

MASSACHUSETTS, MAINE, AND MICHIGAN

Interview #3

Wednesday Morning, June 9, 2010

RITCHIE: Is there anything that we should have covered yesterday that we didn't?

ARENBERG: No, but I was thinking about a couple of Tsongas stories that I think illustrate his character. There were three particular stories that came to mind from a trip we took to the Middle East in the early '80s. It was right after the Israelis had invaded Lebanon, which he was very critical of, which for awhile created some political problems in the Jewish community back home in Massachusetts. I remember in particular, he sent me up there to meet with a bunch of these groups. I used to kid him that I was his designated Jew on the staff to go up and put the fire out. But really he was a very strong supporter of Israel and it really was out of his concern that that particular military action was, from his perspective, outside of their character and their best interest.

We made a trip to the Middle East, and we were there over New Year's Eve—1982 or 1983, I think. I don't remember precisely what year it was. The first little story is that whenever I traveled with him overseas, we were both runners and he would always arrange with the embassy—or I would arrange on his behalf with the embassy—for somebody who was a runner on the embassy staff to come pick us up at the hotel in the morning and lead us out on a local run somewhere. This particular morning in Cairo, we get up early in the morning and we go out to the street to the appointed meeting place in front of the hotel, and there's an entire platoon of Marines. The entire security Marine contingent at the Cairo Embassy was out there. Now I mentioned earlier, Tsongas had been in the Peace Corps. He was very sensitive about not appearing like the ugly American. The last thing in the world he was going to do is run through the streets of Cairo with an entire platoon of American Marines. I mean, he was proud of the service of our troops, but running through downtown Cairo with a whole contingent of Marines was just a bit much for him. So reluctantly, we sent them away and went off on our own run. But he felt so badly about disappointing them. I mean after all, the chance to run with a U.S. senator and so forth. We called over to the embassy and he decided he would go over and drop in on the Marines' New Year's Eve party that night. So we went over there and they had a pool table in the middle of the room and they were playing pool. He rolled up his sleeves.

One thing about him, he was incredibly competitive. He played shortstop on our Senate softball team. He was probably the only senator that actually played on his own team. It's the one time that I ever saw him dress down, get really angry with a staffer was on the softball field—a poor woman who dropped a popup. [Laughing] So anyway, he's having a competitive good old time playing pool with these guys and it goes on and on. Their wives, the ones that were there, were sitting around, as was I, along the wall. It was getting later and later. At this point, I'm tugging at his shirttails and saying, "These guys want to party. This is New Year's Eve." We've got to get the senator out of the room. But he was having just too good a time. I finally got him out of there. But he just really felt badly about letting these guys down.

We went on from there to Jordan, where he had a meeting with King Hussein scheduled. When we got there the king had been in Moscow and was just scheduled that morning to return to Jordan from Moscow. He did, but the king's mother was, at the time, ill in the hospital and he went there. So Senator Tsongas met with then the Crown Prince Hassan, the king's brother. During that meeting, the crown prince got a call from the king who said, "I really want to meet with Senator Tsongas. Is there any way he can stay in Amman until this evening?" Well, we were scheduled to have this big evening event with Menachem Begin who was then the prime minister of Israel. We had to get back to Jerusalem that night. At least at the time—and I think it's probably still true—the Allenby Bridge, which is the bridge over the Jordan River between Jordan and the West Bank, is closed at night. There's a big electrified fence and all that. Nobody had ever crossed that bridge at night since, I guess, the '67 war. So Tsongas says to the crown prince, "If you can arrange somehow for the bridge to be open for us, we'll stay on later and I'll meet with the king and then I'll rush back to Jerusalem." Of course, on the Jordanian side, he calls in the minister of defense or whatever and bang, within ten minutes they're back and say, "Okay, no problem on our side."

But at the time there were not even any direct telephone communications between Amman and Jerusalem. We had to get on the phone and call our embassy, which connected us to the State Department in Washington, which connected us to our embassy in Tel Aviv, which connected us to the Israelis. It became this big huge bureaucratic nightmare and it couldn't be done and so forth and so on. Finally, after about an hour of negotiation, we finally got agreement that the Israelis would open the bridge for us at, I believe it was eight o'clock, and that we should be there at the gate and everything would be fine.

We went to the meeting with the king. I have the photograph. In classic Tsongas fashion, as everybody's taking pictures of the king and the senator, he gestures to me, "Come on. Get in the picture." [Laughs] And he gives the camera to the U.S. ambassador. So I have a picture, taken by the U.S. ambassador, of the three of us—Senator Tsongas, King Hussein, and me—standing there. Then he has a very interesting meeting with the king and then we go out in front of the palace and we hop into this car with the flashing lights and everything and we go swooping down to the banks of the Jordan. We're kind of on a bluff overlooking the river, and that's it: Nobody else is going any further than that. [Laughs] The U.S. ambassador, the Jordanian officials, nobody. So we walked down and it's just three of us; just myself and the senator and Dennis Kanin, who was his chief of staff. We're shuffling across this bridge, and of course, we're thinking about the fact that we know this has all been arranged, but we don't know what the Israeli soldiers on the other side of the river know. [Laughs]

My memory of it is Dennis and I are both trying to shuffle behind the senator a little bit and not look like we're doing that. But he's got his suit bag over his shoulder and he is looking around at the stars in the sky and he says to us, "Make a mental picture of this moment. You'll never forget this." Then we get to the other side and there's a huge gate., I don't know, 10 feet or something like that. It's an electrified fence. The gate is locked. There's nobody around. What do you do now? We started to make sounds, like "Yoo hoo!" [Laughs] But in a kind of falsetto so that it won't sound like any kind of threatening noise or anything. It had to sound very unthreatening, but get somebody's attention. Finally after what seemed like forever, this one Israeli soldier—I think he was an officer—came out of the bushes on the other side. He came up to the gate and he just looks at us and says, "Yes?" I, being as officious as I possibly could be, I said, "This is United States Senator Paul Tsongas. He's been assured by your government that we would be permitted to cross the bridge." And so forth and so on. Not much expression on the other side. The soldier looks at his watch and he says, "We were told you were coming at eight." And it was like seven. I couldn't help myself at that point. I said, "Well, what's the problem? If you open the gate, do you think there's going to be Jordanian tanks behind us or what?" [Laughs] "We're here now."

And so he disappeared back into the bushes. I guess it required orders from a higher authority to deal with this an hour early. But he finally came back and he opened the gate and led us through these bushes and into a field on the other side. We were just standing there shifting from one foot to another wondering what was going to be next. The soldiers all disappeared into a listening post and left us out there. Finally we saw a deuce

and a half come bouncing across the field, with a driver and one of the liaisons from the embassy who was traveling with us, hanging out the window of the truck waving his arms. So finally we did manage to get back to the cocktail party. Of course, this is all anybody wanted to hear about at the cocktail party. “You crossed what? When?” [Laughs]

Then the third quick story about that trip was we went out to a resettlement camp. At the time, it was a time when the Israelis were assisting Jews from Ethiopia in coming out of Ethiopia into Israel. I think, first kind of clandestinely, they were plucking them out of the desert. Later on, I think the Ethiopian government let them all emigrate to Israel and they did come in significantly large numbers. I don't know if you know about this group. They call them the Falashas, I believe. I think the name means something like “strangers” in the Ethiopian language, Amharic. This is a group of Jewish Ethiopians that I think some people believe that this is the lost tribe of Israel. They were off, isolated in Ethiopia for many, many years. I don't know how many, but they didn't know that the rest of the Jewish world existed. They still carried on such phrases as, “Next year in Jerusalem.” I don't think they were really clear on where Jerusalem was or anything. Interestingly, they still even had kohein, which are the priests. For the rest of Jews around the world, a rabbi is a clergyman, but the word “rabbi” means “teacher.” They are not really priests. Jews haven't had priests since the destruction of the second temple in Jerusalem. Except these Falashas had koheins. Anyway, the Israelis had set up this resettlement camp where they were teaching them Hebrew and helping to train them with skills so that they could go into a modern society like Israel and be able to function and earn a living and integrate into society.

Tsongas was very interested in this, particularly because of his interest in the Horn of Africa and his experience in the Peace Corps in Ethiopia. So we went to this camp and it was pretty late at night when we got there. This group of Falashas, they'd been really whipped up into this state of excitement because the Israelis who were there who the Falashas looked up to as almost godlike, these people who had helped them out of their impoverished conditions in Ethiopia, where they were discriminated against, and now brought them into Israel and were teaching them Hebrew and everything. They thought very highly of this group of Israelis. This group of Israelis were just beside themselves that a U.S. senator was coming to see their camp and so it was almost like the king was coming or something like that. Tsongas entered the room. It was very dramatic. They greeted him and everybody was speaking this kind of rudimentary Hebrew. Then they introduce Tsongas and he stood up and began to speak to them in Amharic, their native language. As I said, he had been in the Peace Corps. Well, you know, it was one of the

most magical moments I've ever experienced in my life. It's very hard to describe it. But it was late at night off in this camp. Here are these people who had suffered through who knows what coming through the desert to get to Israel, who saw this, what they saw as this, very exalted figure coming and suddenly he was speaking to them very matter-of-factly in their native language. It's hard to describe what that was like. I can only say it was dramatic—almost magical.

So then they ran and they get their kohein. Their kohein comes in and he places his hands on Tsongas' head and gives him a blessing. Well Tsongas was so taken by this that he sent me back to the car to go get this silver bowl that we had brought from Washington. You always bring gifts. I guess it was probably really pewter, but it was engraved "U.S. Senate." We had brought it because our next stop was Egypt. It was intended for President Mubarak. But he took this bowl and he presented it to the kohein because he was just so taken with him. I'm in the background thinking, what are we going to give Mubarak? [Laughs] Anyhow, I just thought those were kind of three examples.

RITCHIE: Yesterday I was asking about why Senator Tsongas wanted to move from the House to the Senate, but he had a strong interest in foreign policy.

ARENBERG: Yes.

RITCHIE: Wouldn't the Senate have given him more opportunity to focus on foreign policy issues?

ARENBERG: Yes, I think that's right. When he came to the Senate, he did go onto the Foreign Relations Committee. And it was very important to him. He very quickly became chairman of the Africa subcommittee. And that's right, he did focus—I mean, he always had that interest, but the Senate gave him the freedom to focus a lot more on foreign affairs and he certainly exercised that. He was very active on the boycott of Rhodesia, you know, before the Zimbabwe independence, activities in South Africa; efforts to free Mandela and all that, Tsongas was always very prominent in those issues.

RITCHIE: On the other hand, the funny thing about foreign policy is that it can often create problems back home.

ARENBERG: Yeah.

RITCHIE: I come from New York, where anybody who was going to run for mayor always made a trip to Ireland, Italy, and Israel. Those were the foreign policy issues that they had to be concerned with. They had to be right on those issues and couldn't be independent minded, otherwise they'd offend one group or the other.

ARENBERG: Well, I think that's right, but, consistent with what I've said about him before, he was interested in foreign policy and he did what he believed in. Particularly in terms of foreign policy, I don't think that the back home politics, most of the time, played a very great role. Like any elected official, he had to pay attention to it. I did mention that he got himself into trouble over Lebanon somewhat, but his reaction to that was to go back and earnestly explain himself to the community back home. It wasn't to trim his sails. It wasn't to change his point of view on what he thought was right in terms of foreign policy or in terms of U.S. interests. He was very active on disarmament issues. He was deeply involved in the embargoes against South Africa and then-Rhodesia. He was very active, actually, in the foreign policy arena.

RITCHIE: In 1980, Ronald Reagan won the election and obviously Tsongas was out of step with that administration, but how did that affect his views on Reagan's foreign policies?

ARENBERG: Well, he certainly was critical of Reagan. I think consistently, I think he felt about the Republican administrations that he had encountered, that their foreign policies were too focused on military response and less focused on more diplomatic oriented approaches. I think that was pretty consistent throughout. He certainly had problems and he was critical of Reagan's response in Lebanon. He was critical of Reagan's response in Granada. So there certainly were problems there.

RITCHIE: What I remember most was his opposition to Kenneth Adelman to be the head of the Arms Control Agency.

ARENBERG: Yes.

RITCHIE: What was that about? How would you describe that incident?

ARENBERG: Well, I remember the incident clearly, but I've forgotten a lot of the substance about Adelman except that he'd had a disastrous hearing before the Foreign Relations Committee in which he basically answered all of the questions about arms

control with answers like, “I haven’t thought much about it.” Consistent about the way he felt about the Reagan administration, I think he felt that there wasn’t the kind of commitment to the disarmament negotiations that he thought the negotiators should have or the kind of experience and competence. That was sort of the basic thing, although I don’t remember all of the specifics. What I do remember about it, connecting back to talking about the role of the filibuster and so forth, is that he threatened to filibuster that nomination. There was actually a very prominent story that *People Magazine* did about that. They did a spread of pictures of him and a several page article about this young senator who was threatening this filibuster. They asked him about it in that article and he said, “Well, my legislative director, Rich Arenberg is going to be with me every step of the way. And he better know what he’s doing.” I think he called me something like his “parliamentary counselor-of-war.” So that was one of the early experiences I had with Bob Dove, who was the parliamentarian. I immediately went to Bob and said, “Help!” [Laughs] Because I thought, as a Senate staffer, I did have a pretty good grip on the rules. I’d always been interested in them. But suddenly I’d been outed in *People Magazine* and I felt a considerable amount of pressure from that. The whole country would be watching our little filibuster and I didn’t want to screw it up. Bob calmed me down. In the end, the filibuster didn’t come about, but Tsongas did wind up voting against the nomination as I remember it.

He also, by the way, opposed the nomination of Alexander Haig. I think he and [Paul] Sarbanes, is my memory, were the only two who did. I think it was about Haig specifically and his involvements with the Nixon administration, but I think it reflected the fact that he wasn’t really happy about the direction that Reagan seemed intent on going. Because he opposed Haig, I think he bent over backwards and actually did not vote against [James] Watt when that vote came before the Senate a couple of days or weeks later. He always regretted that vote very profoundly and said so publicly at every opportunity. And in fact, when Watt left his deputy, I think was it Don Hodel, I may have forgotten his first name. In the committee hearing, Tsongas gave him a very hard time. He was very honest about it. He told Hodel, “This is less about you and more about Watt and his policies and so forth, but you know, I voted for him and I regret it and I’m not going to make that same mistake.” And he voted against Hodel—because of his involvement in Watt’s policies at Interior, but mostly because he regretted not having voted against James Watt.

RITCHIE: I remember the Adelman case in particular because it was one of those peculiar situations in which Adelman lost in the committee when they voted.

ARENBERG: Oh yeah.

RITCHIE: Then it got to the floor and he won on the floor. We keep lists on things like that and that was one of those rare occasions.

ARENBERG: That's right. I had forgotten about that. Where it was reported to the floor in disagreement. Yeah.

RITCHIE: At that point Tsongas was threatening to filibuster, but then wound up not. I always wondered if the threat was more to draw attention to the issue rather than an all out attempt to defeat him.

ARENBERG: Oh, I think there's a lot to that. I don't think he thought that he was going to be successful in defeating the nomination with a filibuster. I'm not sure if he would have even—I mean, I think if he could have defeated the nomination he probably would have—but I think really his primary purpose was in drawing attention to it and I think that's why. I think he was satisfied that he did that.

RITCHIE: And part of the issue was that Adelman had no previous experience?

ARENBERG: And that it was a reflection of the Reagan administration not being serious about arms negotiations. It's kind of ironic that Reagan wound up doing what he did. I mean, I think Reagan often surprised us in various ways.

RITCHIE: Almost every senator is interested in both domestic and foreign policy to some degree. Even those who aren't on the Foreign Relations committee always have something to say about whatever international issue that's coming up. Isn't that a major distinction between the Senate and the House, that unless a House member is on the Foreign Affairs Committee, no one cares what they think about foreign policy?

ARENBERG: That's absolutely right, although I think it's probably true that the Foreign Relations Committee in the Senate—I don't want to say this in a disrespectful way, but I recall some years ago it was really viewed as one of the major assignments in the Senate, one of the most sought after assignments in the Senate. The time that Tsongas was named to the Foreign Relations Committee, that was considered a great coup for a freshman senator in his first year to be placed on it. I don't think he was in his first year, I think he did have to wait. Because he was initially on the Energy and Banking committees

and then he moved to Foreign Relations very quickly after that from Banking. Then in later years he regretted that and went back to the Banking Committee, not leaving Foreign Relations. I think he left Energy at some point.

But over the years, for whatever reasons—and I think it has much more to do with the broad relationship between Congress and the presidency in terms of control of foreign relations—I think most historians would agree that the role of the president has become stronger and stronger in that arena. That’s reflected itself in terms of the role that the Foreign Relations Committee plays within the Senate. Obviously it’s still a very important and attractive committee. I don’t mean to disrespect it in any way, but I don’t think it’s up there as one of the absolute most sought after committee assignments in the Senate as it once was. At one time it was viewed as if you thought you were a future presidential candidate, then it was important to be on the Foreign Relations Committee to establish your foreign relations credentials. Probably as a reflection of the fact that individual senators, particularly more junior senators, are out there and more prominent than they were in the past, and more happens on the floor irrespective of what the committee may have done or not done. Senators planning to run for president these days don’t feel they have to be on the Foreign Relations Committee necessarily.

I always thought one of the true tests of peoples’ interests in foreign affairs and so forth are senators who go onto the Intelligence Committee, because it’s a lot more thankless. Much of what you do is in secret. There’s not much payoff for it back home. A lot of it you can’t talk about. The hearings, most of them, are in closed session, no TV cameras, no speeches. It does give you a bit of a credential. People say, “Well, he’s on the Intelligence Committee, he must know something about what’s going on.” But it’s interesting, those senators, aside from the chairman and the vice chairman on the committee, I don’t think there’s much payoff for that. The ones who are active, who really do a lot of work on that committee, I think they have a genuine interest and a genuine commitment to that role. It’s an interesting thing.

RITCHIE: It’s either that or their party leadership has twisted their arm to go onto the committee.

ARENBERG: To go on it. Yeah, that happens sometimes. They can’t quite fill out the committee. And it happens in spades with Ethics, of course. But then, the way that the Intelligence Committee is set up, I think it’s a six-year rotation. That’s the way the select committee was set up in the Senate. The majority leader makes appointments to the

Intelligence Committee directly, and of course the minority leader on the other side. And then there's a six-year rotation. They're supposed to rotate off. Almost invariably, they come back and lobby for additional years on the committee and usually get it. They do eventually rotate off, I think.

When Mitchell was majority leader and I served as his liaison to the Intelligence Committee, that's one of the few things that we disagreed about consistently throughout. I always advocated to him that the Intelligence Committee ought to be made a standing committee. I thought it was a disadvantage to be rotating senators through there because of the nature of the intelligence community and I think I felt like as soon as senators built up enough expertise to really be able to dig into things and figure out what was going on in the intelligence community they were rotating off the committee. I believe it's true that the House has now made their Intelligence Committee a permanent standing committee.

But Mitchell felt strongly, consistent with the original rationale, which was the rotation kept fresh blood going through the committee and that it gave more senators the opportunity to be on the Intelligence Committee. Not to ascribe motivations to him, but of course it's one of the powers the majority leader has is to make those appointments and I guess he didn't want to give any of those away either. I'm not sure.

RITCHIE: Speaking about majority leaders' power to make appointments, what was Senator Tsongas' relationship to Senator Byrd when he came? Did they click and did that help him with things like committee assignments?

ARENBERG: I think he had a good relationship with Robert Byrd. I know he respected him. I don't know that they were tremendously close, but I think he felt that he was fairly dealt with by the majority leader when he went to him with something. I know there was a public picture that appeared published somewhere of Byrd walking into the Capitol Building carrying some papers and a book—and you could clearly see that the book was *The Road From Here*, Tsongas' book. So he loved that picture. I remember him mentioning that several times. I think he had a good relationship with Byrd, but I don't think it was special in any way.

RITCHIE: How about the other senator from Massachusetts? That had to be a tricky situation in that Senator Kennedy had been there for 20 years at this point and was a national figure. How do you be the junior senator to someone like Ted Kennedy?

ARENBERG: Yeah, well it's a very interesting question. The Kennedy operation—not just the senator, but the staff, as everyone knows—was sort of a Senate institution. There wasn't an issue that Ted Kennedy wasn't into. So the first problem, of course, that confronts any junior senator from Massachusetts coming into a situation like that is: Where are you going to carve out your niches? It wasn't particularly a personal problem for Tsongas because of just the way he was personally. As I described to you, he didn't worry a lot about all of these Senate trappings. He liked and respected Ted Kennedy, but he dealt with it really on a kind of fact by fact basis. If he wanted to get into something, he got into something and he wasn't particularly concerned about whether it was Kennedy turf. He just didn't see things in those terms. I described to you his maiden speech—that was very characteristic of their relationship. Kennedy, certainly in his later years, was a man of the Senate. He was one of the Senate lions and he thought about all of those things and he knew about all of the senatorial courtesies and the expectations and the privileges of seniority and all of that. It wasn't that Tsongas disrespected that, it just wasn't the way he was. It just didn't concern him and he had a job and he was going about doing it and he had his interests.

Often that was very challenging on the staff level. We used to joke that the Kennedy staff dealt with the Tsongas staff one level down always. In other words, Kennedy's chief of staff would call the senator and the legislative director would call our chief of staff and the LA's would call me. It was always like we weren't all quite on the same level. But we saw that with some amusement. I've always maintained it's a much more difficult thing, in most instances, for the two senators from a state who are of the same party to deal with each other. Obviously they share the same constituency and it's a natural comparison. It's always a natural question, "How come Senator Kennedy voted for this and you voted against it?" The media is always looking to pit you against each other. Sometimes you're competing for the same sources of funding. There are lots of things that make it difficult. Whereas if you have a senator from the other party in the other seat, then everyone's expectation is you're going to vote differently and you're not going to agree on much. In fact, if you get along pretty well and you're one of those pairs of senators that can say, well, when it comes to "x," Levin and Spencer Abraham, when he was the Republican senator from Michigan and they were able to work together on behalf of Michigan, then that's seen as a plus for both of them back home. In some ways, that's an easier relationship to manage than the other one. Of course, there are many Senate pairs of the same party which are very effective allies, so I wouldn't overstate the case. And there are opposite party pairs, like Stevens and Gravel who I mentioned earlier, who just could not stand each other.

In the Tsongas/Kennedy situation, it really never got to be a serious problem. One of the things we used to do periodically—maybe once a year—we would arrange a summit meeting in which Kennedy and Tsongas and the senior staffs would get together and the two senators would give us a pep talk and say, “Now guys, you’ve got to get along. We got to work together. Let’s put aside whatever problems that have come up over the last year and so forth and get back to work.” It was almost a staged operation, but it made everybody kind of clear the deck so we could all go back to whatever. Whatever sensitivities were built up about this or that issue, we were able to all shake hands and put it aside and so forth. But you’re right, it could be challenging. Back home, I think as you said at one point earlier, the nature of Massachusetts politics, it’s kind of a star system. I always used to joke that in Massachusetts politics, arguing about the Red Sox or politics was really kind of the same thing. You go into a bar and they might be saying something about Carl Yastrzemski or Larry Bird or somebody in Boston sports, and they would be talking about Tip O’Neill or Ted Kennedy or Kevin White or any of these figures in much the same terms. Politics is seen that way. It’s personal. There are winners and losers. There are issues, but the personalities and who they are plays a very big role in the Massachusetts style of politics—going back, at least to people like James Michael Curley, a huge figure in Boston and Massachusetts politics for virtually all of the first half of the 20th century. He was the inspiration for that famous novel, *The Last Hurrah*.

Tsongas had his own persona. It was off in its own kind of sphere and he was seen in one way. That didn’t really clash with Kennedy very much, and I don’t think they got in each other’s way. I don’t really know, but my own intuition is Kennedy would scratch his head sometimes and look at Tsongas and say, “Sometimes I’m not sure what makes this guy tick, he does odd things sometimes.” But I think they respected each other and really appreciated each other. Certainly in those later years that was very definitely true. So they always had a good relationship.

When I moved from the Tsongas staff to the Mitchell staff—now I’m from New England, so these subtleties were not lost on me, but Maine politics were different. Maine, in many ways, has many similarities to Massachusetts, and in fact, much of the electorate, at least in southeastern Maine are people who have moved from Massachusetts, and of course, way back in their colonial history they have a connection. Maine, of course, was originally part of Massachusetts Bay colony. But in terms of the politics on that particular spectrum, the way I just described Massachusetts politics, Maine is about as far away from that as you can get on the spectrum. Maine politics are extremely substantive. Figures gain some prominence in Maine, but it’s not that kind of gladiator-

politician/sports-figure type situation. It's very substantive and when you run for reelection in Maine, the first question is: Why shouldn't we send the senator back? Maine has had this history of senators who have sat in those seats for a very long time and have been very distinguished. They're viewed in that way, which is an interesting thing, particularly in a small state where you have a very small congressional delegation. In states like that, often there isn't as much distinction between the House members and the senators because they have a statewide constituency, or in the case of Maine it's two members.

In Maine there was that kind of elevated sense about what was expected from their U.S. senators, but it was tied to substance. My first real experience with that working for Mitchell was on the [William] Rehnquist nomination to be chief justice. He was already on the court when he was elevated to be chief justice. But Senator Mitchell and Senator Cohen each spent a long time on that issue. They both really struggled with it. They really studied it. They made the decision in the fashion that I described Mitchell before. He weighed all the evidence. He wasn't willing to make a decision until that decision was ripe, which was right before he voted. And he announced that he was going to vote against Rehnquist. Cohen, at roughly the same time, announced that he was going to vote for Rehnquist. The next morning there was an editorial in the *Portland Press Herald*, which is one of the two largest papers in Maine and one of the most significant papers politically, and the editorial praised both senators for the process by which they had come to "the well-reasoned decisions" that they had come to. I read that and I thought, boy, I really am in a different world! I just couldn't imagine that in the political arena of Massachusetts. There would have had to have been blood on the floor and a winner and a loser.

RITCHIE: Do you think the size of the population made the big difference there—that Maine is a relatively small state, with more territory than population?

ARENBERG: I really don't know. I feel as though my history, with respect to Maine, going way back, is probably not strong enough to make that judgement. Part of it is a lot of the state is very rural. It's immigrant history is a little bit different than Massachusetts. It didn't have the dominant urban industrial centers that Massachusetts had, although it did have the shoe industry and lost it. So it had some of those same issues that Massachusetts did. But of course, the timber industry was not a very big factor in Massachusetts. It certainly was in Maine. And the potato farmers. Northern Maine, in particular, is what in Maine they refer to as "the other Maine." I mentioned the politics of southeastern Maine, I think that's pulled Maine politics more in the direction of

Massachusetts politics in more recent history.

When most people who haven't spent much time in Maine think of Maine, they think of that tiny southeastern corner. They think of lobsters and fishermen and the quaint seacoast and all of that. Of course, Maine, by East Coast standards, is a very large state. When I traveled up there when I was Mitchell's chief of staff, I used to be fond of telling people down here that you realize when you drive from Washington to Madawaska, which is way up on the St. John River up in the bell of Maine, way up at the top, when you get to the New Hampshire border, you're roughly half way. When you're used to the smaller southern New England states, that's a little mind boggling. People don't really think about how large Aroostook County is up there.

RITCHIE: We were talking about the relationship between Senator Tsongas and Senator Kennedy and how quite often if you're from an opposite party you have a better chance of having a good relationship than if you're from the same party. One of the areas of friction has been nominations: Who gets to make them and then who gets to take credit for them when the president makes them? Was that ever a particular issue for Tsongas? Was he particularly concerned about judicial nominations and things like that?

ARENBERG: I don't really recall it ever arising as a very large issue. I can't remember any specific friction between Kennedy and him on that particular issue. He was, he was never very much tied up in the power to make judicial suggestions to the president, although certainly he did. But again, it was one of those trappings of being a senator that he wasn't all that concerned with.

RITCHIE: Especially because Ted Kennedy was a big player on the Judiciary Committee.

ARENBERG: Right. That's true.

RITCHIE: But even the timing of press releases can sometimes create friction between two senators—who takes credit for what.

ARENBERG: Right, absolutely. We had worked out a kind of protocol for that. Well, with all the senators I've worked for, eventually you developed a working relationship with the other senator—sometimes more satisfactory than others. When I first went to work for Mitchell, there was some tension between the Mitchell and Cohen's

staffs. Because of course, Senator Mitchell was appointed to the Senate and when he ran for reelection the first time, which was before I came to his staff, Senator Cohen's two most senior staffers left his staff and went up to help try to save the [David] Emery campaign in Maine, the candidate who was running against Mitchell. At least for awhile after that, it was felt by Mitchell's staff that the Cohen folks had gone a step too far and so there were some bruised feelings about that that didn't so much reflect themselves in the relationship between the senators, but certainly did within that staffs. I felt as though one of the first things I had to do coming in as a new chief of staff was have a staff meeting and say, "Look, Senator Mitchell never has to run against Senator Cohen. The most important relationship between his staff and ours is that we can get things done jointly for Maine. We have to keep that in mind." And I think we did work on improving that relationship and that relationship did strengthen some. I was always kind of proud of helping to repair the relationship between Senators Mitchell and Cohen. Later I worked with both senators on their book.

These things, even when they are primarily at the staff level, have a way of reflecting themselves in the relationship between senators almost more often than the other way around. Obviously it can work the other way around. If senators don't like each other, then that reverberates through their staffs. I think that's almost unavoidable. But I often think sometimes, in some Senate pairs, that there are problems that really have their roots in the difficulties that staffs have in working with each other. I don't want to make this too strong a point, I just think in terms of shadings. If a senator hears his staff complaining to him all the time about his colleague taking credit where he or she shouldn't have or so forth, that has a way of slightly coloring their relationship. It's almost unavoidable.

RITCHIE: What was your position on Tsongas' staff?

ARENBERG: I was his legislative director and then for a period of time I was the chief of staff. I mentioned his chief of staff had gone off to run Kennedy's campaign in the New Hampshire primary. So I stepped in and became chief of staff. But as I mentioned, the three of us were very close and our understanding was always if Kennedy's race didn't work out, Dennis was going to come back. If it did work out and he moved into the White House or something like that, well then I would stay permanently in that position. So I think of myself as having been his legislative director.

RITCHIE: How would you describe those two positions in an office like that?

What sort of were the day to day types of things that you would do as a legislative director?

ARENBERG: Okay, well certainly the principal thing is to manage the legislative operation. In Tsongas' office we probably had five or six legislative assistants, three or four legislative correspondents. Although I didn't directly oversee the press secretary, the press operation and the legislative operation have to have a close integration. I was his principal advisor on legislative issues. His chief of staff and I were very close and we also collaborated politically and so we were, together, his principal political advisors. Certainly Dennis first and me second in that regard, but we did a lot in tandem. So I think of Senate staffs, in terms of hierarchy, on a continuum from very hierarchical staffs that have a very clear chain of command. I joke that there are some members of the Senate who couldn't pick some of their junior staffers out of a police lineup if they were forced to. Because of the way the paper flow works and they deal largely with their senior staff and it's a very hierarchical structure. At the other end of the spectrum is what I describe as the collegial structure where there's a lot of access to the senator—direct access—at various levels on the staff. The Tsongas structure was very much on that collegial end of the line. The senator was very approachable by all members of the staff at whatever station and he sought their opinion. I described to you his, on occasion, calling the interns into the office and asking them what they think. So there was not a very rigid structure in terms of paper flow and all of that. That kind of more open access, in turn, generally means a different kind of interaction among staffers—more collaboration and less combat—because each staffer doesn't need to protect their “turf” in order to assure “face time” with the senator.

But my management style as a legislative director (and I think this carried through all the way) was I felt that a good legislative director empowers the LA's to be more effective in the jobs that they need to do. Rather than trying to take control of issues as they began to come to a head, I saw my role as being a sounding board for the LA's that I was supervising. When they were on the early stages of the learning curve and building a relationship with the senator, that was even more important than it was later on. But I'm proud of the legislative staffs that I served with. All three of them over all of those years had good reputations in the Senate. Foremost, it always reflects the boss. I'm not just saying that as a loyal staffer, but I've always said one of the unique things about working as a staffer in Congress is that your boss and your product are the same thing. It's inseparable. If you're doing a good job as a staff, if you're well respected, then it has to reflect well on the senator that hired you. It's virtually impossible to earn that reputation if you have a senator who's not very effective in his own regard. That's a big part of the

reputation that you earn. So a big chunk of the credit goes there. But being responsible for those legislative operations, I always felt proud that they had very good reputations in the Senate.

Those were the principal elements to the role. With Senator Levin later on, I was formally his deputy chief of staff as well, but that was really informally. That's the way the structure in the Tsongas staff operated as well. I always say that it's never quite exactly the same again as it is with the senator that you come to Washington with. We had cut our teeth together. We had come through those early wars together. Tsongas, because of the personality that he had, I don't think it's saying too much to say, he really saw us as three kind of compatriots—he, Dennis, and I—and his role in that operation was to be the senator. So he was always very personal in the relationship. When my first son was born, he was right there. Before I bought my first house, he came to walk through it and check the basement for leaks and all of that sort of thing. So that's the kind of relationship we had.

RITCHIE: You mentioned your family. The hours that are required on Capitol Hill are notorious.

ARENBERG: Yeah.

RITCHIE: How was it balancing a personal life with your professional life?

ARENBERG: Well, I think it's a difficult thing. My first wife's father had covered the Hill for the *New York Times* for many years.

RITCHIE: That was Ned Kenworthy.

ARENBERG: Ned Kenworthy, that's right. So it was a familiar drill for her. But we had three kids, Josh, Meg, and Ned, and there certainly were those times where there were places—it was always as they were growing up, "I'll be there when I get there." "I'll be there if I can." I benefitted greatly from the fact, as I described before, particularly with Tsongas, that he had young kids. He had three young daughters, Ashley, Katina, and Molly, and he understood that and he wanted to be there and it was a value for him. Anytime he could get away early, he did that. He never bought the Washington advice that senators had to be out working the "circuit" at night. He didn't expect any less of us. So I was fortunate in that I had a boss who was very compassionate about that—and actually

wanted us to get home to our kids.

Nonetheless, the Senate being what it was, particularly in those years, when Byrd was majority leader, I think Senator Byrd saw using those late night sessions as a tool. He's been clear about that recently. He saw that as a tool, as a way of controlling the Senate. At least in my perception, I've never gone back and actually quantified it, but it certainly seemed to me that we ran those late hours a lot more often than in the contemporary Senate. And there was a little less advanced warning. It was a little like, "Okay, you don't want to come to a vote on this amendment? Well, roll out the cots. Here we go!" And off we were. It got to a point where we used to refer to the "vampire Senate" because it only worked at night. Frankly, during the race when Mitchell was running for majority leader, that was a very big issue. Making the Senate more "family friendly," was the phrase. It had become an issue among particularly the younger senators because it was so difficult to run a family life. I think that was a difficult thing when my kids were young. I was later divorced, but I certainly don't blame my divorce on that.

Then when I was remarried, I married Linda Baron, my high school sweetheart. We were married in the Capitol, which was one of the really lovely things about the kind of person that Carl Levin is. When I got married 13 years ago, we were married in his what we call "hideaway offices." He has one of those offices which has a big bow window that looks straight out right on the line down the National Mall to the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. We were married in front of that window facing out at that beautiful iconic view the the president has at the inaugural and it really was a great occasion. Carl Levin and his wife Barbara played the host to that event, and Carl signed my Ketubah, which is the Jewish marriage contract. We had a great event with some classical Levin moments in it as well. Getting to that hideaway with a large group of celebrants was quite an operation. We had set it up so that guests would come in and come up to his office in the Russell Building initially, which they did. Since this was pre-9/11, although we had to arrange it with Senate Security and the Capitol Police and everything, it wasn't quite as much of a task as it probably would be these days. People were able to park reasonably close to the grounds and everything.

We gathered in his office and led a procession through the labyrinth of tunnels all the way to the hideaway. One of the comical things about that was that George Tenet, who was at that time the DCI, the Director of Central Intelligence, is a good friend of mine. He was a guest at the wedding. I hadn't thought about the particularized security that he had, which is second, I think, only to the president. Knowing the CIA Protective Service, I

don't think they even view themselves as second to the Secret Service. They would contest that. But, so there was that whole thing. I later learned from some relatives who were in the back of this group being led through the tunnel that they didn't know what it was all about but there was some guy back there talking into his sleeve saying, "We don't know where we're going. We're following some lady in a wheelchair through the tunnels." [Laughing] This was my mother-in-law, who having had a stroke, was in a wheelchair, and I was leading the group pushing the wheelchair.

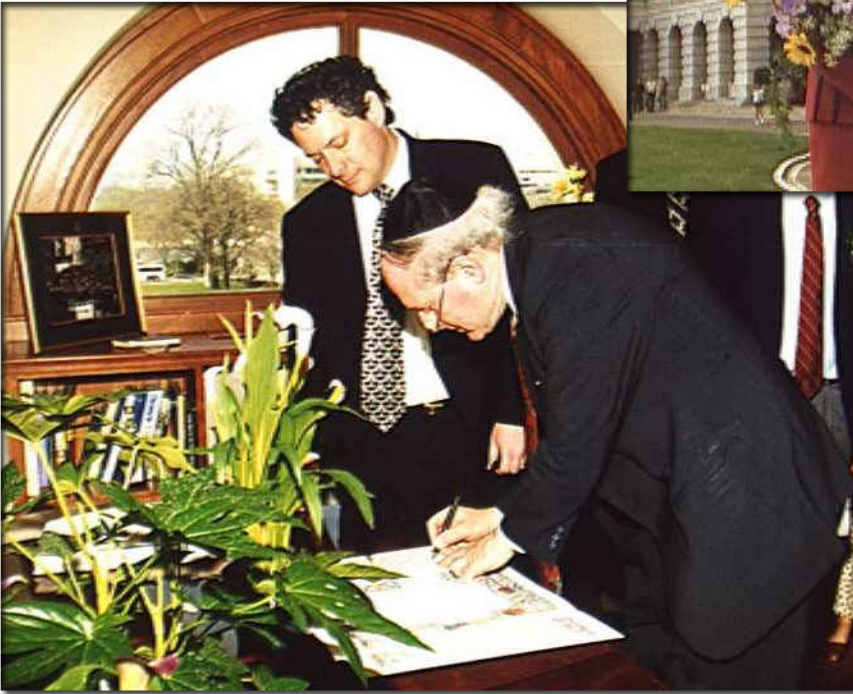
But coming back to the Levin story, we had thought this through and planned it all the way up to the point of, "I do." And we did and the wedding ended and it was a beautiful thing. We turned around and the guests were all kind of crammed into the room standing up and everything. And Senator Levin says to me, "What now?" My face fell. I hadn't thought about any kind of what now. This was, in some ways, the craziest wedding. The reception was out at a boat marina on the Chesapeake out closer to where we lived and so we had another procession through the streets that we had to lead. But at this point here we are still in the hideaway. So I said to Senator Levin, "Well, I guess people will find their way back to their cars." He said, "there's no 'finding your way.'" [Laughing] We had the photographer there and we had to go out, so Senator Levin led the group out of the Capitol while we went with the photographer out in front to take wedding pictures under the dome. We're out there doing that and suddenly I turn around and I see driving across the plaza is Senator Levin driving his car with my mother-in-law and father-in-law in the back seat. They're all waving out the window as he's driving them to their car. [Laughs] But boy I'll tell you, that's the kind of person he is.

RITCHIE: That's the Senate family at work.

ARENBERG: Absolutely. We always refer to the Levin family, and that's not just figurative. That's really true.

RITCHIE: Of course, in some cases, there's tension between the senator's family and the staff because the staff becomes the daytime family, essentially, for the senator and that creates some competition.

ARENBERG: Not true in the Levin family case. Barbara, his wife, is delightful and a great person. And his brother Sandy, who's now the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee in the House, is Carl's closest friend. They are each other's principal political advisor. When that stuff hits the fan, the first phone call goes to the brother.



They're incredibly close. They play squash, if they can't every day, as often as they can, they play squash together. It's really a lovely family and it extends through the staff in a very nice way.

The very first thing that I ever did for Carl—even before I was his staffer, still working for Mitchell, but after Levin had hired me—one of his daughters approached me because I had open access to the Senate floor as a member of the leadership staff—to arrange for senators to come off the floor and participate in a room off the floor in making a video for Carl's birthday. I don't recall all the senators, but I remember asking Senators Jay Rockefeller and David Pryor, Mark Pryor's dad. It was easy because everyone loves Levin.

RITCHIE: I wanted to go back to one other thing. You mentioned before that when Tsongas was going to have that filibuster, he said that you were his principal parliamentary advisor. Is that part of a legislative director's job, to know how to get things through on the floor? To remind the senator of the nitty-gritty legislative procedures?

ARENBERG: Yeah, it's a little bit of all of that. I always felt I had a pretty good command of the rules and strategy. But, you've got a lot of resources in the Senate. I can remember when Tsongas first invited me to come to Washington with him. As I described to you, I had already been thinking about looking for a staff job on the Hill. But when it was actually in hand, and I remember sort of that last night in Massachusetts laying awake, staring at the ceiling and thinking, oh my God, you know, I don't know anything about anything! [Laughs] How am I going to go to Washington and take on this job? It just suddenly seemed so intimidating. And then I got here and I began to realize the tremendous resources that any congressman, let alone senator, has at hand—in the Library of Congress, the Congressional Research Service. In the case of senators, the incredible skills of the Senate Library, the Parliamentarian's Office, the Legislative Counsel, the professional drafting that they do. It's amazing what the resources are. Now when you add on top of that the resources that everyone has given the Internet, it's only served to multiply all of that. The problem isn't finding information, it's synthesizing it and it's in dealing with it in little five-minute bites.

The only way I can describe life on the Hill is that I always admired the academic life and I guess that's what got me where I am now is that tremendous luxury to sit for a couple of hours and study a document and think about an issue or to write something, when for all those years I always felt like every task was done in little five-minute bites.

The phone was ringing. You were paying attention to something on the Senate floor. You had a constituent meeting. LA's were coming in looking for advice on things. You had memos to read. Suddenly the senator's back and he's calling you into his office and that trumps everything and so you're running off to that. I always thought of it in terms of the medical principal of triage. You deal with the biggest bleeder first. I always thought about it that way. You have to have the kind of personality where you're not totally defeated by the fact that there's more on your plate than you can ever possibly deal with. You have to just be able to deal with the fact that you deal with the bleeders first and you work your way down that triage to the next most important thing and you keep going.

I don't want this to sound immodest, but just in terms of describing the job, I always felt one of my greatest strengths was just being able to stay on an even keel. It was that I was usually the least excited person in the room. I could play that role with the staff that I supervised, "Okay, let's settle down. This is a crisis, but we can get through this. We've dealt with worse than this." As I built up experience over the years, if there are two things that helped me most, it was that ability to kind of slow things and settle down. It wasn't anything I hadn't seen before and we could deal with it and the sky wasn't falling in and we were going to live to see another day and all that sort of stuff. The second thing was where you started with this question, I think the experience helped a lot with the Senate ropes. The resources were always there, but knowing where to make that contact, who to reach out to, how to synthesize it, what was the most efficient way to do that. Being able to get the right person on the phone quickly because not only did you know who they were, but they'd dealt with you before. They knew who you were. All of those sorts of things were very helpful to me.

Just what you knew about the Senate was in many ways probably, in terms of the senator, probably the most—it sounds odd—but the most valuable thing was really my ability to say, "Well, I don't think the Senate will be in on that day." "We could have a 5:30 vote on that." That sort of thing. Just being able to read the rhythms of the Senate and to know what might happen next. Are we going to come to a vote on this? How late are we going to go tonight? Often it would be Senator Levin's wife, Barbara, calling me and saying, "Any chance he's going to be home for dinner? What's the prognosis?" Or the scheduler in Michigan saying, "Any chance he can do a Monday morning breakfast?" That sort of thing, some months in advance. The Senate is a very unpredictable place and very often there aren't any absolute answers, but over time with layers of experience, I'd developed the reputation as the "go-to" person on the staff who probably had the best guess about that, the most educated guess. Life in the Senate is so unpredictable in terms

of just daily life. Just in terms of knowing what to expect. What are the parameters of your day going to be? That's a very valuable skill. It has tactical applications legislatively too, of course.

It was important to me, too, because I work out every single day. It's not that I'm such a tremendously physically fit person, but I was a runner. Now I have some arthritis in my knees and I can't run. I ran some marathons in the old days, but I can't do those kind of distances much anymore. So I get into the gym every day. In the Senate, that was a tremendous challenge. In my job, I don't eat lunch. So that was a plus. I never had to take a lunch hour. But I was always looking for that moveable window of about an hour in the day when I could sneak off to the gym and get my workout in. So those skills came into play very much there because I had to be around. One of the roles for an LD is, at least in the offices I worked in, when issues came to the floor, I became the principal person on that. I advised the senator on votes. Like the senators themselves, I could never miss a roll-call vote. So the most important thing you have to know around here is: When's the next roll-call vote? Whether it's after the next recess or possibly within the hour or whatever. That's a very important piece of intelligence. And so I paid a lot of attention to that, too. And one of the things I could do for him is, again, there. The intelligence can be important just in terms of, you know, what's he going to do with his next 15 minutes or 20 minutes? Does he have time to go into this meeting? Is he going to be pulled out of that meeting? Or should we reschedule it, you know, just off the floor? You know, all of those kind of things were a part of my responsibility.

RITCHIE: How closely would you work with the Democratic secretary on figuring that out?

ARENBERG: Very closely. I knew Abby [Saffold] well. I was very close to Marty [Paone] when he was the Democratic secretary. In fact, we're having lunch later today. And close to Lula [Davis] in more recent years. And only very reluctantly after I retired from the Senate did I stop calling her on the floor to ask questions. [Laughs] I said, "Oh, you know, you really don't have to take my call anymore." But I tried to be respectful of the fact that there are always so many people coming to them looking for information and advice. But we had a very close relationship over the years. I always started my week with a call to Lula and I'd get some useful intelligence from her about what the week looked like. And we'd chew the fat and, you know, swap predictions and all that sort of thing. But they were always very helpful to me.

RITCHIE: When you came first, under Tsongas, it was before television.

ARENBERG: Right.

RITCHIE: And then afterwards C-SPAN was on in the background. But how different was life before C-SPAN?

ARENBERG: Well, one skill I have, and people like me had prior to TV, is I knew all 100 voices. You couldn't function very well without doing that. There was just a "squawk box" on my desk with an audio feed from the floor. Because if you didn't hear the presiding officer recognize "the senator from Iowa," and you didn't know the voice, then you weren't going to know—there was no way to follow what was going on on the floor. You didn't know who was saying what to whom. So that's the very first thing that was different, was I knew every senator by voice. And I think, in many ways, it was very similar even when it was on TV, where you develop a listening ability where it isn't even about the words, it's about the rhythms. You develop a sense—it's almost like animal trainers. The Senate becomes an organism to you and you can sense its tones and its moods. Suddenly I would realize that I had to pay close attention.

The voice of the majority leader was one of those things that caught your attention. When the majority leader took the floor, you might very likely be about to get a very important piece of information about what was about to happen or what was going on or so forth. So certainly his voice was one of those clues. But often it was just a question of tone. Was it just another senator droning on with a drafted speech that you didn't have to pay a whole lot of attention to or was the debate coming to a point? Was it quickening or were we about to have a roll call? Was something coming to a head? Was something very real happening on the floor? Suddenly, were two senators engaged in a real live colloquy where they were exchanging barbs or, you know, something was going on. So that was a very important thing. Then in later years, of course, the direct C-SPAN link was sitting there on my desk and one eye was on the floor, to the point now where, my wife thinks it's hysterical, but there's a TV on my desk in my office at home and I watch C-SPAN constantly. Because, after all those years, I just find it hard to be productive without the Senate droning on in the background.

RITCHIE: White noise, right?

ARENBERG: It's the white noise of my professional life. That's exactly right. And so I'm right there. In fact, I had lunch with the Levin staff yesterday and I said, "I just want you all to know that I spend more time watching the Senate floor than anybody else in this room." His chief of staff said, "Yeah, I get these midnight calls from him in which he says, 'That was a good speech Levin just made on the floor. I'm amazed he just said chutzpa in that speech. Did the speech writer write it or was it his own word?'" You know, that sort of thing. Old habits die hard.

RITCHIE: There is something that's very peaceful about hearing the reading clerk standing out and calling a quorum call. That long slow procession . . . "Mr. Levin, Mr.—."

ARENBERG: Oh yeah, right.

RITCHIE: Nothing is happening, but there's always something going on in the background.

ARENBERG: Right. And then when that quorum call speeds up suddenly, you say, "Okay, things are happening. Something's happening. The quorum call just went live." That's one of the fascinating things to me. I'm sort of the amateur Senate historian's office in that I keep all of these databases. Like, for example, all of the motions to instruct that have taken place going back for many years, I found that a kind of fascinating tool. And the different forms that it's taken: the motion to instruct; the motion to request. There's kind of gradation up to the motion to arrest absent senators. And of course, we had one of those also. But I kept this database in terms of what the vote was and who were the senators that voted against that. It always seemed an odd thing to vote against the motion to instruct the sergeant at arms to request the presence of absent senators, a responsibility they are sworn to uphold—the Constitution requires that they uphold. I always thought that was a kind of odd thing to vote against. In fact, in recent years, reflecting the gross partisan polarization that the Senate has come to, there was actually one instance in which the motion to instruct was defeated! [Laughs] In fact, I sent an email to your predecessor at the time and said, "I think we've just observed a first in Senate history." He thought that was probably right.

So I kind of collected things. There was also, as I recall it, in that very same week, there was actually a time in which the Senate actually vitiated a roll-call vote that had taken place. Without looking it up, I would butcher exactly what the circumstance was,

but I think the minority leader had forced the majority to a roll call, one of these roll calls that was kind of on a politically embarrassing thing that was being made—had to do, I think with the Senate advising President [George W.] Bush not to pardon Scooter Libby. The gloves were off. I always describe battles in the Senate to my students in this way: If you're a fan of hockey, you know that when there's about to be a fight, the gloves go flying straight up in the air. They throw the gloves up in the air, because particularly when you're on hockey skates, there's not much point to punching someone with your gloves on. If there's going to be a fight, you gotta get rid of the gloves and they throw them up in the air. In my mind's eye, I always saw the Senate that way. Everything is very collegial and everything goes along smoothly and easily. And then all of the sudden, something happens and those gloves go flying up. And that's the circumstance under which you better know the Senate rules, because the gloves are off, the courtesies are off and then it becomes a question of: what can you do under the rules? What can you prevent? It's really a question of hardball at that point, to mix my metaphors.

Well this was one of those hardball moments and they forced the majority into a roll-call vote on an embarrassing thing. The minority then came back with a more embarrassing amendment—involving Bill Clinton's pardons at the end of his term in office—in retaliation. I apologize that I can't remember exactly what they were. And if you'd like, over one of our recesses, I'll look it up and try to come back with it. But that led to a quorum call and it all got put into the back rooms, as the Senate does. They negotiated something out. They agreed to stand down and that second roll-call vote didn't take place. Then the majority leader moved to vitiate the roll-call vote that had taken place on that first embarrassing issue, and the Senate did it. It was expunged from the *Record* and away it went. I don't know whether that's true or not, but I again hypothesized to your predecessor as Senate Historian that this was probably the only time in Senate history that had ever occurred. My memory is those two things happened in the same week, so we're in a global warming period for Senate firsts, I think.

RITCHIE: Did you spend much time on the floor when you were on the staff?

ARENBERG: I episodically did. When I worked for Mitchell, I spent a lot of time on the floor and of course, as leadership staff, I had open access to the floor on and off and didn't have to wear the special tags or anything like that. As legislative director in both the Tsongas and Levin staff, and particularly in the way that I operate that position—some LD's do spend more time on the floor—I felt nailed to my desk many times. I felt that it was my responsibility to be there where the senator could reach me and that, legislatively,

that my principal responsibility was to operate through the legislative assistants and empower their ability to do things. There certainly were occasions when I went to the floor because I felt I could gain the attention of a committee staffer or someone in a fashion that another LA would have more difficulty with, but most often not. Most often, I would send an LA to the floor. But there were times, you know, again it's those historical moments. When the Senate held its debate about the expulsion of Senator Harrison Williams from the Senate, I was fascinated by that historically. It was testimony to sort of how Tsongas viewed things and our relationship that he indulged that and he just said, "Well, go to the floor." I spent those several days—at that time the staff chairs that were lined up, there was a kind of big black leather chair in the very corner of the Senate. I sat there through that whole episode and just took it in as a historical moment. It was a great indulgence. I'm not sure that I was serving Tsongas' purposes in any particular way than except that he recognized my interest in the Senate's history and indulged that and, I think, was interested in hearing about it, too. There was that.

RITCHIE: Did the Harrison Williams case give you any insights into the Senate as an institution?

ARENBERG: Certainly I think it was a very traumatic thing for all senators. I think it was a very difficult thing and most of them sat there on the floor through that whole thing, which as you know, is very rare for 100 senators to be out there on the floor. They did for the presidential impeachment, but it's hard to remember very many other occasions when that took place, aside from some very dramatic roll calls. But I think many senators stood and made some very heartfelt speeches on both sides of the issue. I think people who intended to vote to expel him with heavy hearts. He was a very well-liked senator. And those who very loyally defended him. I remember Senator Inouye leading his defense in an act of, I think, of great personal loyalty.

RITCHIE: I'll always remember I was standing in the Russell Building and Senator Stennis came to get on the senator's elevator. He turned to me without any introduction and said, "When I was a judge, I threw out every case of entrapment that came before me." Then he got on the elevator and he went away.

ARENBERG: Oh, yeah.

RITCHIE: It was obvious he felt so intense about that.

ARENBERG: Yeah, it really was a horrible circumstance for the Senate. Very revealing. I fear that something like that in today's political environment might be very different. It would get seized on in a very different way. We certainly see it when there are these ethical lapses that come up and a senator's own party turns on him instantaneously these days. That certainly didn't use to be the expectation. The first impulse of the Senate was always to circle wagons. Then let's let it play out. Let's have the Ethics Committee do its bit and everything and then we'll see. The politics about all of that has changed dramatically. It reflects our political culture of course.

RITCHIE: Well, you came in when Senator Tsongas was elected in 1978. It was in '83 that he became ill. Can you tell me a little bit about when he discovered that he was ill and how he began to make his decisions at that point?

ARENBERG: Right, right. It was a tremendous shock. I remember the day that he called the staff in and he said—and he did it almost immediately when he learned—he called us in and he sat down and he said, “I've learned that I have cancer. I've made the decision that I intend to leave the Senate.” He was very intent. He did not want to be perceived as leaving the Senate because he had cancer. He believed very strongly that learning that he had cancer had reordered his values again and that he was leaving the Senate because there was now an urgency about spending time with his family and doing those things and making sure that he had set them up financially. And his wife Niki went back to law school and that all of these things happened and that that was the linkage. It wasn't, “Oh my, I'm sick. So I'm going to leave.”

But he told us that. Of course, it was a really kind of emotional thing. I've described him. He was a very personal and direct person. I wouldn't describe him as a warm person. I think people have seen his persona enough to recognize that. He was more of a cool TV personality, I guess, is how they describe it these days. But there was a little bit of kind of distance to him. It grew out of a—it's an interesting thing, like more politicians than people realize are very shy people, and he certainly was that. If you took him out of a political circumstance where the script kind of helped with the fact that now you work the room and you shake hands and you say hello to people and everything. If you took him out of that circumstance—for example, if my father would come to visit me in the office and I'd take him into the senator's office, he became sort of, “Aw shucks, gee wiz.” [Laughs] Looking down at his shoes. Just very shy about the fact that this was my dad.

But going back to that day. It's hard for me to think of it, almost, without getting emotional about it again. After he'd done that staff meeting, he asked me if I'd drive him home. He lived in Northwest Washington. I drove through the streets of Washington feeling—we made some small talk a bit, but there was a lot of silence. I was just really trying to hold it together. I didn't know too much, really, what to say to him. He'd said, really, what he had to say to the staff. But the reason I described him as cool was that this was not a demonstrative person. This was not somebody you waited for slaps on the back and hugs from and all of that. This was the kind of person where you knew he respected and appreciated you from the way he treated you and you took all that for granted and you just knew it. But the relationship was kind of cool. We pulled up in front of his house and he just leaned across the car, put his arm around my shoulder and said, "Thanks for everything." I still choke up a little when I think of that moment. He got out of the car and went into the house. I drove the car around the corner and then just stopped and just sat there and cried.

Of course, he went on to be a presidential candidate and all of that. In many ways, he recovered and I went on with my career and my life, but I had more difficulty shaking the sense of tragedy about that than I think he did. He wrote a book about all of that called *Heading Home*, I think it's called.⁷ Wonderful. If you haven't read it, read it. It's a wonderful autobiography. I always thought that the real trick to autobiography, doing it well, is having the capacity to be really honest, to say what you were thinking at the time, even if it's embarrassing. The overwhelming instinct writing things autobiographical is naturally to clean them up and make yourself sound good in your own narrative. But I've already spoken a lot about his candor. So he was a natural at autobiography for that reason. He says all the stupid things he was thinking and everything. But the thing that stays with me, the reason I'm bringing that up is that he described the role his wife Niki played and how she just was the drill sergeant. She had the capacity to say to him, "Paul, stop feeling sorry for yourself. We've got a lot of work to do here. Let's get on with it." It's great to have somebody like that in your corner. He valued it greatly and she played a tremendous role in doing that. She's a great person in her own right. A terrific Congressperson.

That's my greatest moment about that period in time. Then when he did get closer to leaving, he called the staff into his office—he had the typical Senate office with all the memorabilia hanging on the walls—and he said, "I want each one of you to pick whatever

⁷Paul Tsongas, *Heading Home* (New York: Random House, 1986).

thing on this wall means the most to you and take it off the wall and take it home.”

RITCHIE: What did you take?

ARENBERG: I hung back and I tried to let a lot of the more junior staff go first. One thing I appreciated was that he had a—I mentioned earlier he was one of the few senators to oppose the Haig nomination in the Reagan administration. That had actually appeared in a Doonesbury cartoon. [Gary] Trudeau had signed the cartoon and sent it to him. So I took that and I have that on my wall. But he gave me some statues that he'd brought from Zimbabwe and some other things. As I may have mentioned to you, I have the world's largest Tsongas archives, I think, including what's in the official archives at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell. I've tried to help them with some things, too.

RITCHIE: After he left and he went into therapy and remission, were you surprised when he came back into politics?

ARENBERG: Yes. I mean, he couldn't help himself. He went off and he had bought a house on Cape Cod and he spent time there, and he got involved in Cape Cod conservation issues. Massachusetts has, I think it's an educational commission that advises the governor and he became the head of that and got into educational issues. So there was never an idle Tsongas moment, even when he was suffering through the more difficult aspects of a bone marrow transplant and the various things he was going through. Chemotherapy and that sort of thing. But he always soldiered on.

I'll tell, again, a funny personal story about his making the decision to run for president. It was a total surprise to me. He would come to Washington from time to time. He had joined a Boston law firm, Foley Hoag. Dennis Kanin, who had been our chief of staff, was one of his partners there. When they would come to Washington to see a client or something, he would call and we'd frequently have lunch. At this point I was working for Mitchell. Mitchell was already majority leader at that time and I was doing the liaison with the Senate Intelligence Committee. The chief of staff of the committee at that time was George Tenet, who I've mentioned before, who went on to be the DCI and went into the Clinton administration and then stayed on into the Bush administration there. But at that time Boren was the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. Boren and Tsongas, unlikely political bedfellows, were friends. Tenet was the chief of staff. He greatly admired Tsongas. George is a Greek American, as is Tsongas, and he had never met him. He had been a staffer to Senator [John] Heinz from Pennsylvania, the

Republican senator. He'd been a staff member for Heinz on the Energy Committee when Tsongas was on the Energy Committee, so he'd observed him from afar and he'd always admired Tsongas and watched his career. Now we were good friends. I had always said to him, "One of these times when Tsongas comes to Washington for lunch, I'll invite you and you'll get to meet him."

So I get this call from Paul and he says, "Why don't you come over to the Marriott. We'll have lunch downstairs. I'd like to catch up." Okay. So later that morning I was in George's office down in the Intelligence Committee and I said, "Hey, I'm having lunch with Paul Tsongas today. Why don't you come along? Paul's very informal. He won't mind." So George tags along. We go over to the Marriott and we sit down to lunch. Dennis is there and Paul's there and we're having lunch. We had the rudimentary introductions and then we had the most stilted, silent lunch that I have ever been through. I mean there's almost hardly any words spoken the whole time. We finish lunch and we get up to shake hands and everything and we're walking back and George is saying, "Oh, I don't think he liked me. I think he was very upset that you dragged me over there." I said, "Look, I'm close to Paul Tsongas and Dennis Kanin. We've been close for years and years and years, and this is not him. Something is going on. I don't know what it is, but it doesn't have anything to do with you. And we'll do it another time."

I get back to my office and the phone rings and it's Paul and he says, "Could you come back to my room?" I said, "Okay, I'll be right over there." All the way over I'm thinking—you can guess what I'm thinking: Oh my God, he's got cancer again. I get into the room and he says, "Sit down." I sit down on the edge of the bed and he says, "What would you think about my running for president?" Well, the first thing that goes instantly through my mind is, Aha, that explains everything! [Laughs] Obviously he wasn't going to discuss it. He had an agenda and it was right there. That's what he wanted to talk about and I'd blown it. So we go through that. He had written this book, I think it's called something like *Call to Economic Arms*.⁸ Since him, it's sort of become automatic that if you're a presidential candidate, you write a book now. It comes out while you're campaigning. That sort of thing. He had written the book—really, this is an absolute Tsongas idea—he laid down his whole philosophy about where the Democratic Party should be and where it had to go on issues and so forth. Then he went around to all of the people that were being talked about as potential presidential candidates, people like

⁸Paul Tsongas, *A Call to Economic Arms: Forging a New American Mandate* (Boston: Foley, Hoag & Eliot, 1991).

[Richard] Gephardt, Mario Cuomo, and Al Gore and so forth, the people that were being talked about taking on George [H. W.] Bush, Sr., in the next presidential election. He tried to say to them, look, I've written this platform. I want you to run for president on this platform. [Laughs]

Of course that didn't happen. First of all, it was a period in time when Bush, Sr., had very high favorability. His favorability ratings, in the wake of the first Gulf War, were up in the high 80s. All of the front line Democratic candidates were kind of shying away from entering the fray, as you'll recall. So in this subsequent meeting at the Marriott, Senator Tsongas says to me, "Well, I've tried to sell the principal candidates on running on these principles and nobody wants to do it. So it isn't that I really want to be president, it's that I want somebody to run on these principles, so I'm going to have to do it myself." I said, "Well I only have one piece of advice. My one piece of advice is don't ever tell anybody that. That you don't want to be president and it's only because you have this platform to run on. It's great that you have a platform. It's great that you're committed to your platform, but you want to be president so that you can do these things. Presidential candidates that don't have the fire in their belly don't do very well." So that was my one piece of advice to him.

In a lot of ways, I would have liked to have been involved in his presidential campaign. I did have kind of a kitchen cabinet occasional phone call kind of role in all of that, but I was working for the majority leader. I had a job I loved in the Senate. And I was going through—it was right in the divorce period for me. It just wasn't a time when I could go off and campaign around the country. So I never even seriously considered it. But his campaign was a fascinating campaign. He won in New Hampshire and he came down here and won in Maryland and then went on to Florida. It may be my own myopia, but if he'd had the kind of money that it took to run in Florida with whatever it is, nine or ten media markets, which was the next major state, then Clinton would have had a very difficult time, I think, with him all the way through the primaries. But he didn't have the kind of money that Clinton had. It was coming in fast and furious after those first two victories, but not at a rate that would have been required to run the kind of media campaign in Florida that would have been required. We all know now what the history of that was. He was though, the last one standing against Clinton. He started at the back of the pack, but outlasted Bob Kerrey, Tom Harkin and Jerry Brown. But I think he's one of those people, there's a handful in recent history, that run for president and fail at it but come away from that national campaign enhanced in the process. And I think Paul Tsongas is one of those people, that he's remembered well by people that remember him

really only for that campaign.

RITCHIE: He did certainly much better than anybody predicted at the beginning.

ARENBERG: Oh, yeah.

RITCHIE: He won about 10 primaries, I think.

ARENBERG: Yeah, he did.

RITCHIE: Do you think he had much impact on Clinton?

ARENBERG: Oh, I think he had enormous impact on Clinton, because I used to kid him that all of the things they fought about in the primaries, when Clinton became president, he adopted the Tsongas position. But it was a very interesting thing to watch, because Clinton had a very tough edge to him, obviously, and in the early stages, Tsongas viewed him as kind of a friend, a nice guy, liked him personally. Tsongas was never the kind of person where because you were a political opponent, you had to be an enemy. He just didn't. I described the Brooke experience, but he was like that. I mentioned Paul Guzzi, where they'd had that bruising primary, they went on to be great personal friends for many years after that. Guzzi became the head of Wang Laboratories, which Tsongas brought into Lowell to be one of the anchor corporations in Lowell's renaissance.

It was very characteristic of him in the Senate, too, to reach across the aisle. I don't mean to go off on another tangent, but his career is full of such amendments. The famous Alaska one was Tsongas-Roth. Tsongas-Lugar was the famous Chrysler one. But there were lots of others, many, many smaller ones. There were Tsongas-Quayle amendments. He loved working with Jesse Helms in the Foreign Relations Committee. He was great at that reaching across the aisle. Personally, I think he loved the perversity of it. I used to tell him, "You have much more trouble working with your natural allies than you do with your natural opponents." He liked that kind of thing.

He fell into that with Clinton. Then when in Florida Clinton's elbows became very sharp and they began attacking Tsongas for being hostile to Social Security because, as a neoliberal, he said some things that were a little beyond the liberal Democratic orthodoxy. I described how he had been critical of Israel years earlier on Lebanon. That was dragged out again. Obviously, the senior vote is very important in Florida. The Jewish vote is very

important in Florida. Tsongas felt that his friend, Bill Clinton, had really stepped over the line, not on the issues, but on the political spin it was given. He felt very bruised by that. It wasn't like him to be bitter for very long, but when he withdrew from the race and went down there and endorsed Clinton, it wasn't in the usual sort of perfunctory, okay, now I'm going to be the good Democrat. He really extracted some negotiations out of that. Not what are you going to give me, but let's talk about the issues that we disagree on, and how far can I get you to concede and that sort of thing. Then over the years, when Clinton was in the White House, I don't want to say it became a warm personal relationship, but it did get patched up considerably. Clinton came to Lowell and campaigned for Niki Tsongas when she ran for that seat just a few years ago.

RITCHIE: Tsongas had made economic issues a real core of what he was running for and Clinton took the "It's the economy, stupid" theme.

ARENBERG: Yeah, but at that point Clinton was running against Tsongas, Clinton was the standard liberal. That's what I mean, in a way. It's probably overstating it to say that Tsongas had an enormous impact on him, as if the experience of running against him changed how he behaved as president. I'm certain that's overstating it, but the point I am making is that how Clinton actually governed as president was—if you go back on almost issue after issue and you go back and you look at the things that they struggled over in the primaries, that Clinton as president was much closer to governing in the way that Tsongas was proposing. I think that's less Tsongas having influence over him than it is that Tsongas was being Tsongas and Clinton was being the politician running for president. I don't mean that in a critical way. Like most political figures would, he was shaping his characterization of things in a way that had resonance in the constituency, the electorate, that he was appealing to in the primaries. Tsongas was a bit more of a straight line in that way. He paid less attention to where he was and what the constituency was doing than saying what it is that he wanted to say. As always, even as a presidential candidate, Paul Tsongas was extremely candid. He was running on that book. [Laughs]

RITCHIE: One account said that Tsongas said what he thought and Clinton said what he thought people wanted him to say.

ARENBERG: That's more unkind than I would quite make it, but I think there's a kernel of truth in that.

RITCHIE: In which case Clinton was more traditional as a politician.

ARENBERG: That's a good way to say it. He ran a traditional Democratic presidential campaign down there, for a Democratic primary electorate. He knew full well he was trapping Tsongas on his right and driving home a cutting edge on several specific cutting edge issues.

RITCHIE: They talk about some people being natural legislators and some being natural executives. Do you think, if he had won, would Tsongas have become a strong executive having spent his career in the legislative branch?

ARENBERG: Probably not. [Laughs] I shouldn't say it that way. I think he would have been a great president. Because I think an important part of being a great president is being able to recognize the skills in the people around you and to bring the right team to bear. Who the people a president surrounds himself with are so critically important. To me, the case study in that is the Reagan presidency: When he had first-class, competent people running his White House, he was admired for running a great and competent presidency. At other times, when things like Iran-Contra were happening, it was because the leadership wasn't there. It was a lot less relevant that it was the same Ronald Reagan on the top of all of those structures. I admired both Baker periods—both Howard and James Baker—when they were chiefs of staff there. So I think the ups and downs of the Reagan administration really demonstrate that. I said this to you earlier, Tsongas always attracted some really wonderful people. People that went on to do great things. And I think he would have been that kind of president, as somebody like Jack Kennedy was.

Tsongas, by the way, was greatly inspired by Robert Kennedy. So there's always this Kennedy thread that runs through. But to address, specifically, the question you asked, I do think he was more naturally a legislator than an executive. Although I wouldn't say it was so much the executive qualities. He had some of the impatience with the legislative process that we often see from people who have been governors who come to the Senate and are typically very dissatisfied here because they're used to making decisions. And when you're governor and you make a decision, something happens out there immediately in the real world. You pick up the phone and the state police go somewhere or an agency does something or things happen. Most of the time it doesn't work that way for a senator. You make a decision and something happens 10 years later. The legislative process, as we both know, is painfully slow and you have to love that process for what it is and revel in it. I think Tsongas definitely had that impatience about it. As I described before with the Mass Plan, he would often find unconventional ways to just go about doing things. Okay, we can't move the legislation. Let's just go do it anyway

in this way or that way. Or I'll just call for it. Or we'll find somebody else to do it. Or I'll write a book. So there was that kind of impatience. In that respect, he wasn't the classic senator's senator, certainly. I would never describe him in that way. But I don't think he was exactly an executive personality either.

RITCHIE: When he announced that he wasn't going to run for reelection, what did you think about doing for yourself at that stage? Did you ever think about going back to the university? Or did you decide that you really wanted to stay in Washington?

ARENBERG: Well, at that point, I had been at the Senate for six years and I had been in Washington for 10. I wanted to stay in the Senate. I was probably unique on the Tsongas staff in that regard. But I always thought of myself as a participant observer. There was always this sort of—I don't want to make it sound too grand by calling it kind of an academic perspective, but there was always that part of it for me. This was my PhD. [Laughs] And it was my political statement, too. There was an activist part of it. It was, as I say, participant observer. But I loved the Senate. I do to this day. I miss it very profoundly. I loved being here. It wasn't easy for me to leave. I could have stayed here forever, in many ways. And I felt that way when Tsongas left. There was also that sense of tragedy. They weren't giving him, at that point, too much time to live. A few years. So I was losing a close friend and a boss and I felt as though I could count on the fingers of one hand the number of senators that I would want to work for.

Although I wanted to stay in the Senate, I also had a very deep philosophy about who you chose to work for as a Senate staffer. First of all, I've already described myself as a true believer, so there was the political litmus test. It had to be someone that I agreed with 95-plus percent of the time. There were a number of people like that. Then there's the personality factor. I knew I would never again have quite the same experience. Paul Tsongas in many ways was like an older brother to me. We were personal friends. He was my boss. We had come through the fires together. I didn't expect to replicate that, but it had to be somebody who I knew I could live with personally, too. And you know who those people are. When you spend time, as you do, around the Senate for many years, you know, you don't have to be in their office. You don't even have to know them all that much, personally. You come to understand what the various characters in the Senate are all about and you know the ones that would be difficult for you to work for even if you agreed with them all the time. So when I boiled it down using both of those standards, there were really only about a handful of people that I could work for. I had been a legislative director and chief of staff, so there were really only one or two jobs each that

were even appropriate. I didn't think there was all that great a possibility that I was going to find a job opening that fit and be able to continue to stay in the Senate. Although I was really on the lookout for that.

In terms of expertise, I mean I'd been this kind of great generalist. I hadn't finished my PhD, so I didn't feel as though I had a lot of really viable academic alternatives. I was always prepared to move back to Boston. I loved Boston and New England and I'd grown up there. There was always that option. But I began to talk to some environmental groups that had been involved in the Alaska Lands Bill and were part of the Alaska Coalition. I was considered for and in fact offered a very nice job at the National Wildlife Federation. But at roughly the time that I was going through that process and talking to people, a mutual acquaintance—actually the mutual acquaintance was Martha Pope, who went on to be secretary of the Senate and sergeant at arms later on. But Martha was then working for the Environment Committee. She was a Mitchell staffer on that committee. I ran into her at an event about Alaska at the Interior Department or something. I think Andrus was there and they were unveiling a bust or a portrait. It was something like that. So there were a lot of the old Alaska cronies who showed up. Martha came over and said, "You know, George Mitchell's chief of staff is leaving and you'd be perfect for that job. You should talk to him." I said, "Well, thanks for that." Remember I said that I could count the senators I would want to work for on one hand. That's one of the fingers on that hand! [Laughs]

I'd been around for six years. I thought I knew how things operated in the Senate. I thought to myself, these things don't sit there on the vine very long. They're open and shut. This is going to be a fast decision. Senators don't wander around without chiefs of staff for very long. I'd better get cracking, you know? So I went back to the office and I immediately went in to see Tsongas. There was a vote coming up on the floor and I asked him if he'd approach Senator Mitchell for me and he said of course, he'd be glad to do that. He went up to Mitchell on the floor and Mitchell said, "That's great. Have him call my office and come right over." So I called over there and set something up. I came over there. All of this was within a couple of hours of having run into Martha at the Interior Department. I'm now sitting in Mitchell's office with him interviewing about this job. So I'm thinking, man, this is how things happen in the Senate. [Laughs] This is all going to be over in a week or so. Think back to what I said about the judge and the decision-making process. We had what I perceived as a marvelous rapport right off. I enjoyed the session. It was very positive. He said very nice things. I left.

I came to know Gayle Cory, who, I don't know if you knew Gayle, but she was a longtime Senate staffer. She was Mitchell's scheduler. She had served as personal secretary, or scheduler, to Senator Muskie when Mitchell was a Muskie staffer. So she was on a whole different plane with Senator Mitchell. She knew him as George and they had a kind of personal relationship. Although she didn't aspire to being a Senate chief of staff. She didn't have all of the tools that you would necessarily associate with a chief of staff in the Senate. She was a very seasoned professional. Politically smart person who knew everybody in the Senate and had been around. Sort of the perfect person to plug in and serve that role on an interim basis. Gayle and I became friends almost immediately. I liked her right away. She liked me. We really clicked. But I also came to realize quite quickly that she added to Mitchell's comfort level in doing what he would do anyway, which is make a very deliberative decision.

This period I'm talking about was January of '84. I ultimately went to work for Mitchell, I believe it was October 1st, 1984. So you can see it was a deliberative process. I certainly had no notion of that going in there that day. Even as I came to realize this was going to be a deliberative process, I underestimated quite how deliberative. Of course, I had the luxury of—I was serving on the staff with a sitting senator. I could quite comfortably be there all the way until he left office the following January. He was encouraging all of his staff to take whatever time and effort they needed to go find their next job and so forth. So there was a lot of job hunting going on and all of that. I had it very comfortable. There was nothing driving me, except there was this whole thing with the Wildlife Federation. So my approach to that was to go to them and just put it all on the table and say, "Look, this is a wonderful job. I'm very likely to take it. Except for this one thing, which is I'm being considered for this job with Senator Mitchell as his chief of staff. I love the Senate. I want to stay there. If he offers it to me, I will take it. If you're willing to give it some time and wait, I'm very likely to take this position if Senator Mitchell decides otherwise." They hung in there not all the way to October. I eventually turned them loose. I had some pity at some point. But they did hang in there for quite awhile, which I was very thankful for and very honored by. I had stopped considering other possibilities at that point.

Periodically, I would call Senator Mitchell. He would take my calls personally, so I knew I wasn't being brushed off or anything, you know? When you call up and a senator immediately gets on the phone, you know you're being considered in a serious way. And he would say that. He was saying, "You know, I think you're a great candidate." He said to me, "I think you're the leading candidate. But there are a few people from Maine that I

want to interview. I haven't quite finished my process and everything." And, "I'll get back to you." I'd be very respectful of that and maybe wait another month or something like that. And then there would be another phone conversation like that. But the phone conversations were so reinforcing that I just kind of hung in there with it. Ultimately, he did hire me.

So this process of having over 34 years, having already said how proud I am of having worked for these three senators. The level of luck, when I think back to it, it makes my knees knock to think about the serendipity involved in each of those jobs coming up right at the time that I had the need for that job. It happened again when Mitchell announced he was leaving the Senate. Again, I had a certain amount of overlap, so I had a little more time to be comfortable about it. But I did again learn from a third party contact in the Senate. Somebody that I knew said, "Well, you know, Senator Levin's looking for a legislative director." In that case, I knew his chief of staff, Gordon Kerr. I called Gordon and he said, "This is a great idea. Come on right over." I went over there. He took me right in. I had a very nice meeting with Senator Levin. I went back to my office. Gordon called back and said, "Can you come back this afternoon? He's got a couple more questions for you." I went back again in the afternoon and he said, "Do you want the job?" It was interesting, his biggest hesitation was, he said, "You've been leadership staff. Why would you want to step down to working for a senator like this and be his legislative director?" And I said very honestly, "You know, Senator, I don't consider it a step down to be the principal legislative advisor for a United States senator, particularly one of your stature. I feel lucky to have done the things with Senator Mitchell I have, to have been on the leadership staff. I think it's added to my bag of skills and some of the things I know about the Senate, but I'd be very proud to do this job." And I meant that.

I never felt that I had somehow taken a step down the ladder or something, moving from a leadership staff. I got that question a lot. The same thing happened within the Mitchell staff, when I moved from being his chief of staff to doing Iran-Contra and then, ultimately, the last position I had with him, I was national security advisor to the Senate majority leader, was my title. It wasn't about that. It was can I serve a senator that I really respect? These twin pillars of—does it serve my desire to play a role in doing the kinds of things I want to do, number one? And number two, this kind of observer thing. Am I going to learn from this? I guess I keep saying it, but I can't express how lucky I feel, both with the quality of people that I've worked for, but just having had the opportunity. I don't think people who haven't spent time in the Senate can fully appreciate just what a long shot it is for those right jobs to come along at the right time and land in them.

RITCHIE: You mentioned that you had worked in a leadership office with Senator Mitchell, but when you went to join Senator Mitchell's office, it was way before.

ARENBERG: That's right. It was on his personal staff. It was as his chief of staff.

RITCHIE: But did you see any kind of a future for him like that? I mean, did you anticipate that he would rise as high as he did?

ARENBERG: Well, Byrd had just appointed him chairman of the DSCC, so it was clear that he was on a leadership track or thinking in that way and thought of in that way in a way that Tsongas—as I say, he wasn't "a man of the Senate" in that same sense. All things were possible with Tsongas. You never knew what he was going to aim at next and where he was going to go, governor, president, but I didn't expect Senate leadership was ever going to be part of that. With Mitchell, there was that theoretical potential, but did I see him as a potential challenger to Robert Byrd or something? Boy, I didn't. I have to admit. When I began to serve as his chief of staff, I began to learn and realize that there were senators who were urging him to do that. Who did see him that way? But I thought, we've gotten more used to it now, but I thought, boy, he's really junior to be thought of as a majority leader. I thought of people like Byrd and Mansfield and Lyndon—I guess Lyndon Johnson hadn't been here all that long either, but based on what I had experienced so far, I didn't think of someone who had been in the Senate a shorter period of time than I had been. I didn't quite think of it that way.

I had great respect for George Mitchell, but I quickly came to realize that I had underestimated him in a lot of regards. Well, the world realizes now what a formidable man he is, but I came to realize that pretty quickly, too, working for him. He became chairman of the DSCC, and so I certainly saw that potential was there. As things began to develop on that leadership track, there was a lot of discussion going on in the caucus, as you know. There had been an almost quixotic challenge to Byrd in, I guess it was '86—

RITCHIE: '86, Lawton Chiles—

ARENBERG: Was it '86 when Chiles challenged him? Yeah, it was almost quixotic at first. It was very late in the game. It didn't seem very likely. But it brought to the surface a lot of these kind of bubbling things that were happening. As I mentioned before, this is remarkable to people who don't live in the Senate, but if you do stop and think about it in any depth, you realize that this is so much a part of people's lives that

how the Senate affects the rest of their lives, their families, and how it operates, is a kind of big issue. Senator Byrd's leadership style as majority leader involved using a lot of these things as leverage. He spent a lot of time in Washington and I think because of the era when he had begun here, I don't think he saw going home to their states in quite the same way that a lot of other senators did. There were the late nights and all of that. And so there was some tension building up around that. It was an era in which there was—not only in the Senate, it was happening across the Congress—more junior members were pushing for a bigger share of the power and how things were operating and more consultation. I'm not the only observer to say that Senator Byrd's leadership style was closer to the vest, that bright red vest that he wore all the time. [Laughs] So I think, in a sense, the Chiles challenge laid bare some of these things. I think even that Senator Byrd made some—you'd know this better than I—but Senator Byrd began making some promises to some of his colleagues about what he might do if he were reelected, what he might do in the future.

Two years hence, the challenges in the caucus became more serious. Senator Mitchell, I think, was very grateful to Senator Byrd for having appointed him as chairman of the DSCC. So I think that there would not have come a time in which Senator Mitchell would have entered a challenge to Senator Byrd. I don't know that for a fact. It's not something that the senator ever said to me directly, but that was certainly my reading of the situation. At least not in 1988. But of course, Senator Inouye did challenge him and then Senator Johnston jumped into it. And then Senator Byrd began making decisions about what he wanted to do and taking the chairmanship of the Appropriations Committee and becoming president pro tem. That's really the point at which Mitchell entered the leadership race.

As, I mentioned before making the Senate more “family friendly,” quietly became a big part of that campaign. And, as I've said to you before, my perception of leadership races is it's a little like the election of the queen of the prom. I don't mean to be disrespectful about it, but there's a real kind of personality element to it. It's very much a senator's senator to senator kind of operation. I think even senior staff have a very imperfect window into what's going on, if at all. It's something that senators do amongst each other on a very personal basis. As I may have said to you, my rule of thumb is that what's going on in a leadership race—that someone's strength in a leadership race is inversely proportional to how publicly they're running for it. Because the only reason to run for a leadership post in the Senate out in the public is because you're not doing very well in the caucus and you're kind of trying to create a perception and some buzz and

maybe get some of your colleagues thinking, well, maybe something's really happening here. Maybe some of my colleagues aren't telling me, maybe there's movement and I'm just not plugged into it, or something like that. But if you feel like you've got the votes or you're close to the votes or you're the frontrunner or something like that, the last thing in the world you want to do is rock that boat.

That was kind of the pattern of that race. Senator Mitchell is a very careful vote counter. He went to every Democratic senator's office and visited them, looked them in the eye. I wasn't in the room, but I know how he is. He asked them direct questions, very specific questions. He didn't count something as a commitment that wasn't a very deep and personal and specific commitment. As such, his count was what it was all the way through. He had very specific counts, they were hard-headed, and in the end very accurate. He had the votes very early in the game, I believe. And ultimately the count was what his count was. He knew where the votes were. I've said to you before, I'm not sure whether it was on the record or not, but I don't believe that senators lie to each other about their commitments in those kind of races. That's the conventional wisdom. That's the conventional explanation for the fact that when you read published reports and when you add up the votes that leadership candidates are claiming, it adds up to more senators than there are in the caucus. [Laughs] That's the simple obvious explanation. But the distinction I'm making is I don't think they lie to each other.

I think it's in the nature of senatorial communications with each other, because it's a body of 100 people and there's always this kind of lubrication that needs to take place in their interactions. They have to deal with each other on a million issues. They're all powerful, so they are all significant to each other in terms of the things that they want to get done. Much happens in the Senate by unanimous consent. And, because of the filibuster rules, they all have enormous leverage. So, they are very careful not to offend each other. When they go after something like a commitment in an election like that and they get sort of a slightly indirect—an arm around the shoulder and, “I always thought you were a great guy, George,” and, “I think you'd make a great leader,” and stuff like that. It's human nature. The tendency, if you're not very disciplined about it and you're a candidate, is to check that one off on your list and say, okay, that's another one. But meanwhile that person is walking away from that encounter and mopping their brow and saying, “Whew, I just dodged another one.” I think that leads to these kind of inflated counts.

But that was a very interesting race because the conventional wisdom all the way through was entirely wrong. I think it was the almost universal belief in Washington outside of the Senate was that Danny Inouye was going to be the majority leader. He had much greater seniority. Everybody in the Senate likes him. He's a very beloved senator, a very effective guy. But Mitchell had incredible qualities. Very widely respected for his wisdom and his skills. I think the biggest knock was that he came from Maine and could he raise money for the party? And did he know the floor? At that time, of course, everybody had been recently through the Byrd experience, so it was thought of as a characteristic of a majority leader that you had to be a very skillful parliamentarian. Since that time, we've come to recognize that they need people at their elbow who can do that, but it doesn't need to be a personal quality.

RITCHIE: What about that issue of being the voice and the face of the party on television? Was that becoming a factor in the leadership choice?

ARENBERG: You know, I don't remember it. I think it did. Certainly Senator Byrd had not been that. I think that was one of the arguments out there, is that we need somebody that can be more effective. I think that's a later development in terms of thinking about majority leaders. At that time, they weren't yet the principal person on the Sunday morning news show interviews and that sort of thing. That really kind of came to fruition with Mitchell—maybe Howard Baker. But I think in the sense that the Senate was now on TV, the method of articulation. Certainly, Robert Byrd is articulate. He's right up there with the Senate orators in history, in a certain fashion, but not in the sense we would think of as translating into a party-wide political asset as the face of the Senate on C-SPAN. So I think in that sense maybe it was already an issue. And I think that role, that sort of face of the party role, grew. Of course, it is episodic. It becomes more important in periods when the White House is controlled by the other party and the Senate majority leader or the speaker, one or the other, really has the potential for becoming the face of the opposition.

RITCHIE: There's always the question of whether the senators want the leader to be the face of the party or whether they want the leader to get out of the way so that they can step up to the microphone.

ARENBERG: Yeah. I've always felt that the principal factors that come into play are personality and personal relationships. Ideology plays somewhat of a role. I think that's probably increasing now because it's increasing in every aspect of the Senate.

We've talked a lot about the increase in polarization and the increase in homogenization of the caucuses. So I think there would be a much greater tendency today to apply a litmus test to the leader. Are their credentials sufficient in terms of that homogeneous Democratic position? It would be much less likely to have a maverick leader. And I think really big factors for senators are things like the falling dominoes. I don't want to make it sound too crass. It's self interest, but after all, part of the business of a senator is how can I do the job of being a senator most effectively? How can I get things done for my state? How can I maximize that? One of the tools is having a close relationship with the leader of my party who can really facilitate things, who can help advance my bills and bring things to the floor.

Then there are these falling dominoes. If somebody becomes leader, do they give up a committee chairmanship? Who then moves into that chairmanship? What does that open up? What are the openings that are going to be created by whether this guy moves up or that guy or that woman? So senators spend time mapping that out and saying, well, what does it mean in terms of my ability, my power—my ability to get things done? What does it mean for me in the sense of what can I do as a senator? How can I be more effective in this decision I make in terms of who's leader? And then the other big one, obviously, is who can do the best job of leading the caucus? And link to . . . You know, one of the things I tell my students is that there's a very important link that runs between this increased polarization and the increased homogenization of each of these polarized parties. That's almost an engine that the increased polarization—they pull further apart, they become more homogeneous. As they become more homogeneous, it drives them further apart and that becomes stronger.

But another part of that is that it leads to stronger leadership. It greatly strengthened the hand of the Speaker in the House. As we both know, Senate leaders don't have those same kinds of powers and it's much harder to exercise leadership power in the Senate. Nonetheless, a homogenized party is much more likely to grant greater powers to that majority leader to be out there as the spear point of that argument and to want to energize that leader to put pressure on the outliers in the caucus to increase the homogeneity by pulling them back in, by putting pressure on them. Because the more like-minded the caucus is, the less they have to worry about the caucus going off in a direction that's not consistent with where they want things to go. When the caucuses were more heterogeneous, they didn't want the leaders to be able to lead it all that effectively because they were worried about, you know, were they going to go off and do something? If you were a southern Democrat, were they going to go off and do something that wasn't

in your interest back home?

RITCHIE: Their job was to straddle the divisions.

ARENBERG: Exactly.

RITCHIE: In fact, we have a cartoon of Everett Dirksen standing on top of two elephants but they're going in opposite directions.

ARENBERG: Oh yeah [Laughs]

RITCHIE: And he's doing it with agility.

ARENBERG: Yes, exactly.

RITCHIE: One other thing about George Mitchell that interests me is the fact that he started out on the Senate staff. He worked for Senator Muskie. There has been, lately, a new type of senator who started out as a staff person. Tom Daschle started out that way. And Trent Lott was in the House on the staff.

ARENBERG: Right.

RITCHIE: But what was it like to work for a senator who had, himself, been a staff member?

ARENBERG: Well I always joked that George Mitchell thought the only reason he had a staff was because he couldn't do it all himself. [Laughs] I think at a certain level he knew he was better at every individual staff member's job than they were. Now there may be other senators whose egos tell them that, but George Mitchell knew it because he'd done it. [Laughs] So there was that, you know? The scheduler was never quite as adept at using the airline manuals and that sort of thing as he was. She'd tell him, "There are no flights that late." He'd be like, "Well, let me see," and he'd grab the book. So there was always that element of, "I don't have the time to do this, but I could really write this speech better. I could do that." He would never say that to you in that way, but he'd been in the staff. He understood those connections in a way that I think senators that haven't been staffers never quite do. It's sort of interesting. They see one face of the staff and sometimes what goes on in the background back here can be very opaque to them.

In the case of Senator Levin, he almost kind of likes it to be opaque. As legislative director, if I'd say, "Well, it's not so-and-so who handles that, it's so-and-so." He'd say, "I don't want to know all that. Just put it together. Make it happen. Get the right person in here." That kind of thing. Mitchell knew the wires behind the motherboard a little better than that. Although he also, on the other side of that coin, he had grown up in the Senate in a different era with a senator who was himself a very prominent senator of a very different era with a very strong personality. He greatly admired Muskie. And there were certain kinds of demands that were a part of doing the job for Ed Muskie, and a certain separation. No matter what the personal relationship was, the senator was a senator. In that sense, Mitchell carried that forward. I always had a great relationship with him. I always felt very close to him. But you might notice that I refer to Paul. I refer to Carl. But it's always Senator Mitchell. I think that's out of respect for the respect that he had for that title, which I think grows out of cutting his teeth working with Muskie.

I think comparing him in a positive way to the positive attributes of Ed Muskie is something that would please him very much. Recognizing that he had any of the tendencies in terms of anger or, you know, that side of treatment of staff or so forth, if I suggested that there was any of that, I think he'd probably be pretty shocked. Even at times we would have people come and join the staff that had been from Maine and had even had a personal relationship in the past. I'm thinking of one person that used to play tennis with him when he was a lawyer in Maine, another lawyer. They'd play tennis and everything and he knew him as George. He came here and joined the staff for awhile. At first it took some adjustment. He came to me and said, "Have I done something? I really feel like this wall has gone up." I said, "No, it's not a personal thing. It's a part of the office. It's like knowing the president before he was president. At that moment, when he takes the oath and he walks away from it, he could be your closest friend, you still refer to him as 'Mr. President.' You don't call him 'Barack.'" And George Mitchell had that. He had grown up in that. So I think that's another element of having those long Senate roots that went back. Having had that habit when I then moved to the Levin staff, I started calling him 'Senator Levin' and he would laugh at me. I mean he'd laugh at me. You know, I'd say, "Senator Levin," and he'd laugh at me and say, "Everybody calls me Carl." [Laughs]

RITCHIE: Your characterization of Mitchell as the ultimate staff person reminded me of the only time I ever sat on the Senate floor during a debate, during the Senate bicentennial in 1989. I sat in a little armless chair next to Senator Mitchell and passed three-by-five cards to him because there was a whole series of remarks that he and

Senator [Bob] Dole were making. My colleague on the other side was passing similar cards to Senator Dole, and Senator Dole would stand up and just read whatever was on the card, maybe ad-libbing a little bit. Senator Mitchell, in between, while he was waiting his turn, was furiously editing the cards. I would see him with his pen changing all of this. I was sort of wondering what—

ARENBERG: Rewriting history there? [Laughs]

RITCHIE: Exactly. He was, well, putting it in his own words, the way he wanted it to be.

ARENBERG: Yeah, right.

RITCHIE: I realized, of course, that he had no time to do any preparation before we went in there. In the scope of things, this was a relatively minor event. It was a ceremony. But I was interested in how meticulous he was.

ARENBERG: When things were really important to him, like a real landmark speech, like the time he was chosen to give the response to President Reagan's State of the Union, for example, but other times, a major speech to a convention or something like that, they would go through fifteen drafts. At least that. I used to laugh about it. They would ultimately reach a stage where he was editing his edits. Where the only iteration was he was putting things in that he had taken out. [Laughs] But there is that. And he's, as you well know, as the country knows, he's extremely articulate in a very distinctive sort of way. And—I had a thought and I lost it, I don't know where I was going.

RITCHIE: He was putting things into his own words, I guess. But it was interesting to me that for something that was fairly routine, he was putting his personal stamp on it.

ARENBERG: Yeah. One of the things he was great about on the Senate floor, thinking about his speeches, was he had a way of expressing and framing the issues—all sides of the issue. He once told me that he had learned from a very good lawyer in Maine that one of the best courtroom tactics was to define your opponent's argument before he did. If you go back and look at his speeches on issues, they almost always contain the opposition's best argument, framed the way he wants to frame it, and generally stated better and more concisely than the opponent could. I ran into a guy, I'm afraid I don't

remember his name. When I was still working for Mitchell, I was on a trip in Germany, and I was at the U.S. embassy in Germany. I met a guy who was working in the embassy who had worked for the Republican Conference. On both the Republican side and the Democratic side, they do the same thing, they have these vote books where they (it's all online now, I guess), but it lists how every senator had voted. For each vote, it describes the argument pro and con, the main argument. This guy's job for the Republicans was to write those pro and con descriptions of every vote. He said, "I just want to tell you, you know, when I had that job working for the Republican Conference," he said, "before I wrote that for any issue, I always looked first to see if your boss had spoken on the floor on that issue, because if he had, I knew that the pros and cons were right there perfectly stated in his speech." [Laughs]

RITCHIE: Well, that's a good reputation.

ARENBERG: Yeah.

RITCHIE: It's noon, so we'll give you a break.

ARENBERG: All right.

RITCHIE: Take your time. But will you be able to come back this afternoon?

ARENBERG: Oh yeah.

RITCHIE: Great.

[End of the Third Interview]