

AL: And he probably respected that.

DN: Yeah.

AL: Well, we're getting very close to eleven thirty, which is our stop time. So I'm going to stop here and hopefully we'll pick up again soon. Thank you.

DN: Okay, all right.

End of Interview