Howard E. Shuman

Legislative and Administrative Assistant
to Senators Paul Douglas and William Proxmire, 1955-1982

Interview #8: Proxmire and the Golden Fleece
(October 1, 1987)
Interviewed by Donald A. Ritchie

Ritchie: We were at the point when you left Senator Douglas' staff. Could you draw some conclusions about his character?

Shuman: I'd like to say a few things. First of all, he had the greatest combination of massive intelligence and strength of personal character of anyone I've ever known. You often find a very intelligent person who may be a good person but without great strength of character. And you often find people of great strength of character who are not necessarily people of huge intelligence. His was a unique combination.

I remember being with him in Switzerland one time when he was with a group of Swiss reporters. He recalled the history of their cantons back to the thirteenth century. On that same trip we went to Bruge, where he sought out the Michaelangelo statue of the Bruge Madonna. We searched it out in this small church. That was the same period that he spoke in German to the people at the Berlin Wall. He had swatted up at one time or another in his life almost every subject. He knew Italian art. He knew economics and made a massive contribution to economics, especially in the Cobb-Douglas function. He had read in detail the history of the Constitution, knew what the founding fathers had said and thought,

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the intricacies of the Constitutional Convention, the history of the United States. He knew more about Supreme Court decisions than almost any lawyer I've ever known. I asked him one time about this, and he told me that he deliberately took time in the summers and at other stages in his life when he took a subject and just made an effort to learn the organized knowledge in that field, physics, and chemistry and the rest. So he had a massive intelligence, plus strength of character.

There were many anecdotes about his character. I mentioned how he would step out into the hall before his secretary would be allowed to say that he was out of the office. There was a lawyer who wanted to be a federal judge who sent him a check for about five thousand dollars. Mr. Douglas sent it back. The man wrote

back and said there was no connection between his wanting to be a judge and the campaign contribution. Mr. Douglas sent it back again, saying: "I know that there may be no connection, but since other people may think so I'm returning it." He had the two dollars and fifty cent rule in the office: no gift could be accepted worth more than two dollars and fifty cents, except for a book. He would take a book worth more than that. But in all kinds of small ways he was an extraordinarily ethical person as well as a man of great intelligence.

We took a ride on his magic carpet, is the way we put it, which was true. I think those who worked for him probably

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experienced the greatest public moments in their lives. It was a unique situation! There will never be one quite like it.

There was one other quality about Senator Douglas which I wanted to mention, and that was the way in which his intellectual activity was very important at times to the political outcome. It happened many times, but I'll use only one example, and that was when he was in charge of holding the hearings and carrying the bill for the increase in the minimum wage when Eisenhower was president. Eisenhower had proposed a ninety cent minimum wage. The AFL-CIO wanted a dollar and a quarter. Most of the progressive, northern liberal Democrats had committed themselves to a dollar and a quarter, and the Republicans were under pressure to vote with the president for ninety cents. Mr. Douglas held very long, elaborate hearings, got all kinds of experts in, and had a special paper done by a skilled man from the Library of Congress. And in an extraordinarily intellectual way, he provided the evidence, and the justification, and the backing for a minimum wage of a dollar. He proved that was the proper economic level at which the minimum wage should be set. And as I've said, economics is not a science, it's an art. I don't want to claim that this was a scientific result, but it was as close to an intellectual result as one could get.

The bill went to the floor, he was managing it, and it went through on a voice vote, because there was no opposition for the

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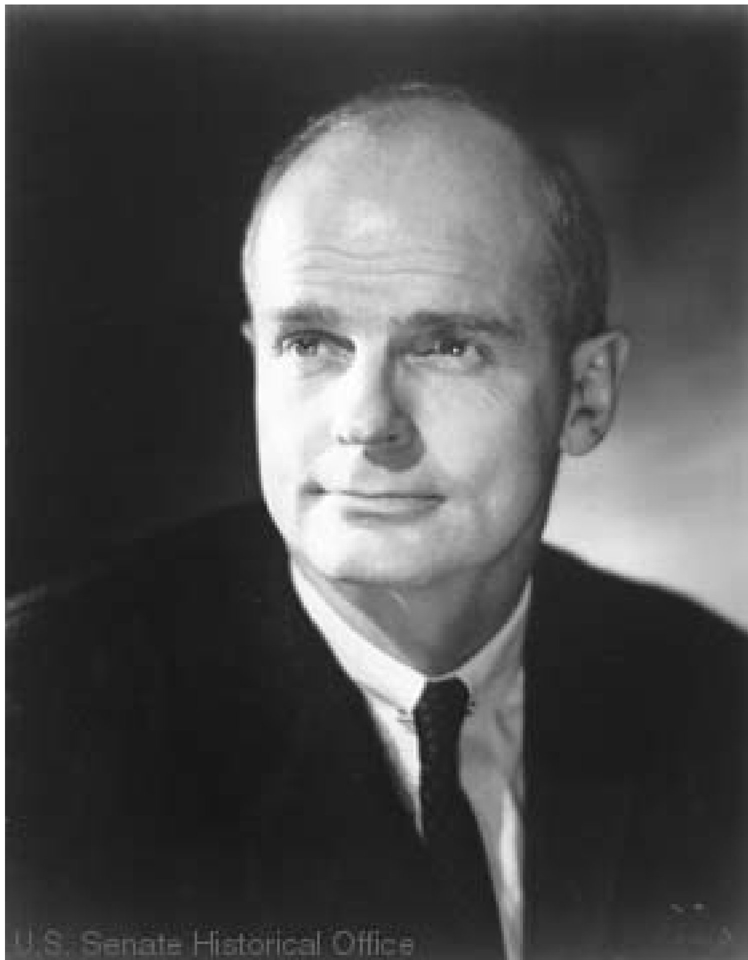
dollar minimum wage. The Republicans didn't want to offend the AFL-CIO unnecessarily, but they didn't want to go for a dollar and a quarter, and they were very happy not to be put on the spot to vote for ninety cents. Most of the Democrats knew that a dollar and a quarter was too much, wasn't really right; it was part of the negotiating to begin with, so they were very happy to get off the

hook. So the bill went through for a dollar minimum wage without any controversy whatsoever. It was an example of the kind of a thing that Mr. Douglas did. It was a good example of the right answer, the fundamental answer to the problem. It was also an example of what a good politician he was. In other words, his intellectual activity drove the final result.

He had the same success when he was an arbitrator in the printing industry. He was the arbitrator between the unions and the management, and I think there wasn't a single time when his decision was not accepted by both sides, just on the sheer quality of the intellectual activity, and the evidence, and the proof. That was a quality he had, which I want to emphasize. He did that, time and time and time again in various pieces of legislation in which he was involved.

Ritchie: How would you compare Senator Douglas to the second senator you worked for, William Proxmire?



Senator William Proxmire
Senate Historical Office

Shuman: They were alike in many ways, and they were different in many ways. I'll try to compare them and contrast them. They were both interested in roughly the same subject matter: economics, appropriations, funding, pork-barrel, taxes, the Joint Economic Committee. Both were chairmen of the Joint Economic Committee. Both were on the Banking Committee. Proxmire tried to get on the Finance Committee, and they did the same thing to him that they did to Mr. Douglas: they kept him off for five years, so finally he took a place on Appropriations. He really took from Mr. Douglas the phrase "A liberal need not be a wastrel," and practiced it. I think he did it for two reasons: one, he thought it was correct, and two, he thought it was very good politics for a Democrat. And both Senators were quite correct. I remember Mr. Douglas used to say, and Proxmire also -- Proxmire first said it -- that with respect to the military there were not hawks and doves, but as far as he was concerned there were fat hawks and lean hawks, and he was a lean hawk. I think many people misunderstood him and thought he was a dove.

Senator William Proxmire (second from left at dais), at a hearing before the Joint Economic Committee. Seated next to Proxmire is Senator William Roth (R-DE).
To the far right is Senator J. William Fulbright (D-AR).
Senate Historical Office Photo

Their work habits were very different. For example, I was always Mr. Douglas' witness when anyone of any importance would come to the office. The Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, no matter who it was, I would be there as his witness. I think he wanted a witness because there were two or

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three times in his life when he'd been without a witness when he was afraid what took place might have ended his career. One was when he was an alderman in Chicago and customarily walked to the office. There was a man who befriended him and who would meet him every day on this four or five block walk and accompany him to his alderman office. Mr. Douglas was told later that this man was selling his influence, allegedly to influence Mr. Douglas. Mr. Douglas didn't have the slightest idea that this was true, and he was very lucky to find it out, because his career might have been ruined. The man kept taking money on the side and had every appearance of influencing Mr. Douglas because he was walking with him. So I was his witness, or someone else was his witness, but mostly I was his witness.

Now, Proxmire didn't do it that way at all. He saw people one on one. I don't think it ever occurred to him that he needed a witness. If I needed to see Mr. Douglas I could walk in on him almost any time, and I did. So I spent a lot of time with him, almost like the buddy system in life guarding. Prox was quite different in that respect. In the morning, he came in usually at eight or eight thirty. He had breakfast in his office alone, and he did not want to be disturbed until about quarter of ten, just a few minutes before he went to his hearing. Then he was available right after the hearings. Then he was not really free until about three in the afternoon when he started to see people from

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the state or elsewhere. Then he was free again between five and six. But with Proxmire I was quite free to go home at six or six-thirty, close the door and go home. He would stay on his own. With Mr. Douglas, if the Senate were in session, someone, usually I, would stay with him -- sometimes all night long.

Mr. Douglas, I think, shared questions about what he should do with his staff to a greater degree. Senator Proxmire pretty much made up his mind on his own. Proxmire would ask, "How should I vote on this one?" And it was quite easy to say to him, "Well, this one is over the budget, so the vote is no." But with respect to some of the major decisions that he made, such as not running again, he didn't consult anyone, including his family; such as the time he gave almost a twenty-

four hour speech in the Senate on the debt ceiling. He told us at five o'clock in the evening that he was going to make the speech starting at six, and we got all kinds of data together, the economic indicators and the president's economic report with all the tables in it. He gave what I think is a massive, important, substantive and sequential speech. It was one of the best speeches I have ever heard on the issue. He did it off the top of his head with just an abundance of raw data at his fingertips, which we had gathered for him. But he made that decision on his own. When he went to the state, he really did not want any staff following him around. Even in one election when I was with him, it was '70, he wanted to shake hands with

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people quite alone, and we would stay back fifty feet or a hundred feet so as not to appear to be with him. His was pretty much a one-man show. And that was different from Mr. Douglas, although Mr. Douglas did not surround himself with any massive number of staff.

Mr. Douglas was quite frugal in his own office, but he was very generous with his staff and with his payroll, as was Proxmire. But in both cases they had a pretty tight staff. When Mr. Douglas was there the big states did not get enough money. The big states got only a third more money than the smallest states, so our staff was only slightly larger than that of Montana, which was next door to us. Our people got about half the salary and worked twice the hours. But when I was with Proxmire, the Senate had changed so there was sufficient money for the big as well as the small states. Of the two types of funds we had, one was for things like telephones, and trips back home, and telegrams, and that sort of thing, the other was for the staff salaries, both types of course supplied by the Senate. In Proxmire's case we made a point of turning back up to half of our operating expenses and certainly a third to forty percent of our staff funds over the years, because he felt that if he were going to be an economizer in the Senate, and point his finger at other people with the Fleece of the Month for the biggest, or the most ridiculous type of spending by the federal government, it was

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important that he live the same kind of life that he was advocating for others. We did that without too much difficulty. I'm quite convinced now that the Senate staffs -- not the staff people personally, but the amount of money that Senators get -- with the possible exception of the very largest states, is more than adequate for their needs, which was not true in the old days.

Proxmire had been a reporter, and I think he knew more about what Woodrow Wilson called the "informing function" than almost any other senator. I used to say there were two kinds of senators: the issue-oriented senators and the power-oriented senators. Power-oriented senators were people who twist arms in the cloakroom, who get on the pork-barrel committees and give out favors for favors in return, the way in which the Dixiecrats ran the Senate for years, but who when they leave the Senate, I think, are largely forgotten. What do they stand for, except a few public works projects and installations in their states? Those are important, but in the long run they don't change the face of history. Then I think there are the issue-oriented senators, in which category I put both Proxmire and Douglas, who are interested in making the country a better place in a variety of ways.

But Proxmire knew that the way to do this was to inform public opinion, to arouse public opinion, to change public opinion, which then reflected itself back on other senators who said, "I've got to know about that issue" -- the SST or whatever --

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"because it's going to be voted on tomorrow and I have to vote on it, so I'd better inform myself about it." He got senators to vote his way, not by giving them a favor in return for one of theirs, but by showing that it was an issue of major public importance, that public opinion was for it, that they really were bound to vote for it. That is the way he killed the SST.

Both men were very, very bright. Proxmire is extraordinarily bright. He is witty. He has a terrific IQ. Mr. Douglas wasn't quite as quick in the sense of getting a joke. He was often witty, but he sometimes didn't quite get the point. Proxmire in some ways was quicker than Douglas, but he didn't have the massive background in reading that Douglas had, in history, in economics, although Proxmire was very quick to learn. You could give him a sheet of paper with a bunch of examples and lots of information, and he could read it very quickly, absorb it, give it back to you, remember it, and use it very effectively.

One thing that Proxmire did which amazed me -- I don't think I could do it myself -- was to invite members of his staff in to debate him. In fact, I think he still does it, not just prior to an election but throughout the years. Both the summer interns and his regular staff would be asked, one of them about once a week, to come into the office at four thirty in the afternoon, to pick a subject that they had not told him about, to pick any side of the case they wanted to make, to make the argument in favor or against

some particular public issue, and then he would rebut it, and take whichever side was left. He did that regularly and routinely to sharpen himself for the debates that he had with his opponents. Unlike the common wisdom that a sitting senator isn't supposed to debate his opponent, because that's the way you give them exposure and raise their level of name recognition with the public, he was so good at it that on the whole the debates he held with his opponents hurt them because he was so much quicker and so much better informed than they were, through this practice.

We did some other things, both with Senator Douglas and with Senator Proxmire. If either senator was to be on "Meet the Press," or "Face the Nation," or one of the weekend talk shows, or were to go on television, we would routinely meet on Friday afternoon before the Sunday and bring in the five or six substantive people who worked for him, either on a committee or on his own personal staff, and for at least an hour, or sometimes longer, we would throw at him the toughest questions we could think of, and he would reply. Then on Sunday morning one or two of us would come in, after we'd had a chance to read the morning papers and get the latest news from the *Times* and the *Washington Post*. We would again throw questions for a half an hour to warm him up before he went to the program. We didn't overdo it, because we didn't want to kill the freshness and the spontaneity that would otherwise come. I think in all the years we did that, and we must

have done it for the major shows forty or fifty times, plus all the times we did it for more minor and mundane events, I don't think we ever missed a subject matter. We didn't always figure out ahead of time the precise question that would be asked, but I don't think we ever, ever missed the subject matter. And on the whole, our questions were tougher than the questions he got.

I would often call the TV producer and suggest that the senator might make some news for them -- that's what they were interested in, that he make news -- and suggest to them general areas where if they asked him a question he might well be prepared to make news. We would try to figure out ahead of time methods of making news, genuine news, not just frivolous stuff. Well, those may be some comparisons.

Ritchie: You mentioned that Proxmire liked his privacy. Would you describe him as something of a loner in his relations with people, with other senators as well as with staff?

Shuman: Well, he's a very independent minded person. He can't be bullied or flattered or bought to do something. He's not against helping a colleague if he can do it. If a colleague says, "I sure would like to have you help me on this," I think he does it if he can, but on the other hand he's very independent. If he'd made up his mind no, I don't think anything would change it. There are a lot of people who say about senators that they've

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got a lot of friends in the Senate, or they don't have a lot of friends in the Senate. I always thought that was a wrong method of judging a senator. I've known a lot of absolute nonentities in the Senate who were very nice people. I don't think it matters much in the Senate that you're a nice fellow and you've got a lot of friends. In fact, when Johnson was there, and Russell was there, it was just the opposite. There was no way that a friendly fellow like Herbert Lehman could be a part of the club, because for them he was wrong on the issues. It was the issues and how they voted on them that made them a part of the club. So I think that's a false method of judging a senator.

Both Senator Proxmire and Senator Douglas had colleagues they were close to on issues, with whom they agreed, or worked together, and yet they were both quite independent of a lot of people.

Ritchie: What was it about Proxmire that led him to take on the leadership and the establishment of the Senate, almost from the day he arrived?

Shuman: Well, he had come from the Wisconsin legislature, where they had held caucuses, where they met and decided things pretty much as a group. They didn't have any binding commitment, but if they got together, and worked together, and reached a consensus, generally most people would go along, because they

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would take into account everybody's view and determine their action. When he got to the Senate, there was no caucus. Johnson would hold a caucus only once a year and give his speech from the throne -- in fact, Democratic senators used to call it that -- just after Congress convened in January. And that was the last time there was ever a caucus of Democratic senators. Proxmire thought it was a very undemocratic method of proceeding. He took Johnson on. He made his major speech, which I think I have mentioned, "Proxmire's Farewell Address" on Washington's birthday, almost a year and a half after he got to the Senate. It was on February 23, 1959. He was critical at the way Johnson functioned.

Ritchie: Did Senator Proxmire get along any better with the leadership under Mike Mansfield and Robert Byrd?

Shuman: He liked Mike Mansfield very, very much, and he got along with Mansfield. Yes, he certainly did get along very much better with Mansfield. I used to say that Johnson was a benevolent dictator but under Mansfield it was anarchy. But anarchy was much better, because it was more pleasant.

Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (right)
with Senators Vance Hartke (D-IN) and George Aiken (R-VT).
Senate Historical Office Photo

Ritchie: So Proxmire wasn't just anti-leadership, and anti-establishment, he was anti-unfair leadership.

Shuman: I think so. And also he's gotten along quite well with Bob Byrd. I think he's voted for Byrd for leader all but the first time. Part of the reason for that: one of the things that

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was very important to Proxmire was his voting record. He hasn't missed a vote in twenty years. He will shortly have more than ten thousand consecutive votes without missing one. Not quorums and votes. There was a man in the House who had a very, very extended record, which he claimed was longer than Proxmire had, but he counted the quorum calls as well as the votes, so it was unclear as to how many consecutive votes he had. But with respect to the Senate, the second largest consecutive voting record was Margaret Chase Smith, who had just under

three thousand. Of course, Johnson would keep her from missing votes. I think it's fair to say that [Lewis] Strauss was defeated for Secretary of Commerce by Johnson with Margaret Chase Smith's vote, in part because he had preserved her voting record, and he then called in the chits when he needed that vote. Although with Margaret Chase Smith, one didn't dare trade directly. Johnson couldn't go to her and say, "I'll protect your voting record if you'll vote against Strauss." There was no way he could do that, but there were more subtle ways.

Ritchie: Why? Would she just resist completely an overt appeal?

Shuman: Yes, in vote after vote. I think she was still there at the time of the SST vote. There was a major vote where we were involved with her. The rule was: For God's sake don't approach her! Don't have the lobbying groups or anyone else go

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ask her. The first group that goes to ask her she'll say no to! That was a very, very important rule.

I got off the track there.

Ritchie: You were talking about leadership.

Shuman: Byrd protected Proxmire on his votes. Byrd would hold up the vote, make certain Proxmire had voted before he would call for the final talley. There were not many times, but there were certainly two or three times in this record of ten thousand votes, when Byrd kept him from missing a vote. I think, although he never said it, that one of the reasons he supported Byrd was because Byrd had done that favor for him. Byrd, of course, was known for this. He did small favors for everybody and then would send the person a note afterwards saying, "I did this for you." He would remind the senators in writing what he had done on their behalf. It was very, very common. I think that may have had some influence on Proxmire's support of Byrd. He got along quite well with him.

Ritchie: So the most important thing the leadership can do is to be fair and to be open, and not to try an end-run around the senators, which Johnson often did.

Shuman: Right. Johnson did it repeatedly for those who weren't under his thumb. He was quite unfair with them. There

were two kinds of senators, very much like George Orwell's pigs. Some pigs were more equal than others when Johnson was leader.

Ritchie: Both Proxmire and Douglas were chairman of the Joint Economic Committee, but Douglas never got to chair a standing committee of the Senate, whereas Proxmire became chairman of the Banking Committee. How different is the role of a senator when he becomes chairman? Does he have much more influence, or have the rules of the Senate made the chairman just first among equals?

Shuman: By the time Proxmire became chairman of the Banking Committee, he was first among equals. That was unlike the period through at least Willis Robertson, when the chairman had control of most of the staff, controlled the agenda, controlled the subcommittees, and effectively controlled the committee. When Proxmire got there he was merely first among equals.

One very good example of that was John Sparkman. He had been chairman of the committee and of the major subcommittee, the Housing Subcommittee. In fact, about sixty percent of the work of the Banking Committee was housing. So to be chairman of the Housing Subcommittee was extraordinarily important. Proxmire was very interested in that position, because on the Appropriations Committee he had the HUD, Independent Offices Appropriations Subcommittee, so here was a chance to have what I call the

"double-whammy," to be chairman of both the legislative committee and of the appropriations subcommittee handling the funds. It gives one very, very great power over the subject matter.

When Proxmire became chairman of the Banking Committee, the new rule was that a chairman of a committee could have only two chairmanships: one of his committee, and secondly he could be chairman of only one other subcommittee, either on his committee or on another committee. So if he were to retain his subcommittee chairmanship on Appropriations, he had to give up the Housing Subcommittee on Banking. He was the first chairman to which that applied. It was the [Adlai] Stevenson committee on the reform of the Senate which did that, and it did so because there were more junior members than there were chairmen and hence more votes to put it through. They really socked it to the chairmen at that time. Now, Proxmire got around that by holding the housing hearings in the full committee on grounds that it was of such importance that it should go to the

full committee. So he effectively controlled it. But there was a Housing Subcommittee chairman who had control of most of the Housing Subcommittee staff, which as I say was half the committee. So as chairman he didn't have as much authority as previous chairmen had had. He lost much of the staff.

I want to make a point about his independence. When he became chairman of the Banking Committee, he got calls from all

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over the country, especially I remember the New York banks, David Rockefeller and others, the California banks, all of whom wanted to come to see him. He said no, he wouldn't see them. He would see them in the committee. If they wanted to see him, they could testify on a bill, and he'd be glad to hear their views. But he wasn't going to see them. I had call after call after call when I told the most powerful and influential bankers in the country that I'm sorry, the chairman isn't about to see you. I didn't usually tell the person, I usually told my opposite number or the number one person working for him, who usually made about ten times as much as I did.

There was a second thing he did, which I thought was very good. He had been frustrated under Willis Robertson, as had Senator Douglas, because Robertson wouldn't process their bill or bills. He might send it to a subcommittee, but it would be killed in subcommittee if Robertson didn't like it. Prox took the view that any member of his committee who had a bill, if he wanted to have a hearing and wanted to have a vote on it, Proxmire would make that possible. He wouldn't stand in their way. So he would call, usually at the beginning of the Congress, and ask them which bills they were interested in. And if they wanted to have a hearing, he'd be glad to hold a hearing, and he'd be glad to arrange for them to get it out of committee if they had the votes. He helped them in every way. Well, it was very interesting,

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because it points up the fact that many, many bills, most bills, are put in not as serious bills but so a senator can say, "I've got a bill in, I've taken a stand on this, or I'm for that," without wanting to get it passed. That generous offer didn't bring with it a vast response from the members of the committee, most of whom had only one or two bills in which they really were interested.

It taught me another lesson in one thing which Proxmire did very, very well. That is, legislatively he concentrated on those issues over which he had some jurisdiction in the Banking Committee or in the Appropriations Committee,

because he could get something done. It's virtually impossible for a senator on Banking or Appropriations to get a bill passed through the Commerce Committee, because no one there is interested in putting someone else's bill through, unless they have a great personal interest in it. I think to be effective, one needs to function that way. It's a very good lesson. It works. And as a result, I think Proxmire has a list of legislation with his name on it probably greater than any single senator in the Senate since he's been chairman of the Banking Committee. Bill after bill after bill; I could put a list in the record, but I won't.

Ritchie: Just the other day when he gave his talk at the Press Club they referred to him as "Mr. Banking." And he's going out with major legislation that he still hopes to get passed.

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Shuman: Well, he has new bills now, but he has had a vast number of bills in the past. Of course, that also brings up the point that any bill coming out of the Banking Committee has the chairman's name on it, so by being chairman of a committee a person will get much more credit than other people. In some ways the issue of how much legislation a person has passed is very misleading. I have yet to be in a campaign where the opponent hasn't said: "He's ineffective. Can you name three bills he's passed, bills that have his name on them?" Well, first of all, Proxmire had fifty bills with his name on them, but the average person, the public didn't know what the bills were, so the quick response was, "No, I can't think of a bill with his name on it." Secondly, unless a person is chairman of the committee, usually what happens is that a member's housing bill gets added as an amendment to the omnibus housing bill. The bill with his name on it ends up as part of a huge bill and is swallowed up in the totality, so the member doesn't get the credit for it. There are a variety of reasons why there are a relatively few bills called the Wagner Act as there have been in the past, or the La Follette-Monroney Act. Very few pieces of legislation are now known by their authors, such as the Glass-Steagall Act, even though certain people are the key people in the legislative process. It's unfair. That has always been raised as a red herring in every campaign I've been in: "How many bills has he passed?"

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A second red herring is: "Why hasn't he been here lately?" Well, a senator can be in every county in the state, as both my senators were, every year, and people don't know they were there. We used to send out lists to the papers saying when he'd be in the county, and here's the legislation that he'd passed, just as a defense against these two general arguments that are made against every incumbent senator.

Ritchie: When you mentioned the Stevenson rules change before, you were with Senator Douglas when he was operating on the outside against powerful chairmen, and you were with Senator Proxmire when he was the chairman of a committee. Do you think that the rules have moved in the right direction, or have they actually frustrated people when they finally got to a position of power and could no longer exert the power of the chairmanship?

Shuman: No, no, I fully agree with the general thrust of the Stevenson amendments. I think they made the Senate a much better place. They diffused power in the Senate instead of concentrating it. They were long overdue and needed to be done.

Ritchie: Well, is diffusion of power in itself good? Or is the question the people who hold the power? In the fifties the Southern Democrats held the top positions. When finally the liberals got into power, was it too diffuse to be effective?

Shuman: No, it wasn't too diffuse to be effective, if the votes were there. And the votes were there starting in '58 and again in '64, and then for a short period after the '74 election after Nixon left. I suppose there is literature among political scientists about how power is concentrated in the House and the Senate, and then it's diffused, and then it becomes concentrated again. There's a constant swinging of the pendulum back and forth. But on the whole, I think it's much better for power to be diffused. Let me give one example. In the House today every member represents almost precisely a half a million people. It has never seemed proper to me that someone who's been there for twenty years, as in the old days, who's chairman of a committee, who's an autocrat, should have any more power than the most junior member, because they represent an equal number of people, and the junior member's constituents have the same right to be represented in the Congress as the constituents of the person who's been there for twenty years. Therefore, at least philosophically, I think that a chairman should be just first among equals. He has power to set the agenda, he has power to call the witnesses, he has power to schedule, so he still has a lot of power, but he shouldn't have the autocratic power that people have had in the past.

Ritchie: You were administrative assistant for Senator Proxmire. What did that job entail?

Shuman: I performed much the same function as I performed for Senator Douglas. I was a super legislative assistant. I did not administer the office. I never

tried to administer the office. I didn't want to administer the office. I was unconcerned about the petty details of the office. I didn't want to hire and fire. I did that only with respect to the legislative people, and even then in both cases the senators made that decision with recommendations from one or two of us. In the case of Proxmire, I usually brought in my successor, Ron Tammen, on the question of adding any legislative staff. Together we would pretty much agree, or if we didn't agree each would tell him whom we thought was better.

When I first came with Senator Proxmire, he didn't have an administrative assistant. He'd had administrative assistants, and he had a reputation for having an office with a big turnover. I don't know why, but it is true that after I came with him the turnover ceased. Some of it was the fault of the people he'd had as his head people. There are two examples. One person who preceded me came in thinking that this was his opportunity to mold a senator in the traditional way that a political scientist would want to mold a senator. He shortly found out that this wasn't possible, that he had a very independent person on his hands who wasn't about to be put into the mold of a political scientist. Another person who was his administrative assistant would publicly

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argue with him. A group of people would come in, and the senator would give his views on a subject, and the administrative assistant would interrupt and say, "I think you're wrong about that, senator." To give Proxmire credit, he was quite good about that because he believed in argument, and debate, and people presenting tough views. But I think it rankled a bit with him. So when that person left voluntarily, he did not fill the job.

When I came with him, that job was vacant. And after I came with him we had a very stable staff, perhaps because I didn't try to run the office in any detailed way. They paid me too much to be the administrator of an office. I think it's a great waste of resources to pay someone as much money as an administrative assistant gets, which is always within a couple of thousand dollars of the senator. You can't get more than a senator, but you can get almost as much. To run the mimeograph machine and decide what computer system you're going to have is really a waste of talent and effort, so I didn't do that. That was done by other people.

What I tried to do, and what both senators did, was first of all to hire people who knew how to write. I think the two most important things were that someone a) knew a subject matter, and b) could write clear, simple, straightforward English. It was imperative to hire people who used active verbs, short sentences, who knew how to write, could write quickly, and did not

procrastinate. Many people say, "I can speak well, but I can't put it down on paper." Writing is effort. Writing is work. Writing is organized thought, and it's not easy. I learned to write by doing a graduate thesis and by writing for a local newspaper and for Time magazine and because I had to meet deadlines. The way to learn to write is to discipline yourself and to meet deadlines.

The second method of operation I had was that each person on the staff had a subject matter, or several subject matters, over which they were expert. With both Douglas and Proxmire, they would go directly to the person who was in charge of environmental matters, or agricultural matters, or the dairy cow in the case of Wisconsin. I didn't get in between them. I was often there and listened, heard what the senator said, knew what deadlines he'd set, and perhaps would enforce these to some degree, or help the person, if he was in trouble or needed to get information.

I had no desire to perform the function of the executive officer in the military chain of command, or act as Donald Regan did in the White House. I think that's a mistake in a political office. I learned that lesson from a man I rode to work with for a year or two, who was the legislative assistant for Herbert Lehman. Herbert Lehman was a marvelous man. I think he shelled out about eighty thousand dollars a year from his own pocket to pay for a sufficient staff to answer the mail. It was a time when

the small states controlled the Senate, and had the big states by the throat, and when the big state senators got such a small additional amount of money that Herbert Lehman had to do that in order to serve his constituents. But the man I rode in with at a time when there was an administrative assistant and usually one legislative assistant, maybe two -- a big state probably had two -- but in this case the L.A. almost never got to see the senator. The administrative assistant guarded the door. Everything the L.A. wrote had to go to the administrative assistant and sometimes wouldn't get to the senator. The administrative assistant decided whether the senator was going to see it. The L.A. was very unhappy. He was a very able person and afterwards worked for Vice President Humphrey in a major capacity at the Executive Office Building. He was an extraordinarily able fellow who was totally frustrated by that set up. And I figured that was the wrong set up.

Now, one of the problems of working the way I did was that if you hired people whom you thought a) knew the subject matter, and b) could write, you were usually right three out of four times. But the fourth time you missed. I usually

missed because the person had an excellent biographical sketch, vita, but didn't live up to it. I resolved after having made one or two mistakes, especially after having made mistakes with the staff of the Douglas Commission, when we didn't really have much choice, but

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when people came in with marvelous looking biographical sketches and then couldn't meet a deadline, to do it in a different way. I determined I wasn't going to hire anybody I hadn't worked with. So I hired people, usually from other offices, I had worked with under the gun in a very important legislative situation, where we had to meet a quick deadline, where the senator would say: "I need this in the thirty minutes, give me a speech." I often wrote speeches in thirty minutes.

In fact, what I really did in Proxmire's office was to write. To characterize it, I wrote for a living. I wrote his articles, I wrote his speeches, I wrote his books. That brings up the question of plagiarism, which I thought was overdone in the [Joseph] Biden case, that is to say, I think Biden was criticized too much for what was called plagiarism. There isn't a senator who doesn't plagiarize his staff. I have a story I tell. It's not quite true. I've embellished it a bit. There is a book called *Uncle Sam, The Last of the Big Time Spenders*, which I have here -- I hold in my hand, as a former Wisconsin senator said. I wrote every word of this book except the preface. The senator was very good to me about this. He gave me I think more than half of the royalties. I put a daughter through college for one year on the royalties. I wrote a chapter a week over ten weeks during the summer vacation. Part of it was written at Cape Cod. I worked out a method of writing it. I wrote on Mondays, Tuesdays

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and Wednesdays, collected data Thursdays and Fridays, spent the weekend just absorbing it. Then Monday morning I worked for three hours writing ten pages of legal sized foolscap, corrected it that night, swatted up what I was going to do the next day, wrote the next morning, collected additional information, swatted it up, wrote Wednesday. I did that for ten weeks, and I wrote the book in ten weeks. But it also represented almost a lifetime of experience, enabling me to do that.

The senator put in the preface something like the following, although I'm exaggerating it a bit: "I want to thank my administrative assistant, Mr. Howard E. Shuman, without whose efforts, word by word, line by line, paragraph by paragraph, page by page, chapter by chapter, this book could not have been written." A little later on, he wrote a book of his own, called *You Can Do It*. It's a health book. And he wrote every word of it. So I went to see him one day and said,

"Senator, why don't we call this book *You Can Do It by Howard Shuman*. And we'll put in the preface: I want to thank Senator William Proxmire, without whose help, word by word, line by line, paragraph by paragraph, page by page, chapter by chapter this book could not have been written." That's my story on that. I wrote for a living, and I liked to write. Writing is like speaking. If you do it a lot, it becomes easier. If you lay off for a couple of weeks, you find it very hard to get back into the stream of things.

Ritchie: When you write for a senator who is going to either give it as a speech or release it otherwise, do you find that you write in that senator's style?

Shuman: Yes.

b>*Ritchie:* Do you try to adjust yourself?

Shuman: Yes. I wrote in Proxmire's style. I wrote in Douglas' style.

Ritchie: What were those styles? How would you think as a Douglas or a Proxmire?

Shuman: Well, they both wrote simple, straightforward English. Douglas was more thorough, less punchy, explained things in greater detail, and used more factual information. He liked to pile up the evidence and prove his conclusions. Proxmire was the journalist who wrote a good lead. Proxmire had a genius for writing the lead. Almost the only thing he'd change in the stuff I wrote for him was to change the lead. He was more assertive and did less of piling up the proof. He knew what a good newspaper lead was, how to grab attention, to say what was the essence of the article or the speech in the first sentence or the first paragraph. He was very good at that, but he didn't change very much except the lead. The fact is I crawled inside both of them. I knew them well enough, worked with them closely enough, went to

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hearings with them, knew what they thought, what they said, what their position was, that almost never did they change what I wrote in any substantial way. In fact, most of the time my style of writing was really at best revised first draft. It came out as I wrote it. I think Proxmire will tell you that I could write very quickly. And I like to write.

Ritchie: That leads to the question of the "Golden Fleece" awards.

Shuman: I knew that was coming up!

Ritchie: What was the history of the Golden Fleece?

Shuman: It's a very simple history. It really begins with the first thing that happened to me when I came to work for Senator Proxmire. I came to work for him early in January of 1969, and the previous December, I think it was the tenth or the twelfth, during a recess of the Senate he held a hearing. He loved to hold hearings during the recesses, between Christmas and New Year, between the 10th of December and Christmas, or on a Saturday, anytime when the press was desperate for news. In fact, I remember one time we had a report which we issued between Christmas and the New Year for the Joint Economic Committee, when almost no one was in town except the senator. I think every camera and every press person in town was there. He held the press conference to release the report, but the press conference

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was held a day or so before the release date, so they'd have time to read it, absorb it, and write their stories. So there was no immediate news that day. After the senator had finished detailing the report, what was in it, and so on, one of the newspaper people got up and said: "Senator, can't you say something else? We're desperate for news!" The senator knew this and took advantage of it.

He had held a hearing in December on the C-5A airplane at which Ernie Fitzgerald had testified. Critics say that Ernie came up and blabbed out that there was a two billion dollar overrun on the C-5A and was disloyal to the Air Force. Ernie doesn't deny that, but that isn't quite what happened. What really happened was that Richard Kaufman of the Joint Economic Committee staff had been briefed at the Pentagon on the C-5A, and had just stumbled, during the briefing, on the fact that there was a two billion dollar overrun. So when Ernie came up to testify, he was asked about that. I went back to read the record, because I put it in the book. But if you read the record you'll find that Ernie demurred, several times. He wasn't about to confirm it. So finally, Proxmire put it to him that there is a two billion dollar overrun on the C-5A, to which Ernie finally answered yes, which was truthful. He wasn't going to lie. Ernie is a hero, and I think deserves all kinds of credit, and has been fired and rehired, and Carter campaigned that he was going to reinstate him,

and then got in and refused to do it; Ernie deserves a lot. Very few people have the guts and the fortitude to do what he's done. But still, if you go back and read the record, he wasn't that much of a hero at the initial stage.

Well, Proxmire asked me, very early, in January, whether he should continue with this issue. I said, "Yes, you must." Two billion dollars is something people cannot understand. They cannot see, feel, and touch two billion dollars. It's just too much. But when it was personified by the Air Force firing the poor guy who told the truth and blew the whistle that was real live stuff. What the senator was trying to do was cut waste at the Pentagon and to make the Air Force procure more efficiently. Now it was personalized by Ernie. That's exactly the kind of issue you want to deal with.

We tried to adopt that principle to government waste in general. So we decided to try to personalize the issue by examples of the biggest, the most ridiculous instances of wasteful spending for the month. We originally held a contest in the office to get a name for it. I didn't win it, two other people came up with the name "The Golden Fleece," which is a double entendre. There was a golden fleece in Greek mythology. Who was it, Jason and the golden fleece? It also has the entendre of fleecing the public. So it was a very good name.

I was responsible for editing and getting out the fleece every month, from about '74 when we started, maybe '75, until 1982 when I left. I wrote about a third of them, and I was responsible for and edited all of them. One of the things I kid about as the consummate administrative assistant is that when the senator was sued for one of the golden fleeces, even though I had been responsible, my subordinate who drafted it and the senator who okayed it, were sued. They didn't sue me. Now, it takes a certain amount of bureaucratic expertise to survive that situation! They were the butt, the senator and the subordinate. Seriously, it was inadvertent that they were sued for $8 million, not me.

But its purpose was to try to draw attention to issues that otherwise people didn't notice. I would like to give one example. There is a man in Washington by the name of I.F. Stone. I.F. Stone wrote a newsletter, which made great news and was a big contribution to public information about all sorts of subjects, because he merely went through the public documents of Congress, the hearings, and wrote about things that other people missed. Now, the press is in a sense lazy. The press likes a fight, conflict, so they spend great effort before an issue is finally resolved, when the big issue is in committee or on the Senate floor, writing about who's

going to win, who's going to lose. They write very little about the substance of the bill, but they do write about the fight, who's winning, who's losing on Civil

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Rights, on a whole variety of issues, on the B-1 bomber, the MX missile. But where the power is, where the money is, in the appropriations committees, which is really the place that funds the programs and where the policy is carried out, the press almost doesn't cover it.

So here was Proxmire who from time to time was chairman of the Appropriations subcommittees on foreign aid, HUD and independent agencies, and on Health and Human Services. He's also on the defense subcommittee of the Appropriation Committee. But the press doesn't come to the hearings. They are seldom involved in what happens in the mark-ups, which are now public. They are very lazy. After the initial fight is over, they forget it. Well, the Appropriations subcommittee is where policy is made. It's the source of policy. Proxmire would cut or increase the budget of HUD, or the space agency, or some defense item, and the press would pay no attention to it at all. The budget is the priorities document. We couldn't get their attention focused on this. So the fleece of the month's purpose was to try to get some attention on these areas which were essentially overlooked by the press in the Appropriations Committee, which were of such magnitude that people couldn't see, feel or touch and understand them, unless there were good examples. The fleece served that purpose very well.

It had quite a good effect. After the first year, I did a survey, because people would say, "Well, does it do any good?" I did the survey to find out what, if anything, had happened as a result of our criticism. We found out that in two-thirds of the cases, it may have been three-quarters, eight or nine of the twelve, that in fact either the practice that we'd complained about had been changed or modified, or the fleece had some other major effect. There was one effect that it had which was not such a good effect: the National Science Foundation, which was then putting out relatively small amounts of money for what seemed to us to be very silly projects -- why people fall in love, and things of that kind, whether fish that got drunk on tequila or on gin were the more vicious, really ridiculous types of things. What they did was to go through their awards, and in order to keep us from finding ridiculous examples, they changed the names. They didn't change what they did, they merely changed the name. But contrary to the charge that was made against us that we merely picked up things that had a stupid name, we never picked something merely because of the title. We often found things that had rather silly names but which in fact seemed to be quite good projects,

and we did not give them the fleece of the month, unless there was some really good reason to do so.

Ritchie: Did you ever in retrospect regret a fleece?

Shuman: No, not even the one we got sued on. In fact, I feel more strongly about the one that we got sued on than almost any other. We did not make an error. There was no error of fact or substance there. One of the things that happened with that fleece (and I can say this because it's part of the record, I'm now quoting the record of the court) was that the fellow who received the grant -- we didn't give it a person, we gave it to the agency, so the person who got the fleece was the National Science Foundation, not the person who received the grant. We said the Science Foundation was at fault for giving such ridiculous sums of money to the person who got them. The person who got the grants had been fired from his job for some of the same things we complained about.

I have no regrets about any one of them, because they were accurate. Over the number of years that I was involved in it, we almost never made a mistake. The only factual mistake I can remember -- there were two, and I can only remember one -- was that we got the city wrong. The person who got the grant was from one city in Indiana, and the research took place elsewhere, and we got the cities mixed up. But apart from that we almost never had a factual error. The one I enjoyed a great deal hit very close to home. I play tennis about five times a week. I live in North Arlington. Within a mile or two of my house there must be fifty public tennis courts, and I play on them all the time. There was

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an article in the suburban press about a study that the National Science Foundation had funded for a small amount of money, five, eight, ten thousand dollars, to find out why people get angry on the tennis courts. The researcher set up a very elaborate study: there was a survey of tennis players. The researcher hired a psychiatrist to interview people. She did all the things behavioralists and the psychologists do, and she ended up finding that the reason people got angry when they were at the tennis courts was that more people wanted to play tennis than there were courts to play on!

When I first saw it, I thought it was a hoax. So I called the reporter, and he said, no, this isn't a hoax. Then I called the researcher, and the researcher was very excited about the work. I really felt rather badly about it, because she was so enthusiastic about her piece of research. But nonetheless we did give the fleece to

the grant that went to Arlington. It pointed up one of the things that was wrong with the way the Foundation (in this case it was the Endowment for the Humanities) gave the money. They gave the money to the State of Virginia without asking the state what it was going to do with the money. Virginia got its share of the money that went out to the 50 states. Then it was of no concern to the Endowment what happened to those funds. Now, the Endowment made the argument, and there was some sense to it. They said, think of the administrative costs if we

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have to follow up on what the states do with every small ten thousand dollar grant. But the small grants add up to a lot of money -- one-hundred twenty-five or thirty million dollars I think they were getting per year at that time -- over which the Endowment relinquished jurisdiction and over which they said they were not concerned or interested in what happened. We pointed that out.

Ritchie: It certainly was a tremendously successful public relations tactic. It always made the newspapers.

Shuman: It always made some of the newspapers. The *Washington Post* sometimes did not print it. Often the *Washington Post* printed the fleece not as the original story but the criticism of the story by the agency who received it.

Ritchie: Why do you think that was?

Shuman: I think they felt it was beneath their dignity. If they had found it, it would be a good story, but for some senator to find out something that was newsworthy and to put it out once a month was sort of interfering with their business and they weren't really going to acknowledge that. Also, the story was written by their staff person, who covered the agency getting the award. And that person, in order to protect sources often gets co-opted by the agency he or she covers. I never asked them, because I learned very early not to complain to newspapers about what they did or didn't run, because they always have the last

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word. In fact, when we were sued, the first story to appear was the rebuttal by the person who got the grant. And the reason for that was that I think the *Detroit Free Press* or the *Detroit News* got our release, say on a Saturday morning, which was for a Monday morning release, and on Saturday afternoon they called the researcher and said, "Here's what's being said about you. What about this?" He gave his reply, and they printed his rebuttal. His rebuttal to our fleece was the

story that was put out first. We read it as the rebuttal to our fleece, which had not yet appeared. I never thought he was maligned as a public figure because his reply preceded any allegation we made. It was like Alice in Wonderland, "Verdict first, evidence later."

Ritchie: Do you think that some of the papers may have reacted that way because they thought it was a stunt? Because the senator was doing this on a regular basis?

Shuman: They might have.

Ritchie: That they might have been suspicious of something that looked overtly like a public relations operation?

Shuman: Well, I think they thought that. But so what? They do it all the time, and they don't think anything is wrong with it. If it were news, they printed it, believe you me they printed it. And we had access to sources that the papers didn't have. Most of our stuff came from digging deep into the subject

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matter of our Appropriations Committee. We had people around on the Joint Economic Committee and on the Appropriations Committee staff and in our own office who kept an eye out for these examples. And if we saw something that was interesting, we could command the papers. We could ask the agency for the details behind it; we could get the original contract, which we did, and which we read, and from which we quoted. We had the basic information, and that's why we were so accurate. But that was information that no one else could get. So, I make no apology for it at all.

Ritchie: Just the other day, Senator Proxmire was asked what he was going to do with the golden fleece after he retired, if he was going to will it to another senator. He said actually he was thinking about taking it with him, and he hoped that he could continue the tradition.

There was another thing about Proxmire that I was always interested in: when he begins to do something he seems very dogged about it. He gave a speech every day for years on the genocide treaty. He makes a point of making a speech every day during the Morning Hour. There are certain issues that he repeats and repeats. Is there something about his character that accounts for that tenacity?

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Shuman: Yes, we always called him an over-achiever. We meant this as praise. He has incredible self-discipline and determination. I don't know how many years he gave a speech virtually every day on the genocide convention. He decided years ago that people hadn't paid enough attention to it. He said, "I'm going to give a speech every day until it's passed." It took about twenty years to get it passed! But it did get passed. And he got a lot of credit for it when it was passed. The same is true with his record on consecutive votes. The same is also true about going back to the state. He makes a point to shake at least a thousand hands every day he's back in the state.

I remember when, I think it was with Ernie Fitzgerald, the Defense Department tried to muzzle or to punish Ernie for testifying before the Joint Economic Committee. There's a statute which makes it illegal for a department or agency to punish an employee for giving testimony to Congress. Congress has to be able to get information and protect itself. Well, obviously, the Justice Department was unwilling to do anything about this. I think that the conflict of interest in the Department of Justice is one of the worst things in the government. There hasn't been an Attorney General to speak of, with one or two exceptions, who wasn't either the brother of the president, or from the law firm of the president, as was true of Nixon, or his personal lawyer as was true of the first Attorney General under both [Jimmy] Carter and [Ronald] Reagan.

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Ritchie: William French Smith.

Shuman: Smith. The Attorney General is almost always someone who is put in to protect the rear of the president and to keep anyone in his administration from being indicted. That is the purpose of the Attorney General, and it's wrong. They should be independent. Their purpose is to enforce the law. This may be apocryphal, but there's a story that over one of the doorways of the Justice Department there are the words: "All ye seeking justice enter here." And there's a big sign at that entrance saying: "Please use the other door." I think that's true. So what we did after writing to the Attorney General two or three times, this was Nixon's Attorney General, asking him what he was going to do about this obvious attempt to muzzle a person for testifying before Congress in violation of the law. And we didn't get a reply. We started putting things in the record like "today is the forty-fifth day since we sent the letter to the Attorney General asking what he was going to do." Then we'd say it's the forty-sixth day, and the fiftieth day, and the hundredth day, and so on, which was a very good device to draw attention. There's nothing wrong with that, because it's what Woodrow Wilson called the

informing function, which is as important as the direct method of legislating. You can't legislate without informing, and that was an example of the informing function.

Proxmire never, ever was interested in publicity in personal terms. When he went home at night, he would go to bed at nine thirty or ten o'clock, and wouldn't answer the phone. He had an unlisted number. I remember the morning when the Iran rescue mission failed. I got a call at six o'clock in the morning from the press, saying, "Where is he? We can't get hold of the senator. What does he have to say about this?" I said, "Call him at the office, he'll be in at eight thirty, and he'll answer your questions." But he wouldn't interrupt his private life to appear on television, he wouldn't do a lot of the things that people who are anxious for press coverage would do. He did it because he felt it was a fundamental part of his job, and that this was the way he could get his issues across. It was not a method of self-aggrandizement. People don't understand that, they don't believe me when I tell them that, but that is in fact the case.

Ritchie: And having been a reporter, he knew -- if you had an issue to get out -- all the things you had to do.

Shuman: Correct. It was a part of his profession. He was trained in it.

I remember one morning about three o'clock, I got a call from the District of Columbia police. Proxmire's son had almost been killed in an auto accident on the Baltimore Beltway. The police couldn't get in touch with him, so they called me in the middle

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of the night. I called the senator, because I had his unlisted number, but he didn't answer. He often refused to answer the phone. What I had to do was I had to get the Capitol Police, tell them who I was, (I knew them, so they knew who I was) to tell them to tell the D.C. Police to go to his house and wake him up. The D.C. Police were unwilling to do that on my word. They were afraid to go knock on a senator's door at three o'clock in the morning. But I had the Capitol Police call the D.C. police, and they in turn did call at his house and got him up. But he wasn't about to answer the phone in the middle of the night. If a senator has a listed phone, he gets a lot of calls from drunks in the middle of the night, people who have got a big argument, mostly drunks.

Ritchie: Your mentioning the accident reminded me of the time the senator was mugged during one of his jogs. He always used to jog to the Capitol and back home again every day.

Shuman: Yes, he used to run in. It wasn't jogging: he ran in and he ran home. There is a distinction between running and jogging. He did this long before it was as popular as it is now. He was on his way home only a few blocks from the Capitol when he was mugged by two black teenagers. One I think was fourteen and the other fifteen. They were both underage, both juveniles. They robbed him, and he fought them, and they ran off. But there was a police car near by which the senator hailed in a matter of

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minutes. There must have been fifteen police cars that descended on the area, and they caught them really quickly. Those kids were very surprised at what happened to them when they mugged a senator!

Well, the senator went down to the hearing, and one of the boys' parents were there. The senator was quite impressed with the family, thought this kid had a good chance. So I suggested to him that he hire those two young men to come into the office after school to give them something to do and to keep them out of trouble. They could help us get out the mail, that is fold the letters, lick the envelopes, get them stacked together and mailed out, which was an hour or two of work. We would pay them the minimum wage or better. I've forgotten what we paid them now, not a lot, but something fair. We did that for about a year, and we didn't tell anybody, and we didn't get any news out of it. It was two or three years later when the *Milwaukee Journal* reporter found out about it and called us. Of course, I couldn't lie to him, so I told him what had happened. But I think it's an example to show that the senator wasn't just interested in publicity.

One of them made it, the other one didn't. It was kind of a sad thing. The one who didn't make it was a big kid, very tall, quite heavy. Afterwards he went into one of the main stores in Washington and shoplifted and was caught redhanded. It bothered me. It bothered me not so much that he did it but how stupid he

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was. I mean, there was no way that a big tall black teenager could walk into Woodward and Lothrop and shoplift without half a dozen people watching him. I criticized him very severely afterwards, not for the immorality, but for the stupidity of what he did. I was unhappy about that. He didn't make it, and I'm sorry he didn't make it. I don't know what else we could have done.

Ritchie: Well, it's an interesting side of his character that he would hire his two assailants.

Another question I was going to ask about was the relationship of a senator's staff to the staff of the committee that he chairs. What is it? Is it a friendly relationship, a distant relationship, a competitive relationship? How well did you work with the staff of the Banking Committee?

Shuman: I worked well with the staff of the Banking Committee, with perhaps one exception. That wasn't a personality thing but was over an issue in which our chief person on the Banking Committee disagreed with what we were doing and asked to opt out. So I had to take over the issue, which I did. But that wasn't a routine friction, that was just on that issue.

I didn't have any conflict with the committees. We had a good committee staff on the Joint Economic Committee, but even on that committee they were not as attuned to the senator's personal style in the way I was. So that every month when the Bureau of

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Labor Statistics reported out the unemployment figures, we would get those figures at nine o'clock for the ten o'clock meeting, and I almost routinely wrote a statement for him as to the significance of the figures. Sometimes he wrote his own statement. One of the things I did with the Banking Committee and the Appropriations Committee, was to go to the hearing and listen and then sum up what had happened. Then I would go out maybe twenty or thirty minutes before the hearing was over and write up a closing statement for him, summarizing what had happened that day. Very, very often that statement summarizing the hearing became the key factor in the news stories, in the leads on television and in the newspapers. That was impossible to do before the fact. Once he was severely criticized by a HUD witness for reading a written statement at the end of a hearing on grounds he had pre-judged the evidence. That wasn't true. I wrote the statement after consulting with him on the dais after hearing the evidence.

If it were a very technical legislative statement, the staff of the committee would do it. But if it were more of a political statement, I did it. So we didn't get in each other's way very much. But I was his economic writer, and since he was mainly interested in economic issues, the budget, monetary policy, tax policy, fiscal policy, I did an awful lot of the writing for the committees in addition to the kind of things that the staff would do, such as preparing detailed questions for him, briefing him.

I suppose, of all the senators I've known, with the possible exception of Mr. Douglas, he was better prepared for a hearing than any senator. Most senators come in and the staff gives them a couple of questions to ask and the senators don't know very much about the subject. They ask the question, and then they don't have a follow up. Well, with Proxmire, we prepared for those hearings much as he prepared to go on Meet the Press. We'd meet with him usually the evening before the hearing, not at nine o'clock in the morning. The staff people would have good questions. I would often write an opening statement the next morning. He would have a list of questions that had been prepared for him to ask, and he would ask them and get the answer that we thought the witness would give. Then he'd be prepared for two or three follow-up questions as well. So he was extraordinarily well prepared. He did his homework in a way that very few people do. It was a joy to work for him, for that reason.

But even after that disciplined preparation he pulled many surprises. Frequently the television people would come around and ask me, "Is he going to make any news?" The hearings would be almost over, and I'd say, "As far as I know he's not going to say anything more." And then he would come in with something at the end of the hearing that was an absolute shocker, but he did it on his own, often without telling us. Sometimes he would tell us, or sometimes he'd say, "Here's what I want to do, go write a

statement." As I say, my job was to write, and to write quickly, and to do it under fire. I did it both at the hearings and for the Senate floor.

There is something people don't really understand very well about the way the floor functions. The legislative process -- I don't think it's a process, everything is called a process these days -- really is not a process in the sense of a factory assembly line where things come in order and go down the line and a wheel is put on here and a motor is put in there and it all comes out as a whole at the end. That isn't the way it works. It's more like a barroom brawl than it is an orderly process that one can study. That's true of almost everything, the legislative process, the budgetary process. Everybody talks about process. Baloney! It's a barroom brawl. The Senate action is very much like getting out a newspaper in the sense that you have to work very fast, write quickly and accurately, speak or issue a statement, forget it and go on to something else the next day.

In this procedure, there are some resources available to senators which sometimes aren't very good resources. I don't mean to say this in a demeaning

way, but I mean to say that the Congressional Research Service, for example, is very useful if you have a month to prepare for a hearing. But unless you know precisely the expert, and have his phone number, the CRS is almost no use to you when you are in the middle of the battle. It takes

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their ammunition days to get to you. So that if a big issue comes up on the floor, as it often does, and some senator says you're wrong about that issue and that your facts are wrong, what you've got to do is to know where to go quickly to get the facts. And in those circumstances, unless you know exactly the right person at the Library, that source is not very helpful.

I knew some people, like George Galloway, who was the Congressional Research Service's expert on Congress. He was the staff man for the La Follette-Monroney Act. He was the American staff person to the Inter-Parliamentary Union. He knew legislative matters backwards and forwards, both the British parliament and the American legislature. I used to say if you've got George Galloway's number, you've got an expert at the other end of the line. So I could call George and get some fact really quickly. Lou Fisher at the Library is another person. Roger Davidson and Walter Oleszek are others. They're the kind of people I know on a personal basis, and I can get them on the phone, and very often they can within a few minutes give me the facts or call back. And there are people on the Joint Economic Committee and other committees who can do that. But generally speaking, those massive resources aren't very useful in the cut and thrust of debate and during the battle, when they are most needed. The Library really doesn't understand that. I wish they understood it better.

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Ritchie: You mentioned a barroom brawl as an analogy. Would you carry it a little further and say that the person who has the advantage is the one with the most muscle? How much power does a person need in the process, or is everyone equal?

Shuman: Well, as I said before, there is the Orwell point that some pigs are more equal than others. When we were up against Lyndon Johnson or Dick Russell and they had the votes, the battle was unequal. In that sense it is true that muscle counts, but contrary to the Johnsonian position that talk didn't make any difference, it made a whale of a lot of difference in some circumstances and then one needed facts and information very quickly.

This is from the preface to my book, *Politics and the Budget: The Struggle Between the President and the Congress* (Prentice Hall), which makes the point I've been making: "While there is a timetable for action on a fiscal year budget and there are certain legal deadlines under the 1974 Budget and Impoundment Control Act, one cannot describe what happens as the budget process, with goals, timetables and schedules. The budget is not produced in a factory, where intricate bits and pieces are polished, honed, and fed into an assembly line to be fastened, stapled or riveted together, emerge at the end as a functional whole. The budget is not a process, but rather a tale of conflict and struggle. At the end of the Congressional session, when the continuing resolution or the Christmas tree tax bill is before the Senate, the atmos-

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phere is that of a barroom brawl, or of the waiting room in a crowded airport after the boarding call has gone out. The budget is not put together in a mechanical, predetermined, orderly way, as the elementary textbooks on how to pass a bill or on the budget process would have one believe." That's the point I'm trying to make. It's shoot from the hip and correct the record more than it is let's sit down and think about this for a month and then act.

Ritchie: That reminds me of Edwin Corwin's description of American foreign policy, that the Constitution is an "invitation to struggle."

Shuman: Yes, I quoted that in an article I wrote only a week or two ago. He was using that as a rebuttal to the thing we keep hearing now. Of course, he wrote that years ago, but we keep hearing all the time that the president is supreme in foreign policy. Not true. Corwin rebuts this by saying that if you read the Constitution it's an invitation to struggle between the president and the Congress over foreign policy matters.

Ritchie: And you would suggest over the budget as well?

Shuman: Certainly. In fact, on the budget, until 1921 there was no presidential budget. There was a "Book of Estimates" and every agency just took its book of estimates, what they wanted, up to a particular Congressional committee. The president has no budgetary authority in the Constitution at all. It's all

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in Congress. This business that it's the president's budget irks me. It rankles me as a person who worked in the legislative branch most of my life.

Ritchie: I have a series of questions I'd like to ask about the atmosphere during the Nixon years, and Watergate, but since we've been talking for over an hour and a half, I think it would be a good idea for us to stop for now.

Shuman: Very good.

End of Interview #8