

LIFE ON THE SENATE STAFF

Interview #5

Tuesday, March 1, 1983

MCCLURE: I'd like to talk, off-the-record at least, about some of the internal life of the staff serving under Senator Hill. To start with, Senator Hill, it turned out, had a passion for gossip and for prodding a staff member to say something about another staff person, something unfavorable. I suppose it was one method of running an intelligence operation. He'd make his own observations, and then try to see if somebody else saw the same thing. But the net result was that certain staff people took advantage of this, to the detriment of others, naturally.

I first observed this when we were having staff meetings, way back in 1955, in Senator Hill's office over in the old building, at which would be present Bill Reidy, our health man, Jack Forsythe, the counsel, and I, plus Charlie Brewton, administrative assistant, and quite often Donald Cronin, who was a lesser member of Senator Hill's personal staff at the time. I'm not sure what his role was; I know he drove the senator to work and drove him home--which incidentally is a way to provide the opening and closing of the senator's day with your own input, so to speak. It's a very useful way for underlings to--to use a phrase from Broadway-- "ace" themselves in with their bosses, if they are so inclined. Anyway, Charlie, had really been

page 136

responsible for my job, in having Lister Hill hire me, and in addition we were very close friends, outside the Senate as well as in.

Charlie was a great idea man. He came up with new schemes all the time, things for the committee to do, some things the senator ought to do. We'd talk about some of these, as well as about the business of the committee. And I noticed that Don Cronin was seeming to take a protective position with respect to the chairman, saying, "Well, Senator, wouldn't that cause some difficulties in Alabama?" He was positioning himself to defend the senator against these wild ideas we were tossing around. It always brought us up short, because Lister Hill, we thought, was perfectly capable of defending himself. If he didn't know what his own political situation in Alabama was, then nobody did.

RITCHIE: Was Cronin from Alabama?

MCCLURE: Oh, yes, graduate of the University of Alabama Law School, at least. I don't know whether he went to college. Well, so was Charlie a graduate, I think, of Alabama Law. Anyway, this situation prevailed for quite a few months and each time it got a little more obvious. Charlie would get very annoyed. He was making a presentation and suddenly it was being torpedoed. And then I noticed that Jack Forsythe was beginning to agree with Cronin. "Yes, Senator, there is a risk here. You know,

the race question down

page 137

there. " Of course, Forsythe was not from Alabama, but he had been born in Virginia and his father was a newspaper publisher, I think, in a little town in North Carolina, so he could claim Southern covering.

From the beginning--I should go back--Bill Reidy, John Forsythe and I would say, "Look, there are three of us. The chairman is going to talk to us separately. We'll never be able to function if we don't tell each other everything he says to each of us individually." And we thought that was what was going to happen, but it turned out that in some of these meetings we'd all start to file out and then Forsythe would say, "Just a minute, Senator, I have something I must tell you." Then Bill and I would walk out. What was he telling him? We never found out, nor what the senator said in return. What was all this mystery? So Cronin and Forsythe found a sort of common bond. They were the same type of people. Certainly Forsythe was extremely capable as a lawyer, but he had this sense of intrigue, this whispering behind the hand, and he always had "something he picked up in the House," where he had worked, that he wanted to share with the senator--and it was certainly not for our innocent ears. Well, this was very aggravating, and Bill and I realized that our little threesome had become a dead duck. So Bill and I shared everything, but we didn't share much with Forsythe anymore because we didn't trust him.

page 138

Well, Cronin really got under Charlie's skin. Charlie was a sensitive guy. He was a victim of polio: had a huge frame from waist up, but wasted legs and braces on the knees. He rolled around. He had a huge head and a brilliant mind, but he was wasted from the hips down. But he went on anyway. He had been a lawyer in the Justice Department. He didn't let his infirmity hold him back at all. In fact, it may have goaded him to greater achievements than he would otherwise have made. But Charlie began taking to drink. Oh, everybody drank a couple of drinks after work, that was standard practice, gathering in somebody's office and having a shot or two before going home. But Charlie wound up going deeper and deeper. Of course, this afforded Cronin another whip, or another chance for knifing.

But the ultimate, I think, in my experience around here was--Charlie told me this one day--the senator called him in and said, "Charlie, where are those letters I sent down to your shop to be answered?" Charlie had a room down the hall from the main office. Charlie said, "Well, what letters, Senator? I answered all the letters I got." "Well, I gave them to Don three days ago and he sent them through, I'm sure." Yes, he did send them through to Charlie's in-box, but then at night he took them out. As far as we could determine that's what happened, because the letters disappeared, after having been delivered to his desk by some clerk. Well, Charlie just was finished by then. The senator was believing Donald on

page 139

everything, and now Donald was putting Charlie in these hideous situations. He was going to be driven out of there, no question about it, and he knew nothing could be worse for a man than to be an administrative assistant to a top senator and then be fired.

Well, during a previous session--it's hard for me to remember which year it was, '57 or '58--the Senate had passed a bill reported from our committee creating a commission on mental health and illness to determine what to do about mental treatment, insane asylums, and related matters. It was composed of many brilliant doctors, medical administrators, and health people. It was established in Cambridge, Massachusetts, under a doctor whose name I don't recall, who was a very close friend of the senator's--as many doctors were. So Bill Reidy, who had worked on this bill, called the head of the commission and persuaded him to hire Charlie as his assistant and fund-raiser in order to make this commission a success, because it depended on private contributions that would be matched by federally funded money. That rescued Charlie. He went to Cambridge with his family. There he was with his terrific Southern accent functioning with Cambridge dons! He made a great success of it and they raised all the money they needed. He went to AA and sobered up--he became a religious AA, believed God was personally watching over him; well, that was great.

The cabal had gotten rid of Charlie Brewton, and guess who became administrative assistant: Donald Cronin. So, I no longer had

page 140

a pal at the top of Senator Hill's office. His second man, John Campbell, was a darling guy, friend of mine, but he had no real authority in the shop; good number two man. Well then, at meetings and in other ways we discovered that Bill Reidy was the next target. Bill was undoubtedly the best authority on health legislation who ever existed. Held started on the Hill with Senator James Murray of Montana, with the Murray-Wagner-Dingell bill in the '40s, which was the first national health insurance bill. Held been in the Farm Security Administration in California during the Depression, when they had had national health insurance and all kinds of programs that died with the war. But Bill was brash. He was born in Harlem, and Irish guy from Harlem, New York. Tough, always said what he thought, usually it was right. Swore a lot and drank a lot. Well, Lister Hill didn't like people around him who drank much so that was a bad point against Bill, but it never affected his work. In fact, he wrote his best speeches when he was potted. His Irish imagination could just flow with a couple of shots of whiskey or more.

So the schemes began--I don't remember the exact technique, but it was based on needling, and they got the senator moved around so he was needling in a kind of arch way, "Well, Bill, feel up to coming in today" kind of thing. Bill and I read those signs very clearly. Fortunately, Senator Murray was still alive and chairman of the Interior Committee. Charlie Murray, his son, was his administrative assistant, and, as I may have said, was really in effect the senator

page 141

in the last years. So Bill moved over to the Interior Committee at the end of November 1959. They had gotten rid of him. I could see no reason to any of this. I mean, Bill was doing a magnificent job. Charlie had been doing a magnificent job. What was the point of driving these good people out? Cronin wanted Brewton's job, of course, but he didn't want Bill's job, and certainly Jack didn't. It really made no sense. It was just feeding this unhappy tendency of Lister Hill to listen to poor-mouthing and bad-mouthing of other staff people.

Well, here I was. We brought on a new health guy, Bob Barkley, and Cronin became AA. All my pals, original friends and colleagues in the Hill entourage, were gone, except Fred Blackwell. Well, along came the NDEA, we've gone through that. It was a great success, it still is on the books. In fact student loans are a big issue right now. Anyway, it was a triumph for Lister Hill because he had put an education bill through without the race issue torpedoing it, or his being blackened by it. I had worked my tail off, but as time went on, as so often happens in legislation, the idea man is shunted aside and the lawyers take over, to help get the text right--well, I fully agree with that, that's why we have a legislative counsel. But the smart operator who's a lawyer can just shunt aside professional staff people right and left, "Well, sure it's a great idea Senator, but you can't do it because of Section 6 of Title 10 and stuff, stuff, stuff, stuff, stuff" which poor professional staff members never had

page 142

time to learn. So the bill was--well, I won't say drastically modified--but a lot of directions changed and ideas were left out as Forsythe and the lawyers went to work on it; some of them I think were necessary, politically, but some of them weren't.

Anyway, I was very pleased that it was passed, and thought it was a great achievement; it was. I was proud to have had a big part in starting it, and managing it up to the last few months. It became law in the autumn of '58 and we moved over to the new building in early '59. We had this new intercom system of telephones that rang when the senator lifted his. Well, in early 1960 the phone would ring. I'd pick up. Jack would. Bob would. "Bob, Jack, come in here." This went on for a couple of weeks, I was not summoned. So I thought, "Well, they're targeting me, there's no question about it." But I had to see the chairman because there were vouchers to sign, letters to sign, and all sorts of committee business that had to be carried on, but that was the limit of it. I would have to ask to see him and wait my turn, and was in and out, bip, bip, no chit-chat, no sitting around and gassing as we sometimes had. I was on a blacklist, right on top of having contributed to Hill's triumph! It was terrible.

Well, I had a boy in college and a girl in private school, I didn't have a very big salary, and I couldn't afford to lose that job. Furthermore, who wants to be a chief clerk fired by Lister

page 143

Hill? Where do you get a job? It would have been bad. So I said, well, they're not going to get me. I'm going to do my job so damn well that there can be no possible criticism of the thing I'm paid to do, but I can't have any in-put in any other kind of activity or legislative program. So I just put my head down. From 1959 to 1963 the only connection I had with Lister Hill was signing of papers and getting staff appointments cleared, making arrangements, payrolls, and the usual administrative stuff. It was unbelievable. It went on almost to the end of '63. Weird business.

There had been one moment in about '61 when this pattern changed briefly. This is a story in itself. I've written a five-page memo on it, and I might even include it in the record, but briefly. I was having lunch with Maurice Rosenblatt down at this old fish restaurant that used to be next to the Commodore Hotel, Wearley's--a great place. Lister Hill used to go there to lunch on Saturday and have his one public Manhattan, and his one luncheon off the Hill, as a matter of fact, per week. This time Cronin was with him and they sat in the back. As they were leaving they stopped at our table. He knew Maurice and somebody else who was with us. Senator Hill said, "St'rt, what are we going to do about this U.N. business?" Well, I knew what he meant; the right-wing was making a great effort to get us out of the U.N. There was a resolution pending and they had stirred up a huge public furor. Senator John Sparkman, as a member of the Foreign Relations Committee had somehow been assigned the

page 144

position of defending the U.N. He as getting all kinds of brickbats and garbage slung at him from Alabama and elsewhere, and it was falling over on Lister, his colleague. Now here was my chairman asking me, "What are we going to do about stopping this mania, this mail, and these crazy people who are trying to wreck our foreign police?" I said, "Well, frankly Senator, I haven't given it too much thought, but if you wish I will." He said, "Yes, bring me a memo on Monday."

I'm foreshortening this, but anyway, I dashed back to the office and told Marjorie Whittaker, my secretary, we're going to work all weekend, and got a hold of Charlie Brewton, who was then working for President Kennedy in the Office of Emergency Preparedness. "Charlie," I said, "this is it. They're going to get me now if I don't produce on this one." It was an impossible task, or one of the more, I thought. I said, "You're from Alabama, that's why I'm calling you, what can we cook up that would shut this stuff down?" Well, the long and short of it was, by noon Sunday we had a scheme, which involved having the president appoint Mrs. Kennedy as chairwoman of a Women's American Peace Movement for the U.N. and calling on everybody, Republican and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, in the name of womanhood and peace, and so forth. We had a grand idea, we thought.

page 145

By God, at ten o'clock in the morning on Monday the phone rang, "St'rt, you got that memorandum?" "Yes, sir, I'll bring it right in." It wasn't too long, of course, and he read it over. Cronin was there. The senator said, "My God, that might just do it, seriously, it might just do it." Most of the Kennedy's weren't liked in Alabama, but Mrs. Kennedy was. She was a charming lady, she'd done nice things for the White House, they had no hatred for her. He said, "Well, how do you think we can get it done?" I said, "Well, I've thought of that, too. A couple of months ago, Bobby Kennedy, then Attorney General, had a bunch of us down to his office, and he talked about his job and what he was doing and so on. He said, 'Now, listen, guys, when you get back up there, anytime you have an idea you think will be helpful to the president or me, call me up.'" So I said to Senator Hill, "I think I can go to Bobby Kennedy on that basis at least. It has to be done within the family anyway, and he's the one who can go into the president's office with it. So I think the doors are partly open." But I said, "I think I'll need a letter from you to the Attorney General. I just can't walk in; I work for you. I can't go floating around with ideas for Mrs. Kennedy." He said, "Write up a letter, but you sign it." I said, "Well that won't do any good." He said, "Well, you can indicate that you're doing it on my authorization." Or I thought he said something like that. Well, he had to, how could I proceed this other way? So off went a

page 146

letter with something in it about Lister Hill, indicating that he wasn't opposed.

Bobby had a guy named John Seigenthaler, former editor of the Nashville, Tennessee *Tennessean*--he's still around, very bright guy--as his administrative assistant. So I called him a day after I sent Bobby the letter. He said, "Yeah, I got the letter, come in and see me." So off I went. The letter enclosed the proposal that I had given to Hill. It was just about the same language but turned around as a proposal to the Attorney General to take to his brother. Well, Siegenthaler said, "I like this. Unfortunately the Attorney General is going to Indonesia in two days. I don't know whether I can catch him to read it." He said, "But he's coming in from Virginia for a big State Department briefing in about an hour and maybe I can catch him in between." So he said, "I'll call you." In a few hours he called back and said, "Yep, Bobby thought it was great and is taking it to the White House." By then I was in seventh heaven. I called up Lister Hill right away and said, "It's moving." Oh, yes, and Siegenthaler called the next day and said, "It's on the president's desk." Evelyn Lincoln had taken it in.

The next day I got a preemptory call from the chairman, "St'rt, come in here!" There was Don Cronin, and he had shot me down this time. Here's how he'd done it: held persuaded Lister Hill that the mention of his name in a memorandum to the Kennedy's would be leaked

page 147

to Drew Pearson, and the Southerners would realize that Hill secretly was a supporter of the Kennedy's and that this would not only do him in but shoot the whole project down. I said, "Senator,

there was certainly no intention on any of our parts to have this happen. You read the letter. You read the letter, Don. What is this all about?" "Well, we've had second thoughts," meaning Don had been needling him, probably called a couple of editors in Alabama and had them squawk. Well, I was just shattered. What in the hell can I do about it? It's on the president's desk, with that paragraph in it! He said, "Get it back." Get it back?! How do you get a letter off the president's desk?! He said, "I'm sure you'll find a way, Stewart, you better had."

Well, old friendships come to mind in critical times and Mike Manatos, White House liaison with the Senate, had been on the Hill and had been administrative assistant to Senator Lester Hunt from Wyoming, who shot himself in his office for reasons we won't go into having to do with Joe McCarthy and Styles Bridges. But anyway, Mike found the body and we who were nearby in the hall heard the tumult, and did what we could--awful time. Mike now was Kennedy's man for the Senate. So we met in Majority Leader Mansfield's office and I told him the story. I said, "You've got to get that thing back. The senator has agreed to let it go through if we just take off that bottom paragraph. I'll get it retyped, clear it with him, and bring it to you, and you can put it back on the president's desk. Can you

page 148

do this? He said, "We'll just see." He called up Evelyn Lincoln and said, "By the way, there's a mistake in that letter transmitted from Bobby; would you send it back and we'll fix it up?" Well, she hadn't read it and Mike Manatos was of Senate origin, so back it came. And on it, in bold writing: "I think this is terrific!" signed Bobby.

So, we kept the first page and retyped the last one, leaving out the heinous paragraph. Then I walked into Hill's office, took the original last page, and tore it into small pieces right in front of him, threw it in his waste basket, and handed him the revised one. He approved it, I took it back to Mike and down it went to the White House. I went over to the floor to report that the transaction was complete so far as this end was concerned. And Senator Hill sat me down on the couch, put his arm around me, banged my leg, and said, "St'rt, boy, I can't tell you how glad I am you did it. Can't tell you how glad I am, boy, you did it!" He'd gotten off Cronin's hook. He didn't want to fire me, or do anything to me. But still that didn't really change anything in my position. By then Cronin was so furious at me, he was absolutely determined to put me out of business. He must have done something else in the Hill office because the old pattern resumed: I was the technical guy who brought in the payroll, until a couple of weeks after the Kennedy assassination. Oh, by the way, what happened to the memo? It was sent to the State Department of all places; and Fred Dutton who was there had it; he was passing it around, and showed it to Senator Goldwater's

page 149

administrative assistant of all people, who happened to be a friend of his. Well, of course, nothing came

of the whole idea. How could Fred Dutton talk to Mrs. Kennedy? The whole thing had gotten sidetracked. Well, anyway, the U.N. is still there and everything is all right.

Jack Kennedy, the poor devil, had been murdered, and the Senate was having eulogies on December 3rd or 4th, and we were in conference with the House on a health bill, in EF-100, you know, that funny little place in the Capitol with a Roman bath outside. The conference broke up for the House members to caucus, and Hill and a couple of other senators and I and Forsythe were walking around out in the Roman bath. Suddenly I heard a voice: "St'rt, come over here, I want to talk to you!" "Yes, sir." He told me, "I'm facing a hard one. They're having a eulogy for President Kennedy, about a week away, and I don't know anybody who can write that speech for me but you. Do it. I want a first draft Monday," which was two or three days off, no time at all. I said, "Have you any idea what you'd like to say?" He said, "Well, he was a member of my committee for years, chairman of an important subcommittee of my committee. On the other hand, he's hated in my state and I can't say anything that will offend them. We've got to walk between these two things: my duty to say something appropriate that will not stir up great trouble." I said, "Well, what's Kennedy done recently that's so great?" There was that limitation on the use of atomic weapons in space, remember

page 150

that treaty that the Russians and we agreed not to fire off bombs in the sky? It was the one disarmament step, I suppose you would call it, that Kennedy managed to take. So Hill said, "Yes sir. Man of Peace. Kennedy, Man of Peace, that will be the theme." OK, it could be done. Nobody could take that away from Kennedy, or from Hill for saying it.

Again my old pal Charlie Brewton came into the picture. By then he had come back to the Senate and was working for John Sparkman as general counsel to the Defense Production Subcommittee. That must have been a strange relationship between Senator Sparkman and Hill with Charlie Brewton around, but it seemed to have worked. I never heard any echoes of it. So I said, "Charlie, here's what the senator has handed to me this time. Man of Peace, hmmm." Well, we knew how to use all those words. We drummed up Marjorie for the weekend and off we went. On the way through the first or second draft, Charlie said, "You know, there is something else that would tickle the senator, and it can't hurt him in Alabama and which I think he probably thinks could properly be said about Kennedy." Lister Hill, if anything, is in pursuit of excellence in whatever he does. And President Kennedy reflected in some ways that same spirit. He liked the brightest boys around him, he liked the best ideas. He wanted no shoddy workmanship, no cheap machinery, no falling apart of the works. He truly, I thought, sought excellence. Well, we worked that in, too.

page 151

It was a short thing, five or six pages. We typed it up and ten o'clock in the morning, "St'rt, got that

speech?" "Yes, sir." Took it in, and he read it, read it twice. He said, "You know, St'rt, when I come to big decisions in my life, I have to clear them with my red-haired twin sister. I have to send this down to Alabama." I had not yet met her, a wonderful person. So, a few days later: "Just had a call from my red-headed twin sister. Says it's the best speech she's read since Cicero!" Seriously, he said, "She thinks it's great; so do I. We'll go ahead with it." After that, they couldn't touch me. I was Lister Hill's right-arm buddy till he went out of office, on most everything. Isn't that interesting?

RITCHIE: What happened to Cronin?

MCCLURE: Oh, when Senator Hill retired Cronin went down to work for the Corcoran law firm, where I guess he still is.

RITCHIE: The Corcoran?

MCCLURE: Tommy-the-Cork. Corcoran and Rowe and Somebody, in a minor position. I think he's doing corporate taxes, or something dreadful. But he could do that kind of work, I'm sure, and no doubt is well paid for it. Anyway, Tommy-the-Cork was close to Senator Hill and took care of Cronin. Campbell went to work for the American Hospital Association. I saved one of the poor guys at the bottom,

page 152

who was just going to fall in between the cracks, put him on our printing staff, and he's still down here on the first floor, Paul Pinson.

Forsythe, however, stayed on. There was an election in '68, and Lister Hill retired. Senator Morse was up, and Senator Randolph was going to be chairman of Public Works and wouldn't take the Labor Committee anyway. So Morse was defeated and Senator Yarborough inherited the chairmanship. Forsythe, to show what a slick, smart cookie he is, slipped out to Oregon. He was a greeeaaat friend of Wayne Morse. Looked at some of the polls, and knew Morse was done for. So he slipped down to Yarborough in Texas and locked himself in there. And suggested, I'm sure, that since the new chairman would want his own man he ought to get rid of McClure and put somebody else in, which he did. Oh well, Forsythe finally resigned and went to work some life insurance lobby, getting \$80,000 a year probably, unscathed by all this, happy as a clam.

It's funny, I didn't mention this, but during this period that I was having such a glorious new honeymoon with Lister Hill, Forsythe cracked up, had to be sent to a dry-out farm, divorced his wife-which Lister Hill thought was terrible. He didn't like divorce; Forsythe had married a sweet little girl, and here she was being dumped. Well, Forsythe was in the dog house, if that's the proper

page 153

term, for the rest of his term with Senator Hill. Some kind of justice in all this, I guess.

RITCHIE: Do you think there were a lot of pressures on a staff member at that time that would cause someone like Forsythe to crack up?

MCCLURE: Well, he no longer was number one, you see. And Cronin, after this "great" speech, couldn't touch me with Senator Hill, so he broke with Forsythe, too, to save his own skin. There was no more trouble from Cronin. He may have caused Forsythe trouble, I don't know.

I do recall, I forgot to tell you, the senator called me every half hour after his sister had approved the speech. At least for two days the phone would ring: "St'rt, just wanted to tell you again, a great speech, boy." And one time I heard Forsythe say, "Aw, [expletive]!" and slam his phone down. Ah, God, it looks funny now, but it wasn't too funny then.

RITCHIE: There was a member of the Secretary's office who did a management study of the employees around here and he found that while most everybody seemed to like their job, and got great satisfaction out of it, very few people had great sense of security in their job.

MCCLURE: It was impossible.

page 154

RITCHIE: Because there was no Civil Service, I suppose.

MCCLURE: To start with.

RITCHIE: And you lived by the whim of the chairman or the majority.

MCCLURE: No question about it.

RITCHIE: Was that a pervasive sense throughout the committee staff?

MCCLURE: It's understood. You must perform as well as you can at all times, and at any moment you can be tossed out. Of course, there are inhibitions. A senator can't fire some girl from his state without worrying about what the effects will be. I mean, it's not a carte blanche power that's given a chairman, but the awareness is there at all times. And it's a good thing, I think. It keeps everybody on his toes. You've got to produce. You've got to satisfy your boss and a lot of other people, too, to whom he looks for assistance and approbation and so on; he doesn't want some guy running around

whom everybody dislikes. All that sort of thing.

RITCHIE: But do you think it encourages that kind of jockeying for power and backstabbing?

MCCLURE: I've rarely seen an office where it didn't go on. There may be some, and some you don't know about because you don't

page 155

know the office well enough, but in those I knew fairly well there was generally somebody. Frequently he or she was ostracized by all the others because they knew what a p-r-i- - he was, so his effectiveness was not so great. But when the top guy is working against you, you're really in trouble--the AA, or the staff director. Of course, I never indulged in any of this crap myself. I didn't have the brains to do it, I guess. Certainly no inclination to do it.

There have been bad staff directors who have mishandled their people, mistreated them. AAs who insist on sleeping with secretaries before they'll give them a raise. Oh, sure, that's part of it. I don't know how much, but I know of cases. Fortunately, Lister Hill, and Wayne Morse, and Guy Gillette, and Jennings Randolph, the four I really worked with, were all above the age of girl-chasing. I don't know what they were doing when they were younger, but there was no sexual hanky-panky going on around them.

RITCHIE: Well, what's the best way for a chairman to handle a staff situation like that, given all the pressures underneath? Or who do you think handled it the best, of all the chairmen you worked for?

MCCLURE: Well, let me take Senator Randolph as chairman of Public Works. He never allowed it to start. If somebody gave him a bad note like that he'd just stare him down, just go deaf, glare at him, wouldn't even say anything. So it just stopped right away. It

page 156

just couldn't go. While he was chairman, I don't know how it is now, I imagine it is quite the same because Senator Stafford, the present chairman, is the same kind of person, but that was a good staff and there was no in-fighting. There were jealousies, of course, but they never reached the chairman, and there was no attempt to knife somebody in a way that would lose him his job. They might fight for positions on a bill, or for their point of view, or snarl at the way some staff member was listening to that lobbyist too much, and so forth. But that's inevitable. That's staff work. You have to have different ideas and different sources and fight for your position. But this business of using any of those things, or other things, to threaten the position, the job security, by feeding poison to the chairman, I regard as vile, and no chairman should allow it to occur. Certainly Randolph never did.

I didn't see Gillette in charge of any staff, except his own, and there was no fighting there. And Morse had no chairmanship either, except the subcommittee on education where his staff amounted to two or three people and there was little possibility of knifings and so forth going on. His office was beautifully run by Bill Berg, and I don't know for sure, of course, but I don't think so.

But Senator Hill, as I said in the beginning, got a kind of a kick, like a duke might of having the courtiers telling nasty stories about each other, and thus increasing his sources or fund of

page 157

knowledge about them and giving him a little handle here and there. Senator Hill loved to kid people. Sometimes it was fun and sometimes it wasn't so much fun. You never could tell exactly whether the dagger was rubber or real. But that was just his way of joshing. It didn't mean anything. But he could spot your weakness, and sometimes he found that weakness not just by himself but by other people telling tales. And there are so many ways they do it, you know, "Gosh, Senator, I think Bill looks bad, don't you?" "Yeah, what do you suppose is the matter, Don?" "Ah, you know, he loves to hit it up after--not during work, of course." "Oh, yeah. Yeah, he does look pretty bad." That kind of thing. What can you do about it? Even if you look wonderful. Ah, dirty stuff. Well, I think that sums up the off-the-record things that I know about that I thought were worth telling. Some of them are pretty good stories and give you a feel of what goes on beneath the surface to some degree.

RITCHIE: While you're speaking under embargo, would you be willing to tell that story about John Kennedy and the conflict-of-interest that you told me the other day? It was about the committee he formed.

MCCLURE: Oh, that. Didn't I tell that?

RITCHIE: You told it to me, but we didn't have the tape recorder on. We were next door.

page 158

MCCLURE: This story relates to Senator John Kennedy when he was chairman of the Subcommittee on Labor, in fact newly-made chairman of the Subcommittee on Labor. The McClellan Committee on Investigation of Labor-Management Activities was revealing all sorts of nasty things about the Teamsters. Bobby Kennedy was the counsel for that committee and was riding hard, too. He was a tough prosecutor. The minority leader, the guy from California . . .

RITCHIE: William Knowland.

MCCLURE: . . . Knowland had come up with a "Democracy in Trade Unions" bill. Well, you know

Bill Knowland didn't give a damn about democracy in unions. It was all designed to hamstring the leadership and permit all sort of anarchic activity to go on. McClellan's committee also came up with a bunch of recommendations. They were all going to come to the Labor Committee, and Jack Kennedy could see these juggernauts coming down the track while he was revving up his presidential campaign. Somebody--I think it may have been Ralph Dungan, who was on our staff at the time as Kennedy's man, though not a lawyer a damn fine staff guy, even for this technical stuff--he must have suggested that Kennedy create a bi-management-labor panel to study the need for revision of Taft-Hartley, which was then the existing law and which these amendments from Knowland and McClellan sought to change a great deal. So in due course the committee created a panel of twelve members, some of whom were from unions,

page 159

some from business, and some professors. While I don't remember all of the names there were some terrific people on it, including Willard Wirtz and Arthur Goldberg, and Gerald Reilly of the Retail Federation, and John what's-his-name from Harvard.

RITCHIE: Dunlop?

MCCLURE: Dunlop? Anyway, great guys, and they all were willing to do it. They were to meet here in Washington. We got them a staff, and money to pay for their transportation. They would meet and read papers and debate and seek to come up with resolutions and propose amendments to the Labor Committee. Well, the whole purpose, I think, from Kennedy's point of view, was to stall, so his nomination, at least, could be attained. That was really the purpose, I think of this body. They met over several months. Well, anyway, before they met officially there was a gathering in S-114 in the Capitol, one of the Appropriations rooms. The panel members were all invited, Senator Kennedy was going to make a welcoming speech.

About ten o'clock that morning, Bob Brenkworth, then Financial Clerk, called, and said, "Stewart, has Senator Kennedy given any consideration to the possibility that some of the members of his new panel will be faced with the conflict of interest, since they are on the payroll of their respective businesses and unions. This doesn't apply to the professors, of course." I said, "My God, Bob, I don't think he has. I certainly haven't mentioned it. It never occurred

page 160

to me." He said, "Well, just think of this: suppose the panel comes up with a recommendation that some group doesn't like. They will charge that the fellows who voted for it were really voting for their union of business position while they were being paid by the Senate." This could have damaged whatever the panel did. I thought, well that certainly makes sense. In any case, Senator Kennedy should be alerted to

it. So I told Ralph Dungan right away. He was busy as hell and said, "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah." I said, "Call Brenkworth, for Christ's sake, and get this thing worked out so you can tell the chairman before he get to the meeting." Well, nothing like that happened, and we're in the meeting, and I'm there as clerk taking notes; Ralph is there, backing up Kennedy.

Kennedy makes a beautiful speech, and everybody's pleased as punch. I have twelve copies of the appointment form to be signed by Lister Hill, appointing these twelve gentlemen to a panel to be paid for entirely by the Senate. It was a dollar-a-day kind of thing, but with expenses. So Ralph turns around and says, "Oh, by the way Senator, Stewart has something to report from the Financial Clerk." Oh, Jesus. I thought to myself, "You dirty bastard, you really dumped it on me this time." What was I to do, with twelve gentlemen and the chairman looking at me. I said, "Yes, sir, Mr. Brenkworth, Financial Clerk, called this morning, and thought that you all should be aware of a potential conflict of interest if you are signed on the Senate payroll while being paid by your own organizations." I

page 161

thought Kennedy was going to kill me! He turned around black as a cloud, shoved me back from the table, and said, "What the hell did you bring that Goddamned thing up for? What did you bring that up for?" I said, "I had to, it's my duty. I had to." He said, "Well, all right" and finally calmed himself down. Of course, they al I agreed and it was all worked out so there would be no conflict of interest.

RITCHIE: Did they just not accept the funds?

MCCLURE: They didn't get the one dollar, and the people who were in town didn't get the expenses; it turned out that all of them except the professors were in town anyway, so the thing became moot, and not even important, but I had to do it. I mean, Brenkworth would have raised it himself, and then where would we have all been? Senator Kennedy never forgave me for that. Held glower at me across the room, for months afterwards. God, it was unpleasant. And it was all that Goddamned Dungan's doing. Well, he may have not intended to do it, but a thing of that sifnificance I'm sure he must have remembered, and he didn't want that black glare to fall on him. Terrible.

RITCHIE: I heard a number of stories about Brenkworth and I get the feeling that a lot of the chief clerks of committees felt as if

page 162

they were between a rock and a hard place. On one side was Brenkworth and on the other side were the committee chairmen and members.

MCCLURE: Yes, and Brenkworth always won. He was wonderful. I hated him and was scared to

death of him for many years, but finally I got to know him and realized what he was up against, with a hundred senatorial payrolls, and sixty subcommittee and committee payrolls, and thousands of people taking trips, some of them that weren't authorized, and hiring planes that weren't authorized, and submitting vouchers. I don't know how anybody stays sane in that job, and, of course, they all have had heart attacks, except the last one, Bill Ridgely. I saw him the other day, he looks untouched. But he had a different temperament. Brenkworth was a top-sergeant kind of guy, and he talked like one, barking at you. But he didn't have time to be nice, he had just too much to do.

We became very good friends after a while. I could forestall difficulties with him by knowing what to do and what not to do. But for new people he was rough. Especially girls, they'd just come back panicked: "Oh, don't send me over there again, Mr. McClure! I can't take it!" But he was always right. He knew the law, he knew the books, he knew the accounting, he knew what you had to do, he knew the regulations and rules. You couldn't argue with him; he knew. So why bother? You could argue fact, well, of course the senator had to

page 163

take that plane because his car broke down, and so forth. And then he, of course--all the vouchers went to the Rules Committee--could have a little cushion there. If they approved then he was off the hook. But he fought first.

RITCHIE: Did John Kennedy have a reputation for having a hot temper when he was a senator?

MCCLURE: I don't know that he did. He wasn't much of a senator, you know, until he took on this labor subcommittee. He wasn't really a senator.

RITCHIE: In other words, he wasn't someone you were nervous about offending in advance; you hadn't anticipated his response?

MCCLURE: No. Well, he was making great speeches on foreign affairs, and evading the tough ones, like labor law, and so forth. He was kind of lazy. His first appointment on the committee, I think, was Railroad Retirement, which would not turn anybody on much. No, I don't think he was regarded as hot-tempered. His brother was much disliked up here, though he changed greatly in later years. When he was a senator himself, he was a wonderful guy, Bobby--great loss.

RITCHIE: Did you have much direct dealing with him when he was a member of the staff?

page 164

MCCLURE: Not too much. He was a prosecutor and I was not in the law business. But you would

see him on the floor, and he treated everybody like crumbs because his brother was sitting there as a senator. Oh, it was nasty. And we all knew that he had been hired by Joseph McCarthy, and that didn't endear us to him either. Anyway, that's another story. But the Labor Committee did have all three Kennedy's. In fact, at one time we had two of them, Bobby and Teddy, and sometimes the by-play in executive session was just hilarious, because they had these inside family jokes, none of which I remember, but they'd be alluding to something that was said the night before someplace: "Well, you didn't say that last night, Bobby!" It was fun.

RITCHIE: I noticed that Senator Edward Kennedy took the Aging subcommittee at one point, and I remember that you had said that you couldn't persuade John Kennedy to take it.

MCCLURE: No, I couldn't persuade Ted Sorenson to take it. I never talked to John Kennedy about it. Sorenson was so wrong about that. Kennedy could have avoided that whole Landrum-Griffin thing if he'd wanted to. "I'm busy with the problems of the aging, you can give that to somebody else." I don't know if Lister Hill would have let him get away with it, but he certainly would have been in a better position than he was to resist it.

page 165

RITCHIE: How does the subcommittee distribution work? Would a chairman like Lister Hill assign someone to a subcommittee that they wanted to serve on, or did he arbitrarily assign them?

MCCLURE: Oh, never arbitrarily. He was a great diplomat. He never surprised anybody with anything like that, no. Well, the tradition was that there were three major subcommittees: Labor, Education, and Health. And there were a lot of others, fifteen at one point. I think they now have fourteen. Five of them were special subcommittees that didn't do anything legislatively. The tradition was that the chairman would take whatever subcommittee he wanted.

Then sometimes, outside pressure would play a powerful role in the selection of a subcommittee chairman. In 1961, after Jack Kennedy became president, the chairmanship of both the Labor and Education subcommittees became vacant, since Senator Murray, chairman of the latter subcommittee, had died.

Senator Morse was Number 2 on Labor, followed by Senator McNamara. Senator Hill was Number 2 on Education, followed by Senator Morse. As chairman of the Health subcommittee, Senator Hill could not take the Education subcommittee chairmanship. Number 3 on Education had been McNamara, so with the death of Senator Murray, he would be expected to inherit Education, while Senator Morse would replace Kennedy on Labor. Oddly enough, just the reverse took place.

page 166

This was the result of heavy lobbying by both organized labor and education, the AFL-CIO and the National Education Association. While still in the doghouse, I had no personal knowledge of what went on. I learned that the AFL-CIO didn't want Morse as chairman of what they regarded as their subcommittee, because he was too independent, while McNamara, an old trade-unionist, was their kind of guy. Also, the NEA and the education lobby in general didn't want McNamara governing their field of interest, but strongly favored Morse, a former college professor and a known advocate of federal aid to education.

So Chairman Hill finally had to work out a satisfactory compromise; he named Morse chairman of Education, to which he was entitled by virtue of subcommittee seniority (Senator Hill not exercising his right), and McNamara chairman of Labor, to which he was entitled when Morse was disqualified by having been named Education chairman.

In the end, everybody was happy. Morse made a superb record in Education and McNamara not only reassured the labor movement but managed the poverty legislation. When Senator McNamara died, Senator Yarborough inherited the Labor subcommittee, and when Morse was defeated in 1968, Senator Claiborne Pell became chairman of the Education subcommittee.

RITCHIE: There was Railroad Retirement, Veterans

page 167

MCCLURE: Yes, until they created the Veterans' Committee, which made no sense at all because most of veterans' affairs involve health and education, and hospitals, and so forth. Anyway, they got their damn committee. Well, senators would assert their seniority on the committee for the subcommittees, that's the way it would work, and then they could keep them--you couldn't throw them off. And sometimes, if nobody really wanted it, and the chairman had left, Hill would appoint the next ranking member, unless he were chairman of something else. We usually had anywhere from seven to ten Democratic members. For those who didn't get operating committees, like Pete Williams, we created a Migratory Labor subcommittee. And McNamara had the Aging subcommittee for a while, until he inherited the Labor subcommittee.

The Republicans, on the other hand, I don't know how they worked it out, but they always had a clash between the right wing and the left wing. When Goldwater was in all the right-wing guys got the best subcommittees, and when Javits was in all the other side got them, unless they were already occupied by Goldwater people; then he never tried to displace them. But the minority membership on a subcommittee doesn't amount to a damn. It's all run by the majority. You know, they don't set agenda, or hearings. They can call witnesses, of course, put in amendments, and bills, and so forth, but so far as running the show they don't have anything to say about it. I don't know how most committees operate. You'd have to ask. I

page 168

suppose it's quite similar, after all seniority is still the reigning law here, and should be.

RITCHIE: I was just wondering, in the sense that there are obviously some subcommittees that are more attractive and there are some that are more dangerous than others.

MCCLURE: Yes. Well, sometimes a man goes on a dangerous subcommittee when he's a freshman, and suddenly some years later he finds he's chairman. It happened to John Kennedy. Well, of course, we tend to make too much of all these things. We look in our own little forest here. The public doesn't give a hoot really who's chairman of what. Lobbyists do, you bet.

RITCHIE: Well, being chairman of the Labor subcommittee obviously helped Kennedy with the labor movement, the unions.

MCCLURE: Oh, I'm sure it did. That Landrum-Griffin conference was something. Kennedy had hired a wonderful fellow from Harvard, who later got involved in the Justice Department's troubles under Watergate, big tall, smart guy, I can't think of his name. Hired him after the panel had disbanded to be his legal counsel, because Dungan wasn't, and none of his own staff was. Archibald Cox. Cox was very smart, much smarter than Kennedy was on labor law. The Republicans on the committee hated him; he was too damn good. They had a good man, too, in Mike Bernstein, an expert labor lawyer and minority

page 169

counsel, but he met his match with Cox and couldn't get away with a lot of the stuff he had done before, when our side wasn't quite as familiar with the implications of a certain amendment.

We ended up finally in conference with a bill that contained something that the building trades didn't want, if I remember correctly. I can't remember the details but it was a whole title of the bill that really had nothing to do with the purpose of the bill, which was to democratize and improve the operations of trade unions. This had something to do with secondary boycott or some other Taft-Hartley issue. There had been a terrific fight in the Senate and the McClellan and Knowland group almost had enough votes to substitute their proposals for the committee bill; it failed very narrowly. I remember we got into conference and it went on and on and on and on and on for days, and the lobby outside was packed with labor lobbyists, newspapermen who couldn't get in, tourists trying to get through, chaotic, right in front of the Disbursing Office, with Brenkworth going mad!

Well, we came to this final question, the building trades title, and the House insisted on it. Maybe we hadn't put it in, I guess that was it, they'd been strong enough in the Senate to keep it out, but it was in the House bill. Landrum and his group had it in. It was a red flag for the building trades. That was it.

And Cox kept arguing that it had nothing to do with this legislation and Kennedy

page 170

would repeat this ad infinitum. Morse wanted to dissolve the conference and return the bill to the Senate for instructions. "My God," Kennedy said, "we'll lose if we go back, they'll give us their bill." which was true, I think. Finally, Dirksen got up and said in his huge voice, "Mr. Chairman, in view of the inability of this conference to reach any agreement while staff is present, I move that all staff be expelled from the room until we resolve this question." That meant Cox, and all the rest of us, too. So we trailed out into the corridor and fought our way through these people, all of them saying, "What's going on? What's going on?" Well, in the end, the Senate accepted the House language, and Kennedy went back to the floor with Morse threatening to filibuster; he wouldn't sign the conference report, put on a terrific Morse show. But the minute it was resolved, then Cox was asked back in to help write the report!

RITCHIE: Do you think that Kennedy gave in because Cox wasn't there?

MCCLURE: I don't know why.

RITCHIE: He didn't put his name on the bill. It wasn't the Kennedy-Landrum Bill.

MCCLURE: He didn't want it.

RITCHIE: Both Landrum and Griffin were members of the House.

page 171

MCCLURE: Wasn't Griffin a senator by then? No, I guess you are right, it was the Democratic-Republican bill in the House. We had a bill, a Kennedy bill, and that was the one we went to conference with, but we accepted the House language, so that's the way it ended up, I think. Furthermore, Kennedy didn't want his name on the damn thing for the rest of history. Tied up with Landrum, that character from Georgia? No way. I don't know what happened. No senators would talk. I guess they felt they had to have a bill, they couldn't just sit there forever, and the House was adamant and the Senate had voted fairly closely on it, and Kennedy wasn't sure he could withstand it--I don't know. But in any event, it didn't lose on its merits, it lost on a power play. I mean the Senate didn't lose in the merits of the question, it just lost because they couldn't see their way to winning.

RITCHIE: Did you ever encounter anything like that again in a conference committee, where the staff was asked to leave?

MCCLURE: No. We had a senator from Colorado named Gordon Allott, a brash young fellow who came out of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, that type, and it took, him a little while to catch on to this place. He was early on a member of the committee and when things would start going badly for him in a meeting he'd say, "What are all these staff people doing here? I would like, Mr. Chairman, to ask them to identify themselves, to determine whether they have

page 172

any business here." Lister Hill would always finesse that one, "Well, they're all here at the request of senators. You can have your man here, too, if you wish." Allott pulled that crap quite a few times.

Of course, executive sessions in those days were fun, and staff people, especially the legislative guys with senators, wanted to be there, even if the bill wasn't in their domain, but it made a kind of a crowd. If there was one thing Lister Hill would never allow was for any of the prerogatives of the chairman to be challenged, let alone successfully challenged. He just fixed it immediately. Not that he over performed his privilege, over exerted in exercising it, but he didn't enjoy anybody trying to take his place, even partly. The old boys all knew that, and they didn't either, wherever they were chairman. But it took some of the young fellows time. Probably still does. Well, I don't think we've got anymore revelations at this point.

RITCHIE: OK. Next time I thought we'd talk about the 89th Congress, in 1965, '66, when that great rush of legislation came through; some of the atmosphere, and the Johnson treatment, and all that.

MCCLURE: I think I'll go back to the minutes, I've been looking at them. It was so complex and there was so much going on. I was talking to Don Baker, who was on the staff of McNamara on our

page 173

committee at the time and he's now, and has been for a long time, the chief clerk of the House Labor Committee. I went to see him one day and I said, "Whatever happened to the War on Poverty?" He said, "Well, I'll show you, it's still going on, and every program." it was not being funded in large amounts, but every one of them is still on the books and still functioning. He said, "They don't make any noise," especially since the recent administration, but even under Carter they were very quiet, and certainly under Nixon. Nixon tried to abolish it. Now the community action programs, which were the most controversial, pitting the poor against city hall, most cities accept them. It's a good idea to find out what the folks think. And it's working all over the country, but nobody talks about it. It's just going on. That was good, I was glad to hear that. Headstart, that was an especially good one, taking little kids into pre-school.

RITCHIE: I was a teacher in Headstart one summer.

MCCLURE: Were you? Well, you know it was a grand idea. And it's still going on. And Upward Bound, another one of those. I guess the Legal Services thing was in that program. It was a massive business; twelve titles or something. Well, give me a little time.

page 174

End of Interview #5