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Cutler, Eliot oral history interview

Andrea L'Hommedieu

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Interview with Eliot Cutler by Andrea L'Hommedieu

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Cutler, Eliot

Interviewer

L'Hommedieu, Andrea

Date

May 24, 2002

Place

Cape Elizabeth, Maine

ID Number

MOH 355

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Biographical Note

Eliot Raphael Cutler was born in 1946 in Bangor, Maine. His father was a physician and his mother was an economist. His father was responsible for the reorganization of the Maine university system; the Cutler Health Center in Orono, Maine is named in his honor. As a sophomore in high school, Cutler transferred from Bangor High School to Deerfield Academy. He attended Harvard University and Georgetown Law School. While at Harvard he was involved with the Harvard *Lampoon*. He worked as a legislative assistant and clerk for Muskie from 1967 to 1972, and was a senior staff person at the O.M.B. during the Carter administration. He is on the Board of Visitors of the Muskie School for Public Service at the University of Southern Maine in Portland, Maine. He is also a member of the law firm of Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld, LLP.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: vice presidential campaign 1967-1968; Don Nicoll; Muskie's personality; assistant on the Senate Public Works Committee; super sonic transport (SST); Public Works Committee; Intergovernmental Relations Subcommittee; Muskie's popularity 1968-1972; Federal Management Administration; Hurricane Camille; Jackson State funerals; environmental legislation; Clean Air Act; Water Pollution Control; National Environmental

Protection Act (NEPA); Muskie's election eve speeches; speech of 1970; 1970 Senate campaign; Muskie's 1972 presidential campaign; Muskie firing Cutler; Jane Muskie; Democratic primary campaign strategies and failure; and losing in New Hampshire.

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Transcript

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is interview number two with Eliot Cutler on May 24th, the year 2002, at his home in Cape Elizabeth, Maine. The last time we were talking about your beginning to work in Senator Muskie's office the summer of 1967, and just touched upon the campaign in '68. Can you tell me a little bit more about that campaign?

Eliot Cutler: Well, first of all it was, I can't remember where we stopped, but it was, of course, as everyone knows a great surprise that Muskie was picked to run with Humphrey. And although there had been some speculation about that possibility, it was still a great surprise because Muskie was from a small state, he was unknown. And as a consequence, there was a, almost panicked effort to assemble a campaign staff.

Almost no one in Muskie's circle had any experience of a national campaign, and in fact virtually all of the people who staffed that campaign, were staffing a national campaign for the very first time. The Humphrey people provided a lot of assistance, but it was a campaign largely made up of Maine people, people who were either on the staff or people who had worked with or for Muskie in Maine politics for many years. And there was just a smattering of people who had any political experience outside of Maine. And that really distinguished it from any campaign that I've been a part of since, and there have been many, several national campaigns.

This was a very unusual, it was a very unusual campaign in that respect. And it started very quietly. No one paid a great deal of attention to Muskie or to what he was saying, or anything, in the beginning of the campaign. Most of the attention was on Humphrey most of the attention was focused on how Humphrey was distancing himself from President Johnson. And Muskie just sort of went about his business most of the time. Most of the campaigning we did was directed at trying to bring Democrats disaffected by the Kennedy and McCarthy campaigns, back into the fold. And when I say disaffected by those campaigns, I mean both Kennedy and McCarthy supporters who were disaffected by Humphrey's nomination, and traditional ethnic and labor Democratic voters who were, who had been disaffected by the liberal left in the Democratic primaries.

And so we spent a lot of time on college campuses, we spent a lot of time in suburban, in sort of the older suburban neighborhoods in the Northeast and in the Midwest. Spent a lot of time in ethnic conclaves, Irish, Polish obviously, Catholic neighborhoods, and we just sort of went about our business. I mean, it was a very quiet campaign for a very long time.

Until, sometime I guess, I don't remember exactly when it was, but I remember very clearly the day the campaign suddenly began attracting attention, which was in Washington, Pennsylvania, when Muskie was speaking in a square. And, I think the name of the college is Washington and Jefferson College, in Washington, Pennsylvania, and he was being heckled as he was, as Humphrey was, almost every day by, by students and leftists, leftist Democrats. And Muskie, and the crowd reacted as the crowd often does and started booing the heckler. And Muskie silenced the crowd and invited the heckler up to speak. He offered to share the platform with this young man, which was really a brilliant thing to do because the young fellow came up and made an absolute fool of himself. He was incoherent, couldn't string words together in a sentence, and Muskie quieted the crowd to let this fellow speak.

And when he was done, Muskie then took over the microphone and proceeded to adapt his stump speech about how he had come to, how his father had come to the United States as an immigrant and so forth and so on. He talked about opportunity and he talked about what makes this country great, and absolutely had the crowd in the palm of his hands. And it was really a remarkable event. And, of course, the members of the press corps who were covering the campaign had been, you must have heard this story a hundred times and you got to be bored by having heard several different versions of it.

AL: No.

EC: But the members of the press corps, who were covering the Muskie campaign, were probably among the most excited of anyone because they were desperate to get on the air. They were desperate to get anything they wrote in their newspapers, because no one was paying any attention. This was particularly true of the television folks. I mean, the television folks had gone for weeks and it was as though they'd vanished, I mean these reporters. Bruce Morton was one I remember, from CBS, Charlie Quinn, Chuck Quinn from NBC, and I think Brit Hume, maybe, from ABC. And these guys, who were all, of course, at that time young, as we all were younger, were desperate, they weren't getting on the air, they weren't getting any airtime. And suddenly this thing happened and it was electric, and it was, you know, Bob Maynard who was covering the campaign for the *Washington Post* had a front page story in the *Post* the next day. Each of the networks had a story, I think, that night.

And it was in a, in a remarkable political year it was another sort of remarkable political event. And it endowed Muskie with an image that he never lost, and that was, this rational, reasonable, calm, calming public figure. And from that point on the campaign just sort of took off. And then, and almost, and because he was new and Humphrey and Nixon were both, you know, had both been around the track so many times in one form or another, and Agnew was sort of horrifying to a lot of people, Muskie ended up really dominating that campaign.

And emerging from it is this, you know, sort of Lincolnesque, a mistake of moniker if there ever

was one, but sort of Lincolnesque and calming figure. We still went to the same places, but the crowds were bigger, there was more excitement, the campaign was getting covered, and Muskie had suddenly emerged as a legitimate national political figure. And then the polls started showing that Muskie was more popular than anybody on the ticket and da-da-da-da-da. You know, it was a typical case of America's infatuation with someone new. But it redounded to his benefit and stuck with him for years.

Now back to the campaign, I mean the campaign, you know, the campaign was sort of interesting to outsiders, to the press that was covering it because, as I said earlier, there were these guys from Maine, mostly guys, some women, who were total neophytes. We didn't know, you know, how you were supposed to run a national campaign. We just sort of did what we thought would work. We treated people, you know, the way we would treat people in Maine, and we didn't really try to trick people, we were very straightforward. And there was sort of a novelty about it, both for us, quite obviously, and also for the people covering the campaign. It was sort of a novelty to have these people from Maine, I mean, you know, who in Maine has ever been in national politics? And Muskie himself was a novelty. I was very excited. It was great, it was a great ride.

AL: Do you recall what the time span was from when you started campaigning until the turning point, that day in Pennsylvania, or what time of year that was?

EC: Oh sure, it was fall because that was when the campaign was, but I mean, that was the time of year. I guess we started, the convention, the start of the convention was in mid-August, as I recall. And I guess we started campaigning right around Labor Day, which is the traditional start of a campaign. And I should think that event in Pennsylvania happened around the first week of October. So it was probably nearly a month which, I mean you know, day in and day out is a long time, of sort of lurking around in the shadows, you know, from place to place.

It was probably a good thing, because we didn't know what we were doing for the first month at all. We were just sort of stumbling around, feeling our way, and trying to, you know, really pick up some knowledge from the Humphrey people who were trying to help us, and from advance people who were trying to help us and who'd done this stuff before. From people who had come to us from the Kennedy campaign or from the McCarthy campaign, and picking up stuff from the press. I mean, you know, it was just, we were learning as we were going. But that made it fun, it was really, of all the campaigns, none ever has, for me, come close to the spirit and excitement and sort of, of that, I mean it was remarkable. Probably because it was the first for me, but I think for most of us it was the first.

AL: What was Don Nicoll's role in that campaign?

EC: Don was the, well, Don had been Muskie's administrative assistant and he was the chief of staff, I guess is what you'd call it now, for that campaign. And Don, Don, as I recall, traveled most of the time on the plane with Muskie. George was on and off the plane. Sometimes he'd, he was sort of the liaison with the Humphrey campaign and he was on and off the plane and in Washington. And Dick Dubord was on the plane almost all the time sort of as a Muskie, as sort of a senior advisor sort of pal, political hand. Let's see, and then there were a bunch of younger

people, Dave Henderson (*unintelligible word*), Bob Shepherd was the press secretary, a fellow named (*sounds like*: Marshall Stern), and then three or four, or two or three women from the staff, I'm trying to remember, Susie Nicholas and Doreen Sheive and Gayle Cory.

Don's role was sort of the chief, he was the chief of staff. And his job was largely, aside from managing things, was to buffer Muskie from the rest of the world really. He, Muskie, both in that campaign and the '72 campaign, Muskie did not as some candidates do, live off contact with other people. He was very much a loner, a loner may be the wrong word. He was not comfortable with sort of a busload of people, and people who he didn't know, people who were reporters. He wasn't gregarious, he wasn't outgoing. He didn't crave sort of companionship and contact, he really preferred to be alone, or nearly so. And he didn't like to deal with a lot of different people, and so he principally relied on Don to do that for him. Don was the filter.

AL: So Don would sort of get the information, decide what Senator Muskie needed to hear?

EC: Yeah, no I think, you know, I shouldn't say, I think that, I think Don was being faithful to what Muskie seemed to prefer as a mode of behavior and operation. I think it was also true, though, that Don, that this was what Don preferred. You know, Don, Don was, I think kind of enjoyed is probably the wrong word, but Don certainly, I think, did not encourage Muskie to deal directly with others. Don's, Don, I think, has become in his later years a much more collegial person than he was then. And as I say, I think it partly reflected what he thought Muskie wanted, and I'm sure is what Muskie wanted and I think Don was being faithful to what Muskie wanted. But I don't think Don ever pushed Muskie to be, to reach out and be, sort of deal directly with more people.

AL: Do you think that there were some difficulties with that approach regarding the campaign?

EC: Not in that campaign. There were some difficulties with that approach that emerged in the '72 campaign, and certainly Don would acknowledge that today. But in that campaign no, that campaign was, you know, we weren't trying to win a nomination. We were simply, we had a job to do which was to go out every day and put Muskie up in front of a bunch of people and do his thing and persuade, you know, disaffected Democrats to come back and vote. And, you know, the job principally was just getting up every day and doing that job as well as we could, and doing it smoothly. And it was, I think Don's management style was pretty well suited to that role and that job, I mean to Muskie's job, to that campaign's job. So, no, I don't think it was particularly a problem.

AL: Did you, was Peter Kyros, Jr. on that campaign as well?

EC: I'm trying to remember this. I think he was on some occasions, but I think he worked, I'm trying to think.

AL: He was more directly involved in the '72 campaign.

EC: Yeah, I think he was here more, I mean here in Washington in '68, I think. And I think he

was in school, I think he, he was still at Yale.

AL: That might be it.

EC: He was still at Yale. And so I think that fall, I mean although he may not, I mean, although he may have spent a considerable amount of time in Washington. I think, furthermore I think his father was running for reelection, too. So I think Peter had other things going on in those years, in that year.

AL: At the end of that campaign, you went back to, well, continue working in -?

EC: Yeah, I went back, I had decided already before Muskie was nominated to take a year off between college and law school. So I was free as a bird, and after the campaign, and so I was already sort of working full time. And after the campaign I came back and I was, I guess I was, became a legislative assistant and applied, started applying to law school but decided, although I applied to a bunch of different law schools, I guess I had decided by that time. I had decided that since Muskie was going to be the next president, which is of course what we all thought by the end of the '68 campaign, that I would rather stay in Washington to go to law school than go somewhere else. So even though I applied to a bunch of other schools and got in some, not all, I decided to stay and go to Georgetown because I figured that I could work for Muskie at the same time.

As it turned out, I did start law school in the fall of '69, but I was so engrossed with what I was doing on Muskie's staff, I mean I, I didn't go to law school at night because that was going to take too much time, so I enrolled as a regular law student. But I was working full time and it was more fun working, and more interesting working, than it was going to law school so what I, so I just didn't go to law school. I mean, I'm jumping ahead, I mean I didn't go to class. That later generated its own challenges.

But in that year following the '68 campaign I wasn't going to school at all, I was working full time. I was working, you know, sixty, seventy hours a week, more, and I was doing a lot of speech writing. I was doing, and I started, I was, Don sort of assigned me to be Muskie's legislative assistant for his work on the environment and public works, what was then called the Senate Public Works Committee, and his subcommittee on air and water pollution, which meant that I worked with Leon Billings.

Leon was the professional staff member who ran the staff, and I was the person on the personal, on Muskie's personal staff who worked with Leon. We worked on, you know, a series of, over the next several years, a series of environmental laws that were, that ended up shaping my own career.

And I did a bunch of other things as well, I mean, things like the SS, the fight over the SST, which I managed for Muskie when Muskie tried to stop the SST from, which is the super sonic transport, the Concorde, tried to stop it from operating in the United States. I did that, I did everything that came through the Public Works Committee, including highway bills and like Section 4F of the Transportation Act, what is now called Section 4F of the Transportation Act,

which is a very important piece of environmental protection legislation.

And various and sundry other, I mean I worked with [Edwin] Ike Webber who was staff director for Intergovernmental Relations Subcommittee; didn't do much work on housing and urban affairs which is another of his committees. Banking, the Senate Banking Committee, I didn't do much work on that. Mostly what I did was Intergovernmental Relations and Public Works. And I was, you know, twenty-two years old and I don't think there was a legislative assistant in the Senate who was younger than I was, and it was a lot of fun.

It was, those years between '68 and '72 were very exciting because Muskie was still the new, he was still a novelty, he was still Lincolnesque. He was still, you know, the flavor of the month, of the year, and was presumed by many if not most to be the odds on favorite to be the next nominee of the party for president. And was, you know, beating Nixon in polls at some points during that period. And it was very heady, it was very exciting.

He became, it was unfortunate in a way, because I mean this, I think this experience fed a lot of his predilections towards, you know, sort of closing himself off. And that, as I say, he was never, you know, as I say, his instincts were to not reach out, to deal with just a few people, to ruminate on everything. And I think the more people treated him as the putative next president, the more he, not consciously, but the more he began to behave that way, to sort of conduct himself in his life as though he were the president. That sowed the seeds of a lot of difficulties that we had in the '72 campaign. So all of this attention and presumption that followed him after the '68 campaign, although very flattering, was I think quite a disadvantage for him in the end. I don't think it was helpful to him.

Now, during that period of time, from '68 to '72, it also happened to be one of the most productive phases in his Senate career. In part because people, either consciously or not, people, I mean his colleagues in the Senate and in the House, either consciously or not, accorded him the stature of a leader. And, you know, there was talk of him challenging Byrd for the majority leader's position, you know, there was a lot of, I mean, you know, everywhere he went, everything he did was more or less newsworthy.

I mean, I remember one of the most rewarding, I mean there was a lot of good that came from this. One of the most rewarding things I did during that four years was really to spawn a complete rewrite of the disaster relief legislation laws, leading ultimately to what became the Federal Emergency Management Administration, and so forth. But in those days, there was almost no coordinated federal disaster response effort, and very few, and only rudimentary laws governing the way federal agencies would respond to a disaster. And in 1969, Hurricane Camille struck the Gulf coast and it was one of the worst natural disasters in history, in that part of the country. It leveled the Gulf coast from Pass Christian all the way through Bay St. Louis and the rest of the, Biloxi and Gulf Port, and the sort of, Louisiana, Mississippi and west Florida Gulf coast, just leveled it and it was an extraordinary disaster.

And in the weeks after, there were reports about how relief aid in the region, provided by government agencies and by the Red Cross and other voluntary organizations, was being mismanaged and was being administered in a discriminatory fashion. And because of Muskie's

sudden stature as a leading Democrat, civil rights leaders and others who were concerned about this, came to, they came to Washington to complain about it. And he was one of their, he was one of the people they wanted to see. And for some reason or other, I guess it was because this was sort of a Public Works Committee jurisdiction, I got assigned to follow up some of these complaints.

Well, I sort of got interested in it and I began working on it very hard, and spending long hours and doing a lot of independent investigation of what was going on, and compiled this huge book, I mean this thick, I remember it was several of the bindings this thick, of statements and stories of the problems. And then I asked if I could go down and take a personal look at this with another, with a member of the committee staff. The committee was chaired by Jennings Randolph from West Virginia.

And I went down to the Gulf coast with [M.] Barry Meyer, who was then the chief counsel for the committee. And we went down and looked around, and what we saw really validated all of the reports that we'd been getting. It was just, there was, you know, black people weren't getting anywhere near the kind of relief aid that white people were getting. Relief aid was dependent on your economic circumstances before the disaster, so that if you were poor and you lived in a shack and you ate, you know, barely subsistence, had barely subsistence diet, you were given barely subsistence diet for relief. I mean, which was remarkable. It was a relief effort that was gauged to preserve the status quo ante, in other words it was to keep in place the social and economic structure that existed prior to the disaster.

And so I came back and I persuaded Muskie, this was, it was interesting, I had worked on this, I sort of took this on as a crusade I guess, and I persuaded Muskie that he should insist on hearings in Mississippi. And the ch---, and I wrote him a long memorandum which we then sent on to the chairman of the committee Randolph, and the chairman of the subcommittee, who was Birch Bayh of Indiana. Birch Bayh was the chairman of the subcommittee that had jurisdiction over disaster and relief legislation. Bayh, I think Bayh, really reflecting the chairman's wishes, did not want to hold these hearings. Bayh also had designs on running for president. And Bayh did not want to offend the southern governors, the southern Democratic governors, by going down and conducting what would have been perceived as a grandstanding set of hearings. And he was, you know, he was a, he was very cautious.

And Muskie really, the more he read about this the more, I mean the more he learned about it, the more he shared my views. I mean he was, I think, really outraged by this. And he really gave me my head on it, I mean he let me, he didn't restrain what I was doing at all, to his credit. And a lot of the Bayh staff people were my friends, good friends. I mean one of them, Jay Berman who was his chief counsel, remains a very good friend, has been. I mean I, in those days he and his wife Rita sort of treated me, I mean they're about six or eight years older than I am, and they treated me as though I were their, you know, younger brother. I mean, I visited their house all the time. I dated people who worked for him. And I will never forget, I went to Jay one afternoon and I sat down and I said, "Look," I said, "if you don't, if your boss doesn't hold these hearings, Muskie's going to ask the chairman for permission to hold his own hearings." You know, they couldn't say no. And Birch himself, who also became a friend later on, Birch called me himself, I guess the next day. He said, "Okay," he said. "You win, we're going to,"

you know, or something to that effect, but, “we'll hold the hearings.”

So we went down and held these hearings and, you know, we had, Muskie was better prepared than anyone else, and more outraged than anyone else. And one of Muskie's great strengths was his ability to project indignation, righteous indignation in a way that no one who isn't six-foot-four or five inches tall and who doesn't have that voice and doesn't have that mien, no one else could do. I mean, you know, thundering righteous indignation. Well, there was no better stage for thundering righteous indignation than this one.

And we had, I had advanced this pretty well and had set it up so that I knew that we'd get good coverage, and we had all three networks down there. And we had, we were on the evening news, national news, I think on all three networks, three nights running because there was three days of hearings. And this was great coverage for Muskie. And Bayh was really scrambling, Bayh had to play catch-up. And we, I mean I remember, and we had these, God, the hearings were in this sort of, we were in a church but we took these visits to places to see the damage. And the local officials who were helping obviously, understandably, wanted to put the best face on things.

And Muskie, I mean I, Muskie really was at his best in these, those three days. I was leading him around, and we'd be following the crowd on this tour of a resettlement area, I mean places where people whose homes had been destroyed were living in tents basically, or areas. I guess this was an area where people's homes had been damaged, but we were being taken around to talk to residents about the kind of assistance they had. And you know, we, this was a group of African-American, this was an African-American neighborhood that I recall, and these people were saying how happy they were with what they'd been given. I mean, this was obviously a setup, because I knew from the work that this was not, this did not reflect the truth. And we were walking down these, it wouldn't be fair to call them streets, these roads, dirt roads, being led, you know, by the nose.

And at one point the crowd was going this way, and I looked down the road and I saw this big, big old, must have been seventy-year-old African-American woman standing on this porch with her arms folded across her chest. And I said to Muskie, I said, “Let's us go talk to her.” So he smiled and said, “Okay,” and we turned and we walked that way. Well, guess where the cameras went, right? And this woman, I mean it was, I mean that was on the news that night. It was a lucky stroke, because she just let go and, you know, it was great, it was great for Muskie. I did that, and then

AL: Let me stop and flip the tape, I'm sorry to interrupt.

End of Side A
Side B

AL: We are now on Side B.

EC: Another, the most frightening time I had during that period, it really was a remarkable, in my life it was a remarkable period. I mean, I wasn't married, and I was young and I was, you know, I could work ninety or a hundred hours a week and not suffer from it. And I was

absolutely bound and determined to make, help make, do what I could to make Muskie president, and bound and determined to sort of do the right things along the way, myself. And, but I had a lot of adventures, I mean that was one. Another one was in the, in was it 1970 when the kids were killed at Kent State? Was that seventy?

AL: I think so.

EC: Or was it '69? I can't remember. In any event, at Kent State and Jackson State. You know, the Kent State killings got a lot of attention, the Jackson State killings did not. And Muskie thought that was wrong. And some of the civil rights leaders in Mississippi asked Muskie, after those murders at Jackson State, to, if he would come to the, lead a delegation from Washington to the funerals for those kids who were killed at Jackson State. And he said he would, and I was sent down to set up the visit.

We chartered a, I'll never forget, we chartered a Southern Airways DC9 to bring these people down, the delegation from Washington. And I was sent down two or three days ahead of time to set it all up and make arrangements for the, help make arrangements for the funeral and for the, for these, accommodations for the people from Washington, for these members of the Senate and the House. It was scary because they were not welcome, and I was not welcomed, and I stayed in a Holiday Inn in Jackson, Mississippi for, I think, two or three nights. And I remember every night when I went to bed I would put a chair up against the door, you know. I mean, I don't think I slept well at all.

I remember shaking hands with the sheriff, the deputy, or the deputy police chief I guess, who was in charge of maintaining order. And this guy, you know, I shook hands with him and I'll never forget, he had the softest, whitest sort of hands, he had fleshy hands. And it was, you know, it, I mean I knew that this was not the place I should be. Anyway, I remember very well taking off, leaving Jackson after the funerals and getting everybody out of there safely, it was very scary.

And then working all the environmental legislation during those years was exciting. Clean Air Act, the Water Pollution Control Act, NEPA, and then, you know, Muskie's election eve speech in 1970 and the preparations for the campaign. It was all, it was all a very exciting time that, and recruiting people for the '70 campaign, '72 campaign I mean, it was a very exciting time that built and built and built and built to --- New Hampshire. But it was, it was very exciting.

AL: You mentioned the election eve speech in 1970. Were you part of writing that?

EC: No, I mean not really, I mean that was Dick Goodwin's speech.

AL: What was that time period like, that, the reelection campaign?

EC: You mean, was it Neil Bishop, who was the, who was his opponent in 1970? Neil Bishop? I mean, it was not a contest. It was simply not a contest. And, I mean, the job, Muskie's task was to get sixty percent of the vote. As I recall, I think he got, I can't recall what he got, maybe he got sixty, sixty-four, I don't know, but it was a, or maybe it was, or was it

Monks? I can't remember who he ran against.

AL: I don't remember.

EC: But it was not, you know, it was not a strenuous campaign, I don't remember a whole lot about it, I didn't have anything to do with it. I was in Washington, I was working on legislative stuff. That was a, I mean, he'd come up and campaign for part of the time, and a lot of the time he spent traveling and campaigning for other candidates, other Democrats around the country, because he was great demand to do that.

And I did a lot of the traveling with him because I was the only single male on the staff, I was the person who traveled with him almost all the time. You know, we'd go out to give, I mean I'd work all week and then Friday we'd leave to go to some place for him to give a speech. Almost every week, sometimes twice a week. And I saw, I mean, you know, I went places, I met people I'd never been, I mean went places I'd never been, met people I wouldn't otherwise meet. It was very exciting.

Traveling with him, on the other hand, was, you know, it was interesting. I mean, I spent a lot of time traveling with Fritz Mondale later. In his campaign in 1984, I was the senior political advisor then and so I was the, I was with him all the time. And traveling with Fritz was an entirely different experience. Partly I suppose because I was twenty, well not twenty, fifteen years older but, and not a kid, or at least not as much of a kid, not a kid. And with Muskie it was, but it was also I think a difference in personality. I mean, Fritz is a gregarious sort of guy. Traveling with Muskie was, you know, bizarre in many ways.

AL: In what ways?

EC: Well, I told the story on the tape we made for his eightieth birthday party. Was it his eightieth?

AL: Yes.

EC: I told the story about one of the trips that I took during that period. Many of the trips we took during that period were to California, but I remember one of them. You know, I'd drive out to his house on Albee Road and I'd pick him up, and we'd drive to the airport and, or someone else would drive us to the airport. Anyway, we'd get on the plane, he'd sit by the window, I'd sit by the aisle, you know, to protect him from people, from unwanted (*unintelligible phrase*). But I expected that, I don't blame him for that. And it's a five-and-a-half or a six-hour flight to Los Angeles, and we get to Los Angeles. And the entire way he would be just staring out the window, thinking. He'd respond to a question if he was asked one with a grunt or a nod or a shake or a, maybe a one-word answer. But there was never any conversation.

Now this is a guy whom I'd been working for by that time for several years, I mean, I was, we were not strangers to each other. I mean, I'd seen him in his underwear, I mean this was, and we'd get to I mean, I remember there was one trip we, and we got to Los Angeles and he put on his jacket and got up. When the plane got to the gate, he stood up, he was putting on his

jacket and he looked at me, he said, "What the hell are you doing here?" Now that was also his greeting of, one of his greetings of choice, sort of 'what are you doing here?' But I mean it was a, you know, it was a joke but it wasn't a joke. I mean it was a, you know, traveling with him was like traveling with the Sphinx sometimes.

Now, I'm sure that wasn't the case with everyone, although I think it was the case with more people than it wasn't the case with. There were people, I'm sure, who, with whom, I mean, you know, if he was traveling with Dick Dubord, you know, there'd be more conversation. You know, I was this strange, strange, I was this guy, you know, this guy who was slightly older than his oldest son, but you know, I was a different generation. And, but it was, you know, most politicians in my experience like to talk, at least with someone who is traveling with them all the time. Not Muskie. It's weird. Anyway.

AL: Did you get the sense that he was really thinking about things intensely?

EC: Yes, I mean I think he stewed over them, you know, Muskie, someone, I think I mentioned this before, someone once said of Muskie that one of his problems as a politician was that he saw seven sides to every issue, which was true, and which was a problem for him as a candidate. It was a great advantage for him as a legislator. But yeah, I think he would sit and think, I think he did a lot of thinking, ruminating, pondering, stewing, worrying, there was all of that.

AL: Were there others who used to try to possibly break through that shell or, I don't know if those are the right words, that had a way of bringing him out?

EC: Well people of his generation, as I said, people like Dick Dubord or Charlie Lander or, you know, old pals of his whom he'd known for years, he was obviously more comfortable with. I mean people, there were some members of the press, journalists, whom he'd known for a long time who he would kid with, you know, and there would be repartee between them. But not, I mean he didn't, I didn't observe him behaving a whole lot differently than he did with me, with Don or with George. Leon over time, but over a longer time. I mean certainly not by then but ten or so years later, Leon had developed a relationship with him that was, I think, more communicative. But by and large, no. No. It was a distant, very distant relationship.

AL: You must have observed Jane Muskie on the different campaigns? Was she, well maybe not. Was she more at home with the children?

EC: Yeah, I mean she campaigned. She campaigned on her own in '72. In 1968, she didn't really campaign much at all, well, I don't, I shouldn't say that, I don't really remember. I mean, I knew her mostly as, I knew her mostly as someone who, I mean I knew her mostly in the home, not politically.

AL: And what were your impressions of her over the years, and her relationship with Senator Muskie?

EC: Well, you know, I don't have many, to be honest. She was very protective of him,

certainly, I mean I, you know, she got me fired at one point. She'd probably not, I don't even know if she would remember this now. I mean, if she remembered it I'm not sure she'd acknowledge it. This fast forwards to the, after the '7-, at the end of the '72 campaign, well after the '7-, beginning in the general election campaign of '72.

The '72 campaign for many of us was just a horrific experience, you know, the demise was painful. And by the end of it, after the convention, we were just exhausted and bitter and despondent and, because we had all invested a lot in that effort. And when Tom Eagleton was, when Tom Eagleton quit the ticket after, you know, after it had been revealed that he had had electric shock treatments for depression, McGovern was casting about to find someone to run with him. And he asked Muskie to be on the ticket, to run for vice president again. Those of us who were left on the staff, I think to a person, thought this was dumber than shit, I mean this was stupid, and it would have been, that it would have been stupid for Muskie to do it, and it was sort of the final indignity and sort of an out-of-world experience. I mean, this was just, 'what is going on here?' But Muskie wanted to think about it, he wanted to go to Kennebunk to think about it.

So, sort of one more time we got a, we had to get a private plane to take him to Kennebunk to think about it. Well, you know, 'Why? How long does it take to think about it?' I mean, why would you go to Kennebunk for a weekend to think about it? Ask any of us, we'll tell you in two-and-a-half minutes, you know, "You don't need to think about this. Say no." I mean, it was just, we were just horrified at the prospect. But we dutifully got him a plane and we put him on it and sent him off to Maine.

And just after he left, I got, I was sitting at my desk in the Senate offices, and I got a phone call from Bruce Morton, who was then a reporter for CBS. And who was, and had been covering Muskie and covering the campaign, and had been a friend. And he said, "Well what do you think about this? What's going on? What's he going to do?" And I said, "Jesus," and I started, I learned a lesson I'll never forget.

I mean I started, I talked to him like he was a friend instead of a reporter, and I didn't say 'this is off the record' and so I didn't do any of that, I just let loose. And I said, "This is the dumbest goddamn thing I've ever seen." I said, this is, I said, "You know what this is like?" I said, "This is like the U.S. Navy taking the battleship Missouri out of mothballs," which they had just done to go shell the coast of Vietnam. I said, "This is like the Navy taking the battleship Missouri out of mothballs, and then they've got it off the coast and the thing can't, doesn't work or something." I mean that's, because what had happened is they'd taken the Missouri out of mothballs and it didn't function.

That night I was at my girlfriend's house watching the evening news with Walter Cronkite, and on comes a story about Muskie being asked to run with McGovern and going off to Maine to think about it. Shows Muskie's plane taking off to go to Maine to think about it, a lot of drama here. I mean, suddenly you have this nominee without anybody to run with. And then Bruce Morton comes on doing a stand-up and he said, you know, he talks about what Muskie's doing and then he says, and sort of, he says, "Is he going to, how will this turn out?" He says, "Well, according to a former, according to a long time Muskie aide, a campaign staff member, this is

like the battleship Missouri,” blah-blah-blah-blah-blah-blah, and then he quotes me. Well there weren't very many long time, there was one. And I remember sitting there and just going, “Oh shit.” And I called Muskie immediately in Kennebunk to apologize. I said, “That was me,” and I said, “I'm terribly sorry.” He said, “That's alright.”

Well, Muskie's administrative assistant at that time was a fellow named John McEvoy, and John and I had never really gotten along. And I think, I think he probably egged this on, but I have it on fairly, I know that Jane insisted that I be fired, and I was fired that evening. John McEvoy called me and fired me. I was back on the payroll in two weeks for Leon.

AL: Leon?

EC: Leon went to Muskie and said this is dumber, the dumbest thing you've ever done. “Now,” he said, “I understand why, under the circumstances, you might not want to force John to take him back on the Senate staff as a legislative assistant,” which John did not do. “But,” he said, “let me hire him as counsel to the subcommittee.” And Muskie said, “Fine, do it.” So I was back on the job. That was my own experience with Jane Muskie, but that doesn't tell me anything. I mean, she was very protective of her husband, and I'm sure that John egged her on with this, fed it. But I didn't have, you know, my relationship with her in those years was, you know, I picked him up, I brought him home, I wrote his speeches, I wrote, you know, I was just, I took his shirts to the laundry, I did whatever I did, you know.

AL: So an incidental relationship.

EC: Very, yeah.

AL: I'd like to talk, if this isn't jumping ahead too much to (*unintelligible phrase*) -

EC: Jump where you want.

AL: I'd like to talk about the '72 campaign in more depth, sort of starting when you started out, the progression of it, who were the key players from your perspective, and sort of how it evolved and spiraled.

EC: Why don't you -?

AL: Sure. You're working on the staff, and Muskie decides, where was the decision made to run for president?

EC: I mean I think the decision just evolved. I don't remember a watershed date when he decided to run for president, it was just an assumption almost, after the '68 campaign. And after the '70 reelection campaign, everyone's attention turned to '72 and everything we were doing was more or less focused on the '72 campaign. And after, as soon as the '70 campaign was over, we started hiring additional people and there was a campaign committee for, you know. I don't remember the dates, I don't remember all of the structures, but you know, we were raising money, he was raising money, money was being raised for him. And there was a campaign

committee being organized, and we were organizing people around the country and, I mean it was just, it was a progression. And it was, you know, I mean it was, for most of that 1970-71 period, really into early '72, there was a presumption that Muskie was going to be the nominee.

AL: So a lot of groundwork was laid during that period.

EC: Yeah, but most importantly we were attracting very, we were attracting the best and the brightest. I mean, all the good organizers out of the '68 campaign for McCarthy. Not all of them, but many, many, many of them who had worked for McCarthy and for Kennedy in 1968 were signing up with Muskie. We were getting, you know, good people in all the states. We were getting labor, we were getting endorsements, it was a very endorsement driven strategy. A lot of the big money people were signing up. But of course, you know, the competition was, you know, Humphrey and Bayh and McGovern, but Muskie was running head and shoulders ahead of them in polls and in fund raising and, we thought, in organization.

Now, the problem was, and it became apparent I think, and the problems were, and they became apparent to many of us early on who sensed them, were that, first of all, this was an organization that was extremely top heavy. And that was, an organization built from the top down, which is not a very healthy way to build a political organization when you ultimately are going to be relying on votes. And we were building, we were trying to get endorsements. We were, you know, the notion was that if you get, you know, Hugh Carey's endorsement in New York that you'd win New York. I mean, not that simple, but it was, there was an assumption that people could be delivered, that votes could be delivered.

We weren't spending enough time or money or resources organizing in precincts, except in some states where we were doing some very serious organization and did it very well. But that problem was compounded, I think, by the fact that the support for Muskie was not very intense among voters. I mean, people were for him, people liked him, but he wasn't, people were not, by and large, people were not passionate about him. Well, when people are not committed, passionate committed to a candidate they can be switched, they can be moved, or they don't vote.

You know, we were very well organized in some states, we were pretty well organized in Iowa, we were very well organized in Illinois, but I don't think we appreciated, and we knew we had to win in New Hampshire. But I don't think we appreciated how high the bar would be set in New Hampshire. In other words, the expectations game was one with which none of us was the least bit familiar, and we turned out to be not very good at playing it. Now, we assembled a terrific group of people. I mean, particularly at my level, sort of the, the campaign was run by first Don and then Berl Bernhard.

AL: George Mitchell?

EC: And George, the three of them. And another guy named Jack English, but mostly by George and Berl and Don. And then there were a group of people right below that. I was in charge of advance and scheduling, Dick Stewart was the press secretary; he'd been a reporter for the *Boston Globe*. Jim Johnson, Mark Shields, Tony Podesta, John Riley, these were all political organizers. Bob Shrum was the speech, principal speech writer, Dan Wexler, there were a lot of

very skilled people who, you know, have gone on to do a lot of great things. But it was a, it was a campaign that I think reflected Muskie, I suppose in a sense it reflected Muskie's desire generally to operate from a, in a removed sort of way.

You know, our competitors were out there organizing in the precincts in the states with people, for one reason or another, particularly to McGovern, passionately committed. And we were sort of dealing through the normal channels of Democratic politics and lining up governors and senators and members of Congress and national committeemen and so on and so forth, and it was, you know, who wanted to be with the winner. They really didn't give a shit about Muskie, many of them. Their commitment wasn't very intense, it wasn't very deep. And so they didn't arouse their own people. So there was no transference of any intense loyalty, and no transference of any motivation particularly.

AL: What was Senator Muskie like on the campaign trail during that campaign?

EC: Impossible, awful.

AL: In what sense? Lack of energy, or?

EC: Yeah, well you know if you read Hunter Thompson's book, you really, you should read it, Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail, which was published in 19-, published about the '72 campaign. Hunter Thompson claimed that Muskie was on a drug called Ibogane, a way to put him to sleep. Muskie was, you know, he was testy, he lost his temper a lot. I mean he was always, he always had had a huge, massive temper, but he was, you know, he was very difficult to deal with. He didn't, I mean he really didn't want to work as hard. Either didn't want to or couldn't work as hard as he needed to work, in order to really win a primary campaign.

And Muskie's principal problem, and I've believed this for a long time . . . This was the first campaign in his entire political career where Muskie had to run against another Democrat, much less several other Democrats. And that, that was a very complicated, that really complicated Muskie's life, political life. Muskie grew up politically, in Maine, trying to expand the political process. Trying to involve new people in it, trying to grow the Democratic Party in a state that traditionally was hostile to it, and ultimately running against Republicans. And, in those days, you have to remember, politics in Maine was not like it is today. Muskie really, Muskie turned Maine politics on its head.

In those days, in the early days of Muskie's political career in Maine, registered Democrats were a very rare breed, there weren't very many of them. There certainly were a lot more registered Republicans and independents. Today, the largest political, largest group of registered voters in Maine are registered independents, and then Democrats and then Republicans. Republicans are now a minority party in Maine, I mean the third largest party, or the third largest affiliation, I should say. Muskie grew up running for office against Republicans but having to appeal to Republicans for votes. For Muskie to get elected governor, Muskie had to have the votes of Republicans and independents, as well as Democrats.

Well suddenly, here he was in 1972, having been in politics for twenty-five years more or less,

suddenly for the first time having to appeal to a much narrower spectrum of the electorate, that is Democratic primary voters. And having to campaign against other Democrats, and having to draw differences between himself and them on the narrowest of grounds. As opposed to his experience all the way through his entire political career, including 1968, where he could speak in sweeping, broad themes of social history and politics, which was where he was most comfortable, where he was most eloquent, where he was most persuasive. He could move you to tears talking about his father's experiences as an immigrant, about his own experiences, about the possibilities that we needed to create for people in America. He could move you to tears. Did this do any good running against other Democrats in a Democratic primary? Not one whit, not at all. Muskie was like a fish out of water, and he never, in my view, ever was able to convert himself into an effective primary campaigner.

He was, in '68, a marvelous general election candidate; he would have been in 1972. In 1970, in the election eve speech, he was a marvelous general election proxy for the Democrats. In 1972 he would have been a marvelous general election candidate, and in fact I believe regardless of whether or not you think he would have been a good president, I think he would have been a great general election candidate. And, notwithstanding the fact that McGovern got slaughtered by Nixon at the polls, I think Muskie could have beaten Nixon. But that wasn't to be.

And you could see the frustration growing through the '71-'72 period, not only in Muskie but among all of us who were working for him, particularly when trying to write speeches for him or develop themes for him. It was impossible to find themes that were divisive enough to make a difference and to compel voters to be for you in an intense way, which is what you need in a primary, and at the same time find themes that Muskie was comfortable with. He simply wasn't comfortable running against other Democrats. And I think that's the story, that is the principal underlying reason why that campaign fell. Even more important a reason than the fact that we were so badly organized in the field which was, I think, the other important reason.

AL: Where do you think that came from, the bad organization in the field? Was it the way that the management was structured of the campaign, were there too many?

EC: It came, I think it came from a couple of principal sources. The first was that there was no one in the very top leadership of the campaign, Muskie, Bernhard, Nicoll, Mitchell, who had any experience in that sphere. And the political director of the campaign, so-called, a guy named Jack English, was so focused on endorsements as a strategy that no matter what Jim Johnson or Tony Podesta or Mark Shields or Harold Ickes, who were the four principal field directors, had to say about the importance of organizing the field, it just fell on deaf ears. It just wasn't, Jack came out of Long Island politics. I mean it was just, you know, if I get Jimmy then I can get Jimmy's people, and if I get Billy, you know. It was, it's just not the way it works. And it was complicated by Muskie's own difficulty in running against other Democrats, so that persuading people in the field to organize for you and persuading the most likely Democratic voters to vote for you was an increasingly difficult thing for him to do.

AL: I just wanted to, before we bypass that time period, ask you about law school and how you got to the end of that?

EC: Well, I started law school the fall of 1969. And as I said, I was working full time and I was enrolled in law school full time. And I certainly thought what I was doing on the Hill was much more important, and it was clearly, it was certainly more exciting than going to law school. I had, you know, I was working for the next president and in comparison with that, law school paled. Fortunately, well I shouldn't say fortunately, at that time Georgetown Law School hadn't moved to its new buildings on its new campus on 5th Street NW, it was still, or I guess 7th or 8th Street, or New Jersey Avenue, we were still on 5th Street, and so it was right at the base of the Hill.

And what I, I could show up for a noontime class instead of eating lunch, and I did that on a regular basis. But that was all I did. I did, I had a property class that met at noon or midday. And I, and it was taught by a fellow named Don Wallace whom I like very much, who is still a very good friend, and it was a subject that I liked and it was important to me and it sort of related to environmental law which was what I was doing. So for all those reasons I would show up for that course, for that class, but I almost never went to my other classes.

Then in the spring of 1970, the United States invaded Cambodia, and the riots and the, you know, then the proverbial, if you will excuse the phrase, the shit hit the fan, I mean on campuses and everywhere else, you know, and people going on strike, including at Georgetown. And so they cancelled exams for the first year of law school. In other words, or they cancelled exams at the law school and so for me that meant no first year, no exams at the end of my first year. This was extraordinary, I mean, and so the exams were converted into take home exams that you had to do over the summer. Well. If there had been, I was by that point worried about how I was going to deal with the final exams because I hadn't gone to class, hadn't done the reading. And lo, you know

End of Side B

End of Interview