

**J. ROBERT VASTINE**

**Staff Director, Senate Republican Conference**

**1985-1991**

Oral History Interviews  
August 27 to October 25, 1993

Senate Historical Office  
Washington, DC

## Deed of Gift

I, J. Robert Vastine, do hereby give to the Senate Historical Office the tape recordings and transcripts of my interviews between August 27 and October 25, 1993.

It is my desire that these transcripts remain sealed until January 3, 2001, and the tapes for an additional fifty years, unless otherwise opened by myself. After those dates, I authorize the Senate Historical Office to use the transcripts and tapes in such a manner as may best serve the educational and historical objectives of their oral history program. I also approve the deposit of the transcripts at the Library of Congress, National Archives, Senate Library, and any other institution which the Senate Historical Office may deem appropriate.

In making this gift, I voluntarily convey ownership of the tapes and transcripts to the public domain.

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J. Robert Vastine

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Accepted on behalf of the  
Senate Historical Office by:

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Richard A. Baker

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## Preface

A microwave antenna satellite dish appeared on the roof of the Hart Senate Office Building in 1985. The antenna was linked to the Senate Republican Conference's offices, which included studio and field cameras, editing rooms, a control room, a studio, and staff members who transmitted video feed to television stations across the country, via satellite. Conference facilities also sponsored daily calls to radio stations in each state, offering "actualities" of Republican senators' comments on the day's news. These technological innovations were the work of J. Robert Vastine, who served as staff director of the Conference from 1985 to 1991.

Traditionally, the Republican Conference had convened each Congress to elect party leaders and occasionally to provide a forum for Republican senators. While the Senate Democratic floor leader also served as chairman of the Democratic conference and of its policy committee, Senate Republicans elected separate floor leaders, conferences chairs, and policy committee chairs. Operating separately from the floor leadership, the Conference staff had devoted much of its attention to producing commentary for Republican senators to submit for publication in newspaper "op-ed" pages. Vastine, however, shifted the Conference's focus to broadcast media and tried to operate like a commercial TV news bureau, quick to respond to current circumstances and to the needs of the Republican senators to reach audiences in their home states.

Although these services encountered some initial resistance from metropolitan television and radio stations, they were welcomed by smaller market stations. Slowly, the metropolitan stations began using the Conference's "video press releases." Similarly, the younger Republican senators were the quickest to adopt to the new opportunities that these media innovations offered, and eventually most Senate Republicans and their press secretaries came to appreciate the new services. Senate Democrats eventually followed suit by establishing their own studio facilities.

Born in Danville, Pennsylvania, on November 12, 1937, and raised in nearby Shamokin, Pennsylvania, John Robert Vastine, Jr., attended local public schools and graduated from the Mercersburg Academy. He received his B.A. from Haverford College, and an M.A. from the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University. In 1965 he joined the staff of Missouri Republican Representative Thomas B. Curtis as an economic advisor. A specialist in international trade policy, Vastine co-authored with Representative Curtis *The Kennedy Round and the Future of the American Trade* (Praeger, 1971).

When Curtis lost his race for the Senate in 1968, Vastine served as Washington representative of the Emergency Committee for American Trade, and for CPC International, Inc. In 1971, Illinois Republican Senator Charles Percy appointed Vastine as minority staff director of the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs. In that position, he became one of the architects of the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Act of 1974, which established the modern role of Congress in the budgetary process. From 1975 to 1977, in the Ford Administration, Vastine served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Treasury for international Trade and Raw Materials. After Gerald Ford lost the election of 1976, Vastine became a fellow at the Institute of Politics of the John F. Kennedy School of Government, at Harvard University, and later moved to California as president of the Alliance for American Innovation, and a founder of the Washington Pacific Group, a consulting firm.

Bob Vastine returned to Washington in 1982 as legislative director of Rhode Island Republican Senator John Chafee. When Chafee became chairman of the Republican Conference in 1985, he appointed Vastine as the Conference's staff director. On November 13, 1990, Mississippi Senator Thad Cochran, a conservative, defeated the more liberal Senator Chafee as Conference chairman, by a vote of 22 to 21. Leaving the Senate Republican Conference, Vastine was appointed as the vice president for congressional affairs of the Oversight Board of the Resolution Trust Corporation. In 1993 he became president of the Congressional Economic Leadership Institute, and in 1999 president of the Coalition of Service Industries.

*About the Interviewer:* Donald A. Ritchie is associate historian of the Senate Historical Office. A graduate of C.C.N.Y., he received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland. He has published articles on American political history and oral history, including "Oral History in the Federal Government," which appeared in the *Journal of American History*. His books include *Press Gallery, Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Harvard Press, 1991), and *The Young Oxford Companion to the Congress of the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1993). For the Senate, he wrote *A History of the United States Senate Policy Committee, 1947-1997* (Government Printing Office, 1997) and co-edited the *Minutes of the Senate Republican Conference, 1911-1964* (Government Printing Office, 1999). A former president of the Oral History Association and of Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR), he received OHMAR's Forrest C. Pogue Award for distinguished contributions to the field of oral history.

*Transcribed by* Elizabeth J. Strannigan

## EARLY YEARS WITH TOM CURTIS

### Interview #1

August 27, 1993

**RITCHIE:** I wondered if you can clear up a mystery: I have two biographical statements. One says you were born in Shamokin, and the other says you were born in Danville.

**VASTINE:** I was born in a hospital in Danville. [Laughs] I didn't know there was that discrepancy.

**RITCHIE:** Shamokin is close by Danville.

**VASTINE:** Quite close by, yes. My family is originally from Danville, which is, as you may know, a little river town. The beautiful Susquehannah. It's a remarkable river. Passive and calm. And Danville's a farming town, and my father's father came from the little town. Let's see, my father was the tenth or eleventh doctor in this family that stretched back, I guess, into the eighteenth century.

But anyway, they settled in Danville. The family name was originally Van de Woerstyne, a Dutch name. They settled in Bucks County in the early part of the eighteenth century, and then they moved west to the Susquehannah area. My grandfather, who was a doctor, had a farm along that river. When he was a young man, Shamokin, Pennsylvania, nearby was a booming coal town, full of immigrants, and he established his practice to Shamokin. He graduated from the University of Maryland medical school.

He moved his practice to Shamokin and found his wife, Helen Bencoter, the daughter of a Methodist minister. Very well brought up young lady who had been to finishing school at the Greer School. Knew how to comport herself. She knew Latin. She knew the piano, and literature; and she knew how to be a doctor's wife. So they lived in Shamokin. My father was one of four sons. There was a daughter who died at age 2 in the great post-World War I flu epidemic.

Anyway, my father became a doctor and followed in his father's footsteps. After going to Jefferson Medical College he came back in 1935 to Shamokin and set up his practice. And then went away in the army during the Second World War, and then came back after having done a residency at Mayo Clinic. He came back and practiced medicine, mainly diseases of the chest and cardiology.

**RITCHIE:** In a coal area, that would be prevalent.

**VASTINE:** He did some work in the identification of diseases related to silicosis. Saw a lot of miners. Saw a *lot* of folks. It was a very polyglot town. There was every brand of Catholic, from Eastern Europe, the Baltic, and the Balkans, full of different people, Irish and all kinds of folks.

**RITCHIE:** Now, when you were growing up was the town stratified, or did you mingle with all these groups?

**VASTINE:** Went to high school so there was a lot of mingling. [Laughs]. I did go off to Mercersburg Academy. I *was* privileged in the sense that my family was highly educated. My mom and dad were both college graduates. Mother had gone to college at Wilson College, and then to the Pennsylvania School of Social Work. And she was very conscious of community service. Finally, I think before leaving Shamokin for their retirement in 1975, she had been the president of the Pennsylvania Association of Hospital Auxiliaries and was active in the Pennsylvania YWCA and the AAUW [American Association of University Women] and had really played her part in community service. She was elected to the school board and was president and treasurer from 1951 to 1961.

I went to Mercersburg. Part of the benefit of being the doctor's son is that we had a lovely resort that we went to in the summer time called Eagles Mere, Pennsylvania. You may have heard of it. It is a marvelous nineteenth-century resort way up in the highlands of Pennsylvania called the Sullivan Highlands around a pristine lake where there are no motorboats allowed, surrounded by



large, old cottages—some with servants’ quarters—for the wealthy Philadelphia-Wilmington families who took a special narrow-gauge train to get up the mountain top, to go there—pre World War II.

We bought one of those old cottages for \$11,000 in 1948 or ’49, with 500 feet across the front and maybe 500 or 600 down the mountainside to the lake, and repaired there every summer. I, therefore, got to know a wider community of friends than I would have in Shamokin. These kids were all going to prep schools, and they were all going to Princeton and Yale; and I was going to high school. They were learning things that I wasn’t learning, and I realized that I might be in trouble. So I got my parents to send me to Mercersburg Academy where my mother’s father had gone. This was his only school. It was then a kind of academy or a junior college, I think.

**RITCHIE:** Very much a prep school for Princeton, in those days.

**VASTINE:** Yes. Oh, you know it.

**RITCHIE:** I wrote a book about a man named James Landis, and he graduated from there in 1916.

**VASTINE:** Oh, really. Yes, well, it was then entering its golden period. Calvin Coolidge’s son went there. In fact, he died as a result of a blister or a blood infection contracted while he was playing tennis there. But, anyway, Mercersburg was *extremely* strict, and a very good school. I was very glad to go there, partly because my mother was the first woman elected president of the school board and my father was a town doctor. And I was very much constrained by my home environment. Going to Mercersburg was, in a sense, an escape.

For most kids it was like going to jail. But for me it was a freeing in some sense. Anyway, I did well enough to get into Haverford College. And then came here to graduate school.

**RITCHIE:** How did you choose Haverford?

**VASTINE:** How does one make these choices in life? You know, it's all happenstantial in the end. My mother's parents lived in Narberth, and during the Second World War when my father was off to war and we were in between the Mayo Clinic and going back home to Shamokin we stayed very frequently in Narberth with my grandmother and my two great aunts, Aunt Victoria and Aunt Madeline. I remember one time dad took us on the Paoli local to Merion—I think it must have been 1946 or '47. Then we walked a very long way to the Merion Golf Club. Well, the Merion Golf Course is a very famous golf course, and we watched Sam Snead play in the Open. [Laughs]

We had to walk past Haverford College campus. So it made an impression on me. When it came time for me to go to college I always remembered Haverford, and it was then one of the best—was thought to be one of the best colleges. I went there. It's just one of those things.

**RITCHIE:** It's a Quaker-based school. Isn't it?

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** But your family wasn't Quaker.

**VASTINE:** Not at all Quaker, but at Eagles Mere our next-door neighbor was a maiden lady of some great years, Mrs. Elizabeth Roberts. She was then eighty, I think. Tremendous fortitude and character. Ran a little gift shop, and I was her employee during parts of the summers. She was very critical of me. She was very demanding of *all* people. I told her at one stage that I wanted to be a diplomat. She asked me one day as I was cleaning out something or other—one of her bird baths—she said, "What do you want to be?" I said, "I want to be a diplomat." And she didn't say a thing! The next day she said, out of the blue—this is a characteristic of Quakers of this school—she said, "Don't diplomats lie?" That was all she said! She had nothing further to say about it.

She turned and walked away. She said, “Don’t diplomats lie?” [Laughs] And just left the scene. [Laughs] So that’s what she thought about my career choice.

**RITCHIE:** Well, there’s something of a truth to that comment.

**VASTINE:** Yes, right. Well, it’s true; but don’t we all. But she was a woman of great strength, and character, and backbone. She played golf into her late, late age. And I enjoyed Quaker meeting. I enjoyed the Quaker experience such as it touched our lives. At Haverford we had what was called Fifth-Day meeting, which was then obligatory. I think, twice a month or three times a month we had to go—the *whole* college gathered at the meeting house. At that time, Haverford was four hundred students. The faculty, some of them—the Quaker faculty—sat on the facing benches, and the students sat and read *Time* magazine and snored.

But some students spoke; and in general, I enjoyed it. I am very disestablishmentarian in my church views, so I quite approve of Quakers except for their politics which are wildly unreasonably liberal, usually. American Friends Service Committee folks tend to be off-the-wall peaceniks.

**RITCHIE:** Herbert Hoover and Richard Nixon both started out as Quakers.

**VASTINE:** Yes, well, I suppose, there’s something to be said for it. Are they the only two?

**RITCHIE:** The only two Quaker presidents.

**VASTINE:** Hmm. Well, I think by the time Richard Nixon got to be president he was *very* far from being a Quaker. [Laughs] Didn’t he embrace Billy Graham?

**RITCHIE:** Yes. He left his Quakerism behind when he left Whittier.

**VASTINE:** And I don't want to try to characterize Herbert Hoover. Anyway, I enjoyed the Quaker aspect of Haverford, and Haverford was a pretty good school, I thought.

**RITCHIE:** Were there any professors who were particularly influential to you in those days?

**VASTINE:** Hmmmm, we had a very good history professor, Wallace McCaffrey who later taught at Harvard. A very, very fine man. But my favorite of all was Clayton Holmes who was the head of the engineering department—faculty of two, Haverford being so small—and he was probably my favorite because he had an absolutely complete woodworking shop and because he was a crusty, crusty Yankee. And because I bought from a departing senior a tall armoire which he called his lazerkuhl, so-called because he could open the top drawer of the bottom section of this cabinet and put his bag of ice in the top drawer, and then just reach out, you see, on Friday night—when it came to be party-time—and pick out his ice to replenish his drink.

So I bought this very banged-up, early nineteenth-century furniture—one of which had been in every Haverford student's room in 1833 when the college was founded. This particular specimen's door hinges were all cracked off. And having been a lazerkuhl, it was very badly marked. I took it—I still have it—it's a giant thing. It's about seven feet tall. Quite heavy. Cherry wood and walnut. I took it to Professor Holmes, and he and I worked on it together to restore it. And, boy, did it need it! [Laughs] So we had quite a good time, and I got to know him well. He was a good influence, very nice man.

**RITCHIE:** But you kept up your interest in diplomacy all through there?

**VASTINE:** Yes. I've *always* been interested. I've always been extremely interested in foreign economic affairs, foreign economic policy—something that used to be called commercial policy. When it came time to finish Haverford and I realized I wasn't fit to do anything, I thought I'd better go to graduate school. So I chose instead—unwisely instead of law school or business school—I chose

SAIS, the School of Advanced International Studies here in Washington. *Not* as good a school as Haverford. And in those days a shadow of its current self.

Lots of good-old-boy senior faculty who'd all been in the foreign service. *Loved* martini lunches—three martini lunches. The assistant to good old Dean Thayer, Priscilla Mason, ran the place. Her family had a lot of money, and that had a lot to do with it. It was then in the old—what's the name of the school that Harry Truman sent his daughter to? Holton Arms! It was in an old Holton Arms School, where Margaret Truman went to school, at Florida and 19th Street. Great, big, old, red-brick building. The students in those days lived in the third or fourth floor, in dormitory rooms, essentially. And I had one of those in the corner.

In some sense I really flowered at SAIS. I studied Arabic, God only knows why! Because of the 1957 crisis—because you had to choose an area study, and everybody chose Europe. And I wanted to be different, so I chose Middle East. So I learned Arabic, and I got a National Defense foreign language fellowship to help me do that and spent the summer between years in Beirut. Then traveled in Syria and Egypt and Israel.

**RITCHIE:** You were there before the troops were landed.

**VASTINE:** Well, no, actually, the first Marines landed in '57. And they were still talking about them in 1960, the summer I was there. But Beirut was its own particular—was its own particular kind of paradise in those years. It was a very, lovely place. Life was very sweet, the weather was gorgeous, and every weekend there was a festival. Great, old Roman ruins in the Bekaa Valley which, I gather now, are a part of the Hezbollah command structure. But they had been taken over by, I suppose the government; and the French had been invited to come and install *son et lumiere*. So this wonderful old temple of Bacchus with its four sides intact, a magnificent structure, was bathed in golden light and paved in gravel. And in this theater, former temple, performed on summer evenings the Bristol Old Vic, and the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra,

dancers from the Royal Ballet. Whatever. I saw some wonderful things there. Get on the bus and go to Bekaa. Go to Baalbek. It was a real privilege to know Beirut before it became a battle zone.

**RITCHIE:** Were you associated with the American University there when you were there?

**VASTINE:** I went ostensibly to take courses there; but what ended up was that I lived in the community center there—the Christian Youth Center, I think it was. And I found myself a tutor in Arabic. But what I really did was live in Beirut and get to know Beirut. Meet people, including diplomats, and get around. Have a good time.

**RITCHIE:** Actually, the Foreign Service was very weak in terms of the Middle East. They hadn't had much of a presence there up to that point. So that would have been a wise area, it seems to me, in which to specialize. Did you assume you were then going to go into the State Department or Foreign Service?

**VASTINE:** Well, I think everybody at SAIS felt that was something that they might somehow be destined to do. But, very fortunately, I didn't end up doing that. Partly because I knew I had to do something about military service. So I decided to get that out of the way first, and I was accepted in fact in Monterey in the language school. But I ended up not doing the navy for reasons I don't remember and just enlisted in the army as a private and went off to basic training at Fort Knox. You know, bivouac was a big deal, a big training, and you went off for a couple of days in the fields and woods, and dug foxholes. And on our first night in the field and woods our commanding officer, a very stern young first lieutenant, made the announcement about the Cuban missile crisis, which added a stark quality of reality.

**RITCHIE:** You went in as an enlisted man, but then you went to Officers Candidate School?

**VASTINE:** Yes. I was assigned to the 352nd Civil Affairs unit which met at Georgetown University. And after basic training came back to that unit as my “mother” unit, and I found an intolerable situation. First of all, it was extremely boring. Secondly, we sat in these *awful*—this was the unit that was supposed to take over the governance of the Middle East in time of war! Such nonsense! These folks couldn’t—I mean it was just a *laugh*, and we sat through these incredibly boring lectures and stupid exercises. And a group of us privates decided that we were going to have to find something else, some way to do this—live through this—so we all signed up, four or so of us, signed up for Officer Candidate School which we did at the National Guard out here at the armory. And that took two years, but it was a lot more interesting than sitting around at—and to make a long story short, I was made a first lieutenant. At that point I had to go back to the 352nd. The commanding officer was a general; and there were a whole bunch of majors and colonels and a few captains and three or four lieutenants. And that meant: guess who did all the work!

They assigned me to the supply room. Just at the time when the army, in its wisdom, decided this unit needed to have full, field equipment. That meant weapons! And field tents and a field kitchen! And this all had to be accounted for and maintained by me and my sergeants who were absolute idiots! It was a *nightmare*. And we were going up to a general inspection—just at the moment when I was coming up with my full, six years of service and had every right to get out. Also at that moment I had just taken a new job, and I was very, very busy.

I went to the commanding general, who was in fact a lobbyist for the Rural Electrification Association, and explained to him that, as I was a lobbyist, I had to go and lobby the Democrat and Republican conventions. He understood that a hundred percent, and I said I just couldn’t possibly take care of the supply room in such a way as to get us past the inspection. Would he understand, please, that I really had to leave the army.

**RITCHIE:** This was for the reserves at that stage?

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** So you were wearing your two hats?

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** But, did you do your reserve duty here in Washington?

**VASTINE:** Yes. Partly at the National Guard Candidate School, which I enjoyed. I enjoyed the camaraderie, and we had, as a class, a lot of esprit de corps. It was awful getting up at four on Saturday morning, but it was a lot better than going to Georgetown to be bored all day long.

**RITCHIE:** But after a year or so, after the officers' candidate school you were, in a sense, able to go back to civilian life except for reserve duty?

**VASTINE:** Well, it was Reserve Officers' Candidate School. It was just weekends.

**RITCHIE:** Oh, I see.

**VASTINE:** That was the remarkable thing about it. It was a weekend program with two weeks in the summer that lasts about two years. I think we had two summer camps up in Pennsylvania, at Indiantown Gap.

**RITCHIE:** So then did you stay in SAIS, or what else did you do while you were in the reserves?

**VASTINE:** Oh, that's when I was in my first job at the U.S. Chamber.

**RITCHIE:** How did that come about?

**VASTINE:** How did that come about? I came back from the army from active duty training in Fort Knox having decided I didn't want to come back to



Washington. But I got home to Shamokin and took a look around and said, there's no place else. I borrowed my brother's Austin Healy and drove down to Washington. And, as these things happen, in three or four days I got a job at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in their international department. My specific task assignment was to run the US-Mexico committee of the Chamber which was a group of Mexican and American businessmen who met periodically to discuss problems that they each faced in doing business in each other's countries.

So I organized their meetings, I wrote their policy papers, I did just a basic secretariat function that one does. It's a standard job, one of the many such in Washington. It's that sort of half-policy, half-organizational effort. There was a *little* bit of Hill work, but not very much. I found the Chamber stultifying. Very little happened there, and probably very little does today. There's a tremendous amount of time spent in meetings, writing, drafting papers that never see the light of day and don't really matter anyway. Not a lot of time, actually, affecting policy. Government policy. Much more time spent deciding what to say. And in an organization the size of the Chamber, when the policy is finally settled upon and decided it tends to be awfully generalized and, perhaps, not too helpful.

But it was a good way to get one's feet on the ground in Washington and learn a lot about how the city works. The guy who had the job before I did was a SAIS graduate. And I heard that he was thinking of leaving so someone suggested I call about it. That was the specific pivot on which the job rested. So I did that for two years and found it unsatisfying. I was not happy. I did not like my boss who was a petty tyrant. A very difficult man, neurotic, really. I had a good friend—again from SAIS—who was working on the Joint Economic Committee; he was the minority staff director, Don Webster. Perhaps you know him, Don.

**RITCHIE:** I don't think so.

**VASTINE:** He was here for quite awhile. He left finally to join the Nixon administration. And he was very close to Thomas B. Curtis of Missouri, the ranking House Republican member of the Joint Economic Committee. When Mr. Curtis succeeded in getting an increase in the clerk-hire of the House members for employing legislative assistants for the purpose of focusing, he intended, on economics, he asked Don for a recommendation. Don took me over to meet him.

It was a very interesting interview. We went in and sat down. I had my nice blue suit on, and I wore a good tie, and I had a nice, white shirt. Went in, and I listened to him talk for about half an hour. Maybe forty minutes he talked—looking at me occasionally—and then, finally he said, “Great!” And I learned from his secretary that I had the job. There was no real interview. I think he took Don Webster’s recommendation on faith, but I think he was one of those sorts of fellows that did it by feel. He kind of liked the way he felt about me, and I guess my blue suit or something. [Laughs] I had the kind of background he liked, and it fitted with him—perfectly—the Chamber of Commerce experience fitted perfectly with his way of looking at the world. And I was certainly interested in foreign economic policy and the trade policy side of his work. So I seized on that job. I guess the first week into it I realized I had really gotten a great job! Because Thomas B. Curtis of Missouri was *very* influential in the House, especially in the area of foreign trade policy which was then, much more than now, dominated by the Ways and Means Committee. Now you know the responsibility is bifurcated somewhat with the Energy and Commerce Committee. Am I saying that right? It’s Dingell’s committee. Energy and Commerce or Commerce and Energy.

**RITCHIE:** Energy first.

**VASTINE:** Yes. The Ways and Means Committee then was run by Wilbur Mills, and there were no subcommittees. Tom Curtis was second ranking Republican next to a formidable man named John Byrnes. But Curtis had his own niche, believe me, carved out. He worked very hard and he had been, for the Kennedy administration, very central to the passage of the Trade Expansion Act

of 1962 for which he received an award—or at least an honor. He was given the chance to give the annual Christian Herter memorial speech at Tufts or something like that.

Christian Herter had been a long-time diplomat, and I think an under secretary if not deputy secretary of state, but was Kennedy's first U.S. Trade Representative. And Tom Curtis had a great deal to do with writing into the law the requirement that there be a separate office in the Executive Office of the President for a U.S. Trade Representative—an ambassador who would speak for the President and conduct trade negotiations and form a small staff—very small staff—to do that. That person was Christian Herter, and he had a political appointee as his deputy, a somewhat effete, tall, sophisticated San Franciscan named William Matson Roth, the scion of the Matson line's Roths whose family home, Filoli, is now a National Trust property just below San Francisco. It's the site where "Dynasty" was filmed.

This very aesthetic man had a fabulous art collection, a house in Georgetown, English tailoring, beautiful custom-made shirts, beautiful manners—this man, really, without sufficient training in economics or foreign affairs, took over as special representative for trade negotiations because Christian Herter's health began to fail. I developed a relationship between my boss, Tom Curtis, and William Matson Roth—Ambassador Roth—who eventually became trade representative, and his staff. I think I may have mentioned I had *carte blanche* to arrange Curtis' breakfasts at the University Club. He breakfasted at the University Club—Tom Curtis did—in the big dining room there.

**RITCHIE:** You said he lived there.

**VASTINE:** That's right, he lived there on the weekdays. He was a Monday-to-Thursday Club member—or was it Tuesday-to-Thursday?—and he went home to his wife and family every weekend. But during the week he lived at the University Club and stayed in his office working late most nights and would get up for breakfast early, and I would meet him there quite frequently

and bring in a guest for breakfast from wherever in the government, or private sector, that I felt might be useful for him. For the development of our views on trade policy, and—where was that story leading?

**RITCHIE:** You were bringing Roth.

**VASTINE:** Oh, yes. Roth and some of his deputies and other members of his staff. People from foreign embassies. Commercial ministers at some of the embassies. And people from the private sector, the business sector here in Washington; lawyers, foreign-trade lawyers.

There were lots of hot issues as in all trade negotiations. There was textiles and chemicals and something called the American selling-price system, customs valuation. Very, very controversial—especially in Tom Curtis' home district where Malenkrot Chemical and Monsanto were very well established, old-line companies with, I would say, protectionists points of view. And here was this Curtis fellow, a true conservative, therefore, a market economist—an Adam Smith economist—who believed in free trade but had to condition it and talk around it every now and then because of his constituencies.

But I set out to make us expert, and we really learned all about the trade negotiations. We traveled several times in Europe to go to negotiations and talk to negotiators; to go to foreign capitals and talk to their negotiators. After each one of these I would write a *long* report and explain to the world what was going on in these negotiations. And they were always given some press coverage. They were long, and they were turgid, as I now realize looking back on them.

I was thinking the other day how we had to do that. This was 1965 and '66, and '67, and we had to do these on long mimeograph sheets. I would create these impossible deadlines and end up with eighteen or twenty or twenty-five single-spaced, legal-size mimeograph sheets to correct. Oh, what a trial! All night long, because I would say, we are going to put these in the *Congressional Record* by four o'clock on a Thursday afternoon so we'd get Friday press, or whatever the deadline was. We had a press man who worked with us to try to

get news coverage, Fred Sontag. Eventually, I took these and converted them into a book called *The Kennedy Round and the Future of the American Trade* published by Praeger [in 1971]. So I guess they served some purpose.

At the time they were really one way in which the public generally would find out what was going on. Particular sectors—industry sectors—found them interesting. They were ways in which Tom Curtis, who was *very* influential, could say what he thought and give signals to folks about what was going to pass and what he would support and what he wouldn't. I remember the chief clerk—his name was Leo Irwin, very estimable guy. He once said to me at a reception at the British Embassy up on Mass Avenue, after we had written a speech about there being no need for steel quotas 'cause the steel industry just at that moment was experiencing, for the first time since before the Second World War, import competition and its pricing structure, its oligopolistic pricing structure was being challenged, severely challenged by the Europeans, especially, and somewhat by the Japanese. So they were beginning to mount a little bit of a campaign in the Ways and Means Committee to try and get some quotas. And we were *firmly* in their way! There was no need. They had, what, less than 7 percent import penetration. They needed quotas? And Leo Irwin commended me for a speech that Curtis had made. He said, "You know, you guys are doing a great job keeping those folks from getting their import protection."

It was very exciting. Very challenging, and very exciting. And a lot of fun. By the end of it—several years into it—the *New York Times* editorially referred to Thomas B. Curtis of Missouri as "Congress' expert on foreign trade." That led a group of congressmen which represented—hmmm, can't remember which particular interests—but some protectionist congressmen to go to the floor and proclaim the *real* experts were somebody else. I can't recall, but there was kind of a rebuttal, a reaction to that on the House floor.

**RITCHIE:** Did you come to Curtis' office with your ideas fairly set, or did you find that being in Curtis' office changed your point of view about trade issues?

**VASTINE:** Well, unfortunately, I was an ideologue. I really believed in free trade. And I still do, but it's somewhat tempered.

**RITCHIE:** How did that start? Where do you trace its roots back to?

**VASTINE:** The study of economics at SAIS, I think. I had a very good professor in a man named William Phillips, who was a very good lecturer and very good seminar leader. He was one of the senior people among the SAIS faculty. At SAIS in those days you had to have an area of concentration, but you also had to study international law, international economics, and international diplomacy. In international diplomacy there was a wonderful fellow named William Franklin, who was head of the State Department's historical office, who was in charge of publishing the great volumes on U.S. foreign policy. He taught European diplomacy, and he was wonderful! I really liked it. Liked him, though he was a crusty, odd character.

William Phillips, the economics professor, was equally good. So I just studied my classical economics and took the lessons of Adam Smith and David Ricardo to heart and believed in comparative advantage. A simple idea which I wanted to apply. [chuckles] And, also, I was inspired, I think, by the course of liberalization from the time of the Smoot-Hawley tariff under the great liberalizing trade act of the Roosevelt years.

**RITCHIE:** Reciprocal Trade. . .

**VASTINE:** The Reciprocal Trade Act. And we were then, you know, the Kennedy Round was the sixth round of trade negotiations. So it was a traceable, historical, kind of an evolutionary process of trying to undo those evil tariffs that led to world-wide recession in the thirties. And there was a bit of a cause about that, the cause of freer trade. I really believed in the cause of free trade. Freer trade, we now say. I think I believed a little bit harder than Tom Curtis believed. And I think sometimes it was a little embarrassing to him to have this young zealot on his staff bugging the chemical-industry folks all the time,

because we really were a thorn in their side. *I* was a thorn in their side, and they did not like me. And he knew that. But he never overtly curbed me. I mean, I was never rebuked.

He sometimes wouldn't agree, and he sometimes changed the words; but he gave me great scope. He was a wonderful boss because he believed in delegating. He liked people who knew what they were interested in, and then he could watch all that energy froth and bubble, and curb it when it had to be curbed, but he could take advantage of it while it was cooking. That was a technique he used with other folks as well. I saw him do it to other people. He was very wise in his way, astute. An observer of human nature with a wry kind of ironic sense of humor. A very nice man who had a *formidable* public style that really turned people off. He could be a terrible curmudgeon. He could be awful to people, especially to Democratic administration witnesses, like the secretary of the treasury. He would come before the Ways and Means Committee, half prepared, Curtis felt; and of course he had thoroughly prepared himself. Part of his role was to embarrass them over their lack of knowledge and thereby impugn their policy goals.

His favorite thing would be to look out over his little half-moon glasses with his funny, little bow tie, and his round face and sort of balding, bristling head and wag his finger and say [demonstrates]: "You haven't done your home work! You gotta go back down there and do your homework. You haven't done your home work!" He had a funny way of talking, you know. Sort of sounded like a country bumpkin, but he was—for the appearances of a country lawyer—a very sophisticated mind, a trustee of Dartmouth, and very highly educated man.

**RITCHIE:** How would you describe your politics by the time you got to Curtis' office?

**VASTINE:** I was kind of a knee-jerk Rockefeller Republican. For no particular reason. I'd never really thought it through. It's taken a long time for me to become really sophisticated, or savvy, or clever. In those days, I mean, if I'd seen the writing on the wall and I wanted to be an opportunist, uh, more of

an opportunist [chuckles], I would've, I think, converted to Reaganism and gotten on the bandwagon. But, I guess probably because of my parents' influence I find myself much more of a moderate, a moderate Republican, and that's where I've mainly stayed.

**RITCHIE:** Were your parents interested in politics or involved at all?

**VASTINE:** Mother ran for office, and she was the first woman elected school board president or woman elected to any kind of post in Shamokin, Pennsylvania. But she wasn't really a politician. She was well known and the doctor's wife; and she was able.

**RITCHIE:** What about Haverford? Did you have any particular leanings at that stage?

**VASTINE:** I was an Eisenhower Republican.

**RITCHIE:** How about SAIS? When I think of SAIS I think of Francis Wilcox who was dean there later on, because he was in the Eisenhower Administration.

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** Was there sort of an Eisenhower Republican leaning there as well?

**VASTINE:** I don't remember anything political about the tone of SAIS except that I won my first office there. I was elected a member of the school council, and I was chairman of the speaker's program. And one of my first speakers was Dean Acheson, whom I remember escorting back down Florida Avenue to Connecticut Avenue. And remember him saying to me, "Gee!," he said—his was in reference to the Kennedy administration—"I sure hope Paul Nitze gets something good. He certainly deserves it." Or something like that. Funny.



**RITCHIE:** But Tom Curtis wasn't a Rockefeller Republican; you wouldn't describe him that way, would you?

**VASTINE:** No, I wouldn't describe him that way. I don't exactly know how to describe his politics now. He was certainly a liberal, I mean a moderate. You know, this will show you that I'm not very good at this. . .

**RITCHIE:** He did sign on to work for Gerald Ford when Ford beat Halleck as the leader.

**VASTINE:** Right.

**RITCHIE:** And he was called a "Young Turk" although he was in his mid-fifties at the time.

**VASTINE:** He was in his fifties. Do you remember that?

**RITCHIE:** Oh, I remember it from the time; but I also looked back.

**VASTINE:** You have? Good. Well, yes, he was a reformer in the House. Part of it was he believed in staff and the need for more staff, especially minority staff. He felt that the leaders could do better by the Republicans than they had been doing.

He wrote a famous letter, an open letter to his colleagues in which he outlined the reforms that he felt necessary and questioned the leadership of Charlie Halleck. I think he indicated that since Halleck had done nothing to get these, he was going to support Gerald Ford. In any case, that letter had a great deal to do with Ford's election as leader—minority leader.

Fiscally, he was very conservative. From the standpoint of civil rights he was aggressive and very committed. On international trade, I think he was a crypto-free trader, and I kind of pushed him out of the closet. But that was okay because his role became much more acknowledged.

**RITCHIE:** He was not a go-along type of person. He was often the one person or two people who vote against this bill or that bill. This was the LBJ era as well . . .

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** . . . and I gather that John Byrnes was a go-along fellow with Wilbur Mills. The two of them could cut a deal.

**VASTINE:** Umhmmm.

**RITCHIE:** But Curtis seems like the type who was not into the cutting the deal. He'd rather lose or speak out against something than compromise.

**VASTINE:** Well that was the foundation of his popularity. Even at Dartmouth he had apparently demonstrated this remarkable bent to go against the crowd. There's a story about him having walked around campus for a week as a blind person because he wanted to know and experience what it was like to be blind. So he apparently blind-folded himself and was a blind man for awhile because he wanted to have that experience or show people what the experience was like.

His very independence of mind was the foundation of his reputation in his home district. He was regarded as somebody who would always speak his mind and be honest and do what he thought was right and do his homework. In polls which explored why he was popular and why he was well esteemed those were always the things that came out. Independent-minded and honest. And if you looked at the man—if you walked in the room and looked at him—you would think: Here's an honest man. He had that quality about him. There was no pretense. There was no artifice. He dressed terribly. He used to refer to clothing as something used to clothe the gourd. And no superficial polish. You just wanted to trust him.

I remember a friend of mine with whom I'd gone to Haverford, who lived in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, with his family, calling me after a television show in which Curtis had been chosen to give the response to a presidential address or an economic message of some sort. He was on television, saying what he thought about the program. My friend called me up and said, "Oh, what a wonderful man you work for! You just can tell, here's really an honest man!" Somehow that conveyed itself through the tube. Quite remarkable 'cause he was not, in any sense, photogenic in the way we think a politician needs to be these days. He was a very remarkable fellow, and that was his reputation.

**RITCHIE:** It was not the best of times for him, however, in the sense that 1965 was the high point of Johnson's Great Society.

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** With spending for everything, when he was a man who was very suspicious of federal spending programs.

**VASTINE:** It gave him heartburn. I remember I just came to work for him as the Medicare-Medicaid bill was being refined and voted out of the Ways and Means Committee. I didn't see a lot of him in the first couple of weeks or months of my work there because he was so tied up in that. But he was very unhappy about it. It really troubled his soul. I remember him being very, very disgruntled and working very, very long hours and being sick with a bad cold the whole time. He was very distressed about that program and other programs.

He used his Joint Economic Committee position to attack spending and express concern about inflation as it became clear that we were going to spend for war as well as for butter! We would do a monthly spending watch.

Curtis would watch the statistics. He cared tremendously about statistics. The integrity of U.S. government statistics and statistical series were very important to him. And, therefore, the Joint Economic Committee because it

compiled—or had begun to compile—its own, publish its own statistical compendia, monthly. And still does, I'm sure. He relied on them enormously, and he would watch for the publication of the government spending as it ratcheted up by quarter, or even by month. Part of my job was to watch out for that and bring it to his attention. He would put out a press release each time saying: See I told you so! Spending is going up.

In those days we didn't have the budget process. Very few of us around remember what it was like *not* to have the budget process. You had to rely on OMB [Office of Management and Budget]. Obviously, a Republican could not rely on OMB for good statistics. Getting a grip on what government was really spending was really very difficult. But he had tremendous interest in that material.

**RITCHIE:** It strikes me, although I've worked exclusively for the Senate, that in the House the rules are very different. There the rules are all geared towards the majority. To let the majority have its way and to push things through.

**VASTINE:** Umhmmm.

**RITCHIE:** How does the minority operate in an institution where the majority can bend everything pretty much the way it wants to?

**VASTINE:** Well, there are two ways of operating. One is go along and get along, and the other is to buck the system. I guess that right now is the classic problem. We see it in human terms being played out by Bob Michel, who is the product of this Ford—wasn't he Jerry Ford's successor?

**RITCHIE:** John Rhodes came in between.

**VASTINE:** But Bob Michel was in office then. And he's a product of that era when it was decided you do better by working with the majority than you do by bucking it. Of course, now he's being challenged by a group of Young Turks

in the House who feel differently. He feels that trying to get along, trying to have influence by being part of the coalition that passes bills, is more effective. Even though Curtis supported Ford, he was more inclined to buck the system than to go along.

**RITCHIE:** I know in Medicare, he offered the main alternative to medicare.

**VASTINE:** That's right.

**RITCHIE:** I gather it's sort of a parliamentary sense: You state an alternative position and you know you're going to lose, but at least you have stated your position. You don't identify yourself with what actually does go through.

**VASTINE:** Precisely. He worked very closely with the U.S. Chamber in doing that, actually. There was a guy from the Chamber—I've forgotten whom—who was in and out of the office a lot. Did a lot of the backup work on that.

**RITCHIE:** I was going to ask you what was his relationship with Wilbur Mills. You said he didn't get along with Byrnes, but how well did he get along with Mills?

**VASTINE:** Well, he had a lot of respect for Mills, I think. And Mills for him.

**RITCHIE:** It's funny, though, when you said he didn't get along with Byrnes, my reaction was: I bet he got along better with Mills.

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** You confirmed my suspicions [laughs].

**VASTINE:** Well, with Mills, you know, it was wonderful to watch him work. He was just as smooth as silk. He understood how to work with people. He apparently had picked [Dan] Rostenkowski very early as his successor. And Rostenkowski was kind of a favorite, fair-haired boy even then. I'm just trying to find a way I can illustrate their relationship, but it doesn't pop to mind at the moment.

I know that Mills appreciated Curtis' work in foreign trade because it made it a lot easier for Mills, who wasn't by any stretch of the imagination a protectionist. He made it much easier for Mills to contain protectionist pressures. In fact, by the end of the Kennedy Round, by '67 and '68, there were so many claims for protection, I think we counted 120—some large number—of different bills being put in for protection for different products, even strawberries. There was quite a concern that the flood of protectionist legislation that would undo the trade negotiations and set things back.

So Curtis' role on the committee was really pivotal at that time in the foreign trade area. He had influence beyond the influence that one man ordinarily has in the way that committee handled legislation. I think his colleagues found him trying. They got very tired of his lecturing and tired of, in a sense, his superiority. But I think he was very influential.

**RITCHIE:** I was interested in the politics of trade. Historically the Republicans are identified with protection and high tariffs, and the Democrats with reciprocal trade. Nowadays Republicans are much more likely to be for free trade and the Democrats for protection. When did it change? Was it happening then?

**VASTINE:** It changed with Reagan. I was amazed to see and to watch the Right Wing—[Jack] Kemp—lead that wing of the Republican Party into free trade. It was amazing! Does this ring true to you? This is my feeling about it.

**RITCHIE:** I know it happened somewhere around there, but I've never quite figured out when.

**VASTINE:** No. It's amazing. It suddenly became a plank. You know, a true-blue, right-wing Republican was a free trader.

**RITCHIE:** But Tom Curtis, when he was doing it, was actually going out ahead of the curve, wasn't he, in free trade?

**VASTINE:** Yes. Definitely. And, of course, if you told him he was a free trader he would probably deny that. He probably wouldn't accept the label. But that was the effect of his support of the Trade Expansion Act, to permit the negotiations to go forward; and it was, I think, quite successful as a negotiation.

**RITCHIE:** One other thing I associate Curtis with is that in 1967 he introduced the resolution to expel Adam Clayton Powell.

**VASTINE:** Oh, yes!

**RITCHIE:** How did he get involved in that, and what was the story behind that?

**VASTINE:** Moral outrage. He was just offended beyond words that this person should claim a seat in the House of Representatives. It was a matter of personal pride and institutional pride and outrage that somebody like this guy from New York, with all of his problems could take a seat in the House! He just did it! No one knew it ahead of time. He was a great parliamentarian. I don't know whether you know that about him. He was the parliamentarian for years of the Republican Convention. He was an authority to the point that he would go over to the House every day at noon and sit in the well in the House. He was a fixture in the House. He would make a point of going there; and I think his colleagues came to consult him. When somebody had a problem, they would consult him. He and H.R. Gross—who played a kind of obstructionist role in the House—had some understanding.

Curtis was very highly regarded as a parliamentarian. He hired summer interns solely for the purpose of clipping back copies of the *Congressional Record*

so that he would have his own record and compendium of the rulings of the parliamentarian of the House. Because, at some point, the Speaker stopped publishing his rules in order to frustrate—Curtis felt—Curtis. Deliberately to frustrate him and other obstructionists and would-be parliamentarians on the Republican side. He actually hired kids to come in and clip the *Records* to get these precedents. It was the precedents of the House. He wouldn't stop talking about it! He had a tremendous interest in that and needed it, of course, in order to challenge rulings of the chair and to be an expert.

The workings of the House and its rules and who should sit there as the people's representative, I think, was very important to him. He chafed tremendously under the tactics of the majority.

**RITCHIE:** In a sense, he was an institution man even though he was in the minority and anti-institutional, or at least opposed to what the majority was doing; but he had a sense of the dignity of the preservation of the institution.

**VASTINE:** Yes, well he also had a way of saying that Rayburn had picked him out. He was very proud that very early—I think in his second term—he was made a member of the Ways and Means Committee. He felt that Rayburn had eyed him; that, somehow, he had fallen into Rayburn's favor very early. And then got tapped. I think he shared the view of Rayburn as an extremely estimable person and worthy to lead the House of Representatives. Yes, he had respect for the institution; but tremendous disregard for [John] McCormack and the way McCormack ran the House and for the abused position of the minority in the House.

And, of course, recall that he had come into the Congress in the two years in which there had been a Republican majority—so, with Congressman Joe Martin of Pennsylvania, or Massachusetts?

**RITCHIE:** Massachusetts.



**VASTINE:** Massachusetts, as the Republican leader. So he knew what it was like to be in the majority. And like a lot of senators who came here when we were in the majority in the Senate, the transition to being in the minority was pretty bitter.

**RITCHIE:** How did he get along with Richard Bolling?

**VASTINE:** They were friends. They were fellow reformers. They were institutional men. They definitely had a community of interest. They served on the Joint Economic Committee together, and though Richard Bolling could be styled a liberal Democrat there was something about Bolling's approach to the institution that Curtis respected. They worked together. I can't think if there was an effort at reform in the House in those years. Bolling was later in charge of House reform. In fact, I guess that led in part to the taking of power from the Ways and Means Committee—when was that, the 70s?

**RITCHIE:** Seventy-four, somewhere in there.

**VASTINE:** I think about that. It was after Wilbur Mills' fall. After Fannie Fox.

**RITCHIE:** What was it like to be a staff member in the House of Representatives in those days?

**VASTINE:** Extremely exciting. I came there after the Goldwater debacle. There were a lot more moderates. I guess those are the ones that survived. Statistically, I can't recall how many Republicans there were; and I can't recall how you divide them between conservative and moderate. But I definitely fell into the moderate camp.

Curtis' cronies—the folks we naturally fell in with—Joint Economic people and others—well, Bob Taft [Jr.]. Where do you put Bob Taft?

**RITCHIE:** Not as conservative as his father.

**VASTINE:** No. I think people think of him as a moderate to conservative member. He and Curtis worked together. And William Widnall, the ranking member of the Banking Committee, was definitely a moderate. And others. So we staff people formed a club. What was it called. The Republican Discussion Group. And I was the treasurer, and Carol Khosrovi, who was then working for Taft and is now Carol Mayor-Marshall and lives in San Francisco and was recently director of the San Francisco Mint and a candidate for state office in California. She, and I, and a group of others formed this group. We had interesting speakers come, representing a moderate viewpoint.

So our response was to form a support group, I suppose. The volunteer army was one of our projects. This was a project that was spawned in Curtis' office: the volunteer army. I just now recall. This is an idea that he had a great deal to do with.

**RITCHIE:** I gather you had free access to him pretty much at any time?

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** Is that a difference between the Senate and the House—that easier to deal with the members or more accessible in the House than in the Senate?

**VASTINE:** Well, I tell you, I worked for [Charles] Percy and [John] Chafee, and I didn't have a problem with access either with senators or the Congress. When I needed to see them, I was always able to. A senator is a bit harder. You may have to wait a little bit longer and be a little bit more flexible, like going to the Senate and walk him back from a vote; or go find him in a hearing room. As I told you, I could see Curtis for as many breakfasts as I wanted to. I could see him every evening when he came back from the House and worked in his office. And he always read and commented on my memos. So he was very accessible.

And you know the House office in those days—he had, for then, a very big office in the Longworth Building. Room 1336. But, still, it was only two and one-half rooms. Later on, we got an annex, so I could go off and write my foreign trade speeches in this annex.

**RITCHIE:** Now, you were a legislative person. But because it was a small staff, did you wind up getting involved in other things; or were you able to specialize?

**VASTINE:** Actually, no. He really wanted me to be a legislative person. He called me his economic assistant. I was on the letterhead as economic assistant. He believed that every congressman should have an economic assistant. He wanted me to concentrate.

The office was an interesting office because it was run by a cadre of five, senior women who had been with him forever! They had their jobs figured out right down to the last paper clip! Each of them knew what she was to do and what the others were to do. And he relied on them totally and completely. They were utterly devoted to him, and I think some of them had been with him his whole term. Is that possible? Eighteen years! But a long time. They were wonderful ladies. At first, the chief one, Marilyn, who became Senator [J. Glenn] Beall's executive secretary later, didn't cotton to me. She didn't call me to tell me I had my job for some weeks because she didn't figure I was the right person, I guess. She did not like my blue suit! [chuckles] Or my polished shoes, I guess. But we overcame it and became very good friends.

Why did I start on that track? Oh! His AA was a very junior young man, a very young lawyer right out of school. The job of the AA was to read and manage the mail. He did not need an AA to tell him how to run his district or to run his politics, or figure out how to vote. He was not an AA in the sense that so many House members have very senior AA's. It was different.

**RITCHIE:** Curtis had been in for eighteen years.

**VASTINE:** Nine terms.

**RITCHIE:** He could have held that seat for the rest of his life if he wanted to.

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** Why did he take the risk of running for the Senate in '68?

**VASTINE:** I think he was bored. I think I asked him that once. He said "I'm bored. I'm getting tired of the House. I'm just fed up with it." I think he wanted the freedom of a senator. He would have been a wonderful senator. He would have been unstoppable. He came very close to being a senator. He was very substantially supported by the publisher of the number two St. Louis paper. The first was the *Post-Dispatch*, and there was another one that may have folded.

**RITCHIE:** *The Globe?*

**VASTINE:** I can't remember it. The *Post-Dispatch* didn't like Curtis much, editorially. But the other paper did, and they were very—the publisher was very strongly in his corner.

Well, that publisher died before the election. And there was another key backer who, I think, also died. And also I remember the "blessing." He went to Gettysburg. Bryce Harlow took him in a limousine to Gettysburg to get the blessings of the General [Eisenhower]. Very interesting. That was 1967, that trip would have had to be. And they were still traveling to Gettysburg. The distant presence of the general was palpable in Washington in those days.

**RITCHIE:** Got the endorsement to take back.

**VASTINE:** Yeah, so he had all his ducks in a row. Then the publisher died. *Globe Dispatch?*

**RITCHIE:** Something like that.

**VASTINE:** *Globe Democrat*. His campaign manager was a very feisty, then young, Episcopal minister, the Reverend Roy Pfauch who is now a big influence peddler in Washington. A character! Who both preached and ran campaigns.

Curtis was so dedicated to the House, and we had launched an effort to get a special anti-dumping code. Something that had to do with anti-dumping, and this code required implementation by the House and the Senate. It just drug out and drug out and drug out. And there was a long, long conference committee. Congress couldn't adjourn. It was the middle of October and Curtis was spending much too much time on this stupid thing.

But it was very substantially his—our—idea, and he was really committed to it. And he shouldn't have been! He should have been home campaigning, and it meant that he just didn't do a lot of campaign appearances that he should have. But he was so committed to the work he was in that he figured he could win. In fact, he misjudged; and he lost. I think he lost substantially because he didn't pull enough of the Republican votes in Kansas City. And somehow he offended the Kansas City Republican establishment by not giving enough attention to them and maybe by canceling some events. I can't recall precisely. But he didn't poll well enough in Kansas City to overcome the big Democratic vote in St. Louis. And, as I recall, he lost by some 30,000 votes. But we outpolled Nixon, I think, substantially. Nixon may have lost by 50,000. I don't recall. I was told at the time and then subsequently it was confirmed to me that he—that [Thomas] Eagleton—it was the tradition in Missouri to buy the black wards—the vote of the black wards in St. Louis. And Eagleton's campaign manager, later AA, told me at a conference on campaigning that they had done that for Eagleton.

But I remember Tom Eagleton coming into our office a vibrant, young lieutenant governor. Had great ties. He always had these just terrific bright green ties, silk rep. Very preppy. Wonderful, deep voice. A very big presence. I

mean, you could tell him the minute he walked in the office. He came in rather frequently, when I first worked for Curtis, to say hello, when he was in Washington. It was quite a race. I volunteered on the campaign for a couple of weeks.

Poor, old Tom Curtis, he just got lost in details. He just didn't have a flair for the big, political—I guess what has become kind of standard political speech. He would get lost in details about the budget. He had a very hard time portraying the forest. He was very, very good at describing all the trees. And, along the way while describing the trees, he could convince people he knew a lot about trees, and he was a student and he was hard-working, and he was honest. But somehow the message got lost. And he came off kind of looking like a fusty, old curmudgeon with his funny, little glasses, and his round belly and his ill-fitting suits.

Eagleton was much more the media candidate—much more the handsome, charming, very articulate, if perhaps superficial, much more liberal Democrat.

**RITCHIE:** The state was still more a Democratic state. It has become a more Republican state now, but in those days they hadn't elected a Republican governor or senator for some time. So it was a big risk to run statewide.

**VASTINE:** Right.

**RITCHIE:** It was clearly an uphill race for any Republican.

**VASTINE:** I think only old Congressman Doc Hall and Tom Curtis were the only two Republicans. So the character of the state has changed a lot, as I guess the South has changed; although I don't think we think of Missouri as being a Southern state, or do we?

**RITCHIE:** Well, it's always a border line. But as you say, Southern politics changed after the passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act.

Curtis voted for both of those, but opposed open housing legislation in 1968. What I wondered was how did a Republican stake out that territory at that time? For instance, you mentioned the black vote in 1968. Was there any chance that he could ever have gotten the black vote in Missouri, regardless if anybody paid for it?

**VASTINE:** No, I don't think so.

**RITCHIE:** So in a sense he was perhaps trying to win over some of the Southern Democrats who were leaving their party at that stage?

**VASTINE:** I can't say. I just don't know. I was a legislative assistant.

**RITCHIE:** There was a political revolution going on at that stage. People who were lifelong Democrats became Republicans, some Republicans became Democrats. The South as a political entity changed and the Solid South disappeared.

**VASTINE:** Well, there has been a revolution. When it started, I think we have to go to Goldwater for a defining moment in Republican Party politics, and to Johnson. What do you think? You're much more of a historian than I am.

**RITCHIE:** I'm not sure, but when you think that Hillary Clinton was a "Goldwater Girl" in 1964, you know that the world has changed in the last thirty years! It's interesting to me that people have gone in such different directions. I think you're right that '64 was a pivotal moment for many reason. Curtis again was ahead of the curve. He probably would have a much easier time winning a statewide election in Missouri now than in 1968.

**VASTINE:** Oh, I'm sure that's true. He used to say that "Selling a politician is like selling a bar of soap." That was a phrase he used. And he said, "I'm not an easy bar of soap to sell." He knew that he was kind of a difficult person, and I guess it was a tremendous risk. But I don't think it ever occurred to him he would lose. I flew around the state with him the day before the

election. We chartered a little private plane and I went with him and his press secretary. Just the three of us plus a pilot and copilot. We touched down at about six places and mainly got interviewed on radio, went to little radio stations in little trailers and third floor walkups all over Missouri, and some big places, too. We got interviewed by a television reporter at the Kansas City airport. We could tell he wasn't going to win. We just could feel that there wasn't a lot of excitement, but I don't think he could tell that. I don't think he was happy at the end of the day. I think he was plain exhausted. But his press secretary and I were pretty sure he wasn't going to win. On election day, I think it came as a surprise to him. I was extremely depressed. I tell you, if Nixon hadn't won! At least that was a ray of hope.

**RITCHIE:** But you didn't even know that until the next day.

**VASTINE:** No. I remember talking to Bryce Harlow at Nixon headquarters sometime during the last couple of weeks of the race. It was touch and go. It was not at all clear they were going to win.

**RITCHIE:** I think this would be a good place to break, with you poised between the House and the Senate. But this has been a very interesting session, I really enjoyed it and learned from it.

**VASTINE:** You say that to everybody.

**RITCHIE:** No, no, I learned a lot from it.

**VASTINE:** I think as a codicil to this we should say that Curtis went over to Reagan. He rebelled. Jerry Ford appointed him to be the first chairman of the Federal Election Commission. I can't remember the issue, but Curtis felt that Ford took a position that undercut the FEC, and Curtis fought him tooth and nail, and was so distressed, so upset by Ford and the way Ford conducted his presidency that he turned against Ford and became a backer of Reagan, parliamentarian of the Reagan movement at the '76 convention, and author of the key parliamentary challenge to Ford, which threatened to unseat Ford. If



Ford had not turned back that challenge, it really would have been open for Reagan to take the convention. I can't recall what it was.

**RITCHIE:** It probably had to do with Mississippi, because there was a challenge to the seating of the Mississippi delegation that was a critical moment to the convention.

**VASTINE:** So Curtis became a Reaganite, full out, an unabashed Reaganite. Maybe he would contest that. Maybe he'd say, [mimics] "Well, now, Bob, I really wasn't a Reaganite," and he would lecture me a little bit about the subtlety and nuance that I had missed, that he believed in some of this but some of that. Always for him it wasn't black and white, there was some gray thrown in.

**RITCHIE:** Well, the wonderful thing about Congress is that it's a stage on which characters perform, and some of the characters are much more interesting than others. And he clearly performed on the stage.

**VASTINE:** Oh, he was wonderful, he really was. I think I should tell you that about a year ago I talked to Warren Erdman, Senator [Christopher] Bond's AA and campaign manager, before the Bond campaign. I said, "Do you ever hear from Tom Curtis." He said, "Oh, my God, do I ever hear from Tom Curtis!" He said, "He was on the phone with me last week and it must have taken an hour. I finally said, 'Mr. Curtis, I can't do for you what you want me to do. I will do so much and I will do no more. And I'm very sorry sir, I cannot do what you want me to do.'" And Curtis took this very hard. [laughs] He wouldn't take no for answer. But he was not the least bit shy in calling the contemporary representatives of his party in state and telling them what he thought and asking them to do the right thing as he saw it.

Anyway, thank you for giving me the opportunity to relive my years with Tom Curtis. He was a wonderful man.

**End of Interview #1**

## FROM THE HOUSE TO THE SENATE

### Interview #2

August 31, 1993

**VASTINE:** You got me thinking about Tom Curtis of Missouri.

**RITCHIE:** Would you like to begin today with some additional comments on him?

**VASTINE:** I wanted to go back for a minute, because I guess talking about him and thinking back on our session made me realize he was a more complicated man than maybe I have thought. He was, first of all, a true conservative in his view of the role of government in society. He would even *say* that he thought the role of government was to provide for public security and national defense and guard the weights and measures. That old formula that I even remember learning in the sixth grade about what government ought to be.

But, at the same time, he had a very progressive side to him. As I said, he was very interested in the volunteer army, and he supported interns and scholars and other people in projects to develop that idea. He was also extremely interested in manpower training. He wrote a book called *Eighty-seven Million Jobs* which he thought was visionary. Unfortunately, it didn't get published except in an odd way. He had a lot of ideas. He thought very deeply about how government could encourage the private sector to develop better programs.

He also helped to encourage the Ripon Society's foundation. He actively helped one of its founders, a man named Jack Saloma, who was a young professor at MIT in those days.

Another quality of his was that he really, truly believed in the power of knowledge. He used to call it fact and fair argument. He would lecture me about fact and fair argument—how that would carry the day. It was kind of a

touching naivete because he had entered the period of media-driven politics, and he acknowledged that he had a problem there. He said, you know, getting elected these days is like merchandising a bar of soap. He was a difficult bar of soap to sell.

But this was a man who was not suited to the television camera. And ultimately, fact and fair argument, in a sense, a progressive conservative point of view lost out to an attractive democrat, media-adept machine politician.

**RITCHIE:** For somebody like Curtis, was being in the House of Representatives a satisfying or a frustrating experience?

**VASTINE:** I think he found it very satisfying until a point, and then I think he found that being in the minority was ultimately just too frustrating. And that's why he was willing to risk all to become a senator—to gain the freedom of the floor of the United States Senate and what that meant in terms of his ability to express his unique views.

He was really, *really* an individualist. He was just extraordinarily different. [Laughs] It was a privilege to work for him and also something of a trial, because you had to listen to very long speeches about things. Sometimes his points of view were just so off the wall, I mean at least from my standpoint as a very young fellow. It just seemed that a lot of those things that he talked about could never happen. Of course he believed that the Soviet system would crumble, and I sort of poo-pooed that, and he was right! [Laughs].

He believed Medicare, the health care system that had been created in his committee, would not last. And he's correct about that. I'm sure that others who worked with him would find other examples. Anyway, that's all I wanted to say.

**RITCHIE:** When you first introduced him, you mentioned in your first meeting that he did all the talking. Afterwards, would he listen as well; or did he do most of the talking?

**VASTINE:** I learned how to get him information. I learned how to convince him. He liked to read memos, and I wrote him memos. Then we would discuss them. He was very interested in my ideas, actually. I learned how to insert my thoughts and guide him. And I could anticipate him. After awhile I got to know him so well that I could anticipate him the next lecture and maybe divert it.

But he wasn't fooled. After I had worked for him about two years we were in a meeting with some folks, and the folks disagreed with me. They were industry representatives, and I was kind of the enemy—in a way—to them. And Curtis was a very crafty, wily guy. Not dishonest, and not dishonest toward me. This is about as direct an example of this as I could find. He looked at me and said, "Well, Bob there has been working for me now for about a year. He ought to know." But what he was telling me was that he'd let me have my head for a year and finally I'd come around to some of his points of view. That I really now was more reflective of his thinking than I had been. [Laughs] And at the same time he was telling the visitors that he wasn't captive to my point of view.

He was very sensitive to me. He was a *very* sensitive boss, and he realized that he had an introverted person on his hands who hadn't had much experience with work and a very bad experience in my first job. I really detested my first boss at the U.S. Chamber. And Curtis helped me a lot by letting me have my head and by encouraging me. That was a technique he had with people. He would find people with energy, with whom he agreed, or in whom he had trust. He would just let them have their head in hopes that something good would happen. He said, "You know, this is all one great, big experiment." He said, "We're dealing with ideas, and that's why we have hearings. We want to expose the facts. We want to have the arguments. If you've got an idea, let me have it. I want to know your ideas. Even if they're wrong. It's all right if you make a mistake. It's perfectly okay."

That was a marvelous quality of his. He was a very good person.

**RITCHIE:** While you were still working for Curtis you were on loan to Senator Percy.

**VASTINE:** For a little while, yes, until Percy got his legs in foreign trade.

**RITCHIE:** How did that come about? How did you wind up being lent out to the Senate side?

**VASTINE:** Well, because my good friend Carol Mayor-Marshall—then Carol Khosrovi—who had been Bob Taft’s legislative assistant in the House went over to work as a legislative assistant for Chuck Percy. She and I were very good friends and still are, and she recommended me to Percy. I’d known other people with Percy. When they wanted someone they could rely on to steer them straight on foreign trade, they called on me.

I think my main contribution—it’s an irony—was to point out to Percy first that there was no private-sector support organization for freer trade. There was no effective private-sector defender, just a weak vestigial one: the Committee for a National Trade Policy. It had gotten very moribund, indeed. It was useless. And there needed to be some kind of organization in Washington that spoke up for the interests of the multinational corporations which were basically for freer trade and the banks. Percy in my presence began to place calls. One of them to Arthur Watson. A.K. Watson was the vice chairman of IBM and the chairman of IBM World Trade, the brother of Tom Watson, son of the great Thomas Watson. And one to David Rockefeller, and I think one to Bill Blackie who was then chairman of Caterpillar Tractor.

He got on the phone to those guys and said “This is the time to do something.” I helped him write a speech, which was going to be a *great* speech in the Senate, and it was going to change the world. It was a competent speech, and it didn’t change the world, but at least it identified where he stood on trade. That’s how I came to know his staff in the early period. It was funny, because he came in like a hot wind from the Midwest. He was tan, fit, and ready. He

was young. He was handsome, he was *extremely* charismatic. He had this gorgeous, deep voice.

Remember I told you I helped found the Republican Discussion Group in the House, and we had him as one of our main speakers after the election of that year. Would have been the election of '68?

**RITCHIE:** Sixty-six.

**VASTINE:** Yes, exactly, '66. The room was absolutely jammed. We got the biggest room in the Rayburn Building. And we had a head table. He came in—this was before I started speechifying for him, speech ghosting for him. He came in, and he had such a sense of command, you know; and everyone is stunned when they see him because he's so small. He's a short man, but he's very well made. He has a great physique. To this day!

He came in and shook hands with the head table, and then he made this speech that was his stump speech. He gave his stump speech. But it was a great speech. To me it was scary—because he was so charismatic and he had such a fantastic voice. It was so big! And powerful! I was really kind of wary of him. I thought, "My goodness! What is this slick item? What kind of bill of goods is he selling? Watch out for him!" I wasn't convinced for some time about him.

I recall when I did begin to have an association with his staff that they would try all kinds of things to identify him as a "new" kind of senator. They wanted him to go out and play touch football on the Capitol lawn at lunch and not be a fuddy, old senator, but be somebody *different*. He had presidential hopes. And he defeated Paul Douglas. Partly as a result of the death of his daughter—the murder of his daughter, Valerie, which he handled wonderfully as a human being and as a father and as a politician.

Anyway, they were positioning Percy right away for power; and the Senate then was still the Senate of the Southern kings, the Southern chairmen.

They were having no part of this young upstart with his blond hair and his good looks. And, of course, he'd even come in suspect within his own party, because in the Goldwater campaign he had waffled and not endorsed Goldwater! That's why the conservatives in the state of Illinois developed a dislike for him that lasted until he was finally defeated; and they *helped* defeat him.

But even before then he played a role in the convention of that year. I guess it would have been the convention of '61?

**RITCHIE:** Sixty. At Nixon's convention he was involved in writing the platform, I think.

**VASTINE:** Yes. Well, there are stories about that, you know. He was the vice chairman of the Platform Committee or something?

**RITCHIE:** Yes.

**VASTINE:** Well, he was definitely *not* interested in sitting down and slogging through a platform. He wasn't interested in that at all! They wanted him to make some sort of a film to talk about the Republican Party or something. He was rehearsing for that, and he was in and out.

That's the same Chuck Percy. Conventions were a disaster for that man. He always got creamed at conventions, I think. I was with him in the Miami Convention of '72. Is that right—'72?

**RITCHIE:** Yes.

**VASTINE:** He started out saying, "I will not be involved in this convention." Then, he said— and I think I had something to do this—"Well, maybe to get involved and the way to get involved is to join a group of my big state friends— my big state colleague and others— to make sure that the delegate allocation formula is fair to the big states." Because, then, the Republican delegate allocation formula for conventions favored the small states.

Well, the way this ended up working out was it was not constitutional—I'm not going to remember all this now. It was not strictly constitutional according to a decision of the court in another case. So we set out well before the convention designing a new delegate allocation formula. And lo and behold I just—I am not numeric at all—I came up with the perfect delegate allocation formula. And, just to telescope the story, we got to the convention; and as you know, conventions are two-week affairs. The first week is spent in rules fights and party-platform stuff! And it was in that first week that we fought through subcommittee—no, rules committee, subcommittees, full committee. Then there's still a further higher thing. And then, finally, the floor of the convention. Fought through this effort to get the delegate allocation formula changed.

And, of course, we were *beat*! We were beat by the fact that the other side had more votes.

**RITCHIE:** But he wasn't successful in selling the plan?

**VASTINE:** But getting back to the thing, he was thoroughly humiliated on the floor of the convention by his own delegation! By a vote of something like six to a hundred against him. I remember big, tall Roger Mudd coming up to him on the convention floor with his TV camera crew. I'd gotten on the floor because I had borrowed somebody's press credentials or something—that was very easy to do then—and I was with him, standing right behind him to the side. And he'd just been repudiated by his own delegation. And Roger Mudd didn't like him and came up, stuck this camera in his face and said, "Well, Senator, wouldn't you say you've just been repudiated by your own convention?"

And Percy said, [intones] "Oh, not at all." My mother was watching this. She saw me. She said, "Well, whatever it was, it looked like it came out all right for him." Which was my first practical lesson that the medium is the message. You have to *look* confident. He understood that about the camera. I remember when we announced our delegate allocation plan in the Government Operations hearing room in the Dirksen Building, we had a big press conference. And he came in looking just great. He walked with purpose! He was presidential! He



had great, big hands. And he sat down at the microphone at the hearing table facing the cameras, and he put his hands up on the table. [Demonstrates] This is a very good pose; very strong looking. So he had his hands there like that, and he steeled his jaw, you know. He looked just great!

He announced this wonderful delegate allocation plan which was the only fair thing. Of course it was morally right and electorally right and democratic and legal, too. [Laughs] But, in the end we just absolutely got smashed! In a way, it came about because the night before the convention floor fight he'd made a wrong decision. He made a decision—not on my advice, but on the advice of somebody else, his campaign manager, a guy named Doug Bailey. Doug Bailey now runs the Campaign Hotline.

Anyway, on the advice of Bailey and one other member of the staff named Scott Cohen who was later the staff director of the Foreign Relations Committee, they decided to back off and not pursue the delegate formula change. Just to say, “Look, we’ve been defeated every step of the way, so let’s stop them.” In the subcommittee, Bill Steiger came in—oh, I can tell you a story about Bill Steiger that would just astonish you! And John Anderson was part of this. Very fascinating! We were all at the Fontainebleau Hotel. “Fountainblow,” I said that very deliberately that way, that awful place, smelling of mildew. What an experience it was. It just went on for endless days, you know. I didn’t sleep at all.

So, the night before the big fight on the convention floor Percy was advised and decided, “Look, we’ve lost, we aren’t getting anywhere, so let’s bag this.” So he went to the Illinois delegation without checking with the New York delegation and with the other folks who’d all been part of this whole effort all along, Javits and speaker of the New York state senate and this whole group of people, Anderson, Steiger. Without checking with anybody, he went and declared to the Illinois delegation: “I’m not going to pursue this fight.”

*Then* he discovered that he would be seen by the press as a turncoat. It was a real mistake. I, in a very early morning conference, had argued against

that. And he said, “Oh, come on, Bob. Look at the doughnut, don’t look at the hole.” That was one of his favorites. But he used that on that occasion. He also used to say, “Let’s figure out how we can make a lemonade out of this lemon.” That was another one of his sayings.

So he went to the delegation and said, “I’m going to stop this. I’m going to go along.” Then he ran into a buzz saw from the media and from his cohorts, the part of his team with whom I had been working as we calculated out all of these delegate allocations night after night. So he had to reverse his decision. And, naturally, the delegation wasn’t going to follow him. So they voted against him, and that was that.

**RITCHIE:** What was it about Percy? He was a man who seemed to have everything going for him.

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** He was wealthy. He was good-looking. He spoke well. He came from a big state with a lot of electoral votes. And somehow. . . .

**VASTINE:** It fizzled.

**RITCHIE:** What happened? Was there some basic flaw to the man, or just hard luck?

**VASTINE:** It’s not that, not hard luck. But something did happen. And it’s so complicated and so subtle. You know, there is not one answer to that question.

I saw him for lunch the other day. A couple of months ago, rather. It feels like the other day. And he’s mellowed into this *lovely* grandfather. He’s in his mid- to late seventies now. He’s very hard of hearing, and his energy level has gone way down. He doesn’t have that drive at all.

But to try to answer your question. I remember my first meeting with him, when he wanted to employ me as the first minority staff director of the Government Affairs Committee. Then named Government Operations Committee. We had a very interesting interview. One of the things he asked me was how old I was. And I guess I said I was thirty-three, something like that. And he said—this youthful senator—“Oh,” he said with feeling. “Oh, to be thirty-three again.” [Laughs] [sighs] I don’t know.

Well, there is one point of view that says he’s not really smart. That’s not fair because he’s plenty smart. But he was not a good politician. He didn’t cultivate people—and his hearing had a lot to do with it. Because it got worse and worse, and he had failures of communication, regular failures of communication, because he was too proud to say, “What? I didn’t hear you. Tell me.” For a long time he refused to wear a hearing aid. If you have a moment for an anecdote.

**RITCHIE:** Yes.

**VASTINE:** When we had Government Affairs Committee markups—I have to say Government Operations Committee—Percy was ranking and Javits was next. We were all crammed at this big table. The hearing table was used as the markup table. And Percy was hard of hearing! So we were working on a bill, marking it up, and I said, into Percy’s ear, “Why not, blah-de-blah-de-blah change.” I had to say it loud enough for Percy to get it even though I was talking into his ear. Javits heard it; Percy didn’t. Javits heard it and turned to me and said, “*That’s* a stupid idea!” “What a dumb idea!” he said. [Laughs] “What a dumb idea!”

I think he didn’t mend his fences carefully enough, and he lost focus. He didn’t really have a message. He really didn’t know how to change the country for the better. Toward the end, Nixon began his second term, and we came off the writing of the Budget and Impoundment Act of 1974. And I was the hero of that in the office because it was a Percy bill. And Percy began his presidential campaign. He actually started fund-raising and traveling around the country.

I asked to be in charge of this sort of vision-of-the-presidency project: here's what a Percy presidency would look like. I had secured the agreement of the AA to go off and take about two months, or six weeks, I guess, of leave with pay to go close myself in a room and read what had been written about the presidency to that point. You know, to conceptualize the Percy presidency. It seemed so *vain!* The whole idea.

The AA's heart really wasn't in it. His name was Joe Farrell, and he was a former executive officer in one of the nuclear subs, a protege in a sense of [Admiral Hyman] Rickover, and an extremely able executive. He really didn't believe in this Percy presidential effort, but Percy wanted to pursue it. The AA would say to me, "Well, why doesn't he just satisfy himself with being a damn good senator? Isn't that enough?" And, of course, he was right!

But Percy was interested in pushing on. It all came to naught in August. It fell apart when Nixon resigned. Then there wasn't any Anti-Christ. There was nobody to run against. Ford was a moderate. You couldn't run against him, you had to pull behind Ford. The whole party was in a shambles, a disaster. There was no role for a Percy candidacy. So they declared an end to it, and they gave back the money. And I ceased being head of the definition of the Percy presidency project. But I'm trying to get back to your question.

**RITCHIE:** To follow up on that, Percy was a very successful businessman before he became a politician. He came in when George Romney, another businessman, became governor with similar promise. It seems to some degree that the qualities that make for a really good business executive don't necessarily make for a really good politician. People automatically assume that one must lead to the other, but I wonder if it's not the best training for somebody from business to go into a political career; or doesn't that hold up from the way you've seen it?

**VASTINE:** Well, that's a good question. And I haven't reached any conclusion about that. I can say to you this: this man was fabulous at resolving conflict and creating solutions and implementing. He was extremely creative.

You could walk into his office with a problem that might involve a conflict with another staff member, or a dilemma, and he was terrific at finding a way out of it. He had a lots of different clubs in his bag, in other words. His business experience. His experience of the world. His knowledge of people. His reach, because he had been a leader in the business community for a very long time. He just knew a lot of people! All of that meant that his scope was very broad. He had been head of a corporation dealing with big problems, financial and otherwise, for a long time.

And he was a marketing genius. I should strike genius. He was very, very good at marketing. Very creative in his ideas. He *never* got enough press. He *never* was happy with his press people. He was *never* happy with his speech writers. None of it was ever good enough or creative enough. He would keep talking about it. I was considered one of the most creative people in the office, I discovered later. But, I always felt—certainly at the start—that I would never satisfy this man’s lust for creativity.

So his tremendous business experience was helpful to him in lots of ways in managing and being a senator. But I think the problem was he was kind of a Bush Republican. He wanted power because he felt he would use it well. I think there were some things he believed in—I’m not sure that I can name them precisely: a chance for everybody; decency. I think he was concerned about the poor. He was concerned about housing for the poor. He was very active on the McGovern Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs. There were things that engaged him, certainly foreign policy did. He found it fascinating. He used to say “I’m not a green eyeshade man.” He had a young woman working for him who later became a federal judge. [Sarah] Barker was her name, Judge Barker. And she said of him once when he had a chance to be on the Appropriations Committee, and he was debating whether to be on the Appropriations Committee. She said, “Senator, I think that’s the wrong thing for you. You’re just not a green eyeshades kind of guy.” That little bit of insight about himself he repeated all the time; and it became a kind of axiom. So when we got the Budget Committee and we’d written the law with his name on it, and he’d managed the bill on the floor of the Senate to pass the Budget and

Impoundment Act in '74, well, I'd thrown my heart and soul into that for a year or more. And I wanted him to be on the goddamn committee. Well, he really didn't want to be on the committee!

I figured out five different ways—or ten—every time he was told “no” by the Committee on Committees or the Conference. I would find a new way to jiggle it so that he could get on the committee. His colleagues acknowledged it and said if anybody deserves to be on this, you do.

Well, the bottom line was that he really didn't want to be. And I didn't realize that! One day I'd gone off to sit quietly and write something in the back room of one of the hearing rooms. He knew where, somehow I had left the number where I'd be. He called me and surprised me by finding me in this hideaway. And he said, “Well, Bob.” [intones] “Well, Bob.” He had a wonderful way of claiming victory though he'd been defeated. [expansive] “*Wonderful* meeting. *Everyone* said what a *wonderful* job I'd done. And you had done, Bob. Your marvelous work in getting the budget bill passed and creating the committee and launching us on this new path.”

He brought me up. And then he said, “But, uh, you know I'm not going to be on the committee. And you know I just have to tell you, as Sarah said, I'm really not a green eyeshades person. And I guess I just didn't want to be on it very much.” And I realized, all the time that he never did. It took until then—after six or eight weeks of fussing around about who was going to be on the committee. I felt so dumb. Never been so dumb. I was depressed for six months. [chuckles] It was awful. But I still didn't answer the question.

I don't know what led to his decline. At the end he was not considered a good chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. He was laughed at. He seemed to have difficulty bringing bills to the floor and managing them successfully. It's because this man who had achieved so very much in his life still had a sense of insecurity and he still drew tremendous pride from the acknowledgement of other leaders. He would said, “Oh, I've got to go. I'm having lunch with the Dalai Lama.” He left a whole bunch of his Republican

congressmen, Illinois delegation colleagues on the line. “Well, the Dalai Lama is waiting for me.” Pissed them off! I mean, how many congressmen care about the Dalai Lama?

It just fell apart. He’d been warned in the election of ’78 that he’d gotten out of touch. That’s the election in which Percy had to fling himself in front of the people on his knees and say: “I’m sorry I didn’t understand you. I misheard you. I lost touch. I do care. I’ll try harder.” And he turned it around in the last ten days. He did it by throwing himself into it with all of his energy and using the remains of his credibility with the media.

In the end he was defeated, I think, by the whole problem with his downstate constituency, which he was never able to mend, the conservative Republicans.

And he’d offended the Jews by calling Yasser Arafat a moderate, which indeed he may prove to be. He had to rely on suburban Republicans who weren’t sufficient to overcome the Democratic alliance of the Jewish people and the inner-city blacks and disadvantaged in Chicago, and the old line Democrats, machine Democrats. While at the same time the downstate Republican were sitting on their hands. And the White House *helped* that by supporting the candidacy of Congressman Tom Corcoran, who ran in the primary against Percy and was defeated. Ed Rollins, I understand supported the candidacy of Corcoran. Rollins was then White House political director. But it definitely created a rift among Republicans, and it wasn’t cured. And the Friday before the election, the employment data were bad. It was a down tic. Until that point there had been upward momentum in the campaign. It just all completely came to a stop, and you really felt it.

I was helping raise money. I was working for Chafee, and I was helping to raise money for Percy with Chafee’s permission. Even I, in Washington, felt it! There just wasn’t anything there any more. There wasn’t any momentum. And he lost narrowly, I think. But, nonetheless, lost. The day when I saw a

picture of Paul Simon and Jesse Jackson and [Walter] Mondale? Was it Mondale?

**RITCHIE:** He was running for president that year.

**VASTINE:** Walking hand in hand in a Michigan Avenue parade—arm in arm. I thought: this is it. The whole, Democratic club—crowd—is back together. Percy had always had good relations with Jesse Jackson. He was very believable in the black community and had a big following.

In the end he did not win respect among his colleagues as a chairman because he got mesmerized by all those foreign ambassadors, because he got the old chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee “disease,” I think. And because his staff didn’t do a good job by him. They seemed to mismanage bills. They didn’t seem to be able to work with him effectively to run the committee. You know, that’s his fault. I think his staff—boy, I’m really being candid—I mean, I know so many of these people still. He let the quality of the staff decline, and it wasn’t as strong a staff as it had been. I think his own ability to communicate and understand and really listen and understand what was happening diminished. We were really an extremely effective minority in the Government Affairs Committee, extremely effective. If [Edmund] Muskie and Percy didn’t agree, *nothing happened* in that committee. There were members of the majority who would vote with us. My point is that I know Percy was capable of being very effective as leader of a committee.

But, the bottom line is, he never really had a message. He wasn’t an ideologue. He didn’t come with a fighting message. He came as a charismatic figure but without the compulsion and the appeal of some sort of a message that hit the gut of Americans. Sort of sad.

**RITCHIE:** Let me back up a little bit before we get to that point because there’s a period between when Curtis lost in ’68 and when you went to work for the committee in ’71 that you were involved in outside organizations. I wondered, when Curtis lost and Nixon won, how is it you didn’t either go with



the Nixon administration or with Percy at that stage. Why did you leave the government in 1968?

**VASTINE:** I left before the election of '68, in March, in fact. A fellow approached me from downtown named Bob McNeil who was a vice president at the Ford Motor Company for international affairs. He was in the economic affairs office here. And he'd been at the Commerce Department. And out of the blue he called me and said, "Can we have a drink? I'd like to talk to you about a job." So I joined him, and we began what is still a very deep, very good friendship. He basically employed me as the first employee of the Emergency Committee for American Trade, which was the group headed by A. K. Watson and David Rockefeller and Bill Blackie that Percy had helped foment some time earlier, maybe some six months before. My first paychecks, in fact, were from the personal account of A. K. Watson.

They found me a little office, and I started lobbying. I went to the convention that year, the '68 convention, to prevent a protectionist plank in the platform. Bill Blackie was my ace in the hole. This chairman of Caterpillar Tractor, one of the biggest employers in Illinois, came at my request to Miami. I took him to meet Ev Dirksen. John Gomien and Glee Gomien, his wife, were Dirksen's long-time staff members whom I knew. They gave us an audience. We walked in on Ev Dirksen eating a sandwich sitting on a baby-blue brocade sofa in this Fontainebleau room—powder blue rug and view of the Atlantic. He was sitting on this couch, with a big, long coffee table stacked with letters and papers, eating his lunch and drinking a glass of milk. We made our pitch for a free trade plank and against protectionism, against the textile interests and all that.

Ev said, "I have this very fine young man, Bo Calloway, who's running for governor of Georgia. Now, Bo has come to me and said, unless he has something on textiles in this plank, he's just not gonna get elected. He needs something, and I have to help him out." So, Dirksen said, "Don't worry. We're going to take care of you and Bo." And, indeed, the platform had a protectionist plank and in

the next sentence or paragraph he had inserted a free trade plank. It was something for everyone.

Then I went out and spent two weeks with Curtis on his campaign. Then Nixon got elected; and, I was just a moderate Republican. Oddly enough, I was a Curtis Republican, which made me not a moderate Republican, but I couldn't get into the Nixon administration somehow. I couldn't crack it. It didn't really matter because I had a pretty good job. And long about a year and a half into this good job with ECAT, I was approached to open the Washington office for a big corporation called CPC [Corn Products Corporation] International.

**RITCHIE:** And what is CPC?

**VASTINE:** Well, it's a corporation that makes consumer products—Best Foods and Hellmann's mayonnaise. It's also the biggest corn miller—I don't know whether it is today, but it was very, very big. It was then among the top 100 U.S. corporations. It is now much, much smaller, relatively. It is a very conservative corporation, very conservatively managed. They were trying to diversify. They had bought a drug company. They diversified into baking. They bought Thomas' English Muffins. So, our interests here in Washington were mainly consumerist. I worked with the Grocery Manufacturers Association, and they made me the head of their Washington Representatives Committee. I began to be connected to that world.

But I was really a neophyte. I really didn't understand about money and politics. I was a little too naive. But the main thing is that I really didn't feel the corporation needed me. The executives thought they *ought* to have a Washington office, some of them, but didn't know how to use it.

Bottom line is, I don't think the corporation cared very much. And I was right! Because a couple years after I left they closed the office. As I was working there, Percy got to be ranking on the Government Operations Committee, and his then-legislative director whom I had brought in to Tom

Curtis' office to take my job when I left Tom Curtis, approached me and said would I be interested in the Government Affairs job. It just worked out.

I came back to the Hill, and I was absolutely ecstatic to be back here. I love the Senate. It was awfully hard because Jim Calloway who was the staff director of the Government Operations Committee, worked for Senator John McClellan. Calloway and his coterie were real savvy, good old boy Southern pols. They had no time for this upstart, Percy, who was demanding a third of the staff and space and that kind of thing. They found him to be very meddlesome and annoying. And I, of course, was his point man. I was the one who was out there trying to establish the minority. It took awhile to do it, but we really did. By the time I left four years later we had a very large staff. It was sort of embarrassing how many staff we had on all the various subcommittees of the Government Affairs Committee—especially the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations.

**RITCHIE:** Percy was famous for that. I remember when he was ranking on Foreign Relations before he became chairman that, at one point, he had more staff working for him than the chairman of the committee had working for him. Somehow he managed to do that—to build large staffs. They used to say Percy hired a lot of people for not much salary, whereas the chairmen tended to hire a few people but at good salaries to have continuity. But Percy's office was famous for having younger people coming through it. Was that your experience? Maybe I'm talking about his personal office rather than his committee.

**VASTINE:** Well, I knew the personal office very well; but I only really know it until 1975 when I left it.

No, it was not a turnstile, merry-go-round. He did attract some very good young people. We became a very effective minority, as a result. We really were. We were very good. I don't think he chewed up people. He had a hard time with press secretaries, though, I will say.

**RITCHIE:** That may have been the view from the other side, looking over at him. That's probably where I heard it from, as a matter of fact.

**VASTINE:** Well, that's very interesting. I didn't know that was his reputation.

**RITCHIE:** When you came on as minority staff member, there had never been a minority staff before, right?

**VASTINE:** There had been one man, who had worked for Karl Mundt, but not as minority staff director. Actually, my title was minority counsel. I don't know why. I'm not a lawyer. It's been pointed out to me many times that I shouldn't have had that title—by lawyers. But I always countered that I could write as good an amendment as they could. And, indeed, I was good at writing amendments and bills.

Another bill that I wrote on my typewriter in the little room back of SD-106—Percy was then on the ground floor, and we had an annex room right by the elevators at the front door of the Dirksen Building—was the Advisory Committee Act of 1974, which regulates advisory committees, and which is a constant thorn in everyone's side, I must say. In my last job the general counsel saw on my wall the pen I got—a Nixon pen I got for having done this. He said, "You're to blame for this!" Minority Counsel, I was the first one, yes.

**RITCHIE:** Since 1946, when they created professional staffs for the first time in the sense that the professional staff worked for the whole committee.

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** They were supposed to be non-partisan. But by 1970 that wasn't necessarily the case.

**VASTINE:** Right. Well, I think some committees took a long time to change. Foreign Relations took the longest time. At that point the movement

for minority staff was very strong, and about two years later, Senator [William] Brock who was a member of our committee put in a resolution that said every senator should get a member of the committee sort of assigned to him or should have a piece of the committee's clerk-hire. Do you remember?

**RITCHIE:** Umhmmm.

**VASTINE:** I thought it was outrageous because it meant a dilution of our authority as ranking. Our clerk-hire had to be spread around, but I thought it was going too far, really—for every member of the Government Affairs Committee to have some of its staff.

I remember there was a moment when we were going through the committee budget, and we were parceling out who was going to do what; which senator would be ranking on which subcommittee, and how many subcommittees there would be, how would it all be parceled out. I remember there was a time when we were asked to give staff to other members of the committee, to give up some of our clerk-hire to other members of the committee, and I fought it tooth and nail! Percy came in, having thought this issue through on his way to work, he walked into the caucus where all the minority were sitting down to decide what to do. And he conceded. Just plain conceded. He wasn't going to buck it. And he was absolutely right. I was being purist. But he was right about it. He would not have prevailed.

That was the period, too, when Javits, who was ranking on five committees or something, had to pick just one. They were cutting back on the power of the old dons.

**RITCHIE:** Percy was still in his first term in 1971, and actually Mundt had been the ranking member, but he'd had a stroke.

**VASTINE:** That's right.

**RITCHIE:** Javits outranked him, but he was already ranking on Foreign Relations, and so Percy, the third person in line, became the ranking member of your committee.

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** Whereas McClellan had been there since they built the Capitol. [Laughs]

**VASTINE:** Yes. Actually it's absolutely astonishing that Percy got to ranking so fast. It was really dumb luck, just one of those things. He was extremely aware of Senator Mundt—not to presume too much, because Mundt was still a senator, I think.

**RITCHIE:** Yes, his wife wouldn't let him resign.

**VASTINE:** Right. He was living near here—you could see where he was living [in an apartment across from the Dirksen Senate Office Building].

**RITCHIE:** I used to watch him walk around the block with his nurse.

**VASTINE:** Oh, really. Well, Percy would call him up and send him notes. Percy was very, very aware of the importance of senior people. There's a story about him, he got to be the president of Bell and Howell at the age of twenty-five, or whatever it was, because, as an intern at Bell and Howell, he became the favorite, by his energy and initiative, of the then-Scottish president, I guess Mr. Howell. He used to talk about this. And he became the fair-haired boy. He had a way of doing that. He understood mentoring and the appeal of a younger man to an older man. He was very careful never to push too hard on Karl Mundt or to presume that he was, before Senator Mundt was dead, that he would really rank. He was very, very careful about that. But, yes, he got the job because Mundt had a stroke, and the conference rules changes of that very year prevented Javits from ranking on "Gov Ops." in addition to his other committee assignments.

At the same time, there had been a change in the rules of the Senate which gave the minority more claim to staff. My job was to move in and exert those—exercise those rules; insist on them; help Percy insist. And he was great! When I would say, “Senator we have to get more space,” he’d write a letter; he would call; he would go for it. He was not scared to push. One of his mottos was that modesty is a much underrated virtue.

**RITCHIE:** What were the functions of the minority staff at that stage?

**VASTINE:** We had to present a minority viewpoint. Well! Okay, I’ll tell you. Yes, I was hired with a great mission! I’d forgotten this. We had a great mission! We were to implement—Percy was to implement, he *personally* was to implement the great Nixon reforms, the so-called Sixth American Revolution. No, “the New American Revolution.” It’s the same thing as “Reinventing Government.”

**RITCHIE:** This was the Nixon reform?

**VASTINE:** This was the Nixon reform. Point Six in his platform in his State of the Union in 1971 was: we are going to reinvent government. We are going to have the New American Revolution in government organization. And the Ash Commission had just reported. The [Roy] Ash Commission had called for the creation of four super-cabinet departments. They were to be the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Business and Industry or Business and Commerce, something like that. And the Department of Energy and Environment, and some other department. I just don’t remember.

Well, it was dead on arrival. The Democrats—McClellan and that group—they thought this was pretty funny. “We’ll have hearings, but. . . .” So, my first job was to organize those hearings. Of course Percy wanted to have a campaign in his Boy Scout, super-idealistic, gung-ho, somewhat irrational way. He wanted to have a statement in the *Record* every day. That’s where you’re going to change things, right? A statement in the *Record* every day talking about the need for this. Letters of testimony! Every member of the business

community writing in clamoring. So that meant we had to write them all and get them to write in. Hearings, of course. But they never got to markup. There was never a markup. I mean, they just weren't going to let it happen. And the Nixon people realized it was a dead letter.

I remember once demanding an audience with the head of congressional relations for the Senate who was very well known guy. He later came back and was Reagan's chief of congressional relations, and then he was given a consulship—after getting the Reagan program through, he was given a rest spell in Bermuda. Max Friedersdorf.

**RITCHIE:** Right.

**VASTINE:** As I said, I *insisted* on a meeting with Max Friedersdorf and talk about strategy and what the White House plans were in helping us get this thing through. And he couldn't have cared less! So that was my *initial* work.

**RITCHIE:** They were also going to revise all the regulatory commissions and have one-person czars instead of commissions.

**VASTINE:** Yes. I forgot about that.

**RITCHIE:** Of course, everything they wanted to abolish had a constituency behind it, usually a very powerful constituency.

**VASTINE:** Well, I've learned all about government reorganization and that it's a thankless task. There is no constituency for it except an idealistic vague sort of one which quickly yawns and gets bored and gets tired with it. Because after you get past the platitudes about how efficient everything's going to be, there's no "there" there. There's no driving, political imperative to do it. So it was a bust, and that's why I'm very cynical about Mr. [Albert] Gore's reinvention. More power to him, but it's a thankless task.



I was listening to a talk show program this morning, and people were saying, “Oh, we’re going to do this. It’s gonna be great. Just gotta do it.” And I said, “Oh, dear, [chuckles] I’ve been there.”

**RITCHIE:** Well, that may be the constituency they’re appealing to. The talk-show constituency rather than any other. I agree that, certainly, the government has gone through major reorganizations from time to time. And it always comes out looking just about the way it did before it started. [Laughs]

**VASTINE:** Yeah, when we had the Nixon “revolution,” one of the things we had to do was to go back and look at the Hoover Commission and what that had accomplished and link its work with the Ash Commission. Oh, we had all this rhetoric. It was just so useless!

But the problem with the Government Affairs Committee is that—Government Operations Committee—is that it isn’t intrinsically very exciting. It doesn’t have a really sexy mandate. It sounds great, and it sounded great to me when I was offered the job. I thought, “Well we can investigate anything.” We can look at scandal and fraud and abuse wherever it occurs in the government and get all excited about that. But, in fact, it doesn’t do that a lot except in the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. And it doesn’t even there do it very well.

On the other hand, we had the consumerist movement. And Senator [Abraham] Ribicoff was head of the subcommittee on Consumer Affairs, I think it was called. He was very aggressive, and he had a very aggressive staff. They did kick up some excitement. One of the things that I had done at CPC, through the Grocery Manufacturers Association, was have a material role in the killing of the first Consumer Protection Agency proposal, in the House. Of course, Percy was the Senate Republican sponsor of such a bill! So I had to sort of recuse myself and step away from it.

The committee then had wonderful membership. We had Muskie, and [Hubert] Humphrey, and [Lawton] Chiles, and [Sam] Nunn, Brock and [William]

Roth, and McClellan and Ervin, and Javits and Percy. [Pete] Domenici joined it as one of his first committee assignments. Roth was an early member. [John] Glenn came on, and of course is now chairman. It was excellent. It was a very, very high quality committee! I can't explain why exactly.

I have a little anecdote. And that was about the first day that Senator Humphrey came back to the committee after his defeat. When would this have been? What year?

**RITCHIE:** Seventy-one. Because he was reelected in '70 after he had been defeated in '64. No, it would have been later.

**VASTINE:** It was '72. Didn't he and Muskie—that's when Muskie ran and cried.

**RITCHIE:** Yes. Muskie was running in the primary in '72. But, no, I think Humphrey came back into the Senate in '71.

**VASTINE:** Right, right. But then he'd run in the primary.

**RITCHIE:** Then he tried to run for president.

**VASTINE:** Tried to run for president but was defeated.

**RITCHIE:** And then he tried again in '76, too.

**VASTINE:** Right. Okay, so here's this picture I have. We're organizing a meeting, as I recall, on an important markup of the committee. I came over from the Senate in the subway; and in the same car were Muskie and Humphrey. I have this indelible picture of Humphrey *clinging* to Muskie—almost holding his arm—leaning on him in a sense in his shadow. Humiliated. Defeated. Broken a little bit. Downcast. Coming back to the Senate for his first meeting with his colleagues. It was very hard for him. He

didn't say anything. Head down. The Happy Warrior. I don't know. Maybe he just didn't have a good lunch that day.

**RITCHIE:** Well, his party was still very divided, and there were a lot of Democrats who weren't too happy about him coming back, I think, at that stage, after representing the Vietnam policy for the Johnson administration.

**VASTINE:** Umhmmm.

**RITCHIE:** You mentioned that the Government Operations Committee isn't the sexy committee, but the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations is. It's gotten a lot of publicity over time.

**VASTINE:** Yes, it has.

**RITCHIE:** Was that really part of the committee, or was that really a sort of an independent operation? I've never quite figured that out.

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** As minority staff director, did you have much relations with that subcommittee; or was that really a separate function over there?

**VASTINE:** I can tell you it was quite separate. Ruth Watt ran her own operation. I can't remember the names of the staff directors, but they did their own thing. They really did. They played cops and robbers and had investigators and secrets, and rooms of locked files.

**RITCHIE:** Kept their own files?

**VASTINE:** Kept files. Oh, yes, big huge room of files down on the first floor—basement floor—of the Russell Building, where I worked, down in the bowels of the Russell Building.

**RITCHIE:** First floor, I guess it was.

**VASTINE:** Our big moment came, of course, with the Budget Impoundment Act. I got an idea from Tom Curtis, who said all you have to do to control the budget is make a resolution. He told me that in the Reorganization Act of 1947 there had been an effort to put in a budget process. And that was simply a requirement—a simple requirement—that, at the beginning of every year, Congress should pass a resolution stating the amount of total spending. It was just a five-line thing. A very simple instruction to the Senate and House. So I went to the Senate Library, and I looked up what he was talking about. And I found what it was, and converted it into a simple bill that Percy then put in. So we had our own bill. Brock also put in a bill.

I don't remember exactly how, but—oh, yes! The Democrats, Senator [Lee] Metcalf's people, picked up the idea because of Nixon's impounding practices. It was very offensive to the Democrats that Nixon had just decided he was going to impound. And he sent John Mitchell and the OMB Director to our committee and other committees, to say, "yes, we believe we have a right to impound." And that got the Democrats' dander up. So in that environment, just after that Nixon reelection, the new budget process was born.

But I also remember how the committee began to pick up the cry. I'm just trying to recall how impoundment extended itself into the budget process. But it did. I engineered it so that we put in a Percy-Ervin bill. It became the Ervin-Percy bill. I wanted it to be Percy-Ervin, of course, but I knew there was no point in that. If it were Percy's bill, it would never get to be law. The committee staff director, Bob Smith, and I made a deal. He understood Percy's importance on the committee. He liked Percy. He knew that Ervin was tied up in Watergate, that we were going to need every bit of Percy's energy to get something passed. And he saw it as his way, as staff director of the committee, to make a mark. One thing led to another, and lo and behold, we began this process of writing this Budget and Impoundment Act that Al From and I and a guy named Nick Bizony, who worked for Bob Smith on the majority side, put

together along with Metcalf's people, a guy named Win Turner and Vic Reinemer, two Metcalf stalwarts.

So, I'm running down.

**RITCHIE:** Well, this is a good point, then, for us to stop. I've got lots more questions, but we can get them at the next session.

**VASTINE:** Oh, there's lots more to talk about.

**RITCHIE:** This is the kind of detail and stories that we're interested in. I know I certainly am.

**VASTINE:** Well, it's fun to look back on it. My memory, I feel, is more acute about this period than it was about Curtis.

You know, the other thing about Curtis is that he really let me burrow in and do my little foreign trade thing. I really specialized. I didn't pay much attention to Social Security or the great debate about guns and butter or even the balance of payments crises that came every Christmas Eve. I was really very, very interested in foreign trade policy and the complexities of foreign trade law, and spent most of my time doing that. I didn't butt in anywhere else. And he was perfectly happy to let me do it! Most congressmen wouldn't have. They would have insisted that they have a brief for every bill coming up on the floor that day, and he didn't. He was perfectly happy to have me off writing tomes about some aspect of the trade negotiations, or whatever. He didn't think I was hard enough on the Japanese. [Laughs] We only learned to do that later.

Anyway, there we are.

**End of Interview #2**

## THE CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET AND IMPOUNDMENT ACT

### Interview #3

September 3, 1993

**RITCHIE:** We had just gotten to talking about the Budget Act of 1974.

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** I'd like to talk a little bit more about that to get your motives. What was it that got you sitting down, drafting the original bill?

**VASTINE:** Well, it was one of those issues whose time had finally come. People had been talking about it for a long time, but there was that moment when it just became so obvious that somehow Congress had to get its act together on the budget, on spending and even estimation of receipts. Partly, it was the political climate, as I think I said last time it was partly because Nixon had flaunted his powers in Congress' face and, more or less, declared that he could impound whenever he felt it necessary. I'm sure that there are folks who have done research on that, chapter and verse, and on the arguments that administration used.

But, there was a feeling in Congress that Congress was being man-handled by the Nixon Administration and disregarded. Furthermore, it didn't have its own house in order and wasn't in a very good place to defend itself—the criticisms of it were valid. It felt like the moment had come to do something, and it was in our committee—it was in our committee's jurisdiction to look at these things. We had jurisdiction over the OMB and over the enabling law that sets up the OMB and the then-budget process.

I remember coming back from Christmas recess, and one of the first things getting into that. Percy was ranking on the committee, and we felt very strongly that we needed to be out in front of the curve. There was a lot of competition with the Javits' staff. Javits was an extremely competitive senator,

as you know. Loved to be first with the newest idea. Senator Percy certainly didn't want to be second! And I didn't want him to be.

So there was all that acting all at one time. The time had come.

**RITCHIE:** There really were two strains there. One strain was, let's get control of the budget, and the other strain was, we have to do something about presidential impoundment. Were the Republicans as concerned about impoundment as they were about the budget?

**VASTINE:** No, the Democrats were concerned about impoundment, and the Republicans were concerned about uncontrolled spending. In fact, one of the ironies of the budget control bill that we began to draft was that we forgot about impoundment. Halfway through the Democrats said, "Hey! We forgot to deal with impoundment here!" So then we added, I think it was, the second title of the bill, dealing with impoundment. It was definitely the codicil to the main body of the bill, the impoundment provisions.

But nobody objected tremendously. The administration did not object, as strenuously as I thought it would, to the addition of those controls on impoundments. Partly, it was because the president was increasingly weak. Partly, it was because the OMB decided that it was definitely worthwhile to have the budget process. I remember being invited over to the Pentagon by Robert Ellsworth, who was then the deputy under secretary, for lunch in order to explain to him the budget process. He was concerned that the budget process would work against—would be used by the liberals to hurt defense spending. That was the Pentagon's concern. Certainly the interest groups—Common Cause and those folks all gathered together to decide: "What should *we* do about the budget process?" This nascent budget process. "Is it going to hurt *social* spending?" They came around to realizing that they couldn't stand in the way of this. It was good government. It really had a momentum. There was no argument you could make to stand in the way of cleaning up Congress' budget house.

Anyway, we were also at the same time able to convince them that it was a neutral process, that it didn't mitigate for or against spending, or for more spending in social programs or less spending on guns, or vice versa. It just provided Congress with a mechanism. And since the Democrats were in the majority and since they tend to be the "spenders," I guess the social action groups decided not to be worried. I remember they had a big convening downtown at one point, I think it may have been at Common Cause headquarters. We all knew up here that they were meeting to decide what they would do. And they ended up supporting the bill! We had a letter of support from Common Cause. It was very interesting—the politics of that.

Certainly, Senator Byrd—maybe we spoke about this?

**RITCHIE:** No.

**VASTINE:** I may be leaping ahead a little bit, but the Government Operations Committee reported this fandangled bill. Then, people found out what was in it, that the authorizing committees were going to have to adhere to time lines and deadlines, and thises and thats and constraints. In the initial Gov Ops bill there were many more constraints than—well, I wouldn't say many more. To be blunt, I've forgotten a great deal about what was in the original bill.

But it was a tougher bill. It was a bill that Senator Roth voted to report from committee, but he voted against the Budget and Impoundment Act on final passage. I think he was the only senator to do that. Because, it did not do what that good Republican thought it should do, and that is control deficit spending. He wanted a process that would result in deficit spending control, not just the *means* for control.

But to go back for a minute, the Government Affairs Committee reported the bill. Then the dons and the moguls around the Capitol figured out what was going on here. And I think they all co-signed a letter to Senator Byrd on the Rules Committee to protest. I don't think there was ever a hearing. There may



have been a hearing in Rules, but I don't think so. But what Senator Byrd did was very enlightened, and very, very commendable.

Instead of doing the bidding of the power brokers, the chairmen, he decided he would take a look at the bill and seriously study it. And he called in someone—I don't know how he found this very able guy—named Herb Jasper, who I think had been at OMB at one point. He's now at the Academy of Public Administration.

In any case, Herb was brought in as a consultant to the Rules Committee to convene a great, big staff markup consisting, initially, of the staff directors of all of the authorizing committees. We took the Rules Committee hearing room and turned it into a markup room. Basically, Herb began a process of reading through the bill and hearing what the problems were. And then he brought in the parliamentarian, who assigned Bob Dove. I think Bob had just come to the Senate, and that's where I first met Bob, through that process of rewriting the Budget Act that the Government Affairs Committee had reported.

Senator Byrd himself spent a long time on the procedures, the germaneness issue, the limitations on debate. All that sort of thing were worked out by him personally with Dove and possibly, probably with Herb and others. But Al Frohm and I kept—we were the motivators. Al Frohm was working for Muskie. I saw my job, at some point, simply the political job of making sure this damn thing passed. I was interested, of course, in its contents, but I was really more interested in the sense in the politics, in getting it to the floor and then getting it to conference.

So we'd send Senator Percy to the floor every week or ten days to press Senator Byrd. Now Muskie couldn't do this, and Ervin couldn't do it. Of course Bob Smith with Ervin was also very eager that it pass. But Ervin was so tied up with Watergate he couldn't spend much time on it. So it really fell to Muskie and Percy, and Percy was the only one who could go to the floor with the bravado and the independence of mind to press Senator Byrd! He would just go over and stand up and say, "Now, Senator Byrd, what's the story with the

Budget and Impoundment Act? It's been, already, two months since we reported it. Two and half months. It's already been ninety days!" And he would get assurances from Senator Byrd that, indeed, everything was marching along, and that he was committed to doing something, and he wasn't going to bottle it up. I'm sure that's all in the *Record*.

I remember three or four of those interventions on the floor to press Senator Byrd on. But if Senator Percy hadn't taken that kind of interest, it might have flagged. And it really was a sign of the times. It really meant something to get it done, and people thought that it would make a difference. Everybody acknowledged that Congress had come to a point where it could not continue to live under the old system where Congress didn't have any way to figure out what it was going to spend. There was no way under the old system. It wasn't actually a system. You had authorizing committees that also had budget authority. And you had the appropriations committees that were ending up appropriating less, and less, and less of what was actually spent because they didn't have control over the entitlements, they didn't have control over the loan guarantee, borrowing authorities and various other elements of the budget. So Byrd played a very constructive role. He could have been an obstructionist, and he could have done it with all of his mastery. But, instead, he turned his mastery to making the new power workable. It was a great compliment to him, I think, because he could have decided it wasn't worth changing. And he didn't do that.

**RITCHIE:** He's kept up some of those themes as well, on the germaneness issue. The Byrd rule, in a sense is a continuation of much was going on at that time.

**VASTINE:** Umhmm.

**RITCHIE:** And he's held their feet to the fire on those. . . .

**VASTINE:** Yes, he has. Yes. He's been very good in that way.

**RITCHIE:** Well, what's your assessment of how the budget act worked after it got passed. Were you satisfied or dissatisfied?

**VASTINE:** I don't want to go past this without talking a little bit about the administration.

**RITCHIE:** Okay. Why don't we start with the administration, then.

**VASTINE:** Well, I just want to tell you this anecdote of going to the White House. Did I go to the White House for the signing ceremony or not? Oh, how can my memory. . . .

**RITCHIE:** Nixon signed it in July of '74, about a month before he resigned.

**VASTINE:** I got a pen for that, and I got a letter from him, a curt little note. Not a typical presidential sort of florid congratulations, you know, for your wonderful work. Okay, it was a different bill. We went to the White House. I don't think there was a White House signing ceremony for this. But, well I'm sorry, I'm floundering a little bit.

But I remember going to the White House for a signing ceremony. It may have been the ceremony for the signing for the U.S. Energy Agency. That was the precursor to the Department of Energy. That was in July. We went down with Ribicoff and, oh gosh, I have a picture of all of us standing behind President Nixon. All the moguls were there—the House guys, and Ribicoff, Chet Holifield, Rogers Morton, and Democrats. And it was the same day the *Chicago Tribune* called for the resignation of Richard Nixon. The *Chicago Tribune*! That was a big day for Richard Nixon. I think it was the first of the papers—the Republican papers anyway—to do that.

You'd have thought that he was still president for life! I mean, untouched! In the way he acted and in the way congressmen and senators acted

toward him! It was still, “Mr. President,” fawning, great respect, everyone treating each other—no reference at all to anything untoward. Just amazing!

I apologize, because I was confusing that with the signing of the Budget Act. I don’t think that he signed it in a public ceremony.

**RITCHIE:** What was the note that he sent you, by the way? Do you recall?

**VASTINE:** Oh, it was just: “Because of your deep interest in this bill I thought you might want to have the pen.”

**RITCHIE:** Period.

**VASTINE:** Period. You know, [chuckles] maybe not even “deep interest.” “Because you had something to do with this.” It was really a back-of-the-hand gesture. But, anyway, I got the pen.

You see, I felt that the Budget Act—to go back to your question—did *exactly* what it was intended to do. I think the Budget Act served very well, for a period. And I think a lot of the credit—tremendous amount of the credit—goes to Senator Muskie and Senator [Henry] Bellmon, the first chairman and ranking member, because they understood it, and they made it work! And on the House side, too, I think Jim Jones was the first chairman of the Budget Committee. You had extremely able senators and congressmen running the process. I was disappointed in the choice of Alice Rivlin as the [Congressional] Budget Director. I had spent some particular amount of time conceptualizing the budget office and the budget committee process and envisaging what the CBO director would be. And she was much too—I thought—aggressively ideological. She brought much too much a point of view. This process was supposed to be neutral.

I remember the list of names being circulated for that position, and Senator Percy at that point, because he was still very important to the process, was given a list. Anyway, we didn’t signal our affection for her. Though I like

her personally. She's always been very nice to me, and she's a very nice person. But I just felt she was too much a Democratic liberal economist and certainly in her work as CBO she was too frontal. She was too public in espousing points of view. But that's a quibble, I think.

Anyway, I think the budget process did what it promised. And people who attack the budget process for not having worked don't understand it, had no idea of what it really was. I mean, the budget process even before Gramm-Rudman was a way for a Congress that wanted to control spending to control it. And, it's Congress ultimately, finally, completely Congress and its inability to come to grips with the problem of deficits that has resulted in deficits. Not the budget process. Now, Gramm-Rudman obviously modified and strengthened, I suppose, the budget process. I'm frankly not enough of a student of it to provide an evaluation. I have not sat down and thought about that sufficiently to provide an evaluation of Gramm-Rudman.

**RITCHIE:** Was the Budget Act, do you feel, the big success of your years with Senator Percy?

**VASTINE:** Oh, I'd say so. Yes. I remember Senator Percy's AA coming to me and saying, "Gosh, if only I could measure my time with him in this way or have something to show for my work with Senator Percy of comparable value." It was definitely the high point.

We did some other good things in the committee. We created the Energy Department and, I guess, I had a lot to do with—everything to do with the Advisory Committee Act. What else? The Privacy Act of 1974 or '75 which is kind of a thorn in government administrators' sides as well, but was worth doing. The Budget Act was definitely the key thing.

**RITCHIE:** How did you find the situation when Senator Ervin became chairman of the committee? He was interested in things like privacy. Did that open the doors, McClellan went to Appropriations—was it easier to work on the minority staff under Ervin?

**VASTINE:** Oh, the atmosphere under Ervin and then Ribicoff was much, much better. Bob Smith, who was Ervin's staff director, is an engaging, affable guy who was competing with Ervin's Judiciary Committee staff to try to be an important committee and do important work and show the chairmanship of Government Operations Committee meant something. So he was interested in getting along and going forward. If he could harness Senator Percy's energy that was just going to help him. He was—*is*—a shrewd and savvy guy. Furthermore, he liked Senator Percy.

Senator Percy—this is an aside—was extremely impressive in those years. I mean, in running the committee—being the minority ranking member, this guy was quite amazing. He was a very fast study. He got up at four in the morning. He peddled his bicycle. He read all his memoranda. He religiously scribbled, “yes,” “no,” “maybe” on them. He came to his meetings with the memorandum—or the remarks—all in hand and digested, so that when it came his time to make his opening statement and do his questions he really did it—not by rote—but with feeling because he prepared. I saw him one day come into the Government Affairs Committee—he was going to meet a big crowd of folks, I think from Illinois, in the hearing room. The issue was some arcane farm policy issue or something off the wall. He walked into my office with his memo—into my office which was in back of our reception room in the committee. Where finally we had graduated to after having started out in the Senate Courts [a converted apartment building] and then going to the Russell Building basement. And then, *finally*, we got offered the room behind the hearing room.

Anyway, he came in there and sat down beside my desk, and said, “I just need a minute of quiet.” And he spent five minutes at the most reading this memo which was a single-spaced page, and walked into the next room. I just followed because I was interested and heard him deliver the contents with complete conviction and with but a few references to the memo. He was really good at that. That was something that Senator Ervin couldn't do, and other senators couldn't do quite as well. He was very, very good. Wonderful guy to work for, really, really wonderful. He responded and appreciated your work. Was very creative and supportive, and he didn't second-guess you, although

occasionally you would get these scrawled memoranda: “I thought we were going to do X or Y or Z.” He was excellent. It was a little thought that occurred to me about him. I got off the subject.

**RITCHIE:** How about with the other Republican senators? Were you also responsible for getting them. . . .

**VASTINE:** No.

**RITCHIE:** It was just Senator Percy?

**VASTINE:** Oh, well, actually, no. I was quite good as minority staff director because, I must say, because I worked well with the staff of the other senators, and I could count votes, and I knew. I could whip the votes so I could convince people to vote with Percy and support Percy which is why we had power in the committee. Furthermore, I knew that some of the Democrats would come over to our side. I think I said earlier, that if Percy and Muskie didn’t agree the committee would go nowhere. If Percy did not agree with what Muskie often wanted to do, it was really a big stumbling block. Our opposition would be a big stumbling block, so we had quite a bit of influence as a minority. I got along very well with them, but I missed something you said. Oh, Ervin, was easy to deal with. I had a good anecdote, but maybe it will come back to me.

**RITCHIE:** Senator Muskie could be—reportedly—uneasy to deal with at times.

**VASTINE:** Oh, yes. He was famous for his temper. You could see the blood rise in his face when he’d get mad. It would start at the collar and go all the way up. And there were sometimes—very seldom—did he let it out. I understand he saved that for his early-morning meetings with his staff when he would vent his extremely irascible nature. Very, very difficult man. It’s almost as though there was something physical or chemical in the morning that drove him to be awful! But, by the time he’d gotten past his staff and to us in the

committee he tended to have calmed down. I can't remember a good story about him. I liked him and respected his judgment, and the bottom line is we did a lot of good work together with the Muskie staff.

**RITCHIE:** All of this was taking place in the Nixon years. What was it like to be a minority staff director on Capitol Hill during the Nixon presidency?

**VASTINE:** Well, you're going away from the Government Affairs Committee, aren't you? Well, it was, first of all, I have been in the perhaps regrettable position—only in a sense regrettable position—in working for moderate Republicans when conservative Republicans have been in power in the White House. Senator Percy worked very, very hard to build good bridges with the Nixon—Ford was easier—with the Nixon White House and with the administration in general. But, frankly, they didn't—I mean he was ranking and they had to pay attention to him—but I wouldn't say it was ever a really cordial relationship.

When I first became staff director and Percy first became ranking, obviously they needed his help in the four great reorganization bills. There was a fair amount of to-ing and fro-ing and bowing and scraping on that. But when it became obvious that these things were dead, there wasn't very much more interaction.

Probably my first day on the job I went down to a meeting in the Roosevelt Room [in the West Wing of the White House] with Percy in which we met with some important person. It might have been [Peter] Flanagan. It might have been [John] Erlichman. I'm not really sure any longer. To get a pep talk on the importance the president put on these bills and the steadfastness of the White House's support. But after that there was almost nothing. It even became a fight to get a hearing! To get McClellan to call a hearing on finally the fourth bill. And there was never a markup.

Then, let's see. Shall I tell you an anecdote about [George] McGovern coming?



**RITCHIE:** Sure.

**VASTINE:** We were, however, Republicans, and we wanted to be for the president, and we wanted the president to win reelection. And we all thought, as I recall, that Senator McGovern was nuts, his economics were voodoo. So there was a Joint Economic Committee hearing. I did much of Senator Percy's economic policy work, backed him up on that. There was in the great, big then-Dirksen auditorium—I think it is subsequently transmogrified into something else—a big hearing, and McGovern was to come in and present his economic program at the request of the chairman, Senator Proxmire, who thought he was giving him a great opportunity to do that.

Indeed, McGovern came in. We were just loaded for bear! We'd gotten it all figured out—all the holes in McGovern's arguments—and thought we were going to knock great, huge holes in him. But, another lesson in how to handle the media, McGovern sat there and took unmitigated grief from the Republicans who, I think, demonstrated quite effectively, his ideas were all wet. He'd said a bunch of things that just couldn't be justified! They just didn't hold water. It was so obvious that they didn't, and we demonstrated that they didn't.

The media *did* pick up some of this. There were some clips in the evening news. But McGovern kept his calm. He handled the cameras so well that, just like my mother said about Senator Percy, a viewer couldn't tell that he was in any kind of trouble! He looked like he was winning his argument, not getting creamed, decimated by the Republicans.

But then, of course, Nixon was reelected, and Watergate began. As it evolved, people realized that it shaped the political climate and helped create the political climate in which the Budget and Impoundment Act was passable. But it also created a sense in the Senate of high drama. You probably had other people tell you all this, and you knew it yourself, but there was a feeling that this was really *something*. Wow! Holy moly. Suddenly everybody started talking about impeachment and the Senate sitting as a jury. And a trial going

forward in the Senate. At that time impeachments were even less known than they are today. There hadn't been an impeachment since the thirties. . . .

**RITCHIE:** A judge.

**VASTINE:** Of a judge. And everybody appointed somebody—of course, this was a great moment for staff rivalry about who would get to do it—who would handle the impeachment brief. And on Senator Percy's staff it was a very able young man named Bob Sloan, a very bright guy who later went to the State Department's solicitor general's office and became general counsel of the International Force for Observers in the Sinai. I haven't gotten the name quite right, International Force for something and Observers. And now, I think, is in law practice on his own.

But Bob became Percy's man on Watergate. I'll never forget how we all gathered on the day of Nixon's resignation in our Russell Building office and turned on the television to hear Nixon say farewell from the East Room. Of course, it was a moment of tremendous drama and pathos. But, also, plainly, a tremendous disappointment. Because everybody up here had their sights set on a juicy trial of the president by the Senate. And as horrible constitutionally as that would have been for the country, from the standpoint of lowly staff, it was a real *thriller!* There was a tremendous letdown. There was a palpable sense of letdown. Suddenly the landscape changed for Republicans. Gerald Ford came in. Senator Percy stopped his presidential effort. Everybody had to pull behind Ford. Ford was such a good man, I think, but was so unfairly treated by the media. The bumping of the head, for example. They made him out to be a bumbling idiot, which is unfair.

I worked in his administration. I'm a great admirer of the way he organized his economic policy process. Bill Siedman, who was later chairman of the FDIC, was then, had just come out of the private sector to be the economic policy coordinator in the White House. And Secretary [William] Simon, for whom I worked, was the chairman of the Economic Policy Board, I think it was called. It could have been called the Economic Policy Council, I'm not sure. I

watched the decisions on international economic policy being made. I supplied the memos backing some of them up and knew Roger Porter who was then Seidman's assistant at the White House. And I think Ford just ran a great process for decision-making.

He had to deal with [Henry] Kissinger and Simon, two of the strongest cabinet officers that, I think, any president in my memory has been served by. Very, very powerful men—who disagreed profoundly on some things, and brought their disagreements right to the president. The president used Seidman in helping make those decisions. I think President Ford did a great job. His pardon of Nixon was, by the people, unpardonable. Thought by the people to be unpardonable. I think it doomed his presidency and cast a pall over everybody. That's a long answer.

**RITCHIE:** How would you judge, for instance, the Nixon administration's congressional relations from your point of view? Were they any good at congressional relations?

**VASTINE:** Oh, you know, I don't want to sink to the level of ad hominem but there was a guy who handled Senate congressional relations on my subject, I can't remember his name. It's just as well, though, he's still around though in retirement. He was just awful! A very unpleasant guy. He'd worked for Senator [Hugh] Scott, and I didn't like him at all.

But, on the other hand, I think Fred Webber worked—I just didn't—I have to beg off that question. I don't have the big picture on that. I just don't have a recollection.

**RITCHIE:** Did the other minority staff directors ever get together? Did you ever plan things from committee to committee, or did you sort of work within your own committee?

**VASTINE:** We never got together. The closest we came to getting together was working with Senator [John] Tower over in the Policy Committee

on an economic plan for the Republicans. Senator Percy sent me over there to be his delegate. I guess this was the Task Force of the Republican Conference that had been created. And I remember meeting in that wonderful Policy Committee room with the impossible acoustics to forge a program with Senator Tower.

Senator Tower was very impressive, in spite of all his airs. He had a tendency to be arrogant, certainly later. And, of course, he had his London suits. Beautiful, tailoring. Do you recall that?

**RITCHIE:** Yeah.

**VASTINE:** Very natty. I used to do a great imitation of Senator Tower emerging, striding from the cloakroom, reaching the top riser of the Senate well before descending, rising slightly on his toes, surveying the scene, flicking his comb through his hair, straightening his tie, and descending to his seat. Very, very senatorial. He was also known to be a shirt-sleeves kind of guy. Everyone said he was an enlisted man in the navy, and a petty officer. So he was in for beer sessions with rolled up sleeves in front of the television. That was the kind of aura he brought to these sessions at the Policy Committee as we tried to decide a Republican program for economic revival.

I remember we had Secretary Simon come up. Simon caught wind—this is very effective congressional relations. Treasury gets very high marks for this. Simon came up, and we ran through our program. I had some proposal that I really liked about how many barrels we ought to save of imported oil. Simon just thought it was the stupidest idea he'd ever heard, and trashed it. But that's neither here nor there. It was a good effort, and it resulted in a nice program and a good press release. But that's the only coordinated effort I recall.

**RITCHIE:** What were your relations with Hugh Scott and the Republican minority leadership in the Senate in those days?

**VASTINE:** Well, there wasn't a lot of effort, you know. I would get calls from Bill Hildenbrand when something would come to the floor that looked like it was our business. He would call up and find out in the course of the business whether we objected to an amendment or to a bill being brought up or, you know, he did his job in that way. But, I was never part of the conference or never went to a Policy Committee meeting with Senator Percy. I guess that wasn't permitted. Or to a conference. While there may have been coordination with Percy, there was none that I recall at the staff level at all in those days.

Later on, of course, when I became staff director of the conference, by that time there were meetings every Friday in the Policy Committee's back room in Bob Potts' office. But, in the Percy era, in the '70s, I don't recall that at all. No effort. Scott was liked.

**RITCHIE:** It was still the era when the committees were, in a sense, baronies and most of the business went on in committees, not Senate-wide.

**VASTINE:** That's correct. As I recall it.

**RITCHIE:** Well, what was it that made you decide to leave the Senate then in '75 to go to the Treasury Department?

**VASTINE:** Let's see. To be honest, after the Budget Act passed and after it became clear that Senator Percy would not participate in it, there wasn't a heck of a lot that was interesting. The committee's agenda is not a very exciting agenda. Though, for a period in the '70s, it was quite exciting because of the Consumer Protection stuff and the Budget Act and because of other things we did. And because we had a very high quality committee. Ribicoff was a good chairman, too, though he liked publicity and cameras and got bored quickly if they weren't there. His staff were excellent. We, at the end, did some interesting work on control of exports of fissionable material.

It was time for a change. I remember we had created a commission, the Commission on Strategic Materials and Commodities, or something like that,

that needed an executive director. Percy had taken a big hand in rewriting it on the Senate floor. And I knew that they were going to be looking for an executive director. Just about that same time, which I guess was in the late winter and early spring of 1975, I had developed a relationship with a guy at the treasury, a deputy assistant secretary who did congressional affairs. We'd become warm friends, and he told me one day—he knew of my interest in international trade and I think he knew of my interest in moving on—and he told me one day that a man I knew named Howard Worthington had died in office. Died on the spot, virtually at his desk. This guy, Howard Worthington, was deputy assistant secretary of the treasury for International Trade and Raw Materials Policy. He worked under an assistant secretary named Gerald L. Parsky whom I had known when we created the U.S. Energy Agency.

Parsky had begun as Secretary Simon's executive assistant. Very young man, very brilliant, a lawyer, Princetonian. Came out of a law firm. Came to Simon's attention somehow, and was suddenly elevated by Simon into a very powerful person at the treasury. Simon took a kind of iconoclastic move from the standpoint of the treasury, he took a whole piece of the international division of the treasury and he gave it to Parsky and made him assistant secretary. He bifurcated the international activities of the treasury into two assistant secretaryships. Parsky was riding high. He had all the sexy issues. He had trade and commodity policy. He had energy, and he had the office of New York finance. And a few other things though I've forgotten. He had three deputy assistant secretaries to work on those matters with him. And I became one of them. Essentially, when my friend told me about the death of Howard, I called up Jerry Parsky. I got his attention, and he said, "I'll consider it." And he considered it, and I got an offer to go be the executive director of the commission and deputy assistant secretary of the treasury; and I leaped to treasury.

I want to go back for a minute that relates to Parsky and Simon and essentially to the Nixon administration and how things work. Early one Sunday morning—I mean *early* one Sunday morning, like seven o'clock, I had a call from

Senator Percy from his home in Georgetown who said, “Bob [imitates]. There’s going to be a meeting,” in his inimitable way. Do you remember him very well?

**RITCHIE:** Oh, yes.

**VASTINE:** I used to do great Percy, by the way. When I’m in good voice, I do a great Percy. I’m not there yet today. He called me up and said, “There’s a meeting at the treasury at 9:30, and you’re to be there. Go there. Get down.” I said, “What about?” He said, “Just go to the treasury. Nine-thirty. Go in the secretary’s entrance.”

So I went down to the treasury, and went in the secretary’s entrance; and we were escorted up to the secretary’s conference room, a room I subsequently got to know well. And we were given a presentation by Simon about the need for immediate congressional enactment of an energy agency to give him the powers he needed. He’d just been appointed energy czar. Charles DeBono had been the guy in the Nixon White House. I can’t recall. No! It was Governor [John] Love of Colorado who was brought in and who was a very sweet man, but he didn’t have the moxie. Simon, who was then deputy secretary of the treasury, did, and he took on being energy czar with a vengeance. That’s when he and Parsky began their relationship. He was famous for returning congressional phone calls at two and three in the morning. Because we had energy rationing, essentially, and senators and congressmen would call up.

Anyway, we got called to the treasury on a Sunday morning and told that this was urgent and we had to pass it, and pass it quick. So we had hearings almost immediately, and I think it was done indeed very quickly. But I remember Simon wanting to be *both* deputy secretary of the treasury and energy czar! That was a provision of the initial draft that we were given.

Finally, we got to conference; and I remember our conference was in the Atomic Energy offices up in the east front of the Capitol up in the secure area, no windows.

**RITCHIE:** Attic floor.

**VASTINE:** We were coming down to the wire on agreeing on a conference report, and this issue of Simon being both—I think it had been dropped at one point. I'd gotten a call from the treasury saying, "Don't forget about Simon wanting to be both." So I said to Senator Percy, "Now, what are we going to do about Simon?" because if we didn't look out for Simon as the minority nobody was going to. I remember calling up Parsky at the treasury saying, "You know this puts us in a bit of an awkward position. How can this guy really be both?" Parsky went and talked to Simon, and Simon said, "Well do it if you can. But it's not life or death." So Simon went on to be secretary of the treasury and that was good enough, I think.

Do you want to stop there?

**RITCHIE:** Well, I was going to tell you that tonight I am going to hear a sort of Percy institution. I'm going over to the American Political Science Association for a performance of the Capitol Steps.

**VASTINE:** Oh, that's nice.

**RITCHIE:** Didn't they begin as a group of Percy staff members, at his annual Christmas party?

**VASTINE:** That's right. But after I was there. I didn't know any of them. They later came on after I was there. They were in the Government Operations Committee staff.

**RITCHIE:** I wondered if in some respect they were a reflection of Percy, their humor and slight irreverence?

**VASTINE:** Why don't you ask them? [Laughs] Let me know. Well, he took himself very seriously. Senator Percy was very much the senator. There was not a lot of irreverence or joviality around. He *liked* being senator, and he



liked being treated as a senator. He liked being addressed as “The Senator.” He didn’t encourage any of the staff to call him Chuck, though there were a few that did just because they’d known him forever. So I’m not so sure he can be credited with creating that atmosphere.

**RITCHIE:** One question about that period is: how does a senator’s committee staff work with his personal staff?

**VASTINE:** It’s so much a matter of personalities. I made it a practice to stay very close to the personal staff. I would pay a visit practically every day. Our offices, thank goodness, were quite close; but, you know, I came and visited with the legislative director and the press secretary, the senator’s personal secretary of twenty-five years, and the AA—occasionally—not always, because he wasn’t the easiest guy to hang out with. But his secretary, certainly, and the legislative staff. I was acutely aware that you could be knifed from the personal staff if you weren’t really careful.

**RITCHIE:** I would think there would be some rivalry for attention for senators, that they might not appreciate a committee staff, being something else to have to deal with.

**VASTINE:** Not in my experience, no. If you’re doing your job at the committee staff level and providing the senator with the material he needs to use that forum to his political advantage and public relations, press advantage, the committee staff can sometimes gain ascendancy over the personal staff. It really depends, but I also have seen cases where committee staff gets isolated and doesn’t know how to build bridges with the personal staff and gets too far out in front or off in left field and is cut off at the knees.

It’s really like everything else up here, it all comes down to personal relationships. The people skills of the individual involved. Sort of sixth sense. I have a highly developed self-protective paranoia. So I’m constantly watching, obviously as a result of my Hill training. [Laughs] So we’ll see.

**RITCHIE:** Well, very good. Maybe we should wrap it up today.

**VASTINE:** Well, if I think if anything else on the Government Affairs side, I'll make a note. You asked earlier a question that I wanted to say more about it, I think the relationship with Ervin and what it was like to be in the minority.

**RITCHIE:** If you'd like to begin with that the next time.

**VASTINE:** Yes, if I think of it.

**End of Interview #3**

## THE VIEW FROM THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

### Interview #4

September 10, 1993

**RITCHIE:** At the end of the last interview you said you were going to think about Sam Ervin and see if there is a story that related. I wondered if it had come to mind, or if you wanted to postpone that?

**VASTINE:** Well, about Sam Ervin, I worked around the man and he knew precisely who I was. He was not a friendly, easy senator. He was nice, and he was polite to his staff. But he wasn't someone who acknowledged staff as he passed them in the corridor, that kind of senator. He was remote, always it seemed, absorbed in thought.

Nonetheless, having worked so hard on the Budget and Impoundment Act, I wanted a picture and acknowledgment of some sort. So I asked for that. I learned that, first of all, you didn't get a picture. You got a copy of a drawing, and that this was not something that was easy to obtain. His pictures were not just passed out. Finally, I got a copy of the drawing of Sam Ervin with—in his block hand lettering at the bottom—a cordial but not effusive acknowledgment of my work and his signature, Sam J. Ervin. And the drawing, of course, has him clutching—not the Bible, of course—but the Constitution. [Laughs] But I'm sure I've got better stories than that.

**RITCHIE:** He had a relatively short term. He was chairman only for two years, I guess.

**VASTINE:** Yes. Then Ribicoff took over. Why was Ervin chairman for only two years? Did he leave the Senate?

**RITCHIE:** He left the Senate in '74. He took over when McClellan became chairman of Appropriations.

**VASTINE:** Yes. And I guess it was his first chairmanship.

**RITCHIE:** He'd been chairman of the Constitutional Rights Subcommittee for years, but he'd never been chairman of a full committee.

**VASTINE:** I guess I told you that it was a great coup to steal the Privacy Act away from the Constitutional Subcommittee, whose staff director was the arch rival of Ervin's new staff director, Bob Smith, of the Government Affairs Committee. What I did was grab a bill that had been written by a friend in the House for introduction in the House, that was structured to be a Government Affairs Committee bill. The parliamentarian in the House directed it to the House Government Affairs Committee. So on learning that, I seized that draft, modified it, and keeping its structural components—because we didn't agree with all the substantive provisions—we got the assistant parliamentarian, Bob Dove, with whom I worked on the Budget Act, to refer it to Government Affairs Committee. So it became an Ervin-Percy bill, and we got it through in a year or so.

I don't know what its great contribution has been to mankind's betterment. One of the items I felt very strongly about was the growing misuse and abuse of the Social Security number as a personal identifier. We had a provision that said that the Social Security number could not be used unless otherwise provided by law. In other words, any casual credit agency or licensing bureau couldn't demand to have your social security number as your identifier unless other provisions of law, such as banking laws provided for that.

I'm constantly amazed now how Americans put up with—have gotten used to—the use of their Social Security numbers. It's become almost pro forma. We tend to forget about police stateism. We go overboard with these excesses about bearing arms, and we don't acknowledge that maybe the greatest threat to our liberty is government's knowledge—not just government, but people's knowledge of very intimate details of our lives through computerized records. It's amazing. Anyway, I've gotten up on my soap box.

**RITCHIE:** Social Security cards used to have a little notice that it was *not* to be used for identification purposes.

**VASTINE:** Did it really? I've long since lost mine.

**RITCHIE:** But now it's your driver's license and every other number.

**VASTINE:** It really is! It's amazing. And at George Mason University, for example, it is the student identifier. If you want to get a book from the library, it's your number! I have a friend there who's a professor who refuses to permit it to be used. He's bucking the system, so they assigned him a number, 000-000-0G19. [Laughs] Or something close thereto.

**RITCHIE:** In the last interview we had gotten to the point when you had left the Senate to go to work for the Treasury Department in 1975. I wondered if you could tell me how is it different working for the executive branch as opposed to the legislative branch? Did you find it a very different experience?

**VASTINE:** It was glorious. Because of instead of always being the alter ego I had responsibility. I administered a staff of sixty. I had four major policy areas that I was responsible for Treasury's positioning, Treasury's action on. They were extremely important and hot issue areas. One was multilateral trade negotiations. Another was East-West trade. Another was Commodity agreements—U.S. commodity policy, vis-a-vis tin, rubber, things like that, coffee, sugar. And Law of the Sea, which was very, very controversial.

My job was to carry the Treasury Department's flag in inter-agency meetings and in international meetings on these issues and make sure that the policy of the Secretary was implemented. If there was a fight, if we disagreed with State—mainly we disagreed with State—my job was to either win or force it to a higher level and very often, particularly on these commodity agreements, particularly on commodity agreements that might raise American consumers' prices, Law of the Sea and things like that we went right to the president. Starting with my group, we'd force into the assistant secretary level, then to the secretary, and then into the council that Simon chaired. And there it advanced to a meeting with Kissinger and the secretary and others and the president.

I remember a meeting we had about shoes. Now, on some issues we and State and USTR [United States Trade Representative] agreed. And those were usually whether to protect American industries or not. So, Treasury, being the defender of free markets and economic competitiveness and efficiency in the economy was very much opposed to protectionism. Of course, this was *music* to me! That is my stand, my belief. On those issues we and State would gather together and defend against the Commerce Department which more often than not had the then-USTR in the person of Fred Dent, who was a former textile magnate and protectionist-bent, on their side. It usually would wind up as USTR and Commerce versus Treasury and State.

We had one great meeting in the Roosevelt Room of the Trade Advisory Committee. This was the top-most cabinet committee on trade policy where all the big decisions were made before they went to the president. The issue was to protect shoes or not. It was about whether to keep a quota or impose a quota regime on imported shoes. It was to be at two o'clock. And at twelve o'clock I had a call from the secretary who said, "I want you to call shoe manufacturers all over the country and find out how they're doing; and bring me success stories." That was all he said. My staff had gone to lunch. And I found one person to help me. And what I did was get a couple back copies of *Footwear News* and began calling shoe companies in various parts of the country, just randomly. I got to the president or the top dog and I said, "Look the secretary of the Treasury would like to know how you're doing. How's business?"

The stories were great! They weren't about to say they were bad. I didn't tell them why I was calling. I just said, "We just want to know how you're doing." Well, the story from Los Angeles was—I remember it very clearly. "We can't get enough workers." "We've just got too many orders." "Business is booming." I called the shoe company in my own home town of Shamokin, Pennsylvania, and they were doing fine, too. This is a very depressed area.

So we went off to this meeting armed to the gills. We had about twenty examples of companies all over the place who were just doing fine, thank you! And it *infuriated* the Commerce Department. It, of course, carried the day.

Simon—I don't think he ever thanked me, it wasn't his style, really. But we just creamed the opposition. They were infuriated, and the trade press carried an attack on Simon for using an underhanded tactic in shaping the decision. It was a fun event. But it gives you an insight into Simon and how he worked.

Simon as Treasury secretary had many failings, but he had many strengths that outweighed them. And the great strength was that this man absolutely understood what he believed in. And had no hesitancy about articulating it and demanding it. Demanding that we adhere to it. At every step. I mean, you understood exactly what the Treasury secretary stood for. And it was fine to go out and fight hard for it. He would back you up.

And we did fight. We fought on Law of the Sea. The rough fights were against commodity policy. Were against commodity agreements, agreements on coffee pricing. A big donnybrook was on setting the price for coffee above world-market levels. That quickly got out of my hands because it became very political—presidential political. But, again, we were able to shape and modify the State Department's drive to obtain very generous kinds of pricing agreements for the developing countries, because the State Department felt that the best way to transfer wealth to developing countries so they could grow—they would have the capital to grow—would be through inflating their commodity prices since we couldn't deliver them foreign aid. Give them aid in another way, through this kind of trade agreement. But this is hardly the operation of a free market.

The great debate in those years really came down to: Okay, we'll concede it finally, said the State Department, that we shouldn't artificially set prices because the markets won't support them eventually; and they'll collapse. But what we must do instead, is try to *even out* the prices—the goal, the role for government in a commodity agreement is to avoid the large, “destructive” swings between excessively high prices and excessively low prices determined by “temperamental—and fickle—world markets.” We must protect those developing countries against that. That became the debate. Well, how do you do that? You have to then have some sort of entity that's going to be in the

markets, empowered to buy and sell, like central banks now do to protect currencies. You have some sort of fund like the exchange stabilization fund, which would step into the coffee market when prices are “abnormally low” and prop them up by buying beans. Or, to have the power, because the fund owns coffee, to enter markets, to sell beans when prices are “abnormally high,” thus bringing down prices to a more “correct” level.

Well, what kind of entity is going to do this and do it wisely and use governmental money to do it? Very tricky questions. These were all being worked out in the two years or so that I was at Treasury, through many international meetings and hashed and rehashed as US commodity policy was reshaped under the pressure of the developing world—the so-called “third world”—and Kissinger’s ardent desire to build relationships with them.

**RITCHIE:** You have three parts of the executive branch that are disagreeing with each other over, in a sense, philosophy. The Treasury which is for free trade; Commerce which is protecting its constituencies; and the State Department which is interested in its relations with other countries, particularly third world countries. How does the Congress get involved in this equation?

**VASTINE:** Ahhh, Congress. Well, it’s funny because, as a creature of Congress, a creature of the Senate, having spent four years with Senator Percy—we found Congress dreadfully ill-informed about most of what was going on. And we didn’t help very much to inform it. In other words, the less they knew the better.

Unfortunately, there were those—Democrats—who felt that the Treasury Department’s stand on commodity agreements was the wrong stand, that we ought to be much more lenient with developing countries in agreeing to commodity price agreements. So there was a little bit of a backfire built on the Hill *for* such agreements. We, occasionally as I recall, had to testify. My boss had to testify. I testified four or five times. My first testimony was on Merchant Marine Fisheries, can you believe it? On subsidies for shipbuilding—the thesis



being in the House Merchant Marine Committee—I think that’s still its title, isn’t it? That these subsidies were good for the economy! Good for jobs. That they actually enhanced tax revenues. So the framework in which I was invited to testify was: “Come and tell us how subsidies help America.” Well, the Treasury didn’t believe in subsidies, so my testimony was to go up and say: This is all nonsense, you know. They *don’t* help! The Treasury is opposed to subsidies, and there’s no way they help anybody. Any employment they create is employment created at the cost of another sector. It’s higher cost employment, and it’s less productive by definition.

**RITCHIE:** Did the different branches, let’s say the State Department or Commerce or Treasury, go to the Hill for support? In other words, would the Commerce Department use chairmen of the committees to try to counteract Treasury Department efforts, or did they basically try to keep the fight within the executive branch?

**VASTINE:** I know what you mean, and it happens, but the fights on these things were mainly internal executive branch fights. The people who used the Hill were the outside interests. For example, in the shoe case. Then we did hear from congressmen and senators. It was mainly the industry folks who got the Hill involved. But on very complex, very complex negotiations, like what’s going to be the shape of a buffer fund—a stabilization fund for the coffee agreement—that was usually way beyond the interest and the knowledge of almost everybody on the Hill.

That is the kind of detail in which I specialized when I was with Tom Curtis, getting into the nitty-gritty of these agreements and trying to understand exactly what the American selling price system of customs evaluation was, or how a quota worked and how it would work in the case of shoes, and what would be the economic impact. Getting into the details of some things like that was something Tom Curtis let me do. But there were very few people in the Hill in those days who paid much attention to that sort of detail. As I recall.

This has now changed. There are now more staff especially in the Committees, whose job is to follow complex trade negotiations closely.

**RITCHIE:** In addition to testifying, did you have to do any lobbying for the administration?

**VASTINE:** Actually I was never—maybe once or twice I was called on to go pay a Hill call. But very seldom, very seldom. No, not a lot of lobbying.

**RITCHIE:** Or Ford's nomination of Graham Martin for ambassador to Law of the Seas? He was the last ambassador to Vietnam, and never got confirmed, as I recall.

**VASTINE:** Right. We had, our ambassador on the Law of the Sea was uh. . .

**RITCHIE:** Elliot Richardson for awhile.

**VASTINE:** Oh, no. That was after. No, it was another man. It was another lawyer, formerly a top executive of IBM. There were two guys there when I was there, and Graham Martin was not one of them.

**RITCHIE:** He never got confirmed.

**VASTINE:** The last one I worked with was not, not very able. It was a formidable job, of course. Very controversial. We used to have terrible fights! There's a lot been written about those negotiations. They went on forever. They must have gone on for ten years or twelve years by the time the curtain finally was rung down and the United States refused to ratify, or sign.

**RITCHIE:** Sign. The Senate ratifies.

**VASTINE:** Well, the president never signed. We never validated. And the Reagan administration never put our signature to the agreement that

Richardson helped to negotiate. We haven't heard about Law of the Sea since very much. It was one of these huge enterprises, where every agency in the government felt it ought to have a representative. But not just one! Oh, no. Two, and sometimes three. And in the case of the Commerce Department, four! And all of these folks would go off to Geneva for these endless negotiations that would go on and on and on. And at enormous cost to the taxpayer to have a U.S. Delegation of 150 people! That boondoggle got sharply curtailed, just as I came on the scene, and the delegation sizes got cut way back.

But we at Treasury had myself and a lawyer, one of the lawyers in the department, and one or two people who worked for me, dedicated to Law of the Sea issues. That's just the Treasury! Our focus was commodity policy and the deep-sea bed minerals and the regime—the international regime—that would be created to, I've forgotten the term, but to husband these resources. But these were considered to be the patrimony of mankind—oh, gosh, there was a phrase that was used, that indicated that, beyond territorial limits, these resources were to be used for the benefit of mankind. And not for crass exploitation by private interests.

So there was something created called an Enterprise that would mine the seabed. I wonder who *is* mining the seabed? Have all these things been forgotten about? I even have a nodule somewhere, one of these manganese nodules that come up from the seabed, that lie around on the floor of the sea in certain places. They lie thickly. Anyway, enough. I can wander off. Don't let me wander off any further.

These were fascinating issues. Of course, you can tell I loved them. I was under tremendous strain because I was new to the game in the executive branch, and I worked for Assistant Secretary Gerald Parsky, whom I mentioned last time. Parsky was under tremendous pressure to succeed in his new job as assistant secretary. And Simon was relentless and ruthless. He never got angry with me, never used his temper on me, but lots of other people felt his lash. But it created an air of great tension. I got to work at 7:30 in the morning, and when my boss couldn't go, I would go to the secretary's staff meetings, and I would

watch him routinely humiliate senior officers of the department. He seemed to enjoy embarrassing the deputy secretary, George Dixon, a very fine former chairman of a bank from Minnesota.

There was a time when—did I tell you about this? On July 3, 1976. Is this conceivable? Or was it '75? It must have been '75, just after I got there. There was no other news that weekend, and Simon went out with a speech written by David Gergen who was then the speechwriter, went out and made a speech about the federal budget being out of control and how food stamps was the best example. And this was the second paragraph—food stamps, for example, “is the best example of a government program spinning wildly out of control, fraught with waste, fraud and abuse,” and maybe one other sentence. That was all. That was the headline in every Sunday paper. I’m telling you. That was the *news*! That was the Sunday news! Unbelievable!

Well, a crash of criticism came down on Simon. And so he ordered me to justify his statement! I had to go out and find out why it was true. So the first thing I did was go to David and say, “Why did you say this?” And he said, “It seemed like a good line.” So I called up my friends, I knew a couple of people at Agriculture, and I called up some folks at Agriculture and I said, “Will you help me with this?” And they said, “No, we’re not going to help you. I mean, Earl Butz is furious that Secretary Simon attacked his program; and we’re not going to help you prove that this program is fraught with waste, fraud and abuse and is spinning wildly out of control.” So then I went to the GAO, and I went to every one I could. Finally, I had some staff who knew about agriculture, had come out of the Agriculture Department. But they were terrible writers—it was the weakest part of my staff. Then Simon was immediately called to testify by George McGovern and Senator Percy, my former boss, to come up and testify and explain himself, please. And I had to produce the testimony. So I worked like a madman for weeks and weeks and weeks and weeks on this project, this awful project, documenting why this food stamp program was spinning wildly out of control! I came up, finally, with a hundred pages—and this is back in the days when you’re still using mimeograph sheets, no computers.

I got the reports of the inspector general of the Agriculture Department documenting dozens of examples, dozens and dozens of cases of maladministration of this food stamp program. Of use of food stamps to buy anything but food. Of use of food stamps as legal tender outside of stores to buy booze and stuff like that. Outside of food stores. Of a tremendous error rate in the determination of who should be a beneficiary and who shouldn't be. So that richer people—people were getting them who really were not qualified by virtue of their income. All of that kind of thing. I laid all this out in writing, then I used examples. At something like three in the morning the day before the testimony I was able to walk into the secretary's office and put this damn thing on his chair, and go home and realize that he was never going to be able to look at this testimony. I guess he came in in the morning. I don't know what ever happened. I really never knew what happened. But he must have come in in the morning and seen that thing and called up McGovern and said, "George, I have the goods on you. What I have here is going to destroy your program's credibility. I've got it all here in black and white. You don't want me to testify. I think you should cancel the hearing." And he didn't testify.

All I knew was the hearing was canceled. I went home and shaved and came back to work in a stupor! I worked for weeks on this thing! Well, nothing was said until, finally, we were on Secretary Simon's Air Force Two plane going to, I think, Eastern Europe later in the summer. He came down the aisle from his cabin and said to me, "That was a great job you did on the food stamp thing." That's all he ever said. Of course everyone was stunned in amazement because he never complimented anybody, within hearing. Then he turned to me and said, "I want you to do the same thing on something else." Ahhh. And I've forgotten what that is, and I never did it.

The reason he was happy was that the *Reader's Digest* had published an article about how Bill Simon on July 4 said the food stamp program was swinging wildly out of control, and he was absolutely right. And here's why. And then they used my statement. So that's the story. I don't know whether that's a good story or not.

**RITCHIE:** Oh, yes. What about Simon? Was he ambitious for something more?

**VASTINE:** Oh, ab-so-lutely! The man was ambition writ large. I've seen ambitious people in government. He certainly is one of the most ambitious I have ever seen. A lot of his ambition had to do with building ties with foreign ministers of finance—to stand him in good stead later when he would be going into private—back to private sector. He went way out of his way to romance the sheiks and the oil folks. He set up a separate office in Treasury to deal with Saudi finance. An office of Saudi finance in which we provided financial advice to the Saudis on how they should use their oil wealth. And for that and other reasons, my boss, Jerry Parsky, went with Simon and went alone several times to visit the sheikdoms and the Saudis and build relationships which he carried into the private sector.

He may have formed the Washington office of Gibson, Dunn, and Cretcher, of which William French Smith was a senior Los Angeles partner. William French Smith, of course, was Reagan's first attorney general. So, you see, Parsky placed himself perfectly for the future. And he opened the Saudi, no I believe a Riyadh office of the law firm and eventually several other foreign offices based on these contacts that he and Simon had assiduously cultivated with world financial leaders.

Simon had a special affinity to the Brazilian finance minister whose name I've forgotten. Simon liked guns. He liked to be given guns, real guns. And this was a problem, of course, because at some point you can't accept the guns. You have to give them over. I think there was some sort of private bill introduced to permit Bill Simon to keep the guns he was given. Fortunately, I did not have to carry that brief. But he was extremely ambitious for his future. Everyone thought that he would go back to Salomon Brothers, but Salomon Brothers wouldn't have him back. He was interested in a political future, and he made public for that reason, he made special ties with the humanitarian relief group. It documents abuse. It documents violations of human rights.

**RITCHIE:** Amnesty International.

**VASTINE:** Amnesty International. I think he became a board member. So, very interesting person, Bill Simon. One of his great strengths was his understanding of Congress and his responsiveness to members of Congress. He understood that he had to build his base here. And when he was energy so-called czar, I think I said he and Jerry Parsky returned congressional phone calls deep into the night. Day after day during that crisis. So he won a lot of support. He was very popular, as a tough guy, as hard-headed, business-oriented. Responsive, especially.

**RITCHIE:** Well, I guess it's similar to being in Congress and if you're working for a particular member you're there as long as that member is there. And if you work for a president, you're there as long as the president stays in office. And the Ford administration was in office two years.

**VASTINE:** Poor Gerald Ford. Yes.

**RITCHIE:** Could anything have saved the Ford administration after the pardon, do you think?

**VASTINE:** Yes. I think if he hadn't made the mistake that fed the media's image of him as a dolt, like referring to Yugoslavia as a democracy. It was a pretty close election. If the press had not systematically presented Gerald Ford as a bumbling fool who bumped his head all the time on the helicopter door, fell down, and bungled things, I think he could have won.

I have a friend who was on his campaign plane who invented the jingle—made the ads. It was an ad showing an airplane in the sky. It had a great musical score. It was a great ad! If we'd had two or three more days, the pollsters I know felt at the time that Ford would have won.

And he was—in my view—a very good president under the circumstances. But I think you asked the key question. And that again was a matter of timing,

the pardon of Nixon. I think if he'd waited two weeks till Nixon was in the hospital with phlebitis and near death, it was reported—very close to death—and pardoned him, I think that would have washed with the public. But to try to do it over a Labor Day weekend, kind of on the sly and hope it would disappear, it was extremely bad advice and very bad political strategy.

I remember that day because I was doing a project on a house I had. I employed a bright, young man to help me. He was a carpenter. And he came running out of the house and he said, "Did you hear what happened?" This was on a Sunday or something. I said, "What?" And he said, "Ford pardoned Nixon!" I said, "Really," and he said, "How can he do that? How can he just do that? That's outrageous! How can he do that?" This young man was so offended. He was morally offended by the idea.

**RITCHIE:** That gave you some inkling.

**VASTINE:** Yes. That was the public reaction: How dare he do that?

**RITCHIE:** Well, when the election was over and Ford had lost—as narrowly as he did, he still lost—what did you see in your future at that stage?

**VASTINE:** Pretty bleak. I hadn't been at Treasury long enough, and Treasury didn't have ties with the business community. We didn't have business advisory committees and things like that. The closest I got to that was when I went with the secretary on his last trip to the Soviet Union after the election, after Ford had been defeated. He commandeered, somehow, a presidential plane over [then White House Chief of Staff] Dick Cheney's objection. And off we flew to London for monetary confabulations with the British. That was Thanksgiving weekend. And then on to Moscow, and it was for a meeting Simon had committed himself to months previous. The meeting of the US-USSR Trade and Economic Commission, which was chaired on the U.S. side by Don Kendall, chairman of Pepsico and a close Nixon associate, friend. Visiting Moscow was altogether one of the dreadful and memorable experiences of my life. Moscow in the winter, the gloomiest, most horrible. The



embassy there is—anybody who has to live there has a reason to be insane after about a month. It's just awful! I won't go into all the details.

But the great, crowning moment was we were invited to the Kremlin for dinner with Brezhnev, all the American business leaders and Treasury people and others who were there. There weren't very many government officials there. Simon was the head of the U.S. Delegation, and was the U.S. government representative, and he sat next to Brezhnev. This was held in the Great Hall of Ambassadors, I think it was called. A fourteenth-century vaulted chamber in the Kremlin with a great central pillar thicker than this room. Square. With great barrel vaults all around to form a giant, square room with this great column in the middle to hold it all up. And frescoed in gold with Byzantine sort of ornamentation, perspectiveless figures.

So all these businessmen were gathered in this great square chamber, and in came Brezhnev, and there was peace and friendship. There must have been eleven glasses at each place. Soviet food is absolutely horrible. It was the worst stuff, even in the Kremlin. It was almost inedible. The only thing you can eat, really, are the fish courses. And this endless dinner went on. I was seated across from the chairman of Armco Steel, later secretary of commerce [in the Reagan administration], William Verity, and that kind of person was there.

The bottom line is that it happened to be Brezhnev's birthday, and Don Kendall presented him with a Mickey Mouse telephone because he liked to collect telephones. He liked American cars and telephones. And this entire company of Americans stood up and sang "Happy Birthday, dear Leonid. Happy Birthday to you." Unbelievable! I was—I was—I stood there gape-jawed. I did not join in the singing. I just thought this is a moment I am just going to watch. [Laughs] Then Brezhnev stood and gave this awful speech about how we're going to bury you. And was applauded. Then after that he came around. With a great firm handshake, he came around and shook hands with everybody including me. And Simon got in his plane right after that and left. And left me and my two staff.

I got my first and only migraine I've ever had. I went to the embassy physician—dispensary rather—and said I have this incredibly bad headache. And this woman just took a look at me. She put her hand on a cup—she had a row of cups, little paper cups of pills right beside the counter. And she just put her hand on one, and she clapped it on the counter in front of me and she said, “Take this.” I said, “What is it?” She said, “Never mind; just take it!” I began to feel a little bit better, but I cut short my stay and I got out of there as soon as I possibly could. It was just miserable, very, very depressing. I can understand why alcoholism is rampant in the Soviet Union and why it's—I was told—the primary threat to American personnel. They just turned to the bottle to have relief from that gloomy, closed, oppressive, horrible place.

**RITCHIE:** So you came back from that to face unemployment.

**VASTINE:** So I came back to that to face unemployment. I thought I was going to be on Wall Street. To make a long story short, with enormous bravado I went to New York and I talked to everybody I could possibly talk to. I ended up, through an old school friend named Nicholas Ray at Merrill Lynch, being introduced to the executive vice president of Merrill Lynch Commodities. And, to make a long story shorter, the day before I was to leave Treasury—the fifth or sixth of February, 1977—I got a call from them and asked me to come to London and be in charge of their commodity hedging operations. So what I would have done would have been to go to governments all over Europe and Eastern Europe and North Africa and offer the services of Merrill Lynch as an intermediary for their sales and their purchases of commodities. And all was fine and good, and I was extremely glad.

[At this point the interview was interrupted for an hour.]

**RITCHIE:** You left us suspended just about the point you were offered a position with Merrill Lynch.

**VASTINE:** Oh, yes and I was going to Harvard.

**RITCHIE:** But before you went there, Merrill Lynch had just offered you the position. Had you already decided to go to Harvard at that point?

**VASTINE:** Oh. Well, I didn't tell about that.

**RITCHIE:** No.

**VASTINE:** Along in November came a call from Jonathan Moore, the director of the Institute of Politics of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Jonathan Moore was following up on a conversation I had three years before when I was interviewed by him and others, including Jack Saloma, to be a fellow at the Institute of Politics. And out of the blue after the election came the call from Jonathan: "Would you like to come and be a Fellow with the Institute of Politics?" And I said, "Yes."

I could tell it was going to be hard to get a job and that this would be a good way to kind of cool out from Washington. And I was extremely tired working first for Percy who was extremely energetic and demanding, and then for Simon. I was really wiped out. I will tell you—honestly—that on election night when Gerald Ford lost, my first emotion was one of relief that I was going to get some rest. My second was, of course, one of great unhappiness. I had worked myself to the bone. Seven-thirty in the morning until nine or ten at night, regularly at the Treasury and one day on a weekend for sure. One, whole day. So I said to Merrill Lynch, "Okay. Great news." They knew about Harvard, they accepted that: "So you go ahead and do Harvard. When you finish with that you come to New York and do your training in commodities futures and everything will work out just fine. And you come down to New York at the end of February, and we'll talk about salary and that kind of thing." I felt that I was being welcomed into the bosom of this giant, American corporation, that everything was going to be fine.

So I drove to Harvard in tears of grief for having to leave Treasury, and arrived in a big snowstorm, drifts up to my chest, and found my way to my apartment which was on Memorial Drive. It was an apartment I was subletting

from the family of the former great president of Harvard, [Charles] Elliott. A chintz-lined apartment overlooking the Charles, thank goodness, very, very well heated. So the second day I was at Harvard, or the first afternoon—it was a Monday afternoon, I’ll never forget, at one o’clock—I had a little office at the Institute of Politics at 10 Mount Auburn Street, and I got the call from the executive vice president of Merrill Lynch, surprisingly. He said, “Well, look I’ve got to fly to London tomorrow morning, and I want to know whether you’ll accept a salary of \$40,000 to come to London and be in charge of that office.” And I said, “Forty-thousand dollars?” I mean, that’s what I was making at the Treasury, and the dollar was going absolutely nowhere. I said, No!

I was in a state of shock in any case because I had been uprooted from Washington and plunked down in the snowdrifts of Cambridge. I was *really* a fish out of water. It was a great shock to me. I’ll tell you, it was one of the saddest moments of my life, leaving the Treasury. I didn’t realize it was happening, I didn’t realize I was really leaving until the afternoon I left. And, finally, it dawned on me. I kept acting as though I was going to be there. You know, all the office parties had been held, and all the champagne corks had been popped and all that kind of thing. Finally, it dawned on me I was really leaving.

**RITCHIE:** Did you have any contact with the person who was moving into your job at that stage?

**VASTINE:** Yes, I knew him. He’s a very good man named Gary Hufbauer who’s now a well known economist. Does a lot of writing on economic policy, very good man. Has always been very nice to me.

**RITCHIE:** Was he of like mind?

**VASTINE:** Yes, basic same policy views, and very able. He’d been in another division of the Treasury, even though he was a political appointee.

Anyway, I really began at Harvard with a clear mind. I didn’t have any job at the end of it, and I decided: What the heck! I’m just going to enjoy this.

I'm just going to really get into Harvard. I'm going to enjoy the students. I'm going to get to know people. I'm not going to worry about getting a job. And the Harvard stipend was sufficient to live on, and I had this nice apartment.

So that's what I did. One of the obligations of being a fellow was to give a seminar and to write something. Do a personal writing project of some sort, and be in residence—and just be available. My seminar was called “The Stand Off Between the World's Rich and Poor,” and it attracted about twenty-five very interesting students—some of whom I still know—from the Kennedy School. I brought for this seminar resource people from Washington—Jules Katz and other trade officials and economic officials, World bank officials—to be my discussants. I finished an article called “U.S. International Commodity Policy,” which I prepared for the *Georgetown Journal of Law and International Business*. And I was in residence. I really *was* in residence, and I sort of fell into the ambit of Quincy House and a bunch of very vibrant students there were very nice to me. They decided to take this poor, lonely Republican under their wing. They befriended me, and I got to know some of them quite well. It was altogether extremely rewarding.

**RITCHIE:** Were there any other Ford administration people there?

**VASTINE:** Well, actually, one of his campaign managers, John Deardorf, was there, and his wife, the talented author who's now the Headmistress of the Madeira School, Elizabeth Griffith. And there was a very liberal journalist. We had a good group, and I had a wonderful experience.

I decided I wanted to learn how to sail, so I went down to India Wharf and Boston Harbor and joined a sailing club. For a fixed fee you got sailing lessons and then the right to use, as often as you wanted to, one of their boats. And I became very familiar with the Massachusetts Bay and did a lot of sailing and really loved it.

So I got myself back together after having worked so hard. I was diagnosed as having certain vitamin deficiencies and that sort of thing, and so

I cleaned up my act and stopped drinking so much coffee. Stopped drinking coffee period. It was altogether an extremely good experience.

I got free of Washington. Washington government junkies get hooked on our institutions. In my case and many other cases, the Senate sort of becomes the defining part of your life, or the Treasury does. Work becomes your definition. I learned that I could live and be happy without having, you know, U.S. Senate staff after my name, or U.S. Treasury Department Official after it.

**RITCHIE:** Maybe the best part of elections is that they force people to rethink their lives. [Laughs]

**VASTINE:** Yes, well, it's really nice for us to sit back and say that, but boy, it causes a lot of dislocation, too, doesn't it? Tremendous amount, and that has been nothing but increased. You know, the Senate has gone back and forth. The administration has changed so much. Anyway, I don't know what more to say about that.

**RITCHIE:** As your term was ending, how did you plan your future at that point, when you finished at the Kennedy School?

**VASTINE:** Well, then began my four years of wandering in the wilderness. [Laughs] I'd been successful in real estate investments. So I went to California with the real purpose of visiting my family who all live there now, and of joining some other friends in doing a lot of jogging and getting in shape because I wanted to go on a trip to Nepal, on a trek. I wanted to go on a two-month trek to Nepal for which I had signed up.

After the Merrill Lynch thing fell through, I just had no interest in coming back here. I felt that I had unlinked from Washington, somehow. There was some sort of a distance, and it wasn't time for me to come back to Carter Washington, or even to try to go back to the Wall Street sort of thing. I often think how my life would have been different had I gone to London and become immersed in the world of commodity trading. A wholly different life, I think.

But I don't regret it. I should say, also, toward the end of the Harvard experience I was offered a job to be the president of the University of Cairo.

**RITCHIE:** Oh.

**VASTINE:** The American University of Cairo. There was a wonderful professor named A. J. Meyer who was very well known in Middle East studies. He was the head of the Center for Middle East Studies, or something close to that at Harvard. And my friends, my good Quincy House friends, decided that they would put me together with him because they thought I needed this introduction.

He picked up on it, and he was a trustee of the AUC. I suddenly found myself going to New York to meet at the *River Club* with other trustees and, finally, on an airplane to Cairo—on the day before graduation—to meet the faculty, who were extremely hostile and suspicious. This New York Board had waited until the very, last day to send over their choice to be president, thereby somehow evading the proper kind of inspection that I should have had. I found this snakepit of a faculty and administration just turned in on itself. The prior president had been a cornball from Iowa, a real odd ball. Not at all urbane or polished, just not at all what you'd picture. I actually stayed in the apartment that was set aside for the use by AUC for its president. It was on the Nile in an eight-story building that had been built for a prince of Farouk's regime. And it was a *vaaast* apartment. Furnished in ghastly faux empire with dark green and dark red velvet hangings everywhere. And oriental rugs. It was very formal. Very frosty place. With a team of servants that lived in squalid quarters in the back, stinking of urine and cooking grease. Very, very unusual. Very forbidding.

I literally just fled from it. It was so inhospitable in human terms. It was just not where I was "at" in that moment in my life—to use the vernacular. I came back. They invited me to luncheon at the *Cote Basque* to seal the deal. I got sick the night before and couldn't sleep. I knew I couldn't do it. So I called

them up and said, “I’m sorry. I’m not going to be there at lunch.” So that was that.

**RITCHIE:** So then you went west?

**VASTINE:** Then I went west.

**RITCHIE:** And you were president of the Alliance for American Innovation and also a consultant to the Washington Pacific Group. What were they?

**VASTINE:** Well, I formed the Washington Pacific Group with a friend named Joe Harrison who had also been in the Ford administration. It was a general political-consulting firm. We stumbled across a client named Nolan Bushnell who was the founder of Atari who was thinking of running for Congress but also wanted to build a public affairs role. Wanted to build an image for himself as a player in California and national politics somehow.

So I formed with him the Alliance for American Innovation of which he was the chairman, which was a very earnest effort to help small, hi-technology companies get started, get seed capital, get technical help. He, in concert with that, formed something called the Catalyst which was kind of a beehive—an infrastructure with spaces in it for many sorts of enterprises. He had a phenomenal reputation, you see, as a very successful entrepreneur, he attracted entrepreneurs who had ideas. They came into his shell group, the Catalyst, and got space and got technical help and got interaction with their peers and got some financial support from Nolan, and legal support. It was a great concept. He called it his high-technology incubator.

Part of my side of it was to bring him to Washington, to introduce him, to get him opportunities to testify. He did, and we met dozens of congressmen and senators. It taught me a very important lesson, and that is that congressmen and senators really love to hear about the future. They love to



hear about the great exciting things that are coming down the pike. Not about somebody else's cry for shoe protection or tax relief.

I took him to the Republican National Convention and he became a big donor. It was a very interesting experience in trying to build a new association, actually, a new interest group. And we had some measure of success at that. But, bottom line is that just about that point I was tired of San Francisco and had done what I needed to do which was have a sort of sabbatical. I wanted again to come back to Washington, and my trips back with Nolan had been a chance for me to reacquaint myself with my friends in the Senate and elsewhere. And I had been also in the Treasury as the deputy director of the Treasury transition team for the Reagan Administration. So I had Treasury connections again and some White House connections though not very many. One thing led to another, and I decided I really wanted to come back, and Senator Chafee offered me a job as his legislative director.

**RITCHIE:** What happened to Nolan's project after that? What happened to the Alliance?

**VASTINE:** After I left it?

**RITCHIE:** Yes.

**VASTINE:** It carried on for awhile, and then it was merged into somebody else's operation, after about a year. I lost—I became so immersed in Washington again I kind of lost touch. But the woman who carried on after me, she speaks of it glowingly. But I really don't know.

**RITCHIE:** I guess ideas come, and they stay, and they disappear.

**VASTINE:** That's right. I don't know what the epitaph on the tombstone of the Alliance ought to be.

**RITCHIE:** Were you active at all in the 1980 election?

**VASTINE:** In California I was active for George Bush. I'd become active in the moderate wing of the Republican Party there. I was a leader in the California Republican League. I was president of the San Francisco Chapter. I gave a big event for Bush in the financial district very early in the campaign. It was very well attended, and Jim Baker came to it as well. They loved it because it was a very dynamic group of young San Franciscans from the financial district. They were, what? They were Bush Republicans. I don't know what Bush Republicans ought to look like, you know. I guess this is still before he had renounced freedom of choice. So I did take a hand in it.

But my curse is, I guess, that I'm a moderate Republican. I'm not a Reagan Republican, and I'll probably never be able to convince anybody that in my heart I'm a true conservative as they define it. So I was never really accepted in the Reagan circles, even though I was quite helpful to them.

**RITCHIE:** Had you had any contact with Bush when you were in Washington before? In the '70's?

**VASTINE:** Only as a congressman. I'd go to lobby him, but I hadn't known him. On the other hand, my partner, Joe Harrison, had lived two doors from him when he was a congressman and he got to know George and Barbara very well. Joe was the California coordinator for the Bush campaign. He was very essential to the fund-raising efforts in California.

The problem is that Bush decided, when push came to shove, not to make a stand in California. By that time it was over. There was no point. Can we leave it there for awhile?

**RITCHIE:** Sure.

**VASTINE:** I'm wearing down. I've had too long a day.

**RITCHIE:** Well that was a transitional period.

**VASTINE:** It's a transitional period indeed, isn't it? Then we can talk about John Chafee and being in the majority in the Senate.

I must say, I was with Reagan at the Century Plaza Hotel on election night. Nolan was an Eagle. We flew down in his Lear jet to Los Angeles and went to the hotel and had rooms there. First we greeted the Reagans. Then we went into the Ballroom to watch the returns come in. And the absolute *astonishment* of winning the Senate! The incredible, unthinkable quality of that. Because having been in the minority, we Republicans in the Senate really had a minority psychology. There were very few Republicans. We were down in the thirties, as I recall, during the '70s, and we really just got hind tit, as it were. So, for me, in that room—I guess I was one of the few people in that room that had Senate experience, it was stunning, absolutely stunning, to think that we were going to control the Senate.

**RITCHIE:** It was stunning to the Democrats, too.

**VASTINE:** Oh, boy! Wasn't it ever! Talk about stunned. So I came back in February—late February in '82 to join the Chafee staff. Okay, Don.

**RITCHIE:** Well, why don't we pick it up from there next time.

**End of Interview #4**

## THE GANG OF SIX

### Interview #5

September 17, 1993

**VASTINE:** I heard John Sununu speak yesterday at an event—a not-for-attribution luncheon, closed to the press, of the RAMS, the Republicans Allied For Mutual Support, which is an old-line, Capitol Hill, senior staff group. I was head of this group—RAMSHEAD—in 1990. Once a RAM always a RAM, so lots of people who are no longer on the Hill go to these things. He was surrounded at the head table by all his former congressional relations staff. He chose to take as his theme: “Why I was right.” It wasn’t me. We had the policies. We had the programs. We had the ideas. But the Bush campaign didn’t put any of those forward. The campaign let the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* dictate the campaign agenda. So we didn’t lead with our strength which was foreign policy.

The reason George Bush lost—get this!—is “that the American people, because of the absence of the Soviet threat, felt they could be capricious, irresponsible in their voting behavior.” They no longer had to be serious. “I guarantee you,” he said, “I guarantee you that, if the Soviets hadn’t been out of power, if the old Soviet bear were still the threat it was, George Bush would not have lost the election.” And it went on and on. There’s not a scintilla of humility. Nobody suggested that Sununu may have had something to do with having helped George Bush lose the election. After all, he was chief of staff for almost three of the four years.

He never did get around to acknowledging, which was the great problem and the reason George Bush failed—George Bush, and [Nicholas] Brady and Sununu refused to acknowledge that many Americans were scared about losing their jobs in the summer of 1991. Despite the euphoria after the brief war, regardless whether or not there was a full-fledged recession in progress, people were worried. And the administration refused to acknowledge that. And

Sununu never did! The man has got unmitigated hubris. But that was a digression.

**RITCHIE:** Interesting insight.

**VASTINE:** I've actually had him as my guest at luncheon three times: twice with the Senate administrative assistants, Republican administrative assistants and staff directors whom I used to have a bi-monthly lunch for, and one other time for the RAMS, this Republican group. I've invited him twice to speak to Republican senators at our weekend retreats. He has a way about him, I must say. He can be sometimes charming and down-to-earth and very hail fellow, like a local politician like a governor you'd expect to be. But I've seen him put down senators and tell them they're wrong in the company of other senators. That doesn't win you any friends on Capitol Hill. He was, for very good reason, *very* disliked.

**RITCHIE:** My sense is he's a man who never listened because he felt he already knew the answers to the questions.

**VASTINE:** Oh, absolutely! Ed Rogers was his assistant at the White House, and Sununu came up a couple of times to our Republican Conference television studio to do broadcasts for Republicans. One of the stories he used to tell on Sununu was that Sununu could multiply any set of numbers instantaneously. Virtually instantaneously. You could say 5,392 by 564, and he'd have an answer like that! Very, very quick. And he made no bones about the fact that he was probably brighter than anybody else around. Not a very attractive man.

Where were we?

**RITCHIE:** Well, this is a good point, actually, because I wanted to go back to 1981 and that period when you were on the transition team at the Treasury Department at the beginning of the Reagan administration. I wondered if at that time when you were looking over the type of people coming

in, did you envision that you might go back to the Treasury Department under Reagan?

**VASTINE:** Well, at first I didn't. Then I got Potomac Fever again, and I wanted to. But I shot too high. The job I wanted was to be assistant secretary of the Treasury for International Affairs. And that just was too political and big a job for me. I didn't realize that. So I should have been happy to get back my old, deputy assistant secretary job. Or one in another subject area, but also a DAS, and work my way up to assistant secretary in due course. But I didn't do that.

So, yes, tactically I didn't make a very good move then. But in some respects I wasn't yet ready to come back to Washington.

**RITCHIE:** I wondered maybe that, the reason I saw the connection there was that Donald Reagan was the same personality. . .

**VASTINE:** Regan.

**RITCHIE:** Regan was the same personality as John Sununu. He appears that way at least, and I wondered if that would have been a problem in having to work in the Treasury Department headed by him rather than by William Simon.

**VASTINE:** If you could work for William Simon, you could work probably for Don Regan. They weren't too different, actually, in their personality types. They were both bullies.

You know, the Treasury transition experience was kind of crazy because part of the transition was run inside the Treasury and part of it outside. I would say that the important part was outside where they were picking their personnel. That's always the key distinction. The people who were in the personnel office, where you choose Don Regan and the under secretaries, that kind of thing.

**RITCHIE:** Now, speaking of the Treasury Department, there. It wasn't just the patronage. There was a lot of pressure to have a philosophy in that Treasury Department, wasn't there?

**VASTINE:** Umhmmmm!

**RITCHIE:** The beginning of the supply siders.

**VASTINE:** Absolutely! They moved in there with a mission. That was Norman Ture and Paul Craig Roberts. Another interesting aspect of the transition team was that a guy who worked for Bill Roth, named Bruce Thompson, whom I had known when I was on the Government Affairs Committee—Bruce Thompson was on the key transition team, the personnel part. Bruce was Roth's tax guy, so Bruce handled the Roth part of the Kemp-Roth bill, and then went down to the transition. He made damn sure that the key supply siders, Norman Ture became under secretary for Economic Affairs. And Paul Craig Roberts, who'd been on the Joint Economic Committee staff, with Roth, I think—knowing Roth in that capacity—became assistant secretary. So, believe me, supply side got built into the Treasury very early.

**RITCHIE:** Where did you see yourself going at that stage?

**VASTINE:** Well, I saw myself going back to San Francisco, which is what I did do. I was glad to get back. I remember it was sort of a wrenching decision. I said, "Shall I stay here and play this game and, you know, work at getting a good job? Or shall I go back?" I went back, and I was glad. I'd had this big burnout in Washington when I left in '77 after the Simon Treasury and working for Chuck Percy. It took four years or so to work that through. By the time the middle of or the Fall of '81 came around, I was really ready. It was then time to come back. I met Senator Chafee, and one thing led to another.

I remember on the day that the Florida airline crashed and hit the 14th Street Bridge, that was the same day, I think, that there was a subway accident.

**RITCHIE:** Yes, the first fatalities.

**VASTINE:** Oh, a very fine friend, named William Roesing, now vice president for Seagram in Washington, Senator Chafee's campaign manager, formerly Senator Percy's assistant in a first Senate campaign and a friend from the Percy office. I called him at home in the evening, from my office in San Francisco. He'd just gotten home. It must have been eight o'clock or nine o'clock, or something like that. I said, "Bill, it's Bob." And he said, "Excuse me, I'm gonna make myself a drink. Don't go away. I want to talk to you, but I've got to make a drink!" And he made himself a bourbon, and he came back. He said, "I have just been in a subway accident." He had just walked his way out of the subway and walked home. But it was he, that evening, who put me into, in a sense, the Chafee job. So I came back on February 22, I think, of '82, to become Senator Chafee's leg. [Legislative] director, and found myself back in Washington.

On the third or fourth day I was back, I was taking a jog on the Mall. One of the things I'd done in San Francisco was to do a lot of running. In fact, I ran my first and only marathon, I think, on my forty-second birthday. And did well, too! It was about five o'clock in the evening, and it was one of those late, winter evenings when the sky gets kind of deep lavender. The Capitol Dome lights had just come on, and the dome was illuminated against this wonderful lavender-rose sky. And I was just dumbstruck! I almost had to stop in my tracks. And I said, "Thank, God, I'm back here." [Laughs]

Because San Francisco is shallow. Bottom line is that San Francisco may have tourist appeal, but those three-story, stucco, bay-front houses marching up and down those steep, little hills, endlessly, one after the other is very boring. I much prefer Georgetown brick. Stop me if I've already talked about this—but the cultural, intellectual life there was dominated by a couple of hundred people. The boards of directors of the big organizations, the World Affairs Council, and the symphony, the ballet, those sorts of organizations. It's the same bunch. They're vibrant, interesting people. But it doesn't go much deeper than that. Lots and lots of very highly educated, very intelligent people go to San Francisco



and veg out on the life style. They get into the food, and the Sonoma grapes, and the Napa grapes, and the differences between them, and the chocolate. I learned about chocolate desserts in San Francisco. I learned about coffee in San Francisco. I learned about gorgeous weekends in Mendicino. But, you know, you couldn't have a political event in the financial district after noon on Friday because nobody was there. I did political kinds of things there, including I was president of the California Republican League's San Francisco Chapter, so I brought Senator Bill Cohen out for an event. Sorts of things like that. I had a big event for George Bush. Did I tell you that?

**RITCHIE:** Yes, you mentioned that.

**VASTINE:** Yes, in the financial district. But, it was pretty thin, finally. So there we are. It was time to come back, and I was glad I did.

**RITCHIE:** How was it different working for somebody like John Chafee than for Charles Percy?

**VASTINE:** Oh, tremendously different! Again, in the candor this room encourages, it was very, very difficult, because I was very much a fair-haired boy with Percy. Sort of a leader, if not the brightest star, certainly right up there in the firmament, [chuckles] in his office. Well with Chafee, I came into a situation where I was a legislative director—I mean, I'd been around a lot, and I knew a lot of people, I knew a lot about a lot of things—but I was in an office that had been together for a long time. And they decided they didn't like me, that I was not one of them. It's a classic story! Part of understanding the Senate is understanding the makeup of a senator's office. And part of that is knowing that they're "families," and they often reject outsiders. Unless you come in as a new guy and work your way up. But to come in new and be imposed from above on a group of strong-headed legislative assistants, it's a formula for disaster. I have seen it again and again.

There are lots of cases where legislative staffs have succeeded in expunging the legislative director. The leg. director can't get credit but gets the

blame. The credit has to go to the LA when, you know, bill “X” passes. And Johnny Green has been the legislative assistant on bill “X.” Johnny Green gets—expects to get—the major credit. The leg. director may have done a lot of work in getting it through, but he or she doesn’t get the credit.

On the other hand, if this bill doesn’t pass, it’s the leg. director’s problem and not the LA. “Well, I didn’t get support from the leg. director.” And the AA, of course, is saying, “It’s his job to get the stuff passed; it’s not my job.” So the senator turns to the AA who turns to the legislative director; and the legislative director can’t turn to the LA and say, “That guy wrote a bad bill.” Because the LA won’t accept that. It’s probably the worst job in any Senate office to be the legislative director. I eventually carved out my niche in the budget process. Have I talked about the Gang of Six?

**RITCHIE:** No, not yet.

**VASTINE:** Well, the first assignment when I first came to the Chafee office was to rock no boats. Chafee was coming up to the end of his first term, his second election as senator, and things were going just fine, thank you. He had great name ID. He had a great re-elect number. The key question in any poll of an incumbent senator about an incumbent senator is: “Do you think John Chafee should be reelected?” And that’s different from: “Do you think he’s done a good job?” That’s a different question. “Do you know who he is?” That’s still a different question. But: “Do you think he should be reelected?” is the bottom-line question. It’s called the re-elect number. And if you’re under fifty percent positive response, you’re in trouble!

Well, Chafee was *way* above fifty. So we went into that election down into the summer time in great shape and, all of a sudden, found ourselves in a real horse race because there was 12-percent unemployment in Rhode Island. A feisty, Jewish former attorney general of the state of Rhode Island—whose name was Michaelson—came on with a slogan, “A fighter for Rhode Island.” And took Chafee on. The margin just slipped like crazy! Finally, we ended up by winning by maybe two percentage points. Part of the evening we were losing. I

remember that very clearly because I went up there to campaign and pound around door-to-door in precinct after precinct. Handing out literature and doing all that kind of thing. Putting up signs on election night.

But re-election was won, and Chafee was returned. That began my metamorphosis in the office. The substantive base was the budget, because that was an area of strength for me. Chafee decided he wanted to offer his own budget resolution. That's something I knew how to do. So I wrote up a Chafee budget resolution, which then became the resolution of the Gang of Five, later six when Mark Andrews was added to the Gang of Five by [Charles] Mac Mathias. Without asking anybody else, Mathias just included Andrews, who was not necessarily welcome!

So this group of Chafee, [Lowell] Weicker, Mathias, and [Mark] Hatfield. Who am I missing? Then, finally, Andrews. Oh, [Robert] Stafford. They proposed their own budget resolution. Well, I think our high-water mark in 1983, we were how many Republicans? Fifty-three? Or Fifty-five?

**RITCHIE:** I'm not sure [54].

**VASTINE:** Okay, well, we had six Republicans who weren't going to go along with the budget resolution reported by Mr. [Pete] Domenici. And it took all of Senator Chafee's fortitude to—he really wanted to go over and be a good guy and work with [Howard] Baker and be part of the team with Jim Baker downtown, all of that. But he stuck to his guns.

So each year for three years running the Gang of Five (or Six) forced upon the leadership elements of its own budget resolution which I had written. In other words, I became important in the office and accepted. And legislative director fully. I mean, I wasn't being bucked all the time. But it took awhile. It was harrowing. It was not a good experience.

**RITCHIE:** What was the thrust of the budget resolution that the Gang of Six proposed?

**VASTINE:** It was to add more money for certain social programs: education, child immunization, women's and infant's—the WIC program. That was basically it, each time. It was more money for Pell grants. Secondary education. I've forgotten precisely the budget categories. But, in a budget resolution it doesn't get too precise. You do it sort of generally.

We'd add money to one of the thirteen categories and in our rhetoric accompanying it specify the programs it was intended for. That was the emphasis. It wasn't a lot of money. A billion bucks or something like that each time. Hardly destroy anything. But, it delayed the budget process by weeks, in each case.

Jim Range, floor advisor to Senator Baker, knew that I had helped to write the budget process to start with. At the end of one of these at a crucial moment when Senator Chafee insisted upon the Gang of Six's position on the Senate floor, Range was standing behind at the back of the chamber. I was sitting next to Chafee on one of those staff chairs, and Range said in a tone projected toward me. "Bob," he said, "you're destroying the budget process."

**RITCHIE:** What was the reaction of the leadership? How did they try to get Chafee back in their, in the reservation?

**VASTINE:** Well, you know, Baker was a conciliator. Baker was a hands-on nice guy. They tried everything. They'd bring in the administration. They'd bring in Jim Baker. They'd bring in David Stockman. They'd bring in Jim Miller. All the levers were pulled. All the White House connections, including going down to the White House. They had six moderates on their hands, and they really never figured out how to deal with them except, finally, to give them some of what they wanted. Our job was to keep the senator on the steady path. Our job, meaning the staff. Because the inclination of all these senators—except for Weicker who was a real maverick—certainly Chafee's inclination was to want to be a good guy, and a team player, and go along with the

team—especially Howard Baker whom he really liked. I don't know whether that answers your question.

**RITCHIE:** Was this sort of a sign to the Republican leadership that they might break on other issues as well?

**VASTINE:** Oh, yes! And they did, occasionally, for example on Central American policy. It was that group that broke away on other issues. But, really, our concerted activity was budget activity. We were the Gang of Six really when it came to the budget.

I remember one year Chafee came back from the big President's Day vacation, whatever it was, and said, "This budget deficit. This is the reason why we have 14 percent interest rates." Remember this was the period when interest rates were intractably high. "We've got to control the deficit." "Bob, I want you to go off and write a budget that will reduce the deficit."

I said, "Well, does that mean I can cut back Social Security COLA's?"

"Yes. Yes. Whatever you have to do."

So I put together this budget resolution that reduced the deficit. I remember at two o'clock one afternoon having to present it to all the Gang of Six plus Keith Kennedy, the then-majority staff director of the Appropriations Committee. A daunting crowd, but these guys were *not* buying it. I mean, when you saw, even then, what you had to do—that was 1983—what had to be done to control the deficit, it was frightening! You had to cut away at the hard stuff, the difficult-to-cut entitlement programs. So I laid out what would have to be done. And it was sobering. So sobering that they all sort of walked away and shook their heads. And Chafee had to forgo. Not that he didn't want to try, but he knew he would have no support amongst the others.

**RITCHIE:** Well, to some degree it makes sense why the moderate senators might be resistant to do that, because it would involve a lot of

programs they had supported over the years—even the Gang of Five. But, what was your sense of what happened to the rest of the Republicans in the Senate? Reagan was the most fiscally conservative president since [Calvin] Coolidge, and he managed to create. . . .

**VASTINE:** Hugest deficits.

**RITCHIE:** . . . the worst deficits in American history.

**VASTINE:** Well, it was the supply side. I haven't really sorted out for myself why it failed. But the tax act of '81 cut receipts to a historical low. I think there had been a historic norm, let's say, of 21 percent revenue to GNP. Between 20 and 21 percent. Revenues had always been 21 percent of GNP or something like that. And all of a sudden, the great tax act of the first Reagan reconciliation bill, which was the tax cut *and* spending cuts, reduced revenues—too much. And TEFRA brought them back—the Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 1982—redressed that a little bit, but not enough. Then we had the recession. I don't think anybody counted on the fact that there would be such a slow down in '82 and '83. So receipts were way off. The other part of it is that we never really solved the problem of capital formation. Weak capital formation in this country. Because we never reduced the tax burden on savings and dividends—dividends and interest.

I heard Martin Feldstein, the economist, explain this extremely lucidly one time in a Republican Conference weekend retreat that I organized. I asked Senator Packwood afterwards what he thought of it. He said, "Well I always discount Martin Feldstein because I know what he's going to say ahead of time." But I thought Feldstein did a great job explaining why it's not worthwhile to save. Because by the time you get finished taking the tax burden off—state and Federal tax burden—it's barely worthwhile after inflation is netted out.

I don't know whether I'm answering your question or not, why did the Republicans go along with this cockamamie program. Well, I guess, first of all, Reagan was elected on that platform. He swept in a majority in the Senate.

There was a sense of euphoria. Everybody *wanted* to believe. It had a certain credibility. The plan. That was the Republican platform, the Republican program.

**RITCHIE:** In terms of the budget resolution and things like that, Senator Domenici got front-row center attention as chairman of that Committee.

**VASTINE:** Oh, yes. Did a wonderful job.

**RITCHIE:** But you were taking him on with this Gang of Six. . .

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** . . . constantly. What was your sense of Domenici?

**VASTINE:** Well, he would call us in. He and Steve Bell would. They knew we were coming, and they would try to head us off at the pass. But it didn't work.

Everybody loves Domenici. He's a wonderful guy. I like him very much to this day. He's a great, great person.

**RITCHIE:** Was he an effective chairman?

**VASTINE:** Oh, very! I think very, very good chairman. He really mastered it. It took him a while. I think he'd been mayor of Albuquerque or something like that. Isn't that right?

**RITCHIE:** I think so. [Domenici was chairman of the Albuquerque City Commission and ex-officio mayor until his election to the Senate in 1972.]

**VASTINE:** And, so I'd seen him in Government Affairs Committee as a very young, kind of wet-behind-the-ears senator. He has kind of an "aw shucks" down-home quality about him. I remember him once saying to Chafee, "Chaf,

I really got it! I finally got this stuff. I really understand it!” [Laughs] So even he knew that it was his learning process, too.

**RITCHIE:** My sense was that he was also standing up against the Reagan administration. I mean, he wasn’t giving Reagan everything he wanted.

**VASTINE:** That’s right.

**RITCHIE:** But, he was trying to balance what Reagan wanted and then what the moderate Republicans were asking for as well—trying to steer some course through the center of it.

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** You were tugging on the other side.

**VASTINE:** We were his counterweight on the moderate side. I used to go to the Budget Committee hearings and markups a lot, because I needed to have the background for what we would do later. So I saw him run the committee, and I think he did a wonderful job. A very good committee.

I think we had wonderful chairmen! I think Mark Hatfield was a wonderful chairman of the Appropriations Committee. Extremely effective chairman! I’m talking about the floor—floor action. And Domenici was a fine chairman. And Dole was a wonderful chairman. And Lugar, for awhile—wasn’t Lugar. . .

**RITCHIE:** No, Percy.

**VASTINE:** No! It was Percy.

**RITCHIE:** Lugar followed Percy.



**VASTINE:** Yes, well, Percy wasn't so good for reasons we've discussed. And we had some other good chairmen.

**RITCHIE:** Stafford was in Environment.

**VASTINE:** Stafford. Umhmmm.

**RITCHIE:** It's interesting that even though the party had swung to the right, the moderates got many of the chairmanship.

**VASTINE:** Yes. And after Dole, Packwood.

**RITCHIE:** Packwood was [chairman of] Finance.

**VASTINE:** Yes, it is interesting because that famous class of Hatfield and. . .

**RITCHIE:** The Class of '66.

**VASTINE:** . . . and Percy matured and became ranking. So they came to power.

**RITCHIE:** Now, you mentioned that the Gang of Six started out as the Gang of Five, until Andrews was added. Why was there resistance to Andrews?

**VASTINE:** He was a—well, personally, he's not very nice. He wasn't considered a heavyweight like the others. He hadn't paid his dues. He was too new. It was a kind of: Who's this guy buttin' into our club? But Mathias was right. If you've got six, six is better than five! [Laughs]

**RITCHIE:** Was Mathias sort of the center of this gang?

**VASTINE:** Hmmm. That's interesting. Well, I suppose from the standpoint of seniority he was. But he had as much seniority as Hatfield.

**RITCHIE:** I think they came both in '66. [Mathias was first elected in 1968.]

**VASTINE:** I'm not sure. I would be hard pressed to say he was the leader. Chafee always deferred to the "G'vernor." Stafford. "G'vernor." Because he was very senior. [Stafford was appointed to the Senate in 1971.] He may have outranked them all. We met sometimes in Mathias' hideaway, which is a wonderful room right next to the Senate librarian's room, with a round oculus looking down the mall. A wonderful room.

**RITCHIE:** That's Senator Kennedy's room now.

**VASTINE:** It had a wonderful, carved marble fireplace by Charles, who's the...?

**RITCHIE:** Bullfinch.

**VASTINE:** Bullfinch mantle. Chafee sparkplugged the Gang a lot because he had ideas. Certainly the budget thing was his idea.

**RITCHIE:** What is the job of a legislative director in general? I understand what a legislative assistant does, but I'm not sure I understand a legislative director.

**VASTINE:** Well, in theory you're supposed to be the person who motivates, leads, and manages the legislative staff. Of course that is internally contradictory. Legislative assistants are little tyrants unto themselves. They all want access to the boss *when* they want it. And very few senators that I know of will only work through a leg. director and really let the leg. director be a manager. So, a leg. director job sort of becomes titular. It means, in Chafee's office it meant that you had to—when I was doing it—that you had to manage the mail, make sure that the mail was being farmed out and answered, and that the form letters on the mail—the responses to mass mailings—were accurate and politically correct. You had to see that people were working. If you had a

sluggard or a laggard, it was your job to kind of counsel that person and bring in the senator or the AA to try to bring him along. To make sure that you knew what was happening on the floor. To make sure that the encyclopedia of the senator's votes, decision, were being kept up. And to be generally on top of whatever he was doing. Also leg. directors often have subject areas that are "theirs," as I had budget issues.

As a true management job it just didn't have substance. It just didn't work.

**RITCHIE:** Was the staff sort of on par, or did you have some problems with some people who were stronger than others?

**VASTINE:** Oh, definitely, always some people who were stronger than others.

**RITCHIE:** So I assume there was some personnel management as part of what you are doing?

**VASTINE:** Yes. But, I'll tell you, not a lot.

**RITCHIE:** You preferred to stay with the ideas rather than the people?

**VASTINE:** Oh. No, I just meant that people, if they felt that you were interfering in the way they wanted to do business, they would complain. So it was sort of touch and go. Like anything else, you built alliances, as I finally did with enough of them that I could control the situation. In the end it wasn't so bad, but there was never a clear delegation of authority to the leg. director to run the legislative shop. It was nebulous. It was "Come in and be leg. director. We need a leg. director." I *thought* I knew what that was.

Every office is completely different. Well, I shouldn't say completely different because they follow some patterns. I think the pattern I was describing in the Chafee office is kind of a prevailing pattern. In the Chafee

office the pattern was very clear and I think characteristic of a titular leg. director who has nebulous managerial and oversight responsibilities of the legislative program. One of the things that I had to do was to organize an annual legislative conference and seminar in which I would try to motivate legislative assistants to come forward with brilliant ideas and programs and lay out their plans and goals for the year.

We always did that, and it was always interesting for awhile. But getting action—getting the plans implemented—was a lot harder. I'd say that Chafee has finally hit his issue, though, on health reform. And he did it through the energies of a woman named Christie Ferguson, a feisty young woman who came to the staff right out of college, who then went to law school while she was on the staff, and who began to concentrate on health-care issues. She has become over time—she must have joined the staff in '81—over the years has become one of the Capitol's authorities on health care legislation and health care programs. She is the architect of the Chafee plan. The moderate, Republican plan which now has twenty-four adherents, including Senator Dole.

**RITCHIE:** You have a variety of legislative assistants. Each one has an area that they're specializing in. Do they have to compete to try to get the senator's attention?

**VASTINE:** Ab-so-lutely! That's the whole game. It's highly competitive. Yes, there is tremendous competition for the senator's time in every office I know. The guy or girl who has the brightest idea and gets the press release is the fair-haired person. It's really all competition. That's why it's hard to be a successful legislative director because everybody else is—and at some point, why is the legislative director there? If the LA has all the facts and the senator wants the LA to write the speech, or write the amendment, or brief the senator on X, Y, and Z, the LD is just in the room to be there. There's no role, unless the LA has gone off the track, and you need to help bring the LA back on. Usually the senator does that. Yes, there is tremendous competition.

**RITCHIE:** I once talked to a press secretary who said it was impossible to be a press secretary in most senators' offices because everyone on the staff wanted to talk to the press. They would never wait and go through the press secretary. I imagine it's sort of the same way to be a director of an office, that everybody want to deal directly with the senator.

**VASTINE:** Absolutely. It's axiomatic. Everybody lives to be with the senator. All the Senate staff. It's a daily fight to see how much time you can spend with the senator. That's where the "high" is, to be in the presence, to be on the floor, to be managing an amendment, to be in committee. It's a great thrill, to be with the great man! It's kind of a disease. The adulation of the senator in the Senate system.

I saw it most recently with Senator [Lloyd] Bentsen, for whom I worked for a few months at the RTC Oversight Board. I worked with him in March 1993, because I had to prepare him for hearings—his first hearings in the House and Senate Banking Committees, which were on the subject of Resolution Trust Corporation funding. I'd seen him around here a lot, and I think he knew that he knew me, so it wasn't a brand new experience. But I noticed that his very senior people—people who had been with him for a long time—were really daunted by him. There was still this quality of "The Senator," you know, the Big Man, that kind of awed them. I could see that with fresh eyes because I'd been in the bureaucracy for awhile. Just noted it. He is a fairly daunting person, by the way, as you may know.

**RITCHIE:** I gather that the legislative director like the administrative assistant is trying to impose some hierarchy in an office in a situation where hierarchy is very unnatural.

**VASTINE:** That's right.

**RITCHIE:** The hierarchy is the senator, and everybody works for the senator.

**VASTINE:** That's right.

**RITCHIE:** But you're trying to create a pyramid structure. And that's.

..

**VASTINE:** Almost impossible. Umhmmm.

**RITCHIE:** It's not a military staff system in any way?

**VASTINE:** No, but I'm told that some senators try to run it like that. Chafee, in spite of his military training and experience as secretary of the navy, which was extremely hierarchical. In spite of all that he worked one-on-one. You're right in all those respects.

**RITCHIE:** What would be your relationship with his people on the committees? Did they reflect legislative interests or were they really just a separate entity altogether?

**VASTINE:** They went off on their own. They were constantly running their own game, which was my experience when I was in the Government Affairs Committee. I wanted to do what I wanted to do. And I happened to be very good friends with Percy's leg. director. He was there stuck reading the mail all the time and trying to do a systematic job of creating some consistency in the senator's legislative effort, while all those legislative entrepreneurs were out there putting in bills and wanting to do this and that, doing things in committee, taking the senator off on digressions.

You know, every senator that I've been around wants to have focus. "I want to focus. I want creativity. I want to focus on new ideas." Oh, I've heard it so often. I mean, they all want it! They want focus. They regret the tremendous tendency to go off on wild goose chases, to go off on tangents, to pick up whatever's popular at the moment. It's a constant struggle. And it never works. I don't know any of them who can sustain a focus on three or four issues.

Percy used to talk about it. We'd *never* do it. Because the next day, you'd have the Gulf of Tonkin resolution. Or the day after that you have the airline strike. Or the following day Lock and Dam Number 64 on the Mississippi needs to be rebuilt! It's just one opportunity after the next to be involved in something fun, something interesting, and something that may get you a line in the paper. So it's very, very hard for a senator to impose on himself and on his staff the kind of discipline that would result in a real concentration. And, really, that only comes when someone like Christie Ferguson—or in my case Congressman Curtis—has a tremendous personal interest in a subject area. And the senator's committee assignment gives that person scope to work in that field as in the case of finance and Christie Ferguson. She did health work there. In my case the Ways and Means Committee, Curtis' work there gave me scope for work on a trade policy. Yes.

**RITCHIE:** Did you find it was any different working for a senator from a small state like Rhode Island as opposed to Illinois with its urban-rural split and all of its varying constituencies? I would think Rhode Island has to be about as compact a state as anybody would represent somewhere in the Senate.

**VASTINE:** Well, day by day it didn't matter that much. In terms of the quality of the work, the quality of the environment.

I'll tell you this, Chafee's office was much more politically sensitive. Much more. I think smaller states, with only a million people, you have to watch it. You can't offend too many folks. Another thing about Percy was that he didn't put too heavy a political restraint on us. Of course in the Government Affairs Committee, we weren't getting into very much hot water either—except for the Consumer Affairs bill. And that's a good example.

Percy gave full rein to a staffer named Stewart Statler to write—for three Congresses in a row, or at least two Congresses, four years, whatever—to spearhead the creation of a Consumer Protection Agency. Well, when I had been a private-sector lobbyist, I had managed to kill that thing in the Rules Committee by one, by a vote that I influenced. Industry absolutely hated it!

Whether rightly or wrongly, they really hated the CPA. It's never become law. But Percy, in spite of the fact that he was thumbing his nose at his own business roots and offending big sections of his business constituency by his continual, ongoing sponsorship of that damn bill, kept on *doing* it! And Stewart Statler was very smart, and a real gut fighter. He didn't endear Percy to any of these business types. So Percy, for six or so years, went about offending the business community.

**RITCHIE:** As legislative director, did you find yourself sort of looking over your shoulder at what the impact of what the legislative assistants were doing?

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** In other words, at the mine field they might lead the senator into?

**VASTINE:** Yes. But I had to learn that for myself, too, because the Percy emphasis was so different from the Chafee one. The real mastermind of the Chafee operation was his chief of staff in Rhode Island, a *real* politician, who had his finger on the grassroots pulse. He had his fingers down in the soil, firmly planted. Every day. He really knew what was going on in that state. He knew when we were going over the edge. I would get calls from him saying, "Hey, what's going on? Why are we doing this? Why are we doing that? Don't you think John ought to be doing this? Don't you think John ought to be doing that?" So there was that constant monitoring based on what was happening in the state.

I didn't have that sense at all in the Percy operation. I think, finally, that's why Percy was defeated. He lost touch with too many constituencies. He did maybe what was right or what he felt was right too often. And he got lost in the Foreign Relations Committee stuff and his interest in meeting with ambassadors as opposed to meeting with local union leaders. So, there we have it. What time is it?



**RITCHIE:** Ten to five. I just want to ask, what was the atmosphere for being in the majority? For the first time in your political career—other than working for Ford in a Republican administration—but here on Capitol Hill for the first time you were on the majority side. How different is that than being on the minority side?

**VASTINE:** Oh, well. It's so different. You control the agenda. That's the bottom line. Control of the agenda is everything! As Bob Teeter used to lecture us, when we would have Republican Conference retreats. He said, "The party that controls the agenda will win the election." And for the first time in a long time, we controlled the agenda, and the resources to implement it.

There are some who argue Howard Baker didn't capitalize on that. Wasn't tough enough. I think he was a very fine leader, actually. When he left. Bob Dole was elected partly because Dole was going to be "tougher."

But, no, it all boils down to control of the agenda and the ability to implement your program. Control the staff. It's quite a nice feeling.

**RITCHIE:** You mentioned even the minority had to scramble for office space. I would imagine. . .

**VASTINE:** Oh, yes. All of that.

**RITCHIE:** . . . you were in a very different position to call the shots.

**VASTINE:** Ummhmm. Well, again, there were those who argue that we weren't tough enough when we took over the Senate. We didn't clean house enough. And Senator Mathias left in Rules Committee a bunch of old staff who, many felt, were determined to frustrate Republicans at every turn. People railed at Mathias for these folks he had in there in the Rules Committee, who were constantly obstructing, making it hard to get rooms and computers. The whole panoply of Senate administrative things.

So there were some who'll argue that we weren't tough enough in taking over and that Baker left too many Democrats in crannies in the Capitol. That kind of thing. Didn't ferret out—didn't change the infrastructure sufficiently to put in Republicans as opposed to Democrats. So they just waited until they could get back, the folks down in the bowels of the sergeant at arms office. That kind of thing.

**RITCHIE:** Maybe having been in the minority for so long Senator Baker was sympathetic to the new minority.

**VASTINE:** Oh, well, Baker was a very nice man. He was not a vindictive, mean politician. And he understood the value of building relationships with Democrats based upon being a gentleman.

**RITCHIE:** I think also one of the advantages the Republicans had then was the Democrats really were so dispirited after that election in 1980. They were *not* used to being in the minority.

**VASTINE:** They were not. Well, I mean, it was palpable in Senator Robert Byrd. It was just a bitter, galling pill—daily to him to accept the fact that he didn't have the votes. It just was palpable. He was bitter about it! And sometimes that would come out—I can't think of any examples of it, but it would come out in his demeanor on the floor, standing on his rights, demanding his moment. "I have *been* leader!" You know, "I know what the leader's trying to do!" "I've been there. So don't tell *me* about this!" That kind of quality in his behavior. Does this ring a cord with you?

**RITCHIE:** Umhmmm.

**VASTINE:** Strike a cord with you? Yes, very tough. Of course, the staff and the senators, Senator [Russell] Long didn't take it well. But I can't remember any specifics about that.

**RITCHIE:** That was Senator Dole's famous line, on election night. Howard Baker called to say, "Bob, you're going to be chairman of the Finance Committee." And Dole said, "Who's going to tell Russell Long?"

**VASTINE:** [Laughs] That is a good line. That man Dole is just so witty. He's unbelievably funny. I went to a goodbye for Walt Riker, his longtime press secretary, couple weeks ago. Dole was there and made comments. He just couldn't stop himself! He didn't have anything written down. Just one one-liner after the other. Each one funnier than the next. He had the room just roaring with his native wit! There was some self-deprecating wit. There was some poking fun at other people, but it wasn't—people say he has an acerbic, mean-spirited sense of humor. It was not that. It was just funny. He's just very, very funny! He plays on words, inversions. Just good, great wit.

**RITCHIE:** It's always struck me how many people who are in public life really *don't* have a sense of humor, and can't tell a joke to save their life.

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** But to Senator Dole, it just comes natural.

**VASTINE:** Yes. He's got a beautiful sense of humor, wonderful sense of humor. Too bad that doesn't come across on television. He tends to project an anger on the tube that sometimes is there, but often is not. He's just laid back and funny. Great man.

**RITCHIE:** Well, would you like to take a break now; and we can pick it up when you went to the Republican Conference.

**VASTINE:** Yes. Let's do that.

**End of Interview #5**

## THE SENATE REPUBLICAN CONFERENCE

### Interview #6

September 27, 1993

[Prior to this interview, Robert Vastine and Donald Ritchie encountered Elaine Franklin, chief of staff to Senator Robert Packwood, in a corridor of the Hart Senate Office Building. She described giving a deposition regarding the senator to the Senate Ethics Committee.]

**VASTINE:** I have long been an admirer and a watcher, in a sense, of Packwood because he was becoming influential in the Senate when I worked for Senator Percy in the early '70s. He was one of those senators who joined in the early effort—even though he did not follow through with it—in the convention of 1972 in Miami to rewrite the convention rules to give more weight to the larger states in the delegate selection process.

I got to know him then; and when I came back to work for Senator Chafee, he was, of course, a prominent member of the moderate wing. And he was very close to Chafee and was a constant companion on the squash courts. They have a squash league—I mean, the two of them play squash several times a week. And they have a kind of understanding, it seems: one never gets very far ahead of the other. But there is a constant competition. They give each other enough rope to let one get out in front, and then the other comes back. Then the other one falls behind. And it sash-shays back and forth, I think, by some subliminal agreement. [Laughs]

So because Packwood was a big supporter of Chafee's, I made it my goal to get Packwood to be an intense user of the Republican Conference facilities upstairs in the Hart Building here; and indeed won him over. Not without a lot of effort and not without engaging his discontent, because things for him had to be *really* perfect. I don't think I have met a more vain member of the Senate. He is so attuned to his appearance on the camera, and he has studied so hard how to make the best of his appearance. He takes a pose, and he never leaves it in front of the camera. He has got a studied pose. It consists of sitting on the

edge of a table with one knee up leaning slightly forward, shoulders at an angle to the camera, head looking up. He has obviously decided that that's his best angle, and he uses it all the time.

Elaine Franklin, the woman we just spoke with in the hall, has a remarkable relationship with him. She will actually comb his hair for him before he goes on camera. This is his administrative assistant! Who comes into the studio to be sure that his makeup is right and that his hair is combed, and *does* the combing. Astonishing.

**RITCHIE:** Well, what do you think of all these charges [of sexual harassment] against him? They seem incongruous given his record in Congress.

**VASTINE:** I think he's the victim of a national reaction. Also a change in the composition of the Senate with more women as members. Barbara Mikulski is on the Ethics Committee. A faction in Oregon that wanted to get rid of him and couldn't at the polls and seized upon this as a means afterward to try to diminish him and even shake him from office. I don't think he deserves it. From what I know he *did* misbehave and was well known to have misbehaved in the sense that he made passes at women. But there's nobody I know that says a woman who refused the passes was somehow hurt by him afterward: that he took retribution against them. I've never heard that charge.

I guess maybe he's the product of—well, I don't know, strike that. I was going to say he was the product of the time when it was possible to do that. But I'm a product of the same time, and I was taught that that was very bad behavior; and you don't make passes at women. Certainly if you are the employer you don't make passes at women. It's just not done! And it is a great lapse on his part that he might have done that. But I think the reaction has been extraordinary.

I'm no student of the Ethics Committee, but it certainly did not cover itself with honor in the case of the Keating Five. For example and specific reference to tarring John McCain, Senator McCain. Keeping his case active and

not terminating his part of the case simply out of partisanship, it seemed. Even though the special counsel recommended that charges against him be dropped.

**RITCHIE:** Since you've been watching the Senate and the Congress in general, how well does Congress handle its ethics cases on its own members.

**VASTINE:** Oh, that's such a hard question. I'm afraid to hazard that.

**RITCHIE:** It's a very difficult thing for a collegial body, I think.

**VASTINE:** Here's an observation—I guess, I felt, and my colleagues on the staff of the Senate felt, that the Ethics process was a necessary institutional response to abuses. In the case of Harrison Williams it produced the right result. I watched that case. I watched the statements on the Senate floor. I found it pathetic, and I felt sorry for him. But I thought he got what he probably deserved. And I guess I felt, also, that digression aside, that, in a way, ethics processes of the Senate and the House were designed to do what was necessary to be done but to really protect the body. And maybe err on the side of leniency when possible. And temper public ire. And, in doing all that, preserve the institution from additional public contempt, which I think is, finally, in the higher interest of the republic. This does not mean that the committee did the right thing in the case of the "Keating Five." Quite the reverse. In "protecting" the Five, they hurt the institution.

**RITCHIE:** The easy way out for them, of course, is to let the voters make the decision. But in Senator Packwood's case, he'd just gotten reelected. So . . .

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** . . . it would be six years before that would happen again.

**VASTINE:** Well, as Elaine was just saying, she feels, and I know others feel, that the Ethics Committee counsel are going beyond the confines of these

allegations against him on a fishing expedition against Senator Packwood. If that's indeed the case, I think that's very unfortunate. But I think it's quite appropriate in the context you've just framed, that is to say a senator who has just been elected and has six years ahead of him to look at the specific charge, and look at it fairly, and give the senator his day as well. So I guess that's the necessary thing. I would only hope that it's gotten done with because dragging it on and on and on and on is not in the public interest either. They do take a very long time, and I guess that—I mean, in the case of [Alphonse] D'Amato, took forever, and could materially have hurt him. But he's such a fighter that he managed around it somehow.

The case of the Keating Five took forever as well. Much longer than it should have. So one has to wonder about the structure and the process and the approach of the staff and the dedication of the chairmen to moving the process along as quickly as possible. I was thinking—just now—that maybe there ought to be an eminence like a former federal judge, with undisputed character and standing, sort of put in as a referee. Do you know what I mean?

**RITCHIE:** Well the senators. . .

**VASTINE:** Sort of a surrogate chairman.

**RITCHIE:** They clearly don't like serving on the committee. They try to get off as much as possible.

**VASTINE:** They don't. They try to get off of it. Anyway, that is where we are.

**RITCHIE:** Well, we ended last week just before you had gone to the Republican Conference. And I'd like to ask about the Conference today, starting with Senator Chafee's role as chairman of the Conference. What exactly does the chairman of the Conference do? And why was he interested in running for that position in the first place?

**VASTINE:** Well, Senator Chafee is a Marine. He served twice on active duty on the front lines. He's a product of a family with a tradition of public service, as I understand it, and a prominent family in Rhode Island. He was Skull and Bones at Yale. He is a former member of the Board of Directors. Member of the Yale Board of Trustees. Three times governor of the State of Rhode Island. And Senator Chafee is a man who likes to be at the heart of things. He's a team player at heart, and he likes to be in the inner circle of the team. For him, even though a moderate and not a very likely candidate to be a member of the Senate leadership team, it was something to which he aspired. And, he ran, I believe, in '74 against—no.

**RITCHIE:** Eighty-four.

**VASTINE:** Yes, '84. When did I take the job? Elections for conference—leadership elections occur the same year as elections for House, and those are even years, right? So I started in '85, so it was '84 that Senator Chafee was elected conference chairman. Is that right? November of '84.

**RITCHIE:** I think so.

**VASTINE:** . . . and I began January 3, or whatever it was, of '85. Good, Lord! It seems like forever. How is that possible?

But I think he had in '82, or maybe '80, had run against Senator Garn to be secretary of the conference. So, he had kind of signaled his interest in leadership earlier in his time in the Senate and therefore it wasn't a surprise that he might try again in '84. He tried because he had the backing of moderate bulls like Packwood and Danforth and others. And because it was a new day. It was a new leadership team taking over. And because he had been close to Dole, in Dole's chairmanship of the Finance Committee.

And because he *worked* at it. And Jake Garn didn't. Jake Garn took a vacation, and didn't really take seriously the job of campaigning for conference chairman, and Chafee did. He worked it very hard. And he won! I think it was



by two votes. I think it was 27-25 or 27-24. So, it was a fair margin, as these things go. We could check that by looking at how many Republicans there were in '85. Because, as you know, and the record should show, former senators don't get to vote. The group that votes in these leadership elections which have occurred typically in November, consists of senators who will be in office the next January in the next Congress.

So he partly got elected on a platform of activism. Having run a Republican Conference task force on U.S. competitiveness in international trade. This task force was about twenty to twenty-five senators and convened a staff working group, of which I was chair. My job was to create this intellectual framework in which you had measures relating to technology, and research and development, and measures relating to capital formation, measures relating to taxation, measures relating to judicial process. Measures which we Republicans thought should be enacted to stimulate American competitiveness.

We deliberated for about a month or so, and we basically just put together a master list of reasonable Republican bills. And a whole bunch of them got enacted. Well, that's not surprising because we were in the majority. But, it was a nice way of conceptualizing and framing the issues. So Chafee took a lot of credit for that. And senators acknowledged that it was a relatively innovative thing to do. The other part of it was that the conference had been very badly run. It had been run, really, by Margot Carlisle.

But she had also formed the Steering Committee, the so-called Senate Steering Committee—was the animating genius and spirit, at the staff level certainly. It was her particular obsession with matters of defense—missiles and bombs—that she carried as well into the conference. She organized the conference in a very odd way. She had her choice of office space in the Hart Building. She chose, instead of a contiguous set of offices or contiguous suite, she chose to have, let's say, about 800 square feet or 900 square feet of space on the atrium in one part of the building but on the same floor, the fourth floor, but the bulk of the space was down the hall on the same floor looking out the other direction toward Second Street. Very strange! Well, it was because she wanted

to retire to her suite of offices where she had an enormous, personal office, a conference room, another office, and a small secretarial bay. She didn't have any windows—she didn't have any access to windows because she wanted to protect herself from the bombing that was inevitably going to be inflicted on our building by unnamed terrorists. That gives you a picture of Margot.

Meanwhile, the staff down the hall in Room 405 was run by Patty Jackson, who was director of Programs and Administration. She was effectively the number two. So the mission of the conference was implemented by her. But she didn't believe in a lot of it. I mean she was a skeptic about the conference's communication efforts which were nascent in those days. But she was the institutional memory. She had joined the Conference staff in the '70s, when Senator Carl Curtis was chairman, and the Conference lacked its own offices.

When I came, the conference had a staff of about 27 including maybe as many as seven writers, a full complement. And a staff of two who dealt with foreign media. And one graphics design person. And two or three or four people—well, certainly two people, who, one of whom is now chief of staff to the governor of Arizona, interestingly—whose purpose was to do broadcasting. Radio and television broadcasting. Actualities and videos. We had a camera; but we did not have a professional camera man. And then there were miscellaneous other folks, some of the conservative true believers hired as a favor. But, as I said, the main product was print, and the print product was a series of monthly columns: “family issues forum;” “foreign policy forum;” “economic forum.” You name it! A forum for everything. There were a dozen of these at least. And these folks were busy writing these columns.

Well, the columns were ghosted pieces written for senators. The idea was that Republican senators would sign these and then they would be distributed in camera-ready form. They would be distributed to newspapers all over the country for insertion in the paper. We did a study when I came in which showed that they were never used! They never made it into the papers, and for very good reason! What does a paper in Texas care about what dear old Jim Abdnor of Dakota—former Senator Jim Abdnor of Dakota—thinks about arms

negotiations when he was not an authority or spokesperson on that issue. So this was a useless effort. It was really useless!

I walked into this mess where the staff was at war with itself. Patty Jackson was totally at odds with the communications people. And my job was to find a new mission, really. I decided that it just seemed obvious. I don't know the moment at which I decided it, but I've gotten way ahead of the story, haven't I?

**RITCHIE:** It's okay.

**VASTINE:** You asked me about Senator Chafee and I'm telling you about this. Anyway, I can go back to Senator Chafee.

My job was to redefine the mission of the organization, and I decided to put most of our eggs in the electronic communications basket and away from print communications and, basically, we stopped all of those publications. We just didn't do them any more. I built up the video and radio side and the graphics side, and we really made a name for ourselves.

About a year later along came Rick Smith—Hedrick Smith—to do his *The Power Game*, I think it was called. In that book he spent two or three pages on the Republican Conference. He called me an executive producer or something like that. But, basically, all, of course, in a very critical context because he presented what we did as part of the elaborate structure of incumbent perks that the Senate had constructed for itself. Even though there was a tone of admiration about what we had accomplished, the context was negative because this was all bad. This couldn't be in the public interest, and he made me defend it in the book.

But back to Senator Chafee. Senator Chafee won the job, and for him, it provided access to White House and other internal councils. Go to the White House on Tuesdays or whenever for Republican leadership meetings, to be at the head of his party in ceremonial and other events and to be acknowledged as the

number three person in the official Senate Republican leadership. And, after all, we were in the majority, so it was a very gratifying thing for him.

On the day he was elected, I told him that I might like to be considered for the job. And he said, “Well that sounds interesting to me, too.” About three weeks later he made the decision, and he came down and presented me to Margot who took the decision with great anger and resentment, as though she expected to be kept on. She had not made many friends outside the circle of the steering committee. And the great come-uppance of the Steering Committee was that, in the end, she could only deliver eight votes for [James] McClure. I did not mention that McClure had been the Conference chairman, and she worked for him.

**RITCHIE:** Then he ran for majority leader [in 1984].

**VASTINE:** Then he ran for majority leader. Of course he didn't win—against a field of four others?

**RITCHIE:** Yes. Stevens. . .

**VASTINE:** Stevens, Domenici. . .

**RITCHIE:** And Dole.

**VASTINE:** Dole. And McClure was the first down with only eight votes. Then I think Domenici might have bowed out. Then it was Stevens and Dole; and Dole won by two.

Margot was very, very bitter.

**RITCHIE:** Well, what the Democrats and Republicans do is very different. In the Democratic Conference, the floor leader is also the chairman of the Conference. But the Republicans have separated it so that the Conference

chairperson is separate from the floor leader. What exactly is left for the Conference leader to do? That's what I've never understood.

**VASTINE:** Damn little. The Conference had a very weakly defined mission before I came along. And by seizing communications and electronic communications and installing the technology, mobilizing the money and the staff to buy the video and radio and graphic technology, in doing that, we gave the conference its first, clear mission.

Now, in addition to that, the chairman of the Conference convenes conferences and, further in addition to that, we've got a tradition now of off-site conferences that we do—at least annually—issue conferences. During two-day retreats. Which senators sort of grudgingly come to, without a hell of a lot of enthusiasm, even though my effort was to make them as much fun and as interesting as we possibly could. It's kind of a cringe to have to go spend a weekend with your colleagues when you see quite enough of them the rest of the time. Especially when there isn't a hell of a lot of collegiality or warmth amongst many of them.

But, you asked about the role of the Conference chair. Officially, it's to convene conferences, and preside at conferences. But even that is dicey. Even that's gotten dicey because a lot of it has to do with venue. For example, if we had had our own conference chamber or Senator Chafee had had a great, big room where you could convene fifty Republican senators easily, it would have been easier for Senator Chafee to dominate those conferences. But what happened was that we always had trouble getting a room; and so Senator Dole volunteered his personal office for these conferences. Well, his personal office can seat fifty senators. And, suddenly, we were meeting under the auspices of Senator Dole who would, of course, turn over the meeting to Senator Chafee or let him convene it. But Dole's presence was, you know, pervasive during the conferences.

So, "what is a conference" got kind of vague. Is this a caucus? Where Senator Dole chairs, or at least is in contention for chairmanship. Or is this a

conference, where Senator Chafee, the Conference chairman, presides? Now, in some cases, it's in Dole's interest not to preside! Very interesting. Sometimes Dole didn't want to preside! It's perfectly fine and good, thank you, to let somebody else handle this hot potato! And just let him be a spokesperson—I mean—in the sense of expressing maybe his own point of view. Or just have the conference be a sounding board so he could figure out what he might do. I think that's the way he used some of those conferences we had—just to hear what other members, where they were coming from so he could set his course appropriately.

**RITCHIE:** Would conferences be called on specific issues?

**VASTINE:** Oh, yes. But not frequently. I was always told and had the impression, that Democrats would conference at the drop of a hat! There was a period of time when they were constantly caucusing. I remember toward the end of '88, '89.

So, anyway, does that answer your question?

**RITCHIE:** They would hold the conference on a specific issue, let's say, to give members a chance to speak their mind on things.

**VASTINE:** Well, and also to let the administration come forward.

**RITCHIE:** Oh, okay, to bring in administration witnesses.

**VASTINE:** Not as witnesses, as spokesmen, advocates. Like the great, big budget deal.

**RITCHIE:** Yes.

**VASTINE:** You know, the budget deal, the breaking of the tax pledge.

**RITCHIE:** Yes.

**VASTINE:** There were lots of meetings around that. A lot. And Sununu and [Richard] Darman and [Nicholas] Brady all came to those meetings.

**RITCHIE:** Were they also intended to try to get some unity? I mean, to get everybody, sort of consensus?

**VASTINE:** Surely. Oh, definitely.

**RITCHIE:** Do they ever do that?

**VASTINE:** Rarely. I would say the high water mark in unity in my recollection was the unanimous Republican opposition to [Bill] Clinton's economic plan of this past spring. That was extraordinary. There were very few times when the Republicans were able—to a man—to agree on an issue. Of course, there is a provision of Conference rules which says that no decision of the Conference is binding on all its members. So there's no obligation. I think if there were provisions such as that in Conference rules, they wouldn't even come to conferences. Just to say "I didn't know." [Chuckles]

Did I answer?

**RITCHIE:** Yes. It's a structural issue. At to what exactly the Conference does. What's the relationship of the Conference chairman to, say, the Republican Policy Committee and the Republican Steering Committee and things like that? Is he ex officio member? Is he a chair of anything?

**VASTINE:** Well, you know the Steering Committee is not a recognized [party organ].

**RITCHIE:** Did the Republican Party have its own steering committee?

**VASTINE:** No.

**RITCHIE:** Other than the Steering Committee?

**VASTINE:** No, no. N-O.

**RITCHIE:** The Democrats have a steering committee.

**VASTINE:** The Steering Committee is a misnomer.

**RITCHIE:** I remember Senator Byrd standing up on the floor one day saying, “What is the Senate Steering Committee?”

**VASTINE:** Yes. “What is this, and who is this Margot Carlisle?” he asked. No. It does not. The Steering Committee is just what we would now call a caucus of like-minded members.

And I recall one time when it became obvious where the Steering Committee as an entity was going to be trying to get Senator Chafee out of his job. I once tried to make a count of who they were. And narrow it down so that we would know precisely. There were at that point maybe, as I recall, fourteen to seventeen senators who could be considered to be members of the Steering Committee though just 'cause you went to a Steering Committee lunch didn't really mean you were on board the Steering Committee program like a Wallop would be. I would say Senator [Malcolm] Wallop was at the heart of the Steering Committee and McClure. McClure then Wallop after him. Wallop, I believe, took over leadership of the Steering Committee.

**RITCHIE:** Was it a self-appointed group?

**VASTINE:** Oh, *definitely*. Oh, yes. Completely informal. Though, I think in this case they—the senators who were members—contributed to the support of the staff. The staff chief after Margot was a very able woman named Jade West. And she had some people working for her. They had a small staff, and I think they got some space in the Hart Building. I know they were not officially recognized as a Senate entity.



**RITCHIE:** I recall that's when Senator Byrd raised the question. I think they got into the telephone directory, and he stood on the floor and said, "Who is the Senate Steering Committee?"

**VASTINE:** It's the same thing as the Wednesday Group. The Wednesday Group in the Senate is an informal luncheon group that meets Wednesdays, obviously. Some Wednesdays, maybe once a month. I don't know how often. There is no staff in that case, and there is no effort to house them in the building. And there's no, you know, no listing. Senator Chafee is, I think, is the sort of nominal chair, convener. It's his secretary who used to organize the next luncheon.

**RITCHIE:** Well, I guess my initial question was sort of really what is the chairman's of the Conferences role, say on things like Policy Committee. Does he have any voice in policy?

**VASTINE:** Well, the Policy Committee per se never meets. The Policy Committee consists of the ranking members of the authorizing committees—or let's say of the standing committees plus a few others. And it never meets. The Policy Committee is the instrument of the Policy Committee chairman and staff director. And the program of the Policy Committee is determined by those individuals, by its staff. It's not determined by the leadership in any sense. It's kind of a fiefdom for its chairman.

You asked about one other position, the Conference secretary. Now the Conference secretary is the person who *really* doesn't have a role. For Garn it didn't matter, because he was a conservative and thought the less government, the less staff, the less mishmash, the better. Don't need to have a role, and the Conference secretary; and if somebody wants me to count whether there is a quorum or not, then I'll count whether there is a quorum. But I don't need anybody on my staff to do that for me.

When Garn left it and Cochran got it, it was something like \$170,000 budget for the conference secretary. That meant they could have two, two and a half, or three people in a little office in the Dirksen Building. They struggled to find a niche. They did some statistical work analyzing Senate votes. They did the vote analyses. Who voted how on what, how the vote split up. But there's precious little they could do. Nonetheless, staff allotment has grown. I once called up Keith Kennedy, whom you know [minority staff director of the Senate Appropriations Committee] and I said, "Keith, is it okay if we get another \$50,000 to do x, y, z." He said, "Look, Bob. The bottom line is you can have anything you want, God dammit. You're leadership. You can have it if you get Dole to agree to it." A sort of bitter resignation. So, these budgets just sort of increased. I don't know where they are now, but I wasn't greedy. I was very careful. Senator Chafee was not greedy. Chafee once said, "Now don't spend everything in your budget. Leave something left over."

**RITCHIE:** That's the Marine Corps way. The Marine Corps always turned back part of the budget.

**VASTINE:** Well, okay. I didn't know that, but that's what he wanted me to do. And I was cautious not to push too hard. I wanted to get the equipment we needed. I wanted to make sure we had the staff we needed, but my goal was not to be profligate, or appear to be. I think by the time I left we had rather significantly increased the overall budget of the conference, but not massively.

**RITCHIE:** Can you tell me, is it the sense then on the Republican side that the leadership is diffuse. . .

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** . . . or is it really concentrated in the Republican leader. In other words, is it on paper diffuse and in reality in the leader. Or is it diffuse in reality as well?

**VASTINE:** The reality is that under Dole it is diffuse. I think if there were a leader whose style was different and who was in constant consultation with the elected leadership and used them as his kitchen cabinet and his advisers and his implementers, then the leadership would be more cohesive. But Dole is not. This is not a criticism of Senator Dole. It is just a matter of style. He tends to listen a long time and then make up his mind, then act; and he's very, very good. He's a wonderful leader, but that's the way he does that.

But to answer your question, it's very diffuse. People go their own ways. Particularly when you have Senator Chafee representing Rhode Island who some call the most democratic state in the union. Here's a senator who gets elected in Rhode Island miraculously. There are only about 14,000 registered Republicans in Rhode Island.

So this man, obviously, has to vote differently than Trent Lott of Mississippi has to vote. Or Wallop of Wyoming. So having him in the leadership of a party that became increasingly conservative over the years—over the six years that I was staff director. I would say we lost moderates and we gained conservatives. Especially, again, conservatives from the House: Trent Lott; Dan Coats, whom we got along famously with and who appreciated us, but voted against Senator Chafee, on ideological grounds. But they *loved* our services, and said so! Stood up and said so. Senator Lott in the last election—Chafee's last election, in which he got defeated—got up and said, "You know, this isn't about the Conference. The Republican Conference is well run. It's about Senator Chafee. He's too liberal. I don't think we can afford to have somebody representing us who does not represent us, who does not represent the point of view of the majority of us." That's a very valid concern. But we only lost by one vote.

You'll have to remind me to tell you about Senator [John] Heinz's mea culpa.

**RITCHIE:** Well, why don't you tell me about it. [Laughs]

**VASTINE:** Well, it may be out of place. I was just thinking about leadership elections and the two, two leadership elections that I had witnessed. They're very interesting events. They're presided over by the Conference chairman, so I had to put together the agenda and get Chafee ready for it with some minor help from Howard Greene.

But, of course, Chafee's first term was the '85-'86 term when we were in the majority; and we at the Conference worked ourselves silly to help people like Paula Hawkins, and [Mack] Mattingly, and [Jeremiah] Denton, and others who lost. [Slade] Gorton—that is the election Gorton lost, isn't it?

**RITCHIE:** Yes.

**VASTINE:** Gorton should *not* have lost. That's one we should have won. But the others were probably not winnable. Except there are those who argue that Denton would have won but for the dastardly last minute campaign mounted with AFL-CIO help against Republicans on the grounds that they were against Social Security. That was the silver bullet that brought down a few people, including, it is thought, Denton, who might have eked it out. But there were others like Paula Hawkins, who could not have been saved. Even Divine Intervention might not have been enough. She was a real goner.

Anyway, we had two years in the majority; and Senator Heinz was chairman of the Republican National Senatorial Campaign Committee. Quite a remarkable figure, Senator Heinz. I liked him very much even though he was sometimes irascible and difficult. But I liked him partly because he liked my programs, and he helped me out. He funded the Conference, especially satellite-acquisition of satellite time. Which was quite expensive.

**RITCHIE:** This is money raised by the campaign committee?

**VASTINE:** Yes, which under the Senate rules then could be made available for use by individual senators through something called COMBO.

COMBO is an acronym, and it was called Communications—hmmm! Communications and Business? I’m going to forget it. I thought it was Communications and Business Account. But the O at the end. No, it evades me. Anyway. These so-called COMBO accounts were for the use of senators in the conduct of their communications and other business. And they were controversial, very! Common Cause annually attacked them. But it was the device by which the senatorial committee funneled campaign funds through us for the use of senators. So we would use x amount of the senator’s COMBO for his satellite feed. And we would bill it to the senator, so the billing looked like we never spent any of it. We were just the intermediary for the use of the money. Anyway, we don’t have to get into the niceties of that.

But I liked Senator Heinz, and he worked hard to produce a majority in 1986, but didn’t. He had to come to the Conference right after the election, which was that year held in the Old Senate Chamber, and kind of face his colleagues. I talked to his AA before the event a couple of hours during the morning and said, “Now look, Senator Chafee would like to thank Senator Heinz for all he’s done. For all his efforts. But that’s going to require him *being* there.” [Laughs] “When is Senator Heinz going to be there? What’s he going to do?”

But I set them all up, warned them. I mean, I told them one of the first things Chafee would do would be to acknowledge Senator Heinz’s efforts, and then ask Senator Heinz to introduce the new members, Kit Bond and I can’t remember who else. We had another good member come in that year. And Heinz was late! So we had to finesse and do something else. And Chafee, I think, introduced the new members. Finally, Heinz came in and was recognized, and he said, “If this were Japan, I would have committed harikari.” It was one of the few times I’ve seen him truly kind of chagrined, you know, not his polished, very articulate, fluent self. A difficult—very, very difficult moment for him to stand in front of his colleagues and discuss a terrible defeat.

**RITCHIE:** And, yet as you say, many of those cases probably were unsalvageable. They were people, in many cases, who won on Reagan’s coat tails and didn’t have them in ’86. . .

**VASTINE:** Well, there was an argument that Reagan really didn't have coat tails. That all these people won because they won because they won. But, you know, it's hard to say. I heard Heinz stand up and dispute the coat tails theory. "These people *didn't* win just because of Reagan's coat tails. My candidates won because they were good candidates! And they will win again." That was the theme. But it didn't work, did it?

**RITCHIE:** Speaking of catching Senator Heinz off guard, I once walked down on the Senate subway platform when he was standing there by himself. As I stepped behind him, I realized he was whistling "Hail to the Chief." And when he turned around and saw me, he turned crimson. [laughs] I felt I had interrupted a private fantasy.

**VASTINE:** It's a great shame his career was interrupted. I was very stricken by it because, as I said, he knew me, and that's always nice to have a senator who will acknowledge you, and wave at you, and talk with you at a party, and give you a ride home in a cab and all that. But the main thing the man had was such an incredible vibrancy. You can disagree with his policy. He was kind of a protectionist—I didn't find that very admirable. But, the bottom line is he was a man of tremendous vigor, and fun. There was really a strong spirit there. Even though there were times he could behave like a spoiled rich kid and get very upset. My first contact with him came when I came back as Senator Chafee's leg. Director, and we had competing interests in the Finance Committee around a trade bill. Heinz wanted to do some nasty stuff to a trade bill. We were without a trade LA at that moment, and I had very strong free-trade views. I got Chafee to oppose Heinz right in the Finance Committee. And Heinz sitting a seat away from Chafee, so Heinz knew damn well I was advising Chafee on what and how I was advising him. So I kind of caught the wrath of the moment.

Heinz would get very petulant when he didn't get his way. Really petulant! Stamp his feet. Get red in the face. I mean, almost literally stamp his feet. On the Senate floor sometimes you felt that he *was* stamping his feet.

When he didn't get his amendment. He didn't get his way a lot because senators didn't like his manner. But, on the other hand, they loved Senator Chafee's manner. Senator Chafee is a very smart fellow who gets along with people by being very considerate and very nice. So, when senators can, they will give him his amendment. Be nice to John Chafee because he is so nice to them. It's quite a style he's developed, actually. Because when he was going to disagree with the leadership—even as conference chairman or even before being conference chairman—when he was going to go against the leader, he let everybody know that really clearly, and why. There were never surprises. He always signaled well in advance that he was not going to be on board, and that has to be appreciated by any leader. You've got to know where your people are, and not be surprised by a defection.

You never had the feeling that Chafee was underhanded or less than candid or less than above board.

**RITCHIE:** What was Chafee's relationship with Dole, when he was Conference chairman and Dole was the leader?

**VASTINE:** Tenuous. Difficult. Sometimes you had the feeling that Chafee and Dole were together. And sometimes you felt there was a lot of anger. Oh, yes, there were times when there was a lot of anger, not on Chafee's part, though.

Once, for example, at one of the Tuesday regular policy lunches which are chaired by the chairman of the Policy Committee, but effectively are caucuses and could just as well be chaired by the chairman of the Conference. Or, by the majority or minority leader. Very odd these leadership things. But they were always chaired by Senator [William] Armstrong in our time who, I must say, always conducted them in an exemplary fashion; very fair, excellent chairman.

So Chafee got up and made a speech. Chafee had been clearly in opposition to the leadership on a particular issue. Can't remember the issue,

but at this particular event, policy committee event, he stood up and made a party loyalty speech on another issue. And Sheila Burke, chief of staff to Senator Dole, snorted from across the table, “*Such* a good soldier!” So, when you’re in disagreement with the leader a lot, it’s hard to be. . .

The Senate is interesting, isn’t it? Senator Chafee and Senator [John] Danforth are known to be “best friends” in the Senate. I mean, that was always the word bruited about in the staff. And then Senator Chafee, one day, referred in his last leadership election, when he couldn’t get Senator Danforth’s AA to call him back on a vote-getting effort, he said, “So much,” he said, “for my *best* friend in the Senate.” With some irony. But that aside, I think Danforth and Chafee are genuinely fond of each other and could be counted to be each other’s best friend in the Senate. I don’t know that myself, personally.

Now, who’s your friend? People don’t have lots of good friends in the Senate, seldom. Because your interests compete so often. It’s hard. I was always told that Howard Baker and [Ernest] Hollings were the best of friends. Couldn’t imagine why, but, indeed, apparently, it was true. They were very good friends. [Laughs]

**RITCHIE:** Well, Senator Baker, was the ultimate institution man, wasn’t he? He almost grew up in the institution. I don’t think of him as a partisan, I think of him as collegial.

**VASTINE:** Oh, definitely! I think, yes, I would definitely say that. And I think I may have indicated earlier that he was criticized for that. Because when we took over he was less harsh on the infrastructure of the Rules Committee. Staff and others who should have been “kicked out.” You know, who were real Democrats and just going to lie in wait until they can get us. Get us and kick us out. Prevail again. And, of course, they did. [laughs]

Listen, I better go.

**RITCHIE:** Okay, can we. . .



**VASTINE:** But, it's been fun. I was telling Liz earlier that I was looking forward to having this hour and a half with you today because it's been such a stressful day, and I know that if I came over here and did this I couldn't possibly be reached by phone or even think about anything else. So, thank you for this respite.

**RITCHIE:** Good. Can we schedule another respite?

**VASTINE:** Yes. We can probably do it for Friday. Do me a favor and hang on to this [transcript] for awhile. I'm building up this big stack and I'm so busy with my job. It's so hard to get a moment.

**RITCHIE:** Well, they read very well. I think there is a nice flow to the whole story, so don't worry about it.

**End Interview #6**

## ANTENNAS ON THE ROOF

### Interview #7

October 4, 1993

**RITCHIE:** We last talked about the time when you took over as staff director of the Republican Conference.

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** But we hadn't really focused on the media aspects of all that. Could you tell me why it was that you decided to change the media focus of the Republican Conference?

**VASTINE:** Change? Yes, well, because the focus had been on print press. And, very curiously, the focus—and some amount of staff time—had been devoted to influencing foreign press. Did I tell you this?

**RITCHIE:** Just a bit.

**VASTINE:** The idea was that, if you could get the *Times* of London to run a story in support of the MX, that valued international opinion would influence American opinion. The idea was also that by liaising regularly with members—the press officers of the embassies—you could influence their opinion. And there was a lot of staff time devoted to that. There were two people on the staff who did nothing but sort of liaise with the foreign press representatives. Tell me how that helps get a United States senator elected?

So my criterion was what will be most useful to a Republican United States senator in his reelection, frankly. We got rid of the programs having to do with foreign press as that didn't seem to have any conceivable relationship to that goal. In fact they were part of the game plan—the structure—of Margot Carlisle and the Steering Committee. That was her interest: defense and strategic policy. Somehow she felt she could make gains for those interests in those ways through those uses of the Republican Conference staff. That just

didn't have any relevance to me, to my objectives—or Senator Chafee's objectives—for the Conference.

We also analyzed the impact of the work of the six writers who did the monthly columns—family issues forum, for example—and found that nobody used those columns. It just became clear that the staff needed to be reoriented, and the really promising direction seemed to me electronic communications. It came as a great—a very great—surprise to me that installing for our use satellite technology, in the Hart Building on the fourth floor, was affordable. Indeed, it was quite affordable, especially because I negotiated a clever—cleverly negotiated, I thought—a sort of installment payment plan with a satellite communications company who wanted our business. They installed equipment on the Hart Building roof with the help the Engineering Department.

You see, the electronics people in the Senate, completely apolitical, had always envisaged that the Hart Building roof would be used for satellite communications. They were all too pleased to put our microwave antenna up there. This thing is only about a foot and a half or two feet in diameter. It wasn't big by any means, you can't see it. But it was the first one there, and the Democrats didn't like that at all.

There was somebody on [Wendell] Ford's staff, John Chambers, who objected. He was then Ford's press secretary. I can't remember the form of the objection, but I knew we had a problem with him. There was this very powerful feeling in the Senate, especially entrenched in the Rules Committee, that print press was okay. The print press is all right, but electronic media were too powerful! It was going too far. A step too far to let senators' offices communicate with Senate funds and Senate facilities to the electronic media directly. A press release would be okay, in print, and mailed. But an electronic press release would not be okay. It was somehow too big, too much.

I found—I mean, I came to this with *no* background in the press at all. So this was a process of continual discovery for me. But I found that, in the Senate, there were two kinds of press secretaries. This is a rule that still

applies, I believe. There were those who were comfortable with the print media, and there were those who were comfortable with the electronic media. Senators would usually, very regrettably, fall into the first group—unless they had background in electronic media—or unless they had a press secretary who was electronic-media based or oriented. If they didn't have that bent or that staff predilection—that staff background—senators tend to be captive of the print media. Because their press secretaries and their office staffs are all too eager to make clippings of all the print press that they get from the weeklies and—in the big state—from all the papers. And this gets photocopied, and this ends up on the senator's desk. So the senator says, "Ah, I got mentioned in the *New York Times*," or the *Los Angeles Times*, or the *Des Moines Register*, whatever it may be. Somehow this *tangible* evidence that he's being heard—you know, "if it's in print it exists." But if it's on the airways, it's ephemeral and doesn't.

So there is this powerful, self-reinforcing bias toward print media. Well, obviously, any number of polls show that Americans get their most direct and vivid impressions of politicians from television, and secondarily from radio. The radio talk shows can be tremendously potent. Well, I've gone far afield, but I was constantly in my time here in the Conference fighting that fight. Trying to get print-oriented press secretaries, and senators oriented toward print media, like Senator Packwood was, to understand the value and the power of video. And then to use our services. And then at the same time to try to convince the Rules Committee folks that it was really okay.

I think finally the Ethics Committee had to make a judgment. The Ethics Committee was asked by [Charles] Grassley whether it was all right to use electronic broadcast services of the Republican Conference during the moratorium periods for elections when senators were prohibited from using the electronic services of the Recording Studio! And the Ethics Committee found that it was all right. So we stayed in business up until senators' elections where the Recording Studio—the official Senate Recording Studio—had to get out of the business. It was on some interpretation, which of course I agreed with. I can't believe they did it. I've forgotten the niceties of that. But, anyway, we—I'm rambling, I realize—but we were able to stay in business.

**RITCHIE:** What type of services did you actually offer to senators?

**VASTINE:** Well, we started out with *a* camera crew and we would go and tape senators in a hearing or at a speech—mainly at a hearing or a stand-up press conference, and take that tape and crudely edit it. At first we didn't have our own editing facility. Crudely edit it. First we took it to a remote site which was down here at 400 North Capitol Street, to the Bonneville Company, and they ran a video uplink service out of 400 North Capitol Street where they also had a television studio.

We would take it down there and edit it and then feed it. “Feeding” is the word for feeding it to satellite, or send it to satellite. Then the press secretary would call up the local television stations and say, “At precisely 3:45 on satellite ABC, transponder BDF you can get Senator Garn.” That's a bad example because the Utah senators never used it. “Senator Packwood talking about tax release” or something.

Then we graduated from that to where we had our own television studio, and three camera crews, our own daily satellite feed which we fed directly from the Hart Building, and then, finally, a two-way satellite capability whereby we could have live, interactive video, that is a two-way video. You have the senator here in the studio who could be interviewed by somebody in Oregon. The senator could see the interviewer, and the interviewer could see the senator. So, it's live two-way. And then, finally, we added on also fiber optic link to the so-called swamp, which is the remote site in the trees right opposite the Senate parking lot, opposite the Senate stairs, on the plaza. So we were able to do, we are able, were able, to do press, live video interactions from there so that we could bring a senator to that remote site and have him hooked up with his TV stations and have them ask questions on the air. For him to answer, with him live, with the Capitol as a backdrop.

Then we also built a radio station, a little radio facility. [First we specialized in “actualities,” or short sound bites, or quotes by senators on newsworthy topics. These were then relayed by phones manned by teams of

interns, to call radio station.] Then we concentrated on bringing senators in to do talk show kind of interactions with their local radio stations. We brought them in to do press conferences with groups of reporters. Reporters would then be able to take clips out of those five- or ten-minute interview sessions and use them throughout the weekend. We preferred doing them on Friday. Senator Chafee was a regular Friday-morning user of that service.

We also got senators to call in newsworthy comment. They could call in on our hot line from anywhere in the world and leave a message. Senator [Arlen] Specter, when he was campaigning for senator, in, I guess, 1987, used to call in from Pennsylvania from his car phone and record an actuality which we would then turn around and phone out via phone to the radio stations in the part of Pennsylvania that he was traveling in. So he could have an event at noon, realized that people cared about, you know, food safety or something and call in a food safety actuality. And then hear it on the radio as he drove down the highway to his next meeting.

That's the kind of thing. In addition, we had the first desktop publishing capability in the Senate, which we got because Senator Heinz, particularly, was interested in being much more creative in his print communications with his constituents. The Senate Service Department then only offered a few fonts, and he wanted lots and lots of fonts, and lots of format innovations. He was a marketing executive. He was very familiar with this kind of thing, and he had on his staff an extremely able guy named Pat [Kenny], and this guy understood computers beautifully, and he understood direct mail *perfectly*. He developed the most sophisticated, direct-mail system in the United States Senate for Senator Heinz. It first of all depended on getting very good lists of Pennsylvanians. He did that by taking the names of people who wrote in on specific issues, like nurses, great list of nurses, great list of doctors, etc., and he would develop relationships with these. Out would go a mailing from Senator Heinz to these nurses saying, "I'm so concerned about nursing issues. Tell me what you think." They would write back. He would write back to them. So there was this kind of dialogue going on all the time that Heinz had developed. And they had actually done polling—well, anyway, they felt they had done

sufficient polling to know that, in areas where they had concentrated direct mail, they had a much better name recognition. It was quite a sophisticated operation.

So I glombed onto that and developed a number of seminars on direct mail, direct-mail techniques for Republican Senate offices. I even tried to hire Pat to come as a consultant to us and advise senators. In fact, he ended up going to work for the Senatorial Committee. He did that for the Senatorial Committee.

But, anyway, back to the graphics department. We ended up with a graphics department of three professionals, very skilled. One of them was hired by the *National Journal* to be in charge of graphics design. Two other people I hired are still there, and they just do all manner of work. We bought them the best machines. What this meant was that these services permitted Republicans to leap-frog the whole Service Department bureaucracy that took ten days or so, and go directly to printing. So you just leap over all the composition people in the Service Department, who were dull and slow, and just send camera-ready copy directly from our office to be printed down there, and mailed. Our people became very sophisticated as well in all the rules governing mailings and direct mail and, you know, limitations thereon. All the fine points having to do with the Rules Committee oversight of senators' mailing—paper allotments and all that kind of thing.

We became sort of consultants in the process as well as actually doing the graphics and the design and the logos and the letterheads and all the sorts of things. I mean, just imagine senators' communications needs and all the ways we could help, including drawing illustrations. Cartoons that would illustrate the newsletters, and charts—charts for days. Charts on the Senate floor. We started the chart mania because we had the equipment. We had charts that were the right size for cameras. On the Senate floor as well as great big ones. Anyway, that's a long answer.

**RITCHIE:** How receptive were papers and stations to the type of stuff you were putting out?

**VASTINE:** Well, it was obviously worth doing because senators continued to do it. The more receptive stations for our television work tended not to be the major market stations—the great, big stations—too proud to take a feed that was politically paid for. By the way, before each one of our feeds we would label—our afternoon feed, I think, at 4:15 for half an hour. And then we would buy more time as we needed it. But we always put a little disclaimer saying: “This is the Senate Republican Conference daily newsfeed paid for with something or other.” There was an FCC ruling which we adhered to. So stations knew that they weren’t paying for any of the satellite time or any of this stuff. And some of them resented that. I mean, the bigger ones that could afford their own satellite services more easily than the small stations disdained use, for awhile. But we found, for example—always brings to mind Senator [John] Danforth’s people in Missouri, developed because their very skilled press secretaries developed a relationship with the St. Louis stations. So Steve Hilton, Danforth’s press secretary, would call up and say, “Hey, do you want to talk to Senator Danforth this morning? We can arrange that.”

In other words, to be able to get to the state’s very popular and very effective senator through the Republican Conference became more acceptable as time went on, and sometimes it became the only way to get to him. Or a very easy way to get to them. We would go to senators’ offices and hook them up. We had a phone hook-up system so that we would have the reporter speaking on the speaker phone to the senator in his office on our camera. Then we would send back via satellite the tape of the interview with the senator voiced and miked so that all of his sound was very good quality, and the reporter could hear his or her questions. And then dub over their questions on the other end if they decided to use that footage. Very effective stuff!

**RITCHIE:** Was it the same pattern with the print media in the sense that smaller papers might be more likely to take what goes on, then say, the large urban dailies? Or did it make no difference who tapped into that?



**VASTINE:** I can't answer that because we scrapped all the paper work. There was no point. I think, I've seen, for example, in the lower Delaware newspapers which are biweekly. One is weekly. They made a lot of use of Senator [William] Roth's columns. So I can imagine weeklies that are starved for copy that are really basic advertising vehicles, would take a lot of this canned print stuff.

But we got out of the business because it was too hard to write. I mean, the great and abiding fallacy of this process that was set up by my predecessors is that it's very, very hard to convince a senator's personal staff that they ought to accept copy written for their senator expressing *his* views on *their* subjects by some "foreign" staff in the Republican Conference. They just viewed us as interlopers. I remember being on Senator Chafee's staff, and our press secretary saying, "Hey, won't you please let Senator Chafee sign this editorial that was written by some guy in the Republican Conference?" I said, "What are you talking about? Who are they? What do they do? Why should I care? This isn't going to Rhode Island, it's going to Arizona! Why to I care about Arizona? Tell me why we should do this?" It didn't work. It wasn't good. It wasn't a good concept.

**RITCHIE:** Well, that raises the question: How receptive were the senators and their staff to news service?

**VASTINE:** It took a lot of convincing. Took a lot of convincing. But every Tuesday I had Senator Chafee loaded with an announcement to make to his colleagues at the Republican Policy lunch. And he would get up and dutifully read out the message about the newest offering, you know. Come on, you guys. I remember once he said, "I kind of feel as though I'm dropping pearls." [imitates] He didn't say before whom. But you know that wonderful Yankee accent..."pewrrrl." I can't quite get it. "Dropping pearls." Everybody laughed.

Senator Chafee, one of his most endearing qualities is his humor. His colleagues love his sense of humor, and they get a kick out of his Yankee drawl or twang.

**RITCHIE:** But were there some senators who were much more receptive than others?

**VASTINE:** Oh, yes. For example, Senator [Don] Nickles, Senator [Dan] Quayle were among our first avid users. The younger ones had more electronic awareness. They came very quickly. Danforth was a good, early user because his press secretaries were so—it was partly determined by press secretaries. If Senator Wilson, Otto Bos was his press secretary. He was a very early convert and a very dedicated user, and to this day is grateful. When I see him, he remembers very clearly that we helped him out a lot.

So I think mainly the determinant was the sophistication of the press secretary.

**RITCHIE:** Were there some who just never used the service?

**VASTINE:** Yes, there were some who were very difficult to convince. And some who just didn't need us. The two Utah senators, for example. All their stations were in Salt Lake City, and they had excellent relationships with them. They frankly just did not need us. They used us occasionally if, for example, they had three or four television stations, the three affiliates and another television station in Salt Lake and one was ignoring them, they would get the other two to use material that we produced in order to kind of create some jealousy on the part of the other. That was just that little bit of game playing going on. But for the most part the Utah senators didn't need us. But they liked us! And we got along fine with them, and we provided them very valuable print services. Especially Senator Hatch, we had a very good relationship with his staff, and with him. Very nice man.

So in the process I got to know *all* Republicans. All the Republican senators. I made it my practice to sort of be around the studio when they came in, or would even go out to shoots just to stand around and just to demonstrate Senator Chafee was really there, and he knew all about it. It was literally a process of letting—part of my job was to let people know that they should be thankful to Senator Chafee for his initiative in providing these services. And Senator Chafee was very proud of it, and very possessive. Very aware of what we'd done.

At first he didn't believe. I remember Senator Nickles, quite gratuitously came to him after my third or second week in my job and said something I'd been doing was great! And Chafee said, "What was so great about that? What did you do for him that was great?" And I explained. He said, "Well, why couldn't *he* have done that from his office?" And I said, "He didn't do it from his office. *We* did it for him, and he's grateful to us." He said, "Oh." And from that day on he began to accept that what we were doing was really different and unique and his colleagues really appreciated it. But soon it was very clear that we were way out in front, and then we began to get articles about how far advanced we were.

Hedrick Smith came and interviewed me, I guess I told you, for the *Power Game*. And other people began to give us attention. So by the end of the second year it was very clear that we were well regarded and well noted, a noted change and a noted contribution. Of course, the senators for whom we worked hardest were defeated. Senator [Paula] Hawkins, for example [and Jim Abdnor].

**RITCHIE:** Now, did you do something extra for Hawkins? You said you worked hardest for her.

**VASTINE:** Well, she had a very aggressive press staff, and we just did a lot of work. We videoed a lot of events, and press staff put all this stuff on the bird, on the satellite, for television stations. There was just a lot of, just a lot of activity because the press staff realized she needed all of the help she could get!

We were there to be used, and they wanted to do everything they could to make her win, help her win.

**RITCHIE:** Did you have to in a sense run training for these people? Tell them how to use the services that you had?

**VASTINE:** Oh, yes, absolutely. Because a lot of the press secretaries didn't know how. They didn't know, they didn't have the faintest idea. It was very strange stuff to them.

The senators had to be brought along. But, you know, they could be brought along by their staff. Sometimes if I ran into interference from the press secretary, I would go directly to the AA. In the case of Senator Specter I felt that the press secretary just wasn't on the ball, and I needed to go to the AA, whom I liked. Paul Michel, who is now a Federal Appeals Court judge, and run through all the panoply of services that we could offer and get them to use it more frequently. My goal was, actually, to lock up the votes, senator by senator. I wanted to make sure that even senators who were ideologically uncomfortable with Senator Chafee knew full well—and used—what we provided and used it. So I would go after them to get that done.

**RITCHIE:** Did setting this up involve working with the press galleries as well? Did you have any contact with the Radio-TV gallery?

**VASTINE:** No. We tried to stay as far away from them as we could. Because we were competitors. We encountered some measure of hostility from the established radio-tv people because we were invading their market in a sense. One way of advertising our work—our facility—was to say: “This is a way you can leapfrog the Washington media and deal direct with the newsrooms and television stations at home, and radio stations at home, with free feeds.” So nobody paid. And the stringers in Washington just didn't like that at all because that meant they were getting as these sort of video news releases—or VNR's, as they're called—or public relations feeds became popular. It meant, in general, it meant less business for stringers. You know what stringers are?

**RITCHIE:** Umhmm. [Freelance journalists, paid by the story, who report for a variety of newspapers and networks.]

**VASTINE:** They didn't like it at all. There was some undercurrent of opposition. But it never really jelled politically. We never got that back from the Rules Committee per se.

**RITCHIE:** It seems like you were leapfrogging a lot of traditional institutions: the Service Department, the Recording Studio, the Radio & TV Gallery.

**VASTINE:** We ran *circles* around the Recording Studio. Senators preferred to come to our facility. Do you know why? Because I drilled into them that we were senator-responsive. When a senator walked in, it was "Yes, senator!" And whatever he wanted. And the Recording Studio, those old farts down there would laugh if a senator made a mistake! This was not a good operation. They regularly made press secretaries angry by not being available. By being slow to respond. By being difficult while you were there. By being bureaucratic!

I had a wholly different approach. I'd say, we are at the service of Republican senators. We will stay all night. Nine or ten at night. We did! We stayed until the Senate went home. We were always available and had hot lines and beepers and ways for people to reach us at odd hours. So we advertised responsiveness, and congeniality.

**RITCHIE:** Even though the Republicans at that stage were in the majority, they had traditionally been in the minority for a generation before that. Do you think it was perhaps their minority status that made them more receptive to doing something entirely different? That is, the Democrats are more likely to use the services like the traditional services rather than. They weren't the innovators in this field. The Republicans were the innovators. Is there some logic to that?

**VASTINE:** Well, a shred of logic would be that we in the early eighties had the edge in fund-raising, and a lot of people thought we had the edge in campaign strategy, campaign tactics. We beat the Democrats blind on direct-mail fund-raising, that sort of thing. Why shouldn't we? It was kind of a natural part of that that we would be innovators and leaders in communications technology, the use of incumbencies. An incumbents use of media for communications purposes.

But that's about it. I mean, the link wasn't—it wasn't some notion that we were newly in the majority and, therefore, could—after all, Senator [James] McClure was elected when we were in the majority, in '80. And he could have brought the same. Margot and he could have brought the same innovative quality that Senator Chafee and I brought, but didn't.

**RITCHIE:** Your first two years were while the Republicans were in the majority.

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** Then in '86 the Republicans lost the majority. Did that have any impact on. . .

**VASTINE:** The first thing that happened was on January 10th in the afternoon after the Inauguration—was it the Inauguration?

**RITCHIE:** No.

**VASTINE:** After the Senate was installed?

**RITCHIE:** Yes, the new Senate.

**VASTINE:** Rick Brandon, my friend in the electronics division, called and said, "Bob, this is the letter, I'm afraid I'm calling to bring you the news you

probably expected. That is, I have a letter here from Senator Ford telling me to dismantle your antenna immediately.”

**RITCHIE:** So what did you do?

**VASTINE:** Well! That began a frantic press and senatorial counteroffensive. I reached Senator Danforth somewhere in his car. Senator Chafee was in a plane. I got Senator [Rudy] Boschwitz involved. I got Senator Quayle involved. It was a very difficult time because they weren't a lot of senators around. It was late in the afternoon. I used Senator [Mitch] McConnell's of Kentucky's AA, who was valuable in advising me on the press. So I called a reporter named Brown who worked for the Louisville *Courier Journal*, who had previously written a story about us, about the Republican Conference at one point, a sympathetic story. I told him what was going on, so he wrote a nasty story about how Senator Ford was trying to turn back the clock.

But the best thing I did was get the secretary of the Senate involved—the new secretary of the Senate, Joe Stewart. And Senator Byrd. Because I knew that the Democrats wanted to do what we were doing. There was a woman, I can't think of her name, who was my counterpart for the Democrats. She wanted to do exactly what I was doing, but she couldn't get support from her caucus, from her leaders. But she realized that when they got in the majority they were going to have to. And so it was Joe, and Byrd, and this woman who convinced Wendell Ford that this was not in the interest of the Democrats, because this was the wave the future. You had to do this kind of thing, and Democrats wanted to do it, too! So, please, Wendell, lay off the Republicans. Apparently, Chafee and Wendell had a conversation. Chafee called in from Rhode Island, in what I understand was an extremely heated conversation. Chafee's secretary told me that she could hear it all through the walls.

I guess Wendell realized that he was going to bite off a little more than he wanted to chew. And he was put up to it by John Chambers, of course, no question about that! John Chambers was a print reporter and had been,

without realizing the world had changed. So had Democrats, and Democratic senators would like to use electronic media, too, to communicate. It was a combination of factors.

Finally, they had a Rules Committee hearing in which Senator Chafee was requested to testify. Chafee lined it up in advance with [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan. I think he called up Moynihan and Pell to ask for a little help. And maybe somebody else on the Democratic side. And, of course, he had Warner, his good buddy John Warner, and [Mark] Hatfield and others on the Republican side. [Ted] Stevens' Alaska ties depended heavily on what we did. We did a lot of work for him! So we had it wired in the Rules Committee.

I remember we took Senator Chafee up on the roof and took a picture of him in front of the antenna and passed it to senators at the hearings. And we did that advisedly. That could have backfired. But I wanted them to see that there was a senator identified with this. This wasn't just a piece of electronic equipment up there. It was a United States senator who "owned" this thing, I mean psychologically he was invested in keeping that thing there. And he represented a lot of others. And he was a member of the leadership of his party. We thought long and hard about taking that picture, but I finally decided it was the right thing to do. It was a funny picture. Senator Chafee handed it to one of the other members, to one of the committee members in the Rules Committee, and I remember each one of them passing it around. And each one of them sort of smiling about it. "There's Chafee in front of his antenna."

Then the committee ordered a study. Meanwhile we could keep operating. So Rick Brandon did a study, and they decided because there was this one antenna up there, everybody would want one. That was one of the reasons for taking it down. Permit one antenna, then there were be hundreds, and that would be impossible. That would be an eyesore. Can't have any eyesores, even though you couldn't see them. It's too far back into the center of the building, away from the street.



So they did a study, and they said there was room for forty antennas, thank you. So applications would be accepted. And, indeed they found out—and they called for comment—that a lot of news organizations had an interest. So it was clear they weren't going to turn this faucet off very easily. Finally, we did win in a sense that we stayed, and it was never challenged again. Then the Democrats followed suit.

One day, I remember, when we were still on the majority and we had gained some notoriety, Joe Stewart, who was then Washington representative for Sonat but very close to George Mitchell, asked me if I wouldn't, please, come have lunch with George Mitchell, just very casual lunch. Tell him what was going on. Tell him what I was doing. He'd be very interested in knowing. I got very antsy about this luncheon. I finally went to Senator Chafee, and said, "Senator, I have this invitation to go to lunch with George Mitchell."

He said, "You *do*." [imitates]

And I said, "Yes. And I don't think I should go."

And he said, "I don't think you should either." He said, "You tell 'em, I said, 'Does Macy's tell Gimbles?' You tell 'em I said that. I want 'em to know that I said that." [chuckles]

So I did not go to lunch with George Mitchell. You were saying, one thing that happened being in the minority was that, first, they tried to dismantle us. The next thing after that was to emulate. I just checked the other day to find out. They never went as far as we did. They found a small room in the Capitol, very small room where they have one camera. They do have a satellite uplink. They do have a swamp fibre optic feed, like I've just described—only 10,000 words ago! But they don't have radio services. They don't have graphic services. They don't *begin* to have the sophistication of service we have. And since I've gone, the Republican Conference has elaborated, the studio's been expanded, and they've developed some very nice looking radio studios, very professional. And the staff is good.

One of the things that we developed were cable TV shows. We worked with the head of a state's cable system association. All these states have associations of cable owners. So we'd call, for example, and say, "Hey, let's have a show with Senator Specter. And all your cable stations throughout the state can take the show. It's got to be on prime time; and it's got to be a call-in show."

We have this 800 number, and we develop this—it's one of the most technically complicated things you can possibly do. And at first we did it, and we just barely made it successful. And then we were dragging along, and I said, "Look if we're going to do this, we're going to do it perfectly. So I brought in a television station manager from Florida as our consultant. One of the most wonderful teachers you would ever meet, terrifically competent professional guy. I just made it very clear we were not going to be amateurs. We were going to do this completely professional and make senators feel absolutely rock solid when they walked into our studios they weren't going to lose the sound. It was going to be perfect, technically perfect. It took about a year of kind of working hard with the staff, insisting on *excellence*.

But by the end of that we had about fourteen senators who regularly—once a month—used our facility to do what we called cable-call-in shows. And as time went on, elaborated the format and did cut-ins and charts and graphs and all kinds of fancy stuff. It worked very well, in the end, after a lot of work.

I'm very pleased with that because it was innovative and technically difficult, and it required me to manage the place so that I got in the end what I wanted. And it was hard. It was hard to get it done.

**RITCHIE:** I can appreciate that. The only time I've ever been on a call-in show, the host got so excited when the first person called in he cut me off the telephone line. When he finally got me back on, he cut the caller off! [Laughs]

**VASTINE:** [whistles]. Oh, boy! [laughs] Some show.

**RITCHIE:** In a sense, you were really teaching yourself how the media worked.

**VASTINE:** Oh, yes.

**RITCHIE:** You had to plunge into a whole, new area of technology.

**VASTINE:** Well, as I was fond of telling people, I didn't need to know how the stuff worked, I only needed to know what it did. It didn't interest me at all for a second how a machine worked. It was really just that machine lets you talk to a satellite, and thus to millions of constituents. That's all I cared about, all I needed to know. Somebody else could figure out how it worked and make it work. That made it easier, my understanding that my role was to direct outcomes, not worry about means.

It was quite a coup for our party, really, to get that antenna up on the roof.

**End of Interview #7**

## SENATORS AND THE MEDIA

### Interview #8

October 8, 1993

**VASTINE:** My picture is in the *National Journal* today. All I've seen is a fax of it, and it makes me look—I photograph terribly. I mean, really terribly, so the background is. . .

**RITCHIE:** The Caulder statue [in the Hart atrium]. They stood you away from it.

**VASTINE:** Yes, underneath the trees. I don't know why he put me under the trees. The light isn't as good.

**RITCHIE:** You're much better right up against it. I'll show you the photograph that John Hamilton took, before you leave.

**VASTINE:** All right. If it's a really good one, can I buy some proofs from you, do you think?

**RITCHIE:** Oh, you don't have to buy them. [Laughs] We can make them available.

**VASTINE:** That would be nice. Anyway, where were we?

**RITCHIE:** We were talking about the Republican Conference. But there was one word that I was wondering if you would define for me. I think I know what it is, but I'm not sure it's going to be clear. You referred to actualities.

**VASTINE:** Yes, actualities.

**RITCHIE:** What exactly is an actuality?

**VASTINE:** An actuality derives from *realites* in French. It's a statement of the moment. It's a comment, a thirty-second or sixty-second sound bite that relates to an actual event, so an actuality. It's an odd word. It doesn't convey precisely what it is, its meaning.

**RITCHIE:** It's sort of a verbal press release, or how is it used?

**VASTINE:** A lot shorter, yes. It's a blip. "I met with the president today, he told me he would fund the Hatch-Hatchee dam renewal program which, as you know, I've been working on that project for twenty-five years now and all residents of Hatch-Hatchee or whatever it is now ought to be really glad that I did this for them." "Thank you, senator." I mean, that's it. That's an actuality. It's a comment on something happening now.

"Today in the Senate we passed H.R. blah-de-blah, and it's going to mean employment for all the people of Illinois. And I did it. It was my vote. It was my idea." That's exactly what an actuality is.

**RITCHIE:** On the assumption that only a sound bite is going to get on the media anyhow, you don't need much more than a few sentences?

**VASTINE:** You have only thirty seconds to catch people's attention. And that's the idea. You've got to have your idea and your crisp way of capturing it orally, right in the front. A zinger has to be immediate for television or for radio to be interested.

There's lot of ways of doing it. An actuality is, as I said, a quick, short, punchy—ideally punchy—quotable, newsworthy, interesting statement by somebody relevant to an issue. But then there are all kinds of ways of interacting with, let's say, radio stations. You could have an interview for five or ten minutes with a reporter on a radio station. He would get to ask you all of his questions he thinks are hot, and then he edits out that little clip that—the sound bite of the clip—he feels is going to get the most attention. In the midst of a great, long paragraph—windy paragraph—a senator could say eight, great

words; and those words could get clipped and isolated for the news. And that, in a sense is an actuality.

**RITCHIE:** It must be frustrating to some of the members, however, to devote a lot of attention to something and only get so many seconds of a speech or something broadcast.

**VASTINE:** Well, it's even *more* frustrating to someone in the press who can't get a senator to say concisely what the hell the senator means. Why do people care? You've got to really think about that. And senators get so lost in their own self-importance and in their jargon and in their phrases and in their clauses. Unless they've had media training, it's very, very hard for them to forget the BS and get to the point. Really hard! Because this place is so awash in BS. Phrases and forms of address.

**RITCHIE:** Did you provide any training for any of the senators?

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** Coach them in any way?

**VASTINE:** Yes. Umhmmm.

**RITCHIE:** How? [Laughs]

**VASTINE:** Well, we had actual media training for them. We had Roger Ailes come on the week when Senate went on the air. Went on C-SPAN-2. We had Roger Ailes come down from New York and give a seminar to a dozen senators. It was available to everybody, but a dozen came, to hear what he had to say about television in the chamber and the basics of how to *be* on television, in a sense, where to look. Never look at the camera in the Senate. Never, ever address the camera. [Laughs] Questions like that.

But when we would put a senator on a cable show we would have to instruct him about where to look, how to be, often. Some senators were terrible at it. Some senators asked for media training, so we would make available the studio and actually find someone whom we thought would be good to come in and talk to them about television.

We gave seminars for press secretaries on how to groom their senators, you know, what kind of tie, what kind of suit. That stuff.

**RITCHIE:** I remember the first week the Senate went on television. Everybody wore a blue shirt and a red tie.

**VASTINE:** This is what we told them not to do, because red vibrates. Red is not a good color for television. A bright red tie, you watch. Remember Nancy Reagan's bright, red dresses? Well, actually, they vibrated on the screen. Television has a hard time with red.

**RITCHIE:** Well, for the President's last message on health care, almost every woman in the Senate wore a red dress. [Laughs] I guess somebody's been telling them they'd stand out in a crowd.

**VASTINE:** That's the idea. Well, it's their idea that they stand out in the crowd.

**RITCHIE:** Who among the senators do you feel learned the most?

**VASTINE:** Are you serious?

**RITCHIE:** Yes. What kind of evaluation would you have of the members you worked with in that period?

**VASTINE:** [long pause] Some are naturals, and some are just *very* difficult. They have to work at it. One senator is obsessed with his eyes, with the bags under his eyes. Instead of having them surgically reduced, which is

what you have to do when you get to his age and have bags. They can be taken away very simply, with a simple procedure that costs about a thousand dollars. But he refuses that, so he gets himself all made up, and then he looks like a corpse. So, this is a guy that struggles with it.

Then there's Senator [John] Warner who knows he's good looking and debonair, and all he does is come in and spits in his palms, fully spits in the palms of his hands and slicks his hair. Then there's Senator Packwood who knows that he's a hard sell on TV and has, with the help of consultants—long ago—figured out what his best pose is and always takes that pose. I think I told you that. Then there are others, like Dole, who don't care; and they just come and do it. Somebody comes along and takes the shine off their forehead. It's hard for me to be much more specific.

I mean, Senator Specter is very aware of his appearance and used to bring his wife to the studio occasionally to comment or observe proceedings in order, maybe, to help him out. But, with all of them, it's a very personal thing, how they are on TV. Especially for a politician, how you're coming across on the tube is critical.

**RITCHIE:** I remember talking to one of Senator Howard Baker's staff members who was talking about a briefing for the new senators after the 1982 elections. After Senator Baker finished, he said, "The press is outside, now; and they'll want to talk to each one of you." And he said, the whole group of them got up and rushed to the only mirror in the room to comb their hair, with the exception of Chic Hecht who stood back and said, "Do we *have* to talk to the press?"

**VASTINE:** [Laughs] Well, that's a little bit overstated, I think. I mean, that's kind of a good line; but I think most of them are aware. Some run for the other door because they don't want to talk to the press. And some run for the door where the press are, and they sort of jostle each other to get on the camera. And watching senators do that is kind of laughable because they know, depending on the issue, if they want to be on camera, they've got to be visible to



the camera, and some of them will *kill* to get their face—jostle and elbow to get their face over the, behind the shoulder of [Al] Simpson or Dole or something like that so they can be seen within the range of the camera. It's rather of amusing, actually. Especially when they leave the White House and there are a few of them commenting for the press after having seen the president.

Senator Chafee has a very hard time pushing himself forward. He's a traditional sort of senator. When I worked on his personal staff, his press secretary was quite frustrated with him because he wouldn't be the first to rush off the floor and dash up to the gallery to comment to the press. He wanted to be pushed so that he would have a reason to do it.

**RITCHIE:** You mentioned last week about Dan Quayle being one of the first senators to use the facility.

**VASTINE:** Yes. He was very, very good. He was a natural for the media. Then he became vice president, and something went dead inside of him. Something froze. I don't understand what it was. The man never figured it out. When he came back to work in our studio after his election, he was a totally different person. We made available, as a courtesy, I made a point of making our studio available to him because he was an officer of the Senate. Why not let Senate facilities be used by the vice president, who is the president of the Senate? So he came to our studio rather often. And the reason that he did was because he felt comfortable there. He knew that we would take good care of him. That we would respect him. That he would have a technically competent crew that wouldn't be critical of him if he slipped, and he slipped a lot.

He would read these precanned little statements for, oh the Winebergs in Iowa City: [stiff and haltingly] "Sam and Rachel, I want you to know how *important* you are to the Republican Party." Before, he would have said: [speeds up cadence] "Sam and Rachel, I want you to know how important you are to the Republican Party." I don't know what happened to Quayle. I don't think anybody's figured out why this extremely promising senator could not make the transition to vice president.

Because I remember Senator Chafee having a lot of respect for him. He was considered a comer. He was a little bit scary. Some of the older senators wanted to make room for him because they could see a lot of energy there and a lot of, not necessarily intellectual fire power, but a lot of get-up-and-go, and a great ability to be an advocate. He'd get on the floor, and when he got cranking, he could be quite a stirring spokesperson for his point of view. He backed Senator Warner and Senator [Sam] Nunn off when Warner was ranking on the Armed Services Committee in the end of the last of the Reagan administration. There was a vote on an Armed Services authorization bill that was very controversial. Warner and everybody wanted to go one way, and Quayle wanted to go another. And Quayle won it! He got the president on his side and this was considered a big victory for him. And he had his Manpower Training Act in 1982 that a lot of Republicans, including Senator Chafee, *ran* on in a year with high unemployment. We talked about this great manpower, whatever it was. It was Dan Quayle's work. In fact I just saw now in Union Station his staff member who did it for him, whose name I can't recall. Couldn't recall it then, either, I regret to tell you.

So Quayle was by no means a yo-yo, and his colleagues did not think of him that way. But I do remember walking down Royal Street in New Orleans on the day of his having been selected vice president and bumping into Senator Warner and his AA. And the AA, Susan Magill, said, "Bob! You'll never going to *guess!* Have you heard?" I said, "What?" She said, "It's Quayle! It's Quayle!" I said, "Oh. No!" And out of the antique shop came Warner with the antique dealer following behind him saying, "Yes, the radio just said Quayle, senator. It's Quayle." And Warner said, "Oh, my God." [groans]

I went to the convention hall that night and went to the Dole sky suite and asked Dole what he thought about Quayle. He said, "I can't imagine what he brings to the ticket." And then he said, "Gee," he said, "I really feel sorry for Dick Lugar."

Senator McConnell was a very, very apt—adept—user of our services. We worked for really about twenty-five to thirty senators who became avid users.

**RITCHIE:** A number of the people you mentioned were. . .

**VASTINE:** Senator Stafford was too. I forged quite a good relationship with his press secretary. Very talented man named Tom Calcani. We did a lot of work for Stafford. Not so much for [Lowell] Weicker. He didn't care. He didn't want to do that kind of thing. Not very much for [Mark] Hatfield. Occasionally, but no much. I'm sorry I interrupted.

**RITCHIE:** I was just thinking the numbers of the names you are mentioned were also chairs of the Senatorial Campaign Committee.

**VASTINE:** Umhmmm.

**RITCHIE:** Did the campaign committee work regularly with your operation then?

**VASTINE:** Oh, very closely, as I tried to indicate last time. Hand and glove. We worked also very closely with Heinz. Heinz was a *very* big user. His press secretaries were very good, and he used us intensively. He was excellent on television. He always looked great.

**RITCHIE:** I was wondering, not so much for themselves. . .

**VASTINE:** Oh, I see. . .

**RITCHIE:** but in trying to round up support for the people who were up, who were vulnerable, and who were their charges for that election.

**VASTINE:** Well, they relied on me to work as closely as we could with senators' staffs who were up. Senator Chafee made especially strong efforts with them. It was his idea, actually, that we would get some of the weak reeds, the problem senators, and do media plans for them. So my staff and I would analyze a media market—we did this for Dan Coats. We took the state of Indiana, isolated, figured out where the television stations were viz a viz the

radio stations, which media markets served which elements of the population, where the Republicans were, where the Democrats were. And then made recommendations about which media markets he should target.

Chafee would call the senator up, make an appointment, and we would meet in the studio with the senator and the press secretary. So there I would be putting forth my judgment about television and radio media to the senator with the press secretary listening. This was an extremely awkward and very uncomfortable position for us to be in because my knowledge of Senate staffs is that they'll get you. [Chuckles] If you try to do an end run around a senator's personal staff, in the end they'll win. Because they're his staff. He trusts them. He hired them. So that was a very uncomfortable position for me to be in. I understand why Senator Chafee wanted to do it, and I tried to do it in such a way that made it as comfortable as possible for the press secretary of the senator. But it was always difficult.

**RITCHIE:** Did you find some of those press secretaries really digging their heels in, and resisting?

**VASTINE:** Yes. Definitely. As I indicated earlier, some of them just didn't like television, and didn't feel comfortable with broadcast media. They much preferred print, and they resisted our suggestions. I remember going to sit down with Senator Boschwitz at the request of his AA and laying out all of the services the Conference and making suggestions for Boschwitz's press activity, that his then-press secretary wasn't doing for him, wasn't organizing for him.

Same thing with Senator Specter. Senator Specter finally called me in because Senator Chafee kept saying, [imitates] "Now, Arlen. Ahrrlin. You've got to be doing more." And "You can do this and you can do that," and then Arlen would go back to his press secretary and the press secretary would say, "No, senator, we can't do that." And Senator Chafee would say, "Oh, yes, we can do that."

Finally, Specter called me up and said, “Will you come up here and please talk to me.” He brought in his press secretary, and we had it out in front of him. The next day the senator came to the studio, and we started working for him and never stopped. At the end of his election—after he was reelected—must have been—wouldn’t that have been. . .

**RITCHIE:** Eighty-six.

**VASTINE:** Eighty-six. I got a note from his campaign manager saying that our work in his behalf had been critical to the success. So, whether that is true or not or just AA bullshit, I don’t know. But, you know, that’s just an example of the sales effort.

He and I had a big fight. He tried to take some of “my” studio. And, finally, I said, “Senator, none of us can understand why you want to take our space away. He said, “I’ll tell you why. Because I’m a senator, and you’re not.” I said, “Senator, every one of us worked our knuckles to the bone to help you get reelected.”

**RITCHIE:** One other person in the equation who we have mentioned from time to time, but I wondered if you would talk a little bit more about, is Howard Greene. And his role in the Republican Party viz a viz Chafee, and Dole, and the other Republican senators.

**VASTINE:** I’m going to get myself in trouble. Well, Howard, plainly is the servant of the minority, and he’s the servant of his members. He’s very efficient, and they rely on him to do their bidding, to put a hold on something when they ask, to save time for them, or to get them a piece of time in morning business, or whatever it is. He plays it very close to the vest and betrays no confidences and is ultimately loyal, I mean, finally, completely, totally to the leader, and the leader alone. Not to the leadership. Though he is, in fact, confirmed by the caucus. There is traditionally a vote at each organizing meeting of the caucus that says confirms Howard Greene or whoever as the secretary for the—what it’s called, the secretary of the minority?

**RITCHIE:** Yes.

**VASTINE:** I sometimes get it confused with the conference secretary. There's another secretary of the minority. Forget it. Scratch all that.

Anyway, confirmed to his post. But, he's just a no-nonsense sort of gruff, in a way unsophisticated person who is under a tremendous amount of pressure and who sometimes gets very wound up and very tense under the pressure. He can be very undiplomatic, and therefore you think he is unfriendly and hard to deal with. But he is sort of unfriendly and hard to deal with sometimes. [chuckles] Yes. I don't know what more to say.

**RITCHIE:** My sense was, from your references to him, was that he was not a person who embraced new changes and new directions, and was more of a traditionalist.

**VASTINE:** Oh, I would definitely say that, yes. But you can understand that. I remember his getting angry at all of this stuff that people were bringing onto the floor to demonstrate—charts and graphs and things like that. That to him was just a pain in the rear.

**RITCHIE:** Exactly. I was just about to say that his life is on the floor of the Senate.

**VASTINE:** Right.

**RITCHIE:** Whereas yours was really between the Senate and the rest of the world.

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** So you were, by trying to reach the rest of the world with charts that might appeal to C-SPAN, you were upsetting his nice floor pattern.

**VASTINE:** Yes, getting in the way of things. But I got along just fine with Howard, really. He's a former resident of Lewes, Delaware. His family comes from Lewes, Delaware. And that's where I have a little home, so we have that in common. He's a decent guy.

**RITCHIE:** The one place where the two worlds did collide was when television went into the chamber for the first time, and there was both a desire to have it in there and also a reluctance to have it in there. That was about the time you were in there.

**VASTINE:** Oh, yes.

**RITCHIE:** What was the general thought inside the [Republican] Conference about how things would be different now that there was television in the chamber? Did they consciously think it would change things?

**VASTINE:** Some people feared that things would change. Definitely, there were those. And I was one of those who was opposed to it. Partly because I thought it would diminish the utility of what I was doing. You know, if clips of senators speaking on the Senate floor were readily available to the press, why would the press want to take material that my conference crews were producing?

In fact, it turned out that we used it to advantage. We monitored the floor regularly, and we made it known to all of our Republican clientele—the press secretaries—that if their boss said something newsworthy, we would instantly retrieve it. Because we kept tapes of the floor activity for 48 hours. So, if something had gone on in the previous 48 hours that was newsworthy, they could—the press secretary—could simply identify the time of day. We would search it out and get it back for them, and they could use it. So, often times, we actually took Senate-floor activity and fed it on the feed as newsfeed even though it had gone out on C-SPAN 2, we replayed it for the bird. Put it up on the bird, rather, and replayed it for local stations.

They sometimes asked for it. And then we would, as a courtesy, of course, provide it. So in the end, it all worked out very nicely for us. But, you know, Howard Baker wanted it. He felt it was important to do it, and I can't remember who the opponents were.

**RITCHIE:** Russell Long.

**VASTINE:** [Robert] Byrd.

**RITCHIE:** Yes, Byrd.

**VASTINE:** I don't think there was a body of opposition of opponents to Republicans. I don't think anybody was scared of it, but I think there were those who were reluctant. But it seems Howard Baker simply got his way.

**RITCHIE:** You mentioned "the bird." What was that?

**VASTINE:** That's the satellite. The bird up in the sky. "Put it up on the bird." "It's going up on the bird." A little jargon. Actually, jargon is very easy to acquire, and once you get about ten words, it's enough to make everybody think that you're a real expert.

**RITCHIE:** Well, you did become a real expert after awhile.

**VASTINE:** Hope I did. No, as I told you, enough to sell the Conference and its facilities. And we would do regular—we did print pieces. We did regular newsletters. What was it called? It was kind of clever. We did an internal newsletter for Senate Republican staff, especially press secretaries. *Inside Outlook*, it was called, in which we advertised our wares, our offerings, our services.

We had an Hispanic service. We hired a Hispanic broadcaster, and he did voice overs that say we'd get Senator Wilson to give us an actuality about something that was happening in California. And then Carlos Gonzales, our



Hispanic broadcaster, would come along with his excellent broadcast voice and read it in Spanish. [imitates] “El Señor Wilson today, you know, said.” You see you’d have a clip that consisted of Wilson starting to say something and then, you know, that would fade off and you’d hear him in the background, but the voice of this Spanish broadcaster reading over it in Spanish would be heard. And then we’d take that and then phone it to fifty or a hundred Spanish-speaking, Spanish-language stations throughout California.

This was the actuality system. I’m going back and forth now between one form of service and another, but we would encourage senators to phone us an actuality which they could leave with us on our hotline which was on all the time. We had Senator [Gordon] Humphrey phone our hotline from a cruiser, or battleship rather, off the coast of Lebanon during a firefight—one of the famous ones—from the ship that was bombarding Lebanon. And he phoned in, and then we turned around and phoned that to all the stations in “New Hampsha” [imitation]. That’s what we advertised—available almost all the time to get senators’ news out to their local stations, radio or television.

**RITCHIE:** It’s interesting that you mentioned Gordon Humphrey because he was known as a man who liked computers and technology. And also somewhat reclusive in the Senate. What was your assessment of him?

**VASTINE:** Very reclusive. I think we actually sent our crew over to his hideaway where he had his command center, to do things for him. Or he would phone in. I don’t think we saw very much of him.

**RITCHIE:** Maybe it was having been an airline pilot. He liked being in a little room separated from everyone else.

**VASTINE:** Well, I guess you’ve been told stories about all that.

**RITCHIE:** Not much, to tell you truth. Just that he stayed in that hideaway office a lot.

**VASTINE:** Well, yes, he did retreat to the hideaway and communicated with his staff via electronics. Very odd duck. I'd watch him come into the Senate, and you had the feeling that he just didn't feel like he belonged there, so tentative. But that changed after all. He finally developed a kind of a swagger like all the others.

**RITCHIE:** One year in the mid-eighties we had to do an inventory of the desks in the Chamber, to record the names that were carved in the desk drawers. The interesting thing was taking all the senators' belongings out of the drawers to then see what was carved at the bottom of the drawer. I remember his desk was filled with airline pilot magazines.

**VASTINE:** No kidding? Well, then you came to the desk that was filled with candy?

**RITCHIE:** I didn't open that one myself. There was a whole squad of us in there, so I didn't get to see inside the candy desk.

**VASTINE:** But you've heard about a candy desk?

**RITCHIE:** Yes. I understand that's the junior member of the Republican Party. . .

**VASTINE:** No, no.

**RITCHIE:** Who sits closest to the door. . .

**VASTINE:** Sits closest to the door [to the Senate Chamber]. On the right. The first desk on the right on the top of the riser. The drawer is always full. [Chuckles]

**RITCHIE:** I gather you've helped yourself. [Laughs]

**VASTINE:** Oh, very occasionally. Candy is not something I indulge. I try not to. But lots of other people did. [Laughs]

**RITCHIE:** Now, would your work take you onto the floor very much?

**VASTINE:** Not a heck of a lot. But I liked going there, so I would go a lot. You know, I had access to the floor without requiring to sign in. So I could walk in the main doors. When something really hot was happening, I would go over to the Senate and watch. Occasionally I needed to talk to Senator Chafee, and that would be a very good way to see him. Just go over and get him on the floor after a vote or during a vote.

I was on the floor for the famous vote in 1985. Did I tell you? When the great vote on the budget package, the tax reconciliation tax package of 1985 when the Republican Finance Committee. It wasn't '85, was it? Eighty-four? Eighty-five? It was '85. When Dole led an effort to cut into Social Security, we reduced the COLA by a fraction. Remember that vote?

**RITCHIE:** I'm trying to remember which one that was.

**VASTINE:** Oh, that was a great vote! That was our big loss and last chance to cut the deficit truly. It passed the Senate first on a tie that was broken by the vice president. And this was when Pete Wilson was in the hospital with pneumonia. Not pneumonia.

**RITCHIE:** He came in in a wheel chair. He had surgery, I think.

**VASTINE:** I think he had an appendix out. I think it was just that. Appendicitis. And he was brought in on a gurney at midnight. I held the door; and he said, "Hi, Bob. Thank you, Bob," or something like that. And he was wheeled into the Chamber to vote. In his bathrobe! With an IV. [Laughs] I don't think it was an IV, actually, but it was very dramatic looking. Very pale. And at the top—he was parked on the top riser and his name was called; and he

said, “Aye,” and he was wheeled out. High drama in the Senate. Really was, because it was a very, very big and important vote.

His being there to vote for it meant that some of the other Republicans who were, like Paula Hawkins with all her Social Security recipients, didn’t have to. And Alfonse D’Amato, who was kind of having a hard time getting reelected, didn’t have to vote for it.

That was a very important vote, and it’s a great shame that the House Republicans rebelled and got Reagan to pull support for it, and it fell. It’s a real shame, from the national-interest standpoint. It might have hurt Republican chances in ’86, but, for the country, it would have been a very good thing.

**RITCHIE:** What was the relationship of the Conference to the Reagan and the Bush administrations? Did you have much dealings with representatives of the administration?

**VASTINE:** From the Conference?

**RITCHIE:** Yes.

**VASTINE:** Not a lot. And neither did the Policy Committee people, to my recollection. I remember Bob Potts—he was the staff director of the Policy Committee—complaining about the lack of kind of contact. I tried to remedy that to an extent by running every other week a Wednesday lunch, which is still going on, for all Republican AAs and staff directors. And I used those occasions to bring our top pollsters and political consultants and chiefs of staff of the president, and the vice president, and cabinet officers in to talk to Republican AAs and staff directors. So that was my way of trying to send the message or get a message across. Give a chance for the administration to talk to Republicans on the Hill.

Also we organized the annual conferences of Republican senators. Actually, that was something that Packwood had done before we became the

majority in the Senate. Packwood, when he was Conference chairman, I guess was in '78 and '79, that period, he used to have Tidewater conferences. I think at the Tide's Inn or something like that. McClure didn't want to do those. And it was urged on me that I ought to. Senator Chafee just didn't want to, just didn't want to. He just didn't have the stomach for it. He just didn't want to.

Then some of his colleagues got on his case, and they really pressed him. And one of them was Senator [Thad] Cochran. I couldn't act quickly enough for him. I mean, he really felt the pressure to do it. So I raced down to Williamsburg and convinced them to give us some space, I think in early June of '87 or something like that. So we started again those conferences. We did two in a row at Williamsburg, and then one at Charlottesville and one at Shepherdstown, and that was my last one. The purpose was to, oh, give Republican senators a chance to go away and look at their navels a little bit and talk.

These offsite conferences were chances for senators to consider their political future and their party's political future. We tried to bring in very thoughtful and stimulating people, to make the conference as successful as possible. But it was very hard to do that. Senators did not want to come, particularly. I guess they felt they spend enough time with each other.

**RITCHIE:** Although there are some that say they don't spend enough time together. That they tend to fragment. . .

**VASTINE:** That's because they don't want to. . .

**RITCHIE:** . . . and head off to their home states every weekend.

**VASTINE:** . . . they don't want to spend time together. Didn't we discuss earlier the fact that senators aren't friends of other senators? They don't like to be around each other all that much. They see enough of each other as it is, and they don't like to come to these group things because they feel they're going to get pressured to conform to a norm.

I remember asking Senator [Warren] Rudman once why he didn't come to any of our offsite things. He said, "I spend enough time around here as it is. Why do I want to go off with these guys anyway for another weekend? I spend too much time with them the way it is." Not interested.

**RITCHIE:** You mentioned about pressure towards the norm. One question I had was: what was the impact of ideology in the party at that time? Was the party split, or were they holding together, or did you feel ideology while you were staff director?

**VASTINE:** Oh, definitely. Oh, all the time. Definitely.

**RITCHIE:** In what ways?

**VASTINE:** Well, just tremendous pressure to conform—especially on Senator Chafee. I mean, it was a great irritant to his colleagues—conservative colleagues—that he would not toe the line on things like campaign finance reform.

**End of Interview #8**

## LEAVING THE REPUBLICAN CONFERENCE

### Interview #9

October 25, 1993

**RITCHIE:** In the last interview I asked about ideological divisions in the Republican Conference, and you had just responded by saying that Senator Chafee was sort of suspect because he was independent on issues like campaign financing reform. But that was when the tape ended and so did the interview.

**VASTINE:** Oh, really?

**RITCHIE:** We really didn't get very far into that question. My question had been: how severe were the ideological divisions in the Republican Party? And what problems did that create for Senator Chafee's and your own leadership of the Conference.

**VASTINE:** The ideological division grew stronger. Did I tell about how the whole leadership election, strategy for the conservatives had been forecast in the *National Review*?

**RITCHIE:** We talked only briefly about that.

**VASTINE:** I would say the party in the Senate had been growing more and more conservative after each successive election, particularly as more conservative members of the House came to the Senate as Republican members. Senator Trent Lott joined Senator Cochran of Mississippi. And Senator Dan Coats came over. And there were others. So the complexion of the Senate was growing more and more conservative. The previous Gang of Six members had been defeated or resigned. Senator Mathias, Senator Stafford, Senator Andrews, Senator Weicker. So Senator Chafee had fewer and fewer natural allies. The caucus was split nearly twenty—nearly in half on that issue. Senator Boschwitz's defeat was a low blow because he was definitely more

moderate, I would say, than hellbent for the conservative. Anyway. What was I leading to?

**RITCHIE:** The strategy.

**VASTINE:** Oh. Well, it became clear to me that Senator Chafee would be challenged. I felt certain he would be challenged by Senator Cochran even two years before it happened. I felt this in the way Senator Cochran behaved toward me, and even how his wife kind of interacted with me. I think if Dan Quayle had been in the Senate, Dan Quayle would have gone after Chafee.

But at any case, the strategy for the conservatives was laid out in the August, I believe it was, an early August issue of the *National Review* in which an article said that Senators Dole and Simpson couldn't be successfully challenged for their leadership jobs but they certainly were not reliable conservatives. They were pragmatists. And, therefore, because they couldn't be unseated, the only way to deal with them was to surround them with other members of the leadership who were bona fide conservatives. And that article identified Senator Cochran in place of Senator Chafee, Senator Nickles for policy committee to fill Senator Armstrong's slot rather than Senator Domenici, Senator Gramm at senatorial committee rather than Senator McConnell. Senator [Robert] Kasten at the Secretary of the Conference rather than Senator [Christopher] Bond. And that's exactly what happened. By one vote or two votes in several cases. Senator Domenici lost by two votes. Senator Chafee lost by one. If Senator [William] Cohen had not gone to France to fulfill a speaking engagement these two would have been a tie vote in Chafee's case, and I think probably his colleagues would have—I think in the end they would have switched toward him. There would have been enough switches to elect him because he's very well liked, and I really don't think people wanted to defeat him. I think they wanted to warn him. I really don't think that the moment had come quite to defeating him.

And there was the extremely unusual, unprecedented case of Senator Hatfield who had to go to the hospital suddenly. I think for a back problem. He



asked to be able to vote from the hospital bed, and he was allowed to, in an extraordinary decision. He gave his vote to another senator on the phone. We have *no idea* whether that senator cast Hatfield's vote correctly or not. That was Senator Gorton. Hatfield was definitely a Chafee man. But whether the vote was cast—there's no reason to think it wasn't. But you don't know those things. You don't know.

So all that led to Senator Chafee's defeat. In the caucus the discussion was not about whether he did—I mean, everybody acknowledged that the Republican Conference had been very well managed, very creative, very helpful to members. But that wasn't the issue. The issue was whether Senator Chafee could vote against the leader of the party so often and lay title or claim title to chair the party's caucus. It just came down to that, plain and simple. He was just plain too liberal for other members of the caucus.

After the event, after the vote was tallied, I talked with Senator Cochran's AA right away. In fact, it was I who told him his boss had won. And he said he was surprised—very surprised because he expected to lose. Their vote count had them coming up short. And our vote had us winning by one vote.

**RITCHIE:** What was Senator Chafee's reaction to it?

**VASTINE:** Well, he was very crestfallen. He was—at first—much more stoical about it than I. But it galled him. And it lingered. And it was very damaging to me, too. I was very upset by it. You know, in leadership elections—I don't know whether people have talked to you about this, I'm sure they have—the staff can do very little. When it comes down to getting the votes, it's member to member. There's nothing, nothing staff can do. You can talk to the AAs of the other members. And, indeed, I did. But they don't really know how their bosses are going to vote half the time. So it's very hard to know.

**RITCHIE:** Did Senator Dole take a position in any of these contests?

**VASTINE:** He refused to. He did not. I think toward the end of the day, but not very early in the day. The vote was delayed for half an hour or an hour for some damn reason—somebody not being there or something. Then there was a procedural argument that had to be settled: who would chair the meeting. Senator Cochran opposed Chafee chairing the Conference because he was being challenged. I think Senator Dole at some point may have indicated that it might be—I'm not sure of this—he may have indicated it might be good to have members representing all parts of the party in leadership. But, he didn't do it in such a way as to make it in fact. No, I think he was just letting events take their course.

**RITCHIE:** What impact has that had on the Conference? Did it change the directions that you were going? Have they used it for ideological purposes, or is it, essentially, pretty much the way it was going along? You had mentioned you were working for the whole party.

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** Have they shifted their emphasis in any way?

**VASTINE:** No. I would say not. As far as I can tell there has been no change of emphasis. Margot Carlisle, the former staff director, actually came back to act as Senator Cochran's chief of staff. And he appointed his former press secretary, a very nice person, a very able guy named Will Feltus, to be the staff director of the Conference.

They were very generous with me. I had anticipated the event and had immediately ready a budget. A briefing book for Senator Cochran on the organization of the staff, the individuals who were on the staff, etc. I made a point of pressing them on whom they would like to keep and whom they would like to have dismissed. You know, what changes they were going to make. People need to know. It was important for Christmas, and that kind of thing. They basically responded by saying that everybody could stay. In fact, nobody was asked to leave other than myself. And, in my case, they gave me through

February and plus with the possibility that I could remain through March if I needed to. So that was very generous.

But it wasn't necessarily a hostile takeover either. I tried to treat it in the most optimistic—most positive way I could, though it was very hard to do so.

**RITCHIE:** And they kept. . .

**VASTINE:** Quite a blow.

**RITCHIE:** Yes. They've kept the same emphasis on communication that you had brought about?

**VASTINE:** Yes. Actually, they've extended that. You may have seen in *Roll Call* that they have initiated a new program for internal television, the internal Senate Republican cable channel. On Monday mornings that is a program intended to brief legislative assistants of Republican senators on the upcoming events of the week. That's a half an hour sort of talk show format.

But probably more importantly what they're doing so—now that we're no longer in the leadership of the country and are much more reactive—the Republican Conference now has a very sophisticated way of tracking events, upcoming events, so that their staff can call up. . . . Let's say, if Clinton is going to San Francisco to make a speech on disarmament, we obviously know that Clinton will be getting local radio and television coverage, press coverage. Conference staff, as I understand it, will call the stations and the press, the media in San Francisco, and say: "You're obviously going to be quoting [Albert] Gore or Clinton on disarmament. Don't you think it would be a good idea to have from the standpoint of balance a Republican spokesperson to rejoin or comment as well?" In that way they are attempting to expand media coverage of Republican alternatives to the administration's programs.

So it remains a very sophisticated communications establishment. Seems to be going very well. They have continued to sort of expand the facility and build in more infrastructure and more sophistication. It's nice.

**RITCHIE:** They haven't gone back to the old days of writing opinion pieces?

**VASTINE:** Well, they did try it. Actually, there was a moment when they did. They can't seem to stay away from it. They hired two writers to try to write op-ed pieces for local papers, and it just didn't work. They fired them finally. It just did not work. Partly, the writing was terrible; but, also, you know, who is it that speaks for Republicans? And this was even during the last Bush administration, so it just wasn't going to work.

**RITCHIE:** During the period that you were staff director, you worked with Republican presidents. There is a big difference in what staff people are doing right now. You mentioned at one point how there wasn't that much connection between the Conference and the Republican administration. But, what *was* your assessment of the Reagan and Bush administrations from the perspective of Capitol Hill? Did you think they were performing well? Or did you wish they were doing differently? And did you get a sense from Republican senators that they were satisfied with the way things were going in the administrations?

**VASTINE:** Well, I think there is nothing original I can very much add about Reagan. I think he and his administration demonstrated a remarkable policy of consistency, and it was in line with what the American people seemed to want; and he was an enormously popular president who was able to talk directly to people and, somehow, internalize a popular point of view. An everyman's kind of language and style. He really had a great sense of that.

Bush was a tremendous failure because he expanded the role of government. He expanded taxes and spending. And he wasn't able to explain his decisions to people. When the crash came, that is to say when the Kuwait

war was over and it was clear the economy was turning sour, he was simply unable to fathom what was occurring in America. And from a communications standpoint, he just didn't get it! He didn't know what people were thinking, and he wasn't able to fashion a message. Therefore, he didn't respond to their needs. He just lost it! People felt that they were losing their jobs, or were about to lose their jobs, in the summer of 1990, was it? Or was it '91? Yes, in the summer of '91. And Sununu and Brady told people there was no recession and, you know, people shouldn't worry. It was all okay. And nobody believed that. And that was the great crack. I think that began the great fissure.

I took the Deputy Secretary of the Treasury, John Robson, to meet Newt Gingrich, the soon-to-be minority leader, in Gingrich's office in the first few days after the Labor Day recess in 1991. And he launched a tirade. He said, "My troops are scared! They've been out in the countryside. They've been talking to people, and they know that people are afraid for their jobs. And this administration has got to right now turn around its rhetoric and start talking about jobs and opportunity and the need for economic growth, or we're going to lose." And he was absolutely right!

I don't know anything about how the White House works internally or worked internally in those days, but it's clear that that message negotiated with the president. I think Sununu has a lot to do with it. His point of view, that very conservative point of view, prevailed in that respect. Sununu also let the president break his "no new taxes" pledge. Curious. Very strange. But what's clear to me is that Bush lost touch. He just did not have it.

I had Lee Atwater speak a couple of times to groups of Republican AA's. And once he told me an anecdote, waiting for the program to start, that he'd just come from California where he'd spent three days on the beach. This was in early June of the last year of Reagan's term. And everyone was wondering, after the primaries, what the hell had happened to George Bush. No one was hearing from him. He was going down in the polls. [Michael] Dukakis was becoming better known, and Bush was doing nothing. Atwater at that moment came to the Senate to talk to Senate Republican AAs, and he told me this story that he'd

just been on the beach for the weekend in Newport Beach, or Long Beach, California. And what did he do? Well, he walked along behind people, just listening to their conversations and then he followed them over to the supermarket and just strolled around and listened to what people were saying. He tried to get a sense of what was really on people's minds. And he said, "The national election is *not* on people's minds out here. They don't care! They care about gridlock on the freeways, and they care about crime. They don't care about Bush or Reagan's or Dukakis." And, he said, "This election isn't going to heat up until a couple of weeks before the election itself."

He went on from there. But, he said, "I try to do this every so often. I try to get out away from Washington and just mingle with people in order to figure out what it is their thinking." That Atwater touch was what was missing, tragically, from Bush's administration. It's a long answer.

**RITCHIE:** You mentioned going over to see Gingrich in the House and also, previously, you talked about House members who were moving over to the Senate. That was one other area we haven't talked much about which was relations between the Senate and the House. I wondered if the Senate Republican Conference had much contact at all with the House Republican Conference? Was there any like-mindedness, or were they really completely separately entities and going separate ways?

**VASTINE:** They're really completely separate. We tried from time to time. Under Sheila Burke's leadership we tried to have joint staff meetings—House and Senate staff meetings. It worked to an extent, but not well. It's unfortunate, but we didn't work together very much.

They're trying to do that now. Get cooperation institutionalized in a way. There's a man on [Bob] Michel's staff named Bob Okun, and David Taylor on Dole's staff whose responsibilities include going to the leadership meetings of the party in the other body and trying to act as a liaison. So there is more, much more, of an attempt at that than had been.

**RITCHIE:** It's an interesting picture that you have a Republican administration's and the two Republican organizations in the Congress. And yet, each faction seems to be independent of the others.

**VASTINE:** Well, there are good reasons for that. That is, the Republican Conference in the Senate had no analog on the House side. Nobody, I mean, really the House apparatus, the House leadership apparatus is really *quite* different from the Senate apparatus. They have a conference and a policy committee and a research committee and whips and deputy whips and leader and—it's a whole different apparatus. We were mainly a communications operation with occasional caucusing and conferencing capabilities. I don't know whether we've talked about our offsite conferences.

**RITCHIE:** Yes.

**VASTINE:** And the House folks, the House Conference, did a lot more research, much along the lines of the Senate Republican Policy Committee, but also along the lines of the House Republican Policy Committee and the House Republican Research Committee. So there's a lot of confusion about that. And, really, there is no analog on the House side to the Senate Republican Conference per se.

Also, there's nothing unusual about any of this. I didn't invent this standoff, as it were, or lack of cooperation. The two bodies found a very hard time coordinating. The leaders of the two bodies have a very hard time coordinating, at the top.

For example, you and I have a friend named Jeanine [Drysedale Lowe] who runs the Commission on the Preservation of the Capitol. She's been trying to have a meeting of the leadership—the joint leadership—of that Commission, which is, obviously, the leaders of the House and Senate—Republican and Democrat—for more than a year! And she can't get them together. And this is Joe Stewart, the secretary of the Senate's operation. So, you'd think he, with

Jeanine, would have the ability to get these folks in a room and discuss what they have to discuss for that purpose. But. It's very hard to do. You know that.

**RITCHIE:** Well, looking back over your career on Capitol Hill, in the House and the Senate, what's your general assessment? Does the system work? Or, would you like to see it drastically different than it is?

**VASTINE:** A hard question. Hmmmm. Well, what do you mean by the system? The legislative process?

**RITCHIE:** Yes.

**VASTINE:** Well, clearly, it works. It does work. It seems, however, to be working at a higher cost to the participants.

They seem to have less and less tolerance for the strains it places on them. And I think it hurts a lot. It hurts everybody a lot. It makes the job a lot less comfortable. A lot more stress-producing, and a lot more difficult. To have Congress to be held in such low esteem and be constantly the brunt or butt of public disdain. I think that Gingrich did the House a great disservice in making the [House] bank issue which, in a sense is a non-issue. How few members have really been—no one's been indicted over the House bank that I know.

**RITCHIE:** The sergeant at arms [Jack Russ] is the only one.

**VASTINE:** Yes. It was substantially distorted by the talk-show hosts into a scandal. It was a perk that was perhaps abused, but nobody lost money, I don't think. The public didn't lose a dime, I don't believe, as a result of the so-called bank scandal. But, what a cost to the reputation of the institution which is, essentially, very, very important.

In the Senate side, for years the issue—even in the Republican period, the period of Republican leadership—there have been quality of life committees. Did you know that?



**RITCHIE:** No. I've heard the expression, but I didn't realize there were committees.

**VASTINE:** Why, yes. There were sort of quality of life groups, task forces. Danforth and folks like that would be on small committees to report back to the leadership on changes to improve quality of life, which mainly meant: How do we avoid all these late nights?

The same theme has been played again and again for years. Grueling late nights, wearing sessions, long days spent with no legislative activity, and then, suddenly in the evening a burst of votes. I think the House of Commons usually works at night, in the evening. Isn't that right?

**RITCHIE:** I think so, yes.

**VASTINE:** So maybe there isn't anything so terribly unusual about this. No, there does seem to be an increase in the willful use—willful misuse—of delaying tactics, filibusters, motions to proceed, the use of procedural devices to delay action. It's very frustrating. It just takes a lot of time and is frustrating to the leadership. But others than I, probably, will comment more trenchantly on those sorts of things. I haven't thought a lot about the workings of the Senate in awhile. Well, what do *you* think?

**RITCHIE:** [Laughs] I'd rather stick to asking the questions!

**VASTINE:** Oh, ho, ho! [Laughs]

**RITCHIE:** I was going to ask you, what happened once you realized you were not going to be with the Republican Conference? How did you chart your course at that stage, when Senator Chafee lost his reelection as chairman?

**VASTINE:** Well, he was dining that night with the president. Being hosted by Bob Dole, and he was going to be seeing Nick Brady, the secretary of the Treasury. So I seized the moment and got him to talk to Brady about me.

There had been a job at the Treasury that I'd been interested in anyway, being senior deputy assistant secretary for international economic affairs. He did that. I was to call Brady the next day, and I did that. Spoke to his right-hand assistant, and that began a process of job searching in the Treasury, which resulted in my becoming vice president for congressional affairs at a Treasury-related entity called the Oversight Board of the Resolution Trust Corporation in which position I did work very substantially for Brady who was the chairman.

I took that job January 13 or something like that, on a Thursday. And, after lunch downtown with a friend, walked to my new work. I was still employed by the Senate, but was checking in, and was immediately given a rough draft of the secretary's testimony ten days later to the Senate Banking Committee on Resolution Trust Corporation funding. An extremely emotional, difficult, angry issue. And I knew nothing about that! I didn't know anything about it. But I sat right down and read the testimony and found problems with it and began to learn and never went back to the Hill. I had expected just to put my head in the door and come back and clean up my office. I'd cleaned up my office and Will Feltus was already in it, but, you know, get my stuff together. Get off the payroll.

I worked for two weeks and got the secretary through two hearings, one in the House and one in the Senate, before getting on the right payroll. I was still being paid by the Senate during that time. There was just no time. It was an incredible crush of activity. Learning a new subject. Putting together a briefing book. The questions and answers are endless. I don't know whether you know anything about how a secretary's briefed, but it's quite different from working with a senator. Because, in the case of Brady, he would bring twenty people into a giant conference room. Several assistant secretaries, a couple of deputy assistant secretaries, the under secretary for domestic finance, sometimes the deputy secretary, the president of the Oversight Board, and myself, and our general counsel. So there would be twenty people sitting around the room. Plus his special assistant. Amazing!

Then you would go through this excruciating process of explaining the basics. Secretary Brady was an extremely nice man, but he had a very hard time with this issue. And he was limited by the fact that he didn't do his homework too well. He was slightly, somewhat dyslexic. And he prefers to learn by being briefed. I was amazed when I listened to him for the first time read the testimony that I had written. I knew it word for word, of course. At the hearing, I realized, what a hard time he had 'cause he would stumble. It was an effort for him to read, sometimes. So he was quite a different person to work with.

The Treasury apparatus, of course, is extremely talented and, in general, so was the support there. The under secretary for Domestic Finance, Bob Glauber, was a very, very talented and brilliant man. And others were as well, so it was a lot of fun. Very interesting for the first year. I spent a great deal of time with the deputy secretary, John Robson, who headed our task force on RTC Affairs. I worked very hard to learn the issue and get up to speed and take on full responsibilities of congressional enactment of RTC funding legislation and succeeded in March of '92. Ninety-two?

I don't know why I'm turned around. Last year was '93. No, this is '93. Ninety-one. March of '91 in getting \$30 billion enacted by House and Senate for the RTC. And then, finally, in November of '91 in getting another \$25 billion enacted with some reservations attached and having the Oversight Board perpetuated.

Senator Riegle wanted to abolish my organization, and my job was to preserve it, because deputy secretary Robson *wanted* it preserved. I mean, we all wanted it preserved. We thought it was the right thing. But we fought that fight all summer long, and we finally beat Riegle. At five o'clock in the evening the night before Thanksgiving, we won \$25 billion and the right to continue to work on the Oversight Board. [Laughs].

Anyway, I spent two years doing that—found it very interesting for awhile and then very tiresome, because the subject is so limited and because the

Resolution Trust Corporation has no constituency. Nobody cares about it, has any interest in it. Most everybody thinks badly of the organization itself, with good reason. It's been terribly, badly managed. It's just one, huge, awful problem. It's never really been handled correctly, I don't think. But I don't know whether you want to get into that or not.

**RITCHIE:** Well, it's an amazing story in the sense that billions of dollars have been pouring into that to salvage the system.

**VASTINE:** Yes, it would cost overall about \$105 billion at the outside not including interest on the borrowed money. It would just be appropriated funds. But, worse than that, is that the Congress, by its various delays, has added perhaps as much as two to three billion. Certainly two, maybe three billion to the cost simply by refusing to fund the RTC so that it can close down dead institutions.

**RITCHIE:** They know they have to do it, but they don't want to do it. Congress comes around to pass the appropriations each time, but they drag their feet up to the last moment.

**VASTINE:** Drag their feet terribly. Gingrich decided he was going to hate Secretary Brady because Brady refused, during that period I was describing to you, the immediate early fall of '91, to acknowledge the problem with the economy and come forward with a plan to fix it. And Gingrich more or less asked for Brady's resignation. Other people did as well. In fact, at one of our hearings, Connie Mack did—one of the hearings at which the secretary had to testify. Senator Mack and Senator D'Amato, I believe, asked for Brady's resignation. Not very nice. I mean, deliberately timed to create a problem. Where was I?

**RITCHIE:** About Gingrich's opposition.

**VASTINE:** But, Gingrich simply refused to . . . well, he permitted a bill providing for \$25 billion to be enacted and to be passed by both bodies in

November of '91. But that bill had on it a provision that none of the, no money thereunder provided could be spent after April 1992. And that meant that the RTC could only within that very limited period of time of four months spend, maybe \$7 to \$8 billion dollars. That meant it only could do part of its remaining job.

Thereafter Gingrich refused to cooperate in assisting in the passage of the RTC bill. That meant that on April 1, 1992, the bill which had been previously passed by the Senate in March, the bill was defeated on the House floor with Gingrich sitting on his hands at the back of the chamber, refusing to lobby for the bill and permitting the conservatives in his party—the nay sayers—to just vote as they wished. In other words, not whipping as the president had asked him to. Not doing his job as whip and getting the votes to pass this damn thing. So it went down with 125 votes only, and a huge 260 opposing vote. Most Democrats and a great number of Republicans voting against it.

So we went to see him before the end of the Congress. I took my immediate boss. After a tremendous amount of negotiation had gone back and forth. Gingrich had been negotiating with the Treasury but not directly with the secretary. The secretary refused, as I understand it, ever to see Gingrich one on one, which is the way the problem could have been settled. It could have been settled by the secretary going along to see Gingrich and saying, “Look here—here we are. We’re both working for this president, and we want him to succeed. And this is an embarrassment. Why don’t we just bury our hatchet here?”

Well, we went to see Gingrich—my immediate boss, Peter Monroe, the president of the Oversight Board, and I—two weeks before the House adjourned sine die in, I guess, would have been October or late September of '92. And Gingrich said, “Look, I’ve made my position absolutely clear.” He said, “I learned from Bob Byrd at the economic summit at Andrews Air Force Base, the Budget Summit. I learned how to deal,” he said. “You say what you want and you stick to it and you get it. And I tell you what I want. It’s simple as my telling you I want a yellow Miatta. I want a yellow Miatta.”

He said, “All I want is for a group of economists—private sector economists—whom I have a hand in picking to be able to go down to the Treasury and use the Treasury’s resources—its computers—and consult with its tax experts on the issue so we can see if we can’t get dynamic modeling rather than static modeling of the effect of tax law changes on economic growth.”

Now this is an old, old argument: static versus dynamic modeling. Treasury insists on static. People who want to make changes and have a different approach to the tax code like dynamic modeling. It all had to do with the issue of the capital gains tax and whether or not the capital gains tax would lose money or make money. If you did static modeling, it would lose money. And if you did dynamic modeling, it would gain money. That is the idea, I think. And Gingrich, having lost the capital gains tax issue, wanted at the very least to change the modeling mechanism or at least provide an alternative one.

He said, “And until I get my yellow Miatta, RTC is not going to be funded.” And he waved at me, he said, “Bob knows that I could start this process tonight and we have it done in a few days. But you have to convince Nick Brady of that first. So I’m telling you what I need,” he said.

And, of course, it never happened. The Treasury just got its back up. The secretary and the others of the Treasury said, “We can’t give the Congress a free run in the halls of the Treasury.” And, of course, that’s not at all what, you know—it could have been handled. It could have been finessed in other ways.

So, the bottom line is that there was no RTC funding in ’92. It took until March this year, I believe, for the Senate to pass the bill again. The House just passed it by hair’s breadth on the second week in September, second or third week in September. It’s in conference. It’s a very confused conference over the issue of minority preferences. And, I suspect it will get out of conference some day; but nobody knows how right now. So, RTC funding is an issue I’m *delighted* not to be dealing with any longer. What a mess!

**RITCHIE:** At one point you said that you'd helped Lloyd Bentsen when he was coming into the Treasury Department? Walking him through his confirmation hearings.

**VASTINE:** Not confirmation hearing. His first Banking Committee hearings.

**RITCHIE:** How did that come about?

**VASTINE:** Well, I had responsibilities for—well, first of all, I was not a political appointee. I mean, it was clear to everyone that I was a Republican but my job classification was not political. It was a schedule A classification which is something called Excepted Service. So, it was clear when the new group came I was not expected to resign and was not asked to. On the other hand, it was clear I was an enemy [chuckles], an alien, a Republican, and, therefore, not to be trusted in spite of the fact that folks in the permanent bureaucracy of the Treasury liked me very much and were very much in my corner wanting me to stay on and continue to do the job that I'd done.

So, the new assistant secretary for congressional relations, Michael Levy, came to Treasury. We got along just fine, at least in a superficial way. But, it became clear, almost immediately, that he was not going to rely on me for very much. Except that I did know how to write this testimony, put briefing books together, do the Q's and A's, and run the process for the secretary to get past his first big hearings in the House and Senate before the Banking Committees. So I ended up briefing the secretary and help preparing, as I had before, the Q's and A's, and the written testimony.

Actually, it went very, very well. The secretary was easy to brief. He's extremely bright. He's very focused. He always runs on time. He did all of his homework. He read everything he was asked to. He took notes. He was, really, very much on top of things. And his special assistant, the chief of the executive secretariat was delighted with the way I'd managed the briefing, the initial briefings, and even later, and expressed his approval and gratitude. But it

really became clear as the time for the marking up of the bill and the political negotiations with the staffs of the committees came—as that time came—that I was *persona non grata* from the standpoint of some Democrats. And it made it very hard for me to stay on and do my job, so I, basically, began to look for other options at that point. And toward the end of spring I was approached to head the Congressional Economic Leadership Institute, which after a period of negotiation, I did accept in August and left the RTC. So that's what I'm doing now.

**RITCHIE:** And what does this organization entail?

**VASTINE:** This is a 501(c)3, a charitable organization. An eleemosynary organization for the purpose of educating members of Congress and their staffs about leading economic issues, especially having to do with American competitiveness in international markets. We work very closely with the House and Senate Competitiveness Caucuses, which are organizations or groups of 150 House members and 50 senators. I organize, essentially, programs in the Capitol that are topical and timely, and I try to bring in the very best people to discuss with congressmen and senators the issues of the day.

My purpose has been to have the most aggressive autumn program that I could because there had been a hiatus between my coming aboard and the prior president's departure during which the caucus and the institute had done very little. And I wanted to change that quickly.

My first program was with three leading members of the Japan Renewal Party, which is the major Japanese reform party. It was sort of a Japan groupies event that attracted a number of congressmen. Then we had a briefing by Bob Ruben, the chairman of the National Economic Council on the work of the National Economic Council. Then I had a program on the Uruguay round with three trade ambassadors, mainly for staff and most recently by the deputy secretary of defense and the deputy secretary of commerce and the under secretary of energy on administrative technology policy.



And I'm organizing for next Friday a briefing by [Labor] Secretary [Robert] Reich and debate with a NAFTA opponent. And then we'll have a few other programs before the end of the session. So, that's the kind of thing we're up to.

**RITCHIE:** Does the leadership conference take a position on anything?

**VASTINE:** No, no. We're a neutral forum. Our purpose is to provide the forum and the opportunity for members to discuss both sides of an issue. And, I think if we took a position—first of all, it would be extremely difficult to because the caucus members are so diverse, we would lose a tremendous portion of our audience. My job is to be sure the programs are well balanced. For awhile, the programs had gotten to be a little bit in the protectionist side; and my charge is to make sure that they're not any longer.

**RITCHIE:** Well, you've come full cycle in that respect, at least. You started out advising *a* member of Congress on economic issues, and particularly on trade issues; and now you're advising *all* the members of Congress.

**VASTINE:** It's actually very creative and very much my own organization to make successful or unsuccessful. We have a number of private-sector sponsors, and I'm very glad that they are loyal and committed to our goals and eager, it seems, or at least willing to continue to contribute. My job is, partly, to rebuild that and expand that funding base. I do that by exciting programs and attracting members of Congress to them and that kind of thing. But, it's quite different from some other things that I've done.

I guess that the same, continuing thread is relations with members. I suppose if there is one thing I'm supposed to know is how to relate to members of Congress and how to identify issues and design programs that will be of interest to them.

**RITCHIE:** Are the members changing? Are they different than they were when you first started working for members?

**VASTINE:** Oh, yes. Tremendously. I think maybe I commented on this earlier. In the sixties a member was a member, and there was no guessing about who it was who was a member of Congress. You could see a guy walking down the hall in the sense in that: There was a member of Congress.

Nowadays, they're so young, it seems, and so diverse. They all have to wear badges! I mean, it's easy to mistake a member! Before, at least to my young eyes, they didn't seem like ordinary people. They seemed like members of Congress, and they were distinguished partly by their age. The fact is that they were older. Lots older. Had a lot of silver hair, most of them. That has certainly changed.

And with it, perhaps also, the tolerance of new ideas and interest in discussing new aspects of things and new ideas. So, from my standpoint perhaps, the changed complexion, the youth—the relative youth—of the caucus, of the members on the House side is an advantage because they're most interested in seeking out new thoughts, new people.

I had to work with a lot of the new members of the Banking Committee. The Banking Committee in the House had twenty-six new members, out of a full membership of fifty-two. So that tremendous turnover, and a process of education. And, for the most part, they're very bright and skilled people who'd spent a long time in government, at local and state levels. They know all about government. They were not a bunch of neophytes to government.

It represented, really, the moving up into the national legislature a lot of people who had been at the city council and county and state legislature level. And I find them very interesting. The governor of Delaware, for example, is a guy that I lobbied. A legislator from New Jersey named Herb Klein, so it's very interesting to watch the changes in the House.

Anyway, I don't know whether that answers your question.

**RITCHIE:** It's definitely been a huge change.

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** It's interesting to see that, in addition to the numbers, that the characters and the types of people are changing, perhaps, as well. So we may have just gone through one of the major generational changes of membership. It remains to be seen how long these people are going to last, whether they'll stay as long as the people they replaced.

**VASTINE:** Well, that would depend on term limits, partly won't it? The term limit movement.

I suppose that scholars of the institution are already studying the makeup of the freshman class compared to the makeup of other freshman classes to determine how many people are new to government versus those who have had government experience. Legislative experience. But I don't know, I'm sure those studies are being done, but I don't know what they have shown or will show.

**RITCHIE:** Well, I think of the big blip classes of Congress of 1958 and 1974 and 1980 when they had great changes. They tended to stay for awhile, for a dozen to twenty years or more. Once they get those seats they tend to stay around.

**VASTINE:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** Then it remains to be seen what their impact will be on the institution.

**VASTINE:** Umhmmm.

**RITCHIE:** This last time around was a big numbers change, certainly, if nothing else.

**VASTINE:** Well, if congressional reform means term limits, it means an end to the chairman system. And I don't know, frankly, whether that's good or bad. I can perfectly rationalize the current system in that it brings to the floor skilled legislators who are politically secure, who know how to run and maintain their seats, and who, usually, if they're able—and many of them are—rise to their positions of power with great knowledge of the committee and its legislative responsibility, substantive responsibilities, and they're experts!

Tom Curtis was an expert. He knew more about Social Security law than any damn secretary of the Treasury or secretary of HHS. But, on the other hand, there's just no doubt—and I've seen it in the finest people that I've worked for—and I've been very privileged to work for three extremely fine, honest, upstanding, solid legislators. But I've seen, even in them, the desire to perpetuate themselves in office.

So, that's not good. And when it gets to the place where preserving your seat—Republican or Democrat—is your major goal, that really does weaken, I think, the country. I despair. Here I am an author of the budget, and I really despair of Congress ever getting control itself of its spending process. On the other hand, the balanced budget amendment is *not* the way to do it. That is not going to work. I do believe that, in spite of arguments—good arguments by Senator Byrd—against it, the line-item veto is probably the best thing, the best immediate step to take. But, I think, simply passing a constitutional amendment that says we shall have balanced budgets is crazy, is demagoguery, I guess. I don't know how exactly, precisely, to characterize it, but it won't work, I believe, and it will cheapen the Constitution, as a result.

Anyway, I do believe that something has to be done. But I don't know what it will be. I mean something has to be done about the deficit.

**RITCHIE:** Well, I want to thank you. You've participated in a long series of interviews. . .

**VASTINE:** I've enjoyed it very much.

**RITCHIE:** . . . and we've covered a lot of territory.

**VASTINE:** Yes. Thank you very much for the opportunity to do it. It's been very interesting and you are a wonderful conversationalist—in that you *listen* with such evident, either real or feigned [laughs] interest that it helps draw one out. So I thank you very much for making it fun.

**RITCHIE:** Good.

**End of Interview #9**

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