

Preface

“For our visitors in the gallery, and for our viewers on C-SPAN, it may look like Senators are running this place,” said then Senator Joseph Biden in the Senate Chamber on January 31, 2008. “Mr. President, we know better. We trust dedicated, professional staff like Marty Paone to get things done. . . . To do his job, Marty has to be a combination traffic cop, diplomat, and parliamentarian—and he has to have the trust of the Senators who follow his direction. Marty has that trust, because he has earned that trust, and because he has all those other skills, too.” By the time of his retirement, Martin Paone had been on or around the Senate floor for three decades, beginning in the Democratic Cloakroom, moving to the Democratic Policy Committee’s floor staff, and then serving as the Minority Secretary and Majority Secretary for Senate Democrats. During these many years he worked under the leadership of Senators Robert C. Byrd, George Mitchell, Tom Daschle, and Harry Reid. As Secretary of the Majority, he was essentially the “floor manager” of the Senate.

“I have been here 35 years,” said Senator Biden; “it is hard for me to remember a time when Marty wasn’t here. And I don’t just mean year in and year out. I mean any hour of the day or night. Whenever this place is open for business, Marty has been here, helping to maintain order and to get things done.” Other senators recalled the help that Paone had offered them when they first arrived in the Senate, teaching them how the place worked and advising them about when to expect votes and how to time their schedules around those votes. “He was just the most knowledgeable, decent, kind, indispensable person around here,” said New York Senate Charles Schumer. “We are going to miss his ever-present—he hovered in the background quietly—omniscience, always knowing what was going on, and always being there to help.”

Martin Patrick Paone was born in Everett, Massachusetts, on March 1, 1951. He received a B.A. in Economics and Philosophy from Boston College in 1972, and an M.A. in Russian Studies from Georgetown University in 1978, paying his way through graduate school by working in the House Post Office and as a “vehicular placement specialist” for the Senate Parking Office. In 1979 he joined the staff of the Senate Democratic Cloakroom, the L-shaped room adjacent to the Senate chamber where Democrats could meet privately. In 1982, Paone transferred to the Democratic Policy Committee, whose staff supported the floor activities of the Senate Democratic leader, where he worked regularly at the party’s desk in

the front of the chamber, just below the presiding officer. His responsibilities including drafting written summaries of all legislative issues on which the Senate was concluding a roll call vote, negotiating unanimous consent agreements with the Republican leadership, and walking the senators through complex parliamentary procedures.

In 1995, under Democratic leader Tom Daschle, Marty Paone became secretary for the minority. The election of 2000 produced a rare evenly divided Senate at fifty-fifty, and then in June 2001 Vermont Senator Jim Jeffords resigned from the Republican party and joined the Democratic conference as an independent. Democrats became the majority party and Paone served as majority secretary until 2003. He was minority secretary again from 2003 to 2007, under Senators Daschle and Harry Reid, and finally majority secretary from 2007 until his retirement in 2008, when he joined the lobbying firm of Timmons and Company. At that time, Senator Reid claimed that it was no exaggeration that “every single Democrat—and more than a few Republicans” relied on Paone’s expertise every day, himself included. “Nothing happens on the Senate floor,” said the Majority Leader, “—no legislation is considered, no parliamentary procedure enacted—without Marty’s influence.”

There was also a personal side to his Senate connections. In November 1983, the *Washington Post* reported that in the Senate’s rush towards adjournment, “Sen. Robert Byrd paused in the debate to inform his colleagues that Ruby Grey Smith, who has worked in the Senate Reception Room for the last eight years, had married Marty Patrick Paone, a member of the floor staff of the Democratic Policy Committee. Byrd observed that with all the burdens of the Senate, the marriage shows that ‘every cloud does have a silver lining.’ Quick to agree with the minority leader, Majority Leader Howard Baker rose to add his congratulations, remembering that on the wedding day the press of Senate business almost interfered with the wedding hour. Sen. Howard Metzenbaum rushed out to get Mrs. Paone to hear the words of congratulation and she was there to see the chamber burst into applause. It may have been the best thing done in that chamber all year.”

About the Interviewer: Donald A. Ritchie is Historian of the Senate. A graduate of the City College of New York, he received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland. His books include *James M. Landis: Dean of the Regulators* (Harvard University Press, 1980), *Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Harvard, 1991), *The Oxford Guide to the United States Government* (Oxford University Press, 2001), *Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps* (Oxford, 2005), *Electing FDR: The New Deal Campaign of 1932* (University Press of Kansas, 2007), and *The U.S. Congress: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2010). He served as president of the Oral History Association and of Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR), and received OHMAR's Forrest C. Pogue Award for distinguished contributions to the field of oral history.