

## 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**